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"I WILL NOT BE PUT TO SHAME": PAUL, THE PHILIPPIANS, AND THE HONOURABLE WISH EOR DEATH[1]

Nijay K Gupta
Durham University

Abstract

Phil 1:18b-26 has been ealled Paul's "existential soliloquy", whereby the imprisoned Apostle faces an imminent trial and weighs the advantages of life and death. Some scholars have pursued the matter of aneient attitudes towards suicide, situating Paul within a Greco-Roman setting that did not abhor the act. However, there is a literary tradition, found in the Jewish literature of the time, which Paul may be drawing upon that illuminates this enigmatie passage further—the *honourable wish for death*. Viewed within a context of honour and shame, Paul is re-envisaging this tradition in light of Christ, demonstrating to concerned Philippians that he and the gospel do not suffer shame in these present circumstances, but find honour that attends living in the crucified Christ.

In 2006 a psychiatrist along with Egyptologists conducted a study of a nearly four-thousand-year-old Egyptian poem written by "the Eloquent Peasant".[2] Their conclusions suggested that this text demonstrates the oldest description of suicide and a remarkable depth of understanding of the psychopathology of despair which longs for death. What is surprising in this text is not an ancient interest in suicide. Classical discussions abound among philosophers and tragedians. In the fifth century B.C.E., Herodotus wrote: "When life is so burdensome, death has become for man a sought after

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[2] See 'Ancient Suicide Note Unearthed' *Metro* (July 11, 2006); see online www.metro.co.uk/ weird/article.html?in_article_id=17315&in_page_id=2.

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refuge" (*Hist.* 7.46).[3] What makes this Egyptian text special is that it was written before and outside of Hellenistic philosophical discussions.

Similarly, several biblical scholars have turned to the matter of psychopathology in Phil 1:18b-26, where Paul seems to enter into pensive reflection on the comparative value of life and death, weighing the advantages of each. One scholar refers to this as an "existential soliloquy" (Dailey 1990, 18),[4] and another writes of Paul's "bubbling forth out of the heart" in this passage where his words betray "at the very least the idea of constraint, and at the worst that of torment" (Silva 2005, 73).[5] Paul sets the options before him: "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain. If it is to be life in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me" (1:21-22a).[6] But his *diaporesis* immediately follows: "But I cannot say what I will choose" (1:22b).[7]

Paul's frankness in this moment supposedly echoes sentiments of despair expressed by poets throughout the ages such as John Donne and Anne Sexton. However, Paul's exercise of "thinking out loud" here causes uneasiness for some because of the inferences that can be drawn. Is Paul considering the possibility of suicide? One scholar in particular, Arthur J. Droge, advocates this view even to the point of suggesting that this is in fact how Paul died (1989, 14). This scenario is only a hypothesis for Droge, but he is more confident in his primary assertion that suicide was "regularly practiced throughout antiquity and was justified by many as an obvious means of deliverance from all sorts of affliction and oppression" (1988, 263). Plato's *Phaedo*, focusing on the death of Socrates, makes more explicit the terms of this act of "voluntary death": suicide is permissible, but

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[3] See Garrison (1991, 3).

[4] Gordon Fee also likens this to a soliloquy (1995, 127).

[5] On Silva's former statement, he translates and paraphrases a comment by U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff (1907, 159).

[6] All biblical quotes come from the NRSV unless otherwise noted.

[7] The exegetical debates on the meanings and appropriate English translations of the two Greek verbs involved, αἱρήσομαι and γνωρίζω, are complex. As for the latter, though Paul most often follows its basic meaning "to make known", here it could hardly be understood in this way. It must be that he cannot make his decision known because he faces "a genuine uncertainty" (Bockmuehl 1998, 90). As for the former, many translations (e.g. NRSV) have opted for "I prefer", suggesting that the context precludes the idea that Paul had a "choice" (See esp. NET translation Phil 1:22n. 35). However, given that the middle form is clearly used in 2 Thess 2:13 and Heb 11:25 to mean "choose", there is little reason to support the translation "prefer" with the evidence at hand. What is more, as Craig Wansink has succinctly noted, obviating Paul's ability to choose (by weakening the meaning of the verb) blunts the rhetorical strategy of the passage and "fails to acknowledge Phil 1.18b-26 as a significant part of Paul's moral exhortation to the Philippians" (1996, 97).

