To What End Exegesis?

Reflections on Exegesis and Spirituality in Philippians 4:10-20

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The purpose of this lecture, which begins by tracing the author's pilgrimage *as an evangelical NT scholar, is to urge that the ultimate aim of exegesis is the Spiritual one — to produce in our lives and the lives of others true Spirituality, in which God's people live in faithful fellowship both with one another and with the living God, and thus in keeping with God's purposes in the world. It is further argued, therefore, that the exegesis of the biblical texts belongs primarily in the context of the believing community who are the true heirs of these texts. These concerns are then illustrated by an exegesis of Phil 4:10-20, where it is argued that the predicates of friendship and orality not only make sense of this passage in its present placement in Philippians, but are intended likewise to lead the community into the climactic theology and doxology of 4:19-20 as the letter is read in their midst.*

Key Words: Phil 4:10-20, exegesis, spirituality, doxology

In part this lecture[1] is something of a confessional narrative of my own pilgrimage as an evangelical NT scholar. It is certainly not intended to serve as a paradigm. But as those who know me well would tell you, it is hard for Gordon to do anything that is not at least a bit hortatory.

I. THE PILGRIMAGE

The crisis event that led to this lecture occurred three years ago, when I was asked to team up with my colleague Eugene Peterson for Regent's annual Pastor's Conference. The topic had been set by those responsible for the conference: Exegesis and Spirituality. In preparing for those lectures, I realized that over the years I had developed a kind of schizophrenia regarding these two topics — schizophrenia in the derivative sense of that word: of a truly "divided mindset."

Even though I am easily the least intentional NT scholar in the history of the discipline, I had nonetheless become one, whether intentional or not. In so

doing I had also entered into a concern to restore a viable evangelical voice in the academy, where scholarship in the generation preceding mine seemed pretty well committed to the agenda of modernity — to control the data by means of a historical-critical methodology, within a non-supernatural framework, which very often included a strongly anti-supernatural bias.

When my generation came on the scene, not only had such a bias rather totally taken over the playground, but it had also established some new rules for the game. These rules developed especially in Germany, where the church had long been subservient to the academy.

The history of evangelical faith in such an environment is not a happy one, although there were notable exceptions in scholars like Adolf Schlatter and Joachim Jeremias. When Scripture could only reach the people of God by way of what the academy allowed it to say, the effect was particularly deadening. When these rules were transported to North America they had a still further deadening effect — especially in the United States, where the doctrine of the separation of church and state was so fundamental to our psyche that no one growing up in my generation could have imagined a world that thought, or that should think, differently. This psyche dictated that the academy must be "neutral" with regard to religion and especially must do so when looking at religious texts.

The net result was that the game had to be played on a field and by a set of rules that were *fundamentally foreign to the texts themselves*. And here is where I entered the game that brought about my schizophrenia: I had pursued a Ph.D. In NT studies so that I might teach the NT with integrity in the setting of the church. In the process I had fallen into scholarship. And to do my scholarly work well, I had learned to play the game by the current rules. This meant to yield to the premise that what we called Scripture, God's eternal word given in love to his people for their knowing and following him, had to be treated first of all (and in the academy, *exclusively*) as historical documents not unlike any other such religious documents. Since history had always been my second love, and since I too believe that the first task of exegesis is the historical one (to be as good historians as possible when dealing with anything that comes to us from an earlier time and culture), I had no trouble at all playing the game by the rules. To be sure, my bias was basically conservative toward all historical data — innocent until proven

guilty — and my own experience of God also biased me historically in the direction that God had intervened in history, the *understanding* of which intervention I also took to be part of the *historical* task.

My schizophrenia came about because I never for a moment believed that these texts were nothing more than simply objects of historical research. These texts were my singular passion, because herein I had been encountered by the living God, who in Christ and by the Spirit called me to himself to be a passionate lover of God. This, and this alone, was my *only* reason for ever becoming an exegete: to become a better reader of the texts, so that I might both live out the life they called me to (that is, to enter into their own Spirituality[2]) and share this passion with others. Indeed, this is the only way I have ever taught in over thirty years in the classroom.

