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Philippians as Chiasmus: Key to the Unity, Structure and Theme Questions

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as the paradigm justified sinner, forces this connection on the text:

Can we therefore conclude that according to Paul Abraham believed in Christ? Very nearly, if not exactly. There is no difference between the character of his faith and that of Christians. He, like us, was justified by faith; like us he is a justified sinner.⁶³

Even Boers admits, however, that this connection is never explicitly made.⁶⁴ This presents a problem for Boers' treatment of the entire chapter, since vv. 23–4 are his primary proof that Abraham is offered as an example of Christian faith in Romans 4, and the force of these verses is read back into his treatment of the earliest portions of the chapter.⁶⁵ A careful examination of the chapter as a whole reveals that Abraham is not offered as a model for our faith; the figure of Abraham fulfils a similar role here as in Galatians 3 – setting the boundaries for God's people as their representative and forefather, not demonstrating how an individual Christian 'finds' justification.

SUMMARY OF ROMANS 4.1–25

Paul draws on the figure of Abraham in Romans 4 to argue that it was always God's intention to include Gentiles among his people (3.29–30). Beginning in 4.1, Abraham functions as the forefather of all who believe and not of those who are merely his physical descendants, a point which allows Gentiles to share in the promises which Abraham received in accordance with his faith. This further demonstrates that ethnic boundary markers are not significant in the people of God (Gal 3.26; 5.6; 1 Cor 7.19), inasmuch as such markers were not present when righteousness was reckoned to their forefather. The figure of Abraham is not used in Romans 4 as a model for how an individual becomes justified by faith, as one might expect if such an issue were a point in contention, but rather as the representative forefather who brings righteousness to all those related to him by their faith, whether Jew or Greek.

⁶³ Hanson, 'Abraham the Justified Sinner', 66.

⁶⁴ Boers, *Theology out of the Ghetto*, 91. While the object of Abraham's faith (4.17) and that of the Christian (4.24) are ultimately the same (cf. Käsemann, *Romans*, 128), Paul never treats Abraham's faith as exemplary. The fact that believing Gentiles have faith like their forefather is assumed, not prescribed. It is a premise in Paul's argument which explains why Gentiles are as much Abraham's offspring as believing Jews.

⁶⁵ Boers, *Theology out of the Ghetto*, 84.

PHILIPPIANS AS CHIASMUS: KEY TO THE STRUCTURE, UNITY AND THEME QUESTIONS

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From a practical standpoint, it is a great advantage to 'kill two birds with one stone'. But it is rare indeed to be able to confront and accomplish *three* significant tasks in one unified effort. That, however, is exactly what this slender treatment proposes to do: tackle the questions of structure, unity and theme that have long haunted the study of Philippians essentially in 'one fell swoop'.

Why would such an ambitious (some may say foolhardy!) agenda be attempted, much less in such short compass? The answer is surprisingly simple: all three issues are so closely connected as to be virtually exegetical-critical 'Siamese triplets'. If that is not immediately clear, consider these angles: 1) The unity of Philippians is considered uncertain largely because the structure question is so muddled; 2) the overarching structure question is rendered considerably more problematic when there is no consensus regarding the integrity of the document under consideration (unless, as shall be seen, structural considerations clearly support the unity of the epistle); and 3) attempting to apply the concept of a 'unifying theme' to Philippians sounds crazy if there is not solid proof that the letter is a unified composition with a clear structure.

Thus, while it is certainly far from ideal to handle all three major issues more or less together, it may actually result in more helpful insight to do so. If, in fact (as the present writers believe), the observable inverted structure of Philippians best proves (beyond reasonable doubt) that the letter has literary integrity and a readily discernible core theme, juggling all three questions together will be more than worth the complexity involved.