"only when God brings some necessity or compulsion (*anagke*) to bear on the individual" (Droge and Tabor 1992, 22). For Droge, then, Paul was certainly contemplating suicide and his musings would not shock anyone who was acquainted with this commonly discussed philosophical issue. Droge reasons that Paul ultimately could not choose death because he was not given divine *anagke* to do so.

Other scholars have also attempted to understand Paul's words in terms of Hellenistic philosophy including D.W. Palmer (1975; similarly, see Vollenweider 1994; Jaquette 1996). Palmer argues that when Paul considers death a gain (Phil 1:21), he is resonating with a contemporary philosophical tenet that taking one's life is a reasonable relief of "the troubles of one's present life" (1975, 208). For both Palmer and Droge, Paul's psychological struggle can be best appreciated within a philosophical milieu. However, there are several reasons why this appraisal of Paul's words is incomplete. First, one must be attentive to the context. If Paul was waiting for an "*anagke*" (as Droge suggests), why would he show such confidence in returning to the Philippians again (1:26)? And, if Palmer is correct that Paul would have seen life as drudgery, how do you account for the pervasive theme of joy throughout the letter?[8] Indeed, if Philippians is truly a "word on target" (Beker 1981, 381) for his converts, we must take seriously the rhetorical interests Paul had in mind when writing these words (see Wansink 1996, 96-125).

Another important concern with the aforementioned proposals is that Paul is assumed to be significantly influenced by the philosophical discussions of his time. But it is not certain that he would share Plato's assertion that death is welcome because "the body and material existence [are] impediments to the philosophical pursuit of truth" (Droge and Tabor 1992, 20; see Plato's *Phaedo* 66b). It is surprising that few scholars have attempted to study Paul's discourse in light of parallel language and thought in Jewish literature from his time.[9] It is my argument that Paul is, in fact, making use of a literary tradition found in Judaism which he then re-interprets in light of the gospel, using his own life as a model for his

[8] Gordon Fee rightly notes that it is esehatological interests and not existential ones that drive Paul's argument (1995, 140; see also O'Brien 1991, 122-3; Croy 2003, 522-3).

[9] Droge and Tabor do, in fact, devote a ehapter to Jews who attempted or committed suicide. However, the concluding chapter of the book makes little account of this literature, choosing to focus on Plato. Additionally, in consideration of the Jewish examples, Droge and Tabor do not clearly differentiate between the purposes and motivations behind these "voluntary deaths" (see 1992, 53-84). For an insightful eritique of Droge and Tabor, see Fowl 2005, 55-58.

converts in Philippi. I refer to it as the *honourable wish for death*. This can be defined as the expected reaction whereby someone offers a petition to God for death in the face of a shameful event or situation that has fallen upon him or her. The implication would not be that life is too burdensome and difficult, but that one is so ashamed that death would present more honour than the current life-situation. Additionally, within the Jewish context that we will be studying, there is no assumption that the person intends to perform the death-act himself.

1. Honour in the Ancient Mediterranean and in Judaism

It is becoming more widely recognised among Biblical scholars that "a person born in the first-century Mediterranean world, whether Gentile or Jewish, was trained from childhood to desire honour and avoid disgrace" (deSilva 1992, 2). Homer commented that "the chief good is to be well spoken of, the ill to be badly spoken of, by one's society, as a result of the successes and failures which that society values most highly" (see Adkins 1975, 154). And Cicero: "By nature we yearn and hunger for honour, and once we have glimpsed, as it were, some part of its radiance, there is nothing we are not prepared to bear and suffer in order to secure it" (*Tusc.* 2.24.58; as cited in Hellerman 2005, 35).

Certainly honour was important among the Israelites as well.[10] In the Decalogue we meet the command to honour one's parents (Exod 20:12). Refering to the significance of this relationship, God demands from Israel the honour a father expects from a child (Mal 1:6). In Proverbs, honour is the reward for wisdom (3:35) and a possession more precious than wealth (11:16). The acquisition of honour was a matter of great joy. But incurring shame was utterly devastating. Jubilees (3:21) interprets Eve's act of clothing her nakedness, resulting from her disobedience, as covering her shame (see Gen 3:7; cf. Rev 3:18).

