

Reflections On The "Gentleness" Paul Calls For In Philippians 4:5

By Paul O. Wendland

Philippians 4:5: "Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near."

τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις. ὁ κύριος ἐγγύς.

On the face of it, this passage seems to present few difficulties. That perspective changes, however, as soon as a person takes a closer look at τὸ ἐπιεικὲς. What can Paul mean by using a word that one commentator called "difficult to pin down with precision"?¹ Besides the NIV's "gentleness," various English translations render it with "magnanimity," "moderation," "forbearance," and "reasonableness." Not only do these suggested translations cover a fairly wide semantic range, but there is also the problem of the abstract nature of this encouragement. What precise attitudes or actions is Paul calling for here?

More than anything else, at issue is the question of whether or not to take τὸ ἐπιεικὲς as a "power word." To put it another way: in this context, does this word connote the type of attitude that should be displayed by someone who enjoys a superior status?

The most influential advocate of this point of view was Adolph von Harnack who argued that ἐπιείκεια in the Septuagint always meant "die Huld des Herschers," "the goodwill of a sovereign."² Following his lead, Priesker argued in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* that the word's usage in the Septuagint always implied the possession of power: "God in His heavenly greatness as Ruler, the king who should be His earthly reflection, and all who have God's gift and commission, have this disposition of mildness *just because they exercise sovereign sway*"³ (emphasis mine). Priesker also included the passage under discussion as an example of this same usage. Christians "by virtue of their heavenly calling" can exercise clemency in the same way that an earthly ruler might.⁴

In his notes on the New Testament, Martin Franzmann wrote this about our passage:

[τὸ ἐπιεικὲς] signifies the gracious condescension of a superior, one so sure of his strength and greatness that he is above the competitive scramble that makes men selfish and cruel; such the Christians are as heirs of the world to come, and as such they are to act to all sorts and conditions of men.⁵

This view did not go unchallenged, however. In 1965 Ragnar Leivestad published an influential article in the *New Testament Studies* in which he pointed out that von Harnack's view on the Septuagint's usage had to allow for at least one exception. From its use in Wisdom 2:19, "it is obvious from the context that the 'righteous' is by no means regarded as a man of authority and power. On the contrary, he seems to be a representative of the poor (cf v.10)...[a man] delivered up to the whims and wishes of the rich and powerful ἀσεβεῖς."⁶ Leivestad goes on to point out that in 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul uses ἐπιείκεια in combination with πραΰτης. He argues that πραΰτης should shape our understanding of ἐπιείκεια, since it is the more common of the two, "[Together] they describe a gentle, humble, and modest attitude as a general Christian ideal, not the magnanimity and generosity of a sovereign."⁷

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995, p 406.

² As quoted by Ragnar Leivestad in "'The Meekness and Gentleness of Christ,' II Cor. X. 1," *NTS* 13, p 157.

³ Herbert Priesker, *TDNT*, Vol. 2, p 589.

⁴ Priesker, *loc. cit.*

⁵ Martin H. Franzmann, *Concordia Bible with Notes*, Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1971, p 375.

⁶ Leivestad, *op. cit.*, p 158.

⁷ Leivestad, *op. cit.*, p 160.

It is this view that has generally prevailed in the theological dictionaries and commentaries written since. In particular, most shy away from ascribing any connotations of status in Philippians 4:5. Ideas of status, they say, apply only to ἐπιείκεια's use in New Testament passages such as Acts 24:4 and 1 Peter 2:18.

What is the responsible exegete to make of this? Perhaps the two points of view are not as far apart as they seem. I would contend that Paul writes these words in a letter where he has spent a great deal of time reminding the Philippians of their high status in Christ. Yet, as I he so often does, Paul re-values and transforms the significance of terms that he uses so that believers "hear" them in a way that runs counter to their former, earthly point of view - in this case, society's notions of what it means to be great in status or powerful in resources. To establish these points, we will first reexamine how this word was used in the ancient world, both in religious and in secular contexts. We will then take a closer look at Paul's usage in 2 Corinthians 10:1 and Philippians 4:5, passages that seem to be very much related in thought.

