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AN EXEGESIS OF PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

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Introduction

In this paper I will conduct an exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11, with special attention given to the christological and soteriological categories spelled out by Paul in the “Christ hymn” of vv. 6-11. While these theological concepts are of particular interest, I will carefully examine each phrase of this pericope in order to properly understand Paul’s message to the church in Philippi (and secondarily, to the whole of the Christian church). I will mention the relevant text-critical issues of the pericope in this paper as well. After completing the exegesis, I will spend the second half of the paper examining the phrase οὐχ ἄρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ (2:6b), which is translated “did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” in the NASB.¹ I will argue that Paul is referring to the humiliation and righteousness of Christ rather than any loss or lack of divinity when he writes of Christ’s disregard of “equality” with God the Father.

Exegesis of Philippians 2:5-11

Philippians 2:5-11 is considered by many commentators to be “the most important section of the letter to the Philippians”² due to its great christological significance. Verse 5 forms a connection between the first four verses of the chapter, which contain a call to the Philippian believers to be unified, selfless, and mindful of one another’s interests, and the “Christ hymn” of verses 6-11.³ Much of the scholarship concerning the structure and background of this pericope involves: 1) the recognition of verses 6-11 as a hymn due to its literary qualities and 2) the origin of the hymn itself. These verses clearly have patterns which identify it as hymnic poetry, including isocolon, antithesis, and parallelism.⁴ The origin or authorship of 2:6-11, however, is

¹ The NASB is the primary English translation I will use in this essay. The English Bible quotes are either taken directly from the NASB, or the translation is used to aid me in my translation of the Greek text.

² Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 186.

³ G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 118-19.

⁴ Paul A. Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 116. Every commentary I have encountered agrees on this conclusion, yet the structure of the hymn is debated. Verses 6-11 have

far more contested among commentators. Traditionally, the hymn was assumed to be a very early Christian hymn which was written prior to the composition of this epistle. More recently, some commentators have contested this view by pointing out that the relevance and relationship of the hymn to the preceding and following pericopes suggest that Paul is the original author.⁵ Regardless of the source of the hymn,⁶ this pericope is invaluable to the church's understanding of Christ's divinity. Christ's pre-existence (6a), his condescension and humiliation (6b-8), and his subsequent exaltation (9-11) are all described in concise yet beautiful language.⁷

5. Τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ: The demonstrative pronoun, Τοῦτο, is referring backwards to Paul's call to humility and love among believers, which he wrote of in the first four verses.⁸ Perhaps the most exegetically important word in this verse is φρονεῖτε (Pres. Act. Imp. 2nd. Pl.), "which connotes not simply intellectual activity but practical thought or reasoning, a focus on the heart as well as the brain, on action as well as thinking."⁹ This verb clearly indicates that Christ ought to be the prime example to the Philippians in *all* that they do.

been structured into three stanzas, six stanzas, and even six stanzas which are themselves couplets. Structural questions are not of utmost importance, but they do assist the reader in understanding the theological categories that Paul was drawing on. Whichever way one chooses to structure the hymn, it is imperative that the reader identifies the doctrines which I list in the last sentence of this paragraph. See Hansen, *Philippians*, 122-27 for an analysis of the hymn's structure.

⁵ See Holloway, *Philippians*, 115-17 for an example of a commentator who argues for Paul as the original author. Most other commentators opt for the hymn being written prior to Paul's writing of the epistle time, and some even assume it.

⁶ This is not to say that the historical context of the hymn is unimportant. The literary context, however, is *more* important for properly exegeting the text. See Moises Silva, *Philippians*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 92-93. O'Brien, *Philippians*, 193-96 also details the numerous historical and religious contexts in which (mostly critical) scholars have attempted to place the hymn, including gnostic philosophy and divine metamorphosis in Greco-Roman religion. While I believe it is possible that Paul is alluding to some of these false religious concepts, Paul is primarily conveying the divinity, humiliation, and exaltation of Christ to the Philippian church in this passage.

⁷ See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 4 vols. ed. John Bolt, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 3:233-482 for a very thorough explanation of these christological categories. And please notice that I went to the library to retrieve "man Bavinck" instead of using my copy of "boy Bavinck" in order to avoid mockery from my professor.

⁸ Some manuscripts begin with Τοῦτο γάρ, but Metzger states that "if γάρ were present originally, no good reason can be found for its deletion." (Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1994), 545.) Therefore, it is unlikely that γάρ is original.

⁹ Charles B. Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 52.

If the Christ hymn in the following verses is read purely as exemplary rather than christological, the ellipsis could be filled with a “to be” verb in translation, thus interpreting the verse to mean that Paul is calling believers to be like Jesus *merely* as an example. However, translating the opening words as “*have* this attitude/mindset” is the most neutral rendering, and it semantically matches the clear soteriological and christological connotations which accompany this call to humility based on the example of Christ.¹⁰ The Philippians “are being called to live a new life out of the story of salvation depicted in the hymn.”¹¹

The words ἐν ὑμῖν (Dat. 2nd. Pl.) in their most literal translation would mean “in yourselves,” though it is often translated in English as “among yourselves.”¹² Both renderings are accurate, but they do bring forth different angles of meaning. Translating the preposition ἐν as “in” emphasizes the internal or personal disposition of the believer, while opting for “among” has more communal connotations.¹³ The broader context of the letter must be examined in order to determine which is the best translation. Harmon points out that “in light of the tensions within the Philippian church... the translation ‘among you’ best captures Paul’s emphasis.”¹⁴ The Philippians are being called to communally love one another as Christ loves them.

