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NT 637/737—Philippians: Spring 2023
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Written Assignment
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a. Trace out (summarize) the logic of Paul’s statements/argument in the Philippians

1:27-2:30

In Philippians 1:27-2:30, Paul exhorts the church in Philippi to become united, appealing to the humility of Christ.

Beginning in Philippians 1:27-30, Paul gives propositions that express his desire for unity in the church in the face of outside opposition. The first major proposition is found in verse 27. He encourages the church to live lives worthy of the gospel, “then” (ἵνα - action-result) Paul will know that they stand in one Spirit. The first clause serves as the action that Paul desires and the second clause serves as the intended result. What follows in verse 28 is Paul’s belief that unity will be a sign to their opponents that they will be destroyed “but” (δέ - negative-positive) the believers will be saved. The “but” serves to contrast two different outcomes. Following the clause “that you will be saved” Paul adds “and” (καί - progression) to emphasize in coordinate progression that this salvation is actually from God. Concluding this section in verse 29, Paul’s shares his sense that God had granted to the Philippians not only belief in God, “but also” (ἀλλά - negative-positive) suffering on behalf of God.

In Philippians 2:1-4, Paul connects his call for unity with the humility of Christ. He begins with “so” (οὖν - inference), where 1:29-30 serve as the supporting proposition while the

encouragement to imitate Christ's humility in 2:1-4 is the conclusion. What follows is three conditional statements in verse 1. "If" (εἰ τις - conditional) the church has been encouraged, been comforted, or experienced affection and compassion, then Paul asks them to be like minded and united. What follows in verse 3 is an encouragement to not act out selfish ambition or vanity, "but" (ἀλλά - alternative) to act in humility. The "but" serves to contrast two alternative ways of behaving. Paul then clarifies in verse 4 what it means to value others above themselves, encouraging the church to not look at their own interests, "but also" (ἀλλά καί - negative-positive) looking at the interests of others.

In Philippians 2:5-11, through the Christ Hymn, Paul shares the greatest example of humility. In verse 6, Paul remarks that though Christ is divine he did not use his divinity for his own advantage, "but" (ἀλλά - alternative) made himself a servant. In further clarification in verse 8, Paul writes "and" (καί - progression) Christ humbled himself as a man and became obedient to death on the cross. Christ's humility and obedience as explained in verse 8 then becomes the supporting statement for the "therefore" (διό καί - inference) in verse 9, where Paul shares how Christ is now exalted. The "so that" (ἵνα - action-purpose) that follows takes Christ's exaltation in verse 9 as the action and connects it to "every knee should bow" in verse 10 as the purpose. Paul concludes the Christ Hymn explaining that this act of worship includes heaven "and" (καί - series) earth "and" (καί - progression) also every tongue.

In Philippians 2:12-18 Paul encourages the church, in light of Christ's humility and exaltation, to embrace the work of sanctification in their lives. The "therefore" (ὥστε - inference) connects the Christ Hymn with Paul's exhortation to work out their salvation in verse 12. Paul's hope is that

they will do so not only while he is present with them “but” (ἀλλά - negative-positive) now much more in his absence. The “for” (γάρ - idea-explanation) that follows in verse 13 explains that this working out of salvation originates from God. What follows is Pauls’ encouragement to do everything without grumbling “so that” (ἵνα - action-purpose) they can be blameless “and” (καί - series) in verse 15. He elaborates with a quote from Deuteronomy 32:5, comparing the church to “children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation,” the “and” (καί - series) operating in series. Paul encourages them to shine and hold onto the word “so that” (εἰς - action-result) he would be able to boast before Christ that his labor was not in vain. He concludes this section with a conditional statement in verse 17, sharing that “even if” (ἀλλά εἰ καί - conditional) he is poured out like a drink offering he will rejoice for them. He exhorts the church to also be glad “and” (καί - progression) rejoice with him.

In Philippians 19-24 Paul shares his hope to send Timothy to the church. In verse 19, he shares his desire to send Timothy “so that” (ἵνα - action-purpose) Paul may be encouraged with good news about them. What follows are two statements that begin with “for” (γάρ - ground). In verse 20, the “for” expresses his confidence that Timothy has genuine concern for the church’s welfare, referring back to verse 19. In verse 21, this “for” expresses Paul’s critique that most seek their own interests, “but” (δέ - alternative) Timothy had proved himself in the work of the gospel. Timothy having proved himself, Paul “therefore” (οὖν - inference) hopes to send Timothy soon to the church “and” (δέ - progression) Paul share his confidence he will also be with them soon.

In Philippians 2:25-30, Paul shares with the church news about Epaphroditus. In verse 25, Paul shares how Epaphroditus is a brother “and” (καί - series) fellow worker “and” (καί - series) fellow soldier. Not only that, Paul shares he is also (δέ - series) a messenger “and” (καί - series) minister. In verse 26, Paul clarifies that he will send Epaphroditus back “because” (ἐπειδή - ground) he had been longing for the Phillipians “and” (καί - series) was distressed by the church’s concern for his illness. In verse 27 Paul confirms that Epaphroditus indeed almost died “but” (ἀλλά - alternative) God had mercy on them. What follows in verse 28 is “therefore” (οὖν - inference) Paul is eager to send Epaphroditus, “so that” (ἵνα - action-purpose) the Phillipians will see him and no longer be anxious. Paul concludes “therefore” (οὖν - inference) the church is receive him with joy “because” (ὅτι διά - ground) he risked his life for the work of the gospel.

b. Choose a key word from this section to study within the context of Paul’s writings.