1.1 Examples of the Honourable Wish for Death in Jewish Literature

[10] Though Jews certainly shared much of the values of the wider culture and put esteem in pedigree, education, birthplace, and righteous deeds, they differed in significant areas as well – especially regarding their faithfulness to the one God and unrelenting obedience to the Torah (see deSilva 1999, 5; idem, 2000, 37-8). Recent contributors to the study of honour and shame in the OT include Tim S. Laniak (1998), Johanna Stiebert (2000, 2002), and Shane Kirkpatrick (2005).

Sometimes the weight of shame could be so distressing that one could not help but plead for death from God. In Numbers, as Israel laments and grumbles because of the poor provisions, Moses turns to the Lord in frustration and a sense of helplessness:

> Why have you treated your servant so badly? Why have I not found favour in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me?...I am not able to carry all these people alone…If this is the way you are going to treat me, put me to death at once—if I have found favour in your sight— and do not let me see my misery (11:11, 14-15).

Elijah sat under a broom tree and, despondent over his solitude and the shame of being driven into exile, also wished for death: "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my ancestors" (1 Kings 19:4). When Jeremiah was beaten and imprisoned by the priest Pashhur for prophesying in the temple against his people, he prayed: "…I am ridiculed all day long; everyone mocks me…[T]he word of the Lord has brought me insult and reproach all day long…Cursed be the day I was born!...Cursed be the man who brought the news to my father…because he did not kill me in the womb…Why did I ever come out of the womb to see trouble and sorrow and to end my days in shame?" (20:7-18). In the book of Jonah, we have an instance where the relunctant prophet is chagrined at the thought of the Ninevites being recipients of Yahweh's compassion and mercy: "…Now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live" (Jon 4:3; see also 4:8). Here we have a particularly insightful example because Jonah weighs the options and considers death better because of the shame he experiences. The sense of dishonour arrives when God's agents feel that Israel's deliverance and vindication should come by one means (usually involving victory and triumph for Yahweh and his people), and God forestalls this end or reveals his will in another way.[11]

Could Paul, whose own apostolic role resembled elements of the prophets, have utilised this tradition to address matters of honour and shame among the Philippian believers? Did they share the same value system?

2. Honour, Paul, and the Philippians

It is, as we have briefly shown, quite easy to argue that ancient Mediterranean societies overall cared about honour and shame. But can we

[11] See the insightful comments on this tendency among Israelite leaders by Douglas K. Stuart 1987, 505.

ascertain, more specifically, whether this was of particular importance to the Philippians and within Paul's epistle to his converts there? We can learn a great deal from extant inscriptions throughout this colony that list the public service and virtuous deeds of various citizens especially in the Philippian forum (Hellerman 2005, 89-100). This is not particularly surprising. More distinctive is the fact that a significant number of inscriptions were erected for plebeians. Hellerman concludes, "At Philippi…everyone who could scrape together the resources necessary to erect an inscription of some kind apparently felt the need to publicly proclaim his achievements" (Hellerman 2005, 109).

Paul could hardly have ignored such important values in his writings, especially to such politically-conscious colonists.[12] In Philippians, Paul emphasises: the necessity of living "in a manner worthy (ἀξίως) of the gospel of Christ" (1:27); the "worth (δοκιμή)" of Timothy and his work for Paul (2:22); the need to honour (ἐντίμους ἔχετε) people like Epaphroditus who risk their life for the Gospel (2:29); the "shame (αἰσχύνη)" of Christ's enemies (3:19); the importance of keeping one's thoughts on "honourable things (σεμνά)" (4:8). Thematically, Hellerman observes several features that highlight Paul's interest in honour and shame (2005, 117). First, it is interesting to note the absence of Paul's normal self-designation as apostle and in place of it the appellation δοῦλος (1:1). Paul's own servant language is a prelude to the "Christ-hymn" where Jesus abandons his throne of honour to descend and play the role of a slave (δοῦλος) to be, in part, a model for believers (2:7). Second, in this letter Paul itemises his own prestigious pedigree and honours (3:4-6) which are, afterward, summarily devalued and compared to rubbish (σκύβαλα; 3:8). As commentators have correctly observed, as opposed to places like 2 Cor 11:6-12:1, Paul is not offering his credentials in his own defense. Rather, a mimetic purpose underlies the passage:

> Paul urges his readers to resist accommodation to the social verticality and pride of honours which so indelibly left their mark on public life in Philippi, by radically redefining, vis-à-vis the dominant culture, the kind of behaviour to be honoured among members of the Christian ἐκκλησία (Hellerman 2005, 128; see also O'Brien 1991, 365).

