

THE PRESENCE OF “HIGH” CHRISTOLOGY IN THE LETTERS OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

by

JASON EAGLEN

(Under the Direction of William Power)

ABSTRACT

The Nicean/Chalcedonian conception of Christ is the fullest expression of “high” Christology, according to the parameters set forth in this study. Does Paul accord with such thinking in his letters? A careful reading of certain portions of Paul’s letters seems to demonstrate that these documents do exhibit some form of a “high” Christology. Though Paul’s conceptualizations of Christ do not precisely accord with the dogmatic formulations proclaimed by later ecumenical councils, he nevertheless seems to have subscribed to a Christology in which his imagery, allusions, and theological formulae adumbrate the High Christology of Nicea and Chalcedon. In short, it appears that for Paul, Jesus is the divine mediator between God and humanity, so that “God might be all in all.”

INDEX WORDS: Paul, Jesus, Apostle, 1 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, Christology, Judaism, Eschatology, Apocalypse, Apocalyptic, Pharisee, Resurrection, Israel, Covenant, Christ, Son, Suffering Servant, Davidic King, Messiah, Pseudepigraphy

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DEDICATION

With great love and gratitude I dedicate this thesis to my beloved wife and dearest friend, Amy, whose patience, strength, and inspiration have been integral to the completion of this project and the fulfillment of my dreams.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study is the result of a question raised while reading the letters of Paul the Apostle. “Mainstream” Christian orthodoxy understands Jesus, as the Son of God, as *homoousios* (of the same substance as the Father),¹ and both fully human and fully divine.² Did Paul comport to such understandings of Jesus, or did he adhere to a conceptualization of Christ in which Jesus is indeed favored and exalted by God, but is nevertheless a created human? In other words, what kind of Christology did the Apostle hold?

In order to deal with questions of Christology, it is important to define the parameters within which such a discussion will take place. “High,” or “low” Christological designations are only useful as qualifiers if one first establishes the boundaries of such descriptions. For the present discussion, these boundaries will be largely based on a model employed by Bart Ehrman. Though other models of Christological definition are certainly valid, Ehrman’s seems to be the most viable option upon which to base this discussion because it is temperate, free of severe polarities, and offers a broad enough range of meaning in which to classify Paul’s Christology, while minimizing eisegetical readings of the Apostle. Based on Ehrman’s model, then, “high” Christology here is defined as one in which the Son is portrayed as fully divine, who existed in eternity past, and who was a participant in the creation of the universe. In contrast, “low”

¹ Council of Nicaea, 325CE

² Council of Chalcedon, 451CE

Christology here is defined as one in which Jesus is portrayed as a created human who, although he is exalted upon his resurrection, is in no way equal to God.³

Based on these definitions, it is a fair assessment to say that the Nicean/Chalcedonian conception of Christ is the fullest expression of “high” Christology. Does Paul accord with such thinking in his letters? The answer is not at once clear. After all, Paul makes clear distinctions between Jesus and “God” through his use of the designations, *Kyrios* and *Theos*, respectively.⁴ Furthermore, though Paul repeatedly mentions Jesus’ exaltation, he likewise often treats Jesus as subordinate to God.⁵ Finally, though Paul certainly ascribes him kingship, he seems to suggest that Jesus’ reign as the Christ is temporary.⁶ Given these facets of Paul’s thought, as indicated in his epistles, it seems then that he espouses a “low” Christology.

This view, however, is complicated by other Pauline characterizations of Christ. For example, Paul calls Jesus the “Wisdom of God” and “the image of God.”⁷ Similarly, Paul seems to indicate that the Son preexisted in a divine capacity prior to becoming a human.⁸ Finally, Paul seems to suggest that the Son cooperated in creation.⁹ These characterizations blur the Pauline distinction between God and Jesus to the point of demanding that any assertion that Paul holds a “low” Christology be reconsidered.

³ Bart Ehrman, *The New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169. As indicated, the definitions employed in this paper are based on Ehrman’s model, but are not exactly his. Ehrman defines “high” Christology as one in which Jesus is portrayed as fully divine, while “low” Christology is one in which Jesus is human and nothing more. Furthermore, Ehrman employs a third category, which he calls “high and low” Christology, in which Jesus is regarded in the same way as a Hellenistic divine man like Apollonius of Tyana, wherein he has certain divine attributes, but there is no sense that he was a participant in creation or that he existed in eternity past. The reason these designations were blended and reduced from three to two for this discussion is that it is virtually impossible to find any scholar who holds that Paul ascribed *no* divinity to Jesus.

⁴ “God” has been put in quotations here because although many modern translations and commentaries understand Paul’s use of *Theos* to refer to God the Father, such a characterization is most likely anachronistic, especially given the fact that when Paul means to call God, “father,” he often uses the term “πατήρ” (see, for instance, Phil 2:11).

⁵ 1 Cor 15:28 and Phil 2:11

⁶ 1 Cor 15:24

⁷ 1 Cor 1:24; Col 1:15

⁸ Phil 2:6-8

⁹ 1 Cor 8:6

It is important to seek a resolution to the problem of Paul's Christology, because such an investigation might yield valuable insights not only about the history of the Apostle himself, but of the earliest Church in which he was an active participant. Recent scholarship, however, has yet to definitively affirm where Paul's Christology stands. Scholars such as Paul Molnar, Richard Bell, and Teresa Okure tend toward defending a "high" Pauline Christology. On the other hand, scholars such as Adela Yarbro Collins and John Miller seem to prefer reading Paul as though he holds a "low" Christology. In order to display some of the possible merits and shortcomings of adopting either a "high" or "low" Pauline Christology, each of these scholars will be briefly examined in turn.

Paul Molnar exhorts theologians to learn from Karl Barth that perceptions regarding Christ should not be pursued from experiential or ideal origins, but from a simple recognition of Christ's Lordship.¹⁰ According to Molnar, idea-based Christology leads to what Barth termed, "Docetic Christology," while experience-based Christology leads to, "Ebionite Christology."¹¹ Molnar asserts that either of these instances of confession of the deity of Christ actually speaks only to the power of human ideas or human experience.¹² Following Barth, Molnar declares that Jesus' uniqueness is in no way contingent upon the community in either sense in order for it to be true and valid.¹³

What is noteworthy about Molnar's exposition of Barth's theology as it concerns Pauline Christology is in the manner in which he regards the entire New Testament canon. Like Barth, Molnar assents to the notion that the New Testament bears witness to the idea that Jesus is the

¹⁰ Paul D. Molnar, "Some Dogmatic Implications of Barth's Understanding of Ebionite and Docetic Christology," *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2000, 2000), 151

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, 152

eternally begotten Son of the Father.¹⁴ Furthermore, Molnar relates Barth's notion that the New Testament defies giving any credence to an impression that Jesus is merely exalted to deity or appeared among humanity only as a symbol of divinity.¹⁵ Molnar emphasizes this point by noting Barth's understanding of the way the canon regarded resurrection. Against theologians who contend that the resurrection somehow constituted or *earned* Jesus' being as the eternal Son, Molnar, following Barth, states that the resurrection *discloses* Jesus' personage as the Son of God, specifically God who has entered history in order to save humanity from sin, suffering, evil, and death.¹⁶

Molnar documents some of the most notable ways Barth's Christological reading of the New Testament challenges the interpretive efforts of other scholars. For example, Molnar notes how Barth's insistence upon beginning any Christology from the point of recognizing Jesus as the Son of God conflicts with the experience-based, Ebionite reading of scholars like Paul Knitter, who supports John Hick's conclusions concerning Christ, which render him as one through whom God can be encountered, but not the only one.¹⁷ Likewise, Molnar notes how Barth's method disagrees with the idea-based, Docetic reading of the New Testament by scholars like Gordon Kaufman, who holds that Christian recognition of Christ's deity merely represents a projection by a community onto a man who simply suffered for others.¹⁸ Molnar contends that either view subverts God's grace, and should therefore be abandoned.¹⁹ Thus, Molnar believes

¹⁴ Ibid., 155

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 159; italics added

¹⁷ Ibid., 163

¹⁸ Ibid., 166

¹⁹ Ibid., 173

that only through a “high” Christological reading of the New Testament, including the Pauline corpus, can a theologian achieve a proper understanding of who God is for humanity.²⁰

Richard Bell likewise promotes a “high” Christological reading of Paul, stressing the idea that Christ alone, as the pre-existent and incarnate Son of God, can stand in the place of humanity as a sin offering.²¹ Bell makes this conclusion based on his reading of Romans 8:3. In his exegesis of this passage, Bell translates *περὶ ἁμαρτίας* as “a sin-offering,” in the same sense as it is found in the LXX.²² Bell then notes how a sin offering in levitical tradition does not simply remove sins but is actually a salvation event which brings renewal to the Israelite.²³ According to Bell, however, Paul concluded that levitical sacrifices did not atone for sins, because he believed that God in Christ made Christ’s death the supreme sacrifice, therefore eclipsing all previous forms of cultic sacrifice, including those of animals or even humans, due to the inherent sinfulness of humanity.²⁴ In other words, Bell asserts that Paul perceives a Jesus who necessarily *must* be the pre-existent Son of God, for no other being is qualified enough to assume the place of sinful humanity in issues pertaining to divine/human reconciliation.

Teresa Okure explores this notion that Jesus must necessarily be the Son of God as well. By exploring Colossians, whose authorship she prefers to attribute to Paul, Okure contends that Paul’s statements concerning Christ’s defeat over the “enslaving” spirits of the world are possible only because he perceives Christ to be a co-partner with God in the creation of the

²⁰ Ibid., 174

²¹ Richard Bell, “Sacrifice and Christology in Paul,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 53, no. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 23

²² Ibid., 5-6

²³ Ibid., 8

²⁴ Ibid., 25, 26

world.²⁵ Okure notes how Paul renders Jesus as preeminent in all things, because he is the source of all creation, and the firstborn of the dead.²⁶ It is this status as firstborn of the dead in which Okure sees the greatest significance for believers. Drawing upon ancient notions that creation reflects the glory of God, Okure seems to imply that God will not let his creation suffer from enslaving powers, including death, but instead desires its liberation from these inimical forces.²⁷ Such an implication can certainly be construed as consonant with other Pauline texts.

Looking to the hymn in Colossians 1:15-20, Okure states that the invisible God who acts in creation is “visible and touchable in the person of Jesus.”²⁸ She proceeds to interpret this “fullness of the deity” which dwells in Christ as being the medium by which humanity can reach God—that is, hear, see, and touch God.²⁹ Believers access this divinity through baptism, and thus share in the divine victory over inimical, fear-inspiring powers, and also share in the divine life. In other words, through baptism, the believer is incorporated into the same divine, creative, victorious body of Christ, and transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of the Son.³⁰ Thus, Okure concludes that the hymnic passage in Colossians is Paul’s attempt to remind the Colossian believers of their lofty status in Christ.³¹ Okure concludes, like Bell and Molnar, that Paul understands Jesus in a “high” Christological sense, for the benefit of humanity.

Not all scholars subscribe to the notion that Paul insisted upon a “high” Christology, however, as Okure, Bell, and Molnar do. For example, Adela Yarbro Collins disagrees with the idea that Paul ascribed pre-existence to Christ. Analyzing the “hymn” of Philippians 2:6-11 for

²⁵ Teresa Okure, “In Him All Things Hold Together,” *International Review of Mission*, vol. xci, no. 360, 2002, 63, 67, 69

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 67

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68 (referencing Ps 8), and 69

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*, referencing Col 2:9

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 69

³¹ *Ibid.*, 71

its liturgical significance, Collins carefully examines Philippians 2:6. Collins alludes specifically to the word *ἀρπαγμός*, over which scholars debate whether it should be understood as indicating a sense of *res rapta* or *res rapienda*. Bearing in mind that *res rapta* indicates that Christ was equal to God from the beginning, and that *res rapienda* signifies that Christ refused to try and steal equality with God, as an arrogant ruler might, Collins opts for the latter usage.³² She justifies this choice because of the plot requirements she perceives in the climax of vv. 9-11, declaring that Christ's final, exalted state must be higher than his initial state.³³ Thus, though Collins ascribes exaltation to Jesus, she nevertheless assigns a "low" Christology to Paul, given the parameters set forth above.

John Miller likewise reads a "low" Christology in Paul. In his review of Don Capps', *Jesus*, Miller reveals his "low" Christological preference. In this review, Miller disputes Capps' assertions that Jesus grew up to a mother who was raped when she was betrothed, and that he was reared, though not adopted, by Mary's husband, Joseph, who refused to do the things for Jesus that the Talmud requires a Jewish father to do.³⁴ In seeking to discredit these claims, Miller speaks of Paul, and in this reference, his perception of Paul's Christology becomes clear.

Addressing the issue of Jesus' paternal caregiver, Miller states there is compelling evidence to support the traditional idea that Joseph was in fact his father.³⁵ He begins his argument by noting how the virgin birth accounts of Matthew and Luke are not consonant with the rest of the New Testament.³⁶ He augments this claim by referencing Paul, taking note of the fact that Paul never mentions a virgin birth, which he would have certainly referred to, had he

³² Adela Yarbro Collins, "Psalms, Philippians 2:6-11, and the Origins of Christology," *Biblical Interpretation*, vol. 11, no. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 366

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ John Miller, "Review of *Jesus*," *Pastoral Psychology* vol. 50, no. 6 (Human Sciences Press, Inc., 2002), 410-11

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 411

³⁶ *Ibid.*

known of it. Furthermore, says Miller, Paul's description of Jesus as being "descended of the seed of David" in Romans 1:3 precludes any possibility for a virgin birth.³⁷ Thus, Miller, approaching Paul's Christology from a psychological-historical angle, determines that Paul's conceptualizations of Christ do not allow for pre-existence with the Father, for he has a human father. In other words, based on the boundaries outlined above, Miller, like Collins, assigns a "low" Christology to the Apostle.

As this sample of current scholarship shows, there is no consensus regarding Paul's Christology as of yet. However, an earnest attempt ought to be made to discern this facet of Paul's thought. It is believed that such an attempt, should it prove successful, would serve to further illuminate the Apostle's life and theology, as well as provide a much needed window into the history of at least a segment of the earliest Church. This project thus endeavors to further such an investigation, by presenting evidence to support one kind of Christological reading of Paul over another.

