

The Divine Economy in Philippians

Sometimes a single verse can function as the key to open an entire book of the Bible. The structure of the whole book of Romans is contained, for example, in the second part of 1:17, which says, "The righteous shall have life and live by faith." It is a key because it is Paul's summary of the gospel, which is the subject of his Epistle (vv. 1-2). In the book of Philippians, however, no single verse seemingly presents itself. Nevertheless, Philippians 2:13, which says, "For it is God who operates in you both the willing and the working for His good pleasure," bears consideration as just such a key.¹ It is, in fact, an abstract of God's economy in the New Testament and, therefore, a hermeneutic to the book of Philippians itself.

My approach may seem to be quite at odds with what has been called the "historical-critical" method of interpreting the Bible, which has dominated the scholarly study of the Bible for the last two centuries. Yet a growing number of scholars, disenchanted with the conundrums into which biblical studies have fallen, are seeking fresh approaches to biblical interpretation (Morgan). One such approach argues for a "theological reading" of the Bible, which, while not rejecting historical or literary analyses of the text, recognizes that by themselves each of them falls short in fulfilling the interpretative aim of those who read the Bible as Scripture (Fowl). Interpreting Philippians by God's economy, I will argue, is to engage in a theological reading of this book of the Bible.

Needless to say, a theological reading certainly does not attempt to be a neutral or objective reading, as one based exclusively on historical methods aims to be. This raises the question: what kind of theology are we bringing to the reading? The wide spectrum of theology, even amongst those who read the Bible as Scripture, requires that we, as readers, are honest about the theological presuppositions we bring to the interpretative task. This helps us to honestly interact with the text so that these suppositions can both inform and be formed by our reading. Openness about our theology, moreover, should also pave the way for others, whose theological perspective may differ from ours, to respond to us critically and, hopefully, productively.

The theology that I bring to this task is a theology which conceives of God's plan or economy not primarily in terms of Christ's redemptive work for our judicial justification but in terms of God's dispensing for His organic building. I will apply this conception to the interpretation of Philippians 2:13, and then to the entire book of Philippians. Finally, I will consider what we can harvest from the reading in terms of transformative outcomes both for the individual and the Christian community. These we should expect to be quite different to those reaped from a reading whose theology conceives of God's economy primarily in judicial terms.

Reading Historically and Theologically

The notion of a theological reading of the Bible refers to "the aims and practices Christians engage in when they read Scripture as part of their struggle to live faithfully before the triune God"; its aim is to "shape and be shaped

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by the faith, worship, and practices of Christian communities" (Fowl 398). The aim of the historical-critical reading of the Bible, in contrast, has little to do with the present impact of the text. Rather, its purpose is a historical reconstruction of the original history of the writer, the first recipients, and their respective intentions and reactions.

For the critical historian of the text, the gap of history from the formation of the text until now is an impediment to be overcome. The text we hold in our hand today and how we understand it, conditioned as it is by all the intervening years since its origination, hides its original, historical meaning. The task of the historical Bible scholar, therefore, is to overcome this gap in order to enter the world of the original and dig out its "true" historical form.

As such an endeavor has become increasingly technical, the theological concerns that the pre-modern exegetes brought to the text seem of little significance.

The supremacy of the historical-critical interests in biblical studies has meant that scholars have been preoccupied with analyzing how the Bible books were formed rather than with the eventual form itself. Whatever conclusion we might reach as to how these texts achieved their final form, they were in that form at the latest by the end of the second century A.D. and have been read and interpreted as such ever since. Yet “by the time one gets to exploring issues regarding how subsequent generations read these texts, historical critics have largely fallen by the wayside” (Fowl 401).

The predominance of historical-critical methodology in the scholarly interpretation of the Bible has meant that theological issues in the text have been increasingly sidelined. As the disciplines of New Testament studies and systematic theology have become ever more specialized, the gap between them has become ever harder to bridge.

