

Philippians

Preached at DCC by Phil Kayser on 2020-09-13

Introduction - why commentaries have been so frustrated with this beautiful book

Like Ephesians, Philippians is packed with so many gems, that it is very possible that I will not touch on one of your favorite verses. I won't even be touching on all *my* favorite verses. But I hope to give you a good feel for where the book is going. Believe it or not, it is a book that has made a lot of commentators scratch their heads.

Last week I pointed out that where Ephesians is focused upon the glorious *church* of Christ, this book focuses upon the glorious *Christ* of the church. In chapter 3:10 Paul said that his life goal was "that I might know *Him* and the power of *His* resurrection, and the fellowship of *His* sufferings, being conformed to *His* death." Christ was the source of his comfort and joy in every section of this book and He wanted Christ to be the source of their comfort and joy.

Of course, Christ is not the only theme of this book. There is a lot of controversy on what ties the book together and that is because there is a lot of controversy on the structure. I've said many times that structure often determines exegesis.

But before I get into that, let me give you what I believe is the heart of the book in one sentence: "By humbly centering our lives around Jesus, we can experience His supernatural joy and peace in all circumstances." It's not just about having joy, though that word occurs 16 times in this book. And it's not just about having joy that flows from Christ, though His name occurs 60 times in 38 verses. Instead it is joy and peace that flows from Christ in all circumstances - even the disappointing ones - if and only if we put off self-seeking and humbly center our lives around Jesus. So let me give you that theme sentence again: "By humbly centering our lives around Jesus, we can experience His supernatural joy and peace in all circumstances." I really think that captures the essence of the book in a nutshell.

Now, I mentioned that scholars have been all over the place on how the book is structured. And I have long held that we miss the genius of the book if we do not understand its structure. But many commentaries that I own have claimed that there is no unifying structure. And most attempted outlines that I have looked at appear to me to be rather arbitrary. And that seems to be the opinion of many scholars. R. C. Swift jokingly said,

Among exegetes, Philippians has been sort of a 'Rubik's Cube' of the Pauline literature. Many times it has been twisted, turned, and rearranged as scholars attempted to make the best sense they could of it. They have sensed that the book has no central theme systematically developed in a logical argument throughout the epistle.¹

And some have even said that it is so fragmented, that there must be two or three of Paul's letters that were stitched together. Wrong. Absolutely wrong. Back in 1985, Garland analyzed all the studies that had been done up to that date on the structure and declared a stalemate with no

¹ Robert C. Swift, "The Theme and Structure of Philippians," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (July 1984), pp. 234-254.

forward progress having been made. Mounce is no slouch of a scholar, but his commentary opted for what he calls “a string of pearls” approach. Everyone recognizes that there are precious fabulous pearls scattered throughout this book. He suggested that these pearls had just been arbitrarily strung together without any necessary order. He claimed, “Since Philippians is an intensely personal letter, it resists all attempts to force it into a logical outline.”²

But that was because no one had checked to see if there was a Hebraic structure. In recent years scholars such as Luter, Lee, Lund, Leithart and others have noticed a beautifully (and very obviously) constructed chiasm in the book, and this has completely changed the landscape of studies on Philippians.³ It now all meshes together beautifully into a cohesive whole.

Now, I admit that I am initially a skeptic when people think they have solved a puzzle and that the solution is a chiasm. Too many people find chiasms where there are none. So I tend to follow Blomberg’s nine rigorous tests⁴ that must be met before a passage can legitimately be considered a chiasmic structure. A chiasm is an ABCDCBA structure with parallels on each of the lettered parts of the book and the center of the book being the theme that knits everything together. Most purported chiasms in passages don’t meet those nine tests. The one I have in your outlines does, and it has exactly the same breaking points that others have discovered. So let me give you a bird’s eye view of what is happening.