A careful reading of certain portions of Paul's letters seems to demonstrate that these documents do not promote a "low" Christology, but rather exhibit some form of a "high" Christology. Though Paul's conceptualizations of Christ do not precisely accord with the dogmatic formulations proclaimed by later ecumenical councils, he nevertheless seems to have subscribed to a "high" Christology, in which his imagery, allusions, and theological formulae adumbrate the High Christology of Nicea and Chalcedon. In short, it appears that for Paul, Jesus is the divine mediator between God and humanity, so that "God might be all in all."³⁸

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ *1 Cor* 15:28

This study seeks to demonstrate this Pauline understanding of Jesus by examining key Pauline texts that speak to his Christological conceptions. This study will examine 1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 2:5-11, and Colossians 1:15-20. Because scholars do not typically regard Colossians as an “undisputed Pauline letter,” a large section of this study will be dedicated to showing that it may in fact be genuinely Pauline. Upon careful analysis of these portions of the Pauline corpus, it is hoped Paul’s Christology will be eminently clear.

CHAPTER 2

PAUL'S CHRISTOLOGY IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15

Introduction

Though 1 Corinthians 15 is well researched and studied because of its lengthy exposition regarding resurrection, another important issue raised in this chapter is Paul's conception of the relationship between Jesus Christ and God. In 1 Corinthians 15:21-28, Paul goes to great lengths to describe both the chronological and hierarchical order of Christ's office and rule, which will conclude once Christ has handed the kingdom over to his God and Father, whereby the Son will be subjected to the Father. This is not problematic in a discussion pertaining to Paul's Christology, because it coheres well with a "low" Christological understanding. What makes these verses problematic, however, is seen later in the chapter, where Paul gives Jesus Godlike characteristics, thus complicating a "low" Christological verdict. For example, in verse 45, Paul labels Jesus a "life-giving spirit." Thus, this chapter elicits certain important questions. For example, if Jesus is a life-giving spirit, is he the same spirit who gave life to Adam in Genesis? If he is the same spirit as recorded in Genesis, how is he subject to God? Is he not God himself? If Paul regards Jesus as God, does this mean that Paul is a monotheist? If Paul considers himself a monotheist, even after penning these verses, what do these verses reveal about Paul's Christology?

A careful reading of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians shows that Paul's words in chapter 15 are not contradictory, but are instead a coherent and logical proclamation of who humans are, who Christ is, and who God is. 1 Corinthians 15 is therefore a treatise on

relationality, whereby God is God, man is man, and Jesus is both God and man. In other words, Paul demonstrates that his conception of Christ is complex and well-developed, and this conception is reflected in his kerygma of Christ. In short, Paul sees in the risen Jesus God revealed in a way that fulfilled the ancient hopes of Judaism, as Paul perceived them.

Mention should be made here concerning certain Jewish tendencies of thought in the first century. Possibly due in large part to the persecution and occupation Israel suffered between the reign of Antiochus IV³⁹ and the first century, with only a brief respite of national independence during the reign of the Hasmonean Dynasty⁴⁰, there was at least a segment of Jewry who adopted apocalyptic eschatological expectations, among which included: (1) a deliverer of Israel, who was possibly either a human king in the line of David or a cosmic ruler, (2) national independence, (3) the recognition of Israel's God by the Gentiles, (4) the overthrow of the enemies of God's people, be they human/political enemies or cosmic enemies such as death or evil, (5) a possible resurrection of all people or only the righteous elect to some kind of life beyond death. Various combinations of these expectations are repeatedly articulated in Jewish apocalyptic literature, which seems to have flourished from around 200BCE to 100CE.⁴¹

³⁹ Some of the atrocities said to have been sanctioned by Antiochus (ruled 175-164 BCE) include: setting up a statue of Zeus in the Temple, executing people who observed the Sabbath, executing mothers who circumcised their sons, executing Jews who adhered to dietary strictures, and burning Torahs. It is believed that Antiochus commissioned these activities in the name of uniting his realm under one Hellenistic religion. See 1 Macc 1:41-64.

⁴⁰ Michael G. Bard, *The Jewish Virtual Library* (www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org, 2006). It is generally agreed that the Hasmonean Dynasty ruled Judea independently from 134 BCE to 63 BCE, when John Hyrcanus II sought the help of the Roman, Pompey, to depose his brother, Aristobulus II, whereby Israel became a vassal of Rome.

⁴¹ See Chapter 3 of Martinus C De Boer's, *The Defeat of Death: Apocalyptic Eschatology in 1 Cor 15 & Rom 5* (Great Britain: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), for an outstanding record of various Jewish apocalypses and accompanying analyses. Additionally, see David Noel Freeman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. I, "Apocalypses and Apocalypticism," by Adela Yarbro Collins, et. al. (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 279-292, for a concise summary of Jewish apocalyptic literature and its attendant religious, political, and eschatological implications. Finally, see Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1953), 78-92. This section includes a detailed exposition of Jewish apocalyptic literature, first-century Jewish eschatological expectations, and the differences between Jesus and Paul in their treatments of the Messianic Kingdom they both expected.

Additionally, it should be noted that though scholarship cannot be certain, due to the dearth of primary data, one sect of Jewry among those who appear to have adopted a number of these Jewish apocalyptic tendencies in thought were the Pharisees, who may have emerged during the Hasmonean era and who seem to have had certain eschatological expectations, including (1) a belief that some kind of stringent Torah observance (as they interpreted it) would either act as a preparation for God's cataclysmic overthrow of God's enemies, and/or act as a requisite into the new kingdom ushered in by this overthrow (2) that this new kingdom would be accompanied or inaugurated by some kind of resurrection of the dead.⁴²

Paul claims to have been a Pharisee⁴³, but given the strained relationship he appears to have had with the Jerusalem Church⁴⁴ and his numerous attacks on the Law⁴⁵, this statement of his cannot easily be taken at face value. Still, there is some need to have a basic understanding of what seems to most likely be Paul's religious thought system, in order to have any meaningful discourse concerning his Christology. Therefore, given the prevalence of numerous occurrences of eschatological language and themes in his letters that are in many ways characteristic of Jewish apocalypticism, as well as his apparent familiarity with the Hebrew Scriptures of the Septuagint, this paper will proceed under the following suppositions, with reservations: (1) that Paul was in some capacity a Hellenistic Jew, (2) that he had some familiarity with Jewish

⁴² David Noel Freeman, ed., *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. V, "Pharisees" by Anthony J. Saldarini (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 291. See this entry for an account of Pharisaic beliefs. Elsewhere in the article, the Pharisees' activity in the politics of Israel and in daily life are also mentioned.

⁴³ Phil 3:5

⁴⁴ Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans, eds., *The Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity*, "What Exactly Is Israel's Problem? Rabbinic Perspectives on Galatians 2" by Jacob Neusner (London/Boston: Brill, 2005) 275-6. Here, the author explores how Paul's message of salvation is in direct conflict with a theology that stresses sanctification, which is precisely what James, the leader of the Jerusalem Church, promulgated, and which Peter followed during the Antioch episode referenced in Gal 2:14. In short, Paul's message about salvation at the end of time clashed with James' message of salvation here-and-now.

⁴⁵ See especially Gal 2:15-21

apocalyptic writings and/or thought, (3) as such, he held some kind of expectation for a redemption and vindication of God's people, in the form of a new age marked by resurrection, whereby the earth would in some way be restored to a pristine condition in which God would rule unobstructed by evil forces.⁴⁶ Admittedly, there are important reasons to hold these suppositions loosely, but they are outside the scope of this present work. Still, within the current discussion pertaining to Paul's Christology, this demarcation of his baseline belief system should be enough to suffice as a general context from which to continue an exposition of 1 Corinthians 15, as well as Philippians 2:5-11 and Colossians 1:15-20. Thus, having established such a general context for the Apostle's religious propensities, the discussion regarding the Christology of 1 Corinthians 15 can resume.

In order to demonstrate how Paul regards his kerygma as the fulfillment of Jewish hopes, as he perceived them, 1 Corinthians 15 must be analyzed carefully. This analysis will be accomplished by examining the allusions to Jewish thought and Scripture found in the text and by making the text comprehensible in the larger Corinthian correspondence in which it is found.

Examining the Jewish Allusions in 1 Corinthians 15

1 Corinthians 15, like much of Paul's writing, is replete with allusions to both Jewish texts and Jewish thought. Of special note among these allusions are those that illustrate Paul's desire to portray Jesus as both the King of God, and God. Once these allusions are carefully examined as Paul uses them, several things become clear: first, Paul regards his gospel as being harmonious with whatever Judaism he believes himself to participate in; second, Paul thinks that death is not a natural end to life but a hostile power that has invaded God's creation which must

⁴⁶ John Barclay and John Sweet, eds., *Early Christian Thought in Its Jewish Context*, "Paul," by E.P. Sanders (Cambridge: Press Syndicate, 1996), 128. In this section, the author declares that Paul believed, "as a good monotheist," that God is sovereign over all, and will not lose anything that is his.

be defeated and eradicated; third, that God's Christ is the agent appointed to effect this defeat, by assuming the throne of God as his King and giving life through resurrection. Paul's use of Scripture thus shows that he not only believes Jesus to be this King of God, but in some fashion, God himself as well. In order to demonstrate this, each allusion will be treated in turn.

Paul begins Chapter 15 by reminding his Corinthian audience of the gospel he brought to them, including the notion that Christ died in accordance with the Scriptures.⁴⁷ When Paul speaks of the Scriptures here, it seems he is referring to an important passage, namely Isaiah 53:4-12, otherwise known as a "Suffering Servant" oracle. In this Isaianic pericope, the suffering servant is brutally persecuted and oppressed for the sake of others, and is ultimately slain on behalf of the unrighteous, thus "winning them pardon for their offenses."⁴⁸ Furthermore, by submitting willingly to this execution, the suffering servant is promised to see his descendants in a long life.⁴⁹ This long life that is granted to the suffering servant is the first of several pieces Paul uses in Chapter 15 to assemble a mosaic of Jesus that renders him both glorious and divine, despite his ignominious death. He continues to build this portrait of glory and divinity by drawing upon several other key Jewish texts and themes, namely those that pertain to kingship, specifically the kingship of God.

In 1 Corinthians 15:25, Paul looks to the Psalms of David to expand what he began when he referred to the blessed fate of Isaiah's Suffering Servant. In verse 25, he alludes to Psalm 110:1, a favorite proof-text of the early church, wherein the LORD tells "my Lord, 'take your throne at my right hand, while I make your enemies your footstool.'"⁵⁰⁵¹ Here, Paul is ascribing

⁴⁷ 1 Cor 15:3-4

⁴⁸ Isa 53:12

⁴⁹ Isa 53:10, 12

⁵⁰ Psa 110:1

⁵¹ De Boer, 117

to Christ the benefits and promises that were proclaimed to Israel's king, specifically King David. He is establishing Jesus' authority to be king of Israel. In other words, he uses the scripture concerning David and intensifies its implications, so that his audience might better understand exactly whom they have put their faith in. Paul emphasizes this point by speaking of Jesus' office as the warrior king who will defeat his enemies.⁵² However, these verses alone merely point out that Paul considers Jesus to be the king whom many Jews in the first century hoped for to deliver Israel from her oppressors, namely Rome. These verses do not show how Paul regards Jesus as being, in some way, God. In order to see such an extension of Paul's references to Davidic kingship, it must be noted how Paul establishes Jesus as Lord of the universe, by virtue of his power as God's King to defeat the "last enemy," death.⁵³

It appears that Paul can make a deduction about Jesus' Lordship over the universe because of another psalm, the royal Psalm 24. The text of Psalm 24:7-10 speaks of a great king who is a "king of glory," who is a "mighty warrior, mighty in battle." This king is not David, but is instead "the LORD of hosts." For Paul, Jesus, who defeats all enemies, including death, is this LORD. The LORD referred to in this citation is most likely YHWH, Israel's God. Thus, it is translated into English with the tetragrammaton LORD. However, in the LXX, this name is "*Kyrios*," which is precisely the same title Paul repeatedly ascribes to Jesus throughout his epistles. Thus, it seems that Paul is acting purposefully when he gives this assignation to Jesus—he seems to be proclaiming that by his function as the warrior king who defeats death, Jesus is *Kyrios*. By proclaiming Jesus as *Kyrios*, Paul is proclaiming that he is not only the King of David's line, promised a throne forever, but is also the King of Glory portrayed in Psalm 24.

⁵² 1 Cor 15:24-25

⁵³ 1 Cor 15:26

Thus, Jesus as Kyrios is both man and God. He dies as a man, rises as a glorified human, and is assigned the task of securing God's realm as the one who shall defeat all of God's enemies, as the LORD of hosts. Paul augments this claim by noting Jesus' ability as Lord to give life.

Paul rounds out his notion of Jesus' Lordship to include a function that is the prerogative of God alone, this being the giving of life. By his rank and power as King, Jesus is contrasted with Adam as being a "life-giving Spirit."⁵⁴ This contrast with Adam is significant. When God forms Adam from the earth and gives his "breath" to him, Adam is said to become a "living soul."⁵⁵ Though he possesses God's spirit, he has neither the faculties nor the wisdom to replicate this feat. However, according to Paul, Jesus does possess this power, by virtue of his function as the giver of life to the dead.⁵⁶ By understanding Jesus as the "life-giving spirit" who gives life to the dead, Paul makes Jesus not just king of Israel, but of the entire cosmos. In other words, for Paul, Jesus is in some way God, who fulfills God's function as both the King of Glory and as the one who gives life to the dead. However, this leaves a critical question unanswered: if Jesus is in some fashion God, why then is he subject to God, as Paul explicitly states in 1 Corinthians 15:28? Can God be subject to God? In order to answer this dense and enigmatic question, this text of Paul's must be read in light of the context in which it is written.

1 Corinthians 15 In Context

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul is rounding out a letter that addresses a host of problems that are plaguing the Corinthian church, including factions, lawsuits before unbelievers, marriage, the Lord's Supper, and spiritual gifts. Paul addresses each of these matters in turn, and with each

⁵⁴ 1 Cor 15:45

⁵⁵ Gen 2:7. Note that in the LXX the word used is *πνοήν*, which can be translated as breath, blowing, wind, or spirit. Likewise, in the LXX Adam is said to become a *ψυχὴν ζῶσαν*. This use of *ψυχὴν* will be treated at length later.