The procedure to be utilized in this study will begin with a selective recent (in this case, the past 15 years) 'status report' on the structure, unity and theme questions for Philippians. Next, a proposed chiasmic outline of Philippians will be visualized. Following that will be a discussion of exegetical clues supporting the

grand chiastic structure of the epistle, as well as a comparison with an extensive listing of criteria for longer chiastic structures. Finally, before presenting the implications of the fine-tuned structural understanding of Philippians for the related issues for further study and the conclusion, the validity and significance of the newly-spotlighted centrepiece passage will be explained.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE STRUCTURE, UNITY AND THEME QUESTIONS

Structure: It has been only a generation since Robert Mounce backed his 'string of pearls' analysis of the structure of Philippians with this observation: 'Since Philippians is an intensely personal letter, it resists all attempts to force it into a logical outline.'¹ Sometimes it must be wondered whether the state of understanding of the structure of Philippians has really progressed very far beyond this (or whether it is believed it can!). For example, while such important recent commentaries as Hawthorne's in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (1983), Craddock's in the *Interpretation* series (1985), Silva's in the *Wycliffe Exegetical Commentary* (1988) and O'Brien's massive contribution to the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (1991) all contain various fairly similar basic outlines, there are minimal treatments of structure, if that. Perhaps reflecting this seeming discouragement about grasping the structural design of the epistle, Fitzgerald's recent major entry on Philippians in the prestigious *Anchor Bible Dictionary* contains no discussion of structure whatsoever. That is more than slightly strange considering that Fitzgerald concludes: 'The presumption of the letter's literary integrity is probably correct.'²

Alongside such minimalizing of the structure question among higher-profile contributions, there has been some recent stirring in other quarters. For example, Swift (1984),³ Watson (1988),⁴ Alexander (1989),⁵ and Luter (1989)⁶ all followed a Greek letter-forms

¹ R. Mounce, 'Philippians' in the *Wycliffe Bible Commentary* (ed. C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison; Chicago: Moody, 1962) 1320.

² J. T. Fitzgerald, 'Philippians, Epistle to the', in *ABD* (gen. ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992) 5.320-2.

³ R. C. Swift, 'The Theme and Structure of Philippians', *BSac* 141 (1984) 257-75.

⁴ D. F. Watson, 'A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question', *NovT* 30 (1988) 57-88.

⁵ L. Alexander, 'Hellenistic Letter-Forms and the Structure of Philippians', *JSNT* 37 (1989) 87-101.

⁶ A. B. Luter, Jr., 'Philippians' in the *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible* (ed. W. A. Elwell; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 1034-48. This was one of the present writers' earlier struggles with the unity, structure and theme of Philippians.

approach, from one angle or another. This was definitely a step in the right direction, but there still existed no emerging consensus on the structure question.

Unity/Integrity: Dalton (1979)⁷ and Garland (1985),⁸ as well as several of the works listed above, have made some significant contributions here, attempting to break out of the scholarly 'stalemate' (Garland's term)⁹ over this question. Garland's article also has strong implications for the structure issue. At this point, it seems fair to say that, if the structure of Philippians achieved anywhere near consensus status among scholars, the unity issue would be largely defused, if not answered altogether.

Theme: Most do not even deal with the *possibility* of a central theme. For those that do, Swift, following Dalton's earlier suggestion,¹⁰ has presented the most helpful discussion here, carefully establishing the viability of 'partnership in the gospel' as a prime candidate for the unifying theme of Philippians.¹¹

EXEGETICAL CLUES POINTING TO A CHIASTIC STRUCTURE FOR PHILIPPIANS

The first layer¹² of the chiasm (A-A') states the theme of the epistle, 'partnership in the gospel'. In section A, Paul introduces

⁷ W. J. Dalton, 'The Integrity of Philippians', *Bib* 60 (1979) 97-102.

⁸ D. E. Garland, 'The Composition and Unity of Philippians', *NovT* 32 (1985) 140-73.

⁹ Garland, 'Composition and Unity', 143. R. F. Hock, 'Philippians' in *Harper's Bible Commentary* (ed. J. L. Mays; San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988) goes so far as to say that 'this proposal [that Philippians is a composite document] has convinced few scholars' (1220). Hock has apparently ignored such recent weighty voices against the unity of Philippians as, e.g., J.-F. Collange, *L'Épître de Saint Paul aux Philippiens* (CNT 10a; Neuchâtel: Delachaux and Niestlé, 1973) = *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Philippians* (London: Epworth, ET, 1979); H. Koester, 'Philippians, Letter to the', *IDBSup*, 665; N. Perrin and D. Duling, *The New Testament: An Introduction* (2nd ed.; New York: Harcourt Brace Jonavich, 1982); D. Patte, *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel: A Structural Introduction to the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983); W. Schenk, *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1984); and J. Reumann, 'Contributions of the Philippian Community to Paul and Earliest Christianity', *NTS* 38 (1993) 438-57. Interestingly, F. Craddock (*Philippians* [Interpretation; John Knox, 1985]) essentially avoids the question by focusing on 'the text of Philippians as we have received it' (48).