The final phrase, ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, straightforwardly uses the relative pronoun ὁ to infer that Christ’s example is the one they ought to follow. Καὶ, which is usually rendered as “and,” should be translated as “also” in this context because it is an adjunctive use of the connective conjunction.¹⁵ Ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (Dat. Sing. Masc.) could be referring to the mindset that believers have by being in Christ, or Paul may be speaking of Christ’s own mindset. Because

¹⁰ Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon*, 51-52.

¹¹ Cousar, *Philippians and Philemon*, 51-52.

¹² The ESV is one example.

¹³ Matthew Harmon, *Philippians*, Mentor Commentary (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2015), 204.

¹⁴ Harmon, *Philippians*, 204.

¹⁵ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 296.

this verse is drawing on Christ as the supreme example, it is more likely that Paul is speaking of Christ's own attitude or mindset, which should then be replicated by Christians as they imitate him.¹⁶

6a. ὅς ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων: The use of the relative pronoun ὅς (Nom. Sing. Masc.) offers a clear link between this phrase and verse 5; Paul is now beginning the Christ hymn and explaining *who* Christ is. Paul begins the hymn with this concessive phrase, which establishes Christ's pre-existence before beginning the discussion of his humiliation. The verb ὑπάρχων (Pres. Act. Part. Nom. Sing. Masc.) “stands in sharp contrast with all the aorists which follow it, and therefore points in the direction of continuance of being: Christ Jesus was and is eternally existing ‘in the form of God.’”¹⁷ The phrase ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ has been a source of much debate among scholars. Μορφῇ (Dat. Sing. Fem.) has a rather wide semantic range, and some argue that “μορφῇ denotes not ‘essence’ but ‘outward appearance,’”¹⁸ thus implying that Paul only *appeared* to be God rather than truly *being* God.¹⁹ Μορφῇ is often used to connote appearance only, but it can also refer to essence. BDAG states that when μορφή is used in this context, it is “an expression of divinity in the preexistent Christ.”²⁰ Likewise, Hendriksen argues that the Pauline use of μορφῇ and similar words “refers to the inner, essential, and abiding nature of a person or thing.”²¹ The phrase which immediately follows this one (Phil 2:6b) clearly connotes a

¹⁶ Harmon, *Philippians*, 204.

¹⁷ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1962), 103n82. There has been some debate concerning the use of ὑπάρχων. Some critical scholars have suggested that the participle is causal rather than concessive, meaning it should translate “*because* he existed in the form of God” instead of “*although* he existed...” The concessive use is far more likely because of the comparison between the form of God and “equality” with God in 6b. See Holloway, *Philippians*, 118-19.

¹⁸ Holloway, *Philippians*, 117.

¹⁹ This, of course, invites a docetic Christology. Holloway goes on to (somewhat mockingly) argue that Paul clearly believed that Christ had an angelic, luminous body before taking on human flesh, and denies any divinity connotations in this phrase. See Holloway, *Philippians*, 117-19.

²⁰ BDAG, s.v. “μορφή.”

²¹ Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 104-05. See these pages for Hendriksen's biblical examples and further rationale for the ‘essential’ definition of μορφή rather than the ‘outward appearance’ definition. Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 82-84 provides further evidence for this view.

level of comparison to Christ being “in the form of God,” so the concession “although” is appropriate with the verb in meaning and translation (see footnote 17). One accurate rendering of 6a, then, is “who, although he existed in the form of God.”

6b. οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ: This phrase is the chief concern of the second part of this essay, so many of the theological implications will be discussed in the following section. The first three words, οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο, are meant to show a level of contrast with the concession in 6a and are loaded with potential meaning. ἡγήσατο (Ao. Mid. Ind. 3rd. Sing.) on its own could connote leading in a supervisory capacity, yet it more commonly means “to engage in an intellectual process, think, consider, regard.”²² The latter is certainly the meaning in this verse and elsewhere in Paul’s letters. Ἀρπαγμόν (Acc. Sing. Masc.) is one of the most controversial words of the Christ hymn because its meaning is not clear. The word is rare in non-biblical Greek, absent in the LXX, and occurs only here in the NT.²³ One definition is “a violent seizure of property, robbery”²⁴ but this definition does not fit the context of Christ’s humility in the hymn.²⁵ Upon examining the context of Phil 2:6b and some definitions provided by church fathers, the word likely alludes to “something to which one can claim or assert title by gripping or grasping.”²⁶

The final four words explain the content of what Christ did not (οὐχ) consider grasping. It is likely that ἴσα θεῷ, which literally means “equal/equality with God,” is “a social category rather than one of nature or essence”²⁷ *as it relates to Christ’s example of humility*. The Christ

²² BDAG, s.v. “ἡγεομαι.” This definition for the use in 2:6b is widely agreed upon among commentators.

²³ BDAG, s.v. “ἄρπαγμός.”

²⁴ BDAG, s.v. “ἄρπαγμός.”

²⁵ John Reumann, *Philippians*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 345. However, I do think the connotations of robbery help us understand what Paul actually means in his use of this rare word. See the second section of this paper for further discussion of ἄρπαγμός.

²⁶ BDAG, s.v. “ἄρπαγμός.” Again, there is much more I will add to this definition below.