“Slave” (δοῦλος) is a significant word in Paul’s letters. Fee observes that Paul’s first century readers, who had day to day familiarity with slavery, would have immediately associated his usage of δοῦλος with those who were considered property and subservient to a master.¹ Louw and Nina similarly define δοῦλος as a person who is the property of an owner.²

The low status and subservient role of the slave takes on significant theological meaning for Paul in the New Testament. His use of the word in describing himself and his ministry appears to serve two purposes. First, the term describes his relationship to Christ and to others. He is, as Fee puts it, “Christ’s slave, bound to him as slave to master, but whose ‘slavery’ is expressed in

¹ Gordon Fee. *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, NY: Eerdmans, 1995), 61-64.

² Johannes P. Louw. *Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*. 2nd ed. (New York, NY: Fortress Press, 1988), 741.

loving service on behalf of Christ for the Philippians.”³ Second, Pauls’ use of the words appears to be intentionally countercultural. For example, in Philippians, Paul describes himself at the beginning of the letter as a “slave of Jesus Christ.” His use of the word subverts societal expectations and serves to contrast his attitude and ministry with that of his opponents.⁴ In 2:7, Paul goes on to use δοῦλος to describe Christ’s incarnational ministry. This humble term becomes a powerful motif in the letter that describes the servanthood of Jesus which Paul hopes his church will emulate.⁵

c. Articulate five (5) strategic questions raised from this biblical passage that you consider worth investigating further, and give your reasons why you chose these questions (e.g., the theological implications of the answer will affect the kind of disposition one has toward suffering)

- Question 1 - What is Paul’s understanding of “work out your salvation” in 2:12?
 - Why? How we understand Paul has implications for salvation and sanctification. Is what Paul shares here counter to eternal security? What active role does the believer take in Christian growth and maturity?
- Question 2 - When Christ “made himself nothing” what happened to his divinity?
 - Why? How we interpret Paul has implications for how we understand the nature of Jesus’ incarnation. Did Jesus let go of his divinity, was it hidden from view, or did he maintain his full divine power at all times?

³ Fee, *Philippians*, 61-64.

⁴ Moisés Silva. *Philippians*. 2nd ed., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, NY: Baker Academic, 2005), 39.

⁵ Fee, *Philippians*, 61-64.

- Question 3 - Paul sees that God had granted the church not only belief in Christ but also suffering (1:29). In Paul's view, what role does suffering play in the life of the believer?
 - Why? How believers view suffering has implications on how they face and go through difficulty. What kind of suffering is Paul referring to? Should Christians expect to suffer?
- Question 4 - What is the role of humility in seeking unity in the church?
 - Why? Paul encourages the church to be unified and he sees the pathway for it is humility in their relationships with one another. In our current moment when opinions are so polarized, how can the church in America become a more unified witness to others?
- Question 5 - What is the "obedience" that Paul is speaking to in verse 2:8?
 - Why? Having a biblical understanding of obedience helps us know the range and limits of Paul's call to obey, potentially protecting the church from abuse, but also helping the church embrace the blessing of obedience.

d. Draw out the significance for today of one of Paul's theological positions.

- i. What are the practical or ethical implications of Paul's position for your particular faith communities?**

One of the challenges for my faith community is learning what it means to be a servant leader in the church. My church is mostly college educated and there are many who are successful in their respective fields (eg medicine, technology, business). For some, leading and managing others comes naturally and they may even have a proven track record in their places of work. So when

Paul writes in his introduction to Philippians, "Paul and Timothy, slaves of Christ," it is a sobering wake up call for us to learn what it means to serve in the church. Much of our servant leadership training centers around surrendering our own agendas, unlearning habits that seemingly made us successful outside of church, and learning to put the concerns of others first.

ii. What steps would you take to help your faith community become spiritually formed in this area?

One step for my faith community is to grow in humility and servanthood. As it was in Paul's time and culture, serving others is considered a low status activity. One of the practices our church has adopted is taking turns cleaning the church space. All members are involved without exception. So once a month - pastors, worship leaders, software engineers, attorneys, etc - we all vacuum, clean toilets, wash windows, and take out the garbage. This has been a wonderful way for our church to grow in humble servanthood.

Another small but practical step our church has taken to grow in humility is to change what we call our "worship" leaders to "music" leaders. We made this change to properly highlight to those serving in a very visible ministry how music is just one of the many ways we worship the Lord. We are also learning that it is most edifying when our music leaders are also simultaneously involved in practical day to day ministry. We currently don't have music leaders whose sole job is to lead music. These changes have helped the culture of servant leadership in our church.