

*IMITATIO CHRISTIANORUM*  
THE FUNCTION OF BELIEVERS AS EXAMPLES IN  
PHILIPPIANS

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**Summary**

*In Philippians, Paul has pastoral, paraenetic aims: the Philippians are to adopt a Christian phronesis – a way of thought and life determined by their relationship to the crucified, humiliated, and risen Christ consisting specifically, in Philippians, of (1) an others-focused mindset; and (2) an attendant boldness and willingness to accept suffering and the burdens of others on behalf of the progress of the gospel. These paraenetic emphases are then embodied and illustrated by multiple examples: Christ is the ultimate exemplar and the source of the content of the exhortation. Paul himself is also one who embodies these qualities, though imperfectly. Timothy especially exemplifies others-focus, and Epaphroditus the willingness to suffer in the service of Christ. Euodia and Syntyche, finally, serve Christ boldly but lack the others-focus and unity that Paul exhorts. We conclude, then, that Paul understands the provision of such Christ-like examples and the imitation of those examples by those in Christ within Christian communities to be an important means by which the community progresses in holiness, that is, to be increasingly conformed to Christ.*

**1. Introduction**

For Paul, the ecclesial community is instrumental in the progress of individual believers<sup>1</sup> toward maturity, as James Samra and others have

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<sup>1</sup> The terms ‘believer(s)’ and ‘Christian(s)’ are here used synonymously, without intended specific emphasis on, for instance, ‘belief’.

shown well.<sup>2</sup> In this paper we argue that Paul is demonstrating in Philippians that for him *inter-believer imitation* (*imitatio Christianorum*) is an important and strikingly democratised aspect of the ecclesial community's corporate role in influencing its individual members toward Christ-likeness, and that this community role has been under-appreciated and under-examined.

### ***1.1 'Imitation' in Pauline Scholarship***

Especially since the 1930s, works on imitation in Paul have tended to construe his imitation language primarily as an attempt to assert, re-establish, or consolidate his authority.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Wilhelm Michaelis's paradigm-setting 1933 article on μιμέομαι persuaded many scholars to view *mimesis* in Paul as primarily the demand for obedience to authoritative teaching rather than for imitation of an example.<sup>4</sup> For instance, Eduard Lohse, in concert with many twentieth-century Pauline scholars, explicitly denies that either Paul or Jesus should be seen as an 'ethical model' in Paul's letters, subsuming imitation language under the rubric of discipleship.<sup>5</sup> While more recent scholarship has cast doubt on Michaelis's findings,<sup>6</sup> especially his downplaying of the role of realistic example in Paul, most discussions of Paul's calls to imitation are still primarily concerned with questions of *authority* rather than with emulation of an *example*.

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<sup>2</sup> J. G. Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community*, LNTS 320 (New York: T & T Clark, 2006). See also, e.g. James W. Thompson, *Moral Formation According to Paul: The Context and Coherence of Pauline Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 43-63; Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: Community, Cross, New Creation, A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperOne, 1996), 374-75.

<sup>3</sup> For consolidation, see, e.g. E. A. Castelli, *Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power*, *Literary Currents in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991); J. K. Hwang, 'Mimesis, Apostolic Parousia, and Church Discipline: An Apologetic-mimetic Interpretation of 1 Corinthians 4 and 5' (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2006); John Howard Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*, NTL (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975; reprint, Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> W. Michaelis, 'μιμέομαι κτλ.', *TDNT* 4:659-74. This work was first published in German in 1933.

<sup>5</sup> E. Lohse, *Theological Ethics of the New Testament*, trans. M. E. Boring (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 51-52. On the imitation of Christ, see esp. R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi: Philippians ii. 5-11 in Recent Interpretation and in the Setting of Early Christian Worship*, SNTSMS 4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967).

<sup>6</sup> The most relevant and sustained critique of Michaelis is B. Fiore, *The Function of Personal Example in the Socratic and Pastoral Epistles*, AnBib 105 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1986).

The literary, social-scientific, and feminist methods emerging in the 1970s and 80s continued to focus on issues of authority rather than example, but with an increasingly negative assessment of the legitimacy of Paul's imitation language, especially with regard to Paul's calls to imitate himself. Most notably, Elizabeth Castelli, drawing on Foucaultian discourse theory, saw in Paul's calls to imitate him and those like him a rhetorical attempt to coerce his audience and consolidate his power, enforcing homogeneity within his communities.<sup>7</sup>

There have since been substantive critiques of Castelli's thesis that point out the need to affirm a sense of actual example in Paul's calls to imitation, the two most recent and thorough being those of Andrew Clarke and Victor Copan.<sup>8</sup> Clarke and Copan, along with newer studies by Hwang and Samra which focus on Paul as exemplar,<sup>9</sup> view Paul's calls to imitation as entailing actual emulation of an example with a paraenetic purpose, but without sustained discussion of any other exemplar in his paraenesis.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Castelli, *Imitating Paul*. See also J. A. Marchal, *Hierarchy, Unity, and Imitation: A Feminist Rhetorical Analysis of Power Dynamics in Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, AcBib 24 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> A. D. Clarke, *A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership*, LNTS 362 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2008); V. A. Copan, *Saint Paul as Spiritual Director: An Analysis of the Imitation of Paul with Implications and Applications to the Practice of Spiritual Direction*, PBM (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008).

<sup>9</sup> Hwang, 'Mimesis'; Samra, *Being Conformed*. See also C. M. Proudfoot, 'Imitation or Realistic Participation? A Study of "Suffering with Christ"', *Interpretation* 17 (1963), 140-60.

<sup>10</sup> I use the variously-defined term 'paraenesis' to refer to Paul's direct exhortation in Philippians (particularly 1:27-2:5), given both convention and their meeting of the qualifications outlined in Troels Engberg-Pedersen, 'The Concept of Paraenesis', in *Early Christian Paraenesis in Context*, ed. Troels Engberg-Pedersen and James M. Starr, BZNW 125 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004), 47-72, esp. 62-42. Similarly, by 'paraenetic' I am referring to exhortation that conforms conceptually to these strictures.

<sup>13</sup> As J. A. A. Brant notes in 'The Place of Mimesis in Paul's Thought', *SR* 22 (1993), 297, 'the Philippians do not mimic Paul; they take the ideal that Paul's actions represent [the mindset of Christ] and apply it to their own behavior'.

