

The Gift that Keeps On Giving

An exegetical analysis of *ho enarxámenos en humín érgon agathón* in Philippians 1:6

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GOSPEL
CHRIST

GOD

RESPONSE

Introduction:

Theology drives exegesis. This is unfortunate however, because exegesis should drive theology. Because of this, faulty interpretations exist. No one is completely immune from this, for perfect objectivity is an elusive sort of quest. It requires hard work to interpret ancient texts and the Bible is no exception to the rule. In this paper, I will examine a text that is often misunderstood due to prior theological presuppositions which drive the handling of the text itself. This paper is not about the psychology of what drives us to mishandle texts: rather, it is an exegesis of a passage that has been commonly misinterpreted. The passage I will exegete is Philippians 1:3-7. In this passage there is a very famous verse, verse 6, which I have heard preached more times than I care to recall and have seen plastered on Christian coffee mugs, license plates, graduation plaques and a wide variety of paraphernalia. I will begin by briefly mentioning how this verse has commonly been understood. Then, I will move to discuss the background of the Philippian epistle, highlighting its historical setting, literary data, and purpose. Thirdly, I will offer a translation of the text itself, followed by an exegetical commentary of it, paying careful attention to syntax, grammar, key words and context. Lastly, I will provide a defense of my own position over-and-against the popular view.

II. Philippians 1:6 in Popular Circles:

The most widespread English translation of the Bible, the *NIV*, renders Philippians 1:6 as follows: “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” In common evangelical parlance, Philippians 1:6 is said to be about either the doctrine of: salvation, sanctification, predestination, or perseverance (and some may argue that it is a combination of these). These doctrines are closely related to each other, especially in the *ordo salutis* (“the order of salvation”) of the soteriology of

systematic theologians. Thus, in this paper I will be broadly referring to any one of these positions as the soteriological interpretation. This soteriological position is by far the most popular view held in conventional commentaries.¹

Those who see Philippians 1:6 to be a verse about salvation say that the “good work in you” is reference to the individual salvation of the Christians at Philippi.² Granted, there is debate among Christians about whether sanctification is a distinct work from salvation; however, among those who make this dichotomy they nuance the verse differently. Those who see this verse as dealing with sanctification build upon the salvation view and emphasize that the “good work” is a subsequent act, which is something that God is completing in individual believers.³ In this perspective, the apostle Paul is promising that God will build upon the “good work” of each of their ‘salvations’ through the process of sanctification and that this will continue until Jesus returns. Those who see this as a verse about predestination, lay emphasis on the word “began” and claim this passage shows salvation is a work independent of libertarian free will.⁴ Early

¹ Robert G. Gromacki, *Stand United in Joy: An Exposition of Philippians*, Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Press, 1980, 39–41; J. Hugh Michael, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, *Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, Ltd., 1928, p.13; Merrill C. Tenney, *Philippians: The Gospel at Work*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956, p. 41; Bruce B. Barton et al., *Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon*, Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1995, pp.27–28.; John F. Walvoord, *Philippians. Triumph in Christ*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1971, p. 28; Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Joyful*, Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1975, pp.29–30; Kenneth Grayston, *The Epistles to the Galatians and to the Philippians*, London: Epworth Press, 1957, p.81; Homer A. Kent, Jr., "Philippians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, Vol.11, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), p.105; R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians*, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937, pp.709–710; Moisés Silva, *Philippians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, ed. Kenneth Barker, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992, p. 52; Judith M. Gundry Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying In and Falling Away*, Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990, pp.33–47.

² For example, Gordon Fee says, "...it refers to God's good work of salvation itself, of creating a people for his name in Philippi" (*Philippians, The IVP New Testament Commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999, p.48).

³ F.B. Meyer waxes eloquently about how this verse teaches that we are, "God's great workshop [and thus]... we are sure that the work which His grace has begun, the arm of His strength will complete" (F.B. Meyer, *Devotional Commentary on Philippians*, Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1979, p.28). Meyer adds, "It is easy to pray for a soul when you know that God is also at work perfecting it" (p.28). Other notable commentaries include: Timothy C. Geoffrion, *The Rhetorical Purpose and The Political and Military Character of Philippians*, Lampeter, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 1993, p.166; and Warren F. Draper, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Philippians, Colossians and to Philemon*, Boston, W.H. Halliday & Co., 1876, pp.22-23.

⁴ John MacArthur uses verse 6 to speak of salvation and manages to tie in Calvin's doctrine of predestination with it! (John MacArthur, *Philippians*, Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 2001, pp.26-30: cf. *See Calvin.Institutes*, Book III, Ch. XXI, Sec. 5). Of course, Calvin agrees with MacArthur in his commentary on Philippians (see John Calvin, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, reprint

commentators like Chrysostom and Augustine have used this to speak about predestination.⁵

Lastly, there are those who see this verse as speaking about the doctrine of perseverance.⁶ James Boice calls verse 6, "...one of the three greatest verses in the Bible that teach the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints."⁷

III. Background to the Philippian Epistle

A. Historical Setting

Before continuing to the passage itself to test these four interpretations, it is helpful to have some background context. Philippians was written by the Apostle Paul around 62 AD.⁸

Paul letter's served a very practical purpose of communication between him and key individuals and/or churches.⁹ While on his second missionary journey, Paul established this church in

ed., Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965, pp.228–30). In similar fashion, Alex Motyer uses Philippians 1:6 to "go off" about Calvinism (see: Alex Moyer, *The Message of Philippians*, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984, p.44-45).

⁵ Augustine says, "God can work in our acts without our help. But when we will the deed, he cooperates with us" (Augustine, *On Grace and Free Will* cited in Mark J. Edwards, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Vol. VIII, Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1999, p. 219).

⁶ A distinction should be made between the doctrines of perseverance and eternal security. I have lumped them together in this paper because both positions use Philippians 1:6 in the same manner to support the idea that a true believer will never lose true salvation. Those arguing for predestination can be seen in footnote 7, whereas those arguing for eternal security are as follows: R. T. Kendall, *Once Saved, Always Saved*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1983, pp.19–22; Alvin Baker, *Eternal Security Understood*, *Fundamental Journal* 3 no.8, Lynchburg, VI: 1984, pp.18-20; Charles Stanley, *Eternal Security: Can You Be Sure?* Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990, (throughout the book); Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*, Dallas: Redención Viva, 1989 (throughout the book).

⁷ James Boice, in his commentary, writes a whole chapter on this one verse! (see: James Montgomery Boice, *Philippians An Expositional Commentary*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan 1971).

⁸ There is no legitimate claim to Philippians being epistolary pseudigraphy. Richard Holloway describes the letter as "indisputably authentic" (Richard Holloway, *How to Read the Bible*, London, W.W. Norton Co., 2007, p.104). Ben Witherington has put forth the following; "About the Pauline authorship of Philippians there is little or no debate" (*Friendship and Finances in Philippi*, Valley Forge, PN: Trinity Press, 1994, p.24). Fred B. Craddock states, "That Philippians is a letter of Paul himself is undisputed" (Fred B. Craddock, *Philippians, Interpretation Commentary*, Atlanta, John Knox Press, 1985, p.4). Critical scholars John Dominic Crossan and Jonathon L. Reed also confer that this is indeed a Pauline letter (John Dominic Crossan and Jonathon L. Reed, *In Search of Paul*, Harper Collins, 2004, p.105). Although authorship is not contested, it would be a misstatement to say 'no one' questions it. Gerald F Hawthorne notes four scholars who have questioned and denied Pauline authorship (Gerald F Hawthorne, *Philippians, Word Biblical Commentary*, Waco, Texas, Word Books, 1987, p.28).