When used without the article, the adjective ἐπιεικής, -ές⁸ can describe something as being suitable, fair, gentle, or good. The corresponding noun ἐπιείκεια (of which τὸ ἐπιεικὲς is the equivalent) conveys the idea of reasonableness, fairness, equity, or moderation. Aristotle in particular emphasizes the idea that τὸ ἐπιεικὲς could be "just and better than some [kinds of] justice."⁹ When the punishment demanded by law did not seem fit to the crime, a person of equity would not insist on the letter of law being carried out. Since any law at best was only a general prescription meant to fit most known cases, it could not possibly anticipate every new case that might arise. When its application in a particular instance seemed too harsh - and thus to exceed the intent of the lawgiver - a fair-minded person would soften the penalties in the interests of a higher justice.

From its association with law and judgment, we can understand how the word was also seen as an attribute or virtue of those in power. Julius Caesar, for example, had a temple built in honor of his divine "Clemency."¹⁰ After he had won his phase of the Roman revolution, he wanted to be known "for his leniency...since he had, in fact, pardoned many who had waged war against him."¹¹ In a similar vein, Seneca defines clemency as "moderation in one's ability to seek vengeance or the mildness of a superior over against an inferior in meting out punishments."¹² Thus "no one could ever imagine a virtue more befitting a ruler than clemency."¹³ As a matter of fact, in Roman political logic, so closely was clemency associated with high status and great power, that if someone accepted it, he thus acknowledged the superiority of the one offering it. Compelled by this logic, Cato the Younger in defeat rejected Julius Caesar's offer of clemency, saying he'd rather die:

Οὐ βούλομαι δὲ τῷ τυράννῳ χάριν ἔχειν ὑπὲρ ὧν παρανομεῖ...παρνομεῖ δὲ σώζων ὡς κύριος ὧν αὐτῷ δεσποζεῖν οὐδὲν προσῆκεν

I do not wish to be obligated to that tyrant for his unlawful conduct. He flouts the law in saving - as if he were a lord - those over whom it is not at all proper for him to be the master.¹⁴

It therefore seems well-established that in some secular contexts, for someone to exercise τὸ ἐπιεικὲς connotes his high status and power as well as denoting his lenient attitude.

⁸ Probably derived from εἶοικα, to be likely, to seem likely, to be fitting or reasonable.

⁹ δίκαιον καὶ τινὸς βέλτιον δικαίου (i.e., one that insisted on the letter of the law), Arist. *Eth. Nic* 1137a, 34.

¹⁰ Ἐπιείκεια, Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 57.3.

¹¹ ἐπὶ τῇ πραότητι...καὶ γὰρ ἀφήκε πολλοὺς τῶν πεπολεμηκότων πρὸς αὐτὸν, Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 57.3.

¹² *Clementia est temperantia animi in potestate ulciscendi vel lenitas superioris adversus inferiorem in constituendis poenis.* Sen. *Clem.* 2.3.1.

¹³ *Excogitare ne quicquam poterit, quod magis decorum regenti sint quam clementia* Sen. *Clem.* 1.19.1; see also 1.3.3: *Nullum tamen clementia...magis quam regem aut principem decet.* "Clemency suits no one more than a king or a princeps."

¹⁴ Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 66.2.

This is not to deny, however, that in other contexts the word can have a more general meaning. Lysias, for example, puts the word in the mouth of Mantitheus to refer to the all-around *propriety* of his public conduct.¹⁵ Isocrates pairs it up with *χάρης*, and in a context where he's speaking about how the Lacedaemonians should behave towards Athenians, he says, "But if we must disregard [larger] *issues of gratitude* (τὰς χάριτας) and *fairness* (τὰς ἐπιείκειας)...in order to speak about the precise point at issue (τὸν ἀκριβέστατον)."¹⁶ In these and in other places, *ἐπιείκεια* would refer broadly to that kind of behavior one would consider appropriate, given the circumstances.

