

Imprisoned for the Glory of God:  
Considering Ryrie's Third Aspect of the  
*Sine Qua Non of Dispensationalism* – in Paul's Prison Letters

Wayne Slusser, Ph.D., Baptist Bible Seminary  
Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Clarks Summit University  
Clarks Summit, PA – September 14, 2017

### Introduction

“To God be the glory” is a phrase often used by evangelicals to express honor and/or praise to God.<sup>1</sup> Although this phrase may be more of a spoken cliché at times rather than truly giving honor to whom honor is due, Charles Ryrie saw it as an essential aspect of dispensationalism. In fact, he writes “the unifying principle of normative dispensationalism is doxological, or the glory of God, for the dispensations reveal the glory of God as He manifests His character in the differing stewardships given to man.”<sup>2</sup>

Paul's letters are *addressed to churches or individuals from the first century, as well as intended for specific occasions related to the original recipients.*<sup>3</sup> Basically, his letters responded to a need or issue existing within a church to correct or clarify doctrinal beliefs and exhort correct behavior; therefore, encouraging the readers as they faced everyday life.<sup>4</sup> Paul's letters

---

<sup>1</sup> Frederick W. Danker provides four main definitions for the term δόξα: 1. the condition of being bright or shining, brightness, splendor, radiance; 2. the state of being magnificent, greatness, splendor; 3. honor as enhancement or recognition of status or performance, fame, recognition, renown, honor prestige; and 4. a transcendent being deserving of honor, majestic being. (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 6th ed., ed. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, with Viktor Reichmann and on Previous English Editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 256-58).

Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida categorize δόξα in the following semantic domains: features of objects (glorious – 79.18), physical events and states (brightness – 14.49), power, force (manifestation of power characterized by glory – 76.13), status (honor or respect in relation to status – 87.4) and (high status or rank – 87.23), supernatural beings and powers (supernatural powers – 12.49), and geographical objects and features (regions above the earth – 1.15) (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, vol. 1 [New York: United Bible Societies, 1989]).

<sup>2</sup> Ryrie, Charles C. *Dispensationalism*, rev. & exp. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 93-94. He also states that the overall purpose to God's program is His own glory; that is, in and through His dealings with mankind, glorifying Himself is the underlying purpose of God in the world.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon D. Fee, Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 60. Also see William Arp's discussion regarding interpreting and preaching epistles (“Preaching the Epistles,” *JMAT* vol 17:1 [Spring 2013], 57-78).

<sup>4</sup> Paul was concerned with the life situation of his readers, but treated each situation as unique and important; thus, the structure and content of his letters vary. Marion L. Soards adds, “Paul wrote to address specific, problematic situations that existed in particular churches. He sought through letters to extend his influence in order to assure desired results, so that in every communication Paul always strives to build up the congregation addressed” (“The Life and Writings of Paul,” in *The New Testament Today*, ed. Mark Powell [Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1999], 88). William H. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr. agree, “Epistles are

follow the normal pattern of the Hellenistic letters of his day.<sup>5</sup> The typical pattern of the Hellenistic letter contains a threefold division: an opening, the main body of the letter, and closing. As one studies Paul's letters, it seems clear that he adopted the Hellenistic letter patterns of his day.<sup>6</sup> Understanding the letter format provides two advantages for the interpreter. First, the letter format provides clues to identify the structure so that the interpreter can locate the major letter sections (e.g. introduction, thanksgiving, body, etc.). Second, it assists the interpreter to identify possible relationships between the sections. For example, the thanksgiving section (typically introduced with a form of the verb, εὐχαριστέω) provides topics that Paul will develop later in the letter.

However, as theologians or scholars study and interpret Paul's letters, they will quickly see that he subtly altered the structure and content of a typical Hellenistic letter for his own purposes. These alterations reflect the unique Christian character of his letters. His focus was the original audience and how he could best relate to them. Due to the fact that each of Paul's letters are occasional, the interpreter must seek to understand the structure,<sup>7</sup> situation,

---

also the most 'occasional.' In other words, the authors wrote the epistles for specific occasions to address individual audiences who were facing unique problems" (*Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* [Nashville, TN: Word, 1993] 352).

<sup>5</sup> William Doty writes, "I argue . . . that in his letters a genre or subgenre was created, and that our task is that of identifying the stages and steps in generic construction. Instead of arguing that there is one clearly identified Pauline form, I argue that there is a basic understanding of structure by which Paul wrote, but that this basic understanding could be modified on occasion, and that the basic understanding itself was something that came into being only gradually" (*Letters in Primitive Christianity* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973], 21).

<sup>6</sup> For a primary discussion on the relationship between Hellenistic letter patterns and the patterns of Pauline writings see Peter T. O'Brien, "Letters, Letter Forms," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 550-53. For supplemental reading concerning this relationship see Ronald Russell, "Epistle as a Literary Form," in *The New Testament in Literary Criticism*, comp. and ed. Leland Ryken (New York: Frederick Ungar Pub., 1984), 75; Craig L. Blomberg, "The Diversity of Literary Genres in the New Testament," in *Interpreting the New Testament: Essays on Methods and Issues*, ed. David Alan Black & David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001), 279-85; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 11-19; Stanley K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Library of Early Christianity 5. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 20-57; Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity*, 1973.

<sup>7</sup> Rather than examining Paul's letters according to their epistolary character (e.g., Hellenistic letter patterns), some scholars interpret Paul's letters based on a rhetorical analysis. (see Frank W. Hughes, "The Rhetoric of Letters," in *The Thessalonians Debate: Methodological Discord or Methodological Synthesis*, ed. Karl P. Donfried and Johannes Beutler [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000], 199-215).