²⁷ Cousar, *Philippians*, 55. These words are remarkably nuanced, and I will further quote Cousar and other scholars in the second section of this paper to explain this phrase more. At face value, I believe that ἴσα θεῷ truly does refer to Christ being ontologically equal to God. Yet when Paul speaks of ἴσα θεῷ as something which Christ does *not*

hymn may be drawing on a comparison between Christ and Adam; while Adam sinned when tempted to be made like God, Christ resisted in perfect humility to the point of death.²⁸ Though Christ is ontologically equal with God, he did not seek an exalted status while on earth.²⁹ As a whole, 2:6b can be translated and understood as “[he] did not consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.”

7a. ἀλλ’ ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν: The conjunction ἀλλ’ continues to contrast the content of 2:6a with Christ’s humiliation. Ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν (Ao. Act. Ind. 3rd. Sing.) is “a most striking phrase which has no convincing parallel in the whole of Greek literature. The emphatic position of ἐαυτὸν (‘himself’) and the form of the verb (an aorist active) strongly suggest that this act of ‘emptying’ was voluntary on the part of the preexistent Christ.”³⁰ The verb κενόω is used only five times in the NT, and four of these contain a metaphorical connotation. The most literal definition, “to empty,” is therefore appropriate, and it denotes a “graphic expression of the completeness of [Christ’s] self-renunciation,”³¹ which is further detailed in 7b-8. Christ voluntarily “emptied himself” via his assumption of humanity and his atoning sacrifice rather than grasp for an exalted status.³²

7b. μορφήν δούλου λαβὼν ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων γενόμενος: Μορφήν (Acc. Sing. Fem.) makes another appearance in this verse, clearly drawing on a comparison with what was said about Jesus being in the μορφή (form) of God in 6a. Some scholars point to the repeated use of μορφή to argue for the presence of Greco-Roman metamorphosis (see footnote 6) in this

grasp, it is referring to the exalted status that he deserves as a person in the Triune Godhead. See my discussion below.

²⁸ Hansen, *Philippians*, 138-141. This argument is complex and relates to the whole structure of the Christ hymn in the eyes of some scholars. See the final paragraphs of this paper for more.

²⁹ Hansen, *Philippians*, 141-142.

³⁰ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 217.

³¹ Silva, *Philippians*, 104.

³² The details of what precisely Christ emptied himself of is worthy of another paper (or book). See Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 106-08 for a brief overview of some of the options.

verse.³³ Again, I don't believe that this theory is of primary significance. Instead, 7b must be understood as an explanation regarding *how* Christ emptied himself in the preceding phrase. Δούλου (Gen. Sing. Masc.) can be taken to mean slave or servant, and it refers to Christ's taking on human flesh and submitting to the Father's will in his humiliation.³⁴ The meaning of δούλου is further corroborated and defined by the phrase ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων, or "in the likeness/similarity of man." Ὁμοιώματι (Dat. Sing. Neut.) is most commonly defined as "similarity," but can also connote the true essence of a person or thing.³⁵ Therefore, in the context of 2:7 μορφήν δούλου λαβὼν ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἀνθρώπων means that Christ's "appearance as a servant matched his true essence" and that "Christ did not set aside His deity to become man, but added full humanity to His full deity."³⁶ Christ well and truly took (λαβὼν) the *form* of a human servant in his humiliation.³⁷

7c-8a. καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν.³⁸ The conjunction καὶ once again serves as a logical connective to the content of the previous verses, demonstrating the unity of the Christ hymn and the logical progression of Christ's humiliation.³⁹ Σχήματι (Dat. Sing. Neut.) has a semantic range which overlaps μορφή significantly, but it generally means "changeable and outward," not "inner essence," possibly meaning that (according to some critics) "the humanity [of Christ] was impermanent and fleeting."⁴⁰ Yet in the context of the Christ hymn it is better to understand σχήματι to mean that *anyone who saw* Jesus could clearly

³³ Holloway, *Philippians*, 120-22.

³⁴ O'Brien, *Philippians*, 223.

³⁵ BDAG, s.v. "ὁμοίωμα."

³⁶ Harmon, *Philippians*, 211, 214.

³⁷ See Douglas F. Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, 3 vols. (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus, 2014), 2:183-95 for an excellent explanation of the two natures of Christ and their necessity for understanding christology and soteriology.

³⁸ There is a slight discrepancy between the numbering of the verses in Greek and in English translations. The NA 28 includes καὶ σχήματι εὑρεθεὶς ὡς ἄνθρωπος in 2:7c and begins 2:8 with ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν. English translations begin 2:8 with Christ "being found in the appearance of man." I am using the numbering from the NA 28.

³⁹ See Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar*, ed. Gordon M. Messing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 651 for the use of καὶ as a logical connective.

⁴⁰ Reumann, *Philippians*, 371.

see his true humanity and humiliation.⁴¹ This is why Paul writes that Jesus was found, or εὑρεθείς (Ao. Pass. Part. Nom. Sing. Masc.), to have the appearance of a man. Christ's manhood was evident to all who saw him simply because he had, and continues to have, a true human nature.