¹⁰ Dalton, 101.

¹¹ L. Alexander's ('Hellenistic Letter-Forms') recent proposal that 'reassurance' (cf. Phil 1.12) is the 'central business' of Philippians (96) rests completely on proving that Philippians is a 'family letter' of the day. That endeavour and other possibilities for a central theme, such as joy, martyrdom/suffering, or gospel (only), have not met widespread scholarly acceptance.

¹² The extensive parallel, complementary and distinctive terminology in the opening (1.1-2) and closing (4.21-3) greetings sections may well mark them off as either the outer layer of the grand chiasm of the epistle or as an elaborate *inclusio*. For a compact discussion of such a constant overarching Pauline *inclusio*, see 'Grace' in the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (ed. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. Reid; Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 1993) 393-4.

A CHIASTIC OUTLINE OF PHILIPPIANS

(1.1–2) *Opening Greetings*: Previewing 'Partnership' Theme, Emphasizing Servant-Leadership.

A. (1.3–11) *Prologue*: 'Partnership in the Gospel' Theme Introduced with Prayerful Gratitude.

B. (1.12–26) *Comfort/Example*: Paul's Safety and Right Thinking in the Midst of a Difficult 'Guarded' Situation.

C. (1.27–2.4) *Challenge*: Stand Fast and Be United, Fulfilling Paul's Joy!

D. (2.5–16) *Example/Action*: Christ's Example of Humility and Suffering before Glory, then Related Behavioural Instructions.

E. (2.17–3.1a) *Midpoint*: Caring Models of Gospel Partnership, Two of Which Are Sent to Help Immediately.

D'. (3.1b–21) *Example/Action*: Paul's Example of Humbling and Suffering before 'Upward Call'/Transformation, then Instructions.

C'. (4.1–5) *Challenge*: Stand Fast and Accentuate Existing Joy by the Reconciliation of Two Past Gospel Partners!

B'. (4.6–9) *Comfort/Example*: The Philippians' 'Guarded' Peace of Mind and Right Thinking in the Midst of an Anxious Situation.

A'. (4.10–20) *Epilogue*: Partnership from the Past Renewed, with Expressed Gratitude.

(4.21–3) *Closing Greetings*: Reviewing Partnership Theme, Emphasizing Oneness of the Saints.

this theme as the reason for his thanksgiving (1.5). Their *κοινωνία . . . εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον* is paralleled by the use of *ἐκοινωνήσεν* in A' (4.15). In both he draws attention to their continued partnership. The Philippians are specifically identified as his partners in the gospel in v. 7, and then in section A' he commends them for sharing with him in his affliction, even when no other church would (4.14). Note that in both sections there is a heartfelt past-present-future development of this partnership. In the first section he states his firm belief that the work which God has begun in the Philippians will continue until the day of Christ Jesus. Therefore, Paul continues to pray for them that their love will abound and that they will be sincere and blameless. In the matching section he describes their possible future needs. Both members of the first layer end on a similar benedictory note (1.11; 4.20).