There are however, some problems to interpreting Paul's letters through ancient rhetorical categories. First, there seems to be somewhat of a problem in mixing the genre of speech and letter writing. Although both genres were readily used, they served two different purposes. Paul's letters are not speeches to be read in the courts or to serve as a persuasion device. Second, those who advocate a rhetorical approach assume Paul was learned in the ancient form of rhetoric of his day through the ancient rhetorical handbooks. This claim is not supported. There is no concrete evidence that Paul was trained in the rhetoric of his day. Third, the fathers of the early church, who had received rhetorical training, did not interpret Paul's letters from the perspective of rhetorical theory. Further discussion on this third point can be found in P. H. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul's Epistle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 167-203. The three points and others can be read in further detail in Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 69-77, Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 73-82, and Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*,

community, and circumstances being addressed. Therefore, it seems both important and necessary to consider Paul's prison letters, each one in its own right, to best discover how and why Paul uses δόξα ("glory") while imprisoned for the sake of the gospel of Christ.

In Paul's prison letters, he uses the term δόξα eighteen times.<sup>8</sup> This paper examines these eighteen uses with a twofold effort. First, to discover Paul's intent within the argument of each prison letter; that is, answering the question, what is its meaning (structure & syntax)? Second, to locate the position of these uses within the structure of Paul's prison letters; also answering, how is it related to the letter as a whole (synthesis)? In other words, when Paul uses δόξα what does it mean and why is it there?

### Ephesians

Paul's letter to the Ephesians is one of those books of the Bible that causes Christian believers to reflect on the glory of God because of his gracious doings on their behalf (e.g., God's calling, 1:3-6; the Son's redeeming, 1:7-12; the Holy Spirit's sealing, 1:13-14). Several scholars have classified Ephesians as one of the most influential documents ever written in the Christian church. It is considered the "quintessence of Paulinism."<sup>9</sup> Brown claims, "only Romans could match Ephesians as a candidate for exercising the most influence on Christian thought and spirituality."<sup>10</sup> At the same time, it is important to note that Paul wrote Ephesians to address matters that relate to believers in first century Ephesus.

It has been traditionally understood that Ephesians was written to the believers in Ephesus of Asia Minor.<sup>11</sup> However, it is not inconceivable that there were other churches in the

---

2d ed., 19-30. Stan Porter rejects the use of rhetorical devices in interpreting Paul. He writes, "There is, therefore, little if any theoretical justification in the ancient handbooks for application of the formal categories of the species and organization of rhetoric to analysis of the Pauline epistles" (Stanley E. Porter, "The Theoretical Justification for Application of Rhetorical Categories to Pauline Epistolary Literature," in *Rhetoric and the New Testament: Essays from the 1992 Heidelberg Conference*, ed. S. E. Porter and T. H. Olbricht [Sheffield: Academic Press, 1993], 115-16).

O'Brien in conclusion states, "Paul's letters, then, ought not to be interpreted 'through the grid of the ancient rhetorical rules', and the notion that 'this method better than any other holds the hermeneutical key that will unlock the true meaning of the apostle's writings' is seriously flawed. . . It is more appropriate that attention be directed to the apostle's own internal method of argument" (*Letter to the Ephesians*, 79-80).

<sup>8</sup> Only the noun form of δόξα is used in the prison letters; not the verb form δοξάζω ("I glorify"). The word δόξα does not occur in Philemon; only in Ephesians, Philippians, and Colossians.

<sup>9</sup> F. F. Bruce, "St. Paul in Rome. 4. The Epistle to the Ephesians," *BJRL* 49 (Spring 1967): 303.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York/London: Doubleday, 1997), 620.

<sup>11</sup> Scholars who hold to Ephesus as the destination for Ephesians include Clinton E. Arnold, Harold Hoehner (who mentions that this position is gaining support by Gnillka, Conzelmann, and Lindemann), and Ralph P. Martin. Harold Hoehner summarizes Ephesus as "a very influential city in Paul's day. Its influence both as a secular and religious center emanated to the other parts of the Roman Empire. It seems that Paul selected strategic cities from which the influence of the gospel would spread to the surrounding areas. Many cities such as Ephesus were places where the cross-pollination of ideas was present" (*Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002], 89). contra Klyne Snodgrass. He, on the other hand, agrees with the suggestion that Ephesians is a circular letter to be read in more than one place (*Ephesians*, The NIV Application Commentary, [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 21).

area in which this letter was intended.<sup>12</sup> Ephesians is a letter that urges believers, based on their union with Christ, to change their inner being and character in a radical way. It is a combination of theology (chaps. 1-3) and exhortation (chaps. 4-6). Paul, in a rather eloquent way, discusses God and his work, Christ and the gospel, life with God's Spirit, and the right way to live.<sup>13</sup> One of the more comprehensive statements about Ephesians is given by Peter O'Brien. He states,

[Paul] writes Ephesians to his mainly Gentile Christian readers, for whom he has apostolic responsibilities, with the intention of informing, strengthening, and encouraging them by assuring them of their place within the gracious, saving purpose of God, and urging them to bring their lives into conformity with his divine plan of summing up all things in Christ. Paul wants to 'ground, shape and challenge' his readers in their faith. In other words, the main purpose of his letter is *identity formation*.<sup>14</sup>

Simply put, Ephesians exhorts its readers to walk worthy of God's calling. Paul uses δόξα and its relationship to God, Christ, and believers, to emphasize that it is God's grace that favors the believer now and forever. Seven uses of δόξα occur either in the anthem of praise (1:3-14) or prayer (1:15-23 & 3:14-21) sections; while one use (3:13) is a historical reflection of Paul's sufferings that leads to his prayer in chapter three.

