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NT 637/737—Philippians: Spring 2023

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Written Assignment #2

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Please answer the following questions, remembering to properly cite any sources that you use.

1. Trace out (summarize) the logic of Paul's argument in the portion of the body of the letter that we have covered thus far (1:27-2:30). In preparation for this assignment, please consult pages 98-100 of Schreiner's *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles* to see what he says about propositions and their relationships to one another. [At least one and one-half (1½) page, but may be more, as needed.]

Succeeding the powerful section of 1:21-26 in which Paul describes his identity in Christ whether in life or death and states his confident hope for remaining in life for the sake of ministry, the passage from 1:27 to 2:30 contains his heartfelt exhortation to the Philippian church to live and to relate to one another in such a way that honors the gospel of Christ. First, from 1:27-2:18, Paul urges the Philippians to embody certain kinds of manner against self-interest, and especially notable and strategically positioned in the middle of his call to action is the very example of the humility of Christ (2:6-11), who is the preeminent motivation for Paul, who in turn motivates the church with his example. In the latter part from 2:19-2:30, Paul mentions two co-workers Timothy and Epaphroditus, whose faithful characters and services also point to the central example of Christ and enable Paul to further illustrate the manner of life and ministry that honors Christ.

In 1:27-28, Paul exhorts the Philippians: "Only conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that (Ac/Pur) whether I come and see you or remain absent, I will

hear about you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel; and in no way alarmed by your opponents—which is a sign of destruction for them, but of salvation for you (-/+), and this too, from God.” For Paul, a manner worthy of the gospel is being steadfast and united in spirit, even in the face of suffering for the faith, just as Paul himself has been experiencing (1:29-30).

In 2:1-5, following the acknowledged suffering that may accompany the believers, Paul makes a significant conditional proposition (in a series of coordinate clauses) to further encourage unity: “*If* there is any encouragement in Christ, *if* any consolation of love, *if* any fellowship of the Spirit, *if* any affection and compassion, [*then*] make my joy complete *by being* of the same mind, *maintaining* the same love, *united* in spirit, *intent* on one purpose (If/Th; Ac/Mn). Verses 3-5 contain Idea-explanation (Id/Exp) for the united spirit— it is looking not only to one’s individualistic interests but also to others’ interests, and humbly considering one another more important than oneself. It is an attitude that is demonstrated by Christ and is to be embodied by the Philippians.

In 2:6-11, Paul centrally positions the example of Christ as the preeminent inspiration and motivation for all of his exhortations that come before and after this hymn. Paul presents Christ’s humility in a series of Action-manner (Ac/Mn) statements in the first half of the verses 6-8: “[He] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself *by taking* the form of a bond-servant... He humbled Himself *by becoming* obedient to the point of death...” Paul then follows with Christ’s exaltation by God in a series of Action/purpose (Ac/Pur) statements verses 9-11: “God highly exalted Him... *so that* at the name of Jesus every knee will bow... *and that* every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.”

In 2:12-17, the inference from Christ's humiliation and subsequent glorification by God is presented as "*Therefore...* work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; *for* (G) it is God who is at work in you, both to desire and to work for His good pleasure." In verse 14, Paul calls them "do all things without complaining or arguments" *so that* (Ac/Pur) they would be proven "blameless and innocent", "children of God", "lights in the world", "holding firmly the word of life", *so that* (Ac/Pur) Paul may take pride, on the day of Christ, in the fact that his labor for the church would not have been in vain. But even if that pride may not come gloriously and he is rather being given away like a poured-out drink offering at the conclusion of a sacrifice in a cultic service, Paul still rejoices and desires the church to share in his joy together.

In his language throughout this body of the letter, Paul seems to accentuate the concept of communality and collaboration among believers in partnership with God. There is sharing of joy as well as suffering, of striving together as well as being exalted together. Paul's manner and action have an effect on the Philippians, just as their manner and action also have an effect on Paul. There is a teamwork in completion of God's work, rather than any individual labor or interest from start to finish. There is interdependence in Paul's ministry, in which humility and consideration of one another's interests are further highlighted through the stories of Timothy and Epaphroditus in the next section in verses 19-29.

In 2:19-24, as Paul describes his current situation and future desire to send Timothy to the Philippians, he praises Timothy in such a way that spotlights a worthy character of a minister/leader. Verses 21 and 22 highlight Timothy's concern for the interests of Christ Jesus, not his own, and his kindred alignment to Paul in the work of the gospel. In Paul's portrayal of Timothy, Hawthorne notes "a network of mutual service, which, for Paul, became a model of how

Christians should relate to one another as partners in the gospel and in suffering. There is a gentle rebuke to any notion of self-interest since the unseen model behind this section is Jesus himself, giving to Paul's characterization an implicit christological dimension."¹

In 2:25-30, Paul follows with a Situation-response (Sit/R) to the above by proposing sending Epaphroditus instead of Timothy. In verse 25, Paul identifies him as “[his] brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also the [Philippians’] messenger and minister to [his] need,” and in so doing, he recognizes both Epaphroditus’ and the Philippian church’s devoted support of Paul and emphasizes the strong ministerial partnership among them in the providence of God. He commends Epaphroditus’ ministry, even unto near death, illustrating yet another powerful example of Christ-like humility and sacrifice that are met by God’s mercy and ought to be recognized and held in high regard. Paul further highlights the concept of interdependence and mutual support of believers when he states in verses 27-28 that Epaphroditus’ being spared of death was not only for Epaphroditus but also for Paul’s being spared of his own sorrow, and that sending him back to the church “so that (Ac/Pur) when [they] see him again [they] may rejoice and [he] may be less concerned about [them],” is as much for himself as is for them.