⁹ Marcus Borg notes: "Paul's letters were an integral part of his life as an apostle and community-founder. Through them he kept in touch with his communities after he had moved on. They represented him in his absence, and they were read aloud in the gathering of the community. They were not intended for the silent reading of individuals but were addressed to the community, which heard them together" (Marcus J. Borg, *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time*, San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 2001, p. 240).

northeastern Greece in the city of Philippi (Acts 16:9-40).¹⁰ Luke describes the city of Philippi as “a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony” (Acts 16:12). Alister McGrath notes that, “It was the first European city in which Paul proclaimed the gospel.”¹¹ Most likely Paul drafted this letter from Rome while in prison.¹² And while he was held in prison, Paul was making plans for future ministry as he “confidently expects to be delivered.”¹³ Paul was a man with great passion and concern for mission. As a Jew, Paul was no stranger to mission and the costs involved in doing outreach.¹⁴ Understanding this missionary mindset and the historical missions of Paul are critical components to grasping the relationship he had with the church and to understanding what he wrote to them.¹⁵ I will now move to discuss the literary qualities of this epistle.

¹⁰ Henry Clarence Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1944, p.249.

¹¹ Alister McGrath, *The NIV Bible Companion*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1997, p.402.

¹² See footnote 12. Gordon Fee maintains that it is, “almost certainly from Rome” (Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002, p.353). Fee may be overstating his case, as Caesarea and Ephesus are plausible locations. These locations would of course impact the date the date of the Epistle that I have offered. If it was written from Ephesus it would have been written around 56; if it was in Rome, circa 61-63, and if it was in Caesarea, circa 56-60. For discussion on the location of Paul’s imprisonment see: Ralph P. Martin, *New Testament Foundations*, Volume 2, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978, pp. 202-205.

¹³ F.F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, Garden City, New York: Anchor 1972, p.331.

¹⁴ Many have mistakenly assumed that the Jews were not mission minded. Tacitus mentions the proselytizing of the Jews even among foreigners (*Hist.* 5.1-13). We read in Horace’s fourth satire about how the Jews “compel” others to become “member(s)” (*Sermones* 1.4.142-43). Paul was a zealous missionary both before his conversion to Christianity as a devote Jew and thereafter.

¹⁵ After receiving a vision from God (Acts 16:1-5), Paul set off on his so-called second missionary journey. It was around 49 CE when Paul sailed off for Europe in response to this vision. He brought along with him, Luke, Timothy, and Silas as traveling companions and ministry helpers. Once they arrived in Philippi, Paul began ministry. He eagerly shared the gospel of Christ and because of it he was imprisoned, along with Silas (Acts 16:16-24). While in prison, they were beaten without official charges being brought against them. When the authorities found out Paul was a Roman citizen and they saw how he was treated, they released them. Upon his release, they asked Paul and his companions to leave the city. Paul left the city, although Luke and perhaps Timothy remained there to continue the ministry in Philippi. From there, Paul traveled to Thessalonica for a period of “three Sabbaths.” While in Thessalonica, the Philippians sent Paul money to help with the ministry, and they did do more than once! (Phil. 4:15-16). As in Philippi, Paul’s ministry was resisted and he was kicked out of town. Thereafter Paul journeyed through Berea and Athens. He eventually set up ministry in the city of Corinth (50-51 CE) and during this time the Philippian church again sent him money (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7-9). In the spring of 52 CE, Paul began his third missionary journey in which Paul traveled, preaching the gospel, planting churches and raising money (cf. Acts 18:23; Rom. 15:25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4; 2 Cor. 9:1-2, 12-23). As in his last missionary journey, the third journey was marked by opposition against Paul. During his third journey Paul came to Macedonia (c. 55 CE) and there he received more money from the Philippians. Paul brought this money to Jerusalem (cf. Acts 21:17-19). He was later arrested and spent two years in prison in Caesarea (56-58 CE). During this imprisonment, the Philippians wanted to help Paul but they did not have the money to help him (Phil. 4:10). In the summer of 58CE Paul sailed to Rome for his trial after he appealed to Caesar (Acts 25:10-12; 27:1). The Philippians wanted to share in his expenses (Phil. 4:10) and so they sent off Epaphroditus to Rome with money (Phil. 4:18). It is in this context that we must read Philippians.

B. Literary Data

While awaiting deliverance, Paul wrote the book of Philippians. Literarily, it has been categorized as an ancient letter. As a letter, it should be classified, in terms of genre, as belonging to the epistolary family.¹⁶ Ryken explains that, “Epistles are occasional letters evoked by a specific situation, not formal essays on theological topics.”¹⁷ This will be an important feature of epistolary genre as we look at the four suggested soteriological interpretations. Briefly, take note that the four positions are all theological topics, which seems to be at odds with the semantic purposes of this genre.¹⁸ It is important to keep the genre in mind, because – as Margaret Ralph points out – “Only when we read the letters in the context of their literary form and their historical circumstances will we be able to understand the revelation they contain.”¹⁹ Having considered the history of this book and its literary genre, I now turn to discuss its purpose.

C. Purpose

Paul wrote this letter for practical purposes. Philippians was basically a letter of thanks, encouragement and ministry update. Firstly, Paul wanted to thank the Philippians for their support, specifically for their financial contributions to the ministry of the gospel.²⁰ The Philippians had sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a financial gift and Paul was returning him to

¹⁶ The genre of letter can be further broken down into three general subcategories: private or documentary, official and literary (Steven L. McKenzie, *How to Read the Bible*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p.149). Philippians would be considered a documentary letter in that its purpose is primarily communication between friends (see also: Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity*, Library of Early Christianity, Philadelphia, Westminster, 1986, pp.49-173).

¹⁷ Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1984, p.157.

¹⁸ That is not to say however that epistolary genre cannot be theological, indeed it is! However, it is to say that Epistles are not systematic theology textbooks. We must not throw the baby out with the bath water by thinking there is no theology to draw from the text, but the theology of a letter is markedly different from what the four soteriological views are claiming.

¹⁹ Margaret Nutting Ralph, *And God Said What? An Introduction to Biblical Literary Forms*, New York: Paulist Press, 2003, p281.

²⁰ Paul is so thankful that he says, “I thank my God every time I remember you” (Phil 1:3).

Philippi (2:28) to thank them.²¹ Stephen L. Harris points out that Paul “maintained an intimate communication with the Philippians, who were the only group from whom he would accept financial support (4:15-16).”²² Secondly, Paul wanted to encourage them so that they would be unified and remain strong under hardship. Brian Rosner comments, “Philippians contains some of the most encouraging passages in the NT.”²³ It is a letter of friendship and thanks. Paul is very personal in his encouragement as he mentions individuals by name Euodia, Syntyche and Clement.²⁴ Thirdly, Paul had an update for them. He wanted to tell the Philippians that Timothy was coming (2:19-24). His audience is largely Gentile²⁵ and Paul wanted to update them so that they would not be caught off guard by aberrant teachings sweeping some of his churches, such as the Judaizers.²⁶ New Testament scholar, John Hutchinson, has succinctly summarized the purpose of Philippians as follows: “To command believers for their financial support in Paul’s ministry and warn them against the dangers of Judaizers, antinomians, and disunity among themselves.”²⁷

IV. The Text: Philippians 1:1-11

²¹ Crossan and Reed have pointed out: “Apparently Epaphroditus did not simply deliver financial aid from Philippi, he also stayed to help Paul personally and, when that generosity endangered his very life, Paul decided to send him home” (John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *In Search of Paul*, Harper Collins, 2004, p.275). In a sense, the letter is “an acknowledgment of the Philippians’ support Paul had received: now he was sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi with the letter acknowledging the receipt of money from them” (Davorin Peterlin, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in the Light of Disunity in the Church*, New York, Brill, 1995, p.3).