In the Septuagint, *ἐπιείκεια* is most often associated with God, kings, and prophets, as Priesker has pointed out.¹⁷ We can get a firmer grasp on its usage if we look at a few specific examples in context. In Psalm 86:5 (ψ 85:5) *ἐπιεικῆς* appears in company with *χρηστός* and *πολυέλεος* as a translation for the Hebrew adjective פָּחַד (forgiving, ready to forgive). In 2 Maccabees, Maccabeus and his followers plead to the Lord to spare them future ills. Yet if they should sin, they ask, "ὕπ' αὐτοῦ μετὰ ἐπιείκειας παιδεύεσθαι καὶ μὴ βλασφήμοις καὶ βαρβάροις ἔθνεσιν παραδίδοσθαι" (10:4).¹⁸ The idea of the exalted LORD graciously choosing not to treat his people as their sins deserve is therefore clearly attested.¹⁹ In the Wisdom of Solomon, the writer praises this attribute of God in even broader terms. God's clemency is seen as the restrained use of his Almighty power:

ἡ γὰρ ἰσχὺς σου δικαιοσύνης ἀρχή,
καὶ τὸ πάντων σε δεσπάζειν πάντων φείδεσθαι σε ποιεῖ...
σύ δὲ δεσπάζων ἰσχύος ἐν ἐπιείκειᾳ κρίνεις
καὶ μετὰ πολλῆς φειδοῦς διοικεῖς ἡμᾶς,
πάρεστιν γάρ σοι, ὅταν θέλῃς, τὸ δύνασθαι. (12:16, 18)

Your strength is the first principle of your righteousness.
The fact you are master of all makes you sparing of all...
Though you are the absolute master, you judge with clemency,
And with great forbearance you direct us,
You have complete power to do what you please.

The same two meanings - a readiness to forgive, a restraint in the use of power - are found when the *ἐπιείκεια* of kings is under discussion. It keeps company with words like *ἡπιότης* (gentleness: Esther 3:13b), *φιλανθρώπως* (benevolent, kindly: 2 Maccabees 9:27), *τιθηνέω* (to cherish, to foster: 3 Maccabees 3:15), and is set in opposition to phrases like *μὴ βία δόρατος* (not with force of arms: 3 Maccabees 3:15) and *μὴ τῷ θράσει τῆς ἐξουσίας ἐπαιρόμενος* (not to exalt myself in the arrogance of power: Esther 3:13b).

The most interesting passage in the Septuagint - and perhaps the most pertinent to Philippians 4:5 - is the one used by Leivestad to refute von Harnack: Wisdom 2:19. Without a doubt, in this context, the one called

¹⁵ Lys. 16.11 καὶ τὰ μὲν ἴδια οὕτως διώκηκα περὶ δὲ τῶν κοινῶν μοι μέγιστον ἡγοῦμαι τεκμήριον εἶναι τῆς ἐμῆς ἐκεικείας, ὅτι τῶν νεωτέρων ὧσοι περὶ κύβους ἢ πότους ἢ τὰς τοι τοιαύτας ἀκολασίας τυγχάνουσι τὰς διατριβὰς ποιούμενοι, πάντας αὐτοὺς μοι διαφόρους ὄντας. "I've managed my personal affairs as I've just stated, concerning my public behavior, I believe that the greatest proof of my proper conduct is this, that the kind of young men who waste their time drinking, playing dice and in other kinds of loose behavior you will notice are all at odds with me."

¹⁶ Isoc. *Panerg.* 4.63.

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, p 589.

¹⁸ "to be disciplined by him (front-shifted for emphasis) with clemency, and not to be handed over to foreign nations."