The second layer (B–B') describes the results of Paul's partnership with the Philippians. In B it results in the spread of the

gospel, even in Paul's imprisonment, because the brethren now have more courage to boldly speak the word of God. Furthermore, he is confident that everything will turn out for good because of the Philippians' 'partnership' through their prayers. Paul states his own commitment to them when he says that, although he would rather depart and be with Christ, yet he knows that it is better for their progress in the faith that he remain (1.12–26). Thus, the importance of having such a partnership is illustrated, and it is clear that all who are involved benefit from it. The B' section reinforces the result of partnership. Paul instructs them about prayer and right thinking, and he exhorts them to practise those things which they have learned from him (4.6–9), even in this letter (1.12–26). Perhaps Paul's time in prison gave him the idea of having the peace of God 'guard' (*φρουρέω*; i.e., in a military or custodial manner) their hearts and minds (4.7), since he was constantly aware of the presence of the guards attached to the Praetorium where he was being held (1.13).¹³

The third layer (C–C') gives Paul's challenge to the Philippians to stand united in their partnership with each other. By doing this they will fulfil Paul's 'joy' (2.2), an idea which also brackets the needed point of fulfilment in 4.1 and 4.4. This need is introduced in 1.27 as he urges them to strive together for the faith. The same idea of 'striving together' is echoed in 4.3 as he recalls Euodia's and Syntyche's past contributions to the furtherance of the gospel. The only two uses of *συναθλέω* in the New Testament are seen in these verses, and the exhortation to unity is seen in the use of *τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε* in 2.2 and *τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν* in 4.2. The congregation is told that they possess the spiritual resources (*παράκλησις . . .*) to be of the same mind (2.1–2) and Euodia and Syntyche are specifically urged (*παρακαλῶ* twice) to live in harmony (4.2). Also in both sections Paul challenges them to stand firm, his uses of *στήκω* in 1.27 and 4.1 being the only two in Philippians.

Paul continues to develop the theme of partnership in the fourth layer (D–D') by urging them to follow classic examples of humility and sacrifice because only those who are able to put aside their own interests can live in unity. In D (2.5–16) he gives the majestic example of Christ, who willingly emptied himself in order to become a servant. Because he was obedient even to death, God chose to exalt him and to give him the name that is above every name.¹⁴

¹³ BAGD, 'πραυτόριον', states, 'If the letter was written fr. Rome, the words are best taken to mean in the whole praetorian (or imperial) guard' (697).

¹⁴ For an explanation of the meaning of this important phraseology, see A. B. Luter, 'Name', *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*.

Reflecting the example of Christ, Paul in D' (3.1b–21) is presented as one who humbled himself, but, in his situation, it was to gain the righteousness of Christ. He urges them to have this same attitude which was present in Christ and now is seen in himself (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε in 2.5 and τοῦτο φρονῶμεν in 3.15).

This analysis results in the following subdivisions in this layer:

- D – (2.5–8) Consider the example of Christ's humility and suffering, (2.9–11) which resulted in God exalting him.
 (2.12–16) Follow Christ's example by working out your σωτηρία and being a light in the present dark world. There will be 'glory' in the day of Christ!
- D' – (3.1b–9) Consider the example of Paul's humbling and loss, (3.10–16) which will result in the righteousness of Christ and the goal of the upward call.
 (3.17–21) Follow Paul's example, not being an enemy of the Cross. There will be glorious transformation when Christ, your σωτήρ, comes!

The most intriguing part of the epistle occurs in section E (2.17–3.1a).¹⁵ Paul, and especially Timothy and Epaphroditus, are held up as exemplary partners in the gospel and ones worth emulating and honouring. Indeed, the latter two will soon be with the Philippians, giving the congregation an opportunity to observe first-hand these two models of godly behaviour. Timothy is described as one who is genuinely concerned for their welfare, not like the others who seek after their own interests. His character has been proven, as seen in the fact that he served with Paul as a child serves his father. Epaphroditus is a brother and fellow-worker (συνεργόν).¹⁶ Besides being their messenger (ἀπόστολος; strikingly, the only use in Philippians), he ministered to Paul's needs. Like Timothy, he is deserving of their honour. As Paul has emphasized the theme of partnership and given the Philippians examples of right behaviour, he now presents these two fellow-workers to the Philippians as those who exemplify what an ongoing partnership in the Lord should be and who will soon be with them. This point is spotlighted by the bracketing effect of λειτουργία ('service, ministry') in 2.17, 30 and λειτουργός ('servant, minister') in 2.25. Their examples are

¹⁵ This same sectional division is adopted by F. Craddock (*Philippians*), who also notes the long-observed 'conclusion-like nature of 2.17–3.1a' (47). If a chiasmic structuring of Philippians is valid, 2.17–3.1a does function, in effect, as the letter's 'conclusion', though located at its midpoint. It is also worth noting that those who view Philippians as composite ordinarily see the break between two of the smaller letters after 3.1a (e.g., Collange, *Philippians*, 121–2).