## 2. Imitation in Philippians

What, then, is meant by ‘imitation’ in Paul? ‘Imitation’ can carry some quite undesirable connotations for the modern reader. The notions of a one-to-one ‘mimicry’ or even ‘parody’ that might accompany this word should be rejected, though, when considering Paul’s use of example in his paraenesis.<sup>13</sup>

Paul frequently appeals to examples in his letters. In the most explicit cases, Paul encourages his readers to ‘imitate’ or ‘become imitators’ (μιμέομαι<sup>14</sup> or γίνομαι + μιμητής<sup>15</sup>), or to follow a τύπος (‘example’),<sup>16</sup> most commonly with the apostle himself as the example. The *concept* of imitation in Paul, though, is more pervasive than the explicit *vocabulary* of imitation. In some cases, Paul uses neither the μιμέομαι word group nor τύπος but still appears to be calling for the following (or the avoiding) of an example. For instance, we can discern appeals to example in Paul’s exhortation to ‘honour’ certain types of people,<sup>17</sup> or in his exhortations to ‘watch carefully’ (σκοπέω)<sup>18</sup> certain others. In other cases, Paul’s literary presentation of groups or individuals, including himself, implies that such people serve as examples.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The verb μιμέομαι is used in 2 Thess. 3:7 and 3:9, both with a group including Paul as its object.

<sup>15</sup> Paul uses γίνομαι + μιμητής (or, once, the compound συμμιμητής) with himself as the object of imitation four times: three of himself only (1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1, and Phil. 3:17, with συμμιμητής); and one of himself as part of a group (1 Thess. 1:6). The construction appears only two other times in Paul: in 1 Thess. 2:14 the object of this construction is a group excluding Paul (τῶν ἐκκλησιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ τῶν οὐσῶν ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ), and in Eph. 5:1 its object is τοῦ θεοῦ.

<sup>16</sup> The noun τύπος occurs in Paul with the sense of ‘example’ seven times, twice referring to the ‘τύπος’ of the judgement on the wilderness generation (1 Cor. 10:6, 11), twice to Paul as part of a group (Phil. 3:17 and 2 Thess. 3:9), once to a congregation (1 Thess. 1:7), and twice to an individual (1 Tim. 4:12 and Titus 2:7).

<sup>17</sup> See Phil. 2:29 (τοὺς τοιοῦτους ἐντίμους ἔχετε) and David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 81.

<sup>18</sup> For a negative instance, see Rom. 16:17; for a positive use, Phil. 3:17. See also *BDAG*, *LSJ*. Further, on the similar use of βλέπω, see George D. Kilpatrick, ‘BLEPETE, Philippians 3:2’, in *In Memoriam Paul Kahle*, ed. Matthew Black and Georg Fohrer, BZAW 103 (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1968), 146-48.

<sup>19</sup> For the identification of this phenomenon in Paul, see esp. Brian J. Dodd, *Paul’s Paradigmatic ‘I’: Personal Example as Literary Strategy*, JSNTSup 177 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 171-95.

### 2.1 *Objects of Imitation in Philippians*

Imitation has long been recognized as particularly important to Paul's strategy in Philippians. Thanks largely to the so-called 'Christ Hymn' in Philippians 2,<sup>20</sup> *imitatio Christi* has been a common emphasis in analyses of Paul's argument in Philippians, especially recently by Peter-Ben Smit,<sup>21</sup> Michael Gorman,<sup>22</sup> and Sergio Rosell Nebreda,<sup>23</sup> among others.<sup>24</sup> In addition to treatments emphasising Paul's appeal to *Christ* as an example in his paraenesis, there is a steady stream of studies of how Paul uses *himself* as an example in his letters, running from the minimalism of Wilhelm Michaelis<sup>25</sup> to more recent postmodern literary and postcolonial approaches.<sup>26</sup> Since nearly all

<sup>20</sup> A number of recent studies have rightly questioned the propriety of referring to Phil. 2:6-11 as a 'hymn' in any technical or historical sense of the term. See, esp. Benjamin Edsall and Jennifer R. Strawbridge, 'The Songs We Used to Sing? Hymn "Traditions" and Reception in Pauline Letters', *JSNT* 37 (2015), 290; Samuel Vollenweider, 'Hymnus, Enkomion oder Psalm? Schattengefächte in der neutestamentlichen Wissenschaft', *NTS* 56 (2010), 208-31; Michael Peppard, "'Poetry", "Hymns" and "Traditional Material" in New Testament Epistles or How to Do Things with Indentations', *JSNT* 30 (2008), 319-42; Gordon D. Fee, 'Philippians 2:5-11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?', *BBR* 2 (1992), 29-46. We will treat the passage essentially as recommended especially by Fee, that is, as prose. Its Pauline origin is also assumed here but does not affect our argument.

<sup>21</sup> Peter-Ben Smit, *Paradigms of Being in Christ: A Study of the Epistle to the Philippians*, LNTS 476 (London: T & T Clark, 2013), 79-106.

<sup>22</sup> See esp. Michael J. Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 9-39; *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 155-76.

<sup>23</sup> Sergio Rosell Nebreda, *Christ Identity: A Social-Scientific Reading of Philippians 2.5-11*, FRLANT 240 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> See also, e.g. R. A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007); H. D. Betz, *Nachfolge und Nachahmung Jesu Christi im Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1967); Martin, *Carmen Christi*. This essay will only address the voluminous literature on the imitation of Christ as it directly relates to Paul's use of believers as examples in Philippians.

<sup>25</sup> Michaelis, 'μίμωμοι κτλ.' See also, similarly, e.g. Dodd, *Paul's Paradigmatic 'I'*; Brant, 'Mimesis'; W. P. De Boer, *The Imitation of Paul: An Exegetical Study* (Kampen: Kok, 1962); Schütz, *Paul and the Anatomy of Apostolic Authority*.

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g. Christopher D. Stanley, *The Colonized Apostle: Paul Through Postcolonial Eyes* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2011); Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-movement* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2007); Kathy Ehrensperger "'Be Imitators of Me as I am of Christ." A Hidden Discourse of Power and Domination in Paul?', *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 38 (2003), 241-61; Marchal, *Hierarchy, Unity, and Imitation*; J. A. Marchal, 'With Friends Like These ...: A Feminist Rhetorical Reconsideration of Scholarship and the Letter to the Philippians', *JSNT* 29 (2006), 77-106; Castelli, *Imitating Paul*.

research on *imitatio* in Philippians has been focused on either Christ (*imitatio Christi*) or Paul (*imitatio Pauli*) as the object of imitation, there has been comparatively little attention to Paul's use of examples other than himself and Christ and the role of these examples within the communities to which Paul wrote.<sup>27</sup> This theme of *imitatio Christianorum*, the imitation of Christians, is woven throughout the letter and suggests that Paul understood the provision and imitation of examples to play a vital role in the church's contribution to the community members' progress toward Christ-likeness.

