**SPECIFIC APPLICATION – FOR THE WORLD AND PAUL**

***14 Do everything without complaining or arguing, 15******so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault*** ***in a crooked and depraved generation*** ***in which you shine like stars in the universe 16******as you hold out the word of life – in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing. 17******But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith******, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. 18******So you too should be glad and rejoice with me.***

 **Philippians 2:14-18 (NIV)**

The Philippians are first of all urged to ‘*Do everything without complaining or arguing’* (2:14). This is followed by a purpose clause with a focus on their role in the world, that they may be ‘*children of God without fault’* (2:15) and so ‘*shine like stars’* in pagan Philippi by holding ‘*out the word of life’*(2:16). But at this point Paul’s sentence takes an abrupt turn as he returns to his and their affairs that was broken off at 1:26. Paul had been writing of God’s glory and good pleasure but now the final goal becomes Paul’s ‘*boast’* in them (2:16), evidence that his ministry will not have been in vain (2:16). If it is not in vain, then his ministry would be like a drink offering poured out in conjunction with their own sacrificial faith. If this should be the case, it would give him and them much more cause to rejoice together (2:17,18). Paul is exhorting what he has been praying: that they be pure and blameless for the day of Christ (1:10).

There are a number of Old Testament echoes in this passage that are easily missed. Paul uses LXX scriptures that recall the story of Israel from its origins, through the desert to its Promised Land. It begins in 2:14 with Israel murmuring (Exodus 16:12) and the Philippians urged not to do so. The reason for the prohibition is first expressed in the words God spoke to Abraham at the renewal of the covenant in Genesis 17:1; as with Abraham, the Philippians are to ‘become blameless’ before God. This concern is then repeated in the language of Deuteronomy 32:5 where in Moses’ song, Israel is judged because of its rebellion as ‘blameworthy children, a crooked and perverse generation’ (LXX). But for the new covenant people of Philippi, this is all reversed. By heeding the prohibition against murmuring they become God’s ‘*blameless …* *children’* and the opposition in Philippi the ‘*crooked and depraved generation*.’ Finally, in Daniel 12:3 Israel’s future hope takes the form ‘*Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens’* with the parallel clause ‘*those who lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever*.’ The LXX has for this second clause ‘*those who hold strong in my words.*’ From the perspective of Paul’s already/not yet eschatological framework, the Philippians, as they live out their calling as God’s blameless children, already ‘shine like stars’ (2:15) as they ‘*hold out the word of life’* (2:16). The eschatological context of Daniel in turn accounts for Paul’s concluding with a word about the ‘not yet’ side of eschatological realities: the Philippians must persevere now in this kind of obedience or Paul will have no ‘*boast’* at the end. He will find that his ‘*labour* (is) *for nothing’* (2:16). Finally, in contrast to that, he imagines his ministry and suffering, and their faith and suffering, in terms of the Levitical sacrifices.

Following the injunction to ‘to work your salvation out’ because God ‘works’ in/among you to will and to ‘work’ for His good pleasure, Paul now urges ‘*do everything*’ where ‘everything’ is all that makes up their common and corporate life in Philippi, especially their standing firm and contending together for the gospel in the face of opposition.

‘*Without complaining’* is an intentional echo of Israel’s grumbling in the desert. The only other time Paul uses this expression is 1 Corinthians 10:10 (‘*And do not grumble as some of them* *did’*) which recalls Numbers 14:1-38. The Philippians’ life was to be in complete contrast to the ‘*crooked and depraved generation,‘* a description that echoes the language of Deuteronomy 32:5 which recalls Israel’s stubbornness again in the desert. Here is where the Philippians need to start ‘working out their salvation’ ‘*with fear and trembling’*: to stop being like the murmuring Israelites.

But since Israel’s grumbling was against Moses and God, and since there is no hint that the Philippians are doing the same (murmuring against Paul or God), Paul adds *‘or arguing’* (2:14). The word ordinarily means ‘disputatious reasoning’ (reasonings that have malicious design), here, as in 1 Timothy 2:8, it refers to disputes or controversies themselves.