⁵⁶ 1 Cor 15:22, 26, 45

instruction, admonition, and exhortation, the letter leads inexorably to Chapter 15, demanding that something be said that makes issues of morality in this life cohere with the next life.⁵⁷

Paul knows that there are members in the Corinthian church who deny a resurrection. They do not deny an afterlife, but bodily resurrection. The entire culture of the Greco-Roman world was accustomed to denying such a possibility.⁵⁸ Many citizens of the Empire anticipated and even looked forward to some kind of separation of the body and soul upon death, wherein the soul would be “free” of its “contemptible outer husk” and enabled to participate in the realm of “spirit.”⁵⁹ Even certain mystical Jews adopted a notion very similar to this, following the teachings of the Alexandrian Jew, Philo.

According to Martinus De Boer, Philo, a contemporary of Paul, contends that “there are two races of human beings: the one is a heavenly human being, the other is earthly.”⁶⁰ Drawing upon Genesis 2:7, Philo concludes that this heavenly human being is the heavenly “archetype” or “idea” of which the earthly is but a derivative copy.⁶¹ This earthly being is therefore a composite of both dust and the divine spirit which God breathed into him, the spirit which enables him to become a “mindlike and truly living soul as Genesis 2:7 says.”⁶² Finally, according to Philo, this soul will be released upon death.⁶³

⁵⁷ N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 313

⁵⁸ Wright, 331

⁵⁹ De Boer, 97. Also, see *The Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, “The Origin of Paul’s Doctrine of the Two Adams in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49” by Stephen Hultgren (London: The Continuum Publishing Group Ltd 2003), 343-370, for his alternative understanding of Philo, as well as Hultgren’s assertion that Paul is *not* responding to Philo’s exegesis of Gen 2. Hultgren contends instead that Paul is merely addressing the nature of the resurrection body, which is an idea foreign to Greek sensibilities. He bases this conclusion on a careful reading of Philo’s works, noting key shifts in Philo’s thought, even in his treatment of Gen 2, so that his understanding of the “heavenly and earthly man” eventually refers to symbols for “mind.”

⁶⁰ De Boer, 99

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 100

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

It should be plain that Philo's exegesis has a great deal in common with Plato's forms, and perhaps that explains its popularity in the Greco-Roman world. According to B.A. Pearson, prominent Diaspora Jews like Apollos of Alexandria were citing Philo's teaching concerning Genesis 2:7 and preaching a-somatic immortality and denying bodily resurrection.⁶⁴ Such a message seems to have resonated with the Corinthians, too. However, Paul has an answer, and in masterful rhetorical fashion, he uses terms the Corinthians know and understand in order to show the fallacies in their reasoning.

In 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Paul recounts his delivery of the gospel to the Corinthian church. Several things are noteworthy about this segment. First, Paul provides a litany of witnesses to the risen Jesus. Such a list is intended to satisfy the skepticism of his audience, for in the ancient Greco-Roman world, living oral sources were often preferable to written sources, for they could be interrogated.⁶⁵ Second, Paul declares that he is the last to have seen the risen Jesus, pointing out that these sightings were not ongoing, but part of a larger history that even now is in progress.⁶⁶ Finally, in this section, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the gospel he preached to them, which was based on his sighting, was a gospel they had in fact once believed.⁶⁷ Thus, in a mere eleven verses, Paul has established himself as just as credible as Philo from a Greco-Roman standpoint, since over five-hundred witnesses can corroborate his account. Likewise, he has re-established himself as an authority over the Corinthian congregation, because they believed him once already. Having called to mind this gospel among his Corinthian audience, Paul then questions how they have deviated from it.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 101. In this excerpt, the author is recounting Pearson's positions concerning the beliefs of the Corinthian deniers. When Pearson alludes to Apollos, he has in mind *Acts* 18:24.

⁶⁵ Ehrman, 63

⁶⁶ Wright, 326

⁶⁷ 1 Cor 15:11

After Paul alludes to his gospel that preaches Christ raised from the dead, Paul confronts the Corinthians directly, asking, “how can some of you say there is no resurrection from the dead?”⁶⁸ He then proceeds to inform the Corinthians how specious this reasoning is, if in fact they believe Christ has been raised from the dead. Then, Paul explains how this is the case: he directly counters the logic employed by Philo and corrects it, so that it is coherent with a worldview that holds up God as sovereign, and his creation as good.⁶⁹ In other words, Paul answers Philo’s “two-man” exegesis of Genesis 2:7 with his own.

In 1 Corinthians 15:21, Paul employs his own “two-man” exegesis of Genesis 2:7, stating unequivocally that in Adam, humanity did not receive any kind of immortal soul, but rather, death. In contrast, however, Paul posits Christ as the one through whom all can attain life. Then, Paul describes the order of Christ’s rule, wherein he will rescue his followers, and then destroy “every authority and power,” including death.⁷⁰ This destruction of death is central to Paul. Death cannot be bargained with, or dealt with in some half-baked fashion. It cannot be reckoned with through notions of bodiless immortality. For Paul, to adopt such ideas is to deny that God in fact possesses supreme creative power and sovereignty over his creation. For Paul, to adopt such ideas is to grant a greater status to death than God, an idea that he finds inconceivable.⁷¹ For Paul, death is a perversion and enemy of creation who mars God’s good, ordered plan. Thus for Paul, any concept of “salvation” that looks to flee one’s good, God-given body is not salvation at all.⁷² In such a scenario, death still prevails, and knowing this, Paul exploits a practice of the Corinthians who hold such views. In 1 Corinthians 15:29, Paul

⁶⁸ 1 Cor 15:12

⁶⁹ Sanders, 128

⁷⁰ 1 Cor 15:21-26

⁷¹ Wright, 314

⁷² Wright, 332-3

questions the Corinthian practice of baptism on behalf of the dead. Having demonstrated that a salvation based on death is no salvation at all, Paul proceeds to demonstrate the foolishness of such baptism. Then, Paul continues his *reductio ad absurdum* by stating that if death is the intended end of all things, the sufferings he and all other believers endure are pointless, and make the followers of Christ the most “pitiable people of all.”⁷³

Upon arguing for the foolishness of the Corinthian deniers, Paul then proceeds to answer what he believes may be questions raised to challenge his assertions. He anticipates that his Corinthian audience might ask, “How are the dead raised?”⁷⁴ Here, Paul is able to proudly pronounce his belief in God’s power to restore. In verses 36-58, Paul returns to the theme of the victorious Christ who has defeated death, and who will defeat death for those who are in him. After he describes the resurrection body using an innovative agricultural metaphor, Paul paints vivid contrasts between Adam and Christ that correspond to believers now and believers in the resurrection.⁷⁵ Whereas the first Adam was corruptible and died, though he was a living-soul, the last Adam is a life-giving spirit. This last Adam, Jesus, is not from the earth, as Adam was, but is from heaven. Consequently, according to Paul, those who bore the image of the earthly one, Adam, will also bear the image of the heavenly one, Jesus.⁷⁶

It appears that here Paul is once again correcting what he believes is an erroneous exegesis by Philo. Whereas Philo grants Adam two natures, Paul grants him one. Likewise, when Philo describes the second, desirable nature of Adam as being a product of heaven, Paul declares that anything humanity needs will come through the man from heaven. Paul does this

⁷³ 1 Cor 15:19

⁷⁴ 1 Cor 15:35

⁷⁵ Wright, 342. Here, the author states that though Paul’s agricultural metaphor is highly innovative, it nevertheless is within the bounds of normative Jewish tradition.

⁷⁶ 1 Cor 15:45-49

by turning Philo's language against him, and in turn, against the Corinthian deniers who accepted his teaching.

Philo speaks of the "mindlike and truly living soul" and "inbreathed spirit" that was given to Adam, and it seems that the Corinthian deniers appropriated these terms to describe themselves.⁷⁷ Based on the antithetical juxtaposition of *πνευματικός* and *ψυχικός* in 1 Corinthians 2:12-15, it appears that the Corinthians disparaged the notion of being *ψυχικός*, while considering themselves to be in the realm of the *πνεῦμα*.⁷⁸ In short, they were believers who held a gnostic anthropology that regarded the physical world, especially their mortal bodies, as contemptible.⁷⁹ Paul disagrees, and cuts this thinking down.

In the LXX, Genesis 2:7 tells how Adam became "*ὁ ἄνθρωπος εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν*." Adam was not a spirit, but instead returned to the earth whence he was formed. Paul calls this earthliness *ψυχικός* in 1 Corinthians 2:14, associates it with foolishness, and places it in direct opposition to things of the Spirit of God, which he calls *πνευματικός*. In 1 Corinthians 15:46, Paul is revisiting this dichotomy with the intention of shaming the Corinthians. They disdain being labelled *ψυχικός*, but if they have abandoned faith in God by believing him incapable of restoring the dead, they are earthly, and not spiritual, regardless of what they might think to the contrary. In other words, Paul is declaring that his message is the only one that is truly salvific, because it proclaims a God who saves humanity from the "sting of death."⁸⁰ God saves and restores humanity to the image he had always intended, and he does this through the actual spiritual one who is incorruptible, the man from heaven. For Paul, it is the fact that Jesus is the

⁷⁷ De Boer, 100-01

⁷⁸ Ibid., 97-8

⁷⁹ Ibid., 102

⁸⁰ 1 Cor 15:56

man from heaven, proved by his death and resurrection, that Paul is able to understand Jesus as both man and God.

Paul seems to have fervently believed that death was not an intended end for mankind.⁸¹ Likewise, he seems to have believed God had created a good world, but that evil forces had led it into corruption and disorder, which was augmented by the sin of the first man, Adam. The sin of this man led to the curse of death. Paul believed that this curse was passed from generation to generation, and was an inherent part of humanity's constitution. The evidence for this conclusion was simple: everybody died, and the world was subject to decay. However, despite these realities, Paul also believed that God was sovereign, and would allow nothing that was his to be forever enslaved by an inimical power who pretended to be God.⁸² Therefore, Paul believed that redemption was part of God's designs for his creation.

Based on his use of the Hebrew Scriptures, it seems a safe assessment that Paul looked to these texts and to the prevailing Jewish thought of his day to learn how God would enact his salvation. For years, much of Israel had looked for a king in the line of David to reclaim her former glory. They looked for this king with confidence because their Scriptures had foretold such a time. However, as Israel was hegemonized in an unprecedented manner by Antiochus Epiphanes IV, a hope for individual resurrection crystallized and was described in various Apocalyptic texts. Though most of these texts were not Scripture proper, they nevertheless seemed to have informed popular Jewish culture and expectation, so that by the time Jesus lived, there seems to have existed a fervent hope among a segment of Jews not only for God to send

⁸¹ Wright, 314

⁸² See especially Rom 5:12-21

either a cosmic or political deliverer, but also for resurrection of the righteous ones who had been faithful to God's laws.⁸³

For some Jews in the first century, Jesus fulfilled the hope for a deliverer. He seemed to be the one foretold in the Scriptures and expected in elements of popular thought as "the Messiah." When he died, his followers said he rose, and this seemed to validate their reasoning that he was in fact the Messiah: he had defeated death, he would live forever, and he would raise them too. He had indeed fulfilled these ancient hopes. Paul disagreed.

Paul knew the Jesus of "the Way" had died on a cross as a criminal. Such things were not the mark of righteousness, the kind of righteousness it seems he thought would help usher in God's long-awaited redemption.⁸⁴ If Jews were giving their allegiance to the criminal, they would further his defilement, and thwart God's salvation from coming. According to Acts, Paul believed he had to act against the movement, and decisively. Thus, he persecuted the Way, until he met the risen Jesus himself.⁸⁵

When Paul saw and spoke with Jesus on the road to Damascus, he had an experience that seems to have changed his thinking profoundly. Jesus, a criminal, had been raised. If God raised him, that meant two things had transpired: first, it meant that God had begun the new age; second, it meant that Jesus, who had died as a criminal, had somehow borne the curse that had been intended for Adam and his descendants, and had somehow broken said curse.⁸⁶ In short, the "sinless one suffer[ed] the full effects of human sin [by being subject to death] in order, not

⁸³ See note 42 for a list of sources concerning these various expressions of Jewish thought.

⁸⁴ Ehrman, 293; cf. Phil 3:4-6

⁸⁵ Acts 8:1, 9:2

⁸⁶ See Schweitzer, 99: "With the Resurrection of Jesus, the supernatural world had already began, though it had not as yet become manifest." Cf. 4 Ezra 7:29-32

that death might be escaped (= substitution), but that the finality of death might be broken.”⁸⁷ To Paul, this was a sign of God’s power, God’s grace, and God’s activity in history. It was a sign that God had acted decisively on humanity’s behalf, despite the fact that “no one is good, not even one.”⁸⁸ By this action on behalf of a rebellious humanity, God demonstrated his sovereignty, justice, grace, and wisdom.

By acting to correct what Adam had ruined, and restoring what he had intended for his creation all along, God demonstrated his sovereignty. The thread that runs through the Hebrew Scriptures concerns man’s relationship to God and God’s creation.⁸⁹ From the time that God gives all things in the Garden to Adam for food, to God’s making all things subject to man in Psalm 8:4-6, the Scriptures depict God as desirous of a humanity with which he can share his creation.⁹⁰ Paul believes that God desires this restored creation, and he also believes that only the resurrected Jesus has fulfilled the idea of “true humanity” portrayed in Psalm 8:6.⁹¹ In 1 Corinthians 15:27, Paul cites Psalm 8:6, indicating his belief that Jesus is the only truly human one because he alone is over all things, even death.

By acting through the agency of Jesus’ death, God demonstrated his justice. By sending one who could fulfill the requirements given to Adam, God showed that his mandates were not negotiable, that he demanded obedience from all men. For Paul, Jesus seems to have been the only one who obeyed God.⁹² He is the answer to the Psalmist’s lament in Psalm 14:3, the one

⁸⁷ David Noel Freeman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. I, “Christology (NT),” by James D.G. Dunn, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 984

⁸⁸ Psa 14:3

⁸⁹ See Wright, 320

⁹⁰ Gen 2:16

⁹¹ Wright, 334: “...God did not rewrite the vocation [for humanity to rule creation as the creator’s vicegerent], but rather sent the Messiah to act in Israel’s place...to be the creator’s wise, image-bearing steward over creation...as the truly human being.”