¹⁹ Other examples would be: 1 Samuel 12:22; 2 Maccabees 2:22; Ezra 9:8; Odes of Solomon 7:42; Baruch 2:27; Daniel 4:27.

upon to exercise *ἐπιείκεια* is not outwardly in a position of sovereign power. The reference occurs in the middle of a tirade against the righteous. The writer is speaking in the character of the worldly wicked who have declared their purpose in life:

καταδυναστεύσωμεν πενήτα δίκαιον, μὴ φεισώμεθα χήρας μηδὲ πρεσβύτου ἐντραπῶμεν πολιὰς πολυχρονίους, ἔστω δὲ ἡμῶν ἡ ἰσχὺς νόμος τῆς δικαιοσύνης, τὸ γὰρ ἀσθενὲς ἄχρηστον ἐλέγχεται.

Let us lord it over the poor righteous man, let's not spare the widow, nor show respect for the grey-headed old age of the elder. Let might be our right, since weakness has shown itself to be useless (Wis 2:10,11).

What makes this passage so interesting is the way the wicked in their positions of power have declared themselves to have the very *opposite* values of clement rulers who use power properly. Questions of leniency, self-restraint, and a proper regard for the weak have no place in their system. Equity is thrown to the winds as they arrogantly determine to exercise dominion in any way that serves their own interests.

Continuing in this same vein, the wicked then propose to lie in wait for the righteous since his life is a walking indictment of theirs (vv. 12,14,15). In particular, they want to test his claims of being a child of God (παῖδα κυρίου: v. 13) who has God for a father (ἀλαζονεύεται πατέρα θεόν: v. 16). These are, of course, claims of possessing a moral superiority. The logic of the wicked is simple: if the righteous man really is a son of God, God will come to his aid and deliver him from the power of his opponents (v. 18). It is inconceivable to them that such claims to high status could be true if there were no power to back them up. So they then decide:

ῥῆβρει καὶ βασάνῳ ἐτάσωμεν αὐτόν, ἵνα γνῶμεν τὴν ἐπιείκειαν αὐτοῦ καὶ δοκιμάσωμεν τὴν ἀνεξικακίαν αὐτοῦ, θανάτῳ ἀσχήμονι καταδικάσωμεν αὐτόν, ἔσται γὰρ αὐτοῦ ἐπισκοπὴ ἐκ λόγων αὐτοῦ.

"With outrage and torture let's examine him to find out about his forbearance, and let's put to the test his ability to withstand evil. Let's condemn him to a shameful death, for his words suggest there will be some kind of divine visitation for him (Wis 2:19,20).

Leivestad puts it well when he says, "*ἐπιείκεια* must here signify...a humble, patient steadfastness, which is able to submit to injustice, disgrace, and maltreatment without hatred and malice, trusting in God in spite of it all."²⁰ On the other hand, we must disagree with him when he dismisses all questions of status in connection with the writer's use of the term. He says, "The righteous is by no means regarded as a man of authority and power...It is only in mockery that [the wicked] allude to his calling himself a child or a son of God."²¹

He misses the point. Here we have the paradox of an individual who has high status, but no earthly power. He may not be regarded as a person of stature with men, but God sees him differently. The righteous man's claims are true, and while there is no promise that they will be vindicated in this life by a demonstration of God's power, their hidden truth will be made evident in the age to come.²² Then ἀναλάμψουσιν ... κρινοῦσιν ἔθνη καὶ κρατήσουσιν λαῶν (they will shine forth...they will judge the heathen and exercise power over the nations, Wis 3:7,8). Thus he is the opposite in every way of the wicked man who possesses earthly power but does not exercise it with any virtue or self-restraint.²³ The wicked man's hopes and purposes will dissolve like smoke in the wind (Wis 5:14).

²⁰ *op. cit.* p 158.

²¹ *ibid.*

²² Note especially 1:22, where the writer says the wicked don't understand "μυστήρια θεοῦ." That is: their error is not only that they mock the claims of the righteous, but that they fail to recognize their hidden truth.

²³ See Wis 5:13.