[12] Por a broader discussion of the importance of the honour-shame value system in Paul's letters, see Robert Jewett 2003, 557-566.

It is in light of this context that we can turn our attention specifically to Phil 1, filtering Paul's statements not only through the lens of psychology and philosophy, but also through the social values of honour and shame.

3. Philippians 1:12-18a, 19-26

Early on in his letter, Paul describes his own circumstances in an attempt to encourage the Philippians that the gospel has not been hindered by his imprisonment, but is actually advancing (1:12-13).[13] Paul is, in fact, certain that this state of affairs will end in his deliverance (σωτηρία) through the Philippians' prayers and the work of the Spirit (see 1:19). Though some scholars have argued that Paul expects this "deliverance" to be physical, as in emancipation from prison (e.g., Hawthorne 1983, 39-40), Paul is probably referring to acquittal before a "heavenly court" (Croy 2003, 519). Consider the fact that in this verse Paul cites (with no formal introduction) LXX Job 13:16: "τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν".[14] Why would Paul have any interest in Job's statement? Here we have another good exemplar of the *honourable wish for death*. Job, a righteous man expecting to be treated by God in a fair way with respect to his own unassailable behaviour, suffered and faced ridicule and shame from others. He curses his day of birth (3:1, 11). He says, if he had the fortune of being still-born,

> I should have slept and been at rest with kings and councillors of the earth who gloried in their swords, or with rulers, whose gold was abundant, who filled their houses with silver (3:13b-15, Brenton's translation).[15]

What does it mean to be at rest with noblemen? If it parallels being *buried* with royalty, Sorin Sabou may be correct that it implies joining their dynasty

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[13] That the next section, including 1:18b-26, has been interpreted as existential or primarily self-reflective should be reconsidered in light of the fact that Paul reports his own situation as he does in 1:12ff. His concern is always for his letter recipients. M. Hooker suggests that Paul describes his personal circumstances "because he has heard that the Philippians are anxious about him. Even here, however, he tells them little about what is happening to him. His main concern is that, in spite of his imprisonment, his work as an apostle is continuing" (2000, 487).

[14] Richard Hays makes Phil 1:19 a test-case for his argument for Paul's metaleptic interpretation of the Scriptures, drawing from not only the verse cited but also its surrounding context (1989, 21-24).

[15] Job even goes as far as preferring to be strangled than to go on living, yet he does not actually speak of wanting to kill himself (Job 7:15).

and receiving the honour status associated with their family (2005, 92, 143). In Job's case, this would mean having honour restored to him.

What Paul writes in 1:20 sets the tone for the subsequent discussion: "It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be put to shame (αἰσχυνθήσομαι) in any way, but that by my speaking with all boldness, Christ will be exalted now as always in my body, whether by life or by death". Carolyn Osiek astutely observes:

> Verse 20 is full of the "loaded" language of honor and shame, the key cultural values of the ancient Mediterranean world...For a man to be arrested and detained in the shameful condition of loss of freedom was damaging not only to his sense of self but to his public reputation (2001, 42-3).

The sense of "shame" of which Paul speaks should not be confused with an introspective sense of guilt. The verb αἰσχυνθήσομαι is directed towards "an objective event, namely the absence of the requested divine help" (Giesen 2006, 242) as the word is often used in the Greek Psalter (e.g. LXX Pss 24:2-3; 118:80).[16] As far as the Philippians may have been concerned, Paul was in such a miserable and humiliating state that it would be natural for him to wish death upon himself. However, Paul is not primarily interested in his *own* honour, but is only concerned that "Christ will be honoured (μεγαλυνθήσεται Χριστός)" (ESV) in Paul's body (1:20b) whatever the outcome.

