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Different interpretation Jesus between the Philippians 2:6-8 and John 1 prologue.

Introduction

Incarnation is the central Christian doctrine that God became flesh, that Jesus Christ is completely both God and man. We could see slightly different presentation of incarnation at Philippians and John 1 prologue. What is the main message that Paul emphasized at the Philippians? Paul expresses his view on humility of Christ in this Philippians. On the other hand, John's Gospel is the primary witness to the doctrine of incarnation. His Gospel insists that in Jesus the divine word became flesh and that consequently Jesus is the human life of God. John writes from that transcends human history and time.

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Philippians 2:6-8: “who, existing in the form of God, did not consider being equal with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of slave, by becoming in the likeness of people. And being found in appearance like a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, that is, death on a cross”.

Many scholars have pronounced verse 5-11 an ancient Christian hymn. Paul described Jesus taking the form of a slave, and becoming in the likeness of people. Modern scholarship argued with the question of whether verse 6-11 come originally from Paul or whether he has simply made use of an already existing poem that puts us in touch with the worship and doctrine of early church.¹ I strongly believe that Paul appeals to the Spirit of servanthood for the Philippians. Paul emphasizes unity in the Christ earlier verses. He expresses there with the phrases “in one spirit, with one soul” we should pay attention verse 5 “think this in yourselves, which was also in Christ Jesus”. Paul is calling us to imitate Christ Jesus, who committed himself to serving underserving people. His message is clear that we could never accomplish what Christ wants us to do without adopting Christ’s attitude. After this, Paul explained Christ’s humiliation (2:6-8).

In the verse 6, “who, existing in the form of God”, this introduces the idea of the preexistence of Christ. The reference to Christ’s pre-existence is found in the Prologue to the Gospel of John. “In the beginning was the Word, and the

¹ Moises Silva , Philippians, 2nd ed Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament. page 92

Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through him, and apart from him not one thing came into being that has come into being". We could find that Christ was in the form of God from the very beginning-before the creation of the world. In the Gospel of John, he emphasized deity of God and Jesus. John's prologue serves to provide the reader with the proper lens through which to interpret the subsequent narrative. Two critical issues are addressed: 1) the relationship between God and Word (Jesus); and the possibility of a close relationship between God and human beings. The prologue includes eight references to 'theos'(1:1, 2,6,12,13,18). Of these, six refer to God the Father (1:1, 2, 6, 12, 13, 18), and two to the Word or Jesus Christ (1:1, 18). The term 'theos' is familiar to John's readers as a reference to the God revealed in the OT. The word occurs in Genesis 1:1 to the Creator. While the Greco-Roman culture was made up of dozens of deities, the Jews believed in only one God (Deut 6:4)².

While John emphasized the deity of God and Son in theology, Paul's purpose in mentioning Christ's preexistence is to show us how much Christ had to give up to dwell among us. He gave up being God so that he might become a human body. It is clear that Paul wished to teach the Philippians, namely, that the best way up is by stepping down, the best way to gain for oneself is by giving up oneself, the best way to life is by death, the best way to win the praise of God is by steadfastly serving others, while safeguarding this idea from any prudential, self-serving motive, which Paul has showed in Phil 2:1-4.

² Andreas J. Kostenberger, Scott R, Swain, Father, son, and Spirit, 1957.page 48

The Philippians had been acting in a spirit of ambition, themselves better than others, believing that they were above serving their fellows, studying how they might promote themselves and get ahead without giving adequate attention to their neighbors. The Christ of the Christ-hymn challenges every one of these false values of the Philippians. ³

In the verse 7, “by taking the form of a slave, by becoming in the likeness of people. And being found in appearance like man”. This is amazing story that preexistent Christ was willing to human form. Then he further lowered himself in servanthood by obeying God. There are many interpretations to understand context. We might also raise questions about specific historical-cultural issues with slavery like in Greco-Roman world? The historical context shows that slavery in Paul’s day was not as oppressive as later forms of slavery. Slaves and slavery are mentioned frequently in the New Testament. Most New Testament references to slavery accept it as a fact of life. A number of references use slavery as a metaphor, usually of the believer’s relationship to God. A few references reflect a negative view of slavery. But the writers of the New Testament never condemn slavery as an institution, or call for its abolition.⁴ What about Paul’s instructions regarding slavery? We should point out that Paul nowhere recommends slavery as an institution. Instead, he regulates an institution that is already in existence. Nevertheless,

³ Gerald f. Hawthorne, Ralph p. Martin, World Biblical Commentary, Philippians. Vol 43. Page 132

⁴ James S. Jeffers, the Greco-Roman world of the New Testament Era ,inter varsity press, page 235

his instructions on this topic indicate that Paul is not believer in violent revolution. Obedience is the way of the gospel.⁵

But it is clear that Paul showed Christ humbleness by “emptied himself” to become lower status. There is possibility with idea that Christ is to be interpreted in terms of Isaiah’s Servant passages (Isa 52:13-53:12).⁶

However Christ took the form (‘morphe’) of a servant (‘doulos’) means to take on essential nature of a servant. He who was in the form of God took on the form of a servant. He came from the highest of the high to the lowest of the low. He took it on himself voluntarily to serve the needs of humankind. We could see the life of Jesus where Jesus puts himself in the place of the slave and washes his disciples (John13). Slave emphasizes that in the incarnation Christ entered the human life as a slave, which as a person without advantage, with no right or privileges of his own. We could see verse 8, “he humbles himself” which, Christ brought himself low.

Again, Paul emphasized how they are to live the Christian life like humble Christ. This is more practical or moral approach to Philippians.

In the Gospel of John, “and the word became flesh and made dwelling among us” (John 1:14), we could see more theological view of incarnation. John explained the word has not changed, but the word does now exist in the flesh. The meaning of “becoming flesh” involves much more than embracing

⁵ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 2nded, Baker Academic page 156

⁶ Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph p. Martin, *World Biblical Commentary, Philippians*. Revised, Vol 43. Page 119

human nature, the very nature and state of Adam. There is also another meaning that Word became flesh is the very dwelling of God. The incarnation is both a fulfillment and a replacement of prophecies, and tradition with the tabernacle.⁷

Conclusion

I believe that context of Philippians 2 is one of the most important revelations of Christ in the New Testament. There are many issues and critical interpretation, but message is clear that Paul exhorts the church to unity and selflessness as a body. Thus, Philippians 2 shows Christ as Paul's ultimate example of the attitude he hopes they will demonstrate within Jesus Christ. This is the same message to us now as it expresses Paul's hopes for our behavior in the light of Christ's example. Jesus showed the washing and drying of his disciples' feet like a servant in (John 13). This is example of nature of Christian discipleship in Christ like service sacrifice for the benefit of others. The Christian must first learn that according to the gospel, Christ is placed below us to serve us. We should follow the Christ in every day for our life.

⁷ Edward W. Klink III, Clinton E. Arnold, Exegetical Commentary on New Testament, John , Zondervan ,page 108

Application

I am a youth group Sunday school teacher for Korean American community. This is a very important topic for young teenagers to understand Jesus. Our society more emphasizes great leadership with pride. We are more interested in controlling people by our power rather than serve others. This is more top to bottom approach by current cultural and social influences. This Philippians context is much to be said about humility. We should teach 'humble Christ mind' to younger generation. Our goal should be adopted the attitude and actions of Jesus our Lord and follow his example of humility. Jesus declared that Mark 10:43, "But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be our servant". We need more and more servant leadership in our society and our church. The Philippians' context is the best example of Christian life to follow Christ Jesus who became servant.

