

Philippians 1:27-30 – Exegetical Commentary

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I. The Text of Philippians 1:27-30

(27) Only live worthily of the Gospel of Christ,

Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε,

that

ἵνα

whether having come and having seen you

εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς

or being absent

εἴτε ἀπὼν

I may hear the things concerning you,

ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν,

that you stand in one spirit,

ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι,

with one soul contending for the faith of the Gospel,

μιᾶ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου

(28) and not being frightened in anything by the ones opposing,

καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων,

which is to them a sign of destruction,

ἣτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας,

but your salvation,

ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας,

and this is from God,

καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ·

(29) because to you was graciously given this on behalf of Christ,

ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ

not only to believe in Him

οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεῦειν

but also on His behalf to suffer,

ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν,

(30) having the same struggle

τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες,

which you saw in me

οἷον εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ

and now you hear about me.

καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί.

**No significant textual variants exist in this text.*

II. The context of Philippians 1:27-30

In verses 3-11 Paul gave thanks to God for the Philippians partnership in His ministry and offered His prayer for their continued spiritual growth. Then in verse 12-14 Paul gladly told the Philippians the fantastic results of his situation, his imprisonment—the advance of the Gospel. More so, even others’

preaching motivated by rivalry and envy was resulting in the Gospel's advancement (15-18). Finally, Paul presented his hard-pressed situation between wanting to be with the Lord at what could be his near death and wanting to be with the Philippians in this life so to encourage their spiritual growth (19-26).

This brings the reader to what appears to be a transition passage, a hinge between verses 3-26 of chapter 1 and various exhortations to follow in chapter 2. Here in verses 27-30 of chapter 1, Paul begins exhorting the Philippians with the imperative to "Only live worthily of the Gospel of Christ." This command functions as an introduction leading into a section of various exhortations. "It [the command in verse 27] is a comprehensive exhortation that covers every aspect of their lives and stands as a rubric over the whole parenthetical section, 1:27-2:18."¹ But at the same time, these verses function as suitable closing remarks to the issues mentioned above, specifically verses 19-26 where Paul is contemplating His hard situation between wanting to be with His Lord while at the same time wanting to live and be an encouragement to the Philippians. He says in verse 17 that either way, whether he comes or is not able to come, he wants them to hear that they are standing firm in unity and not being frightened by their enemies. Paul has presented his situation (12-26), and now he wants to hear of theirs, and in so doing be able to rejoice in their conduct (27-30).

III. Philippians 1:27-30's Relationship to the Book at Large

Verses 27-30 could easily be said to be the heart of Paul's letter to the Philippians. Verse 27 may well be the main proposition of the entire letter, if in fact the assessment that the letter's theme is "Gospel-living."

The Gospel tends to pervade the entire epistle and could therefore be considered thematic. In 1:7 Paul calls the Philippians "partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the Gospel." He assures them in 1:12 that his imprisonment has resulted in the Gospel's advancement. In 16 he states that those who preach with good intent do so "knowing that I am put here for the defense of the Gospel." And in verse 17, he rejoices that Christ (and certainly the good news about Him) is preached even if the preachers do so out of strife. In fact Paul states that for him, his life can be summed up in one word, "Christ." That is why he can rightly exhort the Philippians to live as citizens of heaven in a manner worthy of the Gospel and strive "side by side for the faith of the Gospel" (1:27). In chapter 2 he exhorts the Philippians to be united and humble in light of the Gospel and what Christ has done (2:1-11). In 2:12 he urges them to work the Gospel out into every aspect of who they are because God continuing His work in them and will not cease until completed (1:6). In verse 22 Paul states that Timothy has served with him in the Gospel. In 3:1-11 Paul defends the Gospel. He then exhorts them to live as citizens of heaven, in light of the hope of the Gospel, the complete work of the Gospel in their lives, glorification (3:21). In 4:2-3 he mentions many brothers in sisters who have labored with him in the Gospel. In 4:14-18 he thanks the Philippians for their participation in the Gospel through financial support of Paul's ministry.

In light of the Gospel's pervading occurrence, Paul's words in 1:27, "Only let your manner of life be worthy of the Gospel of Christ," may be an appropriate summary of the main theme in Philippians. This, Paul says, is the only (Μόνον) exhortation that he desires the Philippians to grasp, seeing it will encapsulate all other imperatives of the Christian life.

¹ O'Brien, (37-38).

IV. Summary of Philippians 1:27-30

The main proposition and imperative in these verses is for the Philippians to live worthy of the Gospel. Everything else in the text of verses 27-30 falls under that command and describes how one can fulfill it. In verse 27 Paul gives the reason that they are to live worthy of the Gospel—so that he may hear a report of various expectations he has for them. He desires to hear that they stand in one spirit that is unified by contending for the faith of the Gospel and not being frightened by their opponents. Paul does not condition this reason, for he wants to hear of these things whether present or absent.

But then Paul goes on to give the Philippians some encouragement from some theology. He says that all of their contending and not being frightened is proof of their salvation just as their opponents' opposition is proof of their destruction. More so, they ought to find security in the fact that this all comes from God. But how do they know this all comes from God? Well, Paul explains. It has been graciously given to the Philippians to suffer for Christ's sake just as in the same sense it has been graciously given to them to believe on Christ for salvation. They can know that "this," their suffering, is from God because they know that "this," their belief, is from God. This theology is an encouragement, knowing that God is sovereign in their situation which ought to spur them on to fulfill the exhortation to live worthy of the Gospel and contend for it. But even more than that, the fact that Paul shares with them in this persecution, who is a model for them of how one should respond to trials (1:12-26), is provided in verse 30 to spur them on even more to live worthy of the Gospel.

IV. Analysis of Philippians 1:27-30

(27) Only live worthily of the Gospel of Christ (Μόνον ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ πολιτεύεσθε)

Paul begins this new section with the exhortation for the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the good news of Christ—the good news which they experientially possess and therefore should be exemplifying itself in their lives (Phil 2:12-13).

Only (Μόνον). Μόνον is a transitional word which in this text is indicating a rather important matter. What is to follow this transitional indicator (Μόνον) is the *one thing* Paul is really trying to emphasize or summarize. It is emphatic.² Paul is stressing that the one essential thing for a Christian to do is live in a manner worthy of the Gospel. Such a command encapsulates all other Christian imperatives. If the Philippians were to grasp nothing else, this command would suffice as the only lesson learned.

"Worthy of the gospel" (ἀξίως τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). This phrase is emphasized in Paul's imperative, seeing that it comes prior to the verb unlike a typical English translation and word order.³ In other words, Paul does not want the Philippians to miss the Gospel. He is not simply urging them to live, but to live in a specific manner, a manner that is would be deemed as worthy of the Gospel (1 Cor 15:3-4) they received.

Theology note: Worthy of the Gospel?

Being worthy of the Gospel is a theologically false statement. Man is depraved and consequently the good news of Christ's atoning work that is applied to the elect is something the elect are not worthy of. Salvation is a gift from God, not of man or anything meritorious found in him (Eph 2:8-9). But Paul is not saying the Philippians are to become worthy of the Gospel, for they never can be and are never meant to be, for the Gospel and the salvation provided by it is something man is unworthy of and does not deserve. Paul's point here is for the Philippians to live their Christian life in such a way that reflects the Gospel they

² Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 72.

³ Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 72.

Of Christ (τοῦ Χριστοῦ). This is a both an objective and subjective genitive (a plenary genitive). It is true that the Gospel is Christ's, "Christ's Gospel," but it is also true that Christ is the content of the Gospel, He is in a large sense the Gospel itself (i.e., *Christ* died for sin, *Christ* was buried, *Christ* rose from the dead [1 Cor 15:3-4] to bring justification [Rom 4:25], and those who believe in *Christ* for salvation have it [Acts 16:31]).