But it was precisely this dimension (my *only* reason ever for doing this work in the first place) that was never allowed expression in the academy. Here we had to take the first task of exegesis not only as the first or even primary one, but as the *only* one. Anything that even smacked of caring about the Spirituality of the text — be it its own theology or its doxology or its call to discipleship — on the part of the scholar was disallowed by the present rules of the game. Thus I found myself trying to play baseball but was allowed to play only by the rules of soccer, without the use of hands and arms.

As many of you will recognize, with the publication of my 1 Corinthians commentary ten years ago, I ventured to start playing by the earlier set of rules when the texts were studied primarily by scholars within the community of faith. Since I had brought much of this exegesis to bear in every kind of church setting and since in these settings I could not imagine not asking and offering some pointers toward solutions of the "so what?" questions, I regularly included these in the commentary itself. Why do the history if the Spirituality inherent in the text itself did not matter a whit? This is what I always did in the classroom, and I knew students who had taken the course in 1 Corinthians from me would sense that I had lost my integrity if I did not do the same in the commentary. I also admit that I did so with a considerable amount of fear and trembling: on the one hand, because I knew I was breaking the rules and therefore that the commentary might have a much more limited usefulness than I would have hoped; on the other hand, because I grew up in a context where "Spirituality" was the only thing most people

did with the texts, and this “Spirituality” was very often based on little or no exegesis (we children used to parody a popular gospel song: “wonderful things in the Bible I see, some put there by you and some put there by me”).

Thus back to my preparations for the Pastor's Conference. Here I was faced with the need to articulate what I believed to be the relationship between exegesis and Spirituality, and now I was being forced to come to terms with my schizophrenia. To be sure, those first attempts turned out to be much too mild: I was willing to see exegesis and Spirituality as being related, as I always had in the classroom, but still to see Spirituality as a kind of practical *addendum* to the exegetical task. However, a year and a half later, I was to give the Ongman lectures at the Baptist seminary in Örebro, Sweden, under the invited topic, “The Word and the Spirit.” Here, again, I was specifically asked to address the question of the interface between exegesis and Spirituality.

It was while preparing the first of these lectures that the light dawned, for between the two sets of lectures I had written the Philippians commentary, which had become for me a constant round of Spiritual engagements with the biblical text. It finally became clear to me that during all these years I had not been truly abiding by my own understanding of exegesis as I had articulated it in a variety of places and settings. I have long argued that the first task of exegesis is to try to understand the intent of the author of a text, as much as this is historically possible, with all of the tools available to us as historians. And I still believe this to be so, even in this post-modern age, where scholars, full of inner contradictions, intentionally write books and articles to tell me that an author's intent may be irrelevant to a good reading of a book. The light that finally dawned, of course, was the plain reality, writ large in almost every text in our canon, that the real intent of these texts *was* the Spiritual one: obedience to God, be it in the form of behavior, instruction, worship, doxology, or whatever it might be, including a carefully articulated biblical theology.[3]

Thus, rather than seeing exegesis and Spirituality as opposed to one another, or as one preceding or following or having precedence over the other, I came to realize — and herewith propose for our mutual consideration:

(1) that faithful biblical exegesis must, by the very nature of the documents themselves, *always* take into account the Spiritual purposes

for which they were written, and

(2) that this exegesis belongs within the framework of the believing community, with those who follow (whether exactly or not, at least intentionally) in the train of the original believing communities for whom and to whom these documents were written.

Thus let us say with uncharacteristic passion: the ultimate aim of exegesis (as I perceive it) is to produce in our lives and the lives of others true Spirituality, in which God's people live in faithful fellowship both with one another and with the eternal and living God and thus in keeping with God's own purposes in the world. In order to do this effectively, I would further argue (but will not take the time to do so here), true "Spirituality" must *precede* exegesis as well as be the final result of it. We must begin as we would conclude, standing under the text, not over it with all of our scholarly arrogance intact. And we must end that way as well, or all is vanity, chasing after the wind.

I would therefore make bold to insist that proper exegesis should be done in the context of prayer, so that in our exegesis we hear the text with the sensitivity of the Spirit. Only as we ourselves do our exegesis in the proper posture of humility — on our knees, as it were, listening to God — can we truly expect to speak the Word of God with clarity and boldness so as to comfort, inspire, or speak prophetically to God's people, the people for whom these texts were written in the first place.