¹⁶ Not only does this συν- prefix noun fit nicely with the theme of 'partnership', it is also a part of an impressive pattern of συν- usage throughout the letter (some 15 instances in this brief letter).

especially crucial since Paul, their 'primary partner', so to speak, is presently unable to come to them (2.23).

CRITERIA FOR EXTENDED CHIASMUS AND PHILIPPIANS

The most complete listing of such criteria that we are aware of is found in C. Blomberg's suggestive article on 'The Structure of 2 Corinthians 1–7'.¹⁷ The application of these criteria to Philippians reveals that an overwhelming majority can be found in our proposed outline. A listing of these criteria will follow, along with a brief explanation of their application to the epistle. Because of their length and complexity, we have chosen to shorten and/or paraphrase them.

- (1) *There must be a problem in determining the structure of the text. If a more conventional and straightforward outline is already available and satisfactorily explains the text, there is no need to risk obscuring what is already there.* As explained above, no consensus has been reached as to the structure of the epistle, and its unity/integrity has been consistently questioned as well.
- (2) *There must be clear examples of parallelism between the two 'halves' of the chiasm which have been noted by previous commentators irrespective of how they perceive the structure of the text. This criterion prevents 'forcing' the text into a preconceived structure.* For example, Dalton has expertly developed the *inclusio* role in the epistle of ideas in 1.3–11 and 4.10–20.¹⁸ Garland extensively lists the parallels between the end of Phil 1 and the beginning of chapter 4,¹⁹ as well as an impressive list of parallels between the 'Christ Hymn' (2.5–11) and chapter 3.²⁰
- (3) *There should be verbal (or grammatical) parallelism as well as conceptual (or structural) parallelism in most, if not all, of the corresponding pairs of subdivisions.* In Philippians, verbal parallelism is especially evident, as seen in the use of such key words as κοινωνία (1.5)/ἐκοινωνήσεν (4.15) and συγκοινωνούς (1.7)/συγκοινωνήσαντες (4.14) in A–A'; δεήσεως (1.19)/δεήσει (4.6) in B–B'; στήκετε (1.27)/στήκετε (4.1), συναθροῦντες (1.27)/συνήθλησαν (4.3) and τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε (2.2)/τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν (4.2) in C–C'; and φρονεῖτε (2.5)/φρονῶμεν . . . (3.15) in D–D'.

¹⁷ C. Blomberg, 'The Structure of 2 Corinthians 1–7', *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (Fall 1989) 4–8.

¹⁸ Dalton, 'Integrity', 101.

¹⁹ Garland, 'Composition and Unity', 160–73.

²⁰ Garland, 157–9.

- (4) *This verbal parallelism should involve central or dominant imagery or terminology.* This is substantially evident from the information presented above, especially as seen in the use of the important *κοινωνία*, *στήκω*, *συναθλέω*, and *φρονέω* themes.
- (5) *Both the verbal and conceptual parallelisms should use words and ideas not regularly found elsewhere in the chiasm.* In this regard, it is particularly noteworthy that Paul's uses of *στήκω* in C-C' are the only two in Philippians, and that the only two NT uses of *συναθλέω* also occur in C-C'. The kindred terms *παράκλησις* (2.1) and *παρακαλέω* (4.2) are also only found in the epistle in the C-C' layer. In addition, *δέησις* occurs only one other time in Philippians outside B-B' (in 1.4).
- (6) *There should be multiple sets of correspondences between opposite passages in the chiasm, as well as multiple members of the chiasm itself. The repetition of three or four members is more significant than a simple ABA' or ABB'A' pattern, whereas five or more elements in a chiasm generally implies an intended pattern.* The proposed Philippians chiasm presents four pairs (with the possibility of five if the midpoint is divided into E-E': Timothy and Epaphroditus as two complementary examples of partners in the gospel).
- (7) *The outline should divide the text at natural breaks which are generally agreed upon by others, even those proposing different overall structures. The chiasm should not violate the natural 'paragraphing' of the text.* On this point there may be disagreement since presently there is no clearcut consensus on the outlining of Philippians. However, the writers believe that the proposed divisions fit very naturally with the flow of the text.²¹ If there is a significant point of departure from common outlines, it would be in C-C': separating off 1.27-2.4 and 4.1-5 from the section that follows each. Many also break after 2.16, instead of 2.18, and after 2.30 instead of 3.1a, although neither is a firm given.
- (8) *Since the centre of the chiasm is the climax, it should be a passage worthy of that position in terms of its significance.* With this proposed outline of Philippians, the section 2.17-3.1a, which has long baffled commentators,²² moves into its