We now move on to the passage which is the linchpin of Leivestad's argument against von Harnack's idea of *ἐπιείκεια*'s connoting a superior status. In 2 Corinthians 10:1, Paul begins a new section of his letter by saying:

Αὐτός δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς διὰ τῆς πραΰτητος καὶ ἐπιείκειας τοῦ Χριστοῦ, ὃς κατὰ πρόσωπον μὲν ταπεινὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἀπὼν δὲ θαρρῶ εἰς ὑμᾶς.

I myself, Paul, I urge you by the meekness and forbearance of Christ, I who am lowly when present among you, but am bold to you when away.

That Paul's person and authority are at issue here is evident in his piling up of four distinct references to himself at the beginning of the section. Paul's enemies in Corinth have attacked Paul, accusing him of being something less than a full-fledged apostle of Christ. The basis for those charges seems to have been Paul's less than impressive physical demeanor as well as "a certain deficiency in Paul's oratorical powers."²⁴

Paul's appeal is to the *ἐπιείκεια καὶ πραΰτης* τοῦ Χριστοῦ, reminding his readers that he is exercising his apostolic authority in precisely the same way Jesus displayed his power when he lived among us. Even more, "Christ's humiliation and exaltation are reflected in the fate of his apostles who are united with him in his death and resurrection."²⁵ Far from being evidence of his less than apostolic authority, Paul's seeming weakness is a decisive demonstration that Christ is at work in him. As Christ himself told him: *ἡ γὰρ δύναμις ἐν ἀσθενείᾳ τελεῖται* (2 Co 12:9). Leivestad concludes:

As the power of God was revealed through the weakness of the crucified Lord for the salvation of the world, so the life and power of the risen Christ are being revealed through his weak apostles in the midst of humiliations and afflictions.²⁶

To which we say, "Amen!"

We have quoted Leivestad so extensively because much of what he writes is very good. Where he goes too far, however, is when he seems to be operating with an idea of Christ's "self-emptying" that includes Christ divesting himself completely of all his authority and power as God. "The paradox of the revelation of the Lord does not consist in the mildness and generosity of his reign, but in his coming in the shape of a poor and lowly human being."²⁷ Or, as he puts it later, in using the words *ἐπιείκεια* and *πραΰτης*, "Paul is alluding to the fact of the kenosis, the literal weakness and lowliness of the Lord."²⁸ For Christ's self-emptying to be a "fact," according to him, our Lord could no longer possess the power of God. If this were true, then Leivestad's conclusion would also surely follow: Paul's appeal to Christ's *ἐπιείκεια* and *πραΰτης* cannot include any connotations of high status or great power. While he was visibly present on earth, he did not have any. "He came in the shape of an ordinary, simple man."²⁹

We, of course, reject this idea. Even a cursory reading of the Gospels is enough to make clear that Christ lived among us as more than "an ordinary simple man." A major purpose of his miracles was to demonstrate the reality of his claim to be God's Son. What makes his descent into death so powerfully moving, in fact, was that during every single moment of his sufferings, he was *willing* himself to be weak so that he could be obedient to his Father's will. At any time he could have called on his Father for twelve legions of angels (Matthew 26:53). His royal clemency can be seen in this that at every insult, every slap, every cuff, every blow, he was exercising his forbearance and his self-restraint. Though he was God's Son, he allowed himself to be treated as if he were a

²⁴ Leivestad, *op. cit.*, p 162. See 2 Corinthians 10:10, "ἡ δὲ παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενῆς καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐξουθενημένος."

²⁵ *ibid.*, p 163.

²⁶ *ibid.*, p 163.

²⁷ *ibid.*, p 161.

²⁸ *ibid.*, p 165.

²⁹ *ibid.*, p 161.

worm (Psalm 22:6). Though he existed in the form of God, he became "obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:8).