So with this confession and proposal before us as the context of this lecture, what I hope to do in the space that remains is to illustrate what some of this might look like by looking at a specific passage, Phil 4:10-20, and assessing its role in Paul's letter to the Philippians. I begin with a few words about the term *Spirituality*.[4]

II. ON THE MEANING OF 'SPIRITUALITY'

As the result of my work on the word πνεμμα group in the letters of Paul,[5] I have found myself becoming more and more distressed by our translating of the adjective πνεμματικός with a small-case letter, "spiritual." Indeed, the word *spiritual* is what I call an *accordion* word: its meaning pretty much has to do with how much air you pump in or out of it. The point that needs to be made is that the word πνεμματικός, a distinctively Pauline word in the NT, has the Holy Spirit as its primary referent. As an adjective Paul never uses it

anthropologically to refer to the human spirit; and whatever else, it is not an adjective that sets some unseen reality in contrast, for example, to something material, secular, ritual, or tangible.[6]

In the NT, therefore, Spirituality is defined altogether in terms of the Spirit of God. One is Spiritual to the degree that one lives in and walks by the Spirit; in Scripture the word has no other meaning, and no other measurement. Thus, when Paul says that "the Law is spiritual," he means that the Law belongs to the sphere of the Spirit (inspired of the Spirit as it is), not to the sphere of flesh. And when he says to the Corinthians (14:27), "if any of you thinks he or she is spiritual," he means, "if any of you think of yourselves as a Spirit person, a person living the life of the Spirit." Likewise, when he says to the Galatians (6:1) that "those who are spiritual should restore one who has been overtaken in a transgression," he is not referring to some special or elitist group in the church, but to the rest of the believing community, who both began their life in the Spirit and came to completion by the same Spirit who produces his own fruit in their lives. Christian existence in the NT is thus Trinitarian at its very roots.

At the beginning and end of all things is the eternal God, to whom both Jews and Christians refer over and again as the Living God. God's purpose in creating creatures like ourselves, fashioned in his image, was for relationship: that we might live in fellowship with and thus to the glory of the Living God, both as those who bear God's likeness and as those who carry out God's purposes on earth. Even before the fall, we are told, God's purpose was to redeem the fallen so as to reshape their misshapen vision of God and thus to restore them into the fellowship from which they fell in their rebellion. God has brought this about, we are told, by himself coming among us in the person of his Son, who at one point in our human history effected our redemption and reconciliation with the Living God, through a humiliating death and glorious resurrection. But God has not left us on our own to make a go of it; he has purposed to come to our aid — and this is the reason for God's coming to us and among us by the Holy Spirit.

Thus God's aim in our lives is "Spiritual" in this sense: that we, redeemed by the death of Christ, might be empowered by his Spirit both "to will and to do for the sake of his own pleasure." True spirituality, therefore, is nothing more or less than life by the Spirit. "Having been brought to life by the Spirit,"

Paul tells the Galatians, “let us behave in ways that are in keeping with the Spirit.”

Hence the aim of exegesis: to produce in our lives and the lives of others true Spirituality, in which God's people live in fellowship with the eternal and living God and thus in keeping with God's own purposes in the world. Thus it is simply wrong-headed for us ever to think that we have done exegesis at all if we have not cared about the intended Spirituality of the text — whether it be theological, doxological, relational, or behavioral.

Now on to such an exegesis of Phil 4:10-20.

III. PHILIPPIANS 4:10-20[7]

Let me begin with the scholarly agenda, which in this case I find very often to be in the way of both understanding and Spirituality. Scholarship has tended to have two difficulties with Phil 4:10-20, and these difficulties by and large dominate the exegetical discussion of this passage:

(1) Its placement at the end of the letter. “It is inconceivable,” we are told, “that Paul should wait all that time to express his thanks for the gifts.”[8]

(2) The twin realities

> **(a)** that Paul never actually thanks the Philippians for the gift (in the sense of using the verb εμχαριότειν) and
>
> **(b)** that he uses an array of commercial language to express his acknowledgment.

For those who are troubled by these things, a variety of solutions have been offered. The most common solution to the *question of placement* is to divide the present letter into three, making our 4:10-20 the earliest of the three, dashed off soon after Epaphroditus had arrived, and placed somewhat thoughtlessly at the end by a redactor.[9] The solution to the *linguistic matters* has basically been to describe the passage as “thankless thanks,” and then to “mirror read” some form of *tension* between Paul and the Philippians as lying behind his inability genuinely to thank them.

