

516 | New'Brew | Philippians Project Zion Podcast

Josh Mangelson 00:17

Welcome to the Project Zion Podcast. This podcast explores the unique spiritual and theological gifts Community of Christ offers for today's world.

Karin Peter 00:34

Welcome to "New'Brew", the *Project Zion* series that takes us through the New Testament by explaining, exploring and experiencing the text. Our guides, as always, through scripture, are Tony and Charmaine, Chvala-Smith, and I'm your host, clueless host somedays, but your host, Karin Peter. So, before we begin, I want to remind our listeners that you can actually view all the "New'Brew", and "He'Brew" and "SheBrew" episodes, and see Tony and Charmaine's slides on the *Latter-day Seeker Ministries YouTube Channel*. So, check that out. Now, today's episode, we're still in the portion of the New Testament called "the letters", specifically we're in the letter to the Philippians, and I have two questions that come up when we talk about letters. First, is this a Pauline letter? Did Paul write it? And second, are we still dealing with dysfunction and conflict? So just tell us up front, if that's what, what we're dealing with?

Tony Chvala-Smith 01:35

Well, that second question is kind of personal, Karin, I'd say.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 01:39

The first question, yes, this is definitely from Paul, and we were going to talk about this a little bit later but I can stick it in here, is that some scholars say they're not sure if there's one or two letters, but these are definitely in the Paul, in Paul's own voice. He's using terms and he identifies himself as an apostle, he talks about Christ as he does in all of the other letters that we know come from him, and we get to see another side of him. You know, the last time we got to see Galatians where he was angry and pretty [*inaudible*].

Karin Peter 02:18

He was pissy. He was pissy. He really was. There isn't another word for it. I'm, I'm on, I'm on the West Coast, I can say that. I don't know if editors will take it out or not. But that is how...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:28

Exactly.

Karin Peter 02:28

That's how I read it.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 02:29

He was angry because the very core of what this following Jesus thing is, was being neutralized, and he's not going to have it. But in this, this letter we get to see another side of Paul, and this is a very friendly letter, and it's obvious that there are deep, emotional, spiritual connections with this group. He loves them dearly, and they've obviously loved and cared for him. In fact, we you can find out, you can see different places in the letter where he has allowed them to send money to help him while he's imprisoned. So, he is in prison somewhere when he's writing to the Philippians, and he is not sure whether he's gonna die in prison, or be executed, or whether he may see them again. And he's kind of come to some, some peace with either possibility. But he says, but I think Jesus still needs me around to help you all, so I think that's what's going to happen, and I'm really glad about that, even though I, being with Christ would be alright. So, it's just a very loving letter. But because it's a loving letter, he's

also able to warn them about some things, and we'll look at that in the experience part, that they need to be self-checking on if they are going to continue to grow as a community. But there, there is some dysfunction in this congregation...

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:01
Absolutely.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 04:01
...as well. There's division.

Tony Chvala-Smith 04:03
It's, it's religion, Karin, there's dysfunction.

Karin Peter 04:06
There's always dysfunction. Yeah, it's either the color of the carpet or circumcision. But you know, there's conflict. So, I did, I did want to mention the fact you said that his language is very friendly in this letter. I was reading in one commentary, and I wish I could remember which it was, but I don't, reading a commentary and one particular scholar said the language that Paul uses in the first part of the letter is ingratiating language, it's rhetoric specifically culture, it's a culturally normative rhetoric that you use when you are building or deepening relationships with people. And so, they said that you could see Paul's skill. I mean, we hear rhetoric and we think of it as negative. But he said you could see or she said you can, you can hear Paul's skill in, in managing, in, in deepening and forming relationships by how he uses the language in Philippians.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:04
Yeah. There's very...

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:04
Yeah, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:05
...very little frustration. There's a couple of places where he talks about, "...beware of the dogs", and this is probably the circumcisers, but other than that, it's, yeah, it is that respectful. He respects what they are doing. And, and he accepts their love for him and their support of him.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:28
One of the ways he does this with the language he chooses is that, as Luke Johnson points out, he picks a lot of words that in Greek are compounds that start with the Greek prefix "sin", "co".

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 05:44
Or with.

Tony Chvala-Smith 05:45
Sin means "with co". So, like co-worker, co, co-this and co-that. And so, the, the large number of words he uses in such a short letter that just the very word usage makes you feel, make, would make the readers, hearers feel like, hey, we work together with Paul. We're quite a team, and he loves us and we love him. And so, it's, it's part word, part word choice, intentional word choice. I don't think Paul's making this up. He really deeply cares for these people. They obviously deeply care for him. And this, this is still Paul's characteristic Greek style too, which one scholar describes as staccato. His use of Greek is like bursts. And so, it's very much his style. And, yeah.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 06:28

So, but some, a couple of the things we can see. Remember, remembering that these letters are ad hoc pastoring, and theologizing, he's still trying to put words to things in these new and different settings that will click, that will be useful to people in understanding what does it mean to have the mind of Christ in you, for instance. And so, he's, one thing is divisions. There's divisions and some conflict, probably between two pretty prominent leaders within the church there. And the other thing is, and this kind of hark back to Corinthians, is that there appears to be some people who, who think they're better than other people, and may be more self-interest there. And he, but he did, he's pretty gentle in drawing attention to that this isn't the way that you follow Christ. We'll look at that a little bit, too.

