

The Opponents in Philippians

MGVHoffman

So who are these opponents?
Questions to keep in mind:

- Are they in Philippi **or** at Paul's place of imprisonment **or** anywhere in general?
- Jewish **or** Gentile?
- Christian **or** non-Christian?
- 'Judaizers' **or** libertines?
- Is Paul in competition with them **or** sympathetic to them **or** dismissive of them?
- Is there just one group **or** a variety of opponents?

How are the opponents described?

- 1.15-17
Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. ... They proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment.

Where
Phil and other
Jew/Gentile
?
Xn/non-Xn
Xn
'Judaizer'/libertine
?
Relation to Paul
antagonistic rivals

How are the opponents described?

- 1.27-28
Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel,²⁸ and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation.

Where
Phil
Jew/Gentile
?
Xn/non-Xn
non-Xn
'Judaizer'/libertine
?
Relation to Paul
hostile

How are the opponents described?

- 2.20-21
I have no one like [Timothy] who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.²¹ All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Where
Phil and other
Jew/Gentile
?
Xn/non-Xn
Xn
'Judaizer'/libertine
?
Relation to Paul
antagonistic rivals same as 1.15-17

How are the opponents described?

- 3.2
Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of those who mutilate the flesh!

Where
Philippi? & other
Jew/Gentile
Jew
Xn/non-Xn
Xn?
'Judaizer'/libertine
Judaizer
Relation to Paul
hostile!

How are the opponents described?

- 3.18-19

For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears.
¹⁹ Their end is destruction; their god is the belly (κοιλία); and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things.

Where
Philippi? & other
Jew/Gentile
Jew?
Xn/non-Xn
non-Xn?
'Judaizer'/libertine
Judaizer?
Relation to Paul
hostile same as 3.2?

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Conclusions?

Proposals:

- Xn Judaizers and libertines (Bruce, Martin, Beare, Lightfoot, Jewett, Fee, etc.)
- Xn Gnostic libertines promoting circumcision (Schmithals)
- Jewish (non-Xn) missionaries (Klijn) – Matthew 23.15

Conclusions?

- Claim to be "perfect"
- Strict upholders of the law (except Schmithals)
- Are Christians (except Klijn)

Conclusions?

- Representatives of a perfectionist ideal with Gnostic features (Marxsen)
- Jewish Xn Gnostics or gnosticizing Judaizers (Bornkamm)
- Representatives of a nomistic divine man Christology (Gnilka)
- Syncretists who link circumcision with Hellenistic sacramental ideas (Fuller)
- Jewish Xn missionaries preaching law-based perfection as part of radicalized spiritualistic eschatology typical of early Xn gnosticism (Koester)
- Xn missionaries (Jew or Gentile) who preach circumcision and law observance for Gentiles (Osiek, ~O'Brien)

Conclusions - MGVH

- Claim to be Xns
- Advocate circumcision
- Stress righteousness and perfection based on observance of the Law
- >> Claim power and glory (and hence also critical of someone like Paul who suffers and is humble)

What about 3.18f?

... their god is the belly (κοιλία);
and their glory is in their shame (αἰσχύνη) ...

Romans 16.17f.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. ¹⁸ For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites [=belly/κοιλία], and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple-minded.

Cf. Phil 2.21: All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

What about 3.18f?

... their god is the belly (κοιλία);
and their glory is in their shame (αἰσχύνη) ...

1 Cor 12.23

... and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members (ἀσχήμων) are treated with greater respect.

Conclusions?

How similar / different are these opponents from the opponents of Paul in Acts 15?

Now some men came down from Judea and began to teach the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." When Paul and Barnabas had a major argument and debate with them, the church appointed Paul and Barnabas and some others from among them to go up to meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem about this point of disagreement... But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, "It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses."

Conclusions?

Two groups...

- Xn proclaimers in competition with Paul (1.15-17; 2.20-21)
- 'Xn' "enemies of the cross" (1.27-28; 3.2, 18-19)

... who *may* be the same