The God of the Bible reveals Himself to be the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, and it is in His attribute of one God in three persons that He accomplishes His economy, the goal of which is to obtain a corporate expression of Himself in humanity.

Attempts at establishing a biblical theology have met with a mixed reception and generally impacted little upon the field of systematic theology. All too often, the categories of systematic theology appear too abstract to the task of biblical analysis, and the intricacies of biblical studies seem all too technical to be relevant to the systematic theologian. This separation of the disciplines and shortage of cross-disciplinary approaches has affected not just universities but also seminaries, due to their dependence on universities for their faculty. This has meant that “the burden of integrating NT study, theology, and ethics is unfortunately shifted onto the student” (Fowl 397).

However, reading theologically, with the aim of shaping the faith, worship, and practice of the Christian community, does not mean that we abandon the historical context of the text. Nor is it to be read ahistorically, as if this were the only alternative to a historical reading. Instead, it is to acknowledge that the final form of the text merits interpretation in its own right. And rather than treating the gap between the time of the Bible and our own as an impediment to the task, a theological reading can draw on it as a resource, albeit judiciously. The modern, historical-critical approach tends to dismiss the literal and typological readings of the pre-modern era for the lack of critical method. This approach recovers their relevance, because these readings have historically shaped the theology of the Christian community today, the theology that we bring to the reading. Respecting and building upon past interpretations of the final form of the Scripture is as equally valid as seeking to place the text in

its original historical setting. So, for example, the church fathers’ interpretation of Scripture, and the theology which shaped and was shaped by it, is as important to our reading of the text as the Judaic and Greek world of the New Testament writers, and its influence upon their writings, for in the text we inherit both.

Recognizing the role of the past interpretations, like that of the theology of the present community that we bring to reading, can lead to a major shift in the locus of biblical interpretation from the individual to the ecclesial community, which both inherit from the past and forms the present theology. Fowl writes that “the concerns of the theological reading of Scripture presuppose a setting within Christian communities” (399). Anthony C. Thisleton makes a similar observation when contrasting modern and postmodern exegesis:

Whereas the emphasis in modern critical methods lies on the individual reader (especially the individual interpreter or scholar, but also in most cases the individual biblical editor or writer), in postmodern approaches we can detect a strong affinity with the emphasis in the patristic period and in medieval tradition on the role of a community of readers. (30)

A theological reading places theological and ethical (how that theology is lived out) considerations above historical ones. The hermeneutical concern of the historical-critical method is the communicative aspects of the text, on getting the meaning right; the hermeneutical concern of theological reading is the transformative aspect of the text—its capacity to produce “a people who embody its message” (Green 413).

A Theological Focus: God’s Economy

The God of the Bible moves through the ages to accomplish His eternal economy. In this move, He reveals Himself to be the Triune God, the Father, Son, and Spirit, and it is in His attribute of one God in three persons that He accomplishes His economy, the goal of which is to obtain a corporate expression of Himself in humanity. This is unfolded by Paul in Ephesians, where the Triune God, in the person of the Father, chooses and predestines a group of people for this expression (1:4-6); in the person of the Son, He redeems and obtains this people for His inheritance (vv. 7-12); and in the person of the Holy Spirit as a living seal and pledge, He sanctifies them for this expression (vv. 13-14). To redeem us, the Triune God, in Christ, became human through incarnation and died a vicarious death for us (John 1:1, 14, 29).

To sanctify us in His divine life, Christ through death and resurrection became the Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). In each step of His economical move, He is the Triune God, the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, and in the Trinitarian principle, whatever one of the three passed through, all three participated in. Now in Christ's resurrection, He is consummated as the Spirit. This principle is crucial in reading Philippians 2:13.

Christ's work on the cross is central to the accomplishment of the divine economy for two reasons: first, humanity, which had become fallen, needed redemption; second, humanity, as a created vessel, was still devoid of the divine life and nature. Christ's death and resurrection released His eternal, divine life from the shell of His humanity and imparted it into humankind, making Christ the Firstborn among many God-begotten children. So we can summarize God's economy this way: the Triune God—the Father, Son, and Spirit—embodied in Christ and consummated as the Spirit, is dispensed into His chosen people to make them His household, His corporate expression, which is the church, the Body of Christ, whose ultimate consummation is the New Jerusalem.