Scholars agree that there were at least four things that Paul was trying to accomplish by writing this book: 1) First, Paul wanted to thank the Philippians for the recent gift they had sent to him. It was a huge help, and they had given sacrificially out of their poverty. So he wanted to thank them and bless them. 2) Second, he wanted to respond to various questions and problems in the church that were raised in a letter brought by Epaphroditus - a lowly servant who had been sent to carry a message. But he wanted to do it in a positive way because it really was a great church. He did not want to discourage them. 3) Third, he wanted to diplomatically reintroduce them to Epaphroditus in light of the disappointment they might feel that it was only Epaphroditus (a servant) who shows up instead of Timothy (a very distinguished leader). They really wanted Timothy to come, and Epaphroditus would be a disappointing substitute. 4) And fourth, in all of this, he wanted to help the Philippians to experience the joy of putting on Christ’s humility and attitudes in the face of all their disappointing providences.

² R. Mounce, “Philippians” in the *Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, ed. C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison (Chicago: Moody, 1962), p. 1320.

³ I especially appreciated the seminal work of A. Boyd Luter and Michelle V. Lee in “Philippians as Chiasmus: Key to the Structure, Unity and Theme Questions” in *New Testament Studies*, vol. 41, 1995, pp. 89-101.

⁴ See C. Blomberg, “The Structure of 2 Corinthians 1-7,” in *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (Fall 1989), pp. 4-8. He goes into much more detail, but the nine tests could be summarized as follows: 1. If a simpler solution has been suggested that explains the text in a straightforward manner, stick with it. 2. There must be crystal clear parallelism between the two halves of the chiasm. 3. There should be both verbal and conceptual parallelism. 4. This verbal parallelism should involve central or dominant imagery or terminology. 5. Both the verbal and conceptual parallels should not be regularly found in other parts; they should be unique. 6. There should be multiple sets of correspondences between the parallels, not just a tiny subpoint of a pericope. 7. The outline should divide the text at natural breaking points agreed upon by others - even by others who don’t share the idea of a chiasm. 8. The center of the chiasm should be a subject that is worthy of highlighting. 9. Ruptures in the outline or inversions should be avoided.

Overview of the book as a chiasm

Let's go over the chiastic outline.

Chiastic Outline of Philippians

A Synthesis of the Work of A. Boyd Luter, Michelle V. Lee, Peter Leithart, and others
By Philip G. Kayser

- A 1:1-2 Opening Greetings: saints and leaders in God's grace
- B 1:3-11 Joy during difficulties; remembering past partnership, *κοινωνία*; gratitude; sufficiency in Jesus
- C 1:12-26 Example of guarded peace and right thinking in anxious situation
 - D 1:27-2:4 Challenge: Stand fast; handle conflict; be of same mind; be united; fulfill Paul's joy
 - E 2:5-18 Example/Action: Christ's good glory, kenosis humility & suffering as pattern for Paul
 - F 2:19-3:1a Midpoint - Two Examples: Timothy & Epaphroditus are caring model-servants who empty themselves & showcase Christ & whom Paul commends to the Philippians
 - E' 3:1b-21 Example/Actions: Paul's bad glory, kenosis humility, & suffering as pattern for saints
 - D' 4:1-5 Challenge: Stand fast; handle conflict; be of same mind; be united; Paul's joy & their joy
- C' 4:6-9 Philippians as example of guarded peace and right thinking in anxious situation
- B' 4:10-20 Joy during difficulties; remembering past partnership, *κοινωνέω*; gratitude; sufficiency in Jesus
- A' 4:21-23 Closing Greetings: saints and leaders in God's grace

The two A sections (1:1-2 and 4:21-23)

The two A sections both give greetings and both remind the recipients that they are saints who have been set apart to God by His grace. They are not their own. They have been purchased with a price, and that means they must not live their lives selfishly as if they belong to themselves. Even Paul and Timothy are not their own, but call themselves “bondservants of Jesus Christ” - which is literally “slaves of Jesus Christ.”

So Paul models the humility of Christ already in the A sections. Humility is going to be a very prominent theme. But he also projects faith and hope in God's provisions. One little detail that he adds to the grace and peace in the last section is special greetings from Caesar's household. He just drops that in there - yes, even Caesar's household is crumbling to the Gospel. And that's all I will say about the two A sections, though there is a ton of beautiful information in both.

The two B sections (1:3-11 and 4:10-20)

The B sections both speak of joy during difficult circumstances. Both B sections remember with fondness the partnership or fellowship in the Gospel that they have had with Paul, and they both express the deep gratitude that Paul has toward them. Both of those sections speak of the total sufficiency of Jesus Christ during times of need. I couldn't fit all the parallels into the outline, but when you read those two sections you see promise after promise that are parallel to each other in those two B sections. They are both worth a lot of comparative study.