Ἐταπείνωσεν (Ao. Act. Ind. 3rd. Sing.) is a verb which describes humiliation or disgrace, and it serves to further expound Christ's "emptying" of himself in 2:7a.⁴² The active voice and the reflexive pronoun ἑαυτὸν affirm the fact that Christ willingly took the form of man and underwent humiliation by his own accord.⁴³ The Christ hymn has tremendous soteriological and christological value, but one must not forget that Paul is exhorting the Philippians to use Christ as an example. The recipients of this epistle obviously cannot assume a second nature and do exactly what Christ did, so the example of Christ cannot be a literal example. Instead, the great humility of Christ is a general pattern to imitate and live a life "characterized by self-surrender, self-renunciation, and self-sacrifice."⁴⁴

8b-8c. γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ: The rest of 2:8 continues to unravel the meaning of Christ's self-humiliation before turning to his exaltation in v. 9. The adjective ὑπήκοος (Nom. Sing. Masc.) straightforwardly means "obedient."⁴⁵ The preposition μέχρι could contextually be translated as "to the point of" or "unto," and demonstrates the sheer extent of Christ's obedience which follows: θανάτου, θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ. These words describe the lowest point of Christ's humiliation and depict the *degree* of obedience. In this closing phrase of the first half of the hymn, "the last word to be heard is the cross [σταυροῦ]. Death on a cross

⁴¹ Reumann, *Philippians*, 371.

⁴² L&N, s.v. "ταπεινώω."

⁴³ Christ willingly entered into his humiliation, and he also submitted to the will of the Father in doing so. Both are true. See Kelly, *Systematic Theology*, 2:246-48 for an explanation of the two wills of Christ and the harmony of the Son and Father's wills.

⁴⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 89.

⁴⁵ L&N, s.v. "ὑπήκοος."

was not a heroic death, a noble death, but a shameful death... the cross displayed the lowest depths of human depravity and cruelty.”⁴⁶ Christ’s radical obedience to the point of crucifixion makes him the ultimate exemplar to the Philippians, and it fully discloses the soteriological value of Christ’s humility.⁴⁷ Christ’s “becoming” (γενόμενος) fully obedient to the Father “even to the cross makes this event a saving one and not merely an ideal to be copied by his followers.”⁴⁸

9a. διὸ καὶ ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν: Verse 9 pivots the Christ-hymn from Christ’s humiliation to his exaltation. Interestingly, the conjunction διὸ usually denotes that the inference being made is self-evident.⁴⁹ Paul seems to imply that the cruel extent of Jesus’ humiliation naturally implies a wonderful exaltation. Much like its use in v. 5, καὶ is connective in this verse and should be translated “also” because of the inference that Paul is making between the content of vv. 9-11 with vv. 6-8.⁵⁰ Ὑπερύψωσεν (Ao. Act. Ind. 3rd. Sing.) is the most exegetically important word in this phrase. The verb means “to raise someone to the loftiest height”⁵¹ and “it is in an intensified form... that repeatedly occurs in the LXX to refer to God being exalted, especially in the Psalms and Isaiah.”⁵² In the LXX, ὑπερυψώω generally refers to the Lord being exalted through the judgment of the wicked (Isa 5:16) or through the mercy which he imparts to the Israelites (Isa 30:18). Harmon states: “what is noteworthy in these occurrences is the insistence that God *alone* will be exalted on the great Day of the Lord, which is another way of saying that He will not share His glory with anyone else... What Isaiah insists belongs to

⁴⁶ Hansen, *Philippians*, 157.

⁴⁷ Hansen, *Philippians*, 156.

⁴⁸ Cousar, *Philippians*, 57.

⁴⁹ L&N, s.v. “διό.”

⁵⁰ Silva, *Philippians*, 108.

⁵¹ BDAG, s.v. “ὑπερυψώω.”

⁵² Harmon, *Philippians*, 220.

Yahweh alone, Paul attributes to Jesus Christ.”⁵³ Paul’s pivot to exaltation in the hymn begins with an implicit reference to Christ’s divinity and unity with God the Father.

9b. καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα.⁵⁴ Ἐχαρίσατο (Ao. Mid. Ind. 3rd. Sing.) is generally translated as “bestowed” or “granted” in English, yet it is important to recognize the connotations of this verb. Hendriksen writes that ἐχαρίσατο literally means that the Father “graciously, that is wholeheartedly, granted to him the name.”⁵⁵ The positive connotations of ἐχαρίσατο serve to further paint the picture of the Father exalting the Son with joy. Τὸ ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα, meaning “the name which is above/superior to every name” has been a source of much debate among commentators. A majority of commentators assume that the name (ὄνομα) is the title κύριος, though this is not explicit in the text.⁵⁶ By contrast, some scholars argue that the ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα must be understood in light of first century Jewish apocalypticism. Holloway argues that the Jews of Paul’s time believed that an “angel of Yahweh” would appear on the Day of Judgment bearing God’s name.⁵⁷ Based on this evidence, he claims that Paul identifies Christ as this “angel of Yahweh” after “God promoted Christ to the rank of a Name-bearing angel.”⁵⁸

However, the use of the verb ὑπερυψόω in the first section of the verse sets Jesus apart as not merely an angel, but one with Yahweh himself. Holloway’s theory is not biblically consistent. A far better interpretation draws on one of Paul’s other extant letters for context concerning this strange phrase. Ephesians 1:21 contains similar language: καὶ παντὸς ὀνόματος

⁵³ Harmon, *Philippians*, 221.

⁵⁴ There is a textual variant in this phrase. Some MSS, including the Textus Receptus, omit τὸ before the first use of ὄνομα. Metzger argues that it is possible that “the last syllable of ἐχαρίσατο somehow led to the omission of the article” through a scribal error. Ultimately, the committee was more convinced of its inclusion based on manuscript evidence. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 546.

⁵⁵ Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 115.

⁵⁶ Silva, *Philippians*, 110. It is possible, however, that the “name” referred to here is revealed as κύριος in v. 11.

⁵⁷ See Holloway, *Philippians*, 127-28 for some of Holloway’s sources for this theory.

⁵⁸ Holloway, *Philippians*, 128.