In what can be described as one of the most inscrutable comments by Paul, he considers two options: "For me to live is Christ, and to die gain" (1:21). According to the tradition of the *honourable wish for death*, it would be natural in Paul's context of shame and suffering to wish for the "gain" of death. But, how likely is it that Paul refers to this sort of perspective? From a semantic perspective, it is interesting to note that the infinitives ζῆν and ἀποθανεῖν from Phil 1:21 do not occur in the same verse elsewhere in the NT and appear only twice in the LXX. These two citations bear striking thematic resemblances to Paul's situation.

One occurrence of this word-pair is in Jonah. The beginning of chapter four finds Jonah miserable and confounded by God's mercy towards the Ninevites and their repentant hearts. Though he knew the Lord to be capable

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[16] In Rom 1:16 Paul says that he is "not ashamed (οὐ ἐπαισχύνομαι)" of the gospel. Though some argue that this is no more than a form of understatement termed "litotes" (see Byrne 1996, 51), Halvor Moxnes has cogently demonstrated that Romans as a whole can and should be read from an "honour perspective" in order to comprehend fully its key terms, themes, and socio-rhetorical dynamics (1988, 61-78).

of great love and compassion, as he showed often towards Israel, the "ardent nationalist" (Stuart 1987, 503) could not accept the fact that the Assyrians could be recipients of God's favour. He cries out:

> And now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die (ἀποθανεῖν) than to live (ζῆν) (4:3; cf. 4:8).

For Jonah the choice was easy. It was better to die than to live in the shame of knowing that the Israelites' God relented from punishing their enemies. In that sense, death is a relief from shame and thus "better", or—in Paul's terms—"gain (κέρδος)". A more fitting comparison can be made with another character associated with Nineveh—Tobit. Both Paul and Tobit were Jews living outside Palestine who were zealous for the Lord. They were both willing to be obedient to the Lord whatever the cost and both suffered shame and ridicule from those around them (cf. 2 Cor 6:4-10; 12:10; Tob 2:8). At the height of his troubles and misery, Tobit offers a prayer to God that bears some similarities to Paul's language in Philippians:

> So now deal with me as you will; command my spirit to be taken from me, so that I may be released (ἀπολυθῶ) from the face of the earth and become dust. For it is better for me to die (ἀποθανεῖν) than to live (ζῆν), because I have had to listen to undeserved insults, and great is the sorrow within me. Command, O Lord, that I be released from this distress (ἀπολυθῶ ἀπὸ τῆς ἀνάγκης[17] ταύτης); release (ἀπόλυσόν)[18] me to go to the eternal home, and do not, O Lord, turn your face away from me. For it is better for me to die (ἀποθανεῖν) than to see so much distress in my life and to listen to insults (Tob 3:6).[19]

Tobit cannot stand the sense of distress and shame that he is experiencing and pleads for death. In light of such examples, it is clear how death is gain. But what about Paul's companion statement relating "living" and "Christ?" Logically, if death means a "gain", and in some sense a gain of honour, what does "Christ" mean? For Paul, living in Christ cannot simply be expressed as reward or loss. Associating with Christ puts one in an eschatological crucible where one must die with Christ (Gal 2:20) and identify with his humility, weakness, and "shame" (see Jervis 2007, 50). This involves, often, *losing* one's honour status in order to *gain* ("κερδήσω" Phil 3:8) Christ and be found in him (3:9a). Essentially, choosing the "living is Christ" option

[17] See the use of ἀνάγκη in 1 Thess 3:7.

[18] Paul uses the cognate ἀναλύω to speak of departing and being with Christ (Phil 1:23).

[19] Comparisons have been made between this passage and Job 7:15 (noted above); see Fitzmyer 2003, 35-6.

means existing beyond the normal realm of human values and labels and experiencing the weakness, suffering, shame, and death of Christ in order to obtain the power, glory, honour, and life of Christ (Phil 3:9b).