⁹² See Phil 2:6-11

who does what is right, even though all of humanity is doomed to carry the sin of Adam in its flesh. And yet, though he is righteous, he perishes nonetheless, illustrating God's irreversible demands for compliance to his dictates. In other words, through Jesus' righteousness, he becomes the obedient one for all of humanity, and as such, becomes an unspoiled sacrifice necessary to satisfy God's justice. In short, it appears that for Paul, Jesus fulfills the Suffering Servant oracle in Isaiah 53, becoming the "guilt offering" that brings peace to the world.⁹³ Likewise, just as Jesus "bears [the] iniquities" of many, so too does he "see the light of life and [is] satisfied."⁹⁴ Consequently, he does not languish under the penalty of death given to Adam in Genesis 3:19, but instead rises, and to Paul, thereby becomes the "firstfruits" of all who are to rise from the dead.⁹⁵ This notion of firstfruits signifies to Paul that Jesus' resurrection is a guarantee of more to come, in the sense that the resurrection of the dead that certain Jews looked to, which signified the turn of the ages, had in fact commenced.⁹⁶

It also appears to be the case that Paul also believed that by acting through Jesus' resurrection as the firstfruits of a new creation, God revealed his wisdom. Paul reasoned that man could not, of his own volition, satisfy God's requirements for obedience or justice. Furthermore, Paul surmised that the ancient concept that God's wisdom was embodied in the Torah was insufficient to redeem humanity from its fallen state and restore it to its intended wholeness.⁹⁷ Paul therefore concluded that Jesus, the righteous one who died, must therefore be the real embodiment of God's wisdom, because he alone has the power to save humanity. Thus,

⁹³ Isa 53:5, 10

⁹⁴ Isa 53:11

⁹⁵ 1 Cor 15:20

⁹⁶ Wright, 334

⁹⁷ Dunn, 984. Here, the author notes how "Judaism's distinctive claim was that [God's] wisdom was now embodied in the Torah," citing Sir 24:23 and Bar 4:1. Compare this notion with Paul's diatribe against the Law in Gal 3:10-12. See also Bell, 25: "Paul, like the author of Hebrews, came to the conclusion that levitical sacrifices *did not* atone for sins."

Paul uses Wisdom terminology extensively to describe the risen Jesus, both in his role in God's creation, as well as in his role as the "determinative revelation and redemptive act of God."⁹⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, to Paul, Jesus is both the fulfillment of certain Isaianic and Messianic hopes, but not by any mere man. Rather, he is God's Wisdom "born of a woman, born under the Law."⁹⁹ Because he is both God and man, he occupies a role that should be classified as "intermediary."¹⁰⁰ As the Wisdom of God who alone has the power to be righteous and thus everlastingly receive God's Spirit, he is in some sense God. On the other hand, as the "truly human one," he is what God always intended man to be, which is a partaker of his Spirit, in authority over all his creation.¹⁰¹ Likewise, as the truly human one, he is subordinate to God. Therefore, Jesus is the Lord over all creation, but is subject to God, and once all have received his "life-giving Spirit," all will be made truly alive, "so that God might be all in all."¹⁰² In short, for Paul, Jesus as the Wisdom of God demonstrates God's love, by *descending* to humanity and by clothing himself in flesh for eternity, so that humanity might always be alive with God.¹⁰³ To Paul, Jesus is the prime exemplar of submission, and therefore the model of true humanness, and the means whereby all people might receive life in the Spirit, just as Jesus did. This theme of

⁹⁸ Ibid. Note especially 1 Cor 8:6 to see how Paul includes Jesus in creation.

⁹⁹ Gal 4:4

¹⁰⁰ Dunn, 984. Here, Dunn notes that since Paul evidently offered his prayers "through Christ," this is confirmation that for Paul Christ's role is characteristically as "mediator."

¹⁰¹ Wright, 333. Wright repeatedly insists that Jesus is "the truly human being...who fully bears the divine image" as Adam was meant to. Wright justifies this reasoning on the fact that Adam received the Spirit of God, and was not supposed to die. Similarly, in Joel 2:28-29, the Spirit is said to be poured out on all mankind.

¹⁰² 1 Cor 15:28

¹⁰³ There are, of course, important difficulties with this notion of being with Christ eternally. After all, Paul in 1 Cor 15:24 describes Christ's kingdom as temporary. And yet, Paul says elsewhere (e.g. 1 Thes 4:17) that believers will always be with the Lord. Is this contradictory? Does it mean that Christ, once he has defeated death, as 1 Cor 15 indicates, will no longer be human, but will rejoin the Father in his former glory as the Son?

Jesus' descent, as the means whereby humanity is granted resurrection to eternal life, is further developed in Philippians 2:5-11.

CHAPTER 3

PAUL'S CHRISTOLOGY IN PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

Introduction

A critical reading of Philippians 2:5-11 is a risky enterprise, for the text is rich in religious overtones and numerous shades of meaning, and its apparent simplicity and brevity is actually illusory, for the passage encapsulates a complex system of thought, belief, and vision which defies simple reduction into neat taxonomies or simplistic generalizations. Philippians 2:5-11 does not seem to be, as some scholars have argued, merely an “ethical” passage, nor is it only a “kerygmatic” one, but instead appears to actually be a coherent and complete faith manifesto that articulates, in poetic fashion, Paul’s gospel, which he preached to all the churches.¹⁰⁴ In other words, Philippians 2:5-11 contains the key components of Paul’s theology, including his belief in a risen Jesus whose death on a cross serves as the fulfillment of Jewish expectations for vindication, whereby those who are “in” him, through faith manifested in a death like his, are vindicated as well in power and glory, namely in their resurrection to eternal life.

Indeed, the statement that Philippians 2:5-11 is representative of Paul’s theology is a contentious one, and requires substantial evidence. Therefore, the task of the remainder of this section will be to elucidate the methods used and the evidence these methods yielded in drawing this conclusion. These methods are, in short, translating the text from its original Greek; placing

¹⁰⁴ 1 Cor 4:15-17, Gal 1:7

the passage in context, both in Paul's other writings, and in the first-century church; and finally, considering prominent opinions regarding the text today.

Translating Philippians 2:5-11

The text of Philippians 2:5-11 presents more than a few difficulties in translating it from extant manuscripts, for several reasons. For one thing, the passage uses several words that are rarely found in Paul's writing. For another thing, challenges arise in Philippians when words which may seem synonymous upon an initial reading must be considered carefully within the context of the passage, for here again, even a slight mismanagement of the meaning of the word, or a coarse treatment of its intended significance, may affect the overall meaning of the text in drastic ways. An example of such seeming synonyms which will be treated include *μορφῆ* and *σχῆματι*. Finally, another potential obstacle in the translation of Philippians 2:5-11 is presented by its actual structure, especially verses 6-11, which seem, in the Greek, to suggest more than a mere prosaic composition of Paul's: instead, these verses seem to indicate that this pericope is a poem or hymn. Questions raised by the possibility that the passage is hymnic include the following: if the passage is a hymn, is it Paul's? If it is not Paul's, who then authored it? An even more significant question raised by the hymnic possibility is this: if the passage is indeed hymnic, what secrets can it reveal regarding the liturgy and cultic worship of the primitive Church?

Many modern scholars hold that Philippians 2:6-11 is indeed an ancient Christian hymn.¹⁰⁵ The reasons for this include its rhythm, its meter, its high liturgical content, and its carefully constructed thematic structure. Several notable scholars, including Ralph P. Martin and

¹⁰⁵ Note, however, Collins, 365-6, where she points out that scholars like Gordon Fee do not regard this text as a hymn, but instead as "exalted Pauline prose" (Fee, 1992).

Ernst Lohmeyer, have written detailed analyses of these verses, and have concluded that the evidence seems to point to the passage as being hymnic. Likewise, these and other scholars are convinced that the “hymn” predates Paul’s epistle to the Philippians. This is an important point, for if the hymn is pre-Pauline, does it still cohere with his theology? If it is not pre-Pauline, but is rather a Pauline composition, what features of Paul’s theology does it divulge?

Regardless of whether the passage is Paul’s, or a pre-Pauline liturgical hymn, it cannot be overstated nor forgotten that the text is ensconced in the heart of an entire letter. It is at once a whole, and a portion of a greater context. To translate it, then, without bearing these considerations in mind, is specious. Therefore, each line of the passage will be taken in turn, and then synthesized, with these sensibilities that it is part of a coherent whole ever in mind. The passage reads as thus, and includes verse five, because it is important to discerning the meaning of the “hymn” itself:

5 Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,
 6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων
 οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο
 τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ,
 7 ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν
 μορφὴν δούλου λαβών,
 ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος·
 καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεῖς ὡς ἄνθρωπος
 8 ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν
 γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου,
 θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.
 9 διὸ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερέψωσεν
 καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα
 τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,
 10 ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ
 πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ
 ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων
 11 καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσῃται ὅτι
 κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς
 εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ πατρὸς.

5 Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ:

This verse is a mandate by Paul to his audience. The focus of debate regarding this verse has centered primarily upon the possibilities raised by ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. Does the verse mandate that the Philippians should have the “same mind” as Christ Jesus, or does it allude to a condition already present in those who believe in Jesus? In other words, does the verse read, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is also in Christ Jesus,” or does it read, “Have this mind among yourselves, which is also yours in Christ Jesus?”

6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ:

This verse begins with the connecting relative pronoun, ὃς (who), which ties its referent, Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, to a subsequent description of him. This description raises a series of questions, beginning with, what is meant when the verse refers to Christ as ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων? What is meant by “existing in the form of God?” If God is formless, if God is Spirit, then is this merely a metaphor, or some other kind of linguistic device?¹⁰⁶ Does it refer to a Platonic notion of “forms,” wherein Jesus is the manifestation of an unseen, unknown reality, namely God? If it is derived from Platonic thought, does that negate Jewish influences upon the verse, and by extension, the hymn as a whole, or does it suggest a hybrid of Jewish/Hellenistic thought? Additionally, does ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων point to a pre-existent Christ?

If ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων is indeed referring to a pre-existent Christ, a new set of problems and questions are raised, which are compounded by the enigmatic phrase which immediately follows: οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἠγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ. What is most challenging in this phrase is the word, ἀρπαγμὸν. The word has several possible meanings, and each affects the reading of not only verse 6, but the “hymn” as a whole in profound ways. The word can mean,

¹⁰⁶ Num 24:2

“prize,” “something to be plundered,” or “something to be possessed or grasped.” It is an accusative, masculine, singular noun, and is the direct object of the first aorist, middle, third-person, singular verb, *ἠγήσατο* (he/she/it supposed, believed, considered, held, regarded). The question in translating this verse then, is, is the equality to God alluded to in the verse something Christ already had (in his pre-existent form?), and did not prize? Or, is equality with God something Christ neither had, nor pursued, as a prize, because of his obedience?¹⁰⁷

If the *ἀρπαγμὸν* does refer to a prize which Christ already possessed, namely, equality with God, then it bears out a clearer understanding of Pauline Christology: Christ was pre-existent, but descended in order to serve God. Though Christ was equal to God, he did not regard it as a prize, but instead, out of service, relinquished the prize. This reading seems to fit nicely with verse 5, exemplifying its hortatory tone, but it encounters difficulty at the end of the “hymn,” where Christ is “given the name that is above all names.” This difficulty stems from the following issue: if Christ was already equal with God, how could God have given him something he already possessed?

If, on the other hand, the *ἀρπαγμὸν* is something Christ did not have, nor regarded as something to be pursued, the issues pertaining to the gift of the name may be solved, but they are quickly replaced by new ones. The problems that are raised by this reading deal namely with the exaltation of Christ which the “hymn” recounts. How is Christ’s obedience meritorious of the

¹⁰⁷ Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, “Incarnation/Myth/Theology: Ernst Kasemann’s Interpretation of Philippians 2:5-11,” by Robert Morgan, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 60. Here, Morgan provides an excellent discussion of two important terms used frequently in discussing how to regard *ἀρπαγμὸν*. Scholars generally agree that the “prize” is either *res rapta* (something held onto), or *res rapienda* (something to be grasped at or seized). Incidentally, Kasemann perceived the *ἀρπαγμὸν* in verse 6 as *res rapta*. In contrast to this reading of verse 6, scholars like James D. G. Dunn regard *ἀρπαγμὸν* as *res rapienda*. Dunn’s rationale for this mode of reading shall be treated elsewhere in this paper. See also Collins, 367, where she entertains the possibility that *res rapienda* might be construed in the sense of an attempt Christ could have made to make himself equal to God, in a manner similar to an arrogant ruler.

exaltation he receives in verses 9-11? In other words, what makes his obedience more notable than, say, Abraham's, whom even Paul cites as being justified in the sight of God?¹⁰⁸

7 ἀλλὰ ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν μορφὴν δούλου λαβών, ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος· καὶ σχήματι εὐρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος:

The *ἀλλὰ* which begins this verse signifies a movement in thematic content. The verse shifts from Jesus' considerations of his possessions to begin a lengthy description of his actions, beginning with his emptying of himself of his form, taking the form of a slave, and being born in the likeness of men. The first main point of interest in this verse involves the use of two words which seem synonymous, these being *μορφὴν* and *σχήματι*. Both words can mean "form," "shape," "figure," or "appearance." The question raised by this similarity is, why are the two words used? Do they mean different things in the context of this passage, or are they employed to avoid repetition or redundancy? It would seem that they do mean different things, because a derivative of *μορφὴν* already appeared in this line of thought, in verse 6, indicating that redundancy is not the composer's concern. Furthermore, *μορφὴν* and *σχήματι* are not perfect synonyms. *μορφὴν* can refer to "kind" or "sort" as well, while *σχήματι* can also refer to "look/mien of a person," or "character of a thing." Therefore, if these words have disparate meanings, what are they?

If *σχήματι* here signifies something other than "form," a new dilemma appears: the other possible definitions (shape/figure/appearance/look or mien of a person/character of a thing) seem to suggest something that is less than fully real, something that is outwardly one thing, while inwardly or essentially something else. In other words, if verse 7 is read as, "and as a man

¹⁰⁸ Rom 4:3

having been found in shape/figure/appearance/look or mien of a person/character of a thing,” it seems to connote a person who is not truly human.