Live (πολιτεύεσθε). The most basic and most essential meaning this word is "to live." However, "to live" is much too generic of a meaning to encapsulate the entire idea Paul probably had in mind when using this word. The word most likely contains the idea of citizen conduct.⁴

Πολιτεύεσθε carries with it the concept of the *manner* in which one lives—in other words, conduct.⁵ He wasn't simply commanding them to live, but to live in a specific manner—worthy of the Gospel.

This word is extremely significant to this passage. This significance is mainly because this verb forms the main imperative and central thought. Therefore, this word in many senses wraps its meaning

around the text as a whole, seeing every subordinate clause through the lenses of this main clause. However, equally true is the fact that this main clause, particularly this verb, is defined by the entire text at large. Πολιτεύεσθε refers to properly conducting one's life, and specifically in this passage, in a manner worthy of the Gospel. But what does this mean? The rest of verses 27-30 answer this question, and therefore, in many senses help define Πολιτεύεσθε. In other words, when reading 1:27-30, one can never escape the meaning of Πολιτεύεσθε. Understanding Paul's purpose in using πολιτεύεσθε, as opposed to a more generic word for walk that wouldn't contain this citizenship concept such as περιπατέω, is therefore extremely valuable to understanding not only this word, but the entire text.

That . . . I may hear the things concerning you (ἵνα . . . ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν)

Having presented his main imperative for the passage (1:27-30), Paul now presents the reason he urges them to live worthy of the Gospel—that he may hear certain things concerning the Philippians.

⁴ This is seen by the verbs stem, πόλις, which translates "city." This is not to commit an epistemological fallacy, for in 3:20 Paul tells the Philippians that their citizenship is to heaven. From this one can conclude that citizenship is therefore a sub-theme of Philippians (giving reason to see the idea of citizenship in πολιτεύεσθε). Further, the word "citizenship" in 3:20 has the same root as the verb πολιτεύεσθε, supporting the idea that πολιτεύεσθε contains this concept of citizen living.

⁵ And πολιτεύεσθε's only other use in the NT, Acts 23:1, supports the idea that it contains the idea of conduct or manner of living.

have experienced salvifically, just as they are to work it out into every aspect of their lives (Phil 2:12). Christians may not, in fact they are not, worthy of the Gospel. But having been saved by it, their lives ought to reveal the salvation that they have. This is what it means to live worthy of the Gospel.

Background Info: Citizenship

In Philippians 1:27 and 3:20, Paul alludes to or specifically mentions citizenship, a term which the Roman minds of the Philippians would have special appeal to. The fact that this city was a Roman colony may suggest some or many of the towns believers were Roman citizens or even Roman veterans and consequently would have enjoyed special privileges as Roman colonists. More so, this Philippian community, of which the church was apart, would have had considerable devotion to and pride in the Roman Empire. When Paul reminds the Philippians in 3:20 that they are citizens of

heaven and in 1:27 that they are to conduct themselves as citizen's worthy of the Gospel, he may have been trying to get the Philippian Christians to see themselves as Christians first and Romans second. Being distant from Rome and yet being citizen's of Rome would not have been anything strange to the Philippians, for citizenship was not seen as something connected to location and many of them may have had the 'Italic Right' (in return for being displaced from Rome, these Roman settlers were treated as if they were on Italian soil).¹ Paul may be alluding to this, specifically in 3:20, to illustrate the believer's citizenship in heaven even now in this life.

That . . . I may hear (ἵνα . . . ἀκούω). The "that" (ἵνα) in this phrase is being used to indicate the purpose⁶ for why Paul is exhorting the Philippians to live worthily of the Gospel. They are to conduct themselves in such a way that Paul may receive (subjunctive)⁷ a report about them concerning various matters which he about to present.

The things concerning you (τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν). What are these things (τὰ⁸) mentioned in this phrase? First, the modifier "concerning you" (περὶ ὑμῶν) reveals that these things are matters relating to the Philippians. Paul hopes to here "thing" about the Philippian church members. Second, to be more specific, the following subordinate phrases present in further detail what Paul desires to hear about them—"that you stand in one spirit, with one soul contending for the faith of the Gospel, and not being frightened in anything by the ones opposing."

Whether having come and having seen you or being absent
(εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς εἴτε ἀπών)

Inserted directly between "That" (ἵνα) and "I may hear the things concerning you" (ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν) are two conditions: 1) "whether having come and having seen you [the Philippians] or" 2) "being absent [and therefore not having come and seen you]."⁹ But having exhausted his options (whether absent or present [no other option exists]), Paul actually makes this reason for the Philippians to live worthy of the Gospel (That . . . I may hear the things concerning you) unconditional. In other

⁶ First, ἵνα is introducing a subordinate clause modifying, "Only live worthy of the Gospel of Jesus." This function is crucial for understanding the use of ἵνα in this verse. The possible uses of ἵνα are purpose, result, noun clause, and imperative. Seeing that Paul just used an imperative, the use of imperative seems unlikely. ἵνα is introducing a *subordinate* clause which most likely rules out the imperative use. Plus, whether that use even exists is rather debated. Second, for ἵνα to be used as a noun clause, the grammatical structure of its head clause would need to demand such a use. But the heading clause "Only live worthy of the Gospel of Jesus" does not call for a complementary (used with verbs of wishing, asking, praying, or exhorting) or appositional clause, and certainly not a subject clause. Seeing that "live" is imperative and not indicative, result or purpose are the only possible options. If the use was result, Paul would be getting the cart before the horse. He is not stating a result exists, but exhorting so that a result may be produced. For Paul to be stating a reason would seem strange, for he uses conditional statements and the subjunctive, making such a reason not very concrete and certain. Such an uncertain reason would be terrible grounds for an exhortation. In addition, result is a rather rare use. Therefore, the purpose is the obvious use and provides the most natural understanding of Paul's flow of thought—Paul is exhorting the Philippians to live in a way that he might hear certain things about them.

⁷ The subjunctive, ἀκούω, is used because Paul has just laid out some conditional statements (whether having come and having seen you or being absent), as well as presented the Philippians with a command, which to be fulfilled is conditioned on the Philippians' obedience to it. Therefore, for Paul to use the mood of possibility (subjunctive) fits rather well with the conditional sense in which he is speaking.

⁸ The article in the phrase ἵνα . . . ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν being used is not being used with a noun but is functioning as a pronoun—hence the translation, "the things." At times the article by itself, functioning as a pronoun as in this case, is translated as "the one" in referring to a person. However, the following context (namely the following subordinating clauses) reveal that Paul is not referring to an individual but is using this pronoun to refer generally to that which he hopes to hear about them.

⁹ The use of the double εἴτε forms an either/or situation.

words, in either case, whether present or not, the reason holds true—he wants to hear a report of certain things concerning them.

That you stand in one spirit (ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι)

That (ὅτι). The use of ὅτι ought not to be translated “since” or “because”¹⁰ in this text as it sometimes is in other cases. Here, ὅτι is used to introduce what Paul is hoping to hear, the content of “the things.”¹¹

Spirit (πνεύματι). Πνεύματι is a word that means “spirit” or “wind” and is often used to denote the Holy Spirit. Consequently, much debate exists as to whether πνεύματι in this text is referring to the Holy Spirit or simply a generic human spirit, as in attitude.¹² It seems better, due to the context of this passage to understand πνεύματι as referring to the later.¹³ However, whether the Holy Spirit is intended or a human spirit is meant, a balance can be made, seeing that “such a unity of purpose is affected only in and through the Holy Spirit. To this extent the two interpretations are closely linked.”¹⁴ If it refers to the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is said throughout much of Pauline literature as the basis for unity and fellowship. But on the other hand, if it refers to unity in human spirit, one knows theologically that this will only be successful by the Spirit’s work.

Stand in one spirit (στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι). Obviously how one interprets “spirit” (see directly above)¹⁵ and “in” (ἐν) will affect how one interprets this phrase and specifically the verb “stand” (στήκετε). The use of “in” (ἐν) is to show that their standing is described by being one-spirited, that is, in

Background info: “Whether absent”?

Internal evidence reveals that Paul was in imprisoned at the time of the writing (1:7, 13, 14) which explains why the possibility of his absence exists.