²² Stephen L. Harris, *The New Testament*, NY: McGraw Hill, 2002, p.348. Paul has a strong passion for them. “...Paul’s expression of affection for the Philippians is stronger than any other in his letters” (Craddock, p.17).

²³ Brian Rosner, “Letters”, *The IVP Introduction to the Bible*, Philip S. Johnston (ed.) Downers Grove, IVP, 2006. 235.

²⁴ And perhaps also Syzygus if you take the Greek word *suzugoos* in 4.3 as a proper name.

²⁵ The audience of Paul appears to be largely Gentile for several reasons. First, Acts 16:16 only makes mention of a place of prayer, but not a synagogue. This would imply that the area is not populated much by Jewish people. Secondly, Paul does not cite the Old Testament in his letter, which would imply it is not accessible or known by his audience, suggesting that they are not Jewish. Lastly, Paul does not defend his apostleship in this letter, which would be more of a Jewish issue rather than Gentile.

²⁶ Paul warns his Gentile audience about the Judaizers who sought to make Gentile converts into full Torah observers. Paul writes, “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh! For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship in the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh” (Phil 3:2-3 NRSV).

²⁷ John Hutchinson, *Matthew-Revelation TTBE 520*, La Mirada, CA: Talbot School of Theology, 2005, p.33.

In order to understand Philippians 1:6 we have to appreciate the context of the immediate verses surrounding it. This verse is situated in a rather long sentence. In fact, Philippians 1:3-7 constitutes one elongated sentence in the Greek text. This sentence is situated in the prologue of the letter which contains verses 1-11.²⁸ I will now offer a translation and exegetical commentary of this pericope. After doing so, I will offer a defense of my commentary over-and-against the four soteriological interpretations that I have discussed.

A. Translation²⁹

Philippians 1:1-11

¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ Jesus, whom are in Philippi with the overseers and deacons. ²Grace to you and peace from God our father and from the Lord Jesus, the Christ. ³I thank my God on every remembrance of you, ⁴always with joy in prayer, in every prayer of mine for all of you, ⁵over the contribution of yours in the gospel, from the first day until now, ⁶since³⁰ I am confident of this very thing, namely³¹ that he who is beginning good³² work with the help of you, will carry on until the day of Christ Jesus. ⁷Even as it is right for me to think this of all of you, because I have you in my heart, in even these chains and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel, you all are partakers of grace with me. ⁸For my God is a witness of how greatly I long after all you in the bowels (or affection) of Christ Jesus. ⁹And this I myself pray, that your love might abound yet more and more in knowledge and with all judgment ¹⁰that you might approve things that are valuable, in order that you might be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, ¹¹having been filled with the fruit of righteousness, which is through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.

B. Exegetical Commentary

Epistles always begin with a prologue.³³ The prologue of Philippians extends from the

²⁸ Fred B. Craddock candidly states, "That 1:3-11 is a literary unit is apparent" (p.15).

²⁹ My theory of translation has followed the formal equivalence theory. Leland Ryken defines the formal equivalence theory as "a theory of translation that favors reproducing the form or language of the original text, and not just its meaning. In its stricter form, this theory of translation espouses reproducing even the syntax and word order of the original; the formula *word for word translation* and *verbal equivalence* often imply this stricter definition of the concept" (Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002, p.19). I have tried to maintain a translation that is as literal as possible without losing authorial intention. This has produced a translation that is a bit wooden and awkward in some places, but it best conveys the text for the purposes of academic work.

³⁰ "Since I am" is a casual participle that is used to indicate the cause or reason or ground of the action of the finite verb. Hence, the word "since" has been supplied (see: Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996, p. 631).

³¹ "Namely" has been supplied acknowledging that this *hoti* clause stands in apposition to the substantive (Wallace, pp.458-459).

³² Good is an anarthous noun-adjective construction (Wallace, p. 311)

³³ Randolph Tate defines a prologue as "the opening section of a work, an introduction that is actually a part of the text" (Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible*, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006, p.280).

first verse until the eleventh verse.³⁴ It commences in typical Pauline style with a salutation prescript (1:1-2).³⁵ This is quite standard among the ancient letters of Paul's world.³⁶ Paul greets the church and then utilizes a common ancient motif known as 'prayer-wish,' which Paul saturates with words of thanksgiving.³⁷

As he pours his thanks on the Philippians, Paul expresses how he is filled with joy and gratitude when he prays because of them (1:3-4).³⁸ Why is Paul so thankful? He explains that he is thankful because of their "contribution...in the gospel, from the first day until now" (1:5). The word 'contribution' comes from the Greek word *koinoonía*. It is often translated 'fellowship', which is in keeping with the semantic range of the word, but it misses the context. Like most words, *koinoonía* has a particular semantic range. It is used in a variety of ways depending on the context of the passage in which the word is located. I appreciate what Dr.

³⁴ This is clearly indicated by the eschatological climax of verse 10 ("...until the day of Christ") combined with subsequent closing doxology in verse 11 ("...through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God"). This eschatological / doxological closing employs two common features (eschatology and doxology) that are used to close epistolary prologues. Likewise the content of verse 12 shows that the prologue has ended as it transitions *dé humás* ("now then you..."), which is a very common way to launch into a new pericope in epistolary genre (see: Jack T. Sanders, "The Transition From Opening Epistolary Thanksgiving to Body in the Letters of the Pauline Corpus," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81, 1962, p. 355, 361).

³⁵ Typical epistolary formula for a prescript consists of three parts: the author(s) name, the addressee's name and a greeting (Tate, p.118). Paul opens in the common fashion of Hellenistic letters, starting with the name of the sender(s), then the addressee(s) and a greeting (Bruce J. Malina and John J. Pilch, *On the Letters of Paul: Social Science Commentary*, Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2006, p. 296).

³⁶ Epistolary letters follow the stereotypical Hellenistic letter-writing. It consists of: prescript, body and closing. Paul adapted this formula and employed the following framework:

- I. Salutation (sender, addressee, greeting)
 - II. Thanksgiving (may be a blessing; sometimes accompanied by intercession)
 - III. Body (may include introductory formulae and statement of future plans)
 - IV. Paraenesis (that is, ethical exhortation and instructions)
 - V. Closing (peace wish, greetings, benediction, writing process)
- (Tate, p.120)

³⁷ The greetings in the prescripts of ancient letters often took the form of a 'prayer-wish'. Tate explains that, "Hellenistic letters frequently have thanksgivings where the writer gives thanks to the gods or informs the addressees that mention is made of him or her before the gods" (p.121). Paul utilizes this motif to give thanks to his churches and to God in a common literary style that would be appreciated and recognized by his audience.