### Structure –

The first three uses are in Paul's anthem of praise, or eulogy (a declaration of the blessedness of God).<sup>15</sup> This eulogy section is Paul's way to encourage the Ephesian believers to offer praise to God by declaring God's blessedness (1:3) and establishing three grounds for it (1:4-6, 7-12, 13-14). Each of the grounds focus on a member of the trinity and each conclude with the refrain εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ ("to the praise of his glory," vv. 6, 12, 14).<sup>16</sup> There is a progression and explanation of God's eternal plan and purpose of the salvation blessings (e.g., election or call of the Father, redemption through the Son, and sealing by the means of the Holy Spirit). Paul's emphatic purpose for this section is simply to show the Ephesian believers that God's purposes in Christ and through the Holy Spirit deserve both meditation and adoration. Through this outpouring of adoration, Paul hopes to stimulate a response by reminding them of God's blessing on their life through their redemption.

---

<sup>12</sup> Hoehner states that Paul was in Ephesus on his third missionary journey and probably ministered for about two and a half years. He probably established many churches both in the city and in the outlying village areas (*Ephesians*, 79). Snodgrass speaks to this probability regarding multiple churches to whom Ephesians is addressed. He writes, "We may safely assume that the letter was a general letter to Gentile believers in southwestern Asia Minor and that it became identified with Ephesus as the most important city between Rome and Antioch. It is also possible that Ephesus was one of several cities to which the letter went" (*Ephesians*, 21).

<sup>13</sup> Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, 18.

<sup>14</sup> O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 57.

<sup>15</sup> Peter O'Brien calls this section of praise the *berakah*; extended eulogies or sections of blessing. These eulogies resemble some Old Testament examples of blessings such as Ps. 41:13; 72:18, 19; 106:48 ("Ephesians I: An Unusual Introduction to a New Testament Letter," *NTS* 25 [1978-79]: 504-16).

<sup>16</sup> William J. Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor U. Press, 2009), 4.

The following two uses (1:17 & 1:18) occur in Paul's first prayer in chapter one (1:15-23), containing the thanksgiving.<sup>17</sup> While the thanksgiving formula is in verse 16,<sup>18</sup> Paul introduces the thanksgiving section in verse 15 with a causal participle ἀκούσας τὴν καθ' ὑμᾶς πίστιν ("after hearing of your faith"), giving the reason Paul gives thanks.

The thanksgiving section signals three major themes of the letter. In verse 17, Paul introduces the content of the prayer using a ἵνα clause; while verse 18 introduces the purpose of the prayer εἰς τὸ εἰδέναι ὑμᾶς ("that you might know"). What Paul wants the believers to know is introduced by three interrogative clauses.<sup>19</sup> In both verses Paul utilizes δόξης to point the reader to praise the *glorious* qualities or attributes of God.

The final three uses of δόξα (3:13, 16, & 21) occur in relation to Paul's second prayer. The use in 3:13 indicates the situation of Paul (sufferings) and the benefit for believers (salvation – δόξα ὑμῶν). This leads to Paul's prayer (3:14-21). The other uses, 3:16 & 21 assist the reader in understanding the basis for glorifying God.

Paul therefore, uses two prayers. The first prayer connects with the eulogy (1:3-14), which praises the blessedness of God, and the second prayer responds to the theological message of 2:1-3:13,<sup>20</sup> which declares praise (δόξα) to God for his character and qualities. Using these two prayers, Paul calls on the Father to give wisdom and strength that the believers might know the power of their salvation to live for him.

---

<sup>17</sup> Paul begins the paragraph with Διὰ τοῦτο καὶ γὰρ ("Wherefore, I also" or "For this reason, I also") linking it back to the preceding paragraph (1:3-14). Scholars have characterized this section as one of the most formal elements in the Pauline letter. David W. Smetana for example, says that it "is indeed a miniature letter itself. It acts as a table of contents, giving a summary of what is to come, and is in essence a digest of the whole letter" ("The Thanksgiving Sections' Correlation with the Content of the Prison Epistles" [Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984; reprint, Theological Research Exchange Network, 001-0316, microfiche], 5); see also Roetzl, *The Letters of Paul*, 56-58.

<sup>18</sup> This normal pattern includes the verb εὐχαριστέω ("I give thanks"). Other thanksgiving sections in Pauline writings include Rom. (1:8ff.), 1 Cor. (1:4ff.), Phil. (1:3ff.), Col. (1:3ff.), 1 Thess. (1:2ff.), 2 Thess. (1:3ff.), Philemon (4ff.). If the pastorals are included then 1 Tim. 1:12ff. and 2 Tim. 1:3ff. open with χάριν ἔχω rather than εὐχαριστέω.

<sup>19</sup> The three things the Paul wants the believer to know are: (1) τίς ἐστὶν ἡ ἐλπίς τῆς κλήσεως αὐτοῦ ("what is the hope of his calling"), (2) τίς ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας αὐτοῦ ἐν τοῖς ἀγίοις ("and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,"), and (3) καὶ τί τὸ ὑπερβάλλον μέγεθος τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ εἰς ἡμᾶς τοὺς πιστεύοντας ("and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us who believe").