But I will just read some of the verses because each of these sections that are heading towards the middle are showing what it looks like to be more and more conformed to Christ. Paul will be setting up Christ as an example, Paul as an example, and in the middle, he will be setting up both Timothy and Epaphroditus as examples of Christ-like people.

Let me quickly mention something that Daniel Wallace, Moises Silva, and others point out. They say that the people of the church of Philippi were hoping for an amazing celebrity - an R. C. Sproul kind of a person to be sent their way, but they would be getting a person they considered

to be a mere servant (Epaphroditus). So rather than putting Christ at the center of the book, or any other famous person at the center of the book, Paul picks Epaphroditus - the humble, unknown, unsung, unassuming servant as the person that most looked like Jesus (the Jesus that Paul later calls a bondservant - Phil. 2:7). Epaphroditus will be set up by Paul as the person he wanted the whole church to look like. If you are all like Epaphroditus I will be pleased because then you will all look like Jesus. It's a brilliantly constructed book. And as we go through this, I think you will see that. So keep in mind what it is that Paul is building towards as I read samples from the B sections. Starting at chapter 1 verse 3.

Phil. 1:3 I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4 always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, 5 for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ; 7 just as it is right for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart, inasmuch as both in my chains and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers with me of grace. 8 For God is my witness, how greatly I long for you all with the affection of Jesus Christ. 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, 10 that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, 11 being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

Who does Paul constantly think about day and night in verse 3? Not himself. He is thinking of others. He is an example of Christ-likeness that might be foreign to some Christians. In what circumstances does Paul have joy? Just the good ones? No. He is exemplifying joy in prison in the face of possible death while he is wearing chains on his feet. Though some bad things have been happening in Philippi, is Paul fearful that the sky is falling? No. He's no Chicken Little. He says of them, "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ." Verse by verse Paul is encouraging the Philippians to follow his example of following Christ's example.

He does much the same in the second B section, but in the second section he adds in the examples of Epaphroditus and the Philippians in specific ways that they exemplified these Christ-like graces. Each section is filled with gems of promises of God's sufficiency and yet how God uses humble believers to bless each other. OK? I just want you to get the big picture. We're not going to get lost in the details this morning - as tempting as it might be.

The two C sections (1:12-26 and 4:6-9)

The C sections tackle potentially anxiety-inducing circumstances and show how we can all have peace and right thinking if our lives are centered on Jesus. What were the stressful situations in Paul's life in chapter 1:12-26? (That's the first C section.) Well, there were a number of stressful situations that could have produced anxiety, but did not. He's in prison wearing chains. But he flips that around in verse 13 and says that "my chains are in Christ" and through those chains he has had a captive audience. He's not the captive; the soldiers were. And because of his location, that captive audience included the Praetorian guard. There were only a couple places in the Empire where the Praetorian Guard existed. The Praetorian Guard were Caesar's own soldiers that had constant contact with his family. This means that Caesar's own soldiers can't get away from the Gospel. They are chained to Paul, and thus chained to the Gospel, and through that Gospel become chained to Christ. Hallelujah! Even that stressful situation is a situation Paul can thank God for.

Another stressful situation is that Satan has made fellow believers envy Paul, speak poorly of Paul, backbite Paul, and some had actually lied about Paul. Why would they do that when he is suffering for the Gospel? That is so unnecessarily mean-spirited. But Paul takes it all in stride and realizes that Christ can use them too - and *was* using them to lead people to Christ. Look at how a Christ-centered focus kept Paul from negative thoughts. Reading at verses 15-18:

Phil. 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from goodwill: 16 The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my chains [Wow! That's mean-spirited - verse 17]; 17 but the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. 18 What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice.

Could you rejoice at a competing pastor who bad-mouths you every chance he gets and yet whose church is growing like crazy? Paul could. Why? Because his life revolved around Jesus, not his work, not his reputation, and not outward success. He wants Christ's kingdom to have success, and his humble attitudes kept him from bitterness and anger. He had instead peace and joy. And Paul wants the Philippians to have this same peace and joy.