Furthermore, the occurrence of *ὁμοιώματι* makes this problem even more acute, for this word means, “likeness, image, resemblance, counterfeit.” Both *σχήματι* and *ὁμοιώματι* are datives which refer to the subject, Jesus, from verse 5, and both seem to suggest a person who is on one hand in the form of God, but on the other, only an appearance or likeness of men. Can this docetic view of Christ be consonant with Paul’s conception of Jesus? Or, should the treatment of *μορφὴν* be modified? If *μορφὴν* should be understood as something other than the true essence of a thing, does that “de-divinize” Christ? Is that view in accord with Paul’s perception of Jesus? Is there another possibility which harmonizes the two, without giving essential precedence to one or the other?

ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ:

This verse is a further recounting of Jesus’ actions, and refers to his self-humbling, and obedience unto death on a cross. The major significance of this verse is in its reference to Christ’s death on a cross. Debate regarding this phrase concerns whether or not it is a Pauline gloss to a hymn which he co-opted for this letter to the Philippians. For example, Ernst Lohmeyer believes the allusion to be such a gloss, based on his reconstruction of the “hymn,” wherein he divides it into two strophes, each consisting of three three-line stanzas. In this structure, which he deduced could only be formulated consciously, and in which each line contains a single predicate, the phrase, “death on a cross” is cacophonous and disrupts the metrical composition, while it expresses “Paul’s characteristic emphasis.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, “Ernst Lohmeyer’s KYRIOS JESUS,” by Colin Brown (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 7-9

On the other hand, Lohmeyer's scheme can be contrasted to Hooker's, who believes the "hymn" to be chiasmic in structure. In his rendering, Hooker has verses 6-7 dealing with Christ's kenosis, followed by 7d-8 referring to the downward movement of the cross. The second half of the "hymn" reverses the form, as well as the themes, culminating in Christ's exaltation and receipt of the name that is above all names. This arrangement of the verses and their thematic contents keeps all the words in their original, without supposing any Pauline additions.¹¹⁰

It is worth attempting to discern whether or not Paul added this phrase. If Paul did add the words, it demonstrates two important points: first, that the bulk of the text, and its contents, are pre-Pauline, and second, it points to what Paul considered to be of paramount importance. In other words, if Paul did in fact gloss this passage with "death on a cross," one must wonder why he decided to add this particular enhancement, and not, say, any overt references to Christ's resurrection? What is it about the cross that Paul finds so crucial to his message to the Philippians?

διὸ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομάτων:

This verse marks another major thematic shift in the "hymn," signified by the use of *διὸ καὶ*. Here, God becomes the acting agent, and Jesus is the passive recipient of God's activity. The verse does not present any major translational problems, and can be read as, "and wherefore/on which account God exalted him and delighted to give him the name that is above/over every name." The apparent ease with which this verse can be translated should not, however, eclipse the critical matters raised by these words, namely, what is this name being spoken of, and why does God give it to Jesus?

¹¹⁰ Peter T. O'Brien, *Commentary on Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 192

The Psalms declare that the name YHWH alone is exalted.¹¹¹ Is Paul declaring that God has given this name to Jesus? What implications would such a reading of this text have for Paul's Christology, and perhaps more importantly, for his Jewish monotheism—in other words, if Paul says this, is he a monotheist? If Paul indicates elsewhere that he believes himself to be a monotheist, can this position be justified, in light of this verse?

ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων:

This verse continues to speak of God's exaltation of Jesus, and how at his name the knees of "all beings of the heavens and of the earth and under the earth" shall bow. The issues raised by this imagery are similar to those posed by verse 9. In the preceding verse, God appears to give his name to Jesus. Here, in this verse, God also gives Jesus the right to receive the homage due to him alone.¹¹² Is Paul flagrantly rejecting Judaism, defying the religion he says he once held so dearly and zealously?¹¹³

καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ πατρὸς.

This verse speaks further of the exaltation which God will give to Jesus, and says that "every tongue will confess in full that Jesus Christ [is] Lord to the glory of God the Father." The problems encountered in verses 9 and 10 are compounded here, for again, it is unclear what is meant by the designation, "Lord." Does it signify YHWH or is it a different designation? How does this confession of all beings glorify God, whose name is Jealous?¹¹⁴

In order to answer these questions, as well as those elicited by the other verses of this "hymn," and arrive at a final, satisfactory translation which is true to Paul's original message to the Philippians, Paul must be placed in context. If this "hymn" is read as a portion of a larger

¹¹¹ Psa 148:13

¹¹² Deut 5:9

¹¹³ Gal 3:6

¹¹⁴ Ex 34:14

whole, and as the product of a coherent mind, the apparent contradictions and mysteries which seem to show forth in this “hymn” can be put to rest. Therefore, the next section will examine the whole of Paul’s letter to the Philippians, as well as his other writings, and finally the cultural and religious ethos in which he lived, in order to decipher this passage.

Translating Philippians 2:5-11 In Context

Philippians 2:5-11 is found at the very heart of a letter Paul wrote to the Christian congregation who lived in Philippi, a city located on the northern rim of the Mediterranean Sea in Macedonia. The letter’s writing was occasioned by a gift Paul received from the Philippian church, and was authored as a friendship letter from prison.¹¹⁵ In the letter, Paul expresses his wish to return to the church in person¹¹⁶, alludes to his imprisonment¹¹⁷, and then proceeds to exhort the Philippians to follow his example as they contend with their own suffering¹¹⁸. It is within this portion of the letter that the “hymn” is located.

Paul then alludes to Timothy, and relates his plans to send both Timothy and Epaphroditus on to the church soon.¹¹⁹ He follows these plans with admonitions to the church to refrain from the “dogs,” and speaks vehemently against “the mutilation,” before extolling his own Hebrew lineage.¹²⁰ This passage shall be discussed in detail, for it is critical to deciphering Philippians 2:9-11, and answering the questions about those verses postulated above.

¹¹⁵ David Noel Freeman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. V, “Epistle to the Philippians,” by John T. Fitzgerald (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 320. In this entry, the author describes the typical characteristics of a “friendship letter” in ancient Greco-Roman correspondence. Features of such letters include remarks about fellowship, partnership, the sharing of feelings and hardships, and giving and receiving. Additionally, friendship letters often included, as does Paul’s letter to the Philippians, a discussion of friendship’s antithesis, enmity, and invective and ridicule of common enemies.

¹¹⁶ Phil 1:25, 4:1

¹¹⁷ Phil 1:12

¹¹⁸ Phil 1:27-2:18

¹¹⁹ Phil 2:19-2:30

¹²⁰ Phil 3:2-19

Following his denouncement of the “evil-workers,” Paul continues his letter with further exhortations, enjoining the Philippians to “stand firm in the Lord.”¹²¹ He then proceeds to entreat two apparently prominent members of the church, Euodia and Syntyche, to heal a dispute, without providing any details to its nature.¹²² Paul follows this request by urging the Philippians to rejoice in the Lord, and in such a manner that those who see them should know their faith. Again, Paul calls upon the Philippians to emulate his example.¹²³

Paul finishes his letter by recounting the financial gift of the Philippians, and praises them liberally, before turning the focus of the letter back to God. What is interesting about this portion of the letter is not just that Paul refers to God, but to “my God.”¹²⁴ This too is important to understand the message conveyed in the “hymn” found in 2:5-11.

Scholars disagree as to whether or not Philippians is actually one letter.¹²⁵ Proponents of a two-letter hypothesis cite two different readings to account for their theory. The first, advanced by E.J. Goodspeed, suggests that verses 3:1b-4:20 comprise the first letter, in response to the gift brought to Paul by Epaphroditus. In this hypothesis, Epaphroditus fell sick after this

¹²¹ Phil 4:1

¹²² Phil 4:2-3

¹²³ Phil 4:9

¹²⁴ Phil 4:19

¹²⁵ Again, see Fitzgerald, 321, for detailed rationales for the unified letter, two-letter, and three-letter hypotheses. Fitzgerald thinks that of the three, the unified letter hypothesis seems to make the most sense, due to the thematic consistency of the letter, and the extensive use of friendship language throughout. If the letter is in fact unified, the most likely chronology of events that can be reconstructed seem to be as follows: 1) The Philippians learn of Paul’s imprisonment; 2) they send Epaphroditus with a gift to deliver to Paul; 3) Epaphroditus falls seriously ill on the way to Paul and nearly dies; 4) the Philippians learn of Epaphroditus’ illness and become concerned; 5) Epaphroditus recovers, completes his journey to Paul, and delivers the gift; 6) Epaphroditus learns of the Philippians’ anxiety for him and becomes distressed; 7) Paul sends Epaphroditus back to Philippi with a letter in which he commends Epaphroditus, thanks the Philippians for their gift, warns them about false teachers, and informs them about his own circumstances and plans.

first letter's sending, and after he recovered, he took the second letter, verses 1:1-3:1a and 4:21-23, back to the Philippians.¹²⁶

The second prominent two-letter hypothesis, put forth by Gnilka, divides the letter in such a way that the first letter is composed of 1:1-3:1a and 4:21-23, while the second consists of 3:1b-4:1 and 8-9. In this hypothesis, the first letter is pastoral, and is sent after Epaphroditus brings the gift to Paul. The second letter is sent after Paul has been released from prison, and after false teachers have descended upon Philippi. In the first letter, Paul's main concern is the love the community has for one another; in the second, his focus is upon protecting the integrity of the gospel, in the face of threats he perceives.¹²⁷

A three-letter hypothesis is also prominent in modern scholarship. The most common rendering of this theory consists of Letter A as 4:10-20, Letter B as 1:1-3:1a, and Letter C as 3:2-4:1. The reason for these divisions begin with Letter A, which appears to be a note of gratitude. It is self-contained, and even ends with a doxology. Furthermore, proponents of this theory tend to think it unlikely that Paul would have waited as long as the letter implies, if it were read as a one- or two-letter construction, before expressing thanks to the church. Letter B is intended to commend Epaphroditus after he falls ill. Letter C is a third letter, carried by Timothy, after Paul hears of the Philippian false teachers.¹²⁸

A unified letter theory holds that even though the tone seems to change abruptly when mention is made of the Philippian invaders, such a feature is normative in friendship letters of the ancient Greco-Roman world. Such invective and vilification were common in this era, and served to impress the scope and depth of the friendship between writer and audience by calling to

¹²⁶ Fitzgerald, 321

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

mind a common enemy, and acting as an antithesis to words of praise and affection between the friends elsewhere in the letter. Additionally, though the thanks for the gift in the letter seems to be overtly misplaced, according to Fitzgerald, it actually seems to act as an occasion for Paul to “comment on their long-standing partnership in the gospel.”¹²⁹

The theme of partnership throughout the letter not only makes the unified letter theory appealing, but also helps to illuminate some of the questions surrounding the hymn in verses 2:6-11. Unity and partnership are indeed the primary instruction Paul gives to his churches. This unity and partnership involve a partnership with him, with one another, and with Christ. This unity is more than nominal, however—it is actually a mystical union, whereby believers are actually “in Christ,” and so in “one another.” This point sheds light on both the placement of the “hymn,” and the reason it must be read in conjunction with verse 5: Paul is advancing a participation in Christ that is not contractual, but covenantal. Therefore, Paul is exhorting his churches to follow his example and strive to imitate him, love one another, and be “in Christ.”¹³⁰

For Paul, being “in Christ” means participating in his death, so as to participate in his glorified life.¹³¹ Likewise, it appears that for Paul, this understanding did not nullify the Judaism he held, but fulfilled it, so that in his thinking a new age had begun. Thus, when Paul writes in Philippians 2:9-11 that God gave Jesus the name that is over every name, he is not blaspheming, but assenting to what he understood to be the new covenant, alluded to in Jeremiah. When Paul speaks of the exaltation of Christ, he is not lowering God, but realizing the depth of God’s love for man: God sent his Son so that men might hear “the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”¹³² And it is in the answering of this call that Paul understands both his role and the role his

¹²⁹ Fitzgerald, 321-2

¹³⁰ 1 Cor 4:15-17, 11:1, 12:27, et. al.

¹³¹ Rom 12:5

¹³² Phil 3:14

churches are to play: they are to suffer as Christ suffered. This is nowhere elucidated more clearly than when Paul says, “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse...that I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.”¹³³

References abound throughout Paul’s letters pertaining to this theme of suffering. These references to Paul’s sufferings for Christ look with joy and hope to the end of Christ’s action as the King of God, when he will “hand over the kingdom to his God and Father...for he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet,” for “when everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.”¹³⁴ In other words, Paul understands that in order to fulfill the call of God, to be acceptable to God, one had only to be in his Son, for the Son received the promise given to Abraham that declared that his offspring would “inherit the world.”¹³⁵ Given this line of thinking so prevalent throughout Paul, making sense of Philippians 2:5-11 is much easier, and should be translated as such:

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is also in Christ Jesus, who existing in the form of God did not hold on as a prize to be equal with God, but having emptied himself taking the form of a slave, was born in the likeness of men: and as a man having been found in character he humbled himself becoming subject to death, death of the cross. And wherefore God exalted him and delighted to give him the name that is over every name, so that in the name of Jesus every knee of beings in the heavens and in the earth and under the earth will bend, and every tongue confess in full that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

¹³³ Phil 3:8-11

¹³⁴ 1 Cor 15:24, 25, 27-28

¹³⁵ Rom 4:13, Gal 3:16, Gen 17:7

This rendering treats the debatable words alluded to above in the light of Paul's concept of the "new Covenant," wherein "all the promises of God find their 'yes' in [Jesus Christ]."¹³⁶ The promises alluded to appear to be the same ones that were given to the Hebrews in Deuteronomy 11:27 and to Abraham, through his "seed." Paul believes Jesus to be this seed, and since there is only one, as he points out vehemently in Galatians 3, then he has inferred that in order for Abraham's descendants to participate in God's blessing, they must partake of Christ. In doing this, they "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."¹³⁷ To accomplish this, Paul understands that he must make himself a "slave to all, that [he] might win the more."¹³⁸

Paul understood that many people who heard this kind of message considered it "folly."¹³⁹ And indeed, many commentaries in print today would not agree with such a reading of Philippians 2:5-11 as it has been proffered here. Many scholars would find much of this rendering valid, and much of it incorrect. Many of the writings of these scholars were consulted in the writing of this paper, and although their interpretations may vary from the conclusions drawn here, their reasons for such opinions are founded on good evidence. Because of this, these commentaries should be mentioned, in the hopes of informing readers of numerous opinions, and in the hopes of taking the best from all interested parties in a search for the best possible reading of this important passage, penned by this important historical figure.