## 2.2 Rhetoric and Pedagogy

*Imitatio* is present in Philippians in two intertwined but distinguishable ways. First, Paul uses examples in a rhetorical sense as illustrations of the Christian *phronēsis* to which he calls the Philippians. Secondly, Paul makes both explicit and implicit calls to imitate those who live in the ways Paul has described and illustrated.

First, the rhetorical or epistolary use of examples as illustrations or models is well known in the ancient world. *Exemplum* is common in the rhetoric of Paul's contemporaries,<sup>28</sup> particularly the Stoics, with whom Paul is often compared,<sup>29</sup> and in the deliberative rhetorical tradition in which many would include Paul's epistles.<sup>30</sup> The rhetoricians were not always in agreement, though, on the exact ways in which *exempla* either functioned or should be used. As Smit notes,

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<sup>27</sup> The most recent study to address believers as examples in Philippians is Smit, *Paradigms*, 107-17. Smit understands Timothy and Epaphroditus (2:19-30) to function rhetorically as *exempla* as part of a *digressio* on the Christ *encomium* in 2:5-11. See also P. T. O'Brien, 'The Gospel and Godly Models in Philippians', in *Worship, Theology and Ministry in the Early Church: Essays in Honor of Ralph P. Martin*, ed. M. J. Wilkins and T. Paige, JSNTSup 87 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 274-84; Clarke, *Pauline Theology*, 177-80; Samra, *Being Conformed*, 131, 164; De Boer, *Imitation*.

<sup>28</sup> E.g. Seneca, *Epistulae morales* 6.5-6; 7:6-9; 11.9-10; 52.8; 95.72; Dio Chrysostom, *Orationes* 55.4-5. Cf. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 5.11.1-6.

<sup>29</sup> See esp. Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), esp. 81-130. See also, e.g. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005); Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Circle of Reference in Pauline Morality', in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe*, ed. Abraham J. Malherbe et al. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1990), 171-89.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g. L. Gregory Bloomquist, *The Function of Suffering in Philippians*, JSNTSup 78 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993), 84; D. F. Watson, 'A Rhetorical Analysis of Philippians and Its Implications for the Unity Question', *NovT* 3 (1988), 57-88; Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 25.

even ancient theorists from Aristotle to Aristides were not in agreement on exactly how *exemplum* functioned in an argument, nor were they in agreement even on the genre of argument into which the use of *exemplum* best fit.<sup>31</sup> However, for our purposes today, one important characteristic of *exemplum* is clear: the figures of *exemplum* / *παράδειγμα* and the closely related *chreia* are *probatio* – proofs, and the comparisons that they entail do not require a rigorous one-to-one correspondence, but rather point out and illustrate an important point of contact between the exemplified and the exemplifier.<sup>32</sup> It is in this sense that Paul uses *exempla* in Philippians, that is, as illustrative or paradigmatic portraits of those who portray the characteristics toward which he is exhorting them.

Paul's use of example in Philippians does not stop at the level of rhetoric or form, however. Intersecting with Paul's literary/rhetorical presentation of examples in Philippians is his persistent exhortation to the Philippians to actually notice, honor, and imitate certain of those in their midst who embody, in everyday life, the *phronesis* encouraged in Paul's letter. So, Paul does not use examples only as a rhetorical strategy but also as a pedagogical one; he expects those examples to be sought and imitated in the actual lives of those to whom he is writing. Recent lines of study have examined this aspect of Paul's use of *Christ* and *himself* as examples, but without a focus on others, whom we argue Paul includes as real examples to be imitated in the Philippians' community. For example, Susan Eastman has compared Paul's calls to imitation in his communities to the use of *μιμήσις* in the *παιδεία* tradition.<sup>33</sup> Sergio Russell Nebreda's recent monograph<sup>34</sup> helpfully

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<sup>31</sup> Smit, *Paradigms*, 33-36.

<sup>32</sup> See Bloomquist, *Suffering*, 83-5; Fiore, *Function*; Smit, *Paradigms*, 16-30.

<sup>33</sup> Susan Eastman, 'Imitating Christ Imitating Us: Paul's Educational Project in Philippians', in *The Word Leaps the Gap: Essays on Scripture in Honor of Richard Hays*, ed. J. Ross Wagner, C. Kavin Rowe, and A. Katherine Grieb (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 427-51. See also, similarly, Susan Eastman, 'Philippians 2:6-11: Incarnation as Mimetic Participation', *JSPL* 1 (2010), 1-22. E. A. Judge, 'The Teacher as Moral Exemplar in Paul and in the Inscriptions of Ephesus', in *In the Fullness of Time: Biblical Studies in Honor of Archbishop Donald Robinson*, ed. D. Peterson and J. Pryor (Sydney: Lancer, 1992), 185-201.

<sup>34</sup> Sergio Rosell Nebreda, *Christ Identity*, 35-115. Social Identity Theory (SIT), an approach originating in organisational social psychology, has become an increasingly common tool among biblical scholars seeking to analyse the mechanisms of identity formation in the earliest Christian communities. For a recent discussion of the use of SIT in biblical studies, see Coleman A Baker, 'Social Identity Theory and Biblical Interpretation', *BTB* 42 (2012), 129-38. Our treatment will at times use parallel

employs social identity theory to analyse how the story of Christ in Philippians 2 provides the foundational story for the community at Philippi.<sup>35</sup>

We will, then, move through Philippians, noting both rhetorical and pedagogical uses of example. Before we examine the *exempla*, we need to establish the aims of Paul's exhortation which these examples illustrate and embody.