²¹ Additionally, it can be noted that the numbers of verses in parallel sections are not balanced exactly (example B-B'). However, Blomberg's chiasmatic outlines of 2 Cor 1.12-7.16 also displays some obvious disparities in size, which do not seem to present a significant problem.

²² E.g., O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians*, 314, who succinctly addresses the sense that 2.17-3.1a is 'out of place'.

- originally-intended position of prominence and its significance is clearly seen (see below, 'The Pivotal Role of Philippians 2.17-3.1a in the Chiasmatic Arrangement').
- (9) *Ruptures in the outline should be avoided, if possible. One should not have to argue that one or more of the members of the reverse part of the structure have been shifted from their corresponding locations in the forward sequence.* There are no 'ruptures' of any kind in the chiasmatic outline offered here.

According to Blomberg, it is quite rare for all nine of the criteria to be fulfilled. Thus, a structure which fulfils *most* of these 'stands a strong chance of reflecting the actual structure of the text'.²³ The proposed chiasmatic structure of Philippians seems to reasonably fulfil at least eight of the nine criteria, leading to the conclusion that a chiasmatic structure of Philippians is highly probable, with the crowning midpoint being the strong commendation of Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church in 2.17-3.1a.

THE PIVOTAL ROLE OF PHILIPPIANS 2.17-3.1a IN THE CHIASMATIC ARRANGEMENT

When the chiasmatic structure of Philippians is analyzed, the pivotal role of 2.17-3.1a becomes readily apparent.²⁴ Although it has often been argued that this section forms the end of a letter, thus supporting the thesis that Philippians is a compilation of two or three letters,²⁵ the writers propose that this section is instead the focal point of Paul's argument. It has been maintained that because the section is in the form of a 'travelogue', that is, the standardized form by which Paul communicates the travel plans of himself and his co-workers, it must be the conclusion of a letter, since the 'travelogue' usually appears at the end of Paul's letters. This contention has been at the heart of the debate concerning the unity and integrity of the epistle.²⁶ As Martin concludes, 'This is an

²³ Blomberg, '2 Corinthians 1-7', 7.

²⁴ Sadly, O'Brien (313-44) and Hawthorne (107-21) give barely half as much space proportionately in their comments on this section as Paul allotted to the passage in the letter.

²⁵ R. A. Culpepper, 'Co-Workers in Suffering: Philippians 2.19-30', *RevExp* 77 (1980) 349-58, expertly answers these hypotheses before insightfully expounding the central passage.

²⁶ Another argument is the use of *τὸ λοιπόν*, which is taken to indicate that Paul is ending the letter in 3.1a. However, as Garland notes, this use is 'inconclusive', since it has been shown that it frequently functions as a transitional particle, not just as a closing formula (D. E. Garland, 'Composition and Unity', 149).

important factor in determining whether 2.30–3.1 marks the end of a letter.²⁷

However, as Culpepper has shown, the presence of a 'travelogue' does not necessarily have to indicate the normal ending of an epistle. By surveying the placement of travel descriptions in Paul's letters, he aptly concludes: 1) it is not a severe violation of form for Paul to speak of his co-workers in the body of a letter; and 2) he speaks of his co-workers and travels in the body of a letter when these matters are relevant to the problems of the church or the agenda of the letter.²⁸ Thus, it would not be particularly unusual for Paul to place this 'travelogue' in the middle of the letter. Furthermore, its striking placement should be regarded as a strong indication of its importance to the overall structure of the letter, reflecting a sense of purpose.

