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ABSTRACT

INTERPRETING PHILIPPIANS 2:12, 13 USING THE
GREAT CONTROVERSY METANARRATIVE

by

Sikhululekile Daco

Advisor: Martin F. Hanna

ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Thesis

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: INTERPRETING PHILIPPIANS 2:12, 13 USING THE GREAT
CONTROVERSY METANARRATIVE

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Date completed: April 2019

Problem

Philippians 2:12, 13 present two paradoxical statements in direct juxtaposition. Verse twelve is an appeal to work out one's own salvation, whereas verse thirteen acknowledges that it is God who does the work. How could Paul comfortably hold both views and present them in such close juxtaposition? How can this apparent contradiction of concepts be reconciled?

Method

While specialization in any given discipline affords the opportunity for greater depth of understanding, each theological discipline may augment one's interpretation of a text. Philippians 2:12, 13 poses some interpretive challenges that can be mitigated by broadening one's exegetical methodology to incorporate systematic theology. The Great

Controversy metanarrative is chosen for its breadth and two aspects of its doctrine, namely, the character of God and human agency, are applied to the interpretation of the problem text. Chapter 2 outlines the parameters of the metanarrative under consideration, followed, in Chapter 3, by evidence of the metanarrative in Paul's letter to the Philippians. The fourth chapter outlines the tension in the Philippians 2:12, 13 text and Chapter 5 demonstrates how the Great Controversy metanarrative resolves the tension. Finally, we engage in the exegetical exercise of interpreting Philippians 2:12, 13 with the metanarrative as a tool.

Results

The Great Controversy metanarrative imposes constraints on possible interpretations of Philippians 2:12, 13. To deny human agency would compromise Scripture's revelation of God's character. Yet God's sufficient salvation must interface with humanity's freedom to accept it without limiting divine omnipotence. The Great Controversy metanarrative provides a framework which allows us to affirm both verses twelve and thirteen of Philippians 2 without contradiction.

Conclusion

By applying the understanding of God's character and human agency as conceptualized in the Great Controversy metanarrative, we arrived at an interpretation of the hapax legomenon *κατεργάζεσθε* as being in the intensive middle voice. Moreover, it was determined that human agency, as made possible by God's prevenient grace, is essential in the process of salvation in the context of the Great Controversy.

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

INTERPRETING PHILIPPIANS 2:12, 13 USING THE
GREAT CONTROVERSY METANARRATIVE

A Thesis
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

by
Sikhululekile Daco

2019

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As Seventh-day Adventists, our doctrinal teachings are rooted in systematic theology. However, when engaged in the exegetical exercise, often, this systematic understanding of Scripture becomes peripheral, when it, in fact, could augment our theological enterprise. As some scholars have argued for the heuristic value of the sanctuary motif in Scripture,¹ this paper sets forth, more broadly, that systematically derived doctrines form a formidable foundation to guide exegesis.² Since all exegesis

¹ Referencing Fernando L. Canale, "Philosophical Foundations and the Biblical Sanctuary," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 36, no. 2 (1998). Davidson identifies the sanctuary as a "'heuristic key' into the biblical system of truth." Richard M. Davidson, "Cosmic Metanarrative for the Coming Millennium," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 11, no. 1-2 (2000): 105. As Vogel states, "The Christ of the sanctuary can never be separated from His teachings, and if all the teachings of the Bible find their focal point in the sanctuary as the center of the mystery of God, then the doctrines will inevitably be closely bound up with Jesus Christ and would lose their meaning without him." Winfried Vogel, "Man and Knowledge: The Search for Truth in a Pluralistic Age," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7, no. 2 (1996): 207.

² In their festschrift paying tribute to Robert H. Gundry, various scholars tackle the question of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology. Benjamin E. et al Reynolds, *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* 2 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). I would conclude with Vanhoozer that "Systematic theology is not simply a second step that follows biblical theology; rather, it is a partner in the exegetical process itself." Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Is the Theology of the New Testament One or Many? Between (the Rock of) Systematic Theology and (the Hard Place of) Historical Occasionalism," in *Reconsidering the Relationship between Biblical and Systematic Theology in the New Testament: Essays by Theologians and New Testament Scholars*, ed. Benjamin E. Reynolds, Brian Lugioyo, and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* 2 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 38.

presupposes a systematic perspective, the more forthright one is about their systematic viewpoint, the more transpicuous their exegesis.³

Purpose

This paper is an academic exercise in applying a theological concept to resolve a conceptual dilemma. It highlights the effectiveness of this method in clarifying textual interpretation, eradicating obscurities left by an exegesis that excludes it. Concepts from the Great Controversy metanarrative will be applied to the resolution of a perceived tension in Philippians 2:12, 13. Following an overview of the themes in the Great Controversy, consideration will be given to its appearance in the writings of Paul and more specifically in his letter to the Philippians. Thereafter, examination will be made of the Philippians 2:12, 13 text in its immediate kenosis hymn context⁴ with a suggestion for its interpretation in light of the Great Controversy metanarrative.

³ Goldsworthy rightly points out that the specialization in biblical or systematic theology, when held as mutually exclusive, can hinder a full understanding of Scripture. He states, "unless we are aware of the grounds for the distinctions made between the disciplines, and have some notion of the holistic nature of truth, then fragmentation can lead to a blinkered approach that exalts only one aspect at the expense of all others." Graeme Goldsworthy, "The Ontological and Systematic Roots of Biblical Theology," *The Reformed Theological Review* 62, no. 3 (2003): 156. As Hasel asserts, "The structure of a canonical biblical theology must derive from the materials of the Bible and should not be superimposed form [*sic*] the loci of systematic theology or from external philosophical or other systems. A degree of systematizing the material content of biblical books and groups of writings is inevitable, but the principles for systematizing must derive inductively from Scripture itself." Gerhard F Hasel, "The Relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology," *Trinity Journal* 5, no. 2 (1984): 126. This relationship, however, between biblical and systematic theology is not linear, though. Goldsworthy terms it "the hermeneutical spiral" and provides an apt illustration: "The biblical theologian who accepts the canonical coherence of the source documents has already made a dogmatic assumption, or a whole series of them, about the nature of the biblical canon." Goldsworthy, 161.

⁴ Philippians 2:5–11 is generally viewed as a hymn, whether of Pauline origins or otherwise. While there is discussion about whether that is indeed the case, the question is inconsequential to this study. See Gordon D Fee, "Philippians 2:5-11: Hymn or Exalted Pauline Prose?," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 2 (1992).

The Tension

Paul acknowledges the obedience of the Philippian church in his presence and exhorts them to continue in obedience in his absence (Phil 2:12). After which, he instructs them to work out their own salvation in the same way that they have previously obeyed. The instruction to work and its connection with the concept of obedience implies a soteriological duty⁵ on the part of the church. However, this duty seems immediately contradicted by the next verse where he states that “it is God which worketh in you” (2:13), apparently transferring the responsibility of salvific work to God. The tension thus revolves around who is responsible for the work that brings salvation.

Justification

The Great Controversy as a metanarrative provides the solution to a myriad of theological questions (most notably is the question of theodicy).⁶ Therefore, its application in resolving other theological questions is a promising endeavor. Further, against its backdrop, Seventh-day Adventists have developed a global culture whose *raison d'être* itself derives from the metanarrative⁷. Thence, Seventh-day Adventists, in

⁵ Paul credits the Philippians with obedience, commending them for it, then he goes on to parallel that obedience with his injunction to them to work out their salvation. It is thus apparent that Paul is calling for the Philippians to act in a manner that somehow impacts their salvation.

⁶ John Peckham comprehensively outlines how the great controversy metanarrative answers the questions of theodicy in John C. Peckham, *Theodicy of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018). He concludes, “This theodicy of love articulates an overarching framework in which one might make sense of God’s allowance of evil broadly (for the sake of love) but makes no attempt to explain every specific instance of evil and explicitly denies that every instance of evil is, in and of itself, necessary for some greater good.” Ibid., 170.

⁷ Speaking to the identity of God Himself, Michael Williams references the first verse of Scripture and points out that “Scripture begins with a person acting for a purpose.” He continues, “To know God’s mighty deeds is, in a sense, to know him. And the reason is simple. God’s acts are not erratic or arbitrary acts. Rather, they are the natural outflow of who he is. One would be right to say, of course, that God’s nature precedes his acts. But in the realm of knowing, the reverse is the case. His actions reveal his nature.” Michael D. Williams, “The Theological Disposition and God’s Missional Identity,” *Presbyterian* 43, no. 2

particular, may anticipate resolution of theological enigmas through consideration of the Great Controversy theme.

Tension Resolved

Two aspects of the Great Controversy metanarrative offer interpretive insight. First is the contextual consideration. The metanarrative imposes situational constraints upon those living in its context and an understanding of these constraints helps guide the interpretation of the text. The historical context is naturally consulted when attempting any textual interpretation. However, the supernatural context is often neglected, although it is equally historical⁸ and thus serves as an interpretive tool. As is the nature of a metanarrative, the great controversy exists as the backdrop to every human experience. Acknowledging it can only result in greater clarity to our interpretive journey.⁹

(2017): 32. With respect to the identity of the church, in his article about Christ's mission as outlined in the book of Mark, Ernest Van Eck argues that "the Markan Jesus—as Son of God (see Mk 1:1; 15:39) and patron of the kingdom of God—in his proclamation and enactment of the kingdom of God recategorises outsiders as insiders. Because of this mission and a concomitant ethics, identity is established, an identity which is aligned with the justice and compassion of God." Ernest Van Eck, "Mission, Identity, and Ethics in Mark: Jesus, the Patron for Outsiders," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 69, no. 1 (2013): 1. Seventh-day Adventists claim Revelation 14:6–12 as their mission statement. The three angels' messages announce the culminating events of the Great Controversy with a warning and appeal for preparatory action. Inasmuch as mission is inextricably linked to identity thus, the Great Controversy is intricately connected to Seventh-day Adventist identity. Also see the books by Malan Nel (Malan Nel, *Identity-Driven Churches: Who Are We and Where Are We Going?* (Tygerberg Business Park, Cape Town, South Africa: Shumani Mills Communications, 2015).) and Craig Van Gelder (Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007).

⁸ The theological misunderstanding of the timelessness of God may be responsible of the neglect of the supernatural historical context. If, however, we understand God's time to be analogous to human time, then the reality of the great controversy metanarrative bears sway in the flow of human events. Nelson Pike presents a refutation of the timelessness of God when construed as God existing outside of time on the grounds that a timeless God cannot be personal. See Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (London, United Kingdom: Routledge & K. Paul, 1970). But more convincingly, Fernando Canale develops an argument for the temporal dimensionality of the divine Being based on a phenomenological investigation of Exodus 3:14, 15. Fernando L. Canale, "Toward a Criticism of Theological Reason: Time and Timelessness as Primordial Presuppositions" (Dissertation, Andrews University, 1983), <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/dissertations/22>.