In a similar way, when Paul refers to the meekness and forbearance of Christ as the model for his own apostolic demeanor, he's not denying that Christ *has* authority, nor is he abdicating his claim to be an apostle.³⁰ He's simply stating that he wills to be weak in order that the Lord can be strong in him with a strength that comes only through the gospel of Christ's sufficient grace (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

As we pointed out earlier, Leivestad's article on *ἐπιείκεια* has had a great influence upon later interpreters and their ideas regarding Paul's use of the word. Yet a key part of his conclusion rests on the notion that Paul's reference to Christ's *ἐπιείκεια* in 2 Corinthians 10:1 cannot connote superior status since, in Christ's days on earth, his kenosis rendered him "literally" weak and lowly. Since Leivestad was mistaken at this point, we may legitimately wonder if von Harnack, Franzmann, and Priesker were so very much off the mark after all in their analysis. Specifically, when Paul addresses the Christian community in Philippians 4:5, is he merely urging upon them a generalized virtue of human gentleness, or does he mean to include in his use of the word associations of high status, yet of a kind that is content to be weak in the world?

Philippians 4:5 comes toward the end of a letter in which Paul has once again been busily at work transforming the worldview of God's people by helping them understand all the rich implications of the gospel for their own particular situation. Unlike some of Paul's other letters, Philippians doesn't seem to have been occasioned by any serious problems in the congregation. False teachers are warned against, more as a possible future threat than out of any present necessity. Though self-assertive behavior on the part of some of the congregation's leadership may be causing problems of disunity, these don't seem to have been anywhere near as divisive as similar problems in Corinth. Far more, it seems, Paul wants to express in a friendly way the joy and fellowship he shares with the Philippians in Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:5). They had recently sent him a gift of support by the hand of Epaphroditus for which Paul wants to thank them. In addition, Paul wants to let them know what his own situation is, and how his trial before Caesar is progressing.

For our own purposes, a key consideration is that the congregation seems to have been undergoing persecution. As Paul puts it, "It has been granted to you . . . not only to believe in [Christ] but to suffer for him" (Philippians 1:26). Their position, in other words, is not dissimilar to that depicted for the righteous sufferer in Wisdom. It is not difficult to imagine the reasons for their suffering.

Macedonian Philippi was a colony of Roman army veterans relocated after playing their part in the civil wars. Possessors of the *ius italicum*,³¹ Philippi's citizens enjoyed "all the rights and privileges awarded to any Roman born in the imperial city."³² That the people of the city were proud of their heritage is clear from Acts 16:20,21, where some of them justified their seizure of Paul and Silas by saying, "Οὗτοι οἱ ἄνθρωποι ἐκταράσσουσιν ἡμῶν τὴν πόλιν, Ἰουδαῖοι ὑπάρχοντες καὶ καταγγέλλουσιν ἔθνη ἃ οὐκ ἔξεστιν ἡμῖν παραδέχεσθαι οὐδὲ ποιεῖν Ῥωμαίοις οὖσιν." Not only do we see obvious race pride in the final phrase Ῥωμαίοις οὖσιν (since we are Romans), we also note racial hostility against "foreigners" like these Jews (Ἰουδαῖοι ὑπάρχοντες), who were advocating customs no self-respecting Roman could countenance.

We don't have to suppose that the Philippian congregation was composed entirely of Roman citizens to believe that anyone who cast his lot with the community of Christians in Philippi would suffer a great loss of status. The mere fact that they had now become strict monotheists would cause them to suffer at least the suspicion of their neighbors. In many cases it must have gone further. For reasons of conscience, they could not now participate in the community's sacrifices to their false gods - an action which would brand not only atheistic, but also against good order in society. Even worse, their lack of attendance at communal sacrifices to the health of the emperor could be construed as a sign of a treasonous spirit. They were opening themselves up

³⁰ One might simply look at 2 Cor 10:2; 10:11; 12:6, 12:12, and 12:21 for evidence of this.

³¹ "The *Oxford Classical Dictionary* calls this "the highest privilege obtainable by a provincial municipality" (2nd edition, p 559).

³² "Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*. Waco: Word Books, 1983 170.

to insults, harassment, lawsuits, false accusations, loss of property, and worse - all the behaviors that are inspired in a dominant majority when they recognize a despised minority is living among them.