¹ Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Revised., vol. 43, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 158.

2. Choose a key word from this section to study within the context of Paul’s writings. Key Tools: The commentaries required for the course, an analytical concordance, Greek-based dictionary such as Louw & Nida, a Greek lexicon, such as BDAG, journal articles, etc. If you are having trouble accessing these resources in Logos, Accordance, Bibleworks, etc., please let me know. Please do not resort to public domain online resources such as Strong's, Thayer's, etc. I will be happy to help you find more recent resources. I want you to have the benefit of using a modern Bible dictionary, lexicon, etc., for this word study. [At least 1/2 page, but may be more, as needed].

ἀδημονέω (Phil 2:26)

According to *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament (BDAG)*, ἀδημονέω means to “be in anxiety, be distressed, troubled.”² The same word is found elsewhere in the synoptic report from Matthew 26:37 and Mark 14:33 in which Jesus goes to pray in the Garden of Gethsemane accompanied by Peter, James and John, and begins to be “deeply distressed.” In Phil 2:26, the word is used for Epaphroditus who “has been longing for [all those in the Philippian church], and has been distressed because [they] heard that he was ill.” Hawthorne and Martin provide a parallel example from a second-century papyrus letter in which a soldier son expresses similar anguish upon his mother’s knowledge of his sickness and grieving about him.³ The meaning of the word in the context of the Philippians passage enlivens the mental and emotional state of Epaphroditus regarding his kindred relationship to his church whom he deeply misses, and amplifies Paul’s message about seeking the interests of others as demonstrated by Epaphroditus’ deep devotion and care.

3. 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

² Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 576-79.

³ Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, Revised., vol. 43, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 164.

theological implications of the answer will affect the kind of disposition one has toward suffering) [At least 1/2 page, but may be more, as needed].

Question 1: What implication may the partnership model of Paul's own ministry and his interdependence on Timothy, Epaphroditus and the saints at Philippi have on our own ministry and church life today?

Why? In certain popular spheres, church may be understood as a personal religious activity at the level of attendance and consumption, not as something more that constitutes *life*. Exploring how Paul may have understood ministry and ekklesia would open our eyes to its collective nature of partnership with one another and with God. This fundamental perspective shift would properly orient our attitude and posture toward ministry and community life in the church.

Question 2: What does Paul mean in 2:2 by "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind?" What kind of sameness is Paul urging here?

Why? At a glance, the verse could be taken out of context as a call to uniformity rather than unity, and in a contemporary culture in which identity is associated with diversely different expressions of ourselves, some might dismiss the verse wrongfully, and it would be a shame to misunderstand what Paul is pointing to, i.e. taking on the same mind of Christ, which is to be the compass for the believer's life and relationship to one another.

Question 3: What would qualify as "seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" in 2:21? Then what would be seeking the interests of Jesus Christ, according to Paul?

Why? Earlier in 1:15-17, Paul mentions those who proclaim Christ from envy, rivalry and

selfish ambition, whose proclamation of Christ nonetheless makes him rejoice despite their wrong motivation. In a sense, these people seem to be seeking both their own interests AND the interest of Jesus Christ without the two being at odds with each other. This perceived tension may lead someone to confusion, and so, exploring the heart of Paul and seeking clarity in what he may mean by “self-interest” vs. “the interest of Jesus Christ” would be helpful.

Question 4: What was the demographic of the church at Philippi like?

Why? As a Roman colony where many retired soldiers resided and as the first place in Europe that Paul evangelized, Philippi must have been entirely new to Christianity and the way of Christ. The cross of Christ must have been foolishness to the gentiles especially in the socio-cultural setting of clear honor vs. shame. The cross of Christ must have been a shock and thereby a treasure to Paul himself as a Jew. So then, how did the church grow? Who were among the first believers? What can be known about them? The knowledge of their demographic may provide more insight into the issues that are addressed by Paul.

Question 5: What can we infer from this passage about Paul’s theology on God’s sovereignty and our responsibility?

Why? In 2:12-13 for example, while Paul clearly acknowledges God’s sovereignty, he also urges the believers to active participation. Closely examining these examples will enable us to see that they may not be at odds with each other but rather dovetail in completion of the work of God.

4. Draw out the significance for today of one of Paul’s theological positions. [Use as much space as you see fit for this].

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

Paul's message to be humble and to consider one another more important than our own selves is not only a sobering call but also an identity marker for a community be either like-minded with Christ, or like-minded simply with one another. Seeking the interests of others rather than our own interests begins with being interested in the other person, especially when they may not fit our list of preferences. Our interest tends to rise with the people with whom we share interests, while we lose interest beyond the initial welcome for those who differ from us. This manner of relating is more informed by the world than by Christ's example. If we were to unite in humility by taking more interest in one another and even considered it more important than our own, that would be a high standard that is nonetheless worthy of the gospel of Christ.

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

Going through a study on the Book of Philippians and understanding the heart and pastoral concerns of Paul for the believers in Philippi, with whom we may well relate to in our own experiences of rivalry, selfish ambitions, cliques, dissonance and lack of unity in a community, would allow us to truly appreciate the examples of humility that Paul presents of Christ foremost and of himself as well as his co-workers, as our antidote and motivation to truly become set apart as a Christ-like community, a church walking in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ.

Bibliography

Bauer, Walter. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Revised and edited by Frederick W. Danker. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Hawthorne, Gerald F., and Ralph P. Martin. *Philippians*. Revised. Vol. 43. Word Biblical Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018.