¹⁰ If reason was the use, Paul would be exhorting the Philippians to live worthy of the Gospel so that He may hear the things about them, *because* they stand in one spirit, contending for the faith, and are not fearful of their opponents. This is grammatically possible and not *completely* nonsense use. However, seeing Paul is exhorting them and not commending that in this specific text, it makes more sense that Paul not be exhorting them to live worthy while two seconds later claiming they already are. Such grounds, “you’re already doing it,” would not be very good grounds of exhortation, “so keep living worthy.” With this understanding, the use of reason comes across as slightly nonsensical.

¹¹ Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 74; Fee, Gordon D. *NICTC Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 160.

¹² As O’Brien, P. T. notes in *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 150, “Many take it as designating the Holy Spirit, either as the sphere or the agent through whom (the preposition ἐν, ‘in’, could designate either) the Philippians will remain steadfast. Reference is made to Eph. 2:18 (ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι); 4:4, and 1 Cor. 2:13, as well as to the immediate context of Phil. 2:1, where κοινωνία πνεύματος (‘fellowship of the Spirit’) turns up, in support of this interpretation.” If πνεύματι is not referring to the Holy Spirit, the idea of “in one spirit” would mean “with one purpose” or “in the same attitude and mindset.”

¹³ This understanding finds support from the fact that “the phrase is parallel to the immediately following words μετὰ ψυχῇ and denotes ‘having the same attitude or the same orientation of will’” (O’Brien, P. T. notes in *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 150). Greenlee (Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 74) and Hawthorne (Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, 56) agree and mention this same argument. Hawthorne argues that since the Philippians are being commanded to stand in one spirit or Spirit and since the context is about unity (as will be presented further in chapter 2 by Paul) the human spirit is in view here. The word ἐνὶ also seems to designate human spirit of unity. If Paul was referring to the Holy Spirit, wouldn’t it seem theologically obvious there is *one* (ἐνὶ) Holy Spirit? He would more likely omit ἐνὶ if the Holy Spirit was in view.

¹⁴ O’Brien, P. T. (1991). *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* (150). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

¹⁵ Those who see ἐνὶ πνεύματι as referring to the Holy Spirit claim the use is space and/or reference.¹⁵ Association could be another possible use (with the one Spirit).

like-mindedness and with like-purpose.¹⁶ So than what did Paul intend to bring across by the use of the verb “stand” (στήκετε)? As at other times when this verb is used in the NT, it connotes the idea of holding fast or being firmly grounded.¹⁷ So in other words, Paul wants to hear that they are firmly established in a like-minded attitude and purpose—also known as, being unified (2:2, 5).¹⁸

With one soul contending for the faith of the Gospel (μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου)

Having made clear that whether he is to be absent or present Paul desires to hear about the Philippians that they are firmly established in like-spirit, Paul now continues his line of thought by providing the Philippian believers specific means of achieving that goal. First, Paul states they are to stand firm in oneness of spirit by means of striving together with like-mindedness for the faith of the Gospel.

With one soul (μιᾷ ψυχῇ). The use of the dative in μιᾷ ψυχῇ (simply “one soul”) is clearly association,¹⁹ hence the English translation, “with.” In other words, seeing that these words describe the participle, “contending” (συναθλοῦντες),²⁰ this contending or striving is to be done with one soul. But

¹⁶ In the realm of understanding “spirit” as referring to human spirit, several uses of ἐν are possible. First, one might suggest means as the use. This would mean that the verse would be saying that the Philippians are to stand by means of all having one spirit and attitude. Yet, this use would leave “stand” as ambiguous, as opposed to ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι defining what is meant by stand. Nonetheless, if “stand” is left alone (as in, not described by ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι) than the reader is left to be uncertain as to what Paul means when he says “stand” (for certainly Paul is not referring to physically standing which means “stand” is going to have in some sense an ambiguous use that needs to be further explained). Some may then suggest space or reference as the use of ἐν. This is to say that the Philippians’ standing is to be done in reference to the same spirit, or, their standing is to be done in one-spiritedness. Likewise, one might suggest manner as the correct use of ἐν, which is to say ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι describes how they are to stand—with one spirit, in the same attitude and purpose. As Hawthorne seems to imply, the context of united purpose indicates that when Paul mentions “spirit” here, he is referring to this like-mindedness, attitude, purpose (Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, 56). Seeing that “stand” is being used by Paul in an ambiguous, general sense, one can rightly say that the use is probably somewhere in between space/reference and manner. ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι is describing the Philippians’ standing.

¹⁷ The verb στήκω (the lexical form of στήκετε) is always translated as “stand” in more literal translations (i.e., NASB, ESV, KJV, NRSV), but more often in the NT it connotes the idea of holding fast or being firm and grounded (Rom 14:4; 1 Cor 16:13; Gal 5:1; Phil 4:1; 1 Thes 3:8; 2 Thes 2:15) than connoting the literal idea of standing (Mk 3:31; 11:25). Seeing that Paul is obviously not trying to connote the idea of physical standings, the former is the correct meaning. As BDAG states, this verb in 1:27 means “to be firmly committed in conviction or belief” (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. [2000]. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* [3rd ed.]. [944]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press).

¹⁸ In reference to the upcoming context pertaining to unity O’Brien states, “As those who are troubled by internal rivalries, they are to stand firm *in one spirit* for the cause of the gospel, withstanding the common enemy (1:27–30). The emphasis on unity is even more pronounced in 2:1–4, where, on the basis of supernatural, objective realities that have occurred in their lives, they are urged to be one in aim and disposition, have the same love, and be united in spirit. Against their natural tendency to self-assertiveness they are called upon to put the interests of others before their own and to be marked by a spirit of selflessness and humility (cf. 4:2–3). Paul then appeals to the ‘Lordly Example’ of Jesus Christ, who made himself nothing but was exalted to the highest place by the Father. He is the pattern to which the Philippians are to conform” (O’Brien, 37–38).

¹⁹ The συν in συναθλοῦντες makes this rather clear and certain.

²⁰ This is to say μιᾷ ψυχῇ is describing συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου as opposed to adding further description along with στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι to the standing (στήκετε) that was just mentioned earlier in this verse. In other words, this is to say that the comma in one’s translation belongs before μιᾷ ψυχῇ and not after it. Evidence for this understanding is seen by the fact that, as just noted above, μιᾷ ψυχῇ naturally goes with συναθλοῦντες to form a dative of association. It may seem odd that μιᾷ ψυχῇ is placed before this participle.

what does “soul” mean here? Ψυχή is a word that has an extremely broad range of meaning. In this text, its meaning appears to be revealed by the previous use of πνεῦμα just words before. Paul most likely is paralleling them,²¹ and they probably are referring to the same idea of being like-minded and having the same attitude.²² In other words, they are to stand firm in unity by contending for the faith.

Contending (συναθλοῦντες). As assumed above, the use of contending (συναθλοῦντες) and consequently its clause (with one soul contending for the faith of the Gospel) in Paul’s argument is to provide the means by which the Philippians may stand.²³ This word, “contend” συναθλέω is only used here in verse 27 and 4:3 (but ἀθλέω occurs in 2 Tm. 2:5), and has the idea of striving or laboring. In this verse, in light of what is the striving is being done for on behalf of (see directly below), it seems better to understand the verb as not simply denoting the idea of effort (i.e., “labor” or “strive”) but the idea of fighting, battling, or contending.²⁴

However, as Greenlee states, the reason μία ψυχῇ is placed before the participle it modifies is for emphatic reasons (Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 75).

²¹ As O’Brien notes, πνεῦμα (‘spirit’) and ψυχῇ (‘soul’) appear on occasion in the NT, almost interchangeably (Lk. 1:47; cf. Jn. 11:33 with 12:27; and Mt. 11:29 with 1 Cor. 16:18) (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [151]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans). This appears to be what Paul has in mind here.

