

Philippians 1:27-2:11: *The Mind of Christ*

1. In 1:28, Paul speaks of “opponents.” There are two theories of who these might be. The first and most obvious holds that they are the Judaizers Paul actually warns of in chapter 3, who want to impose circumcision upon Gentile converts. The second theory is a bit more subtle, noting that Paul often uses language of civic responsibility as in 1:27, or 3:17-20, where Paul says that “our citizenship is in heaven” (in contrast to those who set their minds on “earthly things”), or even when Paul refers to Jesus as our Lord and Savior (4:20), using terminology reserved for the Emperor. In this second theory, the “opponents” are the cult of the Emperor and loyalty to Rome.

Fee says,

The use of this metaphor is a brilliant stroke. Not only does it appeal to their own historic pride as Philippians, but now applied to their present setting, it urges concern both for the mission of the gospel in Philippi and especially for the welfare of the state, meaning in this case that they take seriously their “civic” responsibilities within the believing community. Their being of one mind and heart is at stake; disharmony will lead to their collective ruin. [78]

Does the choice of opponents matter to your reading of Philippians? How does Paul’s perspective impact your view of what it means to be a citizen of the U. S.?

2. In this passage Paul declares open war on their opponents, in contrast to the previous passage, where he greets them and their harassment with a monumental “meh.” What’s different? How does Paul tell them to prevail over their opponents?
3. Central to this letter is an assumed view of the gospel and what it means in the lives of Paul and his readers. See the accompanying chart. What other aspects of life would you add? How would you update the second column for our modern cultural context? And where do you find the 3rd and 4th columns most helpful or lacking?

≻Ω≼

Fun fact: In 1:28, Paul encourages the Philippians not to be “frightened” by their opponents. “The (somewhat rare) word translated *frightened*, used sometimes to refer to ‘spooking’ horses, probably here carries the nuance ‘be intimidated’ or ‘be thrown into consternation.’” (Fee, 79)