### 3. Paul's Core Exhortation: Christ-like Suffering and Humility (1:27–2:4)

In 1:27-30 and 2:1-4, Paul sets out his two main exhortations to the Philippians. First, in 1:27-30 he calls the Philippians to live their lives as citizens 'worthy of the gospel',<sup>36</sup> which means to 'stand firm' and to consider suffering for Christ a gift from God. Then, in 2:1-4, he calls them to unity through an others-focused *phronēsis*,<sup>37</sup> which involves being like-minded (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε), considering others more significant than themselves, and not seeking their own individual interests (τὰ ἑαυτῶν). So, Paul's most direct paraenesis to the Philippians has two main foci: willingness to suffer joyfully for the gospel (1:27-30, cf. 2:8) and an others-focused mindset (2:1-4, cf. 2:8).<sup>38</sup> Both of these foci run counter to majority norms in Paul's world,<sup>39</sup> and part of Paul's burden in Philippians is to counter the

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terminology with such studies, but this essay is concerned not with the formation of group identity itself but on the mechanism by which Paul expects the prototypical characteristics of that identity (in Philippians, others-focus and joyful suffering) to be actualised in the lives of individuals within the community, i.e., through inter-believer imitation.

<sup>35</sup> See also, esp., Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 9-39; Stephen E. Fowl, *The Story of Christ in the Ethics of Paul: An Analysis of The Function of the Hymnic Material in the Pauline Corpus*, JSNTSup 36 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 49-102.

<sup>36</sup> All translations in this article are mine.

<sup>37</sup> See esp. Fowl, *Story of Christ*, 203-207. I use the terms 'others-focus', avoiding the loaded 'kenotic', in this essay to incorporate the idea of 'life for others' and the 'other-regard' described by D. G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2005), 206-13; see also Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 199.

<sup>38</sup> See Wayne A. Meeks, 'The Man from Heaven in Paul's Letter to the Philippians', in *In Search of the Early Christians: Selected Essays*, ed. Allen R. Hilton and H. Gregory Snyder (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 112.

<sup>39</sup> Especially ταπεινοφροσύνη. See, e.g. Epictetus, *Dissertationes* 3.24.56; Xenophon, *Anabasis* 6.3.18; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 8.3.48. Cf. Judge, 'Teacher as Moral Exemplar', 187.



dishonour that would result from their association with him in his suffering in prison (1:12-26)<sup>40</sup> and to encourage their allegiance to an alternative ‘court of reputation’ determined by Christ-likeness.<sup>41</sup> So, I argue, Paul is careful to encourage the imitation of Christlike examples in an environment in which precious few can be found.

Our focus in this paper is on those other than Christ and Paul himself who are held up as examples in Philippians. However, since Paul’s exemplary presentations of himself and Christ are crucial to our understanding of Paul’s paraenetic aims, we should still begin by sketching the roles of Christ and Paul as examples in the letter. We will then be prepared to appreciate the way in which the examples provided by Timothy, Epaphroditus, and others contribute to our understanding of Paul’s intentions for the manner of the Philippians’ progress in Christlikeness.

#### 4. Christ the Controlling Example

Following the direct exhortation in 2:1-4, Paul turns to his primary example in 2:5, instructing the Philippians: τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (‘adopt this mindset among you which was also in Christ Jesus’).<sup>42</sup> The following verses then present the controlling example by which the surrounding examples are to be judged. Gorman rightly refers to this passage (2:6-11) as Paul’s ‘master story’.<sup>43</sup>

We see both of the two above foci of Paul’s exhortation exemplified in Christ in 2:6-7 and 2:8. First, in 2:6-7, Christ exemplifies radical

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<sup>40</sup> See David Briones, *Paul’s Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach*, LNTS 494 (London: T & T Clark, 2013), 66-69. Briones outlines the social ramifications of the Philippians’ association with someone in prison, citing Epictetus *Diatribai* 2.6.25; 1.4.23-24; Cicero, *Pro Caecina* 100; Seneca, *Ad Lucilium*. 85.41. Shame and imprisonment, he concludes, are ‘inextricably linked’. See also Craig S. Wansink, *Chained in Christ: The Experience and Rhetoric of Paul’s Imprisonments*, JSNTS 130 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1996), 57-59.

<sup>41</sup> See esp. deSilva, *Honor*, 23-93.

<sup>42</sup> The translation of Phil. 2:5 has been highly controversial, but there is now a basic consensus against, most prominently, Ernst Käsemann, ‘Kritische Analyse von Phil. 2,5-11’, *ZTK* 47 (1950), 313-60 that, regardless of how one construes the syntax of 2:5, the *function* of the passage that follows is paradigmatic. See, e.g. adopting Käsemann’s syntax but not his denial of the paradigmatic quality of what follows, Gorman, *Cruciformity*, 41-43; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 97; G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, Pillar New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 121.

<sup>43</sup> Gorman, *Inhabiting the Cruciform God*, 9-39.

others-focus in that he who was in the very ‘form of God’, ‘made himself nothing, taking the form of a servant’ (δοῦλος). Then, in 2:8, Christ is the epitome of redemptive suffering in his ‘becoming obedient to the point of death’, even ‘on a cross’. Finally, in 2:9-11, the hymn then relates the result of such selflessness and death-defying service of others, Christ’s exaltation, which leads in verses 10-11 to the universal recognition of his absolute Lordship.

Two of the characteristics epitomized by Christ: (1) willingness to lose status, suffer, and die for the gospel; and (2) selfless humility that leads to unity in light of the gospel, will be the standards by which Paul holds up the human examples that follow for the Philippians to imitate. We recall that, in Paul’s use of Christ as a rhetorical *exemplum*, he in no way implies that his example is imitable in every respect, but that there are important points of contact between the story of Christ and Paul’s paraenetic aims. It will become clear that though one or perhaps both of these two characteristics can be seen in Timothy, Epaphroditus, and Euodia and Syntyche, none of these believers completely possesses either of these qualities. When seen together, though, as Paul describes them with allusion to this hymn and its accompanying exhortations, these exemplars form a fuller picture of the character of Christ and reveal the necessity of the community in providing a model of Christ-likeness whereby all the individuals, by the power of ‘God who works in [them]’ (2:13) are increasingly prepared for the ‘day of Christ’ (1:6, 11; 2:16).

## 5. Paul as Example

According to Richard Hays, the imitation of Paul as leading the Philippians into Christlikeness ‘is implicit in the whole structure of the argument of Philippians’.<sup>44</sup> At three crucial points in the letter, Paul presents himself as an imperfect Christlike example for the Philippians to imitate.

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<sup>44</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*, 31; *pace* Dodd, *Paul’s Paradigmatic ‘I’*, 194. See also esp. Ernst Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper*, KEK (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 5-7, 98, whose influential approach to the letter emphasized Paul’s (and Christ’s) role ‘als Vorbild des Martyriums’.