³⁸ Malina and Pilch write that this "section [is] expected in a Hellenistic letter and is usually called a "thanksgiving" (1:3-11). Since, however, "thank you" in Mediterranean culture ends a relationship, it is preferable to understand this as a statement of indebtedness to a benefactor, in this case, God. This segment consists of two parts, the first of which deals with the past to the present and the second with good wishes for the proximate future. 1:3-6 constitute the first part dealing with the past, the present, and a mention of the forthcoming "day of Jesus Christ." The usual best wishes for the proximate future are continued at 1:7-11." (p. 299).

Haddon Robinson wrote about the importance of context when trying to understand a word in the Bible: “Words are stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning.”³⁹ In Philippians 1:5 *koinonia* is not being used as fellowship. In English the word fellowship means physical companionship or more colloquially, the act of hanging out.⁴⁰ In this context, Paul is not thankful because the Philippians hung out with him. This would make no sense given that he is in jail and he speaks of their *koinoonía* in the present moment (“until now”). Rather than mere company, Paul is thankful because of their contribution toward advancing the gospel. Paul often uses this word fellowship to speak of those making contributions, more specifically, sharing financially or forming a ministry partnership through financial giving.⁴¹ Hence, I have properly translated *koinoonía* as “contribution.” The word appears 14 times in Paul’s letters and it is most often used to speak of financial contributions.⁴² For example, in Romans 15:26 we read, “for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources (*koinoonían*) with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.” In 2 Corinthians 8:1-6 Paul writes to the Corinthians about how the “churches of Macedonia” gave money (they “overflowed in a wealth of generosity...beyond their means” [8:3, 4]). In this passage, Paul describes their financial contribution as fellowship

³⁹ Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980, p. 21. This is so important. Robinson went on to say something that is imperative for us to consider while doing a word study such as this: “In our approach to the Bible, therefore, we are primarily concerned not with what individual words mean, but with what the biblical writer means through his use of the words. Putting this another way, we do not understand the concepts of a passage merely because we analyze its separate words. A word-by-word grammatical analysis can be as pointless and boring as reading a dictionary” (Robinson, pp. 21-22).

⁴⁰ Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines fellowship as: “(1) companionship, company; (2) community of interest, activity, feeling, or experience: the state of being a fellow or associate” (Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, <http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/fellowship>, accessed July 24, 2007).

⁴¹ Craig Keener notes: “The term translated “participation” (NASB) or “partnership” (NIV) was often used in an economic sense for those who “share” (NRSV) monetarily. Here it includes the financial help the Philippians have given (4:10-20) (*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993, p.558).

⁴² The word *koinoonia* is used to speak of: financial contributions (Rom. 15:26, 2 Cor. 8:4, 9:13, Phil. 1:5); fellowship with God (1 Cor. 1:9, 2 Cor. 13:14, Phil. 2:1); the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16 [2x]); how light and darkness do not mingle (2 Cor. 6:14); human fellowship (Gal. 2:9), sharing another’s emotions or experiences (“the fellowship of his sufferings” Phil. 3:10); the work of God in salvation (Eph. 3:9); and evangelizing others (Philem. 6). Of the fourteen uses in letter attributed to Paul, the word is most often used of finances (4x) and secondly as fellowship with God (3x).

(*koinoonían*).⁴³ In 2 Corinthians 9:13, Paul speaks again about their financial support (“...by the generosity of your sharing (*koinoonías*) with them and with all others”). Just as these passages use the word fellowship (*koinoonía*) to speak of financial contributions, so has Philippians.⁴⁴ This is clearly seen from the context of the verse within its pericope.

In addition to his thankfulness, Paul expresses excitement for the gospel, the *euangellion*. The word *euangellion* occurs in: 1:5, 7, 12, 16, 27 (2x); 2:22; 4:3, 15.⁴⁵ It is something Paul emphasizes in this letter.⁴⁶ The Philippians were active from “the day” they met Paul and even “until now” with their most recent donations brought by Epaphroditus (vs.5). This sacrificial giving spoke to Paul on many levels: “...it did much more than help Paul defray expenses incurred. It testified to Paul that the gospel had taken root in the community, and consequently, that his mission had been successful.”⁴⁷ The evidence of God’s work in the Philippian community is visibly manifest by their generosity. Such charity would have been culturally challenging, and in turn it provided a powerful witness for the outside community to see the power of the gospel at work in this community of Christians.⁴⁸

After Paul expressed his thanks for their financial gifts in verse 5, Paul goes on to say in verse 6 that since he is “confident of this very thing” (in reference to their financial giving), God will carry on their good work in the gospel until the day of Christ Jesus. This “good work” (*érgon agathón*) that Paul speaks of is the expansion of the gospel brought about by their

⁴³ In 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 Paul writes, “For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing (*koinoonían*) in this ministry to the saints.”

⁴⁴ Francis X. Malinowski defines *koinoonia* in 1:5 as the Philippians’ financial gift to Paul (“The Brave Women of Philippi,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15, April 1985, p. 61).

⁴⁵ See: Peter O’Brien, “The Importance of the Gospel in Philippians,” in *God Who is Rich in Mercy*, Peter O’Brien and David G. Peterson (eds.), Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986, pp. 213-33.

⁴⁶ See: John P. Dickson, *Mission-Commitment in Ancient Judaism and in the Pauline Communities: The Shape, Extent and Background of Early Christian Mission*, WUNT 159, Tübingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 2003, pp. 88-91.

⁴⁷ L.G. Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993, p.190.

⁴⁸ Craig L. Blomberg notes how, “Paul’s principles concerning sacrificial financial giving (see esp. 2 Corinthians 8-9) would have seemed foolish to Jews, who forbade giving away more than 20 percent of one’s income, and to Gentiles, who did not even have any empire-wide system for meeting the needs of their poor as the Jews did” (*Making Sense of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004, pp.137-138).

financial contributions.⁴⁹ Paul sees God as “beginning good work with the help of” the Philippians financial gifts. He uses the preposition *en* to express how the good work began “with the help of” the Philippians.⁵⁰ This is a standard use of *en* in the Greek text of the New Testament.⁵¹ Those who seek to make this passage into a theological stanza of soteriology have misunderstood the *en* to be a preposition denoting a fixed position in place, time or a state; as opposed to, a preposition of instrumentality. Hence, they translate this, as the *NIV* has, “...he who began a good work in you...” and they understand this to be a metaphysical state that God has imputed to the individual believer, hence they use the English preposition ‘in’. While it is grammatically possible to understand the *en* this way, it is completely foreign to what Paul has been discussing thus far.⁵² Paul is thanking them in this prescript to the letter, not writing a systematic theology textbook. Furthermore, he has been discussing their financial charity and

⁴⁹ Kenneth S. Wuest states that “the good work is giving to missions” (“Philippians,” *Wuest’s Word Studies*, Vol.2, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1966, p. 32).