²² The expression μία ψυχῇ (‘one soul’) had previously been used by Aristotle to depict the social idea of unanimity and communal sharing and later by the Pythagoreans in relation to the golden age when people would have all things in common and would be ἐνὸς σώματος καὶ μιᾶς ψυχῆς (‘one body and one soul’). An interesting example of this usage is reflected in the LXX at 1 Ch. 12:38, where μία ψυχῇ depicts the unity of purpose in Israel in desiring David as king. Luke’s summary description of the original Jerusalem congregation uses the same expression: ‘All the believers were one in heart and mind’ (καρδία καὶ ψυχῇ μία, Acts 4:32). The Spirit-filled community in Jerusalem exhibited a remarkable unanimity—and our phrase describes this unity of purpose—that found concrete expression in the sharing of their possessions. Paul’s use of a traditional phrase here is an expression of his concern for the Philippians’ unity of heart and purpose in the face of persecution (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [151–152]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

²³ Greenlee lists two options for the use of this participle: “1. It states the means by which they are standing firm [WEC]: you are standing firm by striving together. 2. It states an action in addition to standing firm [NAB, TEV]: you are standing firm and striving together” (Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 75). The issue of determining which use is correct comes down to whether one sees the two participle clauses (“contending” and “not being frightened”) as subordinate and somehow describing “stand in one spirit” or if one sees all three (“stand,” “contend,” and “no be frightened”) as all being the content of what Paul wants to hear about them. If Paul desired the later, that is, to see all three as parallel, then why did he make the first one an indicative and the later two participles? If he desired all three to be considered parallel, he most likely would have made what is “contending” to be “contend” and “not being frightened” to be “not be frightened.” Therefore, the grammar suggests the later two are modifying and subordinate to the former. After determining that these two participles are subordinate to στήκετε, and noting that they both lack an article meaning they are most likely adverbial, only one option is really sensible, and that is Greenlee’s first option mentioned—means. (One might suggest manner, but manner is technically to be used to describe a fashion in which something is done, not the actions themselves [Young, 153-154]). Hawthorne indicates his opinion of the two clauses’ use when he states that one stands the best when he is contending and not being frightened. O’Brien states “the following participles explain positively (συναθλοῦντες, ‘contending, struggling’) and negatively (μὴ πτυρόμενοι, ‘in no way intimidated’) what this remaining steadfast (στήκετε) signifies. στήκετε is the main verb, on which the following participles depend and to which the relative clause of v. 28b, ἥτις ἐστὶν (‘which is’) points back” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [150]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

²⁴ The verb perhaps contains military imagery (Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. [2000]. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* [3rd ed.] [964]. Chicago: University of Chicago Press). The similar verb ἀθλέω, according to the TDNT means “to engage in competition or conflict,” In the LXX it

For the faith of the Gospel (τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). This phrase indicates the object of the contending just mentioned above. The use of the dative in τῇ πίστει is interest (hence the translation “for”),²⁵ meaning the Philippians are to contend for the sake of the faith of the Gospel. That faith is what

Background info: “The ones opposing”?

Although, as just noted, opposition is not the driving force in Philippians, it certainly exists. Paul mentions opponents in various locations through the epistle (1:15, 17, 28-29; 3:2, 18-19). Some have held that these references describe one group of opponents. But this seems rather unlikely seeing that the descriptions are not always harmonious (for example, 1:15, 17 seems to indicate these opponents are members of the church whereas here in 1:28-29 they seem to be individuals outside the church in that they persecute the church). It is best to understand each reference individually with an understanding that some overlap may and probably does exist (in other words, an opponent addressed at one point is not necessarily the same opponent addressed in

they are to contend for. “Of the Gospel” as well as the use of the article (τῇ) specifies what faith Paul is making reference to here. They are to contend for the belief system of the Gospel, that is faith in a creedal sense.²⁶

(28) And not being frightened in anything by the ones opposing (καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων)

And (καὶ). This coordinating conjunction is functioning so as to add a parallel clause to the clause, “with one soul contending for the faith of the Gospel” (μὴ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου).²⁷

Not being frightened (μὴ πτυρόμενοι). This passive participle is parallel to the participle “contending” (συναθλοῦντες) in the clause directly before it. Consequently, they have the same use—means.²⁸ The Philippians are to stand firm in oneness of spirit by contending for the faith and not being frightened by anything of their opponents. On the other hand, being frightened would produce the

denotes the conflict of martyrs such as in Macc. 4. (Vol. 1: *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- [G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.] [electronic ed.] [167]. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans).

²⁵ Hawthorne believes the dative is used as a dative of interest or advantage and could be translated “for the faith.” He further states that it should not be understood as a dative of association (contending with the faith) because of συναθλοῦντες presence with the συν (Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, 56). As noted above, the συν is used with μὴ ψυχῇ. Further, association might suggest one is opposed to the faith in his contending or possibly that alongside with the faith as if the faith and the contender are partners in their contending. But the faith doesn’t actively contend, as if it were a person. O’Brien states, “τῇ πίστει is a dative of interest or advantage, rather than of instrument” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians: A commentary on the Greek text* [152]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans). Instrumental means, as O’Brien states, is unlikely. The reason being, faith is not the means by which believers contend, or at least the means by which successful and strong contention is made. Rather faith is the object for which believers contend for.

²⁶ Greenlee lists four options: 1) faith in reference to the gospel, that which characterizes the gospel, 2) faith based on the gospel, 3) faith which has resulted from the proclamation of the gospel, 4) faith produced by the gospel (Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 75). Hawthorne rightly states that faith here is being used in a creedal sense (Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, 57). In other words, “faith of the gospel” could be said the belief system of the Gospel, the Gospel faith, as opposed to another type of faith. Options 3 and 4 simply are reading into the text too much to pull those meanings out. Further support is found in Paul’s purpose in what he is saying, or context. Part of Paul’s exhortation is that that contend for the faith. The idea of contention puts “faith” in its proper perspective. It is not a personal experience that one is contending for, but the validity and truth claims of the Gospel, the “Gospel faith.”

²⁷ This is shown by the existence of two parallel participles in each clause function the same way.

²⁸ See the arguments for the use of means for the participle “contending” (συναθλοῦντες) in footnote 23. The same arguments apply in like manner to this parallel participle.

a different location, although he may be). In 1:28-29 Paul describes these specific opponents as individuals who opposed the Philippians believers or congregation, most likely indicating they were not members of the church themselves. Paul indicates that they are suffering, which is rather vague but indicates some sort of persecution. This is probably all one can know about these individuals, but on the other hand, is all one needs to know to interpret the text.

opposite effect—they would not be firmly established (“stand”).

In anything by the ones opposing (ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων). Paul does not leave any exceptions as to what they are not to be frightened by.²⁹ He says literally, “in nothing” (translated as the positive “anything” due to what would be a double negative in English). Yet Paul does qualify this statement. He says, “nothing *by those opposing you*.”³⁰ In other words, referring to the opponents (qualifier), nothing (no exceptions) from or by them is to frighten the Philippians.

Which is to them a sign of destruction (ἥτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας)

Which (ἥτις). The initial question regarding this phrase is, what does *which* refer to? What is its antecedent?³¹ ἥτις most likely does not have any one specific antecedent but more likely refers to what has been described above, and then in a more general sense from the word “stand” to “ones opposing” with special reference to the latter idea of belief and suffer/the opposition causing suffering found in verse 29.

²⁹ The use of ἐν μηδενὶ is therefore a cross between reference (“referring to anything, do not be frightened”) and means (“don’t let anything frighten you”).

³⁰ The use of “by the ones opposing” is agent. Those opposing are the agents delivering the “nothing” the Philippians are not to be frightened by.