Other Notable Interpretations of Philippians 2:5-11

R.P. Martin's *Carmen Christi* remains one of the most notable and informative texts pertaining to Philippians 2:6-11. Martin considers the passage to be a "carmen," which is "a

¹³⁶ 2 Cor 3:6, 1:19-20

¹³⁷ 2 Cor 3:18

¹³⁸ 1 Cor 9:19

¹³⁹ 1 Cor 1:22-24

Christological ode devoted to praise of the Church's Lord and hailing him in confession."¹⁴⁰

Martin arrived at this conclusion by considering the following characteristics of the passage: first, since letters in the ancient church were meant to be read aloud, he thinks it worthwhile to look for passages that exhibit such literary devices as "homoeoteleuton," alliteration, antithesis, or chiasmus. Moreover, Martin believes that since the Jewish tradition had a long heritage of Psalmody, it would be only natural for the primitive church to desire an offering of praise to its "cultic God," Jesus Christ. Thus, he reads the passage as a hymn, which is a Christological confession that proclaims the Lord as pre-existent, incarnate, and exalted—the "three states of Christ."¹⁴¹

A second major contributor to the study of this Philippians text is Ernst Kasemann. Kasemann's treatment of the text is primarily theological. He desires to read the text as critically as possible, without an "exegete's bias." Unlike other commentators, Kasemann is not concerned as much with the structure of the hymn, as he is with its content. Kasemann believes that this content is mythical, and deals with a divine being's incarnation and exaltation, but denies an ethical application to the myth. By rejecting this "ethical idealism," Kasemann hopes to capture more of the hymn's message of salvation. Like his predecessor, Karl Barth, Kasemann "refuse[s] to reduce the divinity of Christ to his humanity's transparency to divine glory." In other words, Kasemann bitterly holds that the hymn is patently Christocentric, and should not be read in a Heideggerian, over-humanizing way.¹⁴²

Kasemann treated ἀρπαγμόν in verse 6 as *res rapta*, and attributes Hellenism with being the primary influence behind Paul's writing of the text. He does not see the hymn as alluding to

¹⁴⁰ R.P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (New York, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 20

¹⁴¹ Martin, 21-23

¹⁴² See Morgan, 55-59, for a detailed account of Kasemann's anti-ethical reading of the text, and his rationale for such a reading.

the church, but to Christ, except when the Father is mentioned in the last verse. Kasemann believes that at this point in the hymn, the church is first mentioned, for this signifies the eschatological event.

A third important commentary in the study of Philippians 2:5-11 is by James D.G. Dunn. Dunn's treatment of the text is notable because it contends that the entire hymn exemplifies an "Adam Christology." For Dunn, the hymn is structured to reflect both God's intention in creating humankind (Adam), and to contrast the traditional understanding of Adam's failure. As "Adam was 'bad,' and the degenerative pattern of humanity, Christ in contrast was the 'good, redemptive pattern.'" Dunn posits that such a dualistic Christology was "widespread" throughout the early church, and is founded upon the notion that the "exalted Christ has fulfilled the function originally intended for humankind," as embodied by Adam. Thus, Dunn takes a *res rapienda* view of ἀρπαγμὸν, and contrasts Christ's not seizing the equality of God with Adam's attempt at seizing it in the Garden. By refusing to submit to this pride, Christ becomes the exalted one, the one who is "truly human."¹⁴³

Finally, Stephen Fowl regards Philippians 2:5-11 in an ethical way, and begins by treating ἀρπαγμὸν as *res rapta*. Additionally, Fowl cites Paul's overarching concern for unity among his community, stating that Paul considered such unity as essential to salvation. Furthermore, according to Fowl, Paul's words in Philippians regarding what he wants to do should be understood as examples of what he wants his Philippian converts to practice as well. Fowl takes this position because he thinks that such a manner of life, a manner of "being poured out as a libation for the sacrificial service of faith," is the "manner of life which God vindicates."

¹⁴³ Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, "Christ, Adam, and Pre-existence," by James D.G. Dunn, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 74-78. Of special interest in this commentary is a reference chart provided by Dunn, wherein he demonstrates the parallels he perceives between Adam and Christ on page 76.

This reading, then, accords well not only with verse 5, but also with the references within the hymn to Christ's self-emptying and taking the form of a slave. Furthermore, this mode of reading does not seem to do violence to Kasemann's rendition, because it still maintains that Christ is the high Lord. Where it deviates primarily from Kasemann's translation is in the exaltation of the church that is implied both in the hymn, and more overtly, throughout the Pauline corpus. This reading, finally, is most consonant with the reading offered in this section.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

The reading of Philippians 2:5-11 offered here, therefore, is not just ethical, nor is it only kerygmatic. It is, in fact, a manifesto of Paul's gospel. It sees in the risen Christ whom Paul experienced the fulfillment of Israel's hopes, and commends the Philippian Church to follow Christ in like manner, if they are to share in his glory. It cannot be overstated that Paul perceived suffering, as a slave, as the means whereby he could know the "power of the Cross."¹⁴⁵ In this suffering, Paul believed he had "obtained access to this grace in which [he stood], and rejoice[d] in the hope of sharing in the glory of Christ."¹⁴⁶ Thus, the writing is ethical. This passage exhorts the Philippians to suffer so they too may enjoy "the sanctification and its end, eternal life in Christ Jesus, our Lord."¹⁴⁷

However, the passage is kerygmatic, for it heralds Christ, and the new life that is available in him. It decries the old ways of the Law, in favor of something new, wherein men

¹⁴⁴ Ralph P. Martin and Brian J. Dodd, eds., *Where Christology Began: Essays on Philippians 2*, "Christology and Ethics in Philippians 2:5-11," by Steven Fowl, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 141-7. Also, note that the Scripture reference is to *Philippians 2:17*

¹⁴⁵ 1 Cor 1:18

¹⁴⁶ Rom 5:2

¹⁴⁷ Rom 6:22-23

might be free, and “adopted as sons of God.”¹⁴⁸ By becoming such sons of God, Paul perceives in the death, resurrection, and life of the church, the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, and his covenant with Israel. In these promises, and their “yes in Christ Jesus,” Paul formulates his message of hope, his gospel, which he not only preaches to all the churches, but recounts in the hortatory, doxological, and christological passage found in Philippians 2:5-11.

Thus, there exist striking similarities between the Christology of 1 Corinthians 15 and Philippians 2:5-11. Christologically, both passages laud the risen Jesus, who for Paul is the center of faith because of the fact that he did not remain in some sort of preexistent state as the Son, but instead clothed himself in flesh, descended to humanity, and bore the sins of men for their salvation. Such themes are evident as well in Colossians. However, many scholars do not deem Colossians to be an authentically Pauline letter. Therefore, before the Christology of Colossians can be explored, the arguments against its status as a Pauline letter must first be dealt with.

¹⁴⁸ Gal 3:26

CHAPTER 4

PAUL'S CHRISTOLOGY IN COLOSSIANS

Introduction: Is Colossians Paul's "Eighth Undisputed Letter?"

If Philippians is a genuine Pauline letter, why then do scholars generally regard Colossians as a deutero-Pauline letter, given its apparent similarities to Philippians, especially those similarities between the Philippians "hymn" and the Colossians "hymn" in 1:15-20? Are those scholars who hold that Colossians is a pseudepigraphy justified in their reasoning, or should Colossians be numbered among the "undisputed Pauline letters?"

The research involved in finding an answer to this question revealed that the debate over Colossians' authorship is far from settled, and that there are, in fact, numerous reasons to doubt the prevailing opinion that Colossians is pseudepigraphal. Though many scholars have most often cited aberrant vocabulary, syntax, theological positions, and themes in Colossians as their rationale for denying that the letter is genuinely Pauline, the arguments to support Pauline authorship are likewise viable. The task of the remainder of this section, then, will be to establish the validity of these arguments, and demonstrate that Colossians may in fact be a genuine Pauline letter. This task will be accomplished by 1) enumerating and examining the most prominent arguments against Pauline authorship of Colossians in scholarship today, 2) answering these arguments in turn, and 3) delineating a possible scenario to account for the so-called anomalies of Colossians, and demonstrating that it may in fact have been authored by Paul. Once these arguments have been made, the Christology of Colossians will be explored.

An Examination of the Most Prominent Arguments Against Pauline Authorship of Colossians

Paul was assumed to be the author of Colossians until 1838, when Ernst Mayerhoff questioned this identification. He based his suspicion upon four arguments. First, he noted that the language and style differed from Paul's other letters. Second, he contended that Colossians was written to combat a heresy that could have only emerged in the church after Paul had died. Third, Mayerhoff believed that Colossians was dependent on Ephesians (which, incidentally, he considered to be genuinely Pauline), but too different from that letter to be Paul's. Finally, Mayerhoff cited the appearance of numerous terms in the letter that were otherwise not found in Paul's undisputed letters, or whose meaning had been so significantly altered that they could no longer be confidently ascribed to Paul.¹⁴⁹

The theological and linguistic arguments begun by Mayerhoff were expanded and further developed in the 1970s, as scholars reexamined Colossians. W. Bujard's critical analysis of the letter in 1973, which stands as the most significant study of the epistle's authorship since Mayerhoff, concluded that the letter was not Paul's, based on the letter's style, syntax, and structure.¹⁵⁰ In his study, Bujard showed that the sentences in Colossians are "significantly longer and more complex than Paul's," that there is less attention given to the logical development of an argument in Colossians than in genuine Pauline letters, and that "the use of

¹⁴⁹ Mark Kiley, *Colossians as Pseudepigraphy* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1986), 37-39. See this section for an excellent summary of both Mayerhoff's arguments against Pauline authorship of Colossians, as well as those of numerous scholars today. Kiley agrees with Mayerhoff that Paul did not write Colossians, but his reasons are based on his thesis that all Pauline letters are written around a core concern for the financing of his missions, not necessarily the merit of Mayerhoff's arguments. In fact, Kiley disputes Mayerhoff as follows: first, he believes Colossians is not based on Ephesians, but rather, is based on Philippians (p. 44); second, he sees the argument against variant vocabulary as weak, because even in the undisputed Pauline letters, numerous words occur in particular letters and nowhere else (p. 45). This will be one of the arguments later in this paper to assert Paul's authorship of Colossians.

¹⁵⁰ Richard E. DeMaris, *The Colossian Controversy* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1994), 12. See this passage for a summary of Bujard's argument. DeMaris' main concern is not so much with the authorship of the letter, but rather, with the "philosophy" alluded to in Col 2:8. This philosophy, like the anomalous "tone" of the letter, alluded to elsewhere, will also help to bolster the argument that the letter is Paul's.

many synonyms and appositional phrases makes the style of Colossians wordy and tautologous.”¹⁵¹

Since Bujard authored his analysis of Colossians, numerous other scholars have subscribed to the notion that Colossians is pseudepigraphal, so much so, in fact, that it is no longer numbered among the undisputed Pauline letters among conventional scholarship. James D.G. Dunn declares that it is probable, “given the relative constancy of Paul’s style elsewhere, the hand [who authored the letter] is different [than Paul’s].” Dunn comments further that the differences he notes in the letter, as compared to the seven undisputed Pauline letters, “are not secretarial, but authorial, in differences of speech mannerisms and patterns of composition.”¹⁵² These opinions regarding the apparent stylistic and theological disparities found in Colossians are so widespread, in fact, that they are echoed in the text of a well-read New Testament studies textbook, authored by Bart Ehrman.

Ehrman declares that “one of the most compelling arguments [for questioning Paul’s authorship of Colossians] depends on a detailed knowledge of Greek, for the writing style of Colossians differs markedly from that found in Paul’s undisputed letters.” Furthermore, Ehrman sees theological disparities between Colossians and other Pauline letters. He cites, for instance, Paul’s rebukes against the Corinthian church, who claimed to already be participating in the resurrection with Christ, as being at odds with the eloquent passage in Colossians that declares that believers have “already been raised with Christ in the heavenly places.” Although Ehrman

¹⁵¹ David Noel Freeman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. I, “Epistle to the Colossians,” by Victor Paul Furnish, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1093. In this entry, Furnish notes that Bujard’s arguments concerning the “style” of Colossians are not easily dismissed. This stylistic argument, however, will be shown to be inconclusive, when the letter is compared to Romans.

¹⁵² See James D.G. Dunn’s, *The Epistles to Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 35-36

concedes that Paul may have altered his theology during the course of his ministry, he sees such an inconsistency as being highly problematic.¹⁵³

Indeed, Ehrman, Dunn, Bujard, Mayerhoff, and the rest of Pauline scholars who have concluded that *Colossians* is pseudepigraphal based on the lexical, syntactical, theological, and thematic differences of the letter are correct in perceiving the problematic passages of the epistle. However, these problems are by no means insurmountable, and when they are viewed in light of the context in which the letter was written, they actually appear to be quite fitting to Paul's circumstances and thought. In order to demonstrate this, these objections to Pauline authorship will first be examined and responded to.¹⁵⁴

Answering the Arguments Against Pauline Authorship of *Colossians*

The most often cited argument against Pauline authorship of *Colossians* is actually the easiest to dispel. This is the argument based on the use of words in the letter that are not found anywhere else in the Pauline corpus, or for that matter, the entire New Testament. There are thirty-four such words in *Colossians*.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, such a presence of distinctive vocabulary might at first seem a logical rationale for concluding that someone with a different lexicon might have authored the letter. The question is, do any of Paul's other letters exhibit such disparities in

¹⁵³ See Ehrman, 379-81, for a succinct summary of the arguments against Pauline authorship. Though Ehrman does not think *Colossians* is genuinely Pauline, he does go to great lengths to note the key features of the letter that do resemble Paul's letter-writing style, and his theology, especially the importance of suffering in the world, Jesus' death as a reconciliation, and the participation of believers in Jesus' death through baptism.

¹⁵⁴ This paper will not deal with the "philosophy" of 2:8 for two reasons. First, it does not necessarily bolster the argument for Pauline authorship. Second, numerous scholars deal with the issue, and because the best conclusions regarding the identity of the philosophy do not deter from any arguments against Pauline authorship, a mere recitation of all the possibilities of who this group was seems unnecessary. However, it should be said that the best conclusions regarding the identity of this group were authored by Dunn and Demaris. In short, Dunn believes the group to be predominantly Jewish, from a Colossian synagogue, who were concerned with food laws, the calendar, and circumcision (Dunn, 30-34). Demaris believes the "philosophy" to be comprised of a "distinctive blend of popular Middle-Platonic, Jewish, and Christian elements that cohere around the pursuit of wisdom" (Demaris, 17). Both of these options are not only possible, but likely during the Apostle's life.

