

**THE UNIVERSAL ESCHATOLOGICAL  
WORSHIP OF CHRIST  
IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE PHILIPPIANS**

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### Abstract

This is a study on the Christological passage in Paul's letter to the Philippians (2:6-11), which focuses on one exegetical issue, the rhetorical function of the exaltation part (vv. 9-11) of this passage in the letter. To solve this exegetical issue, scholars usually situate this exaltation section within either the *lordship-obedience* or the *humiliation-vindication* schemes. While these two paradigmatic readings have contributed to a better understanding of the role of this Christological passage in the letter, they tend to undermine the role of the universal eschatological worship of Jesus Christ at the end of the passage (vv. 10-11) in Paul's paraclases. The present study, therefore, intends to explore and highlight the significance of this eschatological worship motif in two major discourses in the letter, 1:27-2:18 and 3:2-4:4.

The importance of the motif of the universal eschatological worship of Christ is noted in the examination of its Jewish and imperial coordinates. With regard to the former, the motif is carefully reworking of the biblical visions of the universal eschatological worship of YHWH in Isaiah 45:22-24 LXX in order to accommodate two complementary interests: (1) the Jewish eschatological hope that all nations will worship YHWH at the eschaton in holiness and (2) the Christian conviction about the universal worship of Christ on the day of judgment (cf. Romans 14:10-12).

Accordingly, this eschatological worship motif has a strong ethical impetus: *at the day of Christ the Philippian believers are expected to worship Christ in holiness.*

With regard to the latter, this worship motif has anti-imperial stance, as it responds to the struggle of the Philippian Christians who lived in the pagan imperial society of Philippi. The passage claims the supremacy of Jesus Christ over Caesar Augustus who was regarded as the God-sent emperor to save the world and thus worshipped

across the Roman Empire, including in Philippi. In this light, this worship motif exalts the readers to remain faithful to their faith in Christ, their gospel-like conduct, and their proclamation of his gospel until the coming of the true savior Jesus Christ (3:20).

To appreciate all this, Paul's eschatological frame of mind, which is expressed in his "think this" statements (1:6-11; 2:5-11; 3:4-15), becomes crucially important. These passages call the readers to seriously work out their holiness through participation in God's salvific work within and among them until the day of Christ (1:6), so that on that very day they may all be found perfectly holy (1:10-11), worthy to join the universal worship of Christ (2:10-11). Accordingly, the two schemes noted above need to be situated within this call. Their obedience to Christ's lordship and their suffering-humiliation are being part of their active participation in God's work within them to perfect his salvation. Their eschatological vindication (resurrection) is not the end purpose, but to prepare them to join the universal worship of Jesus Christ in holiness.

## Table of Contents

Declaration .....	3
Abstract .....	4
Table of Contents .....	6
Abbreviations .....	10
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	
1 Background .....	11
2 Review of Scholarship .....	12
3 Thesis .....	27
4 The Terminology of Worship .....	27
5 Approach and Presentation .....	28

### PART ONE: THE BACKGROUND OF PHILIPPIANS 2:10-11

#### Chapter Two: The Visions of Eschatological Worship in Jewish Perspective

1 Introduction .....	32
2 The Vision(s) of Eschatological Worship of YHWH .....	33
2.1 The Covenantal Notion .....	33
2.2 The Universal Worship of YHWH .....	36
2.3 YHWH's Eschatological Reign and Salvation .....	39
2.4 Transformation of the Worshippers of YHWH into Holiness .....	45
2.5 Summary .....	48
3 The Universal Eschatological Worship of YHWH in Isaiah 45:23-24 .....	49
3.1 The Universal Eschatological Worship of YHWH .....	51
3.2 YHWH's Eschatological Reign and Salvation .....	53
3.3 The Motif of Holiness .....	54
3.4 Summary .....	56
4 The Reception of Isaiah 45:23 in the Second Temple Writings .....	57
4.1 4Q215a – Time of Righteousness .....	58
4.1.1 The Universal Eschatological Worship of YHWH .....	60
4.1.2 The Eschatological Reign and Salvation of God .....	62



4.1.3	The motif of holiness .....	64
4.2	The Reception in the <i>Aleinu</i> Prayer .....	66
4.2.1	The Universal Eschatological Worship of YHWH .....	68
4.2.2	YHWH's Eschatological Reign and Salvation .....	69
4.2.3	The Motif of Holiness .....	70
4.3	The Reception in Paul's letter to Romans (14:11) .....	71
4.3.1	The Universal Eschatological Worship .....	72
4.3.2	YHWH's Eschatological Reign and Salvation .....	74
4.3.3	The Holiness Motif .....	77
5	Summary .....	79