³¹ The issue concerning the antecedent of ἥτις is best solved by two things, 1) taking into account the gender and number of ἥτις, and 2) Paul’s flow of thought and following argument/reasoning. First, ἥτις’s gender and number (feminine, singular) help eliminate several otherwise possible antecedents, for pronouns, by rule, are to match up with their antecedent in gender and number. Several proposed options (i.e., the participle “not being frightened” and the participle “contending”) are eliminated as possible options due to not being feminine and singular. Second, Paul’s line of thought and argument also helps determine what he has in mind for ἥτις. Whatever the antecedent of ἥτις is, it must have the interesting ability to dually function as a sign of destruction for unbelievers and salvation for believers (28). This fact eliminates the option of “faith” (for faith of believers is not necessarily a sign of destruction for unbelievers) which is one of the sole possible antecedents to line up with ἥτις in gender and number (the other being “soul” [ψυχῇ]); but this would not make much sense with Paul’s criteria. So what is the antecedent? Paul’s argument indicates what he has in mind. Notice the parallels between Paul’s words here in verse 28 (“which is to them proof of destruction, but your salvation, and this is from God”), and what he will eventually say in verse 29 (because to you was graciously given in the matter of Christ’s behalf not only to believe in Him but also for His behalf to suffer). His words in verse 29 appear to be a theological defense of his words in 28. Whatever this sign is (that is, whatever the antecedent of “which” is), Paul seems to be indicating that it has something to do with the dual theological fact that belief and suffer have both been granted to the elect individual. In other words, if belief has been granted to the elect, then belief is a sign of one’s salvation. And on the other hand, if suffer has been granted to the elect in addition to belief, then the act of opposing (or producing that suffering) might very well be a sign of one’s not having salvation but eventual destruction. With that said, ἥτις most likely does not have any one specific antecedent but more likely refers to what has been described above, and then in a more general sense from the word “stand” to “ones opposing.” As Gordon Fee states, “The ‘which’ (‘this,’ NIV) with which the clause begins is best understood as referring to the Philippians’ following through on the three matters he has just urged on them.” If they follow through, it will be an encouragement to them of their salvation, and an omen to their opposers. O’Brien rightly concludes, “Either way the meaning is essentially the same, and the clause provides a ground of encouragement for Paul’s friends” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [154]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

Is to them (ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς). “To them” here obviously from context refers to “the ones opposing” just mentioned in the text above.³²

A sign of destruction (ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας). There are two ways this phrase could be understood. First, that this is proof that the ones opposing will be destroyed, or two, that to the ones opposing see their opposition as proof of the believers destruction, as contrasted with the second clause which would be seen as stating that the believers on the other hand don’t see it as a sign of their own destruction but their own salvation. The question then is, whose destruction is being spoken of, the ones opposing or is Paul speaking of what the ones opposing think is a sign of the believer’s destruction? The former option seems more probably in light of the evidence.³³

The word for “proof” in this verse is ἔνδειξις and can either be used to refer to something that compels one to accept something either mentally or emotionally or to refer to something that points to or serves as an indicator (i.e., a sign or omen).³⁴ The use of ἔνδειξις in verse 28 is the latter.³⁵ If ἔνδειξις at carries the idea of proof, it must only be in the sense of providing absolutely certainly, because the fact that ἡτις is a sign a destruction is backed by theological truth, not flimsy evidence.

“Destruction” (ἀπωλείας) is a word used by Homer to refer to the killing done in battle, or in 4 Macc. 8:9 to mean torture.³⁶ However, in light of the fact that it is contrasted with “salvation,” it surely does not have this physical meaning. As BDAG notes, in this verse the word

Theological note: Sign of destruction and sign of salvation?

What does it mean for someone’s salvation or ultimate perdition to be shown by a sign (or multiple signs)? In several locations, various NT authors make it that individuals are known by the actions they produce. For example, in John 15 Jesus says that those “in Him” will bear much fruit. In 1 John 3 John presents the truth that regenerate individuals will be characterized by a continual repentance. James states in his second chapter that those possessing

³² The only reasonable option seems to be “the one’s opposing.” “The dative αὐτοῖς is one of reference” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [155]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans) and the pronoun is being used as an indirect object, the recipient of the omen/sign to be exact. The context is contrasting believers and the ones opposing to the believers, who are, it goes without saying, most assuredly, nonbelievers. Therefore, it follows that the sign of destruction belongs to the one’s opposing, and certainly not the believers. Further, gender and number fits this argument, for the two agree in gender in number.

³³ ἡτις (“which”) is what is said to be a sign of destruction. If one understand the antecedent of “which” as was presented in footnote 31, the former meaning is the obvious answer. But more so, one would be hard-pressed to find an antecedent for ἡτις (“which”) that would argue for the latter meaning in words. Secondly, if Paul was trying to indicate the former option, it would have made more sense for him to have said in the next line “but to your salvation” rather than “but of your salvation.” Instead of contrasting perceptions, he is contrasting the realities of the two groups. Understanding the meaning of the word ἔνδειξις (see next paragraph in the body of the text) helps one understand that Paul was not referring to opinions or finite arguments (such as the former option suggests), but sure facts—a definite sign, clear omen, etc. “The point is not that the adversaries themselves see this . . . though perhaps they may have a dim awareness of it, but that it seals their doom as the enemies of the gospel and confirms the eternal salvation of the faithful who endure to the end. . . . The dative (αὐτοῖς), however, is one of reference . . .” which means the destruction is in reference to the ones opposing (the antecedent of αὐτοῖς). “The undauntedness of the believers in the context of persecution is a sign of perdition and salvation whether the persecutors recognize it or not. The apostle is stating the facts of the case (ἐστὶν)—not the possible psychological effects on the opponents of the Philippian Christians” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [155]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

³⁴ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (332). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³⁵ Ibid., 332.

³⁶ Vol. 1: *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*. 1964- (G. Kittel, G. W. Bromiley & G. Friedrich, Ed.) (electronic ed.) (394). Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.

has the idea of eternal punishment for the wicked (cf. Mt 7:13; Rev 17:8, 11; Heb 10:39; 2 Pet 3:7).³⁷

But your salvation (ὁμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας)

“But” (δὲ) introduces a contrasting clause to the phrase “of destruction.” In other words, in this case Paul is not speaking about the sign in the sense that it is an omen of destruction, but a sign of salvation.

Although this circumstance (ἥτις) is an omen of their opponents’ destruction, it serves as sure proof of the Philippians salvation. As noted, “which” (ἥτις) has a rather broad range of reference. Yet from verse 29 one sees that Paul focuses on belief and suffering. Surely belief is a sign of salvation, seeing it is the means of salvation. And secondly, even suffering, seeing that it is granted to the believer just as is his belief (29), is therefore a sure sign of salvation³⁸ (cf. 3:10; Rom 8:17; 1 Thes 3:3; 1 Pet 2:21).

genuine faith will have works to validate their profession. On the other hand, Jesus says false prophets will be known by their fruit in Matthew 7. Here in Philippians 1:28 Paul does the same thing. ἥτις (“this”/“which,” as noted to refer in a broad sense to much of verse 27 and 28) is this sign, either of one’s salvation or eternal damnation.

Theological note: “This” is from God?

Paul claims here that “this” (all that “this” entails) is from God, has its origin in God. If this concept is surprising here in verse 28, Paul seems to elaborate in verse 29 when he says that God has not only appointed the Philippians to believe but also to suffer, meaning both their belief and suffering are from God. But Paul

And this is from God (καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ)

“And” (καὶ)³⁹ introduces the reader to Paul’s next thought—that this is from God.⁴⁰ How one understands the antecedent of “this” obviously then determines how one views this entire phrase. Noting the grammatical uncertainty of τοῦτο (seeing it is neuter and singular and consequently does not have a definite antecedent) and recognizing Paul most likely did not form τοῦτο this way on accident, it is best to understand τοῦτο as referring a general sense to everything from “that you stand” up until this point in the text.⁴¹ This understanding, further,

³⁷ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (127). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

³⁸ “Salvation” (σωτηρίας) is a word that begs the question, salvation or deliverance from what? Possible answers include a wide variety such as deliverance from enemies, sickness, etc. In the NT, however, “salvation” is often used in reference to the redemptive act of God through the good news of Jesus Christ. That is what the word means in this context, which is seen by the nature of the sign (i.e., faith, persecution) of this salvation.