¹⁵⁵ Kiley, 43

vocabulary? The answer is, quite simply, yes. In fact, Philippians, a letter of comparable length to Colossians that is conventionally recognized as undisputedly Pauline, has thirty-six such words.¹⁵⁶ If the use of variant or unusual vocabulary is the basis for denying Paul's authorship, what must be said about other letters in his corpus that exhibit like tendencies?

The second argument against Paul's authorship is a bit more difficult to assess than the argument from vocabulary, but it is not insuperable. This position cites the variant syntax found in Colossians as being too different from Paul's other letters. Indeed, some of the sentences in Colossians are markedly different from those found in letters like Galatians or 1 Corinthians. Some of the sentences are tremendously long and wordy. Bart Ehrman declares that "whereas Paul tends to write in short, succinct sentences, the author of Colossians has a more complex, involved style."¹⁵⁷ In order to illustrate this point, he notes Colossians 1:3-8, which is, in fact, one long sentence. Like the argument from vocabulary, this seems at first glance to be a rather indicting claim against genuine authorship, but several points bear mentioning, which call this argument into question.

For one thing, though the sentence Ehrman alludes to, Colossians 1:3-8, is admittedly long at one hundred and two words, it should be noted that it is part of the introduction/salutation/thanksgiving formula that marks most of Paul's letters, and it is by no means representative of the average sentence structure found throughout the letter. In fact, the only other sentence that is longer than this throughout the letter is the "hymn" in 1:15-20. Most other clauses in the letter are less than sixty words.¹⁵⁸ Still, is the fact that two exorbitantly long

¹⁵⁶ Kiley, 44

¹⁵⁷ Ehrman, 380

¹⁵⁸ It should be noted that in Nestle-Aland's Greek-English New Testament (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1981), if one performs a word count based solely on the placement of periods, rather than the word count in various clauses, the word count per sentence is generally significantly higher in Colossians than many sentences in other

sentences exist in the letter sufficient grounds for questioning Pauline authorship? This might be the case, if no other letters exhibited such tendencies. However, letter openings similar to that found in Colossians are rather normative for Paul, as seen in his letter to Romans and 1 Thessalonians. In Paul's first letter to the church of Thessalonica, his thanksgiving numbers eighty-one words. The greeting in Romans numbers a substantial ninety-three words. Thus, typically Pauline letter openings (introduction, salutation, thanksgiving) may include lengthy passages, and the fact that Colossians bears such an eloquent, sweeping thanksgiving is by no means conclusive evidence against Paul's authoring of the letter, for other undisputed letters bear strikingly similar traits.

The issue of similarity is the basis for the third argument against Pauline authorship of Colossians, this being that the letter speaks theologically and thematically in a manner that is inconsistent with recognized Pauline letters. To support these positions, scholars note the absence of certain key Pauline themes, and apparent contradictions between Colossians and the rest of the Pauline corpus. Regarding the absence of major themes in Colossians, scholars have marked the lack of "such major Pauline topics as God's gift of righteousness, the meaning of justification, faith versus works of the law, the function of the law, or the meaning of freedom in Christ" from Colossians.¹⁵⁹ The absence of such themes, however, is not necessarily a convincing reason to deny that Paul authored the letter, for all of Paul's letters deal with matters that are either not found at all or are not as developed in his other epistles. For example, the

Pauline letters. However, this issue is not by itself conclusive evidence against Paul's authoring the letter, due in part to the fact that ancient Greek writing did not usually use punctuation at all. Also, there is the possibility that since Paul did not found the church at Colossae, he may have been writing in a more elevated and formal tone than what is normally seen in his letters to his churches. Admittedly, these possibilities are dubious and nearly impossible to prove, but they should nevertheless be maintained as potential options to explain the disparities between Colossians and undisputed Pauline letters.

¹⁵⁹ Furnish, 1093

parousia receives a more elaborate treatment in 1 Thessalonians than anywhere else.

Furthermore, 1 Thessalonians has no mention of circumcision. The Corinthian correspondence is replete with addresses to concerns seen virtually nowhere else, including the Lord's Supper, meat sacrificed to idols, lawsuits, incest, head coverings, "super apostles," the resurrection body, and spiritual gifts. Libertinism is most admonished in Philippians. The relationship between Israel and Gentiles is nowhere as well articulated and expanded as it is in Romans.¹⁶⁰ Thus, the observation that Colossians is strangely silent on such matters as cited above is called into question. Admittedly, however, this is not the case regarding the apparent contradictions scholars have noted between Colossians and the undisputed Pauline corpus. In other words, these contradictions present the best evidence against Paul's authoring of the letter.

Scholars have noted passages in Colossians that seem to contradict important theological and thematic elements found in other Pauline letters, and regard this as highly problematic. Examples of these contradictions include the following: 1) in Colossians, the redemptive work of Christ is identified above all with "the forgiveness of sins," whereas in Romans, the author perceives Christ's work mainly as one of justification, 2) in Colossians, Christ is identified as the "head" not only of the church, but the entire cosmos, whereas in 1 Corinthians and Romans, the entire body of the church is identified with Christ, and no special standing is attributed to the "head," 3) whereas in other Pauline letters, like Romans, eschatological themes seem to definitely carry a futuristic, "not yet" context, Colossians emphasizes a "now" eschatology, and the redemption believers experience at present, and finally, 4) when the author of Colossians counters the mysterious "philosophy" of 2:8, neither the polemic nor the character of the adversarial "philosophy" itself are as well defined as they are when Paul speaks against the

¹⁶⁰ Dr. Emily Cheney, Religion 4082, (Athens, GA: University of Georgia, Fall, 2002)

“mutilators of the flesh” in Galatians.¹⁶¹ Admittedly, these apparent contradictions present the greatest challenge to attributing Colossians to Paul. The presence of such contradictions seems to suggest that one who is as seemingly coherent as Paul could not have possibly written the letter. This reasoning would be sound, if it did not hinge upon one critical presupposition: that Paul is a systematic theologian who possessed a rigid, unchanging theology. This, however, seems to be a dubious notion, based upon a close examination of the biographical details of the Apostle’s life. Such an investigation reveals, in fact, that the Apostle did change at least some of his views, in light of the circumstances he was experiencing, and his letter to the Colossians serves as a valuable window into the progression of this key Christian figure’s changing modalities of thought.

When, Why, and How Colossians Was Written By Paul

Scholars agree that numerous, “typically” Pauline elements do exist in the letter to the Colossians, including Jesus’ death on the cross, which brings reconciliation; that believers have been “buried” with Christ in baptism; that faith involves the discarding of one’s “old” self and becoming a “new” person; that the church is the “body” of Christ; and finally, that in Christ, normal, societal barriers are dissolved.¹⁶² However, as noted above, there are significant passages in the letter that seem to deviate from Paul’s system of theology, and these contradictions serve as the greatest reason to suspect that Paul authored the letter. Such variances can only be explained in one of the following ways: either Paul was schizophrenic (in the sense of experiencing personality changes so drastic that he seems to be speaking with two different voices), another person wrote the letter in Paul’s name, or Paul himself changed his

¹⁶¹ Furnish, 1093-4

¹⁶² Furnish, 1093

positions as circumstances in his life changed. Based on a review of the Apostle's life, this last option seems the most credible. In order to demonstrate this, several traditional theories regarding Paul's life must be reexamined.

One of the reasons scholars see Colossians as being so deviant is because it conflicts with Romans. This is significant because many scholars believe that, of the extant letters, Romans was written last.¹⁶³ If Romans is the last letter Paul wrote, it would be exceedingly difficult to explain how Colossians could be so different from preceding letters like Galatians and succeeding letters like Romans, for the tone and subject matter between letters like Romans and Galatians is rather uniform. But is Romans the last of Paul's letters? This is a question of principal importance, for if it is, then it is most likely that Paul did not write Colossians, because he does not appear to be any kind of psychologically impaired person. However, if Romans is not the last letter from Paul's hand, this may well be a significant chink in modern thought regarding not only Colossians, but Paul himself, and the early church at large.

In Paul's letter to the Romans, he offers valuable clues to assess whether or not it was the last letter he authored. He mentions a collection that he has gathered from Macedonia and Achaia that he intends to deliver to Jerusalem, before departing for Spain via Rome.¹⁶⁴ As he alludes to this errand to Jerusalem, Paul commends Phoebe, "a minister of the church at

¹⁶³ Cheney, 2002; see also Ehrman, 341 & 344, who believes that Philippians and Philemon were written during either a Roman or Ephesian imprisonment (if Ephesian, then datable to around 55CE), and that Romans was written in 57-58CE; cf. also Calvin Roetzel, *The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context*, 4th Ed., (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 103, 113, and 116, where he dates Romans to 56-57CE, Philippians to 55-56CE, and Philemon to 55-56CE. The issue between Philippians and Romans is important, for themes are found in Philippians that act as a bridge between the seeming change in Paul's thought from Romans to Colossians. For instance, the Christological hymn of Phil 2:6-11 is unique to the Pauline corpus, and shows a Christology that is far more developed than what is found in Romans, one where Christ is pre-existent. However, seeds of this Christology can be found in Romans, especially in 1:20 and 14:11. Meanwhile, the issue between Philemon, Philippians, and Romans is critical because Philippians and Philemon both mention people who will prove critical to dating Colossians and establishing its author.

¹⁶⁴ Rom 15:24-29

Cenchreae,” to the church at Rome.¹⁶⁵ Cenchreae is a city close to the port city of Corinth, and given this location, as well as the fact that Paul is on his way to Jerusalem, the letter should be dated to his third missionary journey, which many scholars agree occurred between 54-58CE.¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, numerous scholars believe *Philippians* and *Philemon* to have been authored before Romans, probably around 55CE, while Paul was imprisoned. This theory, however, poses several significant problems. For one thing, in order for *Philippians* to have been authored during a confinement of 55CE, the place of imprisonment would most likely have had to be Ephesus.¹⁶⁷ However, Ephesus is never mentioned as a site of incarceration, either in Paul’s letters, or Acts. In fact, it was not regarded widely as a possibility until the twentieth century, because of its close proximity to Philippi.¹⁶⁸ Similarly, if Paul was ever jailed in Ephesus, there is little evidence to corroborate that he was under a death sentence, which both *Philemon* and *Philippians* seem to indicate. On the other hand, there are two prison sites listed in Acts, which can confidently be corroborated by Paul’s letters, these being Caesarea and Rome.

In Acts 23, the author describes how Paul is taken, under the protection of armed Romans, to Caesarea for his own protection from hostile Jewish mobs, where he is to await trial before Felix the governor. In Herod’s “praetorium,” Paul sits for two years, until Felix is succeeded by Festus.¹⁶⁹ After Festus hears Paul’s defense against the charges his accusers have

¹⁶⁵ Rom 16:1

¹⁶⁶ David Noel Freeman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. V, “Paul,” by Hans Dieter Betz (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 191-2. Here Betz attempts to date the major events of the Apostle’s life. Betz dates *Philippians* to a probable Ephesian imprisonment, around 55CE, and dates *Romans* to 56CE. See also, map titled, “The Journeys of St. Paul,” in *New American Bible* (New York: Catholic Book Publishing, 1991), p. 181

¹⁶⁷ See Fitzgerald, 323. In this entry, Fitzgerald notes that neither Paul nor Acts mention Ephesus as a place of imprisonment. Based on uncertainties such as these, Fitzgerald concludes that Rome was probably the most likely site of composition for *Philippians*.

¹⁶⁸ Fitzgerald, 322

¹⁶⁹ Acts 23:35, 24:27

brought, Paul appeals to Caesar.¹⁷⁰ Festus agrees, and then Paul is eventually extradited to Rome. In Rome, Paul awaits his trial for two years under house arrest, and then Acts falls silent regarding the Apostle's fate.¹⁷¹ Presumably, Paul received his hearing with Caesar after these two years had lapsed, and was subsequently executed.¹⁷²

Though Paul never mentions either Caesarea or Rome by name, he does offer important clues to substantiate the account in Acts. For instance, in Philippians, Paul mentions both his imprisonment, as well as the praetorium and "Caesar's household."¹⁷³ Furthermore, scholars agree that the tone of this letter signifies that Paul was well aware of the gravity of the charges brought against him, that he knew he faced death.¹⁷⁴ Similarly, in Philemon, Paul mentions his imprisonment three times.¹⁷⁵ What connects Philippians and Philemon is the mention of Timothy, Paul's faithful servant.¹⁷⁶ These allusions serve to validate the claim that both letters were written during the same prison stay. Because of the fact that Acts only mentions Caesarea and Rome as prison sites, then the place of authorship for these letters was most likely not Ephesus, but was either Caesarea or Rome, thus dating both Philippians and Philemon not to 55-56CE, but rather around 58-62CE and 60-64CE, respectively. However, Acts' word is not proof enough. What serves to augment the position that Philippians and Philemon are authored later than Romans is the content of Philippians, which seems to indicate that Paul experiences a marked theological shift as he languishes in prison. The passage that most conveys this transformation in thought is the so-called "hymn" in Philippians 2:6-11. In this passage, Paul's

¹⁷⁰ Acts 25:11-12

¹⁷¹ Acts 28:30

¹⁷² Betz, 191

¹⁷³ Phil 1:7, 1:13, 4:22

¹⁷⁴ Again, see Fitzgerald, 322, for an explanation of the Apostle's tone behind passages such as Phil 1:7, 13-14, 17, as well as his "contemplation of martyrdom" in Phil 1:19-26 and 2:17.

¹⁷⁵ Phile 1:1, 9, 13

¹⁷⁶ Phil 1:1, 2:19; Phile 1:1

Christology takes a marked turn, as does his eschatology. If the implications of this hymn can be shown, then it can be shown that the charge that scholars have leveled against Colossians as being too variant from other Pauline letters is unfounded. In other words, if Colossians and Philippians can be shown to have been authored by the same individual, then the argument for concluding that Colossians is Pauline is significantly strengthened. Therefore, a look at the similarities between the Philippians hymn and its counterpart in Colossians is in order.