<sup>20</sup> The three paragraphs (2:1-10, 11-22, 3:1-13) contain theology. Paul discusses details related to the hope of his calling, passing from death to life (2:1-10); the riches of his inheritance, strangers to fellow heirs (2:11-22); and the greatness of his mighty power, as it strengthened Paul in his ministry and as he instructs them concerning the mystery of the church (3:1-13).

## Syntax –

Paul uses the refrain εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ (“to the praise of his glory”) throughout the eulogy section to emphasize the believer’s praise toward the Father; that is, the glory of the Father.<sup>21</sup> In the three occurrences, vv. 6, 12, and 14, Paul uses the genitive case to attribute this quality to God. The use in verse 6, however has another substantive (τῆς χάριτος) following δόξης.<sup>22</sup> Here Paul’s emphasis is on an aspect of God’s glory; that is, his grace, therefore making the object of praise God’s grace.<sup>23</sup> It is God’s gracious act on behalf of people that saves them (1:3-6).

In verses 12 and 14, the emphasis shifts to God’s glory as the object of praise. Specifically, in v. 12, Paul says that believers were made heirs, in order that they will praise his glory for the great plan of redemption through Jesus Christ (1:7-12). And in v. 14, Paul desires the readers to praise God’s glory because he has sealed believers through the Holy Spirit (1:13-14).<sup>24</sup> Therefore, the theocentric character of the passage (1:3-14), the work of the trinity bringing about blessings of salvation, ought to have as the ultimate goal a note of praise; hence Paul’s use of the refrain ‘to the praise of his glory.’ It seems that Hoehner’s definition of glory throughout this eulogy section as “the reflection of the essence of one’s being, the summation of all of one’s attributes”<sup>25</sup> captures Paul’s intent.

In verses 17 and 18, Paul uses δόξης in his first prayer (1:15-23) as an attributive genitive. As attributive, it specifies “an *attribute* or innate quality of the head substantive.”<sup>26</sup> In v. 17, Paul uses δόξης to describe a quality or characteristic of the Father (πατήρ), the fact that he is *glorious*. Thielman states that he is glorious because he is the origin and defining example of glory.<sup>27</sup> In v. 18, Paul uses another string of genitives (ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τῆς κληρονομίας

---

<sup>21</sup> Clinton Arnold states, “Paul leads his readers to the conclusion that the only proper way to respond to the incredible favor and love God shows to his people is by rendering praise to him, magnifying his glory” (*Ephesians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zonderan, 2010], 84).

<sup>22</sup> Frank Thielman indicates that Paul’s use of a “string of genitives slow the discourse and emphasize the grandeur or gravity of the thought. . . . Here God took pleasure in his primordial decision to adopt believers as his children, and he did this so that they might praise him for the magnificence of his grace” (*Ephesians* Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010], 53).

<sup>23</sup> See Arnold, *Ephesians*, 84; Larkin, *Ephesians: A Handbook*, 8-9; Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2016), 21-22; O’Brien, 104-05. Contra Hoehner who states the object of praise is God’s glory; “it is praise to God’s essential being, his glory, for his graciousness as seen in his acts of electing and predestinating” (*Ephesians*, 201-02).

<sup>24</sup> The genitive, δόξης, in vv. 12 and 14 is taken as an objective genitive; that is, the readers [someone] praises his [God’s] glory.

<sup>25</sup> *Ephesians*, 200. Christopher W. Morgan states, “In saving us, God displays his grace; and in displaying his grace, he brings glory to himself” (“Toward a Theology of the Glory of God,” in *The Glory of God* ed. Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010], 158).

<sup>26</sup> Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 86.

<sup>27</sup> Thielman states, “The glory that God displays is the splendor or brightness that is often characteristic of God’s power, authority, and honor in the OT and that he graciously shares with his people. As the benediction has shown, it is for the praise of God’s glory (1:12, 14), shown especially in his grace (1:6), that God has made his people heirs (1:12) and provided them with a future inheritance (1:14)” (*Ephesians*, 95).

αὐτῷ), much like the construction in v. 6, to once again slow the discourse and emphasize the glorious nature of God's inheritance. It is God's glory, then that is manifested among the believers; his inheritance. It is the inheritance that God will give to his people. Paul's prayer therefore, establishes God the Father as the one who gives (1:17), and does so as the glorious Father. God the Father is the source of all glory and power enlightening the eyesight of his readers. Verse 18 specifies what the believer is to know; that is, they are his and there is a future salvation for them.

The final three uses in Ephesians, occur in relation to Paul's second prayer (3:14-21). The use of δόξα in v. 13 is the only place in Ephesians where it's referent is not God; rather it is the believer. Here Paul explains that his sufferings, the fact that he is in prison, promote the believer's salvation/eternal life. In other words, the believer's salvation is the glory.<sup>28</sup>

In verses 16 and 21, Paul's second prayer, he desires that his readers are strengthened to know Christ's presence and love. The source and capacity (inexhaustible amount) in which this strengthening is to take place is by God's might; a representation and manifestation of the glory of God. Hoehner concludes, "In essence, he asks God to grant that forthcoming request according to the wealth of his essential being."<sup>29</sup> Paul concludes his second prayer with a doxology where the ascription of glory (δόξα) belongs to God, and God alone.<sup>30</sup> Glory is to be ascribed to God in and through the church, it is to be exclaimed by those 'in Christ,' and God's glory will have no end.

### Synthesis –

Paul begins and ends the first half of Ephesians (1:3-3:21) in similar fashion, ascribing praise and honor to God the Father. Other than the use of δόξα in 3:13, the seven other uses point to a manifestation of the display of an attribute of God's character (e.g., grace, wealth, and power) on behalf of believers and their new life in Christ, including salvation and sanctification. Therefore, giving opportunity for believers to ascribe credit to God alone for their new life and its blessings.