To cooperate with God in His economy, a person first needs to believe in Christ's redemptive work to be forgiven of his sins and reconciled to God. Yet there is a further responsibility, which is that he remain open to the continual dispensing of the consummated Triune God, who first dispenses Himself into his human spirit for its regeneration (John 4:24 cf. 3:6; Eph. 2:22; 2 Tim. 4:22), then into his soul for its transformation (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18; Eph. 3:17), and eventually into his body for its redemption in glorification (Rom. 8:23, 30). Only thus can fallen, corrupted, and divided humanity fulfill God's original purpose of obtaining a corporate human vessel in His image. This image is the fullness of Christ, the full expression in the church of all that God is in Christ. And this, I propose, is the scope of God's economy that is required to interpret Philippians 2:13.

God's Economy in Philippians 2:13

The immediate context of Philippians 2:13 is Paul's charge in the preceding verse to "work out your own salvation." The meaning of salvation here in the context of the book (1:19) is not a salvation received by faith in Christ's redemptive work for our justification before God, but a salvation personal to us ("your own"), which needs to be carried out by us to its conclusion ("work out," 2:12). It is a present, momentary salvation ("now," v. 12) worked out in the particular circumstances in

which we as believers are called to live ("the things concerning me," 1:12). It requires our conformity to the pattern of Christ's self-emptying and obedience ("obeyed," 2:12, even as He became "obedient," v. 8), and needs to be manifested in the details of our living ("do all things without murmurings and reasonings," v. 14), before the world ("children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverted generation," "luminaries in the world," v. 15). It will ultimately determine whether there will be a cause for boasting or, by implication, shame, before the Lord at His coming ("that I may have a boast in the day of Christ," v. 16).

In 2:13, Paul presents the means, the process, and the ultimate goal of this salvation: "For it is God who operates in you [the means] both the willing and the working [the process] for His good pleasure [the goal]." We will now briefly look at each of these in turn.

The meaning of salvation in Philippians is not a salvation received by faith in Christ's redemptive work for our justification before God, but a salvation personal to us. It is a present, momentary salvation worked out in the particular circumstances in which we as believers are called to live.

The means is God who operates in us, but in what sense can He be said to be in us? Before conjecturing upon the qualifying phrase *through His Spirit*, which would more readily fit a systematic Trinitarian interpretation of this phrase, we should consider whether the New Testament allows such a statement to stand on its own. Does the New Testament elsewhere allow the construct of the Triune God being in us?

While few would dispute the scriptural ground for God the Spirit as the third of the Divine Trinity dwelling in the believer (John 14:17; Rom. 8:9, 11; 1 Cor. 3:16; 6:19), many would find it harder to admit the indwelling of God the Son. Yet this too is allowed by the New Testament. Galatians 1:16 declares that God revealed His Son in Paul at his conversion, and 2 Corinthians 13:5 makes an affirmative response to the question, "Do you not realize about yourselves that Jesus Christ is in you?" as the test of our being approved in the faith.

God the Father also indwells the believers. God's operation within us in Philippians 2:13 is further testified by Ephesians 4:6, which speaks of "one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all." In this verse, *all* in context no doubt refers to the believers, whom Paul charges to keep the oneness of the Spirit (vv. 1-3). The threefold description of God the Father's relationship with the members of the Body of Christ here also indicates the Divine Trinity: *over all* refers to the Father as the Originator, *through all* to the Son's accomplishing of the Father's originated purpose, and *in all* to the Spirit's

application of the Father's accomplished purpose. Thus, the Father in the Son realized as the Spirit (John 14:10; 1 Cor. 15:45) dwells in the believers. So Ephesians and Philippians both declare that all three of the Divine Trinity dwell and operate in us. In Philippians 2:13, moreover, the emphasis is on the Father's indwelling as God, indicated by the term "His good pleasure," which Ephesians 1:5 ties to the Father. For sure, the writer means to impress his readers that the means or supply for them to carry out their personal salvation is no mere attribute or gift of God, but the Triune God Himself at work, active, activating, and arousing within them by His substantial indwelling.