But Paul's topic is more broad than simply that of helping these Christians cope with persecution, along with all the losses that it brings. He wants them to persist in the constant struggle of revaluing³³ their old world so that they continually see it in a new way. He wants to strengthen bonds of fellowship in a new community³⁴ that bases status not on outward markers of nationality, race, wealth, power, or even deeds of public virtue, but on the hiddenness of being found in Christ *μὴ ἔχων ἄλλαν δικαιοσύνην ἐκ νόμου ἀλλὰ τὴν διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ* (Philippians 3:9). "In Christ" believers have a place to stand that transcends all these earthly considerations.

Notice, for example, how Paul specifically rejects all claims of status that he might have made for himself *ἐν σαρκί*: his lifelong membership in God's covenant people, his Hebrew-speaking heritage, his attachment to the strictest sect of the Jews, his zeal as a Pharisee, his righteous conformity in an outward way to the demands of the Torah (3:6,7). All these were aspects of his past life that marked him out as a man of distinction. All these things he has lost for the sake of Christ (3:8). But, having gained Christ, the loss of all these things is no loss at all. They have all been re-valued, and he now assesses their worth as *σκύβαλα* (3:8).

Yet being in Christ brings with it an entirely new and even more exalted status: believers are *ἅγιοι ἐν Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ* (1:1), the true and spiritual *περιτομή* (3:3), in whom God himself is at work *καὶ τὸ θέλει καὶ τὸ ἐνεργεῖν ὑπὲρ τῆς εὐδοκίας* (2:13). They are *τέκνα θεοῦ...μέσον γενεᾶς σκολιᾶς καὶ διεστραμμένης* (2:15). They shine out in the world *ὡς φωστῆρες* (2:15). The possession of this exalted status, however, does not mean believers are suddenly infused with a power and glory that will make them stand out in the eyes of the world. While they strain forward in hope of a future glory, they live now in a *κοινωνία τῶν παθημάτων* (3:10; 1:29; 4:14). They exist in lowliness (3:21). They become slaves (2:21). They approach death (2:30; 3:10). The paradox of this life-in-death existence - willingly embraced and endured in Christ - constitutes their shining forth before the world as God's own (1:20, 27,28).

So far as their relationship to each other is concerned, being in Christ means Christians are joined by a bond that is deeper than any conceivable earthly tie. "Being found" in Christ means losing your previously self-centered existence (1:21; 3:8). Christ lived *for* me so that by faith he could live *in* me. The more I trust in him, the more his life, his death, his righteousness matter to me. And the less do my own. Christians are united in him so that they long for one another with the compassion of Christ (1:8). Their attitude toward each other is determined by the mind of Christ (2:5). In him, they are one in spirit, in love, in joy, and in their struggle for the faith (1:27, 2:2, 2:17).

In a concrete way, Christ's life shows itself in believers who determine to do nothing in their mutual relationship *κατ' ἐριθείαν μηδὲ κατὰ κενοδοξίαν ἀλλὰ τῇ ταπεινοφροσύνῃ ἀλλήλους ἡγούμενοι ὑπερέχοντας ἑαυτῶν* (Philippians 2:3). Selfish ambition, striving for glory - these are all attitudes from the old life "whose end is destruction" (3:19). When Christ is our all in all, we humbly consider other Christians as superior to ourselves, and we willingly put our lives at their disposal, just as Christ did for us. Since we find our hope, our joy, our glory, and our righteousness in him, we fear no loss in our own status by making ourselves slaves to one another in obedience to God's will. In Christ, our status as God's children is perfectly safe (2:4-10; 3:21).

It is in this spirit that Paul urges Euodia and Syntyche to be reconciled to each other (4:2). Paul understands this other-worldly, "in-Christ" ethic runs counter to their natural (and sinful!) inclinations. In honest humility, he realizes that he himself hasn't yet reached perfection in his own life (3:12). But true life in Christ

³³ Notice how he prays that they be able *δικιμάζειν...τὰ διαφέροντα* - test (we might almost translate here 'discern') the things that (really) matter (Philippians 1:10).