### Philippians

Paul's letter to the Philippians is personal. There are three basic ideas that help to summarize the thought of the letter. First, he expresses his gratitude to the Philippian church for the generous gift he received through their emissary Epaphroditus. Second, he challenges the Philippians to remain faithful both to a life that is representative in living out the gospel and a life faithful in sharing the gospel. Third, he addresses the issue of harmony and unity. The letter is written much like a conversation, where a shift in topics occurs often. Although shifts in topics provide some difficulty in establishing the structure of Philippians, the Greco-Roman letter structure of Paul's day is still evident throughout Philippians.

---

<sup>28</sup> Thielman states, "Paul's suffering for his readers is their glory because his faithful proclamation of the gospel, in spite of the suffering that his faithfulness entails, has led to their salvation (1:13) and to a partial experience of the 'glory' that one day will be theirs in full" (*Ephesians*, 222). Hoehner succinctly writes, "His [Paul] imprisonment was the glory which they enjoyed because they were now creatures in Christ" (*Ephesians*, 470).

<sup>29</sup> Hoehner, 477-78.

<sup>30</sup> Larkin indicates, "δόξα here refers to the honor and praise due him" (*Ephesians: A Handbook*, 66).

The letter's theme is often captured using the word *joy*. Though it is true that joy is one component/topic mentioned throughout the letter, it is probably better to see Philippians as a letter of encouragement for its readers to stand firm in the gospel and united in love; that is, live in light of the present and future hope of the gospel which produces joy and unity in all circumstances.

Much like Ephesians, Paul's use of δόξα relates to God, Christ, and believers. However, there is also a use that points to unbelievers. The uses of δόξα still communicate that God, and God alone, is to be ascribed praise and honor by all. There are six uses of δόξα throughout the letter. Three uses conclude sections of the letter that clearly show God is deserving of praise (1:11; 2:11; 4:20). Two uses show the relationship between the wealth of God and Christ for the benefit of the believer (3:21; 4:19); while the last use (3:19), relates to unbelievers.

### Structure –

Paul's first use of δόξα concludes the thanksgiving section (1:3-11) of his letter. This customary section found in first-century letter writing finds Paul giving thanks to God because of the gospel partnership that he and the Philippian church share (1:3-8). Paul also prays that the partnership would continue; namely their love would daily characterize the church's behavior (1:9-11). The second use also concludes an important section of Paul's letter; that is, the early Christian hymn (2:5-11) that honors and highlights Christ's humility and servanthood.<sup>31</sup> In both uses of δόξα, Paul's intention is to highlight and ascribe praise & honor to God.

The third and fourth uses of δόξα are in a section of warning (3:1-21). This section is part of the body of the letter. The use in 3:19 is the single use in Philippians that refers to unbelievers, those enemies of the cross of Christ, that are attempting to lead astray the faithful believers of the church of Philippi. According to Paul, the other use in 3:21 describes the future state of the believers' body; especially in contrast to those whose mindset is set on earthly things (cf. 3:19).

The last two uses (4:19, 20) are found in Paul's concluding section (4:10-20). Here he is grateful for the generosity provided by the Philippian church. In 4:19, δοξη indicates the location of God's riches; whereas δόξα in 4:20 serves as Paul's doxology to ascribe honor to God himself.

### Syntax –

Paul concludes two sections of his letter using a prepositional phrase of purpose that begins with εἰς. First, his thanksgiving and prayer section is concluded by ascribing a doxological praise to God (1:11 – εἰς δόξαν καὶ ἔπαινον θεοῦ).<sup>32</sup> This is similar to the wording in

---

<sup>31</sup> Both an explanation of the structure and classification of 2:5-11 as a hymn is beyond the scope of this paper. However, much ink has been spilled to unpack this section of the Philippian letter. See the following commentaries for bibliography and possible explanations: G. Walter Hansen (*The Letter to the Philippians* The Pillar New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 118-33); Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (*Philippians* rev. ed. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 43 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004], 92-98); and Peter T. O'Brien (*The Epistle to the Philippians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 186-87).

<sup>32</sup> Joseph H. Hellerman states, "Both δόξα and ἔπαινος functioned semantically in the context of Rome's honor culture, where public recognition and acclamation served as preeminent social commodities" (*Philippians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* [Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2015], 35).



Paul's anthem of praise and prayer found in Ephesians (cf. Eph 1:6, 12, 14; 3:21). The reader however, must keep in mind that Paul's use here, and elsewhere, is not out of habit; rather it is intentional. D. A. Carson reflects on its purpose; that is, "his [Paul's] prayer is offered up 'to the glory and praise of God' (1:11). . . . These are gospel prayers. That is, they are prayers offered to advance the work of the gospel in the lives of the Philippian believers. And, by asking for gospel fruit in their lives, the *ultimate* purpose of these petitions is to bring glory to the God who redeemed them."<sup>33</sup> In Philippians 1:11 Paul states that "God is the ultimate finality of the Christian life, and as such he alone is to be honored and praised by all. In exactly the same way that the life of Jesus and its influence on humankind were ordained for the glory of the Father (cf. Phil. 2:11), so the life of the Philippian community and its influence on its environs are also ordained for the glory and praise of God."<sup>34</sup>