The process of salvation in Philippians 2:13 is seen in the two words *willing* and *working*, which describe the twofold effect of God's operation: to cause us first to will and then to act. The willing denotes a change within and the acting its outward manifestation. The principle of

The principle of God's salvation is to bring about an inward change in a believer so as to produce an outward transformation in his living. This refers to the organic aspect of God's salvation in the transformation of the soul.

God's salvation, then, is to bring about an inward change in a believer so as to produce an outward transformation in his living. This refers to the organic aspect of God's salvation in the transformation of the soul, implying both the regeneration of the spirit as its base and the eventual redemption of the body as its consummation.

The result of the process of God's operation within a believer for a person's salvation will be the complete possession of his spirit, soul, and body, and this accomplishes the Triune God's goal in 2:13, His good pleasure. In Ephesians 1:5, the good pleasure is called *sonship*, a technical, legal term denoting the status of a son as heir to the father's estate. The corporate sonship of the children of God is for the praise of the glory of God's grace (v. 6), because it is the conclusion of the maturing process that God's grace accomplishes. It begins with a believer being born of God organically by His life (John 1:12-13). This initial birth qualifies a believer to be a child but not yet a son. A growth process is required through both an inward development of the divine life and nature (2 Pet. 1:3-11) and an outward environment of suffering that one must submit to in order to become an heir (Rom. 8:17). In Romans 8:19, the end of this process is the revelation of the sons of God, who will have fully entered into the freedom of the glory of their divine status (v. 21). God's goal is to bring all His children into the corporate sonship (Heb. 2:10), which will be His full expression in humanity. Elsewhere in his Epistles, Paul calls this corporate expression the church, the Body of Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4, 16; Col. 1:18; 2:19).

Therefore, Philippians 2:13 is nothing short of an abstract of the economy of God in the New Testament, showing us the consummated Triune God operating within His beloved children as the means for them to work out their salvation. This salvation is an inward process in the three parts of their being toward the goal of the corporate expression of God through His many matured sons. This hermeneutic we will now bring to the rest of this Epistle.

God's Economy in Philippians

First, let us consider in Philippians the Triune God and His operation within the believers for their salvation. The Father's operation in 2:13 we have already addressed; the operation of the Spirit is found in 1:19 and that of the Son in 2:5-11. It is to the Spirit of Jesus Christ that Paul, in the midst of his troubling circumstances, looks for his salvation

in 1:19. More especially, he seeks the Spirit's ἐπιχορηγία, a compound word rendered variously by different translations as "help" (NIV, NRSV), "provision" (NASB), and "supply"

(NKJV). Conybeare notes that the term literally means "*the supplying of all needs (of the chorus) by the Choregus*." So the words here mean *the supplying of all needs (of the Christian) by the Spirit*" (727). Lightfoot notes that the prefix ἐπί strengthens a word that already denotes a liberal provision and suggests the gloss *bountiful supply* (Philippians 91, Galatians 136).

In what sense does the Spirit have a bountiful supply—is it objective or subjective, for either, according to grammar, is allowable (Lightfoot, *Philippians* 91). The answer may lie in the meaning of the phrase qualifying the Spirit, of *Jesus Christ*. By designating the Spirit in this particular way, unique, in fact, within the New Testament, the apostle is pointing to the nature of the Spirit's anticipated supply. In order to interpret this designation, we need to place it in the context of the designations of the Spirit as progressively seen in the canon of the Bible.