⁵⁰ The preposition *en* can behave as a marker of agency, in which case it is translated “with the help of” (Frederick William Danker, *A Greek-Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000, p. 329). For examples of this see: Mt.9:34, 1 Cor. 6:2, 14:21, Ac 17:31, Rom 3:24. The preposition *en* could also be operating as a marker denoting the object to which something happens, that is, “in connection with” the gifts of the Philippians God is doing things (Danker, p.329). It could also be a marker of reason, in other words “because of you” (Danker, p. 329). It is interesting to observe that Danker does not touch Philippians 1:6 (see pages 326-330). He notes “The uses of this prep. Are so many and various, and oft. So easily confused, that a strictly systematic treatment is impossible” (p.326). Kittel, in discussing the *en* with the personal dative, states: “More important and more difficult is the use with the personal dat. We will begin with the simpler cases and move on to the more complicated. The spatial sense is always the starting-point, but we have to ask how far there is an intermingling of other senses, esp. the instrumental” (Albrecht Oepke, “*En*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel (ed.), Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964, p. 538). The *ergon agaton* is translated as “in” or “among.” But, it could also be translated as “through” (see: G.F. Hawthorne, *Word Biblical Themes: Philippians*, Waco, TX: 1987, pp.13, 21), which would support my translation “with the help of.”

⁵¹ According to Greek scholar Ray Summers and Thomas Sawyer *en* can mean “by means of” (*Essentials of New Testament Greek*, Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1995, p.35). George Hadjiantoniou states that *en* can be “used to indicate the instrument through which an action is accomplished” (*Learning the Basics of New Testament Greek*, Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 1998, p.50; see also: J. Harold Greenlee, *A Concise Exegetical Grammar of New Testament Greek*, Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000, p.33).

⁵² Although it is foreign to the text, interpreters cannot seem to escape the popular soteriological claims of this verse. Even when interpreters see from the context that it is about money, they still cling to the soteriological understanding. In his exegetical commentary Rogers and Rogers note that, “It may refer to God’s work of salvation (Silva), or to their sharing in the advancement of the gospel (Hawthorne)” (Cleon L. Rogers Jr and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998, p.448). This dichotomy is unwarranted and unnecessary. The purpose of their financial sharing is that the good work of the gospel advances, which then leads to salvation. The problem for interpreters is that we have failed to see how money is needed and used in ministry. Jesus offered the parable of the unrighteous servant to teach about how money could be used for ministry (see Luke 16:1-15). Paul is simply acknowledging the obvious, that is, the money they sent him was used for ministry and for that he was thankful.

the advancement of the gospel: hence, it is entirely foreign to what Paul is discussing when commentators arbitrarily make this into a soteriological treatise on Calvinism *et alii* (that is, among other things) by using the preposition *en* to express a metaphysical state of being.

Reflecting upon the contributions of the Philippians, Paul encourages them by saying God “will carry on [their good work] until the day of Christ Jesus.” Daniel Wallace notes that verb translated “will carry on” is a predictive future that is used to indicate that something will take place or come to pass.⁵³ According to Paul, God is the agent who used the Philippians as the means by which he intends to execute or carry out his good work.⁵⁴ Paul is convinced that their gifts will be used to spread the good news of Christ. This connects back to Paul’s earlier statement about the Philippians’ contribution to the gospel. It also connects to his later statement expressing his joy over their recent financial gift (2:25-30). Notice again how this is at odds with the four views commonly asserted about this passage.⁵⁵ There is no mention of salvation, sanctification, predestination or perseverance. Paul is not laying out a doctrinal thesis, he is simply writing a letter to his donors to let them know that their money is being put to good use – it’s helping the gospel spread. He is letting his donors know the lasting effects of their financial contribution – it most certainly will last until Jesus comes back! It is common sense that donors want to know their contributions are being put to good use. Hence, today in the modern world

⁵³ Wallace, p. 568. Danker notes, “to bring about a result according to plan or objective, *complete, accomplish, perform, bring about*” (p.383). Note that Danker sees it as “to finish someth. begun, *end, bring to an end, finish*” (p.383).

⁵⁴ *En* is a preposition in the dative. It is a dative of means (Wallace, pp.162-163). The emphasis is on the agent who is using the action.

⁵⁵ It is fascinating how people miss this point. Even a great mind like Moises Silva approaches the text and acknowledges upfront that, “Some will no doubt object to this construction as an attempt to introduce modern categories of systematic theology (human responsibility and divine sovereignty) into a Pauline statement that is motivated by different concerns” (*Philippians, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005, p.45). He goes on to say that “no reasonable exegesis of that passage [Phil 1:6-8] can dispense with these categories, for they are thoroughly Pauline” (p. 45). The problem is that Silva does not even wrestle with different views! The sad thing is that he flippantly proceeds to proof-text his point from various places outside of Philippians, including the Old Testament and making various etymological errors along the way. Silva then admits that Paul “shifts his focus again in verse 7, where he commands them (not God) for their constancy in supporting Paul whatever the circumstances” (p. 46). Silva fails to answer how if verse 7 is about support then why verse 6 is not. He is more concerned with defending the Westminster Confession than he is exegeting Paul’s text.

we have things like receipts or audits to assure donors that what they give is to put to proper use. Paul is providing his audience with a sort of *theo*-audit, as he relates to them that God is using their aide to advance the gospel.

After thanking them for their contribution and letting them know how God is using it, Paul continues to express his thankfulness. In verse 7 he describes how he has the Philippians in his heart, meaning that he considers them often. He describes his chains and their defense of him (“in even these chains and in my defense and confirmation of the gospel”). It is worthwhile to note that in this letter Paul sees the Philippians as defenders of his ministry and he does not feel the need to defend his apostleship as he does in other letters. Paul calls the Philippians partakers, that is, *sungkoinoonoús*. This word is a compound word of two words: the preposition *sun* (meaning with) and *koinoonous* (a word that we have already seen and addressed). Paul employs this word *koinoonía* here again to continue describing the wonderful partnership that the Philippians have with him. He goes on to describe God as a witness of his affections toward them, which flow from his heart (v.8). Then Paul proceeds to pray for their love, discernment and righteousness, asking for these to grow until the day of Christ (vv.9-11). The “day of Christ” (v.10) is a Pauline phrase for the final return of Jesus, which Paul believed to be an impending reality.⁵⁶ With this, Paul ends his prescript and then moves into the body of his letter.

Having covered the prescript, I will now move to offer further defense of my understanding of Philippians 1:6. I have already briefly shown that the four common interpretations are interpolations of the text. I have argued that the “good work” (*érgon agathón*) Paul speaks about deals with the community’s financial contributions to assist his ministry. I showed how the word *koinonos* is properly translated as contribution. Likewise, I showed that the word *en* functions in the phrase *hóti ho enarxámenos en humín érgon agathón* as a

⁵⁶ Verse 10 is an “eschatological reference to the day of Christ” (Craddock, p.17).

preposition of instrumentality to indicate that God is bringing about the good work with “the help of” the Philippians’ contributions. While the soteriological views may be truthful theologically speaking, they are not accurate exegetically as far as this passage is concerned. I will now proceed to offer a more thorough defense of this commentary.⁵⁷

V. A Brief Defense of My Position:

A. The immediate context

In my exegesis of the prescript I have shown that Paul was not making a theological treatise, and thus interpreting verse 6 in isolation from this immediate context is suspicious. Verses 1-5 do not speak about salvation, sanctification, predestination or perseverance. Verses 7-11 do not either. Thus, arguing that verse 6 is soteriological seems disjointed. One could argue that verse 6 is about salvation, sanctification, predestination or perseverance if any of those ideas were being discussed in the prescript. The problem however is that Paul was not discussing those things and thus it seems unlikely at best. The immediate context reveals – as I have shown in the above commentary – that Paul was giving thanks in verses 1-5 and 7-11, thus it is fitting to understand verse 6 in light of this as Paul’s affirmation that God was caring out a good work by using the very thing he (that is, Paul) was thankful over – their money and friendship.