First, in Chapter 1, following his prayer for the Philippians' discernment (1:9-11),<sup>45</sup> Paul narrates in 1:12-26 his situation in prison with a specific focus on how it 'serves to advance the gospel' (1:12).<sup>46</sup> Immediately, Paul notes explicitly that his imprisonment for the gospel has set a positive example 'in such a way that (ὥστε) most of the brothers', have 'become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment' and 'are much more risky (περισσοτέρως τολμᾶν) to speak the word without fear' (1:14). As a result of Paul's example, these preachers have been more willing to suffer, as Paul does, ἐν Χριστῷ. These preachers have exercised the discernment for which Paul prays in 1:9-11, interpreting Paul's suffering for others as consistent with a life ἐν Χριστῷ and an example worthy of emulation.

Selfless humility and bold joy in the face of death is then further exemplified in Paul's surety that his imprisonment will turn out for his 'salvation' and that he will, with 'full courage', honour Christ in his body, 'whether by life or by death' (1:20). His own life or death is not his ultimate concern, but the progress of the gospel in the lives of his converts, which he sees as being intimately tied to his being able to 'remain and continue with' them.<sup>47</sup> It is clear that he sees his life with the Philippians as 'necessary' for their 'progress and joy in the faith', which will lead to their 'glory[ing] in Christ Jesus' when he arrives with them (1:24-26). It is reasonable, therefore, to understand a major part of Paul's role in the Philippians' 'progress' in the faith to be his exemplifying the 'citizen-life worthy of the gospel' (1:27).

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<sup>45</sup> Paul prays that the love of the community would increase 'with knowledge and all discernment' (αἰσθησις), so that [they] might approve the things that excel' (εἰς τὸ δοκιμάζειν ὑμᾶς τὰ διαφέροντα). This discernment of τὰ διαφέροντα ('the things that matter' or 'the things that are distinguished [by their excellence]') will lead the Philippians to bear 'the fruit of righteousness' and thus be ready for the 'day of Christ'. The verb δοκιμάζειν includes the notions of both discernment of value and acting on that discernment, and the object of this word, διαφέρω as a participle, has a similar range of meaning to the English 'distinguish' and often connotes a differing by superiority to other options. See *BDAG*, ad loc. The activity for which the Philippians need 'knowledge' and 'discernment' is to assess value wisely and choose accordingly. This prayer introduces the concept of imitation as a means of progressing in holiness in that a crucial aspect of *imitatio Christianorum*, for Paul, is this wise discernment of 'the things that differ'.

<sup>46</sup> See Paul Holloway, *Consolation in Philippians: Philosophical Sources and Rhetorical Strategy*, SNTSMS 112 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 102; Bloomquist, *Suffering*, 149-50.

<sup>47</sup> See Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 36; Markus N. A. Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 90.

Further, Paul wants the Philippians to view him as a model of boldness and unity ‘for the faith of the gospel’ from his desire to see them boldly ‘striving’ in ‘the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have’ (1:27-30).<sup>48</sup> Paul’s selfless concern for the progress of the Philippians even over his own eternal comfort with Christ and his joy in the face of imminent death are to serve as a model for the Philippians, regardless of his physical presence with them. Indeed, the coincidence of literary *exemplum* and the narration of Paul’s life as a real example to be imitated points to Paul’s use of the epistle *in loco hominis*.<sup>49</sup> They can boldly contend for the gospel in the ‘same conflict’ as Paul and the faithful preachers of 1:15 by imitating the boldness and selflessness that he exemplifies in this opening passage and that is most fully demonstrated by Christ.

The next instance of Paul as example occurs in the next autobiographical section of the letter, 3:4-14. In this strikingly personal passage and its accompanying exhortations in 3:1-3 and 3:15-4:1, Paul explicitly calls for the Philippians to imitate him and those who think and live according to the pattern he describes. Paul presents himself in these verses as a counterexample to the ‘dogs’ and ‘evil-doers’ by recounting the story of how he has come to rely completely on ‘the righteousness from God that depends on faith’, giving up any status, whether political or religious,<sup>50</sup> he may have enjoyed as a circumcised, Benjamite, zealous, law-keeping Pharisee (3:8-9).

Scholars have pointed out that the trajectory of Paul’s life in this passage runs parallel to the Christ Hymn in 2:5-7.<sup>51</sup> In both cases, the exemplars have plenty of reason to boast in their initial status (Christ in his glory as the very form of God and Paul as the epitome of the zealous Jew), yet they both humbly ‘regard’ (ἡγήομαι) their exalted station in such a way that they give it up on account of the gospel. Christ left his place of glory with the Father and was given ‘a name that is above every name’ (2:9). Paul regarded his ‘credentials’ as ‘rubbish’ in order to ‘know Christ’ and attain the ‘resurrection from the dead’

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<sup>48</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 354.

<sup>49</sup> See Bloomquist, *Suffering*, 128-29, 173-78.

<sup>50</sup> Joseph H. Hellerman, ‘Vindicating God’s Servants in Philippi and in Philippians: The Influence of Paul’s Ministry in Philippi Upon the Composition of Philippians 2:6-11’, *BBR* 20 (2010), 85-102.

<sup>51</sup> See, e.g. N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1293-97; Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics*, 91, 119-26.

(3:8, 11). Paul's life as presented here is exemplary not in the one-to-one sense, but in the illustrative sense. Of course, there are important differences between Paul's and Christ's stories, not least in Paul's initial status vis-à-vis Christ's, but the point of contact between the examples is their *trajectory*. In short, as Christ's suffering resulted in his exaltation, so also whatever Paul suffers by his loss of status should be regarded merely as prelude to his eventual full conformity, ultimately even in body, to Christ (3:20-21)

Having narrated his exemplary *phronēsis*, Paul gives a crucial caveat. Before his explicit commands in verses 15 and 17 to imitate his attitude, he is careful in 3:12 to highlight his own imperfection or incompleteness.<sup>52</sup> He himself has not yet been made complete; therefore his example differs in an important way from Christ's. His is a derivative example of incomplete but single-minded 'struggle toward the goal, the eschatological consummation of what is "already" his in Christ'.<sup>53</sup> Only after emphasizing his imperfection, then, does Paul self-inclusively call on 'those of us who are mature [to] have this mindset' (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν, 3:15).<sup>54</sup> Therefore, Paul sees himself not as a primary, controlling example in his own right, but as a fellow struggler with the Philippians toward the goal of Christlikeness.