The significance of 2.17–3.1a has not gone totally unnoticed by others, and those who call attention to its prominence generally see it in relation to Paul's preceding exhortations. Similar to what has been proposed here, Garland states, 'Both Timothy and Epaphroditus can be considered examples of the selfless attitude that Paul wants the community to emulate.'²⁹ Although Watson sees it as a *digressio* within the *probatio* of the epistle (2.1–3.21), he too sees it as a key exemplification of Paul's exhortations.³⁰ Also, if Culpepper's perceptive and suggestive study does nothing else, it raises the profile of Philippians 2.17–3.1a from somewhat awkward 'filler' to at least a spotlighted focus in the epistle.³¹

Thus, it seems very likely that 2.17–3.1a was deliberately placed by Paul in order to provide immediate examples to the Philippian church for how they should live. In addition, the elegant chiasmic structure points to an even more crucial role for the passage: as the main focal point of the chiasm. If Paul's overall theme is indeed 'partnership in the gospel', then the section on Timothy and Epaphroditus indicates that the crowning central thrust of the letter is to exhort the Philippians to cooperate with and follow the examples of these two partners and servants of Christ. Since both will soon be with the Philippians, not only are they presented as models of the behaviour which Paul desires to see in them, they

²⁷ R. P. Martin, *Philippians* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 116.

²⁸ Culpepper, 'Co-Workers in Suffering', 350.

²⁹ Garland, 'Composition and Unity', 163.

³⁰ D. F. Watson, 'A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question', *NovT* 30 (1988) 71; Garland, 'Composition and Unity', 153, sees this passage as central to dealing with what was 'uppermost' in Paul's mind: 'The dissension that had emerged in the community's ranks'.

³¹ Culpepper, 'Co-Workers in Suffering', 349–58.

are specifically the ones who can help them achieve the apostle's goal of renewed unity.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNITY AND THEME QUESTIONS

As stated at the outset, the structure, unity and theme questions related to Philippians are inextricably linked. If you probe appreciably in regard to one point, you end up staring in the face of at least one of the other kindred questions.

In this case, that is a sizeable advantage. If Philippians is, in fact, a majestic inverted structure, then, realistically, it is impossible that it is a 'stitched together' composite of two or three smaller letters. It defies belief that any editorial process could create such an elaborate chiasm out of independent documents. So, the bottom line on the unity question is: the purported tensions at 2.30–3.1 and in the form and placement of 4.10–20 have been overblown, at least in terms of any shattering potential regarding the integrity of Philippians.

Similarly, now that the structure and unity questions can be more safely laid to rest, the possibility of a unifying theme that unfolds throughout Philippians can be faced with full seriousness. Dalton's 'partnership' proposal³² seems all the stronger, especially given the new spotlighted positioning of 2.17–3.1a.³³ 'Partnership in the gospel' does, in one meaningful sense or another, relate to every section – and every mirroring chiasmic layer – in the letter.

AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY

First, having now directly addressed the foundational literary issue of *what* kind of structure is developed in Philippians, it remains to ask and answer *why* this particular kind of intricate literary pattern (i.e., a grand chiasm) was utilized.³⁴ Along those lines, it is hoped that the recent re-release of Nils Lund's *Chiasmus*

³² Dalton, 'Integrity', 101; Luter, 'Philippians', 1035; see also the excellent study of J. P. Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

³³ Without pushing the observation, it is perhaps relevant to note that the textual centre of Philippians (whether by counting verses or words) is found in the 2.17–3.1a pericope.

³⁴ Blomberg, '2 Corinthians 1–7', notes that 'recent studies have shown that chiasmus had thoroughly permeated the ancient Near East' (18). Also worthy of note here are the plethora of examples (though some are highly questionable) included in the NT portion of J. Welch, ed., *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg, 1981).

in the *New Testament*³⁵ (by Hendrickson Publishers) will further stimulate the already rapidly accelerating interest in related questions, and that this essay will help focus deserved attention on the Pauline literature,³⁶ especially Philippians.