B. The larger context

⁵⁷ Please note that I am not a lone ranger with this view. I am indebted to my hermeneutics professor in grad school who first pointed this out in a class lecture (Walter Russell, *Hermeneutics 501*, La Mirada, CA: Talbot School of Theology, Spring 2004). Dr. Russell has not published on the matter, but his ideas expressed in lecture have been synthesized into my own. Likewise, I have learned much from Dr. John Hart’s presentation on this passage at the November 1995 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society (as well as his subsequent journal articles that I will cite later in this paper). I have utilized his insights throughout this paper. Another noteworthy scholar is Dr. Joe Hellerman, who has published writings on Philippians and has argued that Philippians 1:6 is not soteriological (see his: *Reconstructing Honor in Roman Philippi*, Cambridge Press, 2005). Other notable commentators include: John A. Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians*, ed. W. Young, reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979, p. 9; Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians, Word Biblical Commentary*, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1983, pp.20–22; James A. Brooks, "Exposition of Philippians," *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 23, Fall 1980, pp. 23–36; Donald Guthrie, *Epistles from Prison: Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon*, New York: Abingdon Press, 1964, p. 32.

The letter to the Philippians was intended as a practical letter. Paul had received continual support from the Philippians and he wanted to properly thank them. They had recently sent Epaphroditus to Paul with further aide. It is reasonable to believe that Epaphroditus brought an update on the condition of the church as well. He did not just drop off some cash and split without saying a word edgewise. On the contrary, Epaphroditus spent a period of time with Paul and it would be foolish to believe that in that time they did not discuss the Philippian church. Receiving the gift and hearing of the ministry in Philippi, Paul writes to say thank you and to provide guidance for issues that he learned about from Epaphroditus.⁵⁸ The Philippians were dealing with some matters that Paul wanted to address (the dangers of Judaizers, antinomians, and disunity among themselves). This larger context of practical thanks and instruction fits nicely with my position that verse 6 is about financial contributions. The larger context certainly does not prohibit it from being about soteriology, but it definitely does not fit as nicely in the flow of the overall letter, making it a weaker position to maintain. At the least, the immediate and larger context reveals the need for the soteriological position to offer a defense, which leads to my next point.

C. The soteriological assumption

Those holding to the soteriological position have not proved their case. They have simply made a bold assertion. The burden of proof lies on the one making the claim. They have not substantiated their position, nor dealt with the growing counter arguments whatsoever. Certainly, this is not reason alone to abandon their view, but it does point out the obvious, that is, someone has some proving to do. Until then, the soteriological positions have committed the

⁵⁸ As F.F. Bruce observes: "While he was in Rome, his friends in Philippi sent him a gift of money by the hand of Epaphroditus, one of their number. Paul sent a letter to thank them for the gift, to let them know his present situation and his immediate prospects, and to give them the kind of encouragement he knew they would find helpful" (F.F. Bruce, *Paul and His Converts*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985, p.124).

logical fallacy of overlooking alternatives.⁵⁹ I could not find a single commentator who offered a defense of the soteriological view over and against the mounting opposition.⁶⁰

D. The purpose of prologue

The purpose of a prologue is to set the pace for the letter. In setting the pace, the prologue operates as a microcosm for the whole letter. It contains in infant form what will be developed in the course of the letter. This is the purpose of an epistolary introduction.⁶¹ Thus, we can look to the remainder of the letter to find help in understanding the prologue if there is a question about the meaning. I have already argued that the context of verse 1-11 is sufficient to understand verse 6, nevertheless, from the remainder of the epistle we see my view of verse 6 supported. Throughout the letter Paul continues to thank the Philippians for their financial support.⁶² Furthermore, we do not see any of the four soteriological views expanded upon in the letter. It is beyond the limit of this paper to substantiate this entirely, for to do so I would have to offer an exegesis of every verse. Briefly however, I must point out that Robert C. Swift has argued extensively to show how the introduction (specifically verses 5–7) is fleshed out in the rest of the book. Swift shows that the unifying theme to the epistle is partnership in the furtherance of the gospel.⁶³ This lends further support to my position. The soteriological view is

⁵⁹ Anthony Weston, *A Rulebook for Arguments*, Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Co., 2000, p.72.

⁶⁰ I did find one commentator, Anthony Ash, who recognized the validity of the position I am espousing: although, instead of embracing it, Ash tried to merge both views (similar to Rogers as I pointed out in footnote 52). Ash wrote, "Though the 'good work' could include financial help given Paul, it seems likely, from the nature of this verse, that it embraced more than that, i.e., embraced the entire experience of living Christ" (*Philippians, Colossians & Philemon, The College Press NIV Commentary*, Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994, p. 28).

⁶¹ David E. Garland, "Philippians 1:1–26: The Defense and Confirmation of the Gospel," *Review and Expositor* 77, 1980, p.328; Robert W. Funk, "The Letter: Form and Style," in *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1966, pp.257, 269; and Ronald Russell, "Pauline Letter Structure in Philippians," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, September 1982, p. 306.

⁶² Donald Guthrie notes: "In Philippians iv.18 Paul refers to the gifts sent to him from the readers by the hand of Epaphroditus. Although he expresses thankfulness for their generosity at the conclusion of the Epistle it need not be assumed that this is the first acknowledgement of the gifts that Paul has made. He would hardly have left so important a matter to the end had this been the case" (*New Testament Introduction*, Downers Grove, IVP 1970, p.524).

⁶³ Robert C. Swift, "The Theme and Structure of Philippians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141, July–September 1984, pp. 236–37.

unable to account for a unifying theme in the epistle. If 1:6 is soteriological it should be woven throughout the book or at least developed elsewhere. Conspicuously, it is missing and thus more evidence is marshaled against the soteriological view.

D. The literary limits

This is similar to the above argument, which focused on the function of prologue. Here, I want to focus on the genre or literary use of the prologue. The verses I have considered take place in the prescript. Furthermore, they follow a Hellenistic model. Hellenistic prescripts are the wrong genre for soteriological reflection. The body of the letter is the appropriate place. And that would only be appropriate if there was mention of it in the prologue/prescript – as I have argued above – and since there is not it should be a dead issue. Certainly, one could argue that Paul breaks the mold here. However, it seems unlikely that he broke the mold for just one verse and then immediately returned to follow the Hellenistic prescript model. One could expect such a thing to occur in a sayings or wisdom genre, but that is not the case in prescripts. The literary genre seems to have limited the soteriological options. Of the epistles that are undoubtedly Pauline (Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon) we do not have a single case where there is such systematic and theological conceptions being conveyed in the prescript. The modern reader may wonder why Paul was not more explicit in detailing that Philippians 1:6 was about money. This question is answered by realizing the literary limits of this text and also the literary use of rhetoric in Hellenistic writings.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Note that Paul did not command the giving, he persuaded it with the use of rhetoric. Ben Witherington comments, “That Paul used rhetoric with his converts indicates his commitment to the Christian community as a society that should be led by means of persuasion if possible, and commanded only when necessary” (*Friendship and Finances in Philippi*, Valley Forge, PN: Trinity Press, 1994, p.16).