⁹ Michael Williams asserts that "the biblical way is the way of the story. As such, the biblical story itself—and not some rational structure extraneous to Scripture—ought to inform the framework by which

Similarly, understanding the character of the primary protagonist in the metanarrative, God, delimits our textual interpretation, precluding certain possibilities and offering others. Any insight into the character of the author of a document enhances our understanding of what is meant by the text.¹⁰ The great controversy metanarrative reveals a God who values the free will of His creatures and this trait has soteriological implications.

If Paul was aware of the metanarrative context, it could conceivably have impacted his writing. Thus, we shall demonstrate that he, indeed, had an awareness of the great controversy. Further, since God is the ultimate Author of Scripture,¹¹ and since He

we theologize about God and his ways.” Williams, 28. He identifies the Bible as being ordered by “the redemptive-historical story it tells.” Ibid., 27. He warns that “the systematic theology that fails to think historically and narratively as it works topically will not only miss the vitality of Scripture, but will also be in danger of sacrificing the integrity and meaning of the text.” Ibid., 28-29.

¹⁰ There is much conversation surrounding the importance of the author and reader of a document in determining the meaning of a text. As Hugh White puts it, “Do texts, and especially a sacred text such as the Bible, determine their own meaning? Do they ‘have’ meaning? Or is the meaning we as readers think we find there only our own magnified self-image?” Hugh C. White, “The Trace of the Author in the Text,” *Semeia* 71 (1995): 46. Hence to assert the importance of the author in the comprehension of a text, assumes a certain objectivity to the meaning of a text. When a text is viewed as a means of communication, then it only when the author has an objective meaning that a text could be misunderstood. So the communicative intent of writing is, alone, an argument against complete contextualization of meaning. See *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1992). When reading is viewed as interactive rather than purely subjective, which is my view, then it becomes a means of better understanding the author. The converse is also true, that when one is familiar with the author, it is easier to comprehend their meaning in difficult texts. One must also note the illuminating role of the Holy Spirit in the process of both the writing and reading of Scripture (c.f. 2 Pet 1:21; John 14:26). Apparently God is not idle in the process of the transmittance of His Word from writer to reader—He wants to be understood.

¹¹ Basing his assertion on 2 Pet 1:21 and 2 Tim 3:16, Gerhard Hasel writes, “Scripture issues from God who therefore is the Author of the Bible, even though it is written in human language through human agents... Inspired human writers communicated divine truth objectively, authoritatively, and trustworthily in human language.” Gerhard F Hasel, *Biblical Interpretation Today* (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Research Institute, 1985), 100-01. Further, in a document voted by the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro, the Seventh-day Adventist church affirmed that “The Holy Spirit inspired the Bible writers with thoughts, ideas, and objective information; in turn they expressed these in their own words... Although it was given to those who lived in an ancient Near Eastern/Mediterranean context, the Bible transcends its cultural backgrounds to serve as God's Word for all cultural, racial, and situational contexts in all ages.” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, *Methods of Bible Study, Annual Council Session* (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil: 1986). Gerhard Pfandl summarizes the position of the Adventist church as such, “In contrast to the verbal inspiration theory, Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Holy Spirit

is indubitably aware of the metanarrative, it impacts the message He means to convey through Bible writers. Thence the great controversy metanarrative illuminates our understanding of the text.

Specifically, the parameters for action that the two parties involved in the tension—God and humanity—have are delimited in the great controversy metanarrative. God must respect humanity's free will and humanity cannot save itself. Thus salvation cannot be a sovereign act irrespective of humanity's choice nor can it be attributable to humanity's actions. In the context of the great controversy, humanity must act in making a choice to accept the salvation that God alone can give. So that the work Paul calls for in Philippians is one of making a choice that, outside of God's salvation, has no merit. However, without that choice, salvation cannot be attained. Likewise, God cannot force His salvation on an individual who refuses it.¹²

Limitations

This paper will use a systematic approach to textual interpretation. Given the brief scope of this paper, we do not delve into a defense of the Great Controversy metanarrative.¹³ Our goal is not to determine whether or not the Great Controversy should be accepted as a theological framework, but rather to determine its application to

inspired a prophet's thoughts, not his or her words, except in texts where God's words are actually quoted. That is, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, the thoughts of the authors became the thoughts God wanted them to write down. God provided the thoughts, and the prophets, in relaying the divine message, supplied the best words in their vocabulary." Gerhard Pfandl, "Some Thoughts on the Inspiration of the Bible," *Reflections* 53 (2016): 2.

¹² Peckham argues convincingly that God's actions, in the context of the great controversy, are restricted. He states "Insofar as God covenants to act or refrain from acting in a certain way, he is morally bound to do so. Given such covenantal 'rules of engagement,' then, God's action is (morally) restricted" Peckham, 103.

¹³ For a recent thorough consideration of the scriptural evidence for a Great Controversy metanarrative, see Chapter 3 of Peckham's *Theodicy of Love* (ibid.).

resolving a specific theological question. Doing so will give insight into an interdisciplinary method of biblical interpretation that incorporates the contributions of systematic theology. While some exegesis will be factored into this examination, the paper is not an exegetical investigation at its core, but rather, a systematic one. The goal is to highlight the benefits of integrating systematic theology in the exegetical process.

CHAPTER 2

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY METANARRATIVE

Overview

While some may view the texts in Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12 as mythological,¹ this paper takes the view that they combine to present the biblical metanarrative of an actual cosmic controversy²—a war between good and evil; between God and Satan.³ As Richard Davidson observes, “recent evangelical studies have begun to recognize this warfare worldview as permeating and even central to Scripture.”⁴ Of

¹ For instance, Sigve Tonstad’s analysis of Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 determines that “the poems in Isaiah and Ezekiel have too little in common with the purported mythological antecedents to support the argument for simple derivation.” Sigve K. Tonstad, “Saving God’s Reputation: The Theological Function of Pistis Iesou in the Cosmic Narratives of Revelation” (St. Andrews, 2004), 155. Similarly, Wesley Carr views the concept of demonic powers as a post-exilic notion that was developed to explain the unfortunate circumstances befalling the Israelites. He states, “The tendency is to avoid the attribution of evil to God, and this, coupled with the direct encounter in the exile between the Jews and powerful heathen gods and the loneliness of the journey across the desert, encouraged Hebrew thought to develop its conception of personal evil.” Wesley Carr, *Angels and Principalities: The Background, Meaning, and Development of the Pauline Phrase Hai Archai Kai Hai* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 25-26.

² For instance, find evidence for the connection between Revelation 12 and Isaiah 14 in Tonstad’s dissertation. He concludes “On the basis of the preceding evidence there is a solid basis for concluding that the war-in-heaven theme in Revelation derives from the poem describing the fall of ‘the Day Star, the Son of Dawn’ in Isaiah (Isa 14:12-20)” Tonstad, 117.

³ In this paper we take the stance that the Devil is a fallen angel and not a mere personification of evil as is held by some scholars. See Nestor C. Rilloma, “Biography of the Devil: An Alternative Approach to the Cosmic Conflict,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 13, no. 2 (2002).

⁴ Davidson, 104.

note is the work of Gregory Boyd. He demonstrates that “the whole of the cosmos is understood to be caught up in a fierce battle between two rival kingdoms.”⁵

The war began in heaven where a privileged angel, Lucifer, grew enamored with himself (Ezek 28:17) and determined to usurp the position of God (Isa 14:12–14).⁶ War broke out in heaven (Rev 12:7). The arguments being promulgated in that war are most easily discerned in the encounter between the devil and Eve at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden. There he insinuates that God’s requirements are arbitrary and thus unfair (Gen 3:1).⁷ Moreover, he charges God with malicious mendacity (Gen 3:4, 5). Davidson observes that the reference to trading (*rekullah*) in Ezekiel 28 points to the slander Lucifer began to spread about God in heaven. “Lucifer’s pride and jealousy led to slandering the character of God, until it ripened into open revolt. Lucifer’s pride led him to rebel against the obedient, humble worship of God and to aspire to equality with God, to receive worship and adoration himself instead of God.”⁸

At the core of the devil’s accusations is the question of God’s character. Can God be trusted? As Sigve Tonstad states it, Satan “brought his rebellion against God to earth, and with it the devastating charge that the Creator of the universe is an arbitrary despot who has little thought for the freedom and well-being of his creatures (Gen 3:1).”⁹ That

⁵ Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 290.

⁶ Davidson concludes that “the origin of evil in Lucifer the Covering Cherub is...solidly supported from Scripture” Davidson, 107.

⁷ “The serpent raises questions with respect to the quality of God’s commands. Are they given for the good of human beings, or are they arbitrary? If they are arbitrary, it must mean that God has a sordid motive” Tonstad, 162.

⁸ Davidson, 108.

⁹ Tonstad, 18.

was the essence of the serpent's insinuations at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Thus when Eve gives credence to the devil's indictments and chooses to trust her senses over God's Word (Gen 3:6), she effectively declares that God's character is not trustworthy.¹⁰

Given the nature of Satan's accusations against God, it is necessary that the true characters of the accuser and the accused become apparent over time. "The cosmic controversy is a demonstration interlude between the eternal peace of the past and the eternal peace of the future. It's a time when Satan demonstrates his claims and in which Christ demonstrates the character of God."¹¹ God is charged with being arbitrary and unfair and "against the charge of arbitrariness there is no quick fix. The mere assertion of sovereignty can even aggravate matters unless such a charge is exposed as groundless."¹²

The question, then, to be settled in the great controversy, is whether God's character can be trusted, and the role that humanity plays is to cast their vote in the

¹⁰ "God's trustworthiness relative to motives and God's truthfulness relative to facts are both impugned." Ibid., 163.

¹¹ Norman R. Gulley, "The Cosmic Controversy: World View for Theology and Life," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 7, no. 2 (1996): 96.

¹² Tonstad, 18.

debate.¹³ In legal terms,¹⁴ the plaintiff would be the devil,¹⁵ the defendant, God, and humanity stands as witnesses¹⁶ for or against God. There are no bystanders, as Jiří Moskala puts it, “In the battle between good and evil, we are all on the stage. No one stands outside being only a spectator, somehow in a neutral position. We are all playing an active role whether we want to or not.”¹⁷ Thence, humanity’s actions can be seen as couched in the cosmic controversy metanarrative. As Stubblefield observes in his discussion of the warfare theme in the book of Revelation, repentance,¹⁸ witness, and

¹³ The story of Job highlights the role that humanity plays in the great controversy. When the devil questions Job’s motives for serving God (Job 1:9) he insinuates that the only reason anyone would serve God is to guarantee material blessings. Further, God is cast as bribing humanity for their allegiance. Job’s faithfulness, then, in spite of the lack of material blessings, makes a statement that God is worthy of love for who He is, not just for what He gives.