In his letter to the church of Colossae, Paul continues to extol the Christ of eternity past, as he did in the Philippian “hymn.” In this letter, the Apostle writes another “hymn” of sweeping power and beauty, which continues the themes of Philippians. In Colossians 1:15-20, Christ is rendered in strikingly similar language and themes to Philippians 2:6-11. Notable resemblances exist between the two hymns, both in vocabulary used as well as the portrayal of the pre-existent, eternal Christ. Both hymns subject Christ to God. Both hymns speak of the ultimate submission of all beings, whether on heaven or on earth, to Christ. Finally, both hymns make mention of Christ’s cross, and its power to save. Given these important likenesses, it seems highly probable that the same individual authored Colossians and Philippians. However, these are not the only similarities that are worth noting. The letters share structural and thematic features as well, including: (1) the admonition to “bear fruit,”¹⁷⁷ (2) references to Paul’s prayers that the respective churches be strengthened in discernment/knowledge/perception,¹⁷⁸ (3) the allusions to Paul’s struggles on behalf of the respective churches,¹⁷⁹ (4) references to the revelation of the

¹⁷⁷ Phil 1:11, Col 1:10

¹⁷⁸ Phil 1:9, Col 1:9

¹⁷⁹ Phil 1:30, Col 1:24

glory of Christ's faithful when he comes,¹⁸⁰ (5) admonitions to the churches to continue to pray,¹⁸¹ and (6) frequent mentions of the slavery of the Apostle and his co-workers.¹⁸²

Given these similarities between Philippians and Colossians, it may be tempting to simply charge that Colossians is merely a pseudepigraphy based on Philippians. In fact, Mark Kiley has claimed precisely this.¹⁸³ However, two more points about Colossians must be stressed, which will render such a charge as highly improbable, if not impossible. These points concern Colossians' relationship to Philemon, and the earthquake that occurred in the Lycus Valley around 61CE.

Several names are found in both Colossians and Philemon, a conventionally regarded undisputed Pauline letter. In both of these letters, Paul mentions Onesimus, and sends his greetings from Epaphrus, Mark, Aristarchus, and Luke.¹⁸⁴ Many scholars agree that Epaphrus is the founder of the church at Colossae, and that Paul most likely never personally visited the church.¹⁸⁵ If a pseudepigrapher based Colossians on Philippians, why then would he mention this figure, who is so prominent in both Philemon and Colossians? A possibility is that the pseudepigrapher wished to legitimize his message by asserting the authority of two figures who would have been well known to the Colossian church, these being its founder, Epaphrus, and his mentor and friend, the Apostle Paul. Of course, such a reading would seem to necessarily be post-Pauline, because of the risk of a Colossian response to the letter that would expose its fraudulence to Paul, but this runs into problems, because Colossae was destroyed by an

¹⁸⁰ Phil 3:21, Col 3:4

¹⁸¹ Phil 4:6, Col 4:2

¹⁸² Phil 1:1, Col 1:7, 3:24, 4:7, 12

¹⁸³ Kiley, 44

¹⁸⁴ Col 4:9-10, 12, 14; Phile 1:10, 23-4

¹⁸⁵ Dunn, 22

earthquake around 61CE, years before Paul perished.¹⁸⁶ At least one scholar has answered this apparent “problem.” One scholar believes that the letter was actually written for the Laodiceans, not the Colossians, because “composing it as if it had been addressed to the congregation in Colossae allows him to represent the apostle in direct confrontation with doctrines like those now proving attractive to the Laodiceans [long after the earthquake had destroyed Colossae, but before the time of Ignatius]. The pseudepigrapher must hope that the Laodiceans will recognize this and will hear in “Paul’s” warnings to a neighboring congregation an authoritative word for their own.”¹⁸⁷ This is a possibility, but it does not answer the pseudepigrapher’s need to extol the virtues of Epaphrus. Of course, Epaphrus may have written the letter himself, but to what end, if it could not be read in his church, but rather in a neighboring church?¹⁸⁸ Are the friends of the Apostle that devious? Possibly. However, another scenario seems to make far more sense, and harmonizes well with the remainder of the Pauline corpus, and includes Colossians as the “eighth undisputed letter.”

Concluding That Colossians Is Genuinely Pauline

If 1 Thessalonians is Paul’s first letter, Galatians his second, 1 and 2 Corinthians his third and fourth, Romans his fifth¹⁸⁹, then Philippians, Philemon, and Colossians would be his last letters, all written during his prison sentence, either in Caesarea or Rome. This is certainly possible, as described above. Furthermore, it is equally possible, given the prominence of Epaphrus and Onesimus in both Philemon and Colossians, that Colossians was written before the earthquake of 61CE. This would still afford the possibility that it was written either from Rome or Caesarea, for the dates of these incarcerations are around 58-63, as mentioned above. It is

¹⁸⁶ Dunn, 23

¹⁸⁷ Furnish, 1095

¹⁸⁸ Furnish, 1095

¹⁸⁹ Roetzel, 80, 83, 96, 103, 113, 116

well within the realm of possibility that Paul wrote these three prison letters before Romans, if he was imprisoned in Ephesus, as some scholars have contended, but that hypothesis would ignore the Christology of Philippians, which at least one scholar agrees is strangely odd if it was developed before Romans.¹⁹⁰ This is so because the Christology of Romans is similar, but certainly not the same as what is found in both Philippians and Colossians. In 1 Thessalonians through Romans, Christ is predominantly rendered as judge and Lord, while in Philippians/Colossians, he is given pre-existence, and is explicitly rendered equal to God. Such a drastic change in Paul's conception of Christ would be difficult to explain if Philippians preceded Romans. Therefore, what seems much more likely is that this Christology in Philippians is similar to the Christology found in Colossians, and this Christology was developed when Paul was under a death sentence.¹⁹¹ Such a trauma can most definitely explain the more mystical nature of these two letters than Romans, which, as mentioned before, is one of the key epistles scholars use to negate Colossians as being authentically Pauline. Furthermore, the use of similar names in Colossians and Philemon also serves to bolster the argument that Colossians was authored during the same prison stay, a stay in which the Apostle faced death, realized Christ would probably not come in his life, as he had once thought, and looked ahead "toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling, in Christ Jesus."¹⁹²

The Christology of Colossians

Having established that Colossians may well be a genuine Pauline letter, what can be said about its Christology? In short, the Christology of this letter is strikingly similar to that in Philippians, in that it further develops the themes found in 1 Corinthians 15. In 1 Corinthians 15,

¹⁹⁰ Dunn, 40

¹⁹¹ Phil 2:17, 3:14

¹⁹² Phil 3:14

Christ is God's Wisdom clothed in flesh. So he is in Philippians 2:5-11, as well. However, Philippians 2:5-11 shows a marked development in Paul's thought, where through the "reception of the name that is above every name" and "the bowing of every knee" to Jesus Paul renders him on a par with God that is far more explicit than what is contained in 1 Corinthians 15. Likewise, in Colossians, this theme of Jesus' status as God is even more developed, so that not only is he given pre-existence (as in 1 Corinthians 8 and 15 and Philippians 2), nor is he merely given a role in the creation of the cosmos (as in 1 Corinthians 8:6), but the universe is said to have been both created through him and *for* him. In order to demonstrate this development between the Christology of Philippians and Colossians, a comparison of the two "hymns" is below:

PHILIPPIANS 2:6-11

6 ὃς ἐν μορφῇ Θεοῦ ὑπάρχων
 οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο
 τὸ εἶναι ἴσα Θεῷ,
 7 ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν
 μορφὴν δούλου λαβών,
 ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος·
 καὶ σχήματι εὔθετος ὡς ἄνθρωπος
 8 ἑταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν
 γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου,
 θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.
 9 διὸ καὶ ὁ Θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν
 καὶ ἔχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα
 τὸ ὑπὲρ πᾶν ὄνομα,
 10 ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ
 πᾶν γόνυ κάμψῃ
 ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων
 11 καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσῃται ὅτι
 κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς
 εἰς δόξαν Θεοῦ πατρὸς.

[Have this mind among yourselves, which is also in Christ Jesus],

6 Who, existing in the form of God,
 Did not hold on as a prize
 To be equal with God,
 7 But having emptied himself
 Taking the form of a slave,
 Was born in the likeness of men:
 And as a man having been found in character
 8 He humbled himself
 Becoming subject to death,
 Death of the cross.
 9 And wherefore God exalted him
 And delighted to give him the name
 That is over every name,
 10 So that at the name of Jesus
 Every knee
 Of beings in the heavens and in the earth and
 under the earth will bend,
 11 And every tongue confess in full that
 Jesus Christ is Lord
 To the glory of God the Father

COLOSSIANS 1:15-20

15 ὅς ἐστι· εἰκὼν τοῦ Θεοῦ τοῦ ἀοράτου,
πρωτότοκος πάσης κτίσεως,

16 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ ἐκτίσθη τὰ πάντα
ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς,
τὰ ὄρατὰ καὶ τὰ ἀόρατα,
εἴτε θρόνοι εἴτε κυριότητες
εἴτε ἀρχαὶ εἴτε ἐξουσίαι-
τὰ πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν ἔκτισται-

17 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν πρὸ πάντων
καὶ τὰ πάντα ἐν αὐτῷ συνέστηκεν,
18 καὶ αὐτός ἐστιν ἡ κεφαλὴ τοῦ σώματος
τῆς
ἐκκλησίας-
ὅς ἐστιν ἀρχή,
πρωτότοκος ἐκ τῶν νεκρῶν,
ἵνα γένηται ἐν πᾶσιν αὐτὸς πρωτεύων,

19 ὅτι ἐν αὐτῷ εὐδόκησεν πᾶν τὸ πλήρωμα
κατοικῆσαι
20 καὶ δι' αὐτοῦ ἀποκαταλλάξαι τὰ πάντα εἰς
αὐτόν,
εἰρηνοποιήσας διὰ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ σταυροῦ
αὐτοῦ,
[δι' αὐτοῦ] εἴτε τὰ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς
εἴτε τὰ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς.

15 He is the image of the invisible God,
The firstborn of all creation,

16 Wherefore in him all things were created
In the heavens and on the earth,
The visible and the invisible,
Whether thrones or dominions
Or rulers or powers—
All things were created through him and for
him—

17 And he is before all things
And all things are unified in him,
18 And he is the head of the body the church—
He is the beginning,
The firstborn of the dead,
So that he might be made over all things the
first,

19 Wherefore in him the full measure [of God]
was pleased to dwell
20 And through him to reconcile all things to
himself,
Making peace through the blood of his cross,
[Through him] Whether on the earth
Or in the heavens.

The Colossians hymn is perhaps the best example of the presence of “high” Christology in the thinking of Paul the Apostle. In this hymn, Paul demonstrates that his conception of Christ has changed considerably in scope since the authorship of his first epistle to the Corinthians. Although 1 Corinthians is indeed demonstrable evidence of a divinized Christ, Colossians, following Philippians, raises this Christ even higher. Thus, in Colossians, Christ is not only the Wisdom of God clothed in flesh, the Holy Redeemer of God come from heaven to right Adam’s wrong and fulfill Isaianic expectations of a Suffering Servant, but he is also the one through whom the world was created and for whom the world was created. This, in Jewish cosmology, is clearly the prerogative of God himself, and yet, Paul ascribes this potency to Christ.¹⁹³ Still, Paul renders Christ subject to the Father, demonstrating a Christology that, though it makes the Risen Jesus the divine one through whom creation came into being, he is nevertheless the mediator between humanity and God. Thus, though Colossians bears Paul’s highest Christological expressions, it is nevertheless consistent with what he understood concerning Jesus when he penned 1 Corinthians 15. Likewise, it is consistent with what he wrote in Philippians 2:5-11. Colossians is consistent with all these, and yet, it is the crowning of all them, as Paul’s wisdom and faith in his Lord grew, while he prepared for death.

¹⁹³ Gen 1 & 2

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Upon expositing 1 Corinthians 15, Philippians 2:5-11, and Colossians 1:15-20, it should be clear that these Pauline writings provide valuable insight into Paul's Christology. It should be clear, through Paul's writings, that he had a rather "high" Christology. Still, in spite of the contention of this paper that Paul did in fact have a well-developed Christology, an important question remains. Did Paul regard Christ as *fully* God and *fully* man, as the later Council of Chalcedon declared, or did he hold a more docetic view of his Lord? The answers do not present themselves clearly, either in these passages, or the rest of Paul's writing. In fact, if anything, Paul's writing and the Hebrew Scriptures upon which he bases much of the thought, seem to suggest that the Son of Man and Suffering Servant to which he appears to compare Jesus are holy, yes, but not God. This issue becomes especially noteworthy when Paul's Christology is considered within the balance of the early Church.

The contention at the outset of this paper was that a correct interpretation of Paul's Christology might aid historians in assessing the earliest Church accurately. Upon completion of this paper, this contention still stands. After all, how can an accurate depiction of the early Church's relationships, successes, failures, and composition be ascertained without knowing the theology of one its most influential proponents? This observation gains important relevance when Paul is depicted within the larger first-century Church. Given the tone of passages like Galatians 2:14, it seems clear that Paul did not always stand in solidarity with the "pillars" of the church in Jerusalem. Again, Galatians 2 seems to suggest that circumcision and table fellowship

were the primary issues causing friction among Paul, Peter, and James. However, given Paul's apparent freedom with the Law, one wonders if he raised the ire of fellow believers because of his Christological formulations, as well? Furthermore, if Paul and the pillars did not agree on the nature of the Son, what impact, if any, did the existence of these disparate belief systems have on the Church at large? Finally, did these dichotomies in Christology ultimately aid in severing the church completely from Judaism? It is hoped that further research may come to a satisfactory conclusion regarding these issues. Likewise, it is hoped that this effort might in some small way contribute to such a conclusion.

Finally, despite the questions concerning Paul's Christology and those questions that remain concerning its impact upon the early Church at large, what can be said with little reservation, upon researching the work of Paul, is that Paul loved his Lord, loved God, and loved the Spirit of God. These three "persons" may have had a different connotation for Paul than they do for post-Nicene/Chalcedonian Christianity, but that should not be taken to mean, at least in the opinion of this paper, that Paul was not devout, or a true believer in Christ. In fact, recalling the remarks made at the outset of this paper, based on the research presented here, it seems that Paul's theology of the Son actually adumbrated the formulations of those famous councils, and the fact that these issues linger in Paul only means that Paul continues to elude neat taxonomies and simplistic generalizations, as the brilliant Apostle to the Gentiles.

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