E. Structural elements

A common feature in biblical writings is the use of the *inclusio* structure of letter writing.⁶⁵ The *inclusio* is used as a “literary-rhetorical device by which textual material is framed by the same object or words at the beginning and end.”⁶⁶ It functions in similar fashion to what we would call the prologue and epilogue, that is, the beginning and end of a letter which provides mirrored ideas for communicative purposes.⁶⁷ Paul employs *inclusio* in his letter to the Philippians.⁶⁸ The following graph illustrates the mirror of the prologue and epilogue. This observation and the following graph were made by Dr. John Hart.⁶⁹ (Please note that the footnotes within the graph are also observations made by Hart as well).

⁶⁵ Richard N. Soulen and R. Kendall Soulen, *Handbook of Biblical Criticism*, Louisville, John Knox Press, 2001, p. 85.

⁶⁶ Tate, p.176.

⁶⁷ Commentators who have failed to see the *inclusio* have suggested that there are “editorial seams” in the letter (Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1999, p.369). A key argument used to substantiate this is that Paul does not thank the Philippians for their gift until 4:10-20 which would “be unconscionable, whereas if this were a separate letter (beginning in 4:10), Paul thanks would be direct and his comments on Epaphroditus more consistent” (Johnson, p. 369). However, if the prologue contains Paul’s thanks for their gift and the epilogue 4:10-20 mirrors this, then the need for editorial seams is diminished. If the soteriological is correct than Johnson’s observation is fair: yet, as I have shown, the Philippian letter is saturated with the theme of thanksgiving and financial sharing in the gospel. I would agree with James Ware who sees the overall theme to the epistle as “the Philippians’ cooperation with Paul for the extension of the gospel” (*The Mission of the Church: In Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in the Context of Ancient Judaism*, Boston, Brill, 2005, p.169). Failure to miss this theme creates difficulties for interpreters and text critics. For example, Robert Jewett admitted to the difficulty of a unifying theme, having missed this *inclusio* in Philippians (see: Robert Jewett, “The Epistolary Thanksgiving and the Integrity of Philippians,” *NovT* 12, 1970, p. 49). Others, have tragically posited that Philippians is a mismatch of Paul’s writings because they miss this *inclusio* (see: John Reumann, “Contributions of the Philippian Community to Paul and to Earliest Christianity,” *NTS* 39, 1993, pp.438-57). Most arguments made in favor of such mismatching of Pauline letters say there are three unrelated pieces: 1:1-3:1a, 3:1b-4:1, and 4:10-20, although there is a commentator J.E. Symes who claims there are five different pieces (see: Maurice Jones, “The Integrity of the Epistle to the Philippians,” *Expositor* 8, 1914, p.462; for a rebuttal see: David E. Garland, “The Composition and Unity of Philippians: Some Neglected Literary Features,” *NovT* 27, 1985, pp. 141-73 or Duane F. Watson, “A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question,” *NovT* 30, 1988, pp. 57-88).

⁶⁸ Peter T. O’Brien, “Divine Provision for our Needs: Assurance from Philippians 4,” *Reformed Theological Review*, January–April 1991, p. 28.

⁶⁹ John F. Hart, “Does Philippians 1:6 Guarantee Progressive Sanctification?”, Part 1, *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, Spring 1996, Volume 9:16 (electronic copy). Hart also cites Schubert who observed that 4:10–20 is a reflection of the epistolary “table of contents” in 1:3–11 (Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings*, Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1939, pp. 25–26, 76–77). He also cites Dalton who made similar parallels (William J. Dalton, “The Integrity of Philippians,” *Biblica* 60, 1979, p. 101).

Parallels Between Philippians 1 and Philippians 4⁷⁰

Philippians 1:3–7	Philippians 4:10–20
1:3 <i>I thank my God [eucharistō tō Theō mou]</i> 1:4 offering prayer with joy [meta charas]	4:10 But <i>I rejoiced in the Lord [echarēn en Kyriō]</i> greatly
1:5 ⁷¹ your participation [koinōnia] in the gospel	4:15 no church shared [ekoinōnēsen] with me in the matter of giving and receiving
1:5 ⁷² your participation in the gospel from the first day [eis to euangelion apo tēs prōtēs hēmeras]	4:15 at the first preaching of the gospel [en archē tou euangeliou], after I departed from Macedonia
1:6 He who began a good work [ergon agathon] in you	4:14 you have done well [kalōs epoiēsate] to share with me
1:6 [He] will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus [achri hēmeras Christou Iēsou]	4:17 the profit which increases to your account [ton karpon ton pleonazonta eis logon hymōn]
1:7 ⁷³ it is right for me to feel this way about all of you [touto phronein hyper pantōn hymōn] ⁷⁴ 1:3 for all your remembrance of me [epi pasē tē mneia hymōn] (Moffatt NT) ⁷⁵	4:10 you have renewed your concern for me [to hyper emou phronein]. Indeed, you have been concerned [ephroneite]
1:7 it is only right for me to feel this way [estin dikaion emoi touto phronein] about you all	4:8 whatever is right [dikaia], . . . let your mind dwell on these things [tauta logizesthe]
1:7 ⁷⁶ in my imprisonment [en te tois desmois mou] . . . you all are partakers [synkoinōnous] of grace with me	4:14 to share with me [synkoinōnēsantes] in my affliction [mou tē thlipsei.]

This is a striking harmony. Hart has wonderfully depicted the *inclusio* at work in this epistle.

Paul is clearly mirroring his thanks for their financial contribution in the prologue.

⁷⁰ Note that Hart has only made parallels between 1:3-7 and 4:10-20. He contends that further parallels can be made between 1:9-11 and 4:10–20, but he only cites those in this graph to support his argument that 1:6 is not about sanctification, rather it is about financial giving.

⁷¹ Also cited by Dalton; see n. 23 above [William J. Dalton. "The Integrity of Philippians," *Biblica* 60 (1979): 101].

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ The phrase *pronein* ("to think") plus *hyper* ("on behalf of") appears in the NT only in 1:7 and 4:10, making the passages purposefully interrelated (David E. Garland, "The Composition and Unity of Philippians," *Novum Testamentum* 27 [1985]: 162, n. 75). By showing the Philippians how much he loved them, Paul hoped to gain their continued affection for him and partnership with him. Cf. Reumann, "Contributions," 455, who calls the two uses of this phrase "friendship language."

⁷⁵ Schubert, *Form*, 77, cites the parallel of 1:3 with 4:10 and 18. But see n. 32 above [Panikulam, *Koinoonia*, 84, suggests this for the 4:17–19 passage].

⁷⁶ Also cited by Dalton; see n. 23 above [Swift, "Theme and Structure," 236–37. Several rhetorical analyses locate the central proposition or theme of the book at 1:27–30; Watson, "Philippians," 59, 65; Witherington, *Philippians*, 53].