But such resolutions are completely unnecessary in this case, because the problem is of our own making, resulting from reading our own sociology and cultural norms back into Paul's letter. Both matters find their resolution at two points: first, in the phenomenon of Greco-Roman friendship, taking seriously

the fact that our Philippians is in part a letter of friendship (as well as in part a letter of moral exhortation).[10] Understood in light of the "rules" of friendship — their sociology, if you will, not ours — both its placement and language make perfectly good sense. Second, its placement in particular is best understood against the backdrop of orality and Pauline rhetoric.

I do not have time to go into the phenomenon of friendship in Greco-Roman culture, except to outline briefly what is significant for our passage (the details can be found in my commentary):

1. Greco-Roman culture took friendship far more seriously than most Western cultures — so much so, that many of the philosophers, beginning with Aristotle, have considerable treatises on the nature and obligations of friendship.

2. Friendship was of several kinds; but between equals, the highest level (to cite Aristotle) was between virtuous people, whose relationship was based on goodwill and loyalty (including trust).

3. A considerable "core of ideals" was understood to be inherent in such friendship, most of which appear in some way or another in Philippians. Absolutely basic to everyone's understanding of friendship and crucial to the passage in hand was the matter of social reciprocity, in which, using the language of commerce metaphorically, they spoke of mutually "giving and receiving benefits." This matter of "benefits" called for some of the lengthiest philosophical discussions, because friendship could not be understood apart from "benefits." By their very nature, however, benefits could also be abused so as to undermine mutuality and trust.

It is this language, the language of "contractual friendship," that both dominates Phil 4:10-20 and helps to explain why Paul does not use "thank you" language in a direct way. We know from the literary evidence that although gratitude for benefits received was an expected part of friendship, nonetheless, because of both the mutuality and goodwill inherent in friendship and its expected reciprocity with regard to benefits, the use of "thank you" language was apparently not expected among friends.[11]

If the social phenomenon of friendship explains the *language* of our passage, its *placement* at the end of the letter is most likely due to the combined influence of orality and Pauline rhetoric. We begin with the matter of orality,

noting that the first century CE was primarily an oral (and thus aural) culture. This would have been especially true for the majority to whom this letter was addressed. All of Paul's letters, and Philippians in particular, were first of all oral — *dictated* to be *read aloud* in the community. Much of Paul's rhetoric comes into play precisely at this point. His use of assonance and wordplays, for example, are "designed" to be memorable precisely because oral cultures had a very high level of retention. In literary cultures we are bombarded by so many words in print that very few, if any, are kept in memory in a precise way.

Rhetoric and orality together especially explain why Paul left his acknowledgment of their gift for the very end. For most of us, such delay borders on rudeness, if not impropriety, and for scholars it has been the source of considerable speculation. But Paul had a different agenda. Having to this point dealt with his, and especially their, circumstances[12] (basic to letters of friendship) and knowing full well what he was doing, Paul concluded the letter on the same note with which it began (1:3-7), their mutual partnership in the gospel, thus placing this matter in the emphatic, climactic position at the end. When read aloud in the gathered community, these would be the final words that were left ringing in their ears: their gift to him has been a sweet-smelling sacrifice, pleasing to God; God in turn, through Christ Jesus and in keeping with the "riches" that are his alone in the "glory" in which he dwells, will "fill them to the full" regarding all their needs; and that all of this redounds to God's eternal glory.

At the same time, of course, they would scarcely be able to overlook the exhortations and appeals that *preceded*, given the predominance of these concerns in the large middle section of the letter. This is rhetoric at its best. The theory (predicated on our own sociology) that sees a later, rather mindless, redactor "pasting" things together in this way turns out in the end to make him more clever than Paul.

In this final section, therefore, three concerns intertwine:

First is his genuine gratitude for their recent gift, expressed three times in three variations (vv. 10A, 14, 18).

Second, this is set within the framework of Greco-Roman "friendship," evidenced by the language of "giving and receiving," a relationship of friendship that goes back to the beginning of their relationship together in

Christ.

Third, and most significantly (and typically!), this *sociological* reality is totally subsumed under the greater reality of the *gospel*; thus the whole climaxes in doxology.