### Chapter Three: The Worship of Augustus in Philippi

1	Introduction .....	82
2	The worship of Augustus in the Greco-Roman World .....	83
2.1	The Roman Imperial Cult .....	83
2.2	The Rise and Prominence of the Cult of Augustus .....	86
3	The Worship of Augustus in Philippi .....	89
3.1	Roman Philippi at the Time of Paul .....	89
3.2	The Existence of the Cult of Augustus .....	95
3.3	The Prominence of the Cult of Augustus .....	98
4	The Eschatological Significance of the Worship of Augustus .....	100
4.1	The Myth of Golden Age in Antiquity .....	101
4.2	Virgil's Remaking of the Myth .....	102
4.3	The Imperial Version of the Golden Age .....	106
4.4	The Prevalence of the Mythical-Imperial Ideology .....	111
4.5	The Worship of Augustus and the Golden Age of Rome .....	113
5	Summary .....	115

## PART TWO: THE EXEGESIS ON PHILIPPIANS

### Chapter Four: The Setting of Paul's Letter to the Philippians

1	Introduction .....	117
2	The Integrity of the Letter .....	117
2.1	The External Evidence .....	118

2.2	The Internal Evidence .....	119
	<i>Excursus: the Epistolary Type and the Rhetorical Structure of Philippians</i> .....	123
3	The Writer, the Recipients and their Relationship .....	124
3.1	Paul .....	124
3.2	The Church at Philippi .....	129
3.2.1	The Profile .....	131
3.2.2	The Corporate Identity .....	135
3.3	Their <i>κοινωνία</i> in the Gospel of Christ .....	137
4	The Addressed Problems .....	139
	<i>Excursus: the Cult of Augustus and the Civic Opposition in Philippi</i> .....	142
5	The Anti-Imperial Stance .....	148
Chapter Five: The Universal Eschatological Worship of Christ in Philippians 2:10-11		
1	Introduction .....	154
2	Working Framework for Reading Philippians 2:6-11 .....	155
2.1	The Context of Paul's letter to the Philippians .....	155
2.2	Philippians 2:6-11 as the Narrativial Gospel of Jesus Christ .....	157
2.3	The Reading of the Eschatological Narrative in Deutero-Isaiah .....	159
2.4	Philippians 2:6-11 as a Polemic against the Imperial Narrative of Augustus .....	164
3	Philippians 2:10-11 as the Universal Worship of the Messiah Jesus .....	167
3.1	Worship or Submission? .....	167
3.2	The Object of Worship .....	170
3.3	The Worshippers .....	175
3.4	The Event of Worship .....	177
4	The Significances of the Motif of Eschatological Worship of Christ .....	180
4.1	Christology .....	180
4.2	Soteriology .....	187
4.3	Anti-imperial Stance .....	192
4.4	Ethics .....	199
5	Summary .....	203

## Chapter Six: The Rhetorical Significance of the Eschatological Worship Motif in Philippians

1	Introduction .....	206
2	Paul's Eschatological Framework .....	207
2.1	The Eschatological φρονέω in 1:6-7a .....	208
2.2	The φρονέω Exhortation in 2:5-11 .....	215
2.3	The φρονέω Exhortation in 3:4-15 .....	218
2.3.1	The Correlation between the φρονέω in 3:4-15 and the earlier ones	218
2.3.2	Paul's eschatological aim in 3:8c-11 .....	222
2.4	Synthesis .....	227
3	Philippians 1:27-2:18 .....	228
3.1	Paul's Rhetorical Strategy .....	228
3.2	The Pivotal Elements of Paul's φρονέω .....	234
3.2.1	The Expectation of Holiness .....	235
3.2.2	The Worship Notion .....	240
3.2.3	Participating in God's Active Work of Salvation .....	241
3.3	Synthesis .....	246
4	Philippians 3:2-4:4 .....	248
4.1	Paul's Rhetorical Strategy .....	249
4.2	The Pivotal Elements of Paul's φρονέω .....	252
4.2.1	The Expectation of Holiness .....	252
4.2.2	The Worship Motif .....	256
4.2.3	Participation in God's ἐπιτελέω Activity .....	258
4.3	Synthesis .....	263

### PART THREE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Chapter Seven: Summary and Conclusion .....	267
Bibliography .....	274