G. Pauline Parallels

The language of the Philippian prologue is paralleled in other Pauline texts. Most notably, it parallels 2 Corinthians 8–9, which is a passage about giving.⁷⁷ From looking at the commonality of these texts, one can see with a greater degree of certainty that Philippians 1:6 is not a soteriological proposition. In this Corinthians passage we find the compound *proenarchomai* ("begin [beforehand]") is used with *epiteleō*. This passage and the Philippian prescript are the only places in the New Testament where this double conjunction occurs. In addition to this syntactical parallel, it is interesting that in this section of 2 Corinthians the Macedonians or Philippians are mentioned (9:2, 4). Furthermore, there are parallel overtones, imagery and phraseology in these passages. The phrases (*pro*) *enarchomai* ("begin beforehand") combined with *epiteleō* ("complete") is used twice, *koinoonía* is also used twice (each in reference to giving money), and *charis* ("grace") is used in both texts. John Hart has organized the parallels into the following graph (Please note that the footnotes within the graph are also observations made by Hart as well):

Parallels Between Philippians 1 and 2 Corinthians 8–9

Philippians 1:3–7	2 Corinthians 8–9
1:3 " I thank My God [<i>eucharistō tō Theō</i>]"	9:12 "the ministry of this service is... overflowing through many thanksgivings to God [<i>eucharistiōn tō Theō</i>]"
1:5 "your participation [<i>tē koinōnia</i>] in the gospel"	8:4 " the favor of participation [<i>tēn charin kai tēn koinōnian</i>] in the support of the saints" 9:13 "your generosity in sharing [<i>tēs koinōnias</i>] with them"
1:6 "For I am confident [<i>pepoithōs</i>]"	8:22 "because of his great confidence [<i>pepoithēsei</i>] in you"
1:6 "He who began [<i>ho enarxamenos</i>] a good work in you will perfect [<i>epitelesēi</i>]"	8:6 "as he [Titus] had previously made a beginning [<i>proenērxato</i>], so he would also complete [<i>epitelesē</i>] in you this gracious work " 8:10–11 "[you] were the first to begin [<i>proenērxasthe</i>]...to do this,... But now finish [<i>epitelesate</i>] doing it also, that...there may be also the completion [<i>to epitelesai</i>] of it"

⁷⁷ This observation was noted by John F. Hart, "Does Philippians 1:6 Guarantee Progressive Sanctification?", Part 2, Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society, Autumn 1996, Volume 9:17 (electronic version). I am highly indebted to his insights on this text.

1:6 "that He who began a good work [<i>ergon agathon</i>] in you"	9:8–9 "you may have an abundance for every good deed [<i>ergon agathon</i>]; as it is written '... He gave to the poor'" ⁷⁸
1:6 "He who began a good work in you [<i>en hymin</i>]"	8:1 "the grace of God which has been given in the churches [<i>en tais ekklesiais</i>] of Macedonia" 8:6 "he would also complete in you [<i>eis hymas</i>] this gracious work"
1:6 " perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus [<i>epitelesei achri hēmeras Christou Iēsou</i>]"	9:9 "...He gave to the poor, His righteousness abides forever [<i>hē dikaiosynē autou menei eis ton aiōna</i>]" 9:10 "He...[will] increase the harvest of your righteousness [<i>ta genēmata tēs dikaiosynēs hymōn</i>]" ⁷⁹
1:7 "you all are partakers of grace [<i>tēs charitos</i>] with me"	8:1 " the grace [<i>tēn charin</i>] of God which has been given in the churches of Macedonia" 8:6 "complete in you this gracious work [<i>tēn charin tautēn</i>]" 8:7 "see that you abound in this gracious work [<i>en tautē tē chariti</i>]" (See also 2 Cor 8:4, 19; 9:8, 14)

The parallel of these passages lends further weight to my position that Philippians 1:6 is dealing with the good work God began with the help of the Philippians' financial gifts, as opposed to it being Paul's articulation of Calvinism or the like.⁸⁰

E. Historicity of interpretation

Lest one assume that my position is novelty or some sort of a new-fangled notion, it is worthwhile to note that this view has been maintained in the history of the church. This point alone could be explored at great length. Suffice it say, I will offer one clear example. The Knox

⁷⁸ The good deeds in this verse "have a yet narrower religious sense and refer to charitable deeds, especially material aid (cf. v. 9 and the larger context)" (Volf, *Perseverance*, 33–34). She argues that the Corinthians' beginning and completing of their contribution to the Jerusalem collection is therefore considered contextually to be a good work in the technical sense. Ibid., 43, n. 211.

⁷⁹ "Righteousness" in 2 Cor 9:9–10, since it is in an OT quotation, should be read in light of the Jewish concept of righteousness as almsgiving and good works to be rewarded by God in the future life (*Panikulam, Koinoonia*, 55; Volf, *Perseverance*, 43).

⁸⁰ Not too mention that the soteriological claims present serious theological incongruity. It is beyond the purpose of this paper to argue for or against the theology of the four soteriological views. Truth be told, I have no axe grind, as I am Reformed in my soteriology. However, my allegiance to authorial intent is greater than my loyalty to a theological system, so I have abandoned this verse as a proof-text to be used to support the theology I hold. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to point out that even theologically the soteriological positions are quite problematic. If verse 6 was about soteriology, then it would be making a bizarre theological claim when it is seen in the context of the phrase "from the first day until now." If the first day is in reference to the point when they were saved by Christ then what is the "until now" in reference to? Most of those holding to the soteriological views believe that salvation is a finished work for the individual. If so, this passage would contradict their own system of soteriology. Furthermore, this raises an issue regarding individualism. In Pauline thought, salvation is often pictured in terms of groups and not individuals. Paul is writing to groups and he employs second person plural pronouns as he addresses their salvation.⁸⁰ The Philippian prologue is considerably focused on the corporate and not the individual, which can be seen in the threefold repetition of "all of you" (the "you" is plural) in the prologue (*panton hymon* in vv 4, 7; *pantas hymas* in v 8). This presents huge problems for the viability of the soteriological views.

translation of the New Testament has wonderfully captured the nuance of 1:6, showing the verse to be dealing financial considerations and not soteriological ones. It reads: "Nor am I less confident, that he who has inspired this generosity in you will bring it to perfection, ready for the day when Jesus Christ comes."⁸¹ Some Christians are shocked to hear that this verse could be translated, yet alone interpreted, differently from what they have heard in popular preaching: however, there is a sound alternative to this common interpretation of Philippians 1:6 as I have shown in this paper and it is a position with great textual and scholarly support.

VI. Conclusion:

In this paper I have illustrated how prior theological presuppositions, specifically soteriology, have impacted the handling of Philippians 1:3-7. Focusing on 1:6, I showed through careful exegesis how a verse that has been thought to be dealing with salvation is actually dealing with money. Paul was concerned with thanking the Philippians for their financial gift and showing them how it was used to advance the gospel. In addition to offering exegesis to support this claim, I also put forth a defense of my position. I showed from the immediate context of the pericope and larger context of the epistle that the soteriological position is untenable. I pointed out that the soteriological view has committed the logical fallacy of overlooking alternatives. Further, I showed that it was not in keeping with the purpose of prologue or the literary limits of the text. Using John Hart's work, I illustrated how the prologue and epilogue of Philippians match. Since the epilogue is clearly about finances and does not contain soteriological elements, it lends further support to my view. Relying also on Hart's observation concerning Pauline parallels, I argued that the Philippians prologue parallels 2 Corinthians 8-9, which is a passage about giving. Lastly, I pointed out that historically

⁸¹ *The Holy Bible*, New York: Sheed and Ward, 1950.

Philippians 1:6 has been understood differently in support of my thesis. While Philippians 1:6 will continue to be a popular choice for Christian bumper stickers and the rest, it seems that the important lesson Paul was making needs to be heard. Ministry takes sacrifice and requires generosity. Our gifts to the cause of spreading the gospel are to be considered good works, which can have a lasting impact in the world until Christ returns. Now, that's what I call a gift that keeps on giving!

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