In verses 20-21 we have another stressful situation: he faced the strong possibility of imminent death. The Jews wanted the Romans to hand Paul over to them. That would spell certain death. On the other hand, appealing to Caesar could also spell death since Nero was a wicked man. But Paul's thoughts are not troubled by this in the least. Verse 21 says, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." He's ready to die. Now, he longs to accomplish more while on earth, but he also looks forward to going to heaven. He's not bothered either way. But he knows that the Philippians really want him to come to them again, so there is that tug. But even verses 24-26 is thinking more about others than about himself. Let's begin reading at verse 23:

23 For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. 24 Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. 25 And being confident of this, I know that I shall remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy of faith, 26 that your rejoicing for me may be more abundant in Jesus Christ by my coming to you again.

Point by point Paul is exemplifying exactly the same things that he calls them to exemplify in chapter 4:6-9 - the second C section. Though more succinct, it is crystalizing all of the main issues in the first C section. Let me read that. Chapter 4:6-9.

Phil. 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Phil. 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. 9 The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

So he does repeat that he was a model to them of this, but he is asking them to carry out the very same disciplines of mind and heart that brought *him* joy in *his* circumstances. And he says in verse 7 that they *too* can do it through Jesus.

The two D sections (1:27-2:4 and 4:1-5)

The two D sections also have several parallels. I've only listed five of them on the chart. That's all I could fit on one line. But let me give you more. Both sections are a call to stand fast, to strive together, to have unity, to be of the same mind, to handle conflict better, to think about the other person's interests ahead of their own, and to fulfill Paul's joy. Those repetitions of words are not by accident. There are so many deliberate parallels between those two sections that they cannot be by accident. Paul wants to make it clear that his example and his actions are patterns for them to be a godly example and take similar actions.

How do we handle tough circumstances with joy? Our theme sentence tells us: "By humbly centering our lives around Jesus, we can experience His supernatural joy and peace in all circumstances." Too many Christians lack joy and peace. They claim they don't have peace and joy because of their circumstances. That means that their circumstances dictate their attitudes. That should not be true of the Christian. Don't let life control you and make you bitter. Don't let other people control you and make you bitter. Paul wanted even the potential disappointment of not being able to see him to be handled in a way that reflected well on the Gospel. Look at chapter 1:27. Paul says,

Only let your conduct be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent [in other words, he is not guaranteeing that he is coming], I may hear of your affairs, that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel,

And in verse 28 he doesn't want them to display a bad testimony to the Gospel by being scared of their persecutors. Even how we handle persecution reflects poorly on Christ or reflects well on Christ. So he says,

28 and not in any way terrified by your adversaries, which is to them a proof of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that from God.

And in chapter 2:1-4 he shows how if you have any of Christ and His Holy Spirit inside of you, it should impact how you relate to each other. There is nothing theoretical about this. Verses 3-4:

3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. 4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Though he repeats exactly the same concepts in the second D section (chapter 4:1-4), he gives a concrete example of how *not* to do it. He names names. Ouch! He calls out two women who weren't getting along. You can't get more practical than that. On the other hand, though these women had been fighting, he tells the church that they need to treat those two women with respect despite their differences and to respect Clement as well. We don't know what was going on with Clement, but somehow they weren't respecting him. The bottom line is that Paul doesn't give anyone excuses for their negative attitudes no matter how stressful their situation, saying in verse 4, "Rejoice in the Lord *always*. Again I will say, rejoice!" If you aren't rejoicing, you aren't fully living out the Gospel or evidencing the fact that your life revolves around Christ by the power of the Spirit.

The two E sections (2:5-18 and 3:1b-21)

We are getting closer to the heart of the book with these messages, but there are two more sections enveloping the center - the two E sections. And these two sections crystalize in a powerful way what it means to pour ourselves out in sacrifice to God yet find joy in the process as God exalts us and gives us satisfaction in His cause.

And just to prove once again that there is a chiasmic parallel - The first E section begins with Christ's good divine glory and the second section begins with Paul's bad human glory as a Pharisee of the Pharisees - a man who had made it to the top.