In the Old Testament principally two terms were used for the Spirit: *the Spirit of God* and *the Spirit of Jehovah*. (Note that the term *Spirit of holiness* (Isa. 63:10-11) should not be confused with the New Testament term *Holy Spirit*.) While these designations continue to be employed in the New Testament (e.g., Phil. 3:3; 2 Cor. 3:17), others are added: in the Gospels, *the Holy Spirit*, in the Acts and Epistles, *the Spirit of Jesus* (Acts 16:7), *the Spirit of Christ* (Rom. 8:9), and here, *the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. They all indicate God's move in relation to humankind, first, in creation and His relationship with humankind in the Old Testament, then, in His incarnation

for Christ's earthly ministry, and further, in resurrection for Christ's ministry in the new covenant. Moreover, they describe not just the progressive characteristic of the Spirit's activity in God's chosen people, but specifically they indicate a process that the Triune God passed through, namely, Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection, and His consummation as the Spirit. For this reason, John 7:39 says that "the Spirit was not yet" prior to Jesus' glorification (resurrection); *not yet*, that is, not in existence, but in completion as the consummation of the Triune God. Christ, as the embodiment of God with all His attributes and in His humanity with its perfect human virtues, through death and resurrection was transfigured to become the life-giving Spirit (1 Cor. 15:45; 2 Cor. 3:17). Only then did the Spirit in the aspect of consummation become, or come into being. When the New Testament writers employ the term *Spirit* (e.g., Rom. 8:16; Gal. 3:2; Rev. 22:17), it is this consummated Spirit that they are referring to.

The *Spirit of Jesus Christ* in Philippians 1:19 is the Spirit of the incarnated, crucified, and resurrected God-man. He therefore includes Christ's divinity with all its attributes, Jesus' humanity with its virtues, and also all the accomplishments of Christ's death and resurrection. As the all-inclusive Spirit of the consummated Triune God, the Spirit Himself is the bountiful supply in this Epistle to the suffering apostle for his salvation, enabling Him to magnify Christ, whether in life or in death. Thus, Paul can endure the undermining work of so-called Christian preachers working in rivalry with him and seeking his hurt; he can face the intimidation of an imperial prison and the threat of imminent execution; he is content even when the churches neglect his needs; and still, in these circumstances, he can write to the Philippians an Epistle full of his joy and encouragement.

The passage in which we see the Son's operation, Philippians 2:5-11, is considered by most commentators to be an early Christian hymn. Paul uses this to set forth Christ as the pattern for the Christian life of humility for the corporate life of the community (v. 2). The source of this life is the mind of the believers, a mind which Christ manifested in His self-emptying and utter obedience to God. So Paul charges the believers to "let this mind be in you," or literally, to "think this in you" (v. 5). Some commentators understand the construct *in you* to mean "in your common life," or "in your community" (Beare 75). The immediate context of the problems of ambition and pride being manifested among the believers in Philippi (vv. 3-4) would make such a reading plausible, yet in the thought of the book as a whole, a closer relationship with Christ than that of an extrinsic model is

called for. In 1:8 Paul writes that he longs after the Philippians "in the inwards parts of Christ Jesus," which indicates that the apostle and Christ were one in their inward thought and affections. In 3:9 Paul still desires to be found in Christ, not in position through God's justification in Christ, which is his already by conversion (1 Cor. 1:30), but in disposition, through an organic union with Him through faith. Furthermore, in 4:13 he declares, "I am able to do all things in Him who empowers me." *In Him*, that is, in intimate union with Christ, Paul is able by Christ's resurrection power to do *all things* (3:10), which in the context means to live out the outstanding virtues listed in 4:8—*what things* are true, dignified, righteous, pure, lovely, well spoken of, virtuous, and praiseworthy. Paul's life was one of manifesting these virtues because he and Christ together had one life and living (1:21). So in this confidence, he can exhort the Philippians to imitate him (4:9) as well.