Paul, perhaps like anyone else, would have assumed at the start of his ministry that the gospel would spread as any other εὐαγγέλιον circulates—through bold speech and demonstrations of victory and power. But, instead of merely becoming a verbal herald of the message, he becomes a word-picture of the gospel: "The glad tiding of Jesus' redemptive death is preached by the one who inevitably participates in that death, and whose apostolic sufferings are paradoxically the locus of God's gift of life, being the present form of Jesus's own death-life pattern" (Martyn 1997, 569). Paul learned that his ministry would involve both bold preaching *and* a living drama of the cross of Christ that "interpenetrate and confirm each other as the essential hallmarks of the genuine apostolic calling" (Hafemann 1990, 227; also Schütz 1975, 242-3). But this vocation did not only belong to Paul. He continually encouraged the Corinthians, especially in his earlier (canonical) letter, to be imitators of him (1 Cor 4:16; 11:1). Mimesis (συμμιμηταί) was also expected of the Philippians (3:17) and Paul's attitude towards his imprisonment and sufferings was meant to be a model to his converts who felt a "co-participation" in his difficulties (1:7) and persecution (1:29).

In 1:22-3a he weighs the options carefully: "If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me; and I cannot say which I will choose. I am torn between the two" (my translation). We should not misunderstand Paul's intentions. Paul presents a struggle over the options not simply because he could not decide, but in order to take seriously the dilemma facing his converts in Philippi and their concern over the shameful position that Paul was in and how they expected him to respond (see Jewett 1970; Peterlin 1995, 51; Jervis 2007, 42, 61). In the mind of many, Paul was ostensibly in a position of humiliation and defeat. In the eyes of someone who was steeped in Israel's Scriptures, Paul was shamed in the same way as Moses, Elijah, Jeremiah, Job, and Tobit—righteous men who wished for death because they felt that it offered a relief from the dishonour of not experiencing the kind of vindication they expected. The Philippians themselves likely felt this way themselves and turned to Paul as a model to see his response.

Paul elucidates the advantages of each option. He expresses a desire "to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better" (1:23b). An important question that few commentators ask is *why is this "departing" better*? Previously we brought Job's perspective to bear and recognized that his laying down with noblemen was a way of demonstrating Job's vindication

of his *honour*. Is this the same for Paul? His earlier statement about not being ashamed (1:20) is a nod in this direction, but a more explicit connection can be made by observing a statement made in 2 Tim 4:6, 8 that certainly relates to Phil 2:17:

> As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure (ἀναλύσεώς) has come…From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.[20]

The focus in this passage is not on expressing his hope for the end of pain and suffering, but the honour and glory that attend receiving recognition from the Lord for having "fought the good flght" (2 Tim 4:7). Indeed, being "with Christ" means being where Christ is: "seated at the right hand of God" (Col 3:1), a glorious and regal locale.

Ultimately, for Paul, the choice to continue his work is vital for the sake of his mission—and particularly for the progress of the Philippians (Phil 1:4-5). It would be, in a sense, a reversal of values for Paul (the suffering and humiliated apostle) to be responsible for the Philippians' "advancement (προκοπή)",[21] especially if some among them expected a triumphalistic gospel. But, he does offer a word of encouragement that his returning to them would eventually result in καύχημα in Christ Jesus. This word καύχημα is extraordinarily challenging to translate, but unquestionably involves honour.[22] The NET translation captures this nuance well: "[I wifl remain] so that *what you can be proud* of may increase because of me in Christ Jesus, when I come back to you". But this "pride" or "boasting" is not seen in terms of society's standards. Paul's rhetoric of honour was aimed at re-framing the Philippians' "court of reputation"—that group of people to which they turned to receive credit and praise for their dignity and accomplishments. What deSilva concludes about Paul's language in the

[20] Even if Paul is not responsible for this statement, it stands as an early reflection/interpretation on Phil 2:17 upon which we have to draw. Though many interpreters see 2 Tim 4:6-8 as presenting a "proud Paul" or "reward-seeking Paul" that cannot be found in Philippians, how can one account for the fact that he presses on in his calling toward a "prize (βραβεῖον)" (Phil 3:14), and, in another context, that the Philippians are *his* "crown (στέφανός)" (4:1; cf. 1 Thess 2:19)?

[21] This term can be used for all sorts of progress, including physical (e.g., an army advancement). But, a common usage involves advancing in status and/or honour as in Josephus *Wars* 2:27; see also Paul's description of his "advancement (προέκοπτον)" in Judaism, Gal 1:12.

[22] See, particularly, Sir 44:7; LXX Zeph 3:19-20; Jer 13:11; Philo *Spec* 4:164.