In verses 15 and the first part of verse 16, Paul will now explain the purpose behind his imperative ‘*do everything without complaining or arguing’* (2:14). He wants them first to be blameless with regard to their outward behaviour, so they can be recognised for what they are, ‘*children of God*,’ (2:15), and so they might be blameless on the day of Christ. They live in pagan Philippi in the midst of ‘*a crooked and depraved generation’* (using the language of Deuteronomy 32:5). Paul’s concerns are for the gospel in Philippi and for the church to live out its calling so Paul can ‘*boast’* on judgement day that his labour was justified.

‘*So that you may become blameless and pure’* (2:15). Almost the same wording was used in 1:10 (*‘so that you may … be pure and blameless until the day of Christ’*). Both contexts show Paul’s ‘already/not yet’ eschatological thinking, emphasising present conduct in the light of the day of Christ.

‘*Become blameless’* (2:15) was what God asked of Abraham (Genesis 17:1). The word described observable conduct with which no fault could be found. In the Genesis 17 context the meaning was ‘blameless before God’ and Paul probably has this same thought in mind. ‘*Pure’* was a word used of the heart, not in the sense of ‘clean’ but of ‘innocent.’

*‘Children of God without fault’* (2:15). This echoes Deuteronomy 32:5 (‘*They have acted corruptly toward him, to their shame they are no longer his children, but a warped and crooked generation’*). The LXX adds that Israel is ‘blameworthy.’ Paul picks up the adjective, negates it (‘*without fault’*), adds the preposition ‘in’ and then continues the rest of the Old Testament text. He has turned the whole phrase into the opposite of its Old Testament meaning with regard to the Philippians. They are God’s children, and as they stop their bickering, they will truly be ‘without fault.’

The ‘*crooked and depraved generation’* (2:15) described blameworthy Israel in Deuteronomy 32:5. Paul has it describing Philippi. Although the language comes from the Deuteronomy text, it well described the pagan society of the day.

Having reminded the Philippians of the arena in which they are to live out the gospel, Paul now turns to Daniel’s apocalyptic vision in Daniel 12:1-4 to describe their role in pagan Philippi: *‘in which you shine like stars in the* *universe’* (2:15). It is probably the eschatological context of the Daniel passage that makes the transition to the Philippian church’s future easy for Paul.

But before that, he is concerned with the ‘already,’ ‘*as you hold out the word of life’*(2:16). Paul’s literal word order is ‘the word of life holding firm.’ The ultimate intent of their ‘holding firm’ the gospel is evangelism. Paul still has Daniel 12 in mind. The second line in the Hebrew reads ‘*and those who bring many to righteousness* (shall shine) *as the stars for ever and ever*.’ Paul’s encouragement is not to hold the gospel tightly so the enemy doesn’t take it from you, but to hold fast the message that brings life to those who believe.

In light of the eschatological context of Daniel 12:3, whose language Paul has just echoed, he finishes verse 16 on an eschatological note: ‘*in order that I may boast on the day of Christ**that I did not run or labor for nothing.’* Rather than speaking about their eschatological triumph, he concludes with a personal note about his own ministry: literally – ‘(for) my grounds for boasting/glorying (for) the day of Christ.’ He will reserve his ‘glorying’ for the day when it counts, when they, along with others, become his ‘crowns of boasting’ (1 Thessalonians 2:19; c.f. Philippians 4:1).

Paul saw a very close connection between who the church was (and what it did) and his own life in Christ. He yearned for them, at least in part, because as his converts, their continuing loyalty to Christ meant his life had counted for something. This was not doubt on his part, but an affirmation that by their heeding these words, he would have plenty of cause for ‘boasting’ when they stood together before Christ at His return, ‘*that I did not run or labor for nothing.’*

‘Boasting’ has nothing to do with what Paul has done but with what Christ has done through him (1:26; Romans 15:18). Paul uses the word to mean his confidence and trust, Christ Himself. He is thinking of the sheer glory he and they will experience together in the presence of Christ – they, because of his ministry among them that brought them to that glory, and he because of his ‘glorying’ in them as he and they are in Christ’s presence together.