³⁴ Paul highlights their new *κοινωνία* in 1:5, 1:7, 2:1, 3:10, 3:20, and 4:14.

never gives up by letting itself sink down to the world's level. It rather presses on, aspiring to "win the prize for which God has called us heavenward" (3:14).

It is also in this spirit that Paul urges them all to rejoice "in the Lord," and let their forbearance be recognized by all people (τὸ ἐπιεικὲς ὑμῶν γνωσθήτω πᾶσιν ἀνθρώποις). As should be clear enough by now, virtues for Paul don't float around as airy abstractions in some Platonic space. They have all been brought down to earth in Christ: realized in him, received in him, empowered by him. We have no reason to suppose, therefore, that the ἐπιείκεια καὶ πραΰτης τοῦ Χριστοῦ to which Paul had appealed in 2 Corinthians 10:1 should be of any different nature than τὸ ἐπιεικὲς which he calls for here from the entire community.

The context of this word of encouragement is general enough to apply both to relationships within the community and to those between believers and the world. It naturally flows from what Paul has been saying to Euodia and Syntyche. If rifts within the community of faith become known to outsiders, they can only assume that things are the same in the πολίτευμα of heaven as they are in the πολίτευμα of the world. Outsiders will conclude that people still compete for power, honor, and glory whether they call Caesar or Jesus "Lord." But when believers let the life of Christ be seen in them through their selfless love for one another, their humble service, and their willingness to give up their own self-interest in favor of someone else's (Philippians 2), they give powerful testimony to the truth that the Lord is near.

Also, as members of the community deal with insults, troubles, and persecution from those on the outside, their willingness to bear these sufferings with a calm serenity is a mighty witness to the unbeliever. Believers know that no torment can touch the life they have in Christ. As citizens of heaven, they confidently expect their Savior to come to bring them home. Whether they live or die, the Lord is near. Both the status they enjoy as citizens of heaven and the power they have in Christ remain theirs, though it is covered up in outward weakness. Content to be weak, they will live from that hidden status and demonstrate to all an open-hearted generosity, a ready willingness to forgive, and a magnanimity that seeks no revenge.

Just as the virtue of ἐπιείκεια becomes embodied in Christ, so we would expect it to be present in a demonstrable way in the life of his apostle. Paul can say συμμηγᾶί μου γίνεσθε (3:17) just as easily as he can say τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. When we consider Paul's example in this letter, demonstrations of this paradoxical ἐπιείκεια are exactly what we do see. Paul informs the Philippians that some Christians with impure motives were preaching Christ "to stir up trouble for me while I am in chains" (Philippians 1:17). Paul's response? He remains unperturbed. He does not lash out, even though they are clearly trying to get at him. He simply lets it go by saying, "What does it matter? The important thing is that in every way . . . Christ is preached" (Philippians 1:18).

Similarly, one might expect Paul to dwell more on the threat he was facing from his trial. From an earthly perspective, Paul could only helplessly wait for its outcome. The emperor Nero held Paul's life in his hand. Yet with the regal calm of someone who does not depend on Caesar's clemency for his life, Paul says, "What shall I choose? I do not know. . . I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far" (Philippians 1:23). His own feelings aside, he realizes that to remain "is more necessary" for his fellow believers. Since he is more concerned about other people's interests than his own, he is content to remain in the body and under the cross (Philippians 1:24,25).

The paradox of a Christian's ἐπιείκεια is one of a "spacious generosity"³⁵ displayed in humble - even desperate - circumstance. It is the paradox of Christ. It is the life of Christ lived large within us, and is a mightily attractive power for those outside the believing community. Too often churches become known for their in-fighting and mean-spiritedness. God help us to be known for our ἐπιείκεια instead!

³⁵ Martin Franzmann, *op. cit.*, p 36.