Paul then reiterates his call to imitation in 3:17: 'Brothers, become joint imitators of me, and carefully observe those who walk just like the example you have in us.' The compound form συμμιμηταί ('joint imitators') is a hapax legomenon and combines the imitatio motif with another major theme in the letter, that of community. Although this συμμιμήσις could refer rather to the Philippians' joining Paul in imitating Christ, Paul's lengthy example in 3:4-14 and his explicit call for the mature among them to 'have this mindset' (τοῦτο φρονῶμεν) in 3:15 make it more likely that Paul is immediately thinking of the Philippians' being unified in their imitation of him and his associates. Importantly, Paul's example is derivative, not primary. The phrase τοῦτο φρονῶμεν (let us have this mindset) which Paul uses in 3:15 calls to mind the τοῦτο φρονεῖτε of 2:5, which implies that 'the

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<sup>52</sup> John Reumann, *Philippians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33b (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 536.

<sup>53</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 348.

<sup>54</sup> The pronoun τοῦτο may immediately refer to verse 13b-14, but, by extension, the example of thought that Paul wishes the Philippians to follow is outlined in 3:3-14 as a whole.

“imitation” of himself is implicitly or indirectly imitation of Christ’.<sup>55</sup> Therefore, as we will see with the other instances of *imitatio Christianorum* in Philippians, no one person, whether Paul or one of his associates, is to be imitated independently of his or her correspondence to Christ.

Philippians 3:20-21 constitutes the positive side of a contrast with the ‘many’ who ‘walk ... as enemies’ of the cross of Christ in 3:18-19. The contrast between the two groups is twofold: their current *phronēsis* (earthly vs. heavenly)<sup>56</sup> and their eventual end (destruction vs. a body of glory). This contrast might be construed thus as a rather loose chiasm:<sup>57</sup>

A ὧν τὸ τέλος ἀπώλεια,  
[eventual end]

B ὧν ὁ θεὸς ἡ κοιλία καὶ ἡ δόξα ἐν τῇ αἰσχύνῃ αὐτῶν,  
[character of current orientation]

C οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες.  
[current orientation]

C’ ἡμῶν γὰρ τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς ὑπάρχει,  
[current orientation]

B’ ἐξ οὗ καὶ σωτῆρα ἀπεκδεχόμεθα κύριον Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν,  
[character of current orientation]

A’ ὃς μετασηματίσει τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως ἡμῶν ...  
[eventual end] (3:19-21)

There is much to say about these verses, not least to defend the specifics of the chiasm laid out above. The main point, however, relevant to the question of this essay, is that Paul is here contrasting the respective futures of those who follow his example and that of οὗτω περιπατοῦντες (3:17) with those who do not, whose ‘mindset’ is on earthly things (οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες, 3:19).

<sup>55</sup> D. M. Stanley, “‘Become Imitators of Me’: The Pauline Conception of Apostolic Tradition”, *Biblica* 40 (1958), 871.

<sup>56</sup> τὸ πολίτευμα ἐν οὐρανοῖς, according to our chiasmic layout, corresponds to the οἱ τὰ ἐπίγεια φρονοῦντες. ‘Citizenship’ in this context, commentators agree, refers to an entity that defines and regulates one’s identity and actions and as such fits well in opposition to the concept of a practical ‘mindset’. See Andrew T. Lincoln, ‘Philippians and the Heavenly Commonwealth’, in *Paradise Now and Not Yet: Studies in the Role of the Heavenly Dimension in Paul’s Thought with Special Reference to His Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 99; Reumann, *Philippians*, 576.

<sup>57</sup> For a different chiasmic layout of this text, equally acceptable, see Demetrius K. Williams, *Enemies of the Cross of Christ: The Terminology of the Cross and Conflict in Philippians*, JSNTSup 223 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2002), 218.

If the Philippians imitate the Christ-likeness of Paul *and*, importantly, of ‘those who walk this way,’ rejecting the negative examples of 3:18-19, they will ‘in this way stand firm in the Lord’ (4:1). In commanding the Philippians to οὗτος στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ (‘stand firm in this manner’), Paul indicates that the manner in which the Philippians will stand firm in the Lord is by following the Christlike examples Paul provides and rejecting the negative examples against which he warns.<sup>58</sup>

Philippians 4:1 is crucial for understanding the role examples play in the life of the community at Philippi. The verse is a bridge between the preceding passages and 4:2-10, and Paul makes it explicit that if the Philippians are to ‘stand firm in the Lord’, they will do it ‘this way’ (οὕτως).<sup>59</sup> First, this ‘standing firm’ (ἵστημι) is a summary of Paul’s exhortation throughout the letter. ἵστημι is also used this way in 1:27, also associated there with the two main points of paraenesis: humble unity and joyful suffering for the gospel. Secondly, οὕτως points out the mode by which the Philippians will ‘stand firm’. The referent of this adverb, especially given the verbal echo, seems to be ‘all that follows from 1:27’,<sup>60</sup> and ‘especially [the Philippians’] imitation’<sup>61</sup> of the examples packed into this section. The Philippians’ ‘progress’ in boldness and selfless humility, and therefore their ‘standing firm in the Lord’, will be accomplished by their imitation of the Christlike qualities of the godly, though individually imperfect, community of believers provided to them as an example. This verse, therefore, and the structure of Philippians as a whole suggest that Paul views the imitation of the exemplars he has described and those like them to be a means by which the Philippians will ‘stand firm’ and make ‘progress in the faith’.

The final place in which Paul serves as an example is in the well-known exhortations of 4:8-9. In 4:8, the list of virtues introduced by ὅσα (‘whatever’) or τις (‘anything’), which are subsumed under ταῦτα

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<sup>58</sup> Charles B. Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 82.

<sup>59</sup> Samra, *Being Conformed*, 125.

<sup>60</sup> See, e.g. Fowl, *Philippians*, 388, who agrees that ‘the preceding admonitions [1:27–3:21] have been about “standing firm”’.

<sup>61</sup> See Fee, *Philippians*, 388; with Fowl, *Philippians*, 177; *pace* Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, ed. Ralph P. Martin, WBC 43 (Waco, TX: Word, 2004); Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991); Silva, *Philippians*.