ὀνομαζομένου. The surrounding verses explicitly define the circumstances of Christ being given an exalted name in Eph 1. God “seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come” (Eph 1:20b-21 ESV). The details about the specific “name” that these words connote is less important than the recognition that Christ is exalted to a place of glory and cosmic authority which is equal to, and shared with, the Father by receiving the “name above every name.”⁵⁹

10a. ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ πάν γόνυ κάμψη: This phrase is obviously directly connected to the Father’s assignment of the “name above every name” to Jesus, and it corroborates what I’ve argued about its meaning in my discussion of 2:9b. Ἰνα can connote purpose or result, but it likely means the former in this verse because the exaltation of Christ appears to be done *so that* all of creation will bow in worship.⁶⁰ What I’ve already stated about the exalted name of Christ in 2:9b applies to ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ in this verse as well. As a person of the Triune God, Christ has cosmic authority over all of creation.⁶¹ Πάν γόνυ κάμψη, best translated as “every knee should bow,” reflects submission and great honor in both Hebrew and Greco-Roman contexts. Throughout the OT, this gesture of honor is occasionally directed towards another person (2 Kings 1:13) but is usually reserved for the worship of Yahweh. The use of πάν (every) to describe the limitless scope of honor being given to Christ makes it likely that Paul is making another implicit reference to Christ’s divinity in this phrase.⁶² It is not

⁵⁹ Silva, *Philippians*, 110-11.

⁶⁰ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 238-39. The connotation of purpose seems to be more likely with the use of κάμψη in the subjunctive in the following phrase, but there is an interesting argument that “result” could be in view- particularly with the idea that Christ’s present exalted state has already begun to bring forth the eschaton. The bowing of knees could be said to have already begun in Christ’s defeat of Satan through his resurrection and ascension. I believe it is possible that both purpose and result are in view here.

⁶¹ O’Brien, *Philippians*, 239-40.

⁶² Harmon, *Philippians*, 227-28.

imaginable that anyone but God himself could be worthy of every knee bowing in submission in Paul's Jewish context.

10b. ἐπουρανίων καὶ ἐπιγείων καὶ καταχθονίων: The listing of these three realms: heaven, earth, and under the earth, carries highly significant meaning in the ancient world. Hansen states, “in ancient cosmology these three spheres of the universe were under the control of invisible spirit-powers... The hymn of Christ puts all three realms of the universe under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶³ Paul is expressing the totality of Christ's reign upon his exaltation, which includes spiritual and physical powers. The confession of Christ's Lordship which is described in v. 11 has led some commentators to conclude that the total submission to Christ only describes rational beings.⁶⁴ However, God's (and specifically Christ's) control over inanimate parts of creation elsewhere in the Bible (see Mark 4:35-41) leads me to believe that Paul is stating that literally *all* of creation will submit to Christ's reign in some sense.

11a. καὶ πάντα γλῶσσα ἐξομολογήσεται ὅτι κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστός:⁶⁵ This phrase continues to build upon the all-encompassing exaltation and worship of Christ which began in v. 9. Γλῶσσα (Nom. Sing. Fem.) literally means “tongue,” but is often used poetically to mean “all people.”⁶⁶ The key verb ἐξομολογήσεται (Ao. Mid. Subj. 3rd. Sing.) does not necessarily carry connotations of praise or thanksgiving, and usually has a more neutral meaning of declaration or acknowledgement.⁶⁷ There are examples, however, in the LXX of ἐξομολογέω being used to mean “praise” or “exalt.”⁶⁸ Many have argued that the positive connotation is more likely in

⁶³ Hansen, *Philippians*, 164-65.

⁶⁴ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 93. This is a fair assumption and may be true, but I believe that there is greater evidence in Scripture for the reign of Christ to go beyond rational beings.

⁶⁵ This phrase in v. 11 has two notable textual variants. Some MSS have ἐξομολογέσται (future indicative) rather than ἐξομολογήσεται (aorist subjunctive). Both make sense in context, but Metzger opts for ἐξομολογήσεται based on manuscript evidence. The second variant deals with the word Χριστός; some Western manuscripts omit it, perhaps to match the use of Ἰησοῦ in v. 10. See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 546.

⁶⁶ Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 93.

⁶⁷ Cousar, *Philippians*, 58.

⁶⁸ O'Brien, *Philippians*, 246.

mind here because of the building sense of exaltation in the latter part of the Christ hymn. Yet O'Brien makes the compelling case that while all will confess Christ's Lordship in the eschaton, "not all *gladly* acknowledge the sovereignty of Yahweh in this open confession."⁶⁹ The confession of the condemned may be made with indignation or resentment rather than praise. Regardless of Paul's intended connotation, the scope of Christ's reign is maintained.

Κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς is often recognized by commentators as the climax of the hymn, and may be formally declaring the "name" which was repeatedly spoken of in the preceding verses. Κύριος (Nom. Sing. Masc.) ascribes supreme Lordship to Jesus Christ, and "was the central confession of early Christians; without such a confession a person is not a Christian."⁷⁰ Κύριος could refer to an earthly ruler, but its repeated use in the LXX as the title for Yahweh affirms that Paul is ascribing divinity to Christ.⁷¹ The Lordship which is given to Christ in this verse gives Christ full equality with God and "turns the ancient Jewish monotheism into a new christological monotheism."⁷²

11b. εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός: The final phrase of the Christ hymn orients the true purpose of the humiliation and exaltation of Christ. The words θεοῦ πατρός in the genitive case and δόξαν in the accusative clearly indicates that all of what Christ has done is "to the glory *of* God the Father." One might suspect that Paul is stating that all glory is being taken from the Son and given to the Father, but the powerful declaration of Christ's Lordship in the preceding verses disallows this interpretation.⁷³ The exaltation of Christ, which is punctuated with this final phrase, teaches that "it is not that God has stepped aside and Jesus has taken over. It is rather that

⁶⁹ O'Brien, *Philippians*, 248.