‘*That I did not run or labor for nothing’* brings together the games and manual labour. Life in Christ has the features of a race, with the eschatological prize waiting those who finish (3:14). It also involves labour. One ‘works hard in the Lord’ (Romans 16:6,12). Paul had invested his whole life into seeing that others also obtained the prize for their running. At issue for him was not his own personal prize. For him that prize would consist primarily in having his Philippian friends (4:1) there with him.

‘*But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad* *and rejoice with all of you*’ (2:17). Using metaphors drawn directly from the sacrificial system of the Old testament, Paul now says literally ‘but if indeed I am being poured out as a drink offering at the sacrifice and service of your faith.’ Pictured is the Levitical priest, whose ‘service’ included the offering of a sacrificial animal, and then a grain offering accompanied by a ‘drink offering’ of wine poured out in the sanctuary (Numbers 28:7). Paul pictures himself as the drink offering and the Philippians as serving by offering the sacrifice, which relates to their faith.

What Paul was trying to convey here is not altogether clear. In light of the Greco-Roman background of the metaphor and the similar usage in 2 Timothy 4:6, ‘drink offering’ is possibly being seen as a metaphor for Paul’s death (or martyrdom). If so, then the imagery is that of blood being poured out over the sacrifice. It is by no means clear that this is Paul’s meaning though, particularly when elsewhere in the same letter he expresses the strong conviction that he will be vindicated (1:19,20), will live (1:24), and will return to see the Philippians (1:25,26; 2:24). The greater probability is that Paul sees his imprisonment, not only as a ‘drink offering’ to the Lord, but as his part of their common suffering, the ‘drink offering’ poured out in conjunction with the Philippians ‘sacrifice,’ a sacrifice that comes as a direct result of their faith. The real sacrifice is that of the Philippians faith.

How does Paul’s seeing himself as a ‘drink offering’ poured out on the sacrifice and service coming from the Philippians’ faith, follow his not wanting to have run or laboured ‘*for nothing’*? Paraphrasing his thinking, ‘I expect you to be my grounds for boasting at the Parousia, evidence that I have not laboured in vain. (and presently my labour includes imprisonment, as yours does suffering in Philippi). But if indeed my present struggle represents a kind of drink offering to go along with your own suffering on behalf of the gospel, then I rejoice over that.’ If indeed Paul understood his suffering to be in conjunction with the Philippians’, he saw this as a cause to rejoice. He insists on rejoicing in the midst of their mutual suffering for Christ. *‘I am* *glad*’ (2:17) meaning he is glad in himself but then adds ‘*and rejoice with all of you*’ (2:17).

‘*So you too should be glad and rejoice with* *me*’ (2:18). This is a call to the readers to receive the news he has just given them with gladness and to share his joy. Paul is linking the call to rejoice to his own joy, both in the context of present suffering and in their mutuality of that suffering. Just as they are going through all that they are together, as far as the gospel (1:5) and suffering for Christ (1:29,30) are concerned, so too he wants them to share his joy in the advance of the gospel, no matter what the present circumstances.

Joy in suffering is predicated on the unshakable foundation of the work of Christ, both past and future. Joy is not determined by circumstances because it comes from one’s place in Christ. This is probably the link in Paul’s mind between verses 16 and 17. Having expressed their eschatological future in terms of their being his grounds for glorying in Christ, (looking to the coming day of Christ), he concludes the sentence with a motivational word: that he will not have run in vain. But he doesn’t seem to have any real doubt about this. His life and their life are too closely bound up together, both in believing and in suffering, for there to be any doubt about the future. So the final word is one of joy. Even in his imprisonment, Paul is already glad and he wants the Philippians to rejoice with him.

Without direct referencing these studies have drawn, sometimes heavily, on:

*Paul’s letter to the Philippians* (The New International Commentary on the New Testament) by Gordon Fee (William B Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1995)

*Philippians* (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries) by Ralph Martin (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1987)

*The Message of Philippians* (The Bible Speaks Today Series) by Alec Motyer (Inter-Varsity Press, Nottingham, England, 1984)

*The Holy Bible (New International Version)* (International Bible Society, Colorado Springs, CO., USA, 1984)

*The Prison Letters* (Paul for Everyone) by Tom Wright (SPCK, London, 2004)

*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* by W. E. Vine (Thomas Nelson, Nashville, TN, 1996)