The first E section has Jesus giving up His glory and making himself of no reputation. The Greek word for "no reputation" is κενόω, and literally means to pour oneself out - what Robert Strimple believes is a possible translation of Isaiah 53:12, which states that Jesus "poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors."⁵ In other words, He so humbled himself, that He made Himself of no reputation - even dying the death of a criminal. But this kenosis (this pouring out of His life to humble himself and cast off all privilege) is also modeled by Paul in the second E section where Paul cast off his worldly glory, prestige, and fame as the most successful Pharisee of the Pharisees and counted all that glory as dung that he might win Christ. He made himself of no reputation by following Christ.

The first E section has Jesus as a model of suffering for *Paul* who also poured out his life as a drink offering. The second E section has Paul as a model of suffering for *the saints* of Philippi so that they will empty themselves.

But the central point of both sections is humility. How far did Jesus humble Himself? Well, let's read the hymn to find out. Chapter 2:6-11 is probably an inspired hymn that was sung in the church. Beginning to read at verse 5:

Phil. 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. 9 Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, 11 and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And the application he makes in verses 12-18 must have brought shame to the Philippians and a renewed desire to be more humble and more committed to a cause like Christ was. But he writes it in a way that woos them to make this decision rather than forcing them to do so. He wants to

⁵ "The suggestion first made by Warren in 1911 that the phrase might be a translation of Isaiah 53:12, הִשָּׁךְ... נַפְשׁוֹ "he poured out his soul (to death)" has continued to attract support.⁷¹ The LXX rendering is "his soul was delivered (παράδωκεν) to death," but the suggestion is that this is the text in Paul's mind, and he makes or uses a translation which more literally renders the Hebrew.

Jeremias, who has defended this interpretation of 7a in great detail, noting the many "verbal echoes"⁷² of Isaiah 52:13ff. In Philippians 2:6-11, most recently in an article in *Novum Testamentum*,⁷³ says that the phrase refers to the sacrifice of His life." Robert B. Strimple, "Philippians 2:5-11 in Recent Studies: Some Exegetical Conclusions," *Westminster Theological Journal* 41, no. 2 (1978): 265.

stir up a fire of desire in their hearts to be more like Christ and to passionately serve His cause. That is something that can only happen from the inside out. It can't be force.

This inspiring to the cause in some ways reminds me of how William Wallace inspired people to the cause in the movie, *Braveheart*. He didn't force anyone to fight for him. He wasn't like the nobles. He *inspired* men to sacrificial devotion by his *own* sacrificial devotion to a cause. Yes, it produced shame in Robert the Bruce for a while. But I see one of the major themes in that movie as being the making of Robert the Bruce from being merely a leader with a job to a leader with a cause.

At one point in the movie he had compromised at his father's advice and had betrayed William Wallace. Seeing the look in William Wallace's face gave him enormous remorse, and in the famous dialogue with his father, he expresses the longing to fight for something worth fighting for. He is expressing the fact that he wants his heart to be sold out to a cause like William Wallace's heart was. He admired William Wallace's leadership, and he knew he didn't have it. His father just accused him of naive idealism. Let me read you that part of the dialogue.

Robert's Father says: I'm the one who's rotting, but I think your face looks graver than mine. Son, we must have alliance with England to prevail here. You achieved that. You saved your family; increased your land. In time you will have all the power in Scotland.

Robert the Bruce said: Lands, titles, men, power... Nothing.

Robert's Father: Nothing?

Robert the Bruce: I have nothing. Men fight for me because if they do not, I throw them off my land and I starve their wives and children. Those men who bled the ground red at Falkirk fought for William Wallace. He fights for something that I never had. And I took it from him when I betrayed him. I saw it in his face on the battlefield and it's tearing me apart.

Robert's Father: All men betray. All lose heart.

Robert the Bruce: I don't want to lose heart! I want to believe as he does... I will never be on the wrong side again.

And it takes a while, but you see Robert the Bruce by the end of the movie being willing to die for a cause that is bigger than him. It's only then that he is willing to risk his life.

Well, I see the same powerful movement in the two E sections of the outline. In chapter 2:17-18 Paul says that Christ had so captured his heart and imagination that he was quite willing to die - quite willing to be poured out as a drink offering like Christ was. He wanted his life to count, and the fact that his life did count brought him great joy. And in verse 18 he says he wants the Philippians to have that same joy.