⁷⁰ Harmon, *Philippians*, 232.

⁷¹ Holloway, *Philippians*, 128-29. Holloway surprisingly admits to the divinity connotations of this title, but insists that Jesus is no more than a divine angel, as mentioned above.

⁷² Hansen, *Philippians*, 168.

⁷³ Reumann, *Philippians*, 374.

God shared his lordship with Christ, without it ceasing to be God's alone."⁷⁴ In the intimacy of the Triune Godhead, the exaltation of Christ *is* the exaltation of the Father: "when the Son is glorified, the Father is glorified also, and vice versa; and when the Son is rejected the Father is rejected also."⁷⁵ The shared glory between Father and Son is another thing which cannot be literally replicated by the Philippians as they are called to follow the example of Christ, but Jesus' devotion to the glory of God is certainly a desire that Paul urges the Philippians to have in their lives.⁷⁶

Christ's Divinity in οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ

The Christ hymn is one of the most theologically loaded texts in the Pauline epistles, and there has been no shortage of debate among scholars concerning almost every phrase of the passage. One of the more contested phrases is 2:6b (sometimes called 2:6b-c if the verse is split into three sections): οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ. The NASB translates: "did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped," which I mentioned above in my exegesis. This unusual phrase has been understood as a denial of Christ's divinity to some scholars, but I will argue that τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is actually evidence of Paul's *high* Christology.⁷⁷ I will also argue that οὐχ ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγήσατο describes Christ great humility despite his divine status, and that it expresses Christ's salvific sinlessness as the second and greater Adam.

Understanding the Pauline usage of ἡγέομαι is an important first step to properly exegeting this verse. I briefly mentioned above that this verb often refers to leadership, but can also mean "to consider." Expanding on this distinction, Silva writes in his theological dictionary: "beginning with the early class. period, there are two distinct semantic developments. One of

⁷⁴ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 254.

⁷⁵ Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 118.

⁷⁶ Hendriksen, *Philippians*, 118.

⁷⁷ See Holloway, *Philippians*, 119-20 for an example of a scholar who denies Christ's divinity based on this verse.

them... ‘to rule [politically]’... The other development was the transference of the term to the intellectual sphere, with such meanings as ‘to believe, suppose, consider.’”⁷⁸ The use of the latter definition in 2:6b is the clear meaning based not only on the context of Christ’s humiliation, but also the larger context of the letter. Just a few verses earlier in 2:3, Paul used the same word “to call the Philippians to count others more significant than themselves.”⁷⁹ Additionally, “Paul uses ἡγέομαι 3x in quick succession to stress his decision to consider all his previous advantages as... ‘a loss’... for the sake of gaining Christ.”⁸⁰ In all of these uses, ἡγέομαι refers to a person willingly “considering” themselves to be less for the benefit of others, or for the benefit of the Kingdom of God. Likewise, in 2:6b ἡγέομαι denotes “the *intentional* decision of the pre-incarnate Christ not to do something.”⁸¹ It is imperative to define ἡγέομαι in this manner so that the reader properly discerns what is meant by τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ.

Τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ is the phrase at the center of many scholars’ claims that 2:6b is an explicit denial of Christ’s divinity. Holloway argues:

Regardless of which way one understands ‘equality with God,’ it must be taken in a qualified sense, since even in 2:9-11 Christ’s glory still serves ‘the glory of the Father’... Strictly speaking, Christ is not ‘equal to God’ either *before* his metamorphosis or *after* his exaltation... ‘equality with God’ would then be hyperbole, emphasizing the extraordinary extent of Christ’s self-humbling and therefore of the exemplary nature of his humility.⁸²

Much of Holloway’s argument is founded on his mistaken interpretations of Christ’s “form” of God in 2:6a and “the glory of God the Father” in 2:11b, both of which I believe I have disproven in my exegesis of the text above. By contrast, Hansen suggests a far more biblically consistent interpretation of ἴσα θεῷ. He first traces the concept of “form of God,” which is present in 2:6a, throughout the OT (Exod 33:18-19) and NT (Heb 1:3). Hansen concludes:

⁷⁸ Moisés Silva, “ἡγέομαι,” *NIDNTTE* 2:375.

⁷⁹ Harmon, *Philippians*, 208.

⁸⁰ Silva, “ἡγέομαι,” 2:377.

⁸¹ Harmon, *Philippians*, 208. Emphasis added.

⁸² Holloway, *Philippians*, 120.

The manifestation of the glory of the Lord is closely united with a proclamation of the Lord's goodness and the Lord's name. The glory of God expresses the being of God... This union... informs our understanding of the first line of the hymn of Christ: *existing in the form of God*. If we conclude that the *form of God* means the glory of God... then we will also include that the phrase *existing in the form of God* points to Christ's *being in very nature God*.⁸³

Properly comprehending the divinity connotations of "form of God" in 2:6a is relevant to the interpretation of ἴσα θεῷ in 2:6b because of the hymnic structure of this pericope. The parallelism which is obviously present throughout the Christ hymn "leads the reader to define each line in terms of the other line."⁸⁴ The biblical evidence for μορφῇ θεοῦ necessarily denoting God's very essence means that ἴσα θεῷ must not be taken as a qualified expression. "Equality with God" truly does refer to Jesus' ontological oneness with God. However, I argued above in my exegesis that ἴσα θεῷ has connotations of *social category* rather than essence when it is said to be something Christ is not "grasping for" (see footnote 27). I believe that *both* meanings must be in mind in order to understand the Christ hymn. A further exploration of ἀρπαγμόν in relation to τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ must first be done in order to explain the harmony between these two seemingly opposite interpretations.

