

LEXICAL STUDY OF PHILIPPIANS 2:1-11
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The purpose of this paper is to produce a word study for significant words in Philippians 2:1-11. Ten words have been selected from the Christologically significant Philippians 2:6-11. Each of the ten words chosen have meanings that are important not only to the interpretation of this passage, but also to one's theological understanding of the person of Jesus Christ. For the following study, A. T. Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, Marvin Vincent's *Word Studies in the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel's *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, and Walter Bauer's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* were consulted.

μορφή

The noun μορφή "form" appears in its dative form in Philippians 2:6. BDAG, Robertson and Vincent each understand μορφή as referring to the preexistent deity of Christ (BDAG, 659; Robertson, 444; and Vincent, Phil. 2:6). Robertson expresses their opinion the most succinctly when he wrote "*Morphê* means the essential attributes as shown in the form. In his preincarnate state Christ possessed the attributes of God and so appeared to those in heaven who saw him. Here is a clear statement by Paul of the deity of Christ" (Robertson, 444). Kittel goes into more detail arguing that Paul coined the phrase μορφή θεοῦ "form of God" to contrast with μορφήν δούλου "form of servant" in verse seven. Thus, "The appearance assumed by the

incarnate Lord, the image of humiliation and obedient submission, stands in the sharpest conceivable contrast to His former appearance, *the image of sovereign divine majesty*” [italics added] (Kittel, Vol. IV, 751).

ἄρπαγμός

The noun ἄρπαγμὸν “a thing to be grasped” appears in its accusative form in Philippians 2:6. The difficulty of translating this word (the KJV incorrectly translates it as “robbery”) comes as a result of it only appearing once, in this passage, in the entire New Testament (BDAG, 133 and Kittel, Vol. I, 473). Vincent argues that, instead of “robbery”, ἄρπαγμὸν should be translated “a highly prized possession” (Vincent, Phil. 2:6). Christ, therefore, did not regard His equality with God as a “highly prized possession” to be held onto. Instead, “He counted *humanity* His prize, and so laid aside the conditions of His preexistent state, and became man” (Ibid.).

ἴσος

The word ἴσα “equal” occurs with εἶναι “to be” in Philippians 2:6 indicating its use as an adverb (Robertson, 444). The word has the idea of “being equivalent in number, size, quality” (BDAG, 480). According to Kittel, this word also this word refers to the equality with God belonging to Christ by nature. This equality “is both essential and perfect” (Kittel, Vol. III, 353). This is a clear New Testament claim that Jesus is equal to God (Ibid., 352).

κενόω

The verb ἐκένωσε “emptied” occurs in its 1st Aorist Active Indicative 3rd Person Singular form in Philippians 2:7. According to BDAG, the term means to divest oneself of

position or prestige (BDAG, 539). Kittel states, “the essence remains, the mode of being changes” (Kittel, Vol. III, 661). Some have argued that Christ emptied Himself of His divine nature. According to Robertson, “That was impossible. He continued to be the Son of God” (Robertson, 444). Instead, Robertson argues “Christ gave up his environment of glory. . . . He took upon himself limitations of place (space) and of knowledge and of power” (Robertson, 444).

Similarly, Vincent states:

He did not divest Himself of His divine *nature*. The change was a change of *state*: the form of a servant for the form of God. His *personality* continued the same. His *self-emptying* was not *self-extinction*, nor was the divine Being changed into a *mere* man. In His humanity He retained the consciousness of deity, and in His incarnate state carried out the mind which animated Him before His incarnation. He was not *unable to assert* equality with God. He was able *not to assert it* (Vincent, Philippians 2:7).

ὁμοίωμα

The noun ὁμοιώματι “likeness” occurs in its dative form in Philippians 2:7. BDAG acknowledges that “There is no general agreement on the mng. in two related passages in which Paul uses our word in speaking of Christ’s earthly life” (BDAG, 707). According to Kittel, the word has the idea of “what is made similar” (Kittel, Vol. V, 190). He was just like man in all except that He had no sin. Therefore, his likeness is “not identical with the original . . . but like it” (Ibid.). Vincent, though, is careful to assert that this “likeness” is a “real likeness” (Vincent, Phillipians 2:7). Similarly, Robertson argues: “It was a likeness, but a real likeness (Kennedy), no mere phantom humanity as the Docetic Gnostics held” (Robertson, 445).

σχῆμα

The noun σχῆματι “form” occurs in its dative form in Philippians 2:7. BDAG states

the definition as “the generally recognized state or form in which someth. Appears, *outward appearance, form, shape*” (BDAG, 981). Although both may be translated as “form”, Vincent contrasts σχῆμα with μορφή in his comments on Philippians 2:6. He argues that μορφή “is identified with the essence of a person or thing”, while σχῆμα refers to “an accident which may change without affecting the form” (Vincent, Philippians 2:6). Kittel, though argues that “The reference is to His whole nature and manner as man” (Kittel, Vol. VII, 956).

ΤΑΠΕΙΝΩ

The verb ἐταπείνωσεν “humbled” occurs in its 1st Aorist Active Indicative 3rd Person Singular form in Philippians 2:8. The word implies “voluntary humiliation” (Robertson, 445). Vincent argues that ἐταπείνωσεν “humbled” in verse eight defines ἐκένωσεν “emptied” in verse seven. This word shows “how the self-emptying manifests itself” (Vincent, Philippians 2:8). Similarly, Kittel states that “The ἐαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν of the incarnation becomes a concrete historical event in the ἐταπείνωσεν ἐαυτὸν” (Kittel, Vol. VIII, 18).

ὑπερυψώ

The verb ὑπερύψωσεν “raise to the highest position” occurs in its 1st Aorist Active Indicative 3rd Person Singular form in Philippians 2:9. This is the only time the word occurs in the New Testament (Robertson, 445). The verb is literally translated “exalted above” according to Vincent (Vincent, Philippians 2:9). BDAG says that here it means to “raise someone to the loftiest height” (BDAG, 1034). This exaltation of Christ came as a result of Christ’s voluntary obedience to the Father. Therefore, Christ has been exalted “above or beyond the state of glory which he enjoyed before the Incarnation” (Robertson, 445).

ἐξομολογέω

The verb ἐξομολογήσεται “should confess” occurs in its 1st Aorist Middle Subjunctive 3rd Person Singular form in Philippians 2:11. It is linked with the ἵνα “in order that” of verse ten indicating purpose (Robertson, 446). The verb has the idea here of “frank, open confession” (Vincent, Philippians 2:11). It means “to declare openly in acknowledgment” (BDAG, 351). In this context it refers to the event when “every tongue will acknowledge the lordship of Christ, to the glory of God the Father” (Kittel, Vol. V, 214).

κύριος

The noun κύριος “Lord” occurs in its nominative form in Philippians 2:11. As it is found in this passage κύριος Ἰησοῦς Χριστοῦς “Jesus Christ *is* Lord”, it is the Pauline confession of the early church (BDAG, 578). It means that Jesus Christ is the “one who is in charge” and the “one who is in a position of authority” (Ibid., 577). The word κύριος “declares the true character and dignity of Jesus Christ” (Robertson, 446). This title describes the deity of Christ and is the basis of Christian worship (Ibid.).

Conclusion

The above lexical study of Philippians 2:1-11 has served at least three useful purposes. Obviously, the ten words examined above are important in understanding Philippians 2:1-11. Additionally, each of these ten words are essential to developing a thoroughly biblical Christology. Finally, these word studies serve as a good introduction to the richness of the Greek language.

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