But in the second E section Paul inspires the Philippians by pointing out that you don't have to be perfect like Christ in order to take on these Christ-like characteristics. In verse 10 Paul said that his passion in life was "that I might know *Him* and the power of *His* resurrection, and the fellowship of *His* sufferings, being conformed to *His* death..." Christ can live that through us. Christ can give us His passions. Christ can give us His power. If our life revolves around Christ we have a cause that is worth suffering and dying for. If I'm going to die, I want to die for a cause that is much greater than me.

But Paul doesn't *brag*. He doesn't act as if he *is* Christ. He realizes that he isn't anywhere near as good as the Christ that he follows with devotion. But that doesn't stop him from striving. He says in chapter 3:12-14,

Phil. 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. 13 Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, 14 I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

And then he calls them to have the same mind, and to be passionate about Christ's kingdom and His will and to be willing to lay down their lives for Christ's cause. He's not calling them to do anything that he's not already done. The words of both E sections are stirring words that should set our own hearts on fire.

The heart of the book (2:19-3:1a)

But then comes the heart of the book that has mystified so many people. It's almost anticlimactic in their minds. Not in my mind, but in their minds it is. With the growing intensity of the chiasm, they wonder, why does he put Timothy and Epaphroditus at the heart of this book? Perhaps Timothy is understandable because he has proven himself. Perhaps he is a bit of a hero, even though Paul said elsewhere that Timothy was timid and had stomach problems and wasn't very well respected because of his age. But Epaphroditus? No. He's a nobody. But you see, that's the genius of this book.

Even timid Timothy is a model of Christ. He is at least a well-known and proven character. But then, Paul is pointing out that Timothy is not going to be sent them. Commentators point out that this will be a disappointment, but Paul addresses their disappointment head on *as an indication that they still are not as Christ-like as they should be*. Why is Paul not sending Timothy? Paul explains in chapter 2:20-22 that he needs Timothy.

Phil. 2:20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

The disappointing news to the Philippians is that Paul is going to keep Timothy around until he finds out what is going to happen to him. Yes, verse 19 says that he hopes to send him shortly. And yes, verses 23-24 say that he hopes that *he himself* will be out of prison to visit them shortly. But he doesn't know, and until he figures that out, he wants to keep Timothy around. So that leaves them with Epaphroditus at the heart of this epistle. He was merely a servant. Yet the point of this book is that Epaphroditus illustrates every principle that Jesus and Paul have sought to exemplify in the book of Philippians. In a short article on this book, Peter Leithart says,

By placing these two servants at the center, Paul inverts standard ancient hierarchies. Not even Jesus, with His heroic self-emptying at Calvary, nor Paul, with his dramatic renunciation of all "fleshly" privilege, stands at the center. Sharing the mind of Christ doesn't have to take heroic form in martyrdom or ascetic self-denial. It can take the form of humble obedience and service, not a martyr's death but sickness produced by overwork.

By placing these two servants at the center of his letter, Paul adds a layer to the moral theology of the letter: Have the mind of Christ who emptied himself; follow the example of Paul who renounced ancestral privileges; and—at the peak — receive and imitate the humble service of Timothy and Epaphroditus.⁶

I think he has nailed it. Moises Silva says much the same in his commentary. By putting Epaphroditus in the center of the book Paul says that Epaphroditus best exemplifies the self-sacrificing service of Christ. But he also points out that Paul has killed several other birds with one stone. How is that? Well, let me read just one paragraph from his commentary that introduces several problems that Paul faced. Silva says,

Aware that the Philippians would be deeply disappointed to see Epaphroditus rather than Timothy return, Paul was faced with a serious challenge. How would he cushion this inevitable disappointment? Might Epaphroditus become the object of undeserved criticism? How could he convey his great joy for the church's continual participation in his apostolic ministry while at the same time rebuking them unambiguously for their grave lapse in sanctification? Would he be able to express his heartfelt thanks for their costly offering and yet discourage them from doing it again? And how would he report truthfully his own troubles without intensifying their spirit of discontent? How to help them in this great hour of their need!⁷