¹⁴ Davidson gives credence to a legal view of the great controversy based on the translation of *rib* in the Old Testament as “controversy” (c.f. Mic 6:2; Jer 25:31). He writes, “In light of this biblical legal usage of the term controversy, with which Ellen White was no doubt familiar when she coined (or popularized) the term great controversy, it seems appropriate to broaden the meaning of the term Great Controversy from that which we have usually employed—from regular armed combat terminology—to include the legal battle between Christ and Satan that climaxes in the investigative judgment, the close of probation, and the pronouncement of the verdict in the heavenly Sanctuary. This would also include the legal deliberations of the saints and Christ concerning the sentence upon the wicked during the millennium, the last Great White Throne Judgment and sentencing after the millennium, the execution of the sentence in giving just retribution upon the wicked, and the final cleansing of the earth.” Davidson, 118.

¹⁵ Norman Gulley summarizes the devil’s charges as such: “Satan’s charges against God are numerous. His fairness is called in question. His justice is called in question. His law is called in question. His mercy is called in question. Satan portrays God as severe and tyrannical. Satan clothes God and Christ with his own attributes, and presents himself as just the opposite.” Gulley, 84.

¹⁶ In line with the legal motif, Gulley observes “It is necessary that the truth about God, Christ and Satan be made manifest. The real story of all three is involved in the cosmic controversy. The revelation of who they really are must be made so that all created beings, angelic (fallen and unfallen), humans (redeemed and lost) and the unfallen inhabitants of worlds afar, may all vote unanimously on who is right and who is wrong. Only one side can win, yet all from both sides must vote, and vote the same. This is done with complete freedom, and is done purely on the evidence given by both sides.” Ibid., 85.

¹⁷ Jiří Moskala, “The God of Job and Our Adversary,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 15, no. 1 (2004): 116.

¹⁸ “Repentance goes beyond just an ecclesial mandate in Revelation’s narrative and becomes an act of war in the cosmic combat against opposing forces...it is an aggressive attack against the forms of sin and rebellion that lead to Satanic compromise and ultimate judgment (2:5; 16, 22; 3:3; 18). Because combat defines the role and narrational world of the church, the church’s call to repentance carries a notion of militancy. It must not be understood only as a spiritual discipline; in Revelation it is call to undo Satanic

worship,¹⁹ indeed “the explicit and implicit ecclesial mandates from Revelation’s narrative...appear and must be understood in the context of the overarching warfare motif.”²⁰ The pervasiveness of the warfare theme in all of Scripture in its capacity as a metanarrative requires, then, that every action be interpreted in the context of the cosmic controversy.

Divine Character Theme

The central question in the great controversy revolves around whether or not God’s character can be trusted. In his opening statement to Eve, the Devil reveals his malice against the character of God. Moberly aptly captures the dialectic.

“Instead of ‘You may certainly eat from every tree of the garden’ we have ‘You shall not eat from any tree of the garden’ attributed to God. Why should the serpent say something which, as the woman duly points out, is clearly not the case? Apart from the fact that the serpent thereby engages the woman in debate, the main point lies presumably in the implication of the serpent’s words. What matters is not that the serpent’s words are obviously false, but that they imply that a total prohibition is the sort of unreasonable prohibition that one might expect from God, who is to be seen as more interested in restriction than in freedom.’ ”²¹

Incidentally, the question of whether or not humanity truly has free will and to what extent their agency extends has been a constant topic of theological and philosophical contemplation. Apparently, the question was first introduced by Satan as part of his case against the righteousness of God’s character. Norman Gulley puts it this

power.” Benjamin Steen Stubblefield, “The Function of the Church in Warfare in the Book of Revelation” (Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012), 184-85.

¹⁹ Ibid., 185-95.

²⁰ Ibid., 205.

²¹ R.W.L. Moberly, “Did the Serpent Get It Right?,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 39, no. 1 (1988). in Tonstad, 161-62.

way, “The cosmic controversy has to do with the love of God.” To illustrate, he continues, “Satan’s charge about the law being impossible to keep is merely a questioning of God’s love. It says, God made a law that we cannot keep, so He is not a God of love. This is why Jesus said that the whole law may be summed up as love to God and love to mankind (Matt 22:37–40).”²²

Had God stricken Adam and Eve dead the moment they chose to disobey Him, Satan could charge Him with being a harsh dictator, requiring unquestioning obedience from creatures that He has not truly invested with the freedom to choose. In fact, at every turn in the history of the cosmic conflict, every divine act testifies to the character of God. In the first promise of a Messiah (Gen 3:15), God grants a probationary period with another opportunity for humanity to choose to trust and obey Him. God has to “put enmity” into the heart of humanity because by their choice, Adam and Eve had aligned themselves with God’s enemy.²³ Humanity was now enslaved by sin and was inclined always to choose evil over good. However, God placed in the heart of humanity, a desire for that which is good.

Enslaved by sin, humanity could not act on this desire for good, but Christ would come to set people free, granting them the agency to once again choose God, or equally, to choose sin again—thus making God a merciful God. Further, Christ would come to bear the penalty for sin so that anyone who chose to align themselves with God could live eternally—thus making God just in meting out the promised punishment for all sin.²⁴

²² Gulley, 86.

²³ When Adam and Eve eat of the forbidden fruit, “The text leaves no doubt that the human decision with respect to God’s command reflects acceptance of the serpent’s picture of God.” Tonstad, 164.

²⁴ Romans 3:24–26 asserts that God, in what He accomplishes through Jesus, is both just and merciful (His mercy is demonstrated in that He is the justifier of those who come to Christ).

Moreover, Christ would give His people power to act upon their choice to obey God's law—thus making Him a gracious God. God's character was most plainly revealed at Calvary. As Gulley puts it, "It is precisely this humility at Calvary that is so Christ-like, and so different from Satan. This is the place where the cosmic controversy was seen for what it is, and the place where it was forever decided."²⁵

The cross, then, as the most important event in the history of humanity, accomplished more than merely assuring humanity's salvation. The cross makes an incontrovertible and compelling argument for the attractive character of God. It showcases the malice of the devil against God and reveals all his arguments against God and His government as a mere smokescreen for his desire to usurp God's position—a desire that would drive him to even murder. At the cross, the beauty of God's character was revealed for all of heaven to see in stark contrast to the duplicity of the devil. Yet, while the cross provided the death knell to Satan's accusations, the cosmic controversy could not end at the cross because humanity needed further opportunity to decide upon the trustworthiness of God.

Human Agency Theme

Just as the angels in heaven had to decide whether to trust God's character or to believe the devil's accusations,²⁶ first Eve, and ultimately, all of humanity, had to decide on which side of the controversy they would stand. While it is true that Adam and Eve

²⁵ Gulley, 119.

²⁶ So insidious were the devil's accusations against God that Rev 12:4a indicates that he managed to convince one third of heaven's angels to leave heaven with him (c.f. 12:9).

made a decision in Eden, and chose to align themselves with the devil's arguments, God determined that they should have another chance to make that decision again.

Having served in the very presence of God as the covering cherub (Ezek 28:14), the devil had received a clear revelation of God's character. He knew full well that his accusations were unfounded but chose to rebel in spite of his knowledge of who God was. Rather than instantaneously destroying Satan the moment He perceived the rebellion brewing within Him, God permitted him to introduce the seeds of his rebellion to the angels in heaven. If Lucifer had suddenly disappeared from heaven's courts, the other angels would have wondered what had happened and the answer would have only raised the questions in them that the devil himself raised in his rebellion—is God just? Eliminating His opponent would only make God look guilty without extirpating the rebellious questions Lucifer had raised.

The war that ensued in heaven gave the angels the opportunity to decide whether to believe the devil or trust God (Rev 12:7). As the devil levied for support, God had occasion to present His evidence as well. When the devil and his angels were cast out of heaven (Rev 12:9), it was after having given them the opportunity to make an evidence-based choice. Now that the question about the legitimacy of God's government had been raised, all free beings under His dominion must decide where their loyalties lie. So Adam and Eve were called to make a decision.

The story of how the great controversy was introduced on earth is predicated on human agency. Adam and Eve must choose whether or not to eat of the forbidden fruit and their choice bears the consequences of sin. If you remove Adam and Eve's agency, the entire metanarrative disintegrates. Romans 5:12–19 would argue that Adam's choice

to eat the fruit was not symbolic, just as Christ's death on the cross was not symbolic. That is to say, Adam's choice bore the weight of human agency with the adverse consequence of death. Likewise, Jesus' choice to die in humanity's stead bore the weight of divine/human agency with the favorable result of life.

Not only did Christ die on the cross to suffer the judgment incumbent on humanity for sin, but He also lived a sinless life—that is, a life in complete accordance with the law of God—as an example that we should live likewise. His death provides liberation for humanity from slavery to sin. Whereas humanity was enslaved, unable to exercise their agency to obey God's law, Christ's life, death, and resurrection, frees humanity, granting the opportunity once again to choose to obey—the choice that was theirs at the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in Eden.

Just as in Eden, humanity had the ability to act on their choice, so now, through God's grace, humanity can not only choose to obey God's law, but act on that choice. This is the source of Paul's rejoicing in Romans 7:25. Apart from Christ, he finds himself unable to do what is right regardless of his preference (Rom 7:15, 19). In Christ, though, "there is therefore now no condemnation," as he is able to walk "not after the flesh, but after the Spirit" (Rom 8:1). Notably, Paul speaks of walking after the Spirit as an action of the Christian. Being in Christ does not confer passivity, but rather, activity.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul puts it this way, "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal 5:13). Evidently, when Christ liberates us from bondage to sin, we now have the freedom to choose obedience to God's law, or to choose to return to the enslavement of sin. Christ's freedom, in essence, brings us back to that tree of the

knowledge of good and evil and restores our human agency. Thus it is possible for a Christian, who had accepted the free gift of grace, to fall back into a life of sin, but it is not possible for a sinner to meet the requirements of God's law without accepting God's gracious gift of grace.

Satan made his decision to rebel in full light of the knowledge of the character of God. This concept is outlined in Hebrews 6:4–6,

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

The devil had already been fully exposed to the one compelling facet that God uses to impel allegiance—the goodness of His character. “Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?” (Rom 2:4). But there was still hope for humanity's salvation since more of God's character could be revealed to them.