³⁹ “And” (καὶ) has the use of addition.

⁴⁰ “From” (ἀπὸ) functions to show the origin of “this” (τοῦτο), which is “God” (θεοῦ).

⁴¹ Greenlee suggests four options for possible antecedents: 1) it refers to everything from “that you stand” up until this point in the text, 2) ἔνδειξις (the sign), 3) ἀπωλείας and σωτηρίας (the destruction and salvation mentioned), 4) ὁμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας (specifically, “your salvation”) (Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 79). The first thing to note is τοῦτο itself. τοῦτο is neuter and singular, so most likely the antecedent will also be neuter and singular, unless it is being used more generally and not referring to anything in particular. In light of this observation, several options one might suggest are discarded due to not being neuter but feminine, i.e., ἀπωλείας (option 3), ἔνδειξις (option 2), ἥτις, σωτηρίας (options 3 and 4), but not option 1. (However, μηδενὶ is singular and neuter, but μηδενὶ would seem to be nonsense option). With option 1 as the sole option left, in reference to those possible antecedents that match τοῦτο in gender and number, O’Brien states, “The final words, καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ (‘and this [is] from God’), apply not simply to σωτηρίας, nor to ἔνδειξις alone, but to the whole of the preceding. The antecedent τοῦτο is neuter and refers back to the whole episode of opposition in its double effect, leading the opponents to destruction and the believers to eternal salvation” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians: A commentary on the Greek text* [157]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans). A. T. Robertson in his *Grammar* (page 411) states that both the relative ὃ as an explanation and the demonstrative τοῦτ’ ἐστίν are used

mentions even more than belief and suffering in verse 28 under the broad umbrella of “this.” He mentions the Philippians ability to stand, contend, not be frightened. All of this has its origin in God. Another way of putting it is that God is sovereign and therefore in God’s providence these circumstances are from Him. As O’Brien notes, “These words provide a ground of encouragement for Paul’s friends, and they are further assured that the experience of violent antagonism to the gospel through which they were passing, the steadfastness that they are to demonstrate, and the assurance of salvation that follows are all under the sovereign control and purpose of God” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [152]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

does not run into any theological dilemmas and is actually supported by Paul’s upcoming argument in verse 29.⁴²

(29) Because to you was graciously given this on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him but also on His behalf to suffer (ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεῦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν)

In these next clauses, Paul presents the ground by which he could rightly say that “this” is from God (28)—because belief and suffering were in fact graciously given by God to the Philippians.

“Because” (ὅτι). “Because” is functioning to introduce this statement (verse 29) that provides the grounds of Paul’s claim that “this is from God,” including all that “this” refers to.⁴³

“To you” (ὑμῖν). “To you” indicates the recipients of the graciously given belief and suffering. It also provides emphasis by showing Paul is focusing on the Philippians and their contrasted position with their adversaries.

“Graciously given” (ἐχαρίσθη). The root of ἐχαρίσθη is χάρις which means “grace.” In other words, this word is the verb form of grace and literally means “to grace” and is quite frequently use in the NT is as some form of forgiveness (2 Cor 2:7; 20, 13; Eph 4:32; Col 2:13; 3:13) or a cancelation of debt (Lk 7:42-43). About the other half of its uses indicate that idea of giving (Act 25:11, 16; 1 Cor 2:12;

with little regard to the gender or number of the antecedent (Robertson, A. [1919; 2006]. *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* [412]. Logos). Moises Silva states that this last clause, seeing it is neuter and singular, probably refers to the “whole complex of ideas: conflict, destruction, perseverance, and salvation. The true grounds for the Philippians’ encouragement was the profound conviction that nothing in their experience took place outside of God’s superintendence” (Silva, Moises. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Philippians*, 83).

⁴² Verse 29 forms the grounds of the phrase “and this is from God.” Consequently, whatever “this” is, it must be able to be grounded by the fact that God has given to His own not only belief but appointed suffering. In other words, at bare minimum, “this” seems to include belief and suffering.

⁴³ Between Young (190) and Greenlee (Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 80) together, three options for the use of ὅτι emerge: 1) The ὅτι clause is subordinate to “and not being frightened in anything by the ones opposing,” being the grounds or reason the Philippians shouldn’t be frightened is because God has appointed them to believe and to suffer, or 2) The ὅτι clause is subordinate to “and this is from God,” being proof that “this” is actually from God. As Silva states, “Paul’s use of the *hoti* rather than *gar* makes clear that verse 29 is intended as the reason [or grounds] or explanation for the surprising statement in verse 28, particularly the emphatic clause at the end, ‘and this from God’” (Silva, Moises. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: Philippians*, 83). However, option 1 and option 2 are so intricately woven together in Paul’s thinking that they cannot be separated and that option 2 does not logical exclude option 1 (seeing that option 2, “this is from God,” refers in part of option 1, [in other words, that their courage is from God]). To put it simply, Paul’s statement here, his explanation, proof, or grounds if you will, modifies in some sense verse 28 as a whole for it provides theology that helps explain much of verse 28, not just the last clause “and this is from God” which it directly modifies. In conclusion, it’s not simply one clause that Paul has in mind, but several which have all touched the same theological truth which he now wants to address and will do so through the avenue of the broad range pronoun in verse 28, “this.”

Phm 22; Gal 3:18; Rom 8:32), granting (Acts 3:14; 27:24), or bestowing (Lk 7:21; Phil 2:9). Because of its root, this giving is often done graciously (i.e., Rom 8:32).⁴⁴ Seeing the object of this verb, to infinitives means to believe and to suffer, the use that makes the most sense is the idea of giving, granted, or bestowing. BDAG places its use here in Philippians 29 under the use “to give freely as a favor, give graciously” and defines the use specifically in verse 29 as meaning to have been granted the privilege.⁴⁵ In conclusion, God has *graciously* given to the Philippians both their faith and their present sufferings.

This (τὸ). As Wallace notes, “The article with ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ turns this expression into a substantive functioning as the subject of ἐχαρίσθη.”⁴⁶ What Paul is about to say, not only to believe but also to suffer, then forms the appositive of “this.”⁴⁷ In other words, Paul could have said, “Not only to believe but also to suffer on behalf of Christ has been graciously given to you.”

On behalf of Christ (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ). From a quick reading of the passage, it is hard to determine what exactly “on behalf of Christ” (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ) is modifying. Most likely, this issue might not even cross one’s mind. Yet one might simply assume that “on behalf of Christ” refers either to how these things were “graciously given” (given on behalf of Christ) or the Philippians’ belief (to believe on behalf of Christ). It seems better, however, to understand “on behalf of Christ” (ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ) as referring to “to suffer.”⁴⁸ Paul seemed to begin his thought, “because to you was graciously given this one behalf of Christ . . . to suffer.” Such a statement would have made his point and sufficed his purpose. However, he decided to insert for whatever reason (possibly to put the suffering in perspective or compare the gracious granting of suffering to the gracious granting of believing to help the Philippians understand his

⁴⁴ “Rom. 8:32 speaks of the all-embracing bounty of God in giving his Son (cf. Jn. 3:16), while 1 Cor. 2:12 refers to the Spirit of God leading us to an understanding of all that he has freely bestowed on us. Already under the old covenant the free gift of God was linked with his covenant promise and not with the law (Gal. 3:18). At Phm. 22 the apostle tells his friend Philemon that he hopes to come in person and visit him; if this occurs it will be because the prayers of his Christian friends have been graciously answered by God. Here, too, at Phil. 1:29 the passive voice is again used to signify that the gracious activity was God’s” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians: A commentary on the Greek text* [159]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

⁴⁵ Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed.) (1078). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

⁴⁶ Wallace, D. B. (1999; 2002). *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (607). Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software.

⁴⁷ Both infinitives are preceded by nominative singular articles which match this pronoun subject τὸ, further indicating apposition. As Wallace likewise concludes, “Thus, the articular infinitives are in apposition to a substantival prepositional phrase functioning as subject” (Wallace, D. B. [1999; 2002]. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [607]. Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software).