Second, Paul's infamous Christian hymn illustrating the humility and servanthood of Christ also concludes with a purpose clause εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρὸς (2:11). The hymn clearly points to Christ's humiliation as a servant; a servant who is obedient all the way to the death on a cross. This last phrase summarizes the hymn; that is, "Paul carries the themes of status, honor, and prestige through to the end of the narrative, where, through the exaltation of Jesus, God finally receives the public recognition that is his due."<sup>35</sup>

The use of δόξαν, both in 1:11 and 2:11, conclude Paul's thought. The first (1:11) concludes Paul's prayer. It is a prayer on behalf of the Philippian community. His doxological expression gives God the credit for the Philippians' status as new creations, as they continue daily abounding in love, with pure motives and blameless service, and be filled with the fruit of righteousness. The second concludes Paul's hymn (2:11). His universal confession that Jesus Christ is Lord leads to the crediting of honor and prestige to God as the Father. Therefore, the daily acts of love by the Philippian believers and the humble service of Christ ultimately give honor to God.

As Paul continues his letter, warnings to the Philippian church regarding those who oppose Christ and the gospel are necessary (3:1-21). The use of δόξα in 3:19 is a nominative subject describing the opponents; unbelievers.<sup>36</sup> The opponents flaunted their social status; or they *gloried* in their activities. Carson states "they are endlessly drawn to creature comforts. They please themselves; their god is located no higher than their belly."<sup>37</sup> They valued things that are not worthy of honor; quite frankly, what they valued, was downright shameful. These opponents are 'enemies of the cross of Christ' and the Philippians were to imitate Paul.

Paul insists, rather, that the Philippians adopt the mentality that their position, their place of citizenship, is in heaven. And as a response, their lives are to represent and function as

---

<sup>33</sup> D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 22.

<sup>34</sup> Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians* rev. ed. Word Biblical Commentary, 34.

<sup>35</sup> Hellerman, *Philippians*, 125. See BDAG, 257-58. Danker classifies the use in Phil. 1:11 and 2:11 under honor as enhancement or recognition of status or performance, fame, recognition, renown, honor, prestige.

<sup>36</sup> Hellerman states "The church in Philippi was one among a number of nonelite religious associations in the colony that shared meals together as part of their regular meetings. The pagan gatherings were known to involve gluttony and immorality, including sexual license" (219-20).

<sup>37</sup> Carson, *Basics for Believers*, 92.

a community of heavenly citizens here on earth. In short, the Philippians are “to emulate those who eagerly await Jesus’ return, not those whose mind is on earthly things.”<sup>38</sup> It is Jesus who will then change the citizens’ body to “conform to his body of glory” (3:21).<sup>39</sup> In other words, it is a body that is spiritual, one that is guided perfectly by the spirit.<sup>40</sup>

Paul uses δόξης to contrast the present condition of the Philippian opponents with the future heavenly condition of the Philippians themselves. The opponents’ earthly focus runs contrary to the heavenly minded expectation for the Philippians’ earthly life; especially in light of their future physical existence to be changed by Christ.

Paul’s last two uses of δόξα are in his concluding thoughts to the Philippian church, 4:19 and 4:20. The concluding thoughts primarily speak of Paul’s gratitude for their generosity. Due to the Philippians’ gift, Paul’s thoughts are that God will supply/meet all the needs that they have, just as they met his. Paul’s careful use of the preposition κατά indicates that the Philippians’ needs will not only be met because they are coming *from* God’s wealth, but more importantly, *in proportion to* his wealth. The phrase ἐν δόξῃ follows τὸ πλοῦτος indicating where God’s riches are found; that is, “they exist ‘in the sphere of God’s glory,’ where God ‘dwells’ in infinite splendor and majesty.”<sup>41</sup>

In 4:20, Paul once again (cf. Eph. 3:21) ascribes credit that is due to God, and due to God alone. Hawthorne and Martin indicate “when people give glory to God or burst out in a doxological refrain, as here, they are not adding to God something that is not already present but are actively acknowledging or extolling God for what he already is.”<sup>42</sup>

### Synthesis –

Paul uses forms of δόξα to conclude three different sections of his letter (1:11; 2:11; 4:20); each of which insist the credit, honor be given to God. God deserves the credit for three things: (1) the Philippians’ salvation, and therefore a life that continues to represent this change, (2) Christ’s exaltation, and (3) God’s position, he is forever magnificent and splendid. He is due this honor because he meets the Philippians’ needs according to his wealth, and they will one day possess a body continually characterized and directed by the spirit. The use of δόξα in 3:19 expresses the unbeliever’s version of honor; it brings about shame. Like Ephesians, the manifestation of the display of God’s character (e.g., grace, wealth, and power) on behalf of believers and their new life in Christ, including salvation and sanctification, is Paul’s focus.

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>39</sup> O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, 464. He sees it as a genitive of quality, as does William Varner, *Philippians: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor U. Press, 2016), 89. Contra Hellerman, ‘the body belonging to his prestigious condition,’ 225.

<sup>40</sup> Hawthorne and Martin state, “Christ’s body of glory; i.e., they too will be spiritual bodies—not bodies consisting of spirit merely but bodies with a new determining or motivating force. They will be bodies brought forth and determined by divine, heavenly power. As a consequence, it will be possible to say of these bodies—these transformed people, rather—they are imperishable and immortal, models of glory and power” (233-34).

<sup>41</sup> Hellerman, 270. Varner claims, “This usage follows the example of the word in the LXX where it is often a synonym for God himself” (*Philippians: A Handbook*, 110).

<sup>42</sup> *Philippians*, 274.