Second, since the present treatment is seminal, there is 'open season' on any aspect of the structure suggested here. Also, further research should be done on the distinctive parallels between the opening greeting section (1.1–2) and the closing greetings (4.21–3), which would not normally be considered part of such an overarching mirroring structure. In addition, the reference to 'guard' in 4.7, ironic in light of Paul's earlier specific mention of the Praetorium (with its attached military presence; 1.13), may well be worthy of further exploration within this newly-recognized inverted structural grid.

One final, aptly climactic, suggestion: the substantial pattern of $\sigma\upsilon\nu$ -compound terms has not yet been adequately treated, and it may be found that this surprisingly significant usage contributes virtually as much to the unifying theme of gospel partnership for Philippians³⁷ as the $\kappa\omicron\upsilon\nu\omicron\nu\acute{\alpha}$ word group, as well as to the outlook (the $\phi\rho\nu\nu\acute{\epsilon}\omega$ word group) that is needed to heal the growing breach in the Philippian church (2.2–4; 2.19–30; 4.2, 3).

CONCLUSION

Recent study of Philippians has been confusingly characterized by scholars who either seem to: 1) Assume the unity of the letter while also attempting to prove it by approaches already heavily employed (and critiqued!); or 2) Assume the epistle to be composite without even noting that such a position is far from a firm consensus. Can Garland be blamed for calling such a state of affairs a 'stalemate'?

In the last decade new ground has been broken by W. Schenk's monumental *Die Philipperbriefe des Paulus* (1984). His fresh reader-oriented, linguistic-literary approach has added helpful needed dimensions to the discussion, though it has not been without far-reaching measured criticism.³⁸ Yet, for all his innovative

³⁵ Originally published by the University of North Carolina Press in 1942.

³⁶ Here note the older, but still helpful, study of smaller Pauline chiastic structures in J. Jeremias, 'Chiasmus in den Paulusbriefen', *ZNW* 49 (1958) 145–56.

³⁷ It is quite possible that the compounds are related to the usage of $\sigma\upsilon\nu$ in the opening greetings section (1.1) and in the closing greetings (4.21).

³⁸ See, e.g., the detailed responses to Schenk's commentary in *Semeia* 48 by H. J. B. Combrink, D. Dormeyer and J. W. Voelz (135–69).

methodology, Schenk basically assumes the three-letter theory instead of employing his various new approaches to buttress the position. He launches into his discussions of 'Der Dankbrief Phil A' on pages 29ff., '. . . von Phil B' on pages 76ff and 'Das Fragment des Warnbriefes Phil C' on pages 250ff virtually without proof of the partitioning, and only deals with 'Die Unmöglichkeit der Einheitlichkeits-Hypothese' (i.e., the impossibility of the unity-hypothesis) as something of a 'mini-afterthought' near the end of his volume on pages 334–5.

With all due respect to the past and present luminaries who have studied Philippians, when assumptions are discounted from their unseen, but (too) often decisive, roles in such matters, it is no more inherently unlikely that Paul would have chosen to shape his correspondence with the Philippian church as a grand chiasm than by some other literary strategy current in that society. Certainly the veteran perspective of Dibelius in regard to Philippians is still apropos: '. . . All the peculiarities of the sequence of thought are comprehensible without assuming editorial work or interpolations.'³⁹

If, as the preceding article has sought to argue, there is sufficient literary-exegetical evidence to establish the viability of the Philippians as chiasm hypothesis, it should in fairness be granted a serious hearing among the current competing options . . . nothing more, nothing less. It is simply hoped that the thinking presented here proves to be a contribution in further understanding the elegant literary structure⁴⁰ that develops the 'partnership in the gospel' that Paul had with the Philippian church.

³⁹ M. Dibelius, *A Fresh Approach to the New Testament and Early Christian Literature* (New York: Scribners, 1936) 166.

⁴⁰ Though the preceding treatment falls considerably short of a thoroughgoing discourse analysis approach to Philippians, the present authors have profited significantly from the textlinguistic insights regarding Philippians of Prof. David Alan Black of Talbot School of Theology and Golden Gate Baptist Seminary and the helpful volume he edited, *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992).