Thessalonian and Corinthian epistles is true of Philippians: "God, Christ, and the Christian community form the essential components of this body of significant others whose opinion and grants of honour are alone important" (1999, 136).

Having investigated the matter of honour and shame in chapter one, a brief look at Phil 3.1-11 offers interaction with another, not unrelated, passage that also develops Paul's understanding of a new value system "in Christ".

4. Philippians 3:1-11

It is evident that Paul most likely, at one time in his life, felt proud of his pedigree and achievements (3:5-6; cf. Josephus, *Vita* 1-12). But, in Christ it was compulsory for him to reinterpret his value system. All things became a loss to Paul in view of the gain of knowing Christ (Phil 3:10);[23] and, more specifically, as he comments elsewhere, knowing the "glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). Knowing Christ and being found in him, for Paul, meant molding oneself into the shape (συμμορφιζόμενος) of his suffering and death (3:10)—acts of utter disgrace and ignominy to the world. The apostles demonstrated this Christ-death pattern and were treated as honourless fools (μωροί; ἄτιμοι; 1 Cor 4:10). But, for Paul the gain is resurrection (Phil 3:11).[24] Paul had already demonstrated that resurrection offered great honour and exaltation (2:9-10) for Christ himself, but more importantly for the glory of God (2:11). Thus, as believers conform to Christ's model of death, he will transform their "body of humiliation (τὸ σῶμα τῆς ταπεινώσεως)" into the model (σύμμορφον)[25] of his "body of glory (σώματι τῆς δόξης)" (3:21a). There is no need to *wish for death* out of shame, because conforming to Christ's death offers a glory and honour that reflects the privilege and status of the one that finds *all things* under his subjection (3:21b).

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[23] It is relatively clear that Paul did not completely abandon and forsake his Jewish roots, let alone the significance of Israel's Scripture, but his new understanding of God based on the Christ event required a completely new orientation to it.

[24] N.T. Wright notes that, for Paul, the believer's resurrection is primarily a future hope. But, in this passage, he acknowledges that in some way resurrection is "part of present Christian experience, however paradoxical this may be in the midst of suffering", (2003, 235).

[25] Note the similar language for the "model/form" of Christ in 2.6-7 (μορφῇ, μορφήν). Fee, representing a majority opinion, asserts that the language in 3:21 (and the chapter in general) is literarily designed to "echo" 2:6-11 (1995, 314).

6. Conclusion

Returning to Phil 1:18b-26, we can see Paul's life-or-death quandary in light of both the context and content of the letter as a whole, and the christological re-intepretation of the *honourable wish for death* as demonstrated in Jewish literature. Within the epistle, Paul does not drift into a philosophical self-dialogue as part of a digression.[26] Not only would that be uncharacteristic of Paul, but this passage is best understood as a paradigm for how one, in Christ, is to understand what it means to be in a situation of suffering, shame, persecution, weakness, and disrepute, and yet advance God's kingdom through the gospel and reflect his glory and honour. It has been argued that Paul recognizes and challenges the *honourable wish for death* literary model as demonstrated by Moses, Elijah, Job, Jonah, and Tobit. Each one wished to be obedient to God and see him glorified and each one was stunned at how the Lord did not provide victory and honour. The inevitable reaction was a prayer for death as an end to shame. But, for Paul, that perspective had to be refocused in terms of Christ's example who, in the words of Heb 12:2, "despised shame (αἰσξύνης καταφρονήσας)" and took his seat of honour by God's throne. A plea or wish for death would have brought an end to shame, but the cruciform life in the time-between-the-times would offer the benefit of Christ himself and a type of honour and glory that reflects his resurrection. To interpret Paul's words rhetorically does not diminish the seriousness of his sufferings or his sympathy for his converts in Philippi. Rather, he took an opportunity to think out loud, so to speak, about the real choices that he had faced and the real struggles he had felt in order to be an example to them about what it means to suffer without being ashamed. For Paul, death was undoubtedly a gain—of relief, of honour, of vindication. But, life is "Christ"—mimicking the form of Christ's shame and suffering, but gaining the power of his resurrection and serving to advance the glory and honour of the Lord by becoming human narratives of the gospel-drama.

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[26] As Jervis correctly observes, "His suffering does not make him introspective, but Christ-focused", (2007, 50).

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nijay.gupta@gmail.com

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