## Colossians

Paul's letter to the Colossian church seems to place an emphasis on Christ. Although there is some form of what appears to be a set of *false teachings* (cf. 2:4, 8), Paul does not clearly describe the kind or content of these teachings. However, as Douglas Moo claims, "we hear Paul's response to the issues at Colossae as communicated to him by Epaphras. But we do not have direct access to the other side of the conversation. In this case, the crucial conversation partner is not the Colossians themselves but the false teachers."<sup>43</sup> This makes the circumstances behind the text, the context, difficult to ascertain.

It appears that Paul is dealing with a set of teachings where he deems it necessary to point the Colossian church "to the centrality of Christ and the finality of his authority."<sup>44</sup> Again, there are some statements regarding the false teachings throughout Paul's letter, most significantly in 2:8-23, but the specificity is just not there.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps Morna Hooker is correct in her article that Paul is not addressing any particular teachings; rather simply issuing warnings to the Colossian church regarding some potentially damaging teachings that could harm the church.<sup>46</sup> As a result, I think Moo has the best approach; that is, Christ is central and supreme. For the Colossians, and by application, every believer, Christ meets every spiritual need and it is not necessary to yield to alternative spiritual teachings.<sup>47</sup> As a result, Paul urges believers to live out their faith in Christ by worshipping him and abandoning a life of idolatry, building up God's people, and witnessing to the community.

The Colossians are encouraged to live out their faith because the work and status of Christ affords them this privilege. Once again, similar to Ephesians and Philippians, Paul's use of  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$  relates to God, Christ, and believers. There are four uses of  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$  in this letter. The first is in Paul's thanksgiving/prayer section (1:11). The following three uses are found in two different locations of the letter 1:27 (2x) and 3:4. All three uses communicate the benefits believers have as a result of their indwelling relationship with Christ.

### Structure –

Similar to Ephesians and Philippians, Paul uses  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$  in his opening thanksgiving (1:11). He is praying to God that the Colossians' walk will be worthy and pleasing to the Lord, and he includes God's attributive role in this process. Paul's following two uses of  $\delta\acute{o}\xi\alpha$  occur in the same verse (1:27); both pointing to benefits for the believer. This section (1:15-2:5) is a lengthy extension of Paul's prayer, and therefore, provides the reader with an *atypical* opening of the

---

<sup>43</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 49.

<sup>44</sup> David W. Pao, *Colossians and Philemon*, The Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 25.

<sup>45</sup> See Moo's discussion on the direct and indirect statements regarding the potential *content* of the false teaching to which Paul speaks, (*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 50-60. See also Peter T. O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1982), xxx-xxxviii.

<sup>46</sup> Morna D. Hooker, "Were There False Teachers in Colossae?" in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: Studies in Honor of Charles Francis Digby Moule*, ed. Barnabas Lindars and Stephen S. Smalley (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1973), 315-31.

<sup>47</sup> Moo, 52-53.

letter.<sup>48</sup> In this section, Paul explicates Christ's work (1:15-23) and explains his stewardship of the gospel ministry that God has entrusted to him (1:24-2:5). The fourth and final use of δόξα is in 3:4. This use of δόξα is a part of Paul's transitional paragraph (3:1-4) that both reflects on Christ as the focal point of the preceding chapters; and looks forward to the application and outworking of a relationship with Christ.

### Syntax –

Paul prays to God on behalf of the Colossians. The content of his prayer (1:9 – ἵνα of content) is followed by the purpose (1:10 – περιπατήσαι – inf. of purpose), that then leads to four adverbial participles that describe characteristics of walking worthy and pleasing to the Lord.<sup>49</sup> As Paul communicates these things, he stresses God's power that is in every believer in order to walk worthy; specifically, it is *God's glorious might* (τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ).<sup>50</sup> This parallels the use of δόξης in Ephesians 1:17 and seems to emphasize the same characteristic in both places; that is, God's power, authority, and honor. It is God's weighty, overwhelming presence that is signified here. Harris comments on the phrase (τὸ κράτος τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ) as it follows the prepositions ἐν and κατά. "The ἐν phrase denotes that with which the Colossians are empowered and the κατά phrase, that through which they are empowered: God's glorious strength (κράτος, -ους, τό) imparts the power with which they are endued or empowers them with a full measure of power."<sup>51</sup>

As Paul continues this section of the letter, two more uses of δόξης appear (1:27). Paul's intent here is to make known God's mystery; that is, the inclusion of the Gentiles into his plan, his people. He utilizes δόξης twice to describe those within God's plan (τὸ πλοῦτος – inclusion of Jews & Gentiles) and the future of God's plan. The first use of δόξης in verse twenty-seven is parallel to the use in Eph 1:18 (τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης) and is used adjectivally to describe God's riches; that is, they are glorious.<sup>52</sup> O'Brien describes glorious here as "the wealth of God pointing to the lavish bestowal of his blessings in Christ . . . the immense greatness of the mystery."<sup>53</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> I agree with Moo's assessment that Paul's opening section is beyond the typical limits of his introductions found in other letters. There is a complex and lengthy focus on Christ (*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 175).

<sup>49</sup> Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2013), 28; Constantine R. Campbell, *Colossians and Philemon: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor U. Press, 2013), 7-9.

<sup>50</sup> Taken here as a qualitative or attributive genitive, "glorious might," or "majestic power." Contra Moo, who due to his understanding, views δόξης to be more closely God-focused instead of relegating it to our English adjective function, states, "It might, then, be preferable to take the genitive as possessive: the strength that God supplies his people is in accordance with (and is the expression of) his own intrinsic glory" (98).