As I alluded to in the exegesis section of this paper, ἀρπαγμός is a rare and strange word in Koine Greek. Its extra-biblical uses seem to always convey "a violent seizure of property, robbery."⁸⁵ The context of the Son's humiliation disallows for the word to be translated as "robbery," but I do believe that this definition helps the reader to understand what 2:6b means. "A thing to be grasped" is a proper reflection of ἀρπαγμός in this verse, but the connotation of

⁸³ Hansen, *Philippians*, 138.

⁸⁴ Hansen, *Philippians*, 138.

⁸⁵ BDAG, s.v. "ἀρπαγμός."

robbery should be in view as it relates to Christ's deliberate act of humility rather than self-glorification.⁸⁶

There is a relatively wide scope of interpretations regarding the use of ἄρπαγμός and Christ's equality with God. Hansen lays out four options: 1) grasping for something already possessed, 2) something to be grasped that is already possessed, 3) something to be grasped that is not possessed, and 4) something to be selfishly exploited that is already possessed.⁸⁷ Option three must be rejected because of the stockpile of evidence for Christ's pre-existence and shared divinity with God the Father in the preceding and following verses. The first two options are sensical in light of Paul's high christology, but fail to explain the "robbery" connotations of ἄρπαγμός. For this reason, the concept of Christ choosing not to selfishly exploit the privileges which he already has as the Son of God is the best option.⁸⁸ Hansen argues:

This interpretation takes the hymn's reference to equality with God as a description of Christ's divine nature and position in his preincarnate state. The hymn asserts Christ's decision not to regard his equality with God as *harpagmos*: something to be exploited for his own selfish advantage. When *harpagmos* is understood as *something to be selfishly exploited*, Christ's decision does not imply that he gave up his equality with God but that he expressed his equality with God.⁸⁹

This interpretive option allows for the influence of "robbery" connotations while affirming the sinlessness of Christ and fitting the context of Paul's humility exhortation. N.T. Wright adds: "The pre-existent Son regarded equality with God not as excusing him from the task of (redemptive) suffering and death, but actually as uniquely qualifying him for that

⁸⁶ Cousar, *Philippians*, 54. Also see Michael W. Martin, "Ἀρπαγμός Revisited: A Philological Reexamination of the New Testament's Most Difficult Word," *JBL* 135 (2016): 176-77 where Martin argues that "ἄρπαγμός should be understood actively with the general meaning of 'robbery' and that Phil 2:6 should be amended to accommodate the meaning."

⁸⁷ See Hansen, *Philippians*, 142-46 for a detailed explanation of each of these options.

⁸⁸ Roy W. Hoover was the first to propose this solution in Roy W. Hoover, "*Harpogmos* Enigma: A Philological Solution," *HTR* 64 (1971): 95-119.

⁸⁹ Hansen, *Philippians*, 145.

vocation.”⁹⁰ Only God is capable of such a remarkable depth of humility, which is precisely why Christ was the only one who could adequately accomplish this task. Taking the entirety of 2:6b into account, the verse is then communicating that Christ willingly declined to selfishly exploit the advantageous position that he had as God in the flesh. This message is incredibly revealing of the selfless and loving character of Christ, and is a statement of shockingly beautiful humility.⁹¹

A robber would view ἀρπαγμός as an opportunity to exploit others, but Christ chose to suffer and bear the wrath of God on behalf of his sheep. Christ “gave everything away for the sake of others.”⁹² This definition of ἀρπαγμός in relation to Christ’s equality with God also demonstrates the contrast between the character of God and the mythological gods worshiped in the first century Roman Empire: “Immersed in a Greco-Roman culture that cut its teeth on stories of the gods using their powers and privileges for their own selfish gain, the picture of one who was fully divine not acting in this manner... would have been a startling contrast to what their native world view taught them.”⁹³ The context of Paul’s humility exhortation and the culture of the original reading audience deeply affirms this interpretation. The solution to the problem which I previously alluded to regarding the meaning of ἴσα θεῷ is also answered: “equality with God” does refer to Christ’s ontological oneness with the Father, *and* it refers to the social status which Christ was entitled to, yet declined, in his humiliation.

One final secondary angle of Phil 2:6b lies in the possibility that Paul is labeling Christ as the second and greater Adam. The meaning of μορφή in 2:6a is central here, and again, it is relevant to 2:6b because of the parallelism of the hymn. The general theory is based on the assumption that μορφή can typically be used interchangeably with εἰκών. Εἰκών is literally

⁹⁰ N.T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 83-84 quoted in Hansen, *Philippians*, 145.

⁹¹ Hansen, *Philippians*, 146.

⁹² Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 85.