All of this section is fashioned with consummate artistry, so that their "giving," his "receiving," and their long-term friendship (expressed as a "partnership in the gospel"), which their gift reaffirms, climax in vv. 18-20 with gratitude (from Paul), accolade and promise (from God to them), and doxology (from both him and them to God). In order to get at my concern about the intended Spirituality of the passage, I want to focus on this climactic moment in the letter.

In v. 18 Paul at last mentions their gifts directly. He speaks expansively, piling up verbs at the beginning by which he indicates how richly his own needs have been met by their lavish generosity and concluding with a change of metaphors expressing God's pleasure over their gift. The first clause, "I have received (payment) in full," reflects his final use of the commercial/friendship metaphor, indicating that his "receipt" of what they have "given" puts the "obligation" of friendship back on his side.

As further indication that this passage is not "thankless," Paul starts all over again. "I am filled to the full," he says, and then mentions their gift directly. But in doing so, he describes their gift by means of rich metaphor from the OT sacrifices ("a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice"), so as also to indicate *divine* approval for what they have done. What was for them an expression of friendship and for Paul was both evidence of their partnership in the gospel and the cause of his present "abounding" while in prison is finally described as a sacrificial offering to God, in which God himself took full pleasure.

The mention of God at the end of v. 18 leads directly to the great master stroke, v. 19. The reciprocity of friendship is now back in Paul's court. But Paul is in prison and cannot reciprocate directly. So he does an even better thing: since their gift had the effect of being a sweet-smelling sacrifice, pleasing *to God*, Paul assures them that God, whom he deliberately designates "*my* God," will assume responsibility for reciprocity. Thus, picking up the language "my need" from v. 16 and "fill to the full" from v. 18, he promises them that "my God will fill up every need of yours."

From his point of view they obviously have the better of it! First, he promises that God's reciprocation will cover "*every* need" of theirs, especially their material needs, as the context demands, and also every other kind of need, as the language demands. One cannot imagine a more fitting way for this letter to conclude, in terms of Paul's final word to them personally. In the midst of their "poverty" (2 Cor 8:2), God will richly supply their material needs. In their present suffering in the face of opposition (1:27-30), God will richly supply what is needed (steadfastness, joy, and encouragement). In their "need" to advance in the faith with one mindset (1:25, 2:1-4, 4:2-3), God will richly supply the grace and humility necessary. In the place of both "grumbling" (2:14) and "anxiety" (4:6), God will be present with them as the "God of peace" (4:7, 9). "*My* God," Paul says, will act for me in your behalf by "filling to the full *all* your needs."

And God will do so, Paul says, "in keeping with his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." The Philippians' generosity toward Paul, expressed lavishly in the beginning of v. 18, is exceeded beyond all imagination by the lavish "wealth" of the eternal God, who dwells "in glory" full of "riches" made available to his own "in Christ Jesus." God's "riches" are those inherent to his being God, Creator and Lord of all; nothing lies outside his rightful ownership and domain. They are his "in glory" in the sense that his "riches" exist in the sphere of God's glory, where God "dwells" in infinite splendor and majesty, the "glory" that is his as God alone. It is "in keeping with" all of *this* — not "out of" his riches, but *in accordance with this norm*, the infinite "riches" of grace that belong to God's own glory — that God's full supply will come their way to meet their every need. The language is deliberately expansive; after all, Paul is trying to say something concrete about the eternal God and God's relationship to his people. This is why the final word is not the heavenly one, "in glory," but the combined earthly and heavenly one, "in Christ Jesus." Because Paul has beheld the "glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus" (2 Cor 4:6), expressed in this letter in the majestic Christ narrative in 2:6-11, Paul sees clearly that Christ Jesus is the way God has made his love known and available to his human creatures. This is what the letter has ultimately been all about. It began "in Christ Jesus"; it now concludes "in Christ Jesus." For Paul, "to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Thus the final word in the body of the letter proper is this one: "every need of yours in keeping with the wealth that is God's in glory made available to you in Christ

Jesus."

This says it all; nothing more can be added, so Paul simply bursts into doxology. The indicative yields to the imperative of worship. When one thinks on the "riches of God" lavished on us in Christ Jesus, what else is there to do but to praise and worship? Christ is indeed the focus of everything that God has and is doing in this world and the next, but God the Father is always the first and last word in Paul's theology. "*My* God" is now "*our* God *and Father*"; and the living God, the everlasting one, who belongs to the "ages of ages" and who dwells "in glory," is now ascribed the "glory" that is due his name.