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In 2:5, therefore, when Paul charges the saints in Christ Jesus (1:1) to "let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus," he is speaking in the context of the organic union between Christ and the saints. Christ's mind of self-emptying, humility, and obedience is both an extrinsic model lived out in His earthly life and an intrinsic principle operating within them. For the apostle, ambition and vainglory are problems of a mind void of Christ. The only remedy for such a thinking is for Christ to indwell the believers' mind. Inasmuch, he is saying, "Philippians, the problems you have are a matter of your minds. There is a mind, the mind of Christ, in which self-ish ambition and vainglory simply do not exist. This is the mind of Christ. His self-emptying and obedience was just the living out of His mind. Now He dwells in you so that His mind can be in you as your mind." Paul's charge here is, in fact, just an echo of his prayer in Ephesians 3:17 "that Christ may make His home in your hearts through faith." A mind indwelt by the mind of Christ spontaneously lives a life of selfless obedience. Conversely, a mind untouched by the inner operation of the Son is forever ensnared by the fallen thinking in which rivalry and self-exaltation are endemic.

This aspect of God's operation in the Christian, where the mind of Christ makes home in his mind, is an organic process of transformation. Comparing Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18, we find that the mind needs to be renewed by transformation, a transformation into the image of Christ, indicating the conformity of the soul to Christ in its expression. This brings us to the second part

of the hermeneutic that Philippians 2:13 supplies: the three stages of God's salvation which correspond to the three parts of a human being.

Salvation has both a judicial and an organic aspect. The judicial aspect, which concerns redemption, grants justification and reconciliation to God and forms the basis for organic salvation. It is the organic aspect, rather than the judicial, which occupies Paul's thought in the book of Philippians. The full scope of a Christian's organic salvation is covered in this Epistle. First, the Spirit regenerates his human spirit, causing it to become one mingled spirit with the Lord, so that He as grace may be with his spirit (4:23; 1:27; cf. 1 Cor. 6:17; John 1:17). His soul is then gradually transformed when he allows Christ as the Spirit to spread out into his mind so that he may be one soul, joined in soul, and like-souled with his fellow believers in the common life they share as the church

A life of mutual dependence among the members of Christ's Body, seen here in the relationship between the Philippians and Paul, is a strong sign of the goal of God's economy—His corporate expression in the many sons of God.

(Phil. 1:27; 2:2, 20). For the salvation of his body, he awaits the coming of his Savior from the heavens, when his body will be transfigured and conformed to Christ's body of glory (3:20-21). This will be the completion of his salvation, the entire sanctification of his tripartite being that the apostle prays for in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

It remains to consider in what way the good pleasure of God in His corporate expression is covered in this book. Although the Body of Christ is not covered in doctrine here, the reality of the Body in the relationship of its members is strikingly present. The principle of Christ's Body set forth in Romans 12:5—"So we who are many are one Body in Christ, and individually members one of another"—is illustrated in the relationship between the apostle and the Philippian believers.

Three verses disclose that this relationship was a mutual dependence. In 1:19 Paul counts the Philippians' prayer as an equal cause, with the Spirit, of his salvation: "For I know that for me this will turn out to salvation *through your petition* and the bountiful supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." Such is his consciousness of dependence upon the fellow members of the Body of Christ in Philippi that he considers their prayer, with the Spirit, as a joint channel of his salvation. If 1:19 indicates a directional flow of God's grace in the Body of Christ from the Philippians to the apostle, then in 4:19 the phrase *my God*, and in 1:7 the phrase *with me of grace* show that grace flowed in the other direction too. It is Paul's God who will supply the believers in their need; it is his

particular appropriation of the Lord's grace that affords them the way to enter the deeper experience of Christ that is already his. This life of mutual dependence among the members of Christ's Body, seen here in the relationship between the Philippians and Paul, expresses that which exists among the three persons of the Triune God (John 5:19, 30; 14:7-9; Matt. 12:28). It is a strong sign of the goal of God's economy—His corporate expression in the many sons of God.