I think by constructing every concern in this book through the lens of this chiasm, Paul has perfectly answered every concern. Let's end this sermon by looking at this remarkable model of Jesus - a model that every one of us can relate to. You may consider yourself to be nothing compared to Christ - and you are nothing. You may consider yourself to be nothing compared to Paul - and that is probably true. Most of us probably don't even measure up to timid, weak, and sickly Timothy. But it doesn't matter. The comfort of the book of Philippians is that when Jesus indwells us, He makes our lives count no matter how little or humble we are. We might just be a messenger boy who knows how work hard like Epaphroditus. Beginning to read at chapter 2:25:

Phil. 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;

What a great introduction! Paul considers Epaphroditus to be a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, and the one who ministered to his needs. They considered him to be merely a messenger. Yet Paul is quite clear - He encourages them to exalt the humble and see Christ in this man. Paul is in effect saying, "Here is a man that I value because he is so much like Jesus - the Christ who called Himself a bonds slave." Verse 26:

26 since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

What selfless concern Epaphroditus shows for the church that he loves! He is not so much concerned about his own illness. He is concerned that they will be worried. He doesn't want them to be concerned. He is thinking about their interests ahead of his own - even while it appears that he might be on his death bed. And along with his concern for them he longs for them and shows love for them. Verse 27:

27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

⁶ <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/leithart/2017/07/structure-of-philippians/>

⁷ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 4.

What a poignant way of showing Paul's love for this man. Here was a man who had served Paul faithfully and because of that service had almost died from sickness. Paul considered it a great mercy that God had spared his life. He's not a nobody to Paul. He is a treasure to Paul because he is a treasure to Christ. Paul is exalting the lowly just as Paul wants the Philippians to exalt each other because of Christ in them. If you saw Christ in the person that you despise, you could no longer despise him or her. You would suddenly be motivated to honor and serve that person because in doing so you would be honoring and serving Christ. Verse 28:

28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.

What a great way to speak of Epaphroditus to the Philippians. When they realize the whole story, they are going to value him greatly. Like Christ and Paul, he had poured out his life in sacrificial service, and God had miraculously raised him up. Paul wants them to be just as eager to receive this servant as Paul was eager to send him. Paul wants them to be thrilled that God had raised him from his death bed. In effect Paul was saying, "If you value me, value Epaphroditus." Verse 29:

29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;

When you receive a little child in Christ's name, you are receiving Christ. How you treat the brethren in this church is how you are treating Christ. How the Philippians treated Epaphroditus was how they were treating Christ. They may have looked down on this lowly fella' but Paul wanted them to see him as Jesus saw him. This is the nature of Christ's upside down kingdom. *God is not about celebrities in the church.* He's not. I think the modern church is too much about celebrities. There is no celebrity at the center of this book. If we had written Philippians we might have put Christ at the center or some celebrity at the center and in the process lost most of the readers who couldn't relate to them because they feel so inadequate. Now, Paul is clear that Epaphroditus *was* centered on Christ. That's how Christ is the center of this book. Christ is not obscured by the status of some celebrity who is a hotshot. So here is the question - Are our lives wrapped around Christ like this man's was? "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem." We should esteem such servants because Christ does. Verse 30:

30 because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

Some say that his sickness was related to his work. Either he worked too hard to serve Paul, or made so many sacrifices for Paul, or took so many risks for Christ that he was sick - almost to death. I'm not entirely sure how he got sick. However he got that sickness, Paul says that he exemplified Christ by not regarding his life in order to supply what was lacking in the Philippians gift. They had sacrificially given, but apparently it was not enough. Somehow this dear brother worked hard to make up the difference to help Paul out.

But Paul didn't want to end this section on a negative note. The first half of chapter 3 verse 1 is the end of this central section - "Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord." There were no chapter and verse divisions in the original, and most commentaries recognize a subject break in the middle of that verse.

So Paul keeps bringing up the subject of joy. He has shown through this book how to have joy and peace in the worst of our circumstances. And I will end the sermon by repeating once more the theme sentence of the book as a whole - a theme sentence that I hope each one of us will lay hold of as a theme for our own lives. "By humbly centering our lives around Jesus, we can experience His supernatural joy and peace in all circumstances." May it be so Lord Jesus. Amen.