Summary

Thus we find that the great controversy metanarrative hinges on the key elements of divine character and human agency. Seeing as the war began in heaven and its first casualties were angels (Rev 12:4a), not humans, it is clear that the great controversy concerns more parties than just God and humanity. The key elements identified are with reference to the metanarrative as it is presented in a book (the Bible) that is written for human benefit. The anthropocentric view is not to the negation of other important facets to the controversy on a scale beyond humanity's comprehension, but is merely a limitation of the human perspective on a grand issue. So an interpretation of Scripture,

taking into account the systematic metanarrative of the great controversy, must therefore align with the scriptural presentation of the two key elements of God's character and human agency.

CHAPTER 3

PAUL AND THE GREAT CONTROVERSY

The Great Controversy in Pauline Writings

Probably the most explicit articulation of humanity's engagement in the cosmic conflict comes in the writings of Paul. He says in Ephesians 6:12, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Whereas Paul has just finished counseling the various segments of the Ephesian church (wives, husbands, children, fathers, servants, and masters) on how to interact with one another, he concludes his exhortation with a call to resist the devil by putting on "the whole armour of God" (Eph 6:11, 13). He points out that "we wrestle not against flesh and blood" because in our interpersonal conflict, we may not realize that there is a broader conflict at stake. Thus the subtext for Paul's practical exhortations is a conflict that transcends our physical reality.¹

¹ Timothy Gombis posits that the problematic Ephesians 2 can be most clearly understood when viewed from the perspective of divine warfare. Timothy G. Gombis, "Ephesians 2 as a Narrative of Divine Warfare," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 26, no. 4 (2004). He argues, in fact, that the coherence of the entire epistle hinges on the divine warfare perspective. He states also that, "When read through the ideology of divine warfare from the ancient world, the argument comes into view." Timothy G. Gombis, "The Triumph of God in Christ: Divine Warfare in the Argument of Ephesians," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (2005): 158. For more discussion of Ephesians 6 in particular, as addressing spiritual warfare, see, Peter T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers: Opponents of the Church," in *Biblical Interpretation and the Church: The Problem of Contextualization*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 134-35; Robert A. Guelich, "Spiritual Warfare: Jesus, Paul and Peretti," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 13, no. 1 (1991); Arthur E. Travis, "The Christian's Warfare," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 6, no. 1 (1963); John R. W. Stott, *God's New Society: The Message of Ephesians*

Paul indicates the supernatural import of our physical reality in 2 Corinthians

10:3–5

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Here, Paul intimates that the battleground is in the mind—a battle to meet accusations in opposition to a true knowledge of God. Apparently, Paul was aware of the cosmic conflict of heavenly origins which threatened the understanding of God’s character.²

Limiting his analysis to Paul’s “seven undisputed letters—namely, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon,”³ Christopher Davis constructs a summary of the “coherent center” of Paul’s thought. He posits that “every major aspect of the Apostle’s theology may be derived from the ‘coherent center’”⁴ which encompasses God’s creation of the world, the fall of Adam,

(Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 260-87; Gerald Janzen, "Divine Warfare and Nonresistance," *Direction* 32, no. 1 (2003).

² For more on the warfare theme in Paul’s letters to the Corinthians, see Lisa M. Bowens, *An Apostle in Battle: Paul and Spiritual Warfare in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* 2 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Lisa M. Bowens, "Investigating the Apocalyptic Texture of Paul's Martial Imagery in 2 Corinthians 4–6," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 39, no. 1 (2016); Manuel A. Bagalawis, "Ministry as Warfare: An Exegesis of 2 Corinthians 10:2b–6," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 1 (2000).

³ Christopher A. Davis, *The Structure of Paul's Theology: The Truth Which Is the Gospel* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 66.

⁴ Ibid., 370. An insightful summation of the discussion of the concept of a theological center in Biblical Theology can be found in Walter C. Kaiser, "The Hasel-Kaiser and Evangelical Discussions on the Search for a Center or Mitte to Biblical Theology," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 26, no. 2 (2015). Kaiser presents Hasel’s case for the demerits of elevating one biblical theme as central to the exclusion of other significant biblical material. As Kaiser states, “What is most regrettable, of course, is the fact that Gerhard never got a chance to produce his own complete Biblical Theology which would have demonstrated just how he would illustrate and employ such a coordination of the multiplex themes with all of their variegated variety.” Ibid., 45. David Carr’s definition of a center seems to harmonize with Hasel’s

God's promise of a Messiah, Christ's ministry on earth, His death, resurrection, and commission to His disciples to proclaim the gospel. Lastly, the coherent center includes Christ's Second Advent. "At some point in the future, Christ will return from heaven to execute God's 'Judgment' on the living and the dead"⁵ whereupon the unrighteous will be destroyed and the righteous will receive eternal life. From Davis' perspective, "when Paul wishes to refer to this entire network of convictions, he speaks of his 'gospel'."⁶

Davis recognizes that "Paul's fourteen 'core convictions' take in the whole sweep of time and eternity—the 'present evil age' and the 'eschatological age,' the past, the 'present time,' and the eschatological 'future.'"⁷ Though he may not use the term, Davis identifies the cosmic metanarrative as the 'coherent center' of the theology in Paul's writings. More broadly, Richard Davidson comments that "beyond the Gospels, the New Testament writers continue to present the gospel realities against the backdrop of the

multiplex theme concept. He states that "one is not searching for the most adequate representation of the focal point of the Bible. In this respect, the language of 'center' may be inherently flawed, since it implies one circle with one middle-point. Perhaps it would be even better to speak of 'nodal points' in biblical theology; that is, multiple points where various traditions converge, all treating a common conceptual structure (often differently)." David M. Carr, "Passion for God: A Center in Biblical Theology," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 23 (2001): 3.

⁵ Davis, 368-9.

⁶ Ibid., 369.

⁷ Ibid., 370.

Cosmic War and within a Sanctuary setting.”⁸ Indeed, the cosmic nature of Christ’s ministry has come to be accepted as fundamental⁹ to Pauline theology.¹⁰

The Great Controversy in Philippians

From his Roman imprisonment, Paul writes what has been described as “a letter of friendship”¹¹ to the church at Philippi. Given that he is a prisoner when he writes this letter, it is striking how frequently the message of joy is repeated. “Here in Philippians, the imprisoned Paul, who does not know for sure the final outcome of his confinement,

⁸ Davidson, 114.

⁹ Emerging from the commitment to the unity of Scripture come various terms—like center, framework, foundation, and backdrop—to describe the unifying factor. A central theme orients your understanding as “the centre [*sic*] of gravity for all of its other themes... the theme which all of the Bible’s other themes serve to exposit.” James Hamilton, “The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment: The Center of Biblical Theology?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (2006): 59, 61. A framework orders your understanding: “A coherent Biblical theology must provide a framework for understanding and explaining the relationships between the major elements of the faith revealed in the whole of Scripture.” David L. Adams, “The Present God: A Framework for Biblical Theology,” *Concordia Journal* 22, no. 3 (1996): 282. A foundation offers a starting point from which to build your theology. See, for example Gary Hall, “Jeremiah 29: A Theological Foundation for Urban Mission?: A Case Study in Old Testament Hermeneutics,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 20, no. 1 (2017). A backdrop augments your understanding. See, for instance Brian Kidwell, “The Adamic Backdrop of Romans,” *Criswell Theological Review* 11, no. 1 (2013). Though there are nuances between the concepts of a center, a framework, a foundation, and a backdrop, what remains consistent is that the Great Controversy theme is present and crucial in the writings of Paul.

¹⁰ As Wesley Carr writes, “One of the most influential books for the study of the New Testament in the twentieth century has undoubtedly been *Die Geisterwelt im Glauben des Paulus*, which Martin Dibelius published in 1909. He himself owed much to a slimmer volume from Otto Everling, *Die paulinische Angelologie und Damonologie* (1888). Both authors attempted to establish that a world dominated by supernatural forces was central to Paul’s thought; that these forces were hostile to mankind; and that this was the context within which Paul worked out his thinking on man’s existence and the work of Christ. Although not the first to deal with this subject, Everling and Dibelius are mainly responsible for the centrality of these notions in the study of Pauline theology today... By the time that G.B. Caird published his small collection of lectures in 1956—*Principalities and Powers: A Study in Pauline Theology*—it was almost universally accepted that Christ’s victory over cosmic forces was for Paul a fundamental concept.” Carr, 11.

¹¹ Dennis S.J. Hamm, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, Catholic Commentary on Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 25.

stresses again and again his own joy and that which should characterize his readers.”¹² So frequently is joy mentioned in this salient juxtaposition that the letter to the Philippians has been called “the gospel of joy at the heart of suffering.”¹³

The joy expressed in Paul’s letter to the Philippians is reminiscent of Job’s initial response to the tribulation in his life. He responds to the loss of his entire fortune and the sudden demise of all his children with worship (Job 1:20). He avers, “Naked came I out of my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord,” (Job 1:21).

Paul makes allusion to Job’s story with a direct quote from the LXX. The phrase, “this shall turn to my salvation,” (Phil 1:19) quotes Job 13:16 “τοῦτό μοι ἀποβήσεται εἰς σωτηρίαν.” Given Paul’s background (Phil 3:5, 6), he was, doubtless, alluding to the story of Job.¹⁴

As Fowl states, “when there is a direct quotation from Job in Phil 1:19 and attention to the larger context of Job can provide a theologically edifying context in which to read Philippians, Christians would be unwise willfully to cut themselves off from such edification.”¹⁵ Moreover, seeing as Paul would have been aware of the

¹² Carolyn Osiek, *Philippians, Philemon, Abingdon New Testament Commentaries* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 15.

¹³ Ibid., 31.

¹⁴ Christopher Bruno would argue that even if Paul was unaware of the parallel, the Divine Author intended it. “On the grounds of divine inspiration and divine omniscience, if a verbal and/or thematic parallel is present, we may be confident that the Divine Author of Scripture intended the citation.” Christopher R. Bruno, “Readers, Authors, and the Divine Author: An Evangelical Proposal for Identifying Paul’s Old Testament Citations,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 71 (2009): 320. However, he also acknowledges that “there is a strong possibility that Paul actually intended an allusion.” Ibid., 319. The overall great controversy theme found in the book of Job and resonant in Paul’s letter to the Philippians tips the scales in favor of Paul’s intentionality.

¹⁵ Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 45.

theology of the book of Job, it can be argued that it was his intention to draw his readers' attention to that book for theological context to his letter.

Unbeknownst to him and all his earthly companions, Job was caught in the crossfire between God and Satan. His faithfulness to God posed a threat to Satan's dominion over the earth,¹⁶ a threat which Satan minimized by questioning Job's motives for serving God. The adversity that ensued in the life of Job served to answer the devil's accusations but Job had no idea that this is why he was going through his afflictions. His statement of faith in God's justice to acquit him may have been ignorant of the cosmic backdrop of Job 1:6–12 and 2:1–6, but it affirmed God's assertions about Job (Job 1:8; 2:3). In spite of his sufferings, he maintains confidence in God's trustworthiness and this, in turn, brings glory to God.