⁴⁸ Four possible options of what τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ modifies exist: 1) It was *graciously given on Christ’s behalf* (“Christ’s behalf” describing the giving), 2) it was gracious given *on Christ’s behalf to believe* (“Christ’s behalf” describing the belief), 3) it was graciously given *on Christ’s behalf . . . to suffer* (“Christ’s behalf” describing the suffering), or 4) it was graciously given *on Christ’s behalf to believe and suffer* (“Christ’s behalf” describing belief and suffering). It should be stated initially that believing in behalf of Christ is a concept that does not warrant much theological support. Believe on behalf of Christ or for His sake is a rather bizarre concept that should not be considered as what Paul was intending in this text (discarding options 2 and 4). Option 1 would suggest that the gracious act of given was through or on behalf of Jesus Christ. In other words, Christ is the means by which believers receive this belief and suffering for His sake. But this option suggests less of an “in behalf of” meaning and more of a means, as in “through” or “by means of.” As Hawthorne notes, τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ can have the meaning “for the sake of Christ” (benefaction use – Young, 101). The question seems to be whether ὑπὲρ can be used as means, for if so, Christ is certainly the means through which believers are graciously given things. Young lists *reason* as a use of ὑπὲρ, and Christ is certainly the reason (page, 102) for believers graciously receiving things. On the other hand, this might be a stretched use of ὑπὲρ. Benefaction is a much more common use and nothing from the context argues against it (see footnote 56). Therefore, option 3 seems best when understanding the nature of ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ (the Philippians were to suffer for Christ’s sake, on His behalf).

point more clearer) the phrase, “not only to believe in Him,” as a parenthetical thought right in the midst of his point. Therefore, both the phrases ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ and ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ modify suffering,⁴⁹ the former as the original modifier and the latter to restate the modifier before proceeding once again after the parenthetical side note.⁵⁰

*Not only (οὐ μόνον).*⁵¹ With these two words Paul introduces this parenthetical thought. It has not simply been graciously given to the Philippians to suffer, but Paul decided it beneficial to remind them that their faith in like vein was graciously granted to them—a truth that would surely put things in their proper perspective for the Philippians.

*To believe in Him (τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεῦειν).*⁵² Paul’s point here is that belief in Him,⁵³ that is Christ, referring the saving faith (Acts 16:31), is something that was graciously given to the Philippians.

But also (ἀλλὰ καὶ). “But” (ἀλλὰ) is functioning with “not only” (οὐ μόνον) to form a contrast between “to believe in Him” and “to suffer on His behalf.”

On His behalf to suffer (τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν). With this phrase, Paul restates⁵⁴ what he had previously said and continues the thought he had originally started—“because to you was graciously given this on behalf of Christ—to suffer.” In regards to the use of ὑπέρ, O’Brien states that when it is used with verbs of suffering

Theological Note: Belief is given?

Paul’s words present a theological issue: what does it mean for faith to be graciously given [by God]? In general, two theological views exist regarding this doctrine of faith as a divine gift. The first view, held by those of a more Arminian/Wesleyan tendency, is that God’s gift is the *ability* to will one’s belief. Those of the more Calvinistic tendency hold that faith itself is what is given. The former will say that faith is not a pure gift of God but something that depends in part on man’s free will and whether or not he will choose to believe. To this, one might rightly ask, how is faith still a gift if it is yet something one has to produce? Secondly, faith is paralleled with suffering and both are under the governing of the same verb. In other words, both belief and faith are given in the same sense. Consequently, if suffering in this text is not granted as a possibility but something definite, why should one think that the gift of faith refers to making one *able* to believe, making belief only possible? More so, if the suffering given

⁴⁹ The idea of suffering on behalf of Christ will be addressed later when “on behalf of Him to suffer” (ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν) is addressed.

⁵⁰ “The οὐ μόνον ... ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ appears as a parenthesis of more special definition, and the πάσχειν, which has been prepared for by τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ, is finally introduced and especially emphasized: ‘to you it has been graciously given [by God], on behalf of Christ—not only to believe on him, but also for him—to suffer’” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [159]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans). Further, the fact that both phrases are so similar in makeup seems to indicate Paul was simply restating what was his original thought.

⁵¹ “When a limitation of an Infinitive or of its subject is to be negative rather than the Infinitive itself, the negative οὐ is sometimes used instead of μή. See Rom. 7:6; 1 Cor. 1:17; Heb. 7:11; 13:9. This principle applies especially in the case of the adverb μόνον” (Burton, E. D. W. [1898]. *Syntax of the moods and tenses in New Testament Greek* [3rd ed.] [183]. Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark).

⁵² The order of words in this construction in the Greek is a little bizarre, seeing that τὸ is separated from its infinitive πιστεῦειν by the words εἰς αὐτὸν. Wallace states that “The prepositional phrases each time are wedged between the article and inf. for clarity” (Wallace, D. B. [1999; 2002]. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics - Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* [607]. Zondervan Publishing House and Galaxie Software).

⁵³ The present tense in this infinitive, “to believe” “connotes an ongoing relationship of trust in him. Since it parallels the present tense of πάσχειν there is probably the added thought that God has graciously given to the Philippians the privilege of believing (or of continuing to believe) in his Son even while suffering and undergoing persecution. That was a blessing indeed” (O’Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [160–161]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

⁵⁴ Note, Paul does use a pronoun to refer to Christ instead of “Christ.” But the meaning and purpose are unchanged.

it gives the reason for the suffering (Acts 5:41; 9:16; 21:13; cf. 2 Thes. 1:5; 2 Cor. 12:10).⁵⁵ Therefore, one could translate the words as, “for the sake of Christ.”⁵⁶ In other words, the suffering is not done arbitrarily, but for Christ as one shares in His sufferings (2 Cor 1:5; Rom 8:17). Those who believe *in* Him suffer *for* Him.

The most common use of πάσχω (the lexical form of πάσχειν) means to suffer. In reference to this particular use, BDAG notes that this word denotes suffering at the hands of another, implying the existence of one causing the suffering. The ones most likely causing the Philippians suffering are most likely those opponents indicated in sidebar, “Background info: ‘The ones opposing?’” In other words, the Philippians were being persecuted (present tense)⁵⁷ by individuals outside of the church; this is the most probably explanation as to the source of the suffering.

(30) Having the same struggle (τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες)

“*Having*” (ἔχοντες). Having is being used explain in further detail “suffer” (πάσχειν).⁵⁸ Paul is relating their suffering to his own, and in so doing, illustrating this truth just presented.

“*The same*”⁵⁹ *struggle*” (τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα). These words indentify the content of what Paul states the Philippians have.

One should understand that Paul is not saying he is experiencing the very same suffering from the very same people for the very same reason as the Philippians. For as noted above, the Philippians suffering was most likely caused by “the ones opposing” (1:28), who it seems were individuals in the Philippian community outside of the church at Philippi, which, no matter where Paul was located, was rather far away from Paul. Yet Paul finds no difficulty in still claiming their struggle to be the same. Most likely Paul is making reference to the fact that the Philippians and he are both partners (1:5) and sharers in

is limited to Christians (i.e., Philippians), than this granting of faith should be seen as limited to the elect, not universal to all. Finally, simply taking the words at their face value, with a simply, natural, and literal interpretation will leave one with the understanding that faith itself, not the ability to believe, is divinely given. As Bruce Demarest says, “Faith is not the human condition for receiving new life; it is the divinely given instrument by which God saves lost souls” (*The Cross and Salvation*, 263). And as Paul will later say in Phil 2:13, God can work in His own to will and do things (yet they are willing). A barrage of cross references helps validate this doctrine: Ps 85:4, 6, 8; cf. Ps 80:3, 7; Jer 13:23; 31:18; Lam 5:21; Hos 5:4; Mt 7:17-18; John 15:5; Acts 5:31; **11:18**; Rom 2:4; **2 Tim 2:25**; John 6:28-29; 37; 44-45; **Eph 2:8**; 1 Cor 1:17; 2:1-5; 12:3; 1 Tim 1:14; Eph 6:23; 2 Thes 1:11; **2:13**; **Heb 12:2**; **2 Pet 1:1**.