All of this because the Philippians have sent Paul material assistance to help him through his imprisonment! True theology is expressed in doxology, and doxology is always the proper response to God, even — especially? — in response to God's prompting friends to minister to friends.

IV. FINAL REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUALITY

What, then, is the Spirituality that Paul intends the Philippians to enter into by these words? The answer, I would suggest, lies with the doxology. Surely we have not read the text aright until we recognize that Paul intended the Philippians—and therefore us as heirs of their text—to join him in this praise of God. Besides the implied imperative in the doxology itself, two things lead me to argue so.

First, as noted above, these words of doxology conclude a letter that is intended to be read aloud *in the gathered community* in Philippi. For most of us this is simply a text that is read silently and understood descriptively as bringing conclusion to the letter proper. For many of us praise also tends to be perfunctory. It was otherwise with Paul. He belonged to a tradition that regularly blessed God in its worship, which in its Christian expression was rooted in the salvation that God had brought about in Christ and made effectual through the Spirit. Since "rejoicing in the Lord" was enjoined on them in the hymnbook of the ancient people of God, how much more was it enjoined on them as their proper response to Christ's lavish grace. Rejoicing is precisely what Paul repeatedly urges throughout the letter. "Rejoice in the Lord," he exhorts, "and again I will say it, Rejoice." Thus the concluding doxology is intended in part to lead them to rejoicing.

Second, besides being a letter of friendship, Philippians also shares all of the

significant features of the so-called “letter of moral exhortation,” a primary feature of which was the use of exemplary paradigms to reinforce the exhortation. Anyone reading Philippians carefully will note that the appeals in this letter are fortified by these exemplary paradigms. First, in 2:5-11 Paul points to Christ's attitude both as God and as human to reinforce his appeal to their doing nothing from selfish ambition and vain conceit but in humility considering the needs of others to come before their own. Then, in 3:4-14, Paul offers his own narrative as one who follows Christ's example.

After all, the heart of his story is his counting everything else as street filth “for the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord” — which means, he adds, to know simultaneously both the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, thus being made like him in his death. Those who are mature, he concludes, will adopt his view of things; those who walk otherwise are censured as “enemies of the cross.” Finally, the very last imperative, before the final expression of gratitude for their gift, calls them to “practice whatever they have received or heard from him or seen in him” (4:9). Thus, it seems hardly imaginable that Paul intended them only to hear his own praise of God in this doxology and not to enter into it themselves — especially so in light of the shift from “my God” in v. 19 to “our God and Father” in the doxology.

But doxology is seldom ever for its own sake. The implied imperative of doxology is rooted in the indicative of v. 19, which, I would offer, reflects the theological basis for everything else said in the letter. It is because Paul has caught a glimpse of “God's riches in glory, made available in Christ Jesus” that everything else in this letter (and in other letters) falls into place. This theological reality explains his transformation of language from Stoicism in vv. 11-13, for example; in the light of such “wealth,” lavishly given in Christ, ordinary “want” and “plenty” mean nothing at all. This is also the reason for his counting all things but loss for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord in 3:8-10 and for his straining with all his might in order to secure the eschatological prize, “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (3:13-14). Paul has caught a glimpse of God's “riches in glory,” put on full display “in Christ Jesus.” This is why for him to live is Christ; to die is gain. This is the Christ whom, in the humiliation of his incarnation and death on a cross, God has exalted by bestowing on him the name above all names, the name of the Lord himself; this is the Christ in whom *all of God's riches in*

glory have been lavishly made available to us. For Paul this fact determines everything. This is the glory that he longs for his Philippian friends to see and experience. Thus the whole letter finds its theological focus in this final word.

Our exegesis should in this case, therefore, lead us also to enter into Paul's Spirituality. We too need to pause and reflect, to sense the wonder and awe of such a moment. For Paul these are not mere words; these are the heart of things for him. The Spiritual reality of this text helps us to make sense of his own passions, both for Christ and for Christ's people. Here is one who is in constant communion with God in prayer, who knows the eternal God as dwelling in unfathomable riches of grace, and who knows that God lavishes the riches that are his in glory upon the people through Christ Jesus.