Likewise, Paul anticipated that his suffering¹⁷ would bring glory to God (Phil 1:20).¹⁸ In the same manner that Job's suffering yielded a positive result in the cosmic controversy, "thumbs up or thumbs down, Paul is convinced that his personal fate will 'advance the gospel' (1:12)—either by his continuing to live and then to carry out his ministry, or by his martyrdom for the sake of Christ."¹⁹ Thus, just as Job's faithfulness in spite of great suffering served to vindicate the character of God, so Paul anticipated that

¹⁶ Satan's statement about roaming "to and fro in the earth" (Job 1:7) was an assertion of his dominion over the earth. An assertion which God challenged by the life of Job (Job 1:8) whose allegiance to God meant that Satan's dominion was not complete.

¹⁷ The suffering of Paul is evidenced by terms like "bonds" (1:7, 13, 14, 16), "envy and strife" (1:15), "adversaries" (1:28), "suffer" (1:29), and "conflict" (1:30). Apparently, his life is in imminent danger as implied by the phrase "whether it be by life, or by death" (1:20).

¹⁸ As Hamm points out, "in biblical Greek, 'magnify' can mean 'to cause to be held in greater esteem.'" Hamm, 85.

¹⁹ Ibid.

his life could be part of vindicating the character of God by demonstrating that He is worthy of our allegiance even when He is not blessing us.

When Adam ate the fruit of the forbidden tree and abdicated his God-given dominion, the earth came under the dominion of Satan.²⁰ Hence Jesus speaks of His followers as not being “of the world”²¹ in that they do not subscribe to the government of the prince of the world, the devil. More than a minority cultural group attempting to preserve their heritage, Christians are citizens of a different country living in hostile territory (c.f. 1 Pet 5:8). This imagery of citizenship is introduced in Phil 1:27 and 3:20. “Christians are depicted as residents in an alien land. Their own heavenly citizenship requires of them certain distinctive behaviors...”²² Thus Paul’s ethical exhortations derive force from the great controversy metanarrative.

Failing to see how evil could befall a righteous man, Job’s friends accuse him falsely. In Job 13:16 Job expresses “his trust that God will acquit him as innocent despite false accusations.”²³ Though he may be unaware of the backdrop to his suffering, Job believes that there must be another reason for what he is experiencing and trusts that God will vindicate him in the end.

²⁰ See Christ’s references to the devil as the prince of this world in John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11.

²¹ See John 15:19; 17:14, 16.

²² Osiek, 31.

²³ Hamm, 85.

Thematic Evidence of the Great Controversy Metanarrative

Throughout the letter to the Philippians Paul makes allusions to the great controversy metanarrative. Granted that we have established his general awareness of the cosmic conflict, allusions are adequate evidence for the great controversy metanarrative bearing sway on his theology in the letter. Following is a table summarizing the allusions in the letter with an explanation of why these point to the great controversy.

Table 1 : Echoes of the Great Controversy Metanarrative in Philippians

Echo	Notes	Explanation	Reference
Military language	- defense/stand fast - striving - adversaries/enemies - conflict/strife - suffer	All conflict derives from the root conflict introduced in heaven and is mirrored in the life of the church.	Phil 1:7, 17, 27, 28; 2:3, 15; 3:18; 4:1
Worship	- glory - praise	A key question in the Great Controversy is whether or not God is worthy of worship.	Phil 1:11; 2:10, 11; 4:8, 20
Gospel	- gospel - cross - transformation	The gospel is the solution to the problems raised by the conflict that begun in heaven.	Phil 1:5, 7, 12, 17, 27–30; 2:8, 22; 3:18, 21; 4:3, 15
Eschatological references	- day of Christ - resurrection - heaven	Paul recognizes a reality beyond our temporal earthly existence.	Phil 1:6, 10; 2:10, 16; 3:10, 11, 20; 4:19

Military Language

Revelation 12:7 clearly delineates the nature of the conflict between Satan and God in military terms: “And there was war in heaven.” With the gospel as God’s response to Satan’s attacks, it is evident why the gospel would require defense (Phil 1:7).

Paul even assumes a defensive posture: “I am set for the defence of the gospel” (1:17) showing that he is aware of the conflict surrounding the work of spreading the gospel message.

The Philippian church is apparently well aware of the presence of conflict as well since Paul references their adversaries without much introduction (Phil 1:28). Moreover, he refers to them “striving together” indicating a force antagonistic to their faith (1:27). He later mentions those who are “enemies of the cross of Christ” (3:18) who are clearly in league with the chief adversary whom Paul identifies as Satan in his letter to Timothy (1 Tim 5:14, 15).

It is from the original conflict started in heaven that all other conflict derives. Adversity and interpersonal strife were only introduced into the human experience pursuant to Adam and Eve’s encounter with the devil.²⁴ Thus where conflict and strife appear in the human experience, it is a reflection of the cosmic conflict. Furthermore, suffering, in general, only enters the human experience after sin enters the world (Gen 3:14–19). There is a special suffering experienced by those who align themselves with God’s government. Like casualties of war, they suffer for Christ’s sake (Phil 1:29). The suffering may result from a voluntary repudiation of things that may hinder one’s pursuit of Christ (3:8), or may result from mere association with Christ (3:10; cf. John 15:18–21). Regardless, the Christian’s faithfulness is not determined by their immediate circumstances (4:11, 12) because their strength to endure is found in Christ (4:13).

²⁴ Adam, once completely enraptured by Eve (Gen. 2:23) to the point that he was willing to disobey God for her (Gen. 3:6—there is no mention of Adam being deceived so he, apparently ate the fruit with full knowledge that he was disobeying God), now blames her for his indiscretions (Gen. 3:12). So we see the breakdown of human relationships. Adam also blames God since He is the One who gave Eve to him—evidence of the breakdown in the human-divine relationship. Eve, in turn, blames the serpent that she had previously been conversing with—so humanity’s relationship with nature is marred.

Worship

As he did with Job, Satan seeks to dissuade Christ's followers from worshipping Him by imposing suffering upon them. The devil's accusations against God would characterize Him as a despot unworthy of loving worship. Thus any acknowledgment of God as worthy of worship, particularly in the face of suffering, is a strike against Satan's argument. Paul recognizes that Christian living (including their thought culture (4:8)) glorifies God (Phil 1:9–11). So holy living in obedience to God is an act of worship. His appeals to the Philippian church to live blameless lives (2:15) in spite of adversity (1:27, 28) may be viewed as calls to live lives of worship to God.

Christ modeled obedience in His condescension (2:8). In His humanity (2:7), He demonstrated a life of humble submission to God. In His divinity, He answered the devil's accusations that He was a tyrant (cf. Gen 3:1–4). So clear is God's response to Satan's accusations, that the universe acknowledges that God is indeed worthy of worship (2:10, 11).

Paul concludes his letter with a pledge of allegiance to God, demonstrating which side of the conflict he is on (Phil 4:20). All this in spite of the fact that he is currently suffering persecution for the sake of the gospel (1:13).

Gospel

The gospel is transformative. Firstly, it calls for a lifestyle ("conversation") on this earth that aligns with its message (1:27). Paul calls the Philippians to order their lives

in a way that “becometh the gospel of Christ.” One aspect of this lifestyle is characterized by Christian fellowship (1:5) and unity (1:27b).²⁵

Once received, adherents to the gospel message accept its mandate to work for its spreading as did Timotheus (2:22), Clement and many others (4:3). Even those who may not be on the frontlines of gospel proclamation play a role in its advancement through material support (4:15). Further, the lifestyle that the gospel enjoins on this earth follows the heavenly lifestyle (3:20). Ultimately, it is God’s plan to transform even our physical bodies “that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (3:21).

Philippians 2:8 summarizes the gospel story—Jesus bore the ultimate penalty for sin in a manner that answers all of Satan’s accusations against God. It is no wonder, then, that the devil is opposed to its spreading and would bring about suffering on those who would spread its message (Phil 1:29). Thus the gospel requires defending from the enemy’s attacks (Phil 1:7, 17). Those not aligned with the message of the gospel, place themselves on the side of the devil in opposition to the cross of Christ (3:18, 19). Yet Paul finds that even the suffering that he experiences for the sake of the gospel, works to “the furtherance of the gospel” (1:12) so that Christ is preached nonetheless (1:18).

Eschatological References

By looking with expectation to heaven, Paul acknowledges a reality transcendent to our immediately visible physical reality (Phil 2:10; 3:20). Our needs, he posits, are supplied from a storehouse of riches in heaven (Phil 4:19). Thus our physical reality is impacted by a non-visible spiritual reality. So palpable is this spiritual reality that Paul

²⁵ The notion of unity is evident in the repetition of the word, “one,” and the phrase “striving together.”

claims a lifestyle that aligns with a different government than the earthly government of Satan (Phil 3:20). Not only is one's lifestyle impacted by choosing God's side in the great controversy, but Christ's victory over death removes the ultimate penalty for rebellion against God's government (Gen 2:17) for those who choose salvation. Paul chooses a knowledge of Christ over any accolades and personal attainments for the hope of the resurrection (3:8–11). And finally, the resurrection or day of Christ promises a time when the great controversy is finally ended (Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; 3:10, 11).

CHAPTER 4

THE TENSION

It is within the broader context of the Great Controversy that Paul gives his exhortation to the Philippians which he begins by acknowledging their obedience. Obedience can only be accomplished through action in accordance with one's volition—that is to say, obedience is not a passive experience. So the Philippians have exerted themselves in responding to the teaching of the Word by living lives in accordance with what they have learnt.

Having acknowledged their past obedience, Paul goes on to exhort the Philippians to work out their “own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). This paraenesis immediately raises eyebrows to the Christian who recalls Ephesians 2:8, 9 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.” How could the same Paul who wrote a letter to the Ephesians disqualifying the role of works in salvation, now call the Philippians to work out their salvation?

Further, right after calling the Philippians to work out their salvation, Paul seems to contradict himself with the statement “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Phil 2:13). While this notion seems better to align with common conceptions of the sovereignty of God, it leaves one wondering what role, if any, the individual plays in their salvation?

Philippians 2:12, 13 juxtaposes two concepts that have been the subject of philosophical and theological musing for centuries—free will and the sovereignty of God. To what extent are humans participants in the process of their salvation, if at all, and to what extent is it a divine act?

The Sovereignty of God

Divine sovereignty is often considered to be God's supreme authority over all creation. Texts like Proverbs 21:1 and Daniel 2:21 come to the fore. How this power interacts with human free will tends to a view of God as "the only agent; all activity is but different modes in which the activity of God manifests itself."¹ Philippians 2:13, from this perspective, supports the view that even in humanity's obedience to God, it is He who actuates that obedience and not the individual. But in the absence of agency, can there be responsibility? Would it not be unfair of God to condemn to the fires of hell those who had no agency in determining their life's course? Likewise, to commend and reward those who receive salvation but had no choice or made no effort in the matter would be merely self-congratulatory on God's part.