Theological Note: Suffering is graciously given?

Paul makes very clear, not only in verse 29, but in other areas scripture (i.e., 2 Tim 3:12; 1 Thes 3:3), that suffering is not an accident as if it occurred outside of God’s sovereign will. On the contrary, it is something, as Paul says here, graciously appointed to believers. But how is it gracious to appoint one to suffering? First, in Romans 5:3-5 Paul shows that suffering produces character. Therefore, putting His own through suffering, while keeping His sovereign hand on them, is one of the most gracious things God can do. God is concerned with what the

⁵⁵ O'Brien, P. T. (1991). *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* (159–160). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

⁵⁶ The benefactor use is further argued for by this evidence (see footnote 48).

⁵⁷ “The present tense of πάσχειν suggests that their suffering for Christ was continuous” and “had an active ring to them” (O'Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [160]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

⁵⁸ Greenlee, J. Harold. *Exegetical Summary of Philippians*, 79; Hawthorne, Gerald F. *Word Biblical Commentary: Philippians*, 66.

⁵⁹ τὸν αὐτὸν is being used as an identical adjective, which is normally in the attributive position (Mounce, 103). Consequently, it is to be translated, “the same.”

Gospel,⁶⁰ the nature of which intrinsically always breeding struggle for multiple reasons.⁶¹ Therefore, relatively speaking, their struggles are the same. They have fellowship in this struggle together.

This word, “struggle” contains athletic imagery⁶² and has the idea of an intense toil or labor often for the faith of the gospel.⁶³ Further, when Paul uses the word ἄγων, “The thought of a continual struggle against opposition is not far distant. . . . Suffering is often involved. . . .”⁶⁴ In using this word, therefore, Paul is referring to their common labor and difficulties faced in their work for Gospel.

Which you saw in me (οἷον εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοί).

The antecedent of “which” (οἷον), it goes without saying, is the struggle just mentioned above.⁶⁵ Therefore, the clause, subordinate to the clause above, functions to further describe this antecedent, “struggle.” This struggle, or labor for the sake of the Gospel, Paul says, is one which the Philippians witnessed in Paul⁶⁶ when he was present.⁶⁷ He modeled this struggle to the Philippians.

And now you hear about me (καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί)

With “and” (καὶ), having the use of addition, Paul continues to add to his description of this struggle. Not only was the struggle was something the Philippians had seen in Him (past tense), but something they *now* (presently) hear about Him.⁶⁸ One might ask how the Philippians are to hear these things. Most likely Paul is

believer ought to be concerned but often is not—his spiritual growth. Consequently, God gives his children what they want whether they know they want it or not. Secondly, suffering for Christ ought to be viewed as an honor. This is most likely what Paul has in mind in these words in verse 29. In Romans 8:17 Paul likewise states believers have the privilege of suffering with Christ. If Paul has already shown reasons to rejoice from the consequences of his suffering (1:12-18), why then should he not call the suffering that the Philippians are facing a gracious thing? Melick summarizes this issue well: ““Paul stopped far short of mixing good and evil, which would make evil (suffering) a good thing. He did, however, realize the benefits and privileges of being involved in a battle for the truth and that battle scars were inevitable. . . . Christians are called to a unique Christian suffering because of their identification with righteousness in an evil world, that it is a divinely given privilege to be involved in this battle, and that the struggle becomes redemptive in attesting the grace gift in their own experience. The Philippians were, therefore, to take heart if they were called to suffer. Their steadfastness would demonstrate the reality of their

⁶⁰ “Their active participation in the spread of the gospel from the time of their conversion until the present, meant that they were involved in the same conflict as Paul” (O'Brien, P. T. [1991]. *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* [161–162]. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans).

⁶¹ “Paul explained that his suffering related to calling the Gentiles to Christ so that they could be saved. The universal nature of the gospel presented a problem to Gentiles, who had their own religions, and to Jews, who wanted the Gentiles to accept Judaism. The result was that Paul suffered at the hands of both groups, and the church at Philippi would do so as well” (Melick, R. R. [2001]. *Vol. 32: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* [electronic ed.]. Logos Library System; The New American Commentary [92]. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publisher).

⁶² Melick, R. R. (2001). *Vol. 32: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (92). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

⁶³ O'Brien, P. T. (1991). *The Epistle to the Philippians : A commentary on the Greek text* (161–162). Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans.

⁶⁴ For example when Paul speaks of his struggle for the Colossians (2:1), this parallels his suffering for them (1:24) (Ibid., 161–162).

⁶⁵ Both are masculine and singular. This antecedent is self-evident from common sense.

⁶⁶ Young lists 10 uses for ἐν (“in”). The only one that is reasonable is space. It was in the person of Paul that these sufferings were seen and were now heard.

⁶⁷ The aorist tense being used to describe past action in this case indicates that the “seeing” mentioned in this verse must have taken place in the past, most likely at a past visit.

⁶⁸ The use of ἐν (“in”) in this clause is reference, hence “about me.”

referring this very letter that he is writing which is to be delivered by Epaphroditus. Already in 1:7, 12-30 he has told of his struggle in the Gospel. Such things describe the struggle that both the Philippians and Paul participate in.

relationship to God” (Melick, R. R. [2001]. *Vol. 32: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* [electronic ed.]. Logos Library System; The New American Commentary [92]. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publisher).

(27) Only live worthily of the Gospel (*Subjective and objective genitive*) → **of Christ,**
 Μόνον ἀξίως (reference) πολιτεύεσθε, (Main imperative)
 τοῦ εὐαγγελίου τοῦ Χριστοῦ

that
 ἵνα
 (Purpose)
 whether having come and having seen you
 εἴτε ἐλθὼν καὶ ἰδὼν ὑμᾶς
 (Alternative)
 or being absent
 εἴτε ἀπὼν (Conditional, parenthetical clause)

I may hear (*Content*) → **the things concerning you,**
 ἀκούω τὰ περὶ ὑμῶν,

(Antecedents: Refers generally)
that **you stand** (Space/reference and manner) → **in one spirit,**
 ὅτι στήκετε ἐν ἐνὶ πνεύματι,
 (Means)
with one soul ← (*Association*) **contending** (*Interest*) → **for the faith**
 (reference) → **of the Gospel,**
 μιᾷ ψυχῇ συναθλοῦντες τῇ πίστει τοῦ εὐαγγελίου
(28) and not being frightened (*reference/means*) → **in anything** (*Agent*) → **by**
 the ones opposing,
 καὶ μὴ πτυρόμενοι ἐν μηδενὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀντικειμένων,
 (Reference) →
which is to them a sign of destruction,
 ἣτις ἐστὶν αὐτοῖς ἔνδειξις ἀπωλείας,
 (Contrast)
but your salvation,
 ὑμῶν δὲ σωτηρίας,

Because ὅτι is providing the basis for the previous clause containing τοῦτο, and because τοῦτο's refers broadly to much of the previous text, ὅτι is therefore the basis for the same broad text by means of being the basis for τοῦτο.

(Addition) → **and this is** (*origin*) → **from God,**
 καὶ τοῦτο ἀπὸ θεοῦ.

(Grounds) → **(29) because to you was graciously given this on behalf of Christ**
 ὅτι ὑμῖν ἐχαρίσθη τὸ ὑπὲρ Χριστοῦ

(Infinitives complimenting verb)
not only to believe in Him
 οὐ μόνον τὸ εἰς αὐτὸν πιστεύειν
but also on His behalf to suffer,
 ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ πάσχειν,

(Explanation) → **(30) having the same struggle**
 τὸν αὐτὸν ἀγῶνα ἔχοντες,

(Antecedent)
which you saw in me

(Addition)

οἷον εἶδετε ἐν ἐμοὶ
and now you hear about me.
καὶ νῦν ἀκούετε ἐν ἐμοί.