(‘these things’), comprise the *phronēsis* Paul exhorts. In the next verse, 4:9, Paul’s example, ‘learned’ and ‘received’ and ‘heard’ and ‘seen’ by the Philippians, is to be imitated and helps to qualify the very general Hellenistic<sup>62</sup> paraenesis of 4:8. As Fee notes ‘the indefinite “whatsoever things” mentioned in verse 8 are to be understood within the specific framework of the “what things” having to do with the gospel,’ that they have learned from and seen in Paul.<sup>63</sup> In 4:8 Paul provides the general categories of virtues for which the Philippians are to be watching out, and in 4:9 he specifies a criteria by which to discern them (cf. 1:10),<sup>64</sup> namely in his own words and example, to which we can now add, from the larger context, the example of his associates and of ‘those who walk according to [this] example’ in 3:17.

The corporate import of the *imitatio Christianorum* is especially clear in 3:17, in which, though neither Paul nor his associates have ‘been perfected’, they are nevertheless, as a group, one ‘example’ (τύπος, singular) of which the Philippians are to ‘become joint imitators’. As we have seen, the compound συμμητηής (‘joint imitators’), indicates that ‘imitating a more mature example is something that ought to be done collectively within the community and that the Philippians should order their lives according to οὕτω περιπατοῦντες an imitation in community’.<sup>65</sup> In the community’s Spirit-empowered progression toward Christlikeness, then, both the example and the imitation of that example are, for Paul, a constant spiraling interaction between the individual and the corporate.

## 6. The Example of Other Believers (*Imitatio Christianōrum*)

Who, then, are the οὕτω περιπατοῦντες (‘those who walk this way’) of 3:17? Having looked at Paul and Christ as examples in Philippians, we turn to these other exemplary figures to whom the Philippians are to look and by the imitation of whose Christ-likeness they can ‘stand firm’ (4:1).

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<sup>62</sup> Joachim Gnilka, *Der Philipperbrief*, HTKNT (Freiburg: Herder, 1987), 221; Reumann, *Philippians*, 638-40.

<sup>63</sup> Fee, *Philippians*, 420n33. See also O’Brien, *Philippians*, 502.

<sup>64</sup> Reumann, *Philippians*, 640.

<sup>65</sup> Samra, *Being Conformed*, 165.



### 6.1 Timothy

In the so-called travelogue (2:19-24), Paul's description of Timothy clearly echoes his language in 2:1-18, which calls the Philippians to the two foci of others-focused humility and unity. 2:1-18, then, anchored by the Christ hymn at the center, is the background against which Timothy's exemplary *phronēsis* is commended to the Philippians. Although Timothy doubtless also exemplified boldness in ministry, it is primarily Timothy's correspondence to his previous exhortations to others-focus that Paul wants hold up to the Philippians in these verses.<sup>66</sup>

Paul's emphasis on Timothy's exemplary selflessness begins even in the very first sentence of the letter, in which Timothy is included with Paul as a *δοῦλος* of Christ Jesus. This term's only other use in the letter is in the story of Christ, who took on 'the form of a *δοῦλος*' (2:7).<sup>67</sup> Timothy is again mentioned in connection with the only other instance of the *δουλ*- wordgroup in Philippians in 2:22, in which he 'served (*ἔδούλευσεν*) with [Paul] in the gospel'. Timothy's selflessness in service of the gospel is Paul's particular emphasis.

Timothy's distinguishing characteristic, according to Paul in 2:20, is his selfless concern for others. Timothy is unique to Paul primarily in that he 'will be genuinely concerned for [the Philippians'] welfare' because the 'all' of 2:21, in contrast, 'seek their own interests (*τὰ ἑαυτῶν*), not those of Jesus Christ'. Fee notes that the important contrast here is not merely between Timothy and the others who were available to be sent but also implicitly with 'his character' and that of others, even the Philippians, since Paul's language is so close to that of his exhortations in 2:3-4.<sup>68</sup> Timothy, by distinguishing himself in this area, is explicitly modeling Paul's imperative in 2:4 not to seek merely *τὰ ἑαυτῶν* ('one's own [interests]') but to seek *τὰ ἕτερῶν* ('the [interests] of others'). Implicitly, though, this selflessness and like-mindedness with Paul also, as Culpepper notes, 'condemns the rivalry and self-interest apparent in the preaching of the others (1:15-17)'.<sup>69</sup> So, Timothy is like both Christ and Paul in his selfless concern for and service of others, and this characteristic is therefore presented as an

<sup>66</sup> See R. Allen Culpepper, 'Co-Workers In Suffering: Philippians 2.19-30', *RevExp* 77 (1980), 355.

<sup>67</sup> Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 50.

<sup>68</sup> See Fee, *Philippians*, 267; pace O'Brien, *Philippians*, 321.

<sup>69</sup> Culpepper, 'Co-Workers In Suffering', 355.

example of this one of Paul's two main points of exhortation for the Philippians to imitate.

Although Timothy undoubtedly served with boldness and perhaps would have died for the gospel if necessary, Paul primarily presents Timothy as an example of selfless humility.

## 6.2 *Epaphroditus*

Epaphroditus, on the other hand, though he too shows concern for the Philippians (2:26), is held up in 2:25-30 especially as an example of willingness to suffer for the gospel in ministry, even 'unto death' (2:27), the likes of whom the Philippians are to 'honour' (2:29). Paul's emphasis on Epaphroditus's boldness in this paragraph complements the selflessness exemplified by Timothy.

First, instead of being called a δούλος like Timothy and Paul, Epaphroditus is called συστρατιώτης ('fellow-soldier'), highlighting Paul's emphasis on Epaphroditus as an example of death-defying gospel ministry to complement Timothy, the example of selfless humility.<sup>70</sup> Epaphroditus had fallen deathly ill, and, though Paul does not detail the circumstances of his illness, he presents Epaphroditus as having 'risked his life' in this illness, and having 'nearly died for the work of Christ' (2:30). Paul's note that Epaphroditus 'risked his life' (μέχρι θανάτου ἤγγισεν) is a striking verbal echo of the Christ hymn, in which Christ is portrayed as boldly having been obedient 'unto death' (μέχρι θανάτου) (2:5), the only other place in Paul's letters where this phrase is used. Epaphroditus is clearly a real-life illustration of the φρονήσις which was 'also in Christ Jesus', that the Philippians are to imitate.