From a Calvinistic perspective, the issues raised would bear no sway on the veracity of the claim that God determines our salvation independent of us. For the Calvinist, God is "not subject to or answerable to anyone. Humans are in no position to judge God for what he does."² However, the entire great controversy metanarrative refutes this claim. In the narrative, God's character is on display, first for angels, then for

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, 3 vols., *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 281.

² Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 929.

humanity to decide if He is worthy of their worship. It is the inevitable result of His decision to give His creatures free will.

We must be wary of appeals to divine sovereignty that quell healthy inquiry. “On the whole, sovereignty is often raised as the signal to end all probing and the answer before which all questioning must cease.”³ The writings of Paul and the cannon of Scripture intimate that there is more to be understood about the relation between God’s sovereignty and human agency. Thus the tension introduced in verse 13 of Philippians 2 remains.

Human Agency

The question of agency with respect to salvation that arises in Philippians 2:12 has been addressed in various ways.

Argument 1: One argument minimizes the salvation Paul is speaking of here. The Philippians cannot work for their eternal salvation but they can work for their general wellbeing, the argument goes.

The greater difficulty is the idea of working at salvation in an active sense. Salvation, *soteria*, carries the general sense of health, welfare, and well-being, and especially protection and deliverance from danger...Use of the word here is certainly not to be understood only in the eschatological sense, as if only a state beyond death is envisioned, yet that dimension must be included. Paul is speaking of their total well-being, including their spiritual prosperity both now and in the future.⁴

The problem with this view is two-fold. Firstly, since God is ultimately the provider of all our needs, then to claim that we can meet our own temporal needs falls short in the same manner that claiming to bring about our own salvation. Secondly,

³ Tonstad, 75.

⁴ Osiek, 70.

acknowledging that an eschatological sense of the word, *soteria*, is intended, but broadening its scope to include temporal welfare only magnifies the issue of human agency.

Argument 2: Another suggestion is that when Paul wrote to the Philippian church, he did not have a full understanding of salvation by faith alone as it came to be understood by the reformers.

Several things in verse 12 have given rise to considerable controversy, notably Paul's appeal to obedience, and his admonition to the readers to work out their own salvation...Let us remember that Paul was certainly Jewish, but neither Catholic nor Protestant, and try to approach the text from the perspective of a first-century Pharisaic messianic Jew...The obedience advocated here is not yet the radical submission to the gospel as it later came to be understood in Reformation theology. Paul is not posing to the Philippians the choice of obedience or destruction. He is simply reminding them that their submission to him on the issue at hand, the disunity in the community, will carry them further toward their spiritual welfare.⁵

The first problem with this view is that the very texts used in the reformation, to advance salvation through faith, were derived primarily from the writings of Paul. It seems unlikely that he would write so extensively on righteousness by faith with no comprehension of what it entailed. Additionally, this view assumes that Paul was limited in his understanding of salvation through faith because of his Jewish background but that the reformers were not similarly limited because of their Catholic European backgrounds.

Argument 3: One other perspective is that Paul does not appeal to any individual to work for one's own salvation. Rather, he is speaking collectively.

As a Christian motto, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling' (Phil 2:12) can easily be heard as a mandate addressed to a struggling individual. But in fact 'your' is plural here in the Greek, as is the verb 'work out.' Similarly plural are all the personal references in the first half of the sentence: 'beloved...obedient...you have always been.' Besides the accident of language—that the plural is not always perceptible in English—another reason we tend to miss Paul's tone is that North

⁵ Ibid., 74.

American culture tends to focus on individual striving more than communal sharing...When we savor the full context, this mandate, which could seem to appeal to individualism and independent striving, is really an antidote to those very tendencies.⁶

Even though Paul is speaking collectively, this does not negate him speaking of human work to the end of salvation. The view aims to neutralize individualism, but it does not address the issue of humanity's role in the process of salvation. Furthermore, the use of a plural verb when addressing a group does not invalidate the personal application of the message.

The question remains, then, of how we are to understand this work we are called to do for our salvation. Hodge states, "There are three truths of which every man is convinced from the very constitution of his nature. (1.) That he is a free agent. (2.) That none but free agents can be accountable for their character or conduct. (3.) That he does not possess ability to change his moral state by an act of the will."⁷ It is intuitive to regard humanity as free agents, but what is the extent of this freedom? Varying theories have been posited with differing merits and demerits.

Those who subscribe to the doctrine of contingency, for instance, would hold that "the will is independent of reason, of feeling, and of God."⁸ Any external influences upon the will, from this perspective, would nullify its freedom. This theory attempts to fully embrace the freedom humanity intuitively feels. It advances that "a man may act in opposition to all motives, external and internal, and in despite of all influence which can be exerted on

⁶ Hamm, 112-13.

⁷ Hodge, 293.

⁸ Ibid., 283.

him...”⁹ and on these grounds no future free act can be known with certainty. This, however, raises problems with the doctrine of the foreknowledge of God which asserts that God knows, with certainty, all future acts.

If humans do possess agency and God is sovereign, how do these two concepts harmonize? Or does one negate the other? If so, what is the meaning of Philippians 2:12, 13?

⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 5

TENSION RESOLVED

Philippians 2:13 says that God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The text speaks of God working so it would be enlightening to understand the manner in which God works. Philippians 2:1–11 gives us that very context, which aids in our understanding of verses 12 and 13. Verse 12 begins with the conjunction, wherefore (ὥστε), expressing consequence or result so that the perceived tension in 12 and 13, is textually derived from the preceding verses in 1–11. One cannot properly understand the meaning of verses 12 and 13 without considering the context from which they arise. Moreover, the kenosis hymn is the theological foundation for Paul’s subsequent ethical appeals.

The Kenosis (Character Key)

Thought to have originally been written as a hymn for its poetic form, “the Christological poem, the so-called ‘Philippian hymn’ of 2:6-11, is one of the most important pieces of very early reflection on the role and destiny of Christ.”¹ Firstly, it establishes the divinity of Christ, “who, being in the form (*morphē*) of God” (Phil 2:6).²

¹ Osiek, 32.

² There is discussion about whether the pre-existence of Christ is in view for the author in this text. See George Howard, "Philippians 2:6-11 and the Human Christ," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 40 (1978). and James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2 ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996). Notwithstanding the main purpose

This form is and “outward expression that embodies essential (inner) substance so that the form is in complete harmony with the inner essence.”³ So Christ, was in essence, God and “took upon him the form (*morphē*) of a servant” (Phil 2:7). “In contrast to the status and quality of God, he freely took on the far inferior status of humanity by becoming incarnate.”⁴ Thence we have the orthodox belief that “the eternal Word of God was fully divine, always existed, yet entered completely into humanity in the person of Jesus, thus uniting full divinity and full humanity in the Incarnation.”⁵

As mysterious as the nature of Christ may be, it emerges from a description of God’s response to the issues raised in the great controversy. Romans 5:19 points to Adam’s disobedience as the means by which sin entered the world and plunged it into the midst of the cosmic conflict.⁶ Likewise, it “suggests that the obedience of Jesus serves as antidote to the disobedience of Adam and was thus redemptive.”⁷ “Many scholars discern the same contrast between Christ’s ‘obedience’ and Adam’s ‘disobedience’ behind the

of his article, Gordon Fee clarifies the divinity of Christ in Paul’s expression in Philippians 2:6–8. See Fee, 40-41.

³ Inc. Helps Ministries, *Helps Word-Studies*, vol. Biblehub.com (Warrenville, IL: theDiscoveryBible.com, 2011).

⁴ Osiek, 61.

⁵ Ibid., 58-59.

⁶ Some scholars have seen the reference to Christ as being in the form of God as an allusion to Adam’s creation in the image of God. See, for example, Andrew J. Bandstra, “Adam and the Servant in Philippians 2:5ff,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (1966): 213; Herman N. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard de Witt (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975). Others contend that Philippians 2:6–11 references divine Sonship. See Charles A. Wanamaker, “Philippians 2:6–11: Son of God or Adamic Christology?,” *New Testament Studies* 33, no. 2 (1987). The disagreements have ramifications for one’s understanding of what the passage teaches about the pre-existence of Christ. Nonetheless, the connection between Adam (whether as son of God or as first man) and Christ has scholarly acknowledgment.

⁷ Osiek, 62.

first part of the ‘Kenosis Hymn’...Adam, in his pride and disobedience, attempted to seize the ‘equality with God’ not given to him; but Christ freely surrendered the glory he already possessed.”⁸

Adam’s disobedience, in the context of the cosmic conflict, placed him in alliance with the devil’s accusations about the character of God. In order to reconcile humanity with God (c.f. 2 Cor 5:19), Christ came as Adam’s substitute so that by claiming the obedience of Christ, humanity may once again join heaven’s family (c.f. John 1:12).

Inasmuch as Jesus was fully human and could represent humanity, He was also fully divine and represented divinity.

In Jesus Christ the true nature of the living God has been revealed ultimately and finally. God is not a grasping, self-centered being. He is most truly known through the One whose equality with God found expression in his pouring himself out in sacrificial love by taking the lowest place, the role of a slave, and whose love for his human creatures found consummate expression in his death on the cross.⁹

The kenosis hymn thus outlines the divine response to Satan’s attacks on God’s government. This response is demonstrative of the manner in which God governs.

“Whereas Lucifer wanted to usurp Christ’s throne for his own glory, Christ left His throne to save sinners on planet earth.”¹⁰ “That this is God’s own nature and doing has been attested for all time by Christ Jesus’s divine vindication; he has been exalted by God to the highest place.”¹¹ “Even though the shamed crucified Jesus is now exalted Lord,

⁸ Davis, 159-61.

⁹ Gordon D Fee, *Philippians, The Ivp New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 101.

¹⁰ Gulley, 97.

¹¹ Fee, *Philippians*, 101.

thus being honored way beyond expectation, the ultimate honor belongs to God...God's honor above all is vindicated in the triumph of the exalted Christ."¹²

Stephen Fowl draws a contrast between Christ's humility and Rome's dominion: "On the cross Christ's body becomes the site where Rome's pretensions to dominion are overwhelmed by the power of God, a power which is revealed in weakness."¹³ We may observe the disparity between the violent manner in which the earthly Roman government exercises its power and the submissive, selfless, sacrificial deportment of Christ. As representative of God's government, this indicates the nature in which God governs. Not from a place of domination, but from love. One cannot but hear echoes to Christ's admonition to His disciples in Matthew 20:25–28,

But Jesus called them unto him, and said, Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.