We bring our exegesis to fruition when we ourselves sit with unspeakable wonder in the presence of God, contemplate his riches, pray that they might be poured out on our own friends and family; and stay there in contemplation long enough that our only response is doxology: “to our God and Father be glory for ever and ever, Amen.” Until we have done this, I would venture, we have done our exegesis only tentatively. We have been mere historians. To be true exegetes we must hear the words with our hearts, we must bask in God's own glory, we must be moved to a sense of overwhelming awe at God's riches in glory, we must think again on the incredible wonder that these riches are ours in Christ Jesus, and we must then worship the living God by singing praises to his glory. Then we will in some measure have entered into Paul's intent for the Philippians themselves, which, I would argue, is what our exegesis should be all about.

FOOTNOTES:

[1] This essay was given as the Annual Lecture for the Institute for Biblical Research at the annual meeting in New Orleans on November 23, 1996. When the editor of this journal asked me to submit it for publication, I toyed for a long while over whether to tone down some of the rhetorical features of oral speech and to give it a more academic appearance with greater interaction with scholarship in footnotes. In the end I decided to let it stand pretty much as delivered, with a few minor changes here and there, and to keep only those notes that were already in the paper when it was delivered.

[2] For my reasons for capitalizing this word, see the discussion in the next section, "On the Meaning of Spirituality."

[3] See the critique of "critical" exegesis by Wayne Hankey ("The Bible in a Post-Critical Age," in *After the Deluge: Essays toward the Desecularization of the Church* [ed. William Oddie; London: SPCK, 1987] 41-92), who urges a return to the Fathers, who "teach that the essence of revelation is the raising of the mind of the biblical writers and of the hearers to grasp the intellectual content, the spiritual truth about God, his manner of working in us and his will for us, which it is the proper aim of Scripture to communicate" (p. 83). While I agree with the spirit of this comment, Hankey also reflects a far too sanguine attitude toward the Fathers. Indeed, this book is a bit of a mixed bag, since the next essay by Roger Beckwith ("Not in the Wisdom of Men") ironically argues on the basis of a highly questionable "critical" exegesis of 1 Corinthians 2 for a pre-critical understanding of the biblical text.

[4] Some of this material has already appeared in my "Exegesis and Spirituality: Reflections on Completing the Exegetical Circle," *Crux* 31 (1995) 29-35, which was the published version of the first of the Ongman Lectures noted above. These lectures were given again in somewhat altered form as the Huber Drumwright Lectures at the Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in October 1995.

[5] See my *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), especially the analysis of the word group in chap. 2.

[6] What this means, of course, is that much that has come under this rubric both in the secular world and in Christian history is much more Greek in its basic orientation than it is biblical. For a recent brief overview of a position

similar to mine, see Inagrace Dietterich, “What is Spirituality?” *The Gospel and Our Culture* 8/3 (September 1996) 1-3, 8 [repr. From *The Center Letter*, published by The Center for Parish Development, Chicago].

[7] For more detailed argumentation of many of these points, see my commentary on Philippians (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). In fact, some of the exegesis in the latter part of this section is lifted almost *en toto* out of the commentary, in part to illustrate the very points being argued in this essay.

[8] F. W Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians* (London: Black, 1959) 150.

[9] This has always struck me as an unusual “solution,” since it solves nothing, and only puts the problem back one remove from Paul. As I suggest in the commentary, this seems more like a vain attempt to exonerate Paul, since we cannot really imagine that Paul would have written differently from our “better selves.” That is, since we would have written it one way, therefore Paul also must write that way. But somehow it is perfectly all right to attribute what we deem “improper” on the part of Paul to “mindlessness” on the part of a redactor, who might rather have been the one whom we should suspect of more thoughtfulness.

[10] On this question see the introduction to my Philippians commentary (pp. 2-7) and the further bibliography found in n. 16 (p. 4).

[11] See esp. Gerald W. Peterman, “'Thankless Thanks': The Epistolary Social Convention in Philippians 4:10-20,” *TynB* (1991) 261-70.

[12] Here especially one needs to note the repeated phrase τα περι (κατα) μμων (εμε) (1:12, 27; 2:19, 23), which is precisely the stuff of letters of friendship. See the discussion in my Philippians commentary, p. 3 and n. 17 on 1:12.

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