The Transformative Impact of God's Economy

It remains to consider the transformative outcomes of this theological reading of Philippians for our faith, worship, and practice. Fowl in his reading of 1 Corinthians 11:2-34 (403-408) derives three transformative outcomes for the Christian community: repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Without a doubt, as he points out, these are much needed in today's Christendom, where excessive individualism and pride are in evidence. However, what is interesting about these outcomes is that they reflect theological presup-

positions which Fowl no doubt consciously brings to the task of reading, those whose gospel focus is Christ's redemption for the repentant sinner's forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation to God. Living out these outcomes in and amongst our communities, he points out, means recognizing our failures to live faithfully before the Triune God and to understand His Word; it requires our own repentance and willingness to forgive others; it advances the cause of reconciliation among God's people of different persuasions; and it affords us a greater understanding and sympathy with those outside the Christian faith.

Philippians, while based upon the judicial aspect of God's forgiveness, justification, and reconciliation, stresses the further aspect of salvation in Christ's life, the organic aspect of God's salvation in Romans 5:10: "Much more we will be saved in His life, having been reconciled." In this theological context there are three organic outcomes: prayer, transformation, and blending.

It is no mere afterthought that brings Paul to the matter of prayer in Philippians 4:6-7. Troubles turn Christians to prayer, and in this prayer we contact the Triune God, as the Spirit indwelling our spirit. Seemingly, the outcome of this prayer is the attribute of peace given to us by God; in actual fact, it is the Triune God adding Himself to our being, as Witness Lee brings out from a comparison of the terms *peace of God* and *God of peace* (vv. 7, 9):

The result of practicing fellowship with God in prayer is

that we enjoy the peace of God. The peace of God is actually God as peace (v. 9) infused into us through our fellowship with Him by prayer, as the counterpoise to troubles and the antidote to anxiety (John 16:33). (Recovery Version, Phil. 4:7, note 1)

Should Christians practice bringing everything to God by prayer, they will contact God and He will dispense Himself into their tripartite being as their bountiful supply.

The outward environment and the inward dispensing of God lead to the transformation of the soul. By allowing the Lord to renew his mind through His indwelling, a Christian's inward parts gradually become one with the inward parts of Christ, making him a mature son of God. His thinking is regulated by the heavens, as he awaits his coming Savior and the transfiguration of his body (3:20-21).

Transformation, however, is not for individual spiritual attainment. Philippians is a book in the viewpoint of the Body of Christ, seen in the harmony of the members in their fellowship with one another. This harmony requires the members to be blended together (συγκεράννυμι, 1 Cor. 12:24). Thinking differently, especially among fellow workers in the gospel (Phil. 4:2), hinders the realization of the corporate expression of Christ's Body, and it is an indication of the need for dispensing, which produces blending. In the dispensing of the Triune God, there is the receiving of the mind of Christ. Hence, there is an organic capacity to assist one another in thinking the same thing in the Lord, being attuned in the same mind and opinion (v. 3; 1 Cor. 1:10). This assistance is the blending, the help rendered by all kinds of different members, on many different occasions, and in many different places.

Reading and interpreting the Bible is both a historical task and a theological one. If, as lovers of the Triune God, we read the Bible as Scripture, then we are reading it theologically. While historians may strive toward the ideal of constructive objectivity in their method, it behooves us as theological readers to recognize the suppositions we bring to the text. Knowing and, if possible, articulating these will help us converse more honestly with the text in our reading and also allow others whose viewpoints differ to ours to join in the conversation. Reading theologically requires a conscious location within the Christian community so that our reading can derive meaningful outcomes for our faith, worship, and practice.

In this context Philippians 2:13, which speaks of the indwelling Triune God's operation, references a salvation

that progresses throughout our tripartite being toward God's good pleasure, His corporate expression. In this process, there is prayer, transformation, and blending for the practice of Christians for whom the organic building of the Body of Christ is paramount.

by Jim Batten

Notes

¹The significance of this verse for the whole book of Philippians is identified by Witness Lee (*Living* 120).

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