Divine Sovereignty

Due to its universal nature, divine sovereignty has come to be conflated with omnipotence. It may be argued that God's omnipotence is indispensable to His sovereignty since He must rule over all. However, while this a natural argument, one must ask if it is biblical. Is God's sovereignty defined solely by His omnipotence? The evidence indicates the contrary. Indeed, an oversimplification of sovereignty as

¹² Osiek, 65.

¹³ Fowl, 99-100.

omnipotence leads to a character assassination of the Divine and lays the foundation for the perceived tension between sovereignty and free will.

Sovereignty is not merely the power exerted in governance, but rather the manner in which one governs. A kind and gentle king may be every bit as sovereign as a harsh and domineering oligarch. Summarizing Karl Barth's thoughts on the kenosis in volume 2 of his *Dogmatics*, Cynthia Rigby states:

God's *kenosis* in Jesus Christ is not, for Barth, a matter of God's deciding whether or not to take on human flesh. Rather, it is a revelation of who God is, a statement about God's very nature as a relational, compassionate being... To encounter what God has done in Jesus Christ, then, is to discover *who* God is. To proclaim that God could have chosen to do things differently than what God has done is to posit that God can be different from who God is. While such a statement might intend to reflect faithful commitment to the reality of God's sovereign power, it actually facilitates escape from the radical implications of who God reveals God's self to be.¹⁴

The kenosis may be viewed as limiting God's sovereignty because of the unfounded equivalence drawn between sovereignty and omnipotence. When in fact the kenosis is a revelation of God's sovereignty—a picture of how God governs.¹⁵

If we can separate the sovereignty of government from God's omnipotence as a quality of His essence, then divine sovereignty is a description of not of who God is but what God does. By virtue of God's infiniteness and our finitude, we are limited in our comprehension of His ontology. Yet we may catch glimpses of His ontological reality through His economic manifestations. When we read the kenosis as an economic

¹⁴ Cynthia L. Rigby, "Free to Be Human: Limits, Possibilities, and the Sovereignty of God," *Theology Today* 53, no. 1 (1996): 52.

¹⁵ In his analysis of Philippians 2:6–11, Michael Gorman asserts that Christ humbled Himself, not merely "although" He was divine, but precisely "because" He was divine. He states, "Christ's status of being 'in the form of God' (and thus possessing 'equality with God')... was most truly and fully exercised, not in exploiting that status for selfish advantage..., but in the self-emptying and self-enslaving that manifested itself in incarnation and crucifixion." Michael J. Gorman, "Although/Because He Was in the Form of God: The Theological Significance of Paul's Master Story (Phil 2:6–11)," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 1, no. 2 (2007).

expression that gives but glimpses into the ontological reality, then we can gather greater insight from the text. The alternative is to impose our ontological limitations of God into the text and find ourselves perplexed when we get to verses 12 and 13.

The kenosis hymn describes the character of the God who works in us to will and do of His good pleasure—He is the same God who esteems humanity so highly that He suffered humiliation and death for us.¹⁶ Could a God who regards us so highly turn around and overrule our agency—an agency that He gave to us in the first place? It seems unlikely. In order to conclude that v. 13 is a picture of a God who unilaterally determines our fate, one would have to approach the text with preconceived notions of who God is. The context reveals the character of a God that cannot be reconciled with a deterministic God.

On the contrary, the kenosis hymn outlines the response of heaven's government to the accusations lobbied against it. It is a response that demonstrates the manner in which God's government operates. Contrary to the devil's accusations, God is not an unrelenting despot who demands worship at any cost. Rather, those who choose to worship Him do so based on His benevolent character. Thus to conflate sovereignty with omnipotence is to limit God's sovereignty because God does not only rule from His power, but from His love as well.

¹⁶ When Paul makes the statement, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5) he is referencing the mindset he has just exhorted the Philippians to possess in Philippians 2:1–4. The mind of Christ, then, is one that does nothing "through strife or vainglory" but in lowliness of mind esteems "other better than themselves;" it looks not "on his own things," but "on the things of others." Thus, Christ reveals to us a God who, although He is infinitely superior to humanity, "values" (NIV) humanity so much that He sacrificed His life (Phil 2:6–8).

Free Will

Had God not given His intelligent creation the freedom of agency, sin would never have arisen and He would not have had to sacrifice Himself to provide another opportunity for humanity to choose Him. Having now provided a way of escape from the consequences of their rebellion, would God turn around and usurp the agency He risked everything to protect?¹⁷ The ethical injunctions directed at the Philippian church pursuant to the kenosis hymn indicate that human agency is assumed.

We consider the definition of agency put forth by Hodge, who states that

a man is free not only when his outward acts are determined by his will, but when his volitions are truly and properly his own, determined by nothing out of himself but proceeding from his own views, feelings, and immanent dispositions, so that they are the real, intelligent, and conscious expression of his character, or of what is in his mind.¹⁸

When confronted with a picture of who God is, as revealed in the kenosis hymn, for instance, humanity must exercise their agency in determining whether they will yield obedience to God or not. This decision can be made by none other than the individual concerned. It is not something that God can do for anyone.

¹⁷ When Christ came to earth, God emptied heaven “For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily” (Col 2:9). So perilous was Christ’s mission that in Gethsemane, He asked for an alternative means of accomplishing it (Matt 26:42)—if there was any other way to resolve the great controversy, God would have used it.

¹⁸ Hodge, 285. The libertarian perspective of human free will rejects causal determinism altogether but libertarians hold nuanced views of the way free will functions. Some libertarians espouse agent causation. See Timothy O'Connor, *Persons and Causes: The Metaphysics of Free Will* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000). Others espouse event-causal libertarianism. See Robert Kane, *The Significance of Free Will* (New York City, NY: Oxford University Press, 1998). Yet another perspective holds a non-causal theory of free will. See Hugh J. McCann, *The Works of Agency: On Human Action, Will, and Freedom* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). Hodge himself is compatibilist and would hold that human free will is not incompatible with determinism. Yet in his definition, he too affirms agency. This paper does not delve into the complexities of the varying definitions of human free will and how that intersects with divine foreknowledge. For more on this topic see Martin F. Hanna, ed. *Salvation: Contours of Adventist Soteriology*, ed. Martin F. Hanna; Darius W. Jankiewicz; John W. Reeve (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2018).

Even when an individual chooses to yield obedience to God, however, they may find their agency insufficient to bring about the desired result. This is the dilemma Paul finds himself in in Romans 7:7–25. Whereas “free agency is the power to decide according to our character; ability is the power to change our character by a volition.”¹⁹ The agency God instilled in humanity at creation still remains, but sin has robbed humanity of the ability to act in accordance with their decision to obey God. Gordon Fee explains it thus; “God is the one who empowers you in this regard. They are indeed to ‘work at’ it (*katergazesthe*); they are able to do so because God himself is ‘at work’ (*energōn*) in and among them. This does not mean that God is ‘doing it for them,’ but that God supplies the working power.”²⁰

After accepting the free gift of God’s grace and choosing to follow God, the Christian still finds themselves in a Romans 7:7–25 experience.²¹ This does not mean God has not accepted them. Rather, it is the process of sanctification which “consists in

¹⁹ Hodge, 293.

²⁰ Fee, *Philippians*, 105.

²¹ Stephen Chester gives an apt summary of the theological questions regarding the Romans 7 text. “Does Paul’s use of first person pronouns throughout 7:7-25 indicate that he is here autobiographical or does he in fact take on one or more different personae? Following his shift to present tense verbs in 7:14, does Paul speak of pre-Christian existence or do 7:14-25 describe the struggles of the Christian life?” Stephen J. Chester, “Romans 7 and Conversion in the Protestant Tradition,” *Ex auditu* 25 (2009): 135. Likewise, Donald Engebretson states that “Part of the problem concerns the timeline and the subject of the chapter. Is Paul describing his own pre-Christian struggle to live as God demands? Or is he describing his later postconversion struggle as a Christian? To whom is Paul referring? Is it himself, the Christian in general, the unregenerate nonbeliever, all people in general, the typical Jew’s experience of the law or the nation of Israel as a whole? Finally, the question arises as well as to what *nomos* refers: the Torah only, the contents of the Decalogue, or the so-called second use of the law, by which our sins are reflected and thus condemned.” Donald V. Engebretson, “Personal Struggle, Defense of the Law, or Israel’s Struggle?,” *Logia* 20, no. 4 (2011): 25. For some of the differing perspectives, see Gerald Bray, ed. *Romans*, ed. Thomas C. Oden, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture, vol. 6 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 180–91; Michael Paul Middendorf, *The “I” in the Storm: A Study of Romans 7* (Saint Louis, MO: Concordia Academic Press, 1997); Stanley K. Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1994), 251–85.

the gradual triumph of the new nature implanted in regeneration over the evil that still remains after the heart is renewed.”²² The Christian continues to have a choice now to live in accordance with God’s will or to fall back into a life of sin.

When Jesus prayed “sanctify them through Thy truth; thy Word is truth” (John 17:17) He delineated the agent of sanctification. The Word of God has sanctifying power. It is not a mystical power²³ unleashed by chanting mantras.²⁴ Rather, the more one studies the Word of God, the clearer a picture of God that they see, which leads them to a deeper surrender to Him and a concession to being transformed into His likeness (c.f. 2 Cor 3:18). The Holy Spirit enlightens “the eyes of the understanding” (Eph 1:18) so that we may fully comprehend the Word of God and make decisions in line with the truth.

It is the human agent who must be willing to see a clearer picture of God. Having seen the goodness of God (c.f. Rom 2:4), they will be drawn to Him (c.f. John. 6:44) and must make a decision to follow Him. While it is God’s goodness that draws and the Holy

²² Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, 3 vols., *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company), 224.

²³ Bernard McGinn defines mysticism as “contemplation, rapture, union, deification, and divine presence... This term [does] not indicate an academic exercise, but rather a way of life dedicated to achieving transformative contact with God.” Bernard McGinn, "The Venture of Mysticism in the New Millennium," *New Theology Review* 21, no. 2 (2008): 70. One avenue used to attain a mystical connection with God is contemplative prayer. As Filip Milosavljevic points out, “According to Emergents, contemplation was introduced into personal and corporate worship for a two-fold purpose: it is a tool for unification with God, but it is also a tool for transformation of how one thinks and processes about himself/herself and the world around them.” Filip Milosavljevic, “Emergent Worship: A Study on "Contemplation" in the Emerging Church” (Andrews University, 2012), 13. This form of contemplation is not about a mindful intellectual consent to biblical truth, unlike the prayer and meditation advocated in the Bible. *Ibid.*, 24–27. Given the importance of engaging the mind in decision-making in the context of the Great Controversy, religious practices that encourage mindlessness and thoughtlessness are a cause for pause.