Epaphroditus is also portrayed as having similar concerns to those of Paul. He, like Paul in 1:12-26, was concerned that Philippians not be discouraged because of his nearness to death (2:26). Like Paul's, his concern, even when faced with death, was not for his own wellbeing, but for the wellbeing of the Philippians. Epaphroditus's fearlessness and joy in the face of death also echoes Paul's attitude in 1:19-21 that 'Christ will be honored in [his] body, whether by life or by death' and that in either case he can 'rejoice'. Similar language is used of Epaphroditus's homecoming: they are to 'rejoice at seeing him' and to

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<sup>70</sup> For an emphasis on suffering in Paul's presentation of Epaphroditus, see Fee, *Philippians*, 273; Bockmuehl, *Philippians*, 174; Fowl, *Philippians*; O'Brien, *Philippians*; *pace* Silva, *Philippians*; Hawthorne, *Philippians*.

‘receive him with all joy’ because of his nearly dying ‘for the work of Christ’ (2:28-30). Epaphroditus has reflected the characteristics of both Christ and Paul in giving (‘risking’) his life in service for the ‘work of Christ’, and is therefore held up along with Timothy as a model so that, together, these two examples combine Paul’s two main desires for the Philippians’ Christlikeness: humble selflessness like Timothy and fearless ministry in the face of death like Epaphroditus.

We see, then, that Timothy and Epaphroditus are examples of the selfless humility and willingness to suffer epitomised in Christ.<sup>71</sup> Paul has aspects of both of these qualities, though neither is perfected in him, as he makes explicit in 3:12. Timothy is emphasized as an example of selflessness, Epaphroditus for his fearless ministry in the face of death. These are among the οὗτω περιπατοῦντες.

Euodia and Syntyche, on the other hand, have rarely been cited as examples at all.<sup>72</sup> In fact, they are sometimes identified with various ‘opponents’ of Paul in other passages in the letter or as perhaps the primary foci of Paul’s imperatives.<sup>73</sup> However, the fact that Euodia and Syntyche are entreated to cease their apparent quarrel and ‘have the same mindset in the Lord’ is no barrier to their being presented by Paul as exemplary in another area in which they exhibit those characteristics that he wants to see in the Philippians.

The situation described in 4:2-3 functions differently from the previous four examples but as an example still. It is a case in point that the community as a whole, for Paul, is necessary for progress in holiness, since no one believer fully possesses even one of the two main points of Paul’s paraenesis in Philippians. There is no single prototypical [Philippian] Christian. Like Epaphroditus, Euodia and Syntyche have served the gospel faithfully with Paul, but, unlike Timothy, they are not unified in an others-focused unity. In other words, they have one of Paul’s emphasized virtues but lack the other. Paul therefore asks them to ‘have the same mindset’ (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν), which echoes his command in 2:2 to the Philippians in general (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονῆτε). Euodia and Syntyche individually are called to the same unity to which the Philippian church in general has been called

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<sup>71</sup> In *Consolation*, 122-23n101, Holloway makes a similar observation, but links Epaphroditus’s example specifically instead with 2:12-18.

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Fowl, *Philippians*, 180; Holloway, *Consolation*, 143n60.

<sup>73</sup> See, e.g. Davorin Peterlin, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians in the Light of Disunity in the Church*, NovTSup 79 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 101-32.

throughout the letter. Like the Philippians, Euodia and Syntyche need to heed the Christlike examples of others-focus and unity, found in their community of believers (the οὕτω περιπατοῦντες) even as they also provide them with a Christlike example in another area.

Then, Paul further extends his request for the reconciliation of these women to another member of the community,<sup>74</sup> who is to ‘help these women’, and he reminds the Philippians of how Euodia and Syntyche have faithfully served ‘in the gospel’ with him and that their ‘names are in the book of life’. The community is here explicitly charged with the care and restoration of two of its own to the unity to which they have all been called. This unity is, as we have seen from the οὕτως in 4:1, achieved at least in part through the God-empowered imitation of those who exemplify Christ-like, others-focused humility, and willingness to suffer in service of the gospel. The situation of Euodia and Syntyche is, therefore, an example of where Paul sees the locus of believers’ progression in holiness, namely, the community. As has been illustrated by the structure of examples in the epistle, this community is imperfect, but it can function as a Christ-like model (3:17) when its members, in whom ‘God works’ (2:13), are seen as a corporate reflection of the character of Christ.

## 7. Conclusions

Paul’s two paraenetic aims for the Philippians are not fully exemplified by any one of the believers whom Paul holds up to be imitated. As we have seen, Paul is careful to emphasise Timothy’s selfless humility; Epaphroditus is an example of death-defying boldness; Paul exemplifies both qualities, but imperfectly. Only when seen together do these believers’ lives constitute a corporate example worthy of imitation. The imitation of these Christ-like examples is presented as the means by which the Philippians will ‘stand firm’ and be fruitful for the ‘day of Christ’.

The striking democratisation of influence apparent in Paul’s calls to inter-believer imitation in Philippians should not be missed. It might be argued that those who are named explicitly in the letter are in some

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<sup>74</sup> The identity of this figure is controversial and beyond our scope, but this σύζυγος is, doubtless, a believer and a well-known member of the Philippian community, so, e.g. O’Brien, *Philippians*, 481.

elevated position in the community either by their association with Paul (Timothy), or by their prior prominence in the Philippian community (Epaphroditus, Euodia, Syntyche). Paul's most explicit call to imitation, however, points to a nameless group defined solely by their 'walking this way' (οὕτω περιπατοῦντες). For Paul, it is not status, power, or wealth but Christ-likeness, particularly instantiated in Philippians as others-focus and gospel boldness, that makes a worthy exemplar. Anyone who 'walks this way' is an example and a resource for the community's 'progress in the faith'.

One of the unique contributions of Philippians to Pauline theology is the glimpse it provides into the Pauline understanding of this practical way in which believers are to progress in Christlikeness 'amid a crooked and depraved generation' (2:15). As revealed by the structure of the *imitatio Christianorum* theme in Philippians, progress in holiness occurs in the Spirit-empowered interactions between believers in the community.<sup>75</sup> This theme of imitation of believers as the mode of progress in Christ-likeness in Philippians locates that progress firmly in this small, suffering community of believers, who have precious few living examples of and encouragements toward Christ-likeness, and whose culture considers humility and others-focus to be vices rather than virtues.

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<sup>75</sup> See, similarly, J. Ross Wagner, 'Working Out Salvation: Holiness and Community in Philippians', in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament*, ed. Kent E. Brower and Andy Johnson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 255-67.