<sup>51</sup> Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 29.

<sup>52</sup> In his commentary, Moo continues to encourage readers not to weaken δόξης to a mere adjective. He insists that δόξης connotes the presence of God, not simply descriptive of God (*The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*), 156-57.

<sup>53</sup> O'Brien also contends that perhaps Paul employed δόξης (splendor) "to emphasize that this wonderful mystery partook of the character of God himself" (*Colossians, Philemon*), 86. Campbell contends "In the OT (LXX),

The second use of δόξης in verse twenty-seven describes the future of those who are included in God's plan. Those included in the mystery, namely here as the Gentiles, identifies them with their representative Christ. As a result, they have hope. Moo states, "Christ fully represents us. It is because of this that we can have *the hope of glory*, that is, the certainty that we will experience final glory. . . . Paul reminds us again that hope is tied to Christ, and to Christ alone."<sup>54</sup> It is an emphasis to a promise of a perfect life, or an assurance of all things right. Due to this privilege, O'Brien says that, "The wealth of God was lavished in a wonderful way. Christ therefore, was in them . . . indwelling in them"<sup>55</sup> thus incorporating them into the community of Jesus.

The final use of δόξη (3:4) assists in the theological transition from the believer's positional sanctification (Col 1-2, indwelling of Christ) to progressive sanctification (Col 3-4, living out of Christ in one's life). These verses (cf. 3:1-4) "reflect Paul's conviction that the life and destiny of the believer are inextricably bound up with Christ."<sup>56</sup> What is clear is that the believer's identification with Christ will one day be manifest (3:4). What significance does the prepositional phrase (ἐν δόξει) play in this context? When Christ is revealed as the Son of God, the sons of God will also be revealed (cf. 2 Thess 1:10). The final emphasis of Paul in verse 4 is the future manifestation in glory for the believer; a sharing in Christ's likeness (cf. Phil 3:20).<sup>57</sup> Pao notes that it "becomes a significant anchor for the Colossians as they seek to be faithful to the gospel in which they are called."<sup>58</sup> It is Paul using this context to motivate the Colossians toward Christlikeness, for one day they will be like him.

### Synthesis –

Paul uses forms of δόξα to emphasize aspects of Christ and his role with the Colossians. His Christology throughout the letter points to the sufficiency that is found in him for the believer's standing, current growth, and future glorification. It is God's power, through Christ, that Paul prays would be used to strengthen the Colossians in their current walk (1:11). The wealth of God graciously lavished on the Gentiles provides them with a right-standing in Christ, ultimately awaiting as a confident hope (1:27). Lastly, Paul motivates the Colossians with the reality that one day they will perfectly share in Christ's likeness (3:4). Life for the Colossians, therefore, ought to represent this change in position, their new life in Christ. As a result, God is due honor because he sufficiently meets the Colossians' needs according to his wealth.

---

the 'glory' and 'riches' of God are frequently held together (Gen 31:16; 1 Kgs 3:13; 1 Chr 29:28; Esth 1:4; 10:2; Ps 111:3; Prov 3:16; 8:18; 22:4)" (*Colossians and Philemon*, 25).

<sup>54</sup> Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 159.

<sup>55</sup> O'Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 87.

<sup>56</sup> Moo, 251.

<sup>57</sup> The dative use of δόξει most likely refers to the state of glory for the believer. Contra Campbell, manner ('in a glorious manner'), *Colossians and Philemon*, 50.

<sup>58</sup> Pao, *Colossians & Philemon*, 216.

### Observations Regarding Paul's Use of δόξα

Paul captures the glory of God in several distinct senses; and does so while suffering for the sake of the gospel. It is his suffering (imprisonment), the proclamation of the gospel, that benefits others' standing before God; ultimately for the glory of God. Paul utilizes δόξα to emphasize God and the manifestation of his workings on behalf of the believer, the believer's salvation, sanctification, and glorification; and does so through a depiction of God's acts by himself, through Christ, and by means of the Spirit.

First, δόξα points to a manifestation of an attribute of God's character (e.g., grace, wealth, and power). God is the source of power, authority, and honor (Eph 1:17; 3:16) that enlightens the eyesight of his readers, giving them knowledge, and strengthens the believer's inner man. God possesses majestic power (Col 1:11); his weighty, overwhelming presence, empowers the believer to walk worthy and pleasing to him.

Second, δόξα displays God's character. God deserves the credit for the believer's status as new creations (salvation). The display, or expression of the life of the Christian community, daily abounding in love (sanctification), has as its goal the offering of praise to God, reflecting his being; all of who he is. Therefore, providing Christians with the privilege to ascribe credit to God alone (Phil 1:11). God displays his grace in saving the believer (Eph 1:6, 12, 14; Col 1:27a), displays his wealth by blessing and meeting the needs of his people (Eph 1:18; Phil 4:19), and displays his status/prestige in sending the Son to the cross, resurrecting him, and exalting him (Phil 2:11). This universal confession that Jesus Christ is Lord leads to the crediting of honor and prestige to God as the Father.

Third, δόξα appropriately responds to God's character. Believers worship, or give honor and praise that is due him (Eph 3:20; Phil 4:20). They actively acknowledge God for who and what he already is. This is an appropriate response of God's people, for God is the source and strength of his people.

Last, δόξα represents hope for the believer. The believer has assurance he will one day be guided perfectly by the spirit (Phil 3:21), be included in God's future perfect plan (Col 1:27b), and be revealed with Christ, a sharing in Christ's likeness (Col 3:4).