⁹³ Harmon, *Philippians*, 209.

translated “image” and is used in the Bible to express humanity’s being made in the image (εἰκών) of God.⁹⁴ If this were the case, 2:6a (and by 2:6b by implication) would be semantically stating that Jesus existed in the *image* of God by using μορφή. The reference and comparison between this verse and the Genesis account would be obvious to the reader if εἰκών and μορφή were synonyms. By implication, this comparison would mean that ἴσα θεῷ either means that Adam had ontological equality with God, or it would indicate that ἴσα θεῷ has *nothing* to do with Christ’s divine status because Adam was not divine.⁹⁵

However, the synonymous use of μορφή and εἰκών is inappropriate. Εἰκών θεοῦ is used to refer to humans (and therefore Christ in his humanity) in the NT, but “image of God” and “form of God” are never used interchangeably.⁹⁶ For this reason, there is not a clear reason to draw a strict parallel between Adam and Christ in 2:6 in the Christ hymn as a whole, which is a common interpretive framework for this pericope.⁹⁷ Yet there is reason to draw *some* conclusions about Christ as the second Adam at a theological level. Ridderbos states that “while the first Adam wanted to appropriate to himself the being on an equality with God in an unlawful manner, Christ did not regard this equality, in which he already shared, as a privilege that had come to him for his own advantage, on the ground of which he could have refused the way of self-emptying and humiliation.”⁹⁸ Drawing on the Adam/Christ parallel in a limited sense is

⁹⁴ BDAG, s.v. “εἰκών.” Examples of scholars cited in this paper who assume the semantic overlap include Dunn and O’Brien. Of course, Jesus absolutely does reflect the image of God. Specifically, he renews the image of God and allows man to be reconciled to God as a substitute. Yet Christ is not *merely* in the image of God like all humans are, but also truly God himself. See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 71.

⁹⁵ Hansen, *Philippians*, 139-40.

⁹⁶ Hansen, *Philippians*, 139-40.

⁹⁷ See O’Brien, *Philippians*, 209 for O’Brien’s use of the Adam/Christ parallel in this pericope. He and many other commentators structure the *entire* hymn as a parallel in which Christ succeeds where Adam failed. I believe this is theologically true, but not fully consistent with this *entire* pericope.

⁹⁸ Ridderbos, *Paul*, 74-75. Ridderbos does argue that εἰκών and μορφή share the exact same meaning, which I (nervously) disagree with. Nevertheless, the theological implication he makes here is amenable to my limited view of the Adam/Christ parallel in the Christ hymn. Much of the linguistic research on the semantic range of these verbs was done more recently, which is why many contemporary conservative scholars such as Hansen argue otherwise.

helpful in demonstrating that Christ did exactly what Adam did not. Adam chose to rebel against God by seeking equality which he did not have, while Christ chose humility when he deserved the benefits of being equal with God. This theological truth which can indirectly be derived from Phil 2:6 is not only consistent with Paul's exemplary exhortation of Christ's humility; it also adds to the christological and soteriological value of this pericope which I have demonstrated throughout my exegesis.

Conclusion

In this paper I have carefully exegeted Phil 2:5-11, with special attention given to the christological and soteriological implications. I have shown that the example of Christ is the central focus of the pericope, but a declaration of Christ's nature and purpose is also a significant emphasis of the Christ hymn. Furthermore, I have proven that Paul is demonstrating Christ's divinity and deserved exalted status in 2:6 despite his choice to undergo humiliation for the sake of his sheep and for the glory of God. It is my hope that my exegesis of this marvelous passage both encourages and comforts the Christian, while also pointing him to Christ's perfect example as he runs "with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb 12:1b-2 ESV).

Appendix: Logical Progression and Textual Apparatus⁹⁹

5 Τοῦτο τ' ἔφρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν¹⁰⁰

ὁ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ,

ὃς

6 ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπάρχων

οὐχ ἄρπαγμόν ἡγήσατο τὸ εἶναι ἴσα θεῷ,

7 ἀλλ' ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν

μορφὴν δούλου λαβών,

ἐν ὁμοιώματι ἑανθρώπων γενόμενος.¹⁰¹

καὶ σχήματι εὐρέθεις ὡς ἄνθρωπος

8 ἐταπείνωσεν ἑαυτὸν

γενόμενος ὑπήκοος μέχρι θανάτου,

θανάτου δὲ σταυροῦ.

9 διὸ καὶ

ὁ θεὸς αὐτὸν ὑπερύψωσεν

καὶ ἐχαρίσατο αὐτῷ

ὅτι ὄνομα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντων ὀνομα,¹⁰²

10 ἵνα ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ

πάν γόνυ κάμψη

⁹⁹ The text and apparatus are taken from the *NA28*.

¹⁰⁰ τ' γαρ Ɔ46 2x D F G K L P 075. 0278. 104. 365. 630. 1175. 1505. 1739. 1881 m lat syh

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¹⁰¹ ἑανθρώπου Ɔ46 t vgmss; McionT Cyp

¹⁰² ο D F G K L P Ɔ 075. 0278. 81. 104. 365. 630. 1175c. 1241. 1505. 1881. 2464 m; ClexThd

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ἐπουρανίων

καὶ ἐπιγείων

καὶ καταχθονίων

11

καὶ πᾶσα γλῶσσα Ἦ ἐξομολογήσεται¹⁰³

ὅτι Ἦ κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς Ἦ¹⁰⁴

εἰς δόξαν θεοῦ πατρός.

¹⁰³ Ἦ ἐξομολογήσεται A C D F* G K L P Ψvid 075. 0278. 6. 33. 81. 104. 365. 630*. 1175. 1241. 1505. 1739. 1881. 2464 pm; Irv.l.

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¹⁰⁴ Ἦ κύριος Ἰησοῦς (Ac) F G 1505* b g vgms sams; Orlat pt

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