²⁴ The practice of repeating a phrase is one of the means suggested for achieving the intimate connection with God during contemplative prayer. This is used as a method of silencing the mind, emptying it of all thoughts so that an individual may connect at a mystical level. Milosavljevic, 19, 20.

Spirit who illuminates the understanding, God cannot do the human work of choosing life (c.f. Deut 30:19).

However, while we possess the agency to choose life, we do not possess the ability to fulfill that choice.²⁵ Hence Paul continues, “For it is God which worketh in you...” Without God working in us, our choice would not matter. In fact, without God working for us beforehand, we would not even have a choice (c.f. Rom 5:8). However, without our choice to accept His salvation, all that God could sacrifice (c.f. Rom 8:32) would never suffice to save us. The sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice is not at issue. Rather, it is a question of whether or not we avail ourselves of His all-sufficient sacrifice in order to benefit from His salvation (c.f. Matt 23:37). This is Paul’s genius in Philippians 2:12, 13. He gives both elements equal attention because they are, indeed, both essential in our salvation.

Thus the dual elements of free will and the character of God (as manifested in His sovereignty) guide our interpretation of Philippians 2:12, 13 to avoid negating free will or limiting divine sovereignty.

²⁵ There is a difference between our ability to make a decision and the power to carry out that decision. This is clearly demonstrable in an individual who is incarcerated against their will. They may choose freedom but they are unable to exercise that choice.

CHAPTER 6

METANARRATIVE INTERPRETATION

From an exegetical perspective, the great controversy metanarrative delimits our interpretation of the text as to suitably guide our understanding. There is a comprehensible hesitation to stating a presupposition when approaching a text exegetically. However, an honest exegesis must recognize its systematic presuppositions. Evidence has already been given to support the adoption of the great controversy metanarrative as a systematic foundation to Paul's letter to the Philippians. Consequently, in this section, we will examine the key word in our text, *κατεργάζεσθε*, a hapax legomenon, to determine its best interpretation in the light of the great controversy metanarrative.

Ὡστε, ἀγαπητοί μου, καθὼς πάντοτε ὑπηκούσατε, μὴ ὡς ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ μου μόνον ἀλλὰ νῦν πολλῷ μᾶλλον ἐν τῇ ἀπουσίᾳ μου, μετὰ φόβου καὶ τρόμου τὴν ἑαυτῶν σωτηρίαν κατεργάζεσθε·

King James Version: Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

Based on his description of the character and position of Christ (2:11),¹ Paul calls the Philippians to a work akin to the obedience they have already rendered in the past

¹ The conjunction, “Ὡστε” connects the preceding sentiments with Paul's subsequent exhortation.

(2:12). There are two verbs in verse 12, ὑπακούω and κατεργάζομαι. The perceived tension revolves around the meaning of κατεργάζομαι. The verb being a contraction of κατα and εργάζομαι, one may assume that it is a deponent verb along with εργάζομαι. Recent scholarship, however, questions the validity of the deponent classification of verbs.² While verbs considered to be deponent are translated into English in the active voice, the assertion is that they actually carry lexical middle or passive voice. It is thus needful to determine whether κατεργάζεσθε is middle or passive and the implications of such determination.

Since κατεργάζεσθε is a hapax legomenon, in the absence of comparative references in Scripture, we must systematically consider both the passive and middle interpretations. Merely parsing the verb only gets us to the fact that it is in either the passive or middle voice but the distinction between the two voices is significant. If κατεργάζεσθε is in the passive voice, then Paul means to de-emphasize the volition of the subject—"No volition—nor even necessarily awareness of the action—is implied on the part of the subject."³ On the contrary, if the middle voice is intended, then Paul actually means to emphasize "the subject's participation."⁴ In the absence of comparative references to κατεργάζεσθε, we must systematically consider both the passive and middle interpretations.

² Jonathan T. Pennington, "Setting Aside 'Deponency': Rediscovering the Greek Middle Voice in New Testament Studies," *Linguist as Pedagogue* (2009).

³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 431.

⁴ Ibid., 414.

Passive Voice

No agency, ultimate, intermediate or impersonal, is indicated in the construction of the clause. But the sheer absence of an agent does not rule out the passive voice.

One might argue that the suppressed agent is clearly God who works out our salvation and that perhaps if the agent was named, it would make the sentence too complex. However, the verb in the first clause, ὑπακούω, appears in the active voice and the adverb, καθὼς makes the second clause dependent on the first implying that the agent in the second clause is that same as the one in the first clause—in this case, ἀγαπητός.

Most convincingly, though, would be the argument that “the focus of the passage is on the subject; an explicit agent might detract from this focus.”⁵ Since the verse begins with an emphasis on the obedience of the ἀγαπητός, Paul’s intent may be to maintain focus on the experience of the ἀγαπητός. The underlying assumption to this interpretation is that the understanding “that God is behind the scenes is self-evidently part of the worldview of the New Testament writers. The nature of this book demands that we see him even when he is not mentioned.”⁶ This assumption is systematic in nature and not strictly exegetical. Thus the exegesis of the text relies on one’s systematic analysis of Scripture.

It could equally be argued that the central role of free will in the great controversy metanarrative has exegetical implications. The voice of the verb κατεργάζεσθε must be one that maximizes exercise of free will on the part of the ἀγαπητός.

⁵ Ibid., 436.

⁶ Ibid., 438.

Given the semantic intent of the simple passive to minimize the “cognition, volition, or cause on the part of the subject”⁷ it is unlikely, in the context of the great controversy, that Paul intended the simple passive voice in his choice of the conjugation of *κατεργάζομαι*. The causative passive is a more likely candidate as it “implies consent, permission or cause of the action of the verb on the part of the subject.”⁸ The causative passive usually occurs with imperative verbs but it is actually a rare construction. Since it carries the semantic weight of the middle voice, we turn our attention to the middle voice as a more likely interpretation of *κατεργάζεσθε*.

Middle Voice

The emphasis that the middle voice places on the subject’s participation has greater interpretive appeal from the great controversy metanarrative perspective with respect to free will.

Since *σωτηρίαν* is the direct object of the clause, we can rule out the direct middle and redundant middle as an interpretations of *κατεργάζεσθε*.

When it comes to the indirect middle voice, “what is frequently at stake, grammatically speaking, is whether the middle is to be considered indirect or deponent.”⁹ As we have already chosen to disregard the deponent option, the indirect middle may have interpretive sway. With the indirect middle, the subject “shows special interest in the action of the verb.”¹⁰ Notably, the intensive middle which is often considered in the

⁷ Ibid., 439.

⁸ Ibid., 440.

⁹ Ibid., 420.

¹⁰ Ibid., 419.

same category as the indirect middle, draws even greater attention to the subject as is implied by the intensive pronoun ἐαυτῶν.

The intensive middle stops short of the causative middle which would have the subject as the source of the action. With respect to salvation, interpreting κατεργάζεσθε as an intensive middle places responsibility of working out one's salvation on the subject without requiring that the subject is the source of said salvation. Conversely, the causative middle would require that the subject not only work out their salvation, but be the source of salvation. Our systematic understanding of the great controversy metanarrative proscribes a causative middle interpretation.

In the permissive middle, “the subject allows something to be done for or to himself or herself.”¹¹ It is a rare usage but given the hapax legomenon κατεργάζεσθε, it may well be the author's intent. In the case of Philippians 2:12, a permissive middle interpretation for κατεργάζεσθε “implies acknowledgment, consent, toleration, or permission of the action of the verb.”¹² This aligns with a great controversy metanarrative system and would mean that the subject gives their consent to have their salvation worked out.

Thus we find two contenders for possible interpretation of κατεργάζεσθε—the intensive and the permissive middle. Since the first clause sets parameters for the second clause, the manner in which salvation is worked out must align with the manner in which the subject has always obeyed. The permissive middle would suggest that obedience is purely volitional. The subject allows obedience to happen with no effort on their own

¹¹ Ibid., 425.

¹² Ibid., 426.

part. This, however, would contradict the active voice of ὑπακούσατε in the first clause. On the other hand, the intensive middle agrees with the effort implied in ὑπακούσατε without contradicting the fact that salvation does not come through our own works (Eph 2:8, 9). Moreover, the phrase “φόβου καὶ τρόμου” and the intensive pronoun, ἑαυτῶν, align better with an intensive middle than with a permissive middle interpretation.

While the permissive middle would concede volition, it fails to acknowledge the freedom, not only to choose, but to act in accordance with that choice. The intensive middle not only recognizes, but emphasizes, the subject’s freedom to act without transgressing the biblical tenet that God is the source of salvation. In the context of the great controversy as a metanarrative, then, the intensive middle would be the interpretation of choice for the hapax legomenon in Philippians 2:12.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

As he wrote his epistles, Paul was aware of the Great Controversy metanarrative. Moreover, his diction and allusions in his letter to the Philippian church, evince an awareness of the metanarrative. He uses military language, makes eschatological references, and speaks of the gospel and worship, which all echo themes in the Great Controversy metanarrative and call the reader to consider its ramifications for their understanding of the epistle. In particular, when faced with challenging texts like Philippians 2:12, 13, one must bring to bear the entire arsenal of theological tools to the interpretive process. The Great Controversy metanarrative furnishes one more tool to aid in the exegetical process.

While the Great Controversy metanarrative is broad and expansive, two elements were isolated for their application to the interpretation of Philippians 2:12, 13—namely, human free will and the character of God. It was found that free will is guaranteed by the very character of God who gave it in the first place. Understanding the divine commitment to preserving human free will places certain constraints on possible interpretations of Philippians 2:12, 13. It cannot be interpreted in a way that abrogates human free will and/or violates the character of God.

The character of God, as revealed in the kenosis hymn (Phil 2:6–11) was identified as central to our understanding of the sovereignty of God—an issue in

Philippians 2:13. Here a distinction was made between God's omnipotence and His sovereignty—where His omnipotence is a quality of His essence, whereas, His sovereignty is an economic function of how He exercises His rulership. The perspective of God's character of love leads to a view of divine sovereignty that must allow for human agency.

Finally, the Great Controversy metanarrative was intentionally applied as a presupposition to the exegetical process of interpreting the hapax legomenon, *κατεργάζεσθε*, found in Philippians 2:12. After applying the metanarrative constraints imposed by the Great Controversy, it was found that the intensive middle voice would be the interpretation of choice.

Thus, in summary, we demonstrated Paul's awareness of the Great Controversy metanarrative as he wrote to the church in Philippi. Where after we applied the constraints delineated by the elements of free will and the character of God to possible interpretations of Philippians 2:12, 13. Ultimately, we found that the Great Controversy metanarrative as a systematic presupposition, aided the exegetical process. Thus, systematic theology is demonstrated as a helpful tool in biblical interpretation.

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