Karin Peter 07:31

Okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 07:32

So, this, this letter is addressed to the church in Philippi, and get a little contextual information here. So, Philippi is a city, it was the, the end of the line on a Roman highway called the Via Egnatia, the Egnatian Way, that went across Macedonia. And so, it's, it's on the east end of the highway. Some parts of that road still exist, by the way, because the state of Missouri didn't build them, right? The Roman Empire built them, and so...

Karin Peter 08:02

Their infrastructure was solid, the Roman Empire. Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 08:06

So, so, Philippi is at the far east end of that, and then the port city is Neapolis. According to Luke's catalogue of Paul's travels, in what Luke would refer to as his second missionary journey, this, this is the first Christian community Paul establishes in continental Europe. And he, you know, he crosses over to Neapolis and goes to Philippi, a major city. And Philippi also was a retirement city for Roman soldiers, ex-Roman soldiers, so it has a lot of Roman-ness in it. So, he establishes this community there. It's kind of a strategic location really, but then, you know, moves on in his missionary travels. But it's evident from the letter that he was in fairly regular contact with them, and that they, they really had a relationship quite different from Paul's relationship with the Galatians, or even the Corinthians, so that, there's this this a sense of warmth in the relationship. So, Paul identifies himself in Timothy as the author. That doesn't necessarily mean Timothy was writing with him, but, but often what Paul is trying to do when he writes these letters is indicate to the readers that, that it's not just Paul making stuff up, that it's coming out of a community.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:28

And it's not just Paul who's ministering...

Tony Chvala-Smith 9:31

Right.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 09:31

...but that this is a team effort in all these places that they go to.

Karin Peter 09:36

So, one of the equivalents we could talk about that is when you read a resource, or even when I'm writing a resource, I would write "we", even in emails, to my, to people on a team with me. "We should look at...", or "We could try..." even though I could very well say, "I would like us to..." whatever, but I don't. I use "we" language because we're in this together. He's doing that here.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 10:02

Yup.

Tony Chvala-Smith 10:03

Paul, it's estimated that Paul has a kind of a, we'll call it a team of perhaps as many as 40 people, of different ethnicities and of both genders, in terms of gender constructs in the ancient world. And so that's quite remarkable when you think about it. So, he's not just, Paul is not a lone duck or loose cannon, right. He's, he has a community that he works with and is responsible to. So, Charmaine mentioned this earlier that scholars have pondered whether this letter is a single letter, or whether an editor has stitched together two or three fragments of a Pauline letter. The only internal evidence for that is a kind of abrupt change of tone when you get to chapter three. I think you always have to remember that these letters were not, these letters were brought to a community by a delegate who represented Paul, who is going to read and talk them through. So, changes of tone may not necessarily indicate anything. It, it may mean that, that the, the person who's presenting the content to the gathered community is supposed to get more serious here or something like that. The other thing is that, in the mid-second century, there's a bishop in Asia Minor named Polycarp, we have his writings, and Polycarp, wrote a letter to the Philippians, and in that letter refers to letters they had. It's not clear whether that means the Philippians in the second century had a bunch of Paul's letters, like a collection of them, or whether they had more than one letter he wrote to them. But in any case, I think most scholars currently would say, you can read Philippians as a single unified letter. You don't have to posit two or three letters stitched together.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 11:40

Right. And I think that's another piece to remember about these letters is that they were not usually written in one sitting, you know, so it's not like, you know, you have one train of thought, and you're going to end with, "Sincerely yours", but that these are intended to address specific issues. And so, one day they might have dealt with, what does it mean to be a disciple of Christ? And the next day is, okay, so here's the real, on the ground issues that we're going to need to deal with. And so, you know, I think that's a, that this letter writing was a time consuming, and costly process.

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:18

And by analogy, Karin, imagine if you or I started a letter in the evening, and then put it, put it aside, and then in the morning we went back to the letter and tried to start writing in it again without coffee.

Karin Peter 12:33

Well, it depends on the letter. If I was mad before I went to sleep, I probably cooled off by morning, so the letter is going to change anyway. But I can't even imagine writing a letter without coffee. So, maybe...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:44

Or if you, if you didn't sleep all night worrying about it, then when you get...

Tony Chvala-Smith 12:49

So, we may, we may not know how to account for the abrupt change of tone in a letter, but we, you don't necessarily have to assume that, that it's being stuck together.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 12:59

A separate letter.

Karin Peter 12:59

Okay.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:00

One of the things that's cool about this letter is if you read it carefully, you can figure out what's going on behind the scenes, and trying to figure out the story behind a letter in the New Testament is really helpful to interpreting it. And so, one of the, you can figure this out pretty clearly. So, Paul is imprisoned, the location we'll get to in a minute, that's complicated.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:18

Yeah.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:19

Paul...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:19

Let's keep that kind of brief if we can.

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:21

Yeah. Paul is imprisoned and the Philippians hear that he's imprisoned and they send Epaphroditis, one of their number, to him with a gift of money, because in the Roman world, commonly when you were imprisoned, you had to pay for it yourself. So, Epaphroditis comes from Philippi to wherever Paul is with money to support Paul in prison, and then Epaphroditis becomes so sick he almost dies, but the news gets back to the Philippians of his, his gravely ill condition. And so then...

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 13:52

And they're worried and they're fretting over, oh my gosh, what's happening with Epaphroditis?

Tony Chvala-Smith 13:58

And then then Epaphroditis recovers and here's that the Philippians we're worried. And so he's now ready to take this letter that Paul's written back to them and say no, no, don't worry, I'm alive. I'm well. And also to take this letter has Paul's thank you to the Philippians for their for their giving and then Paul indicates that he's planning to come with Timothy or to send Timothy soon, and then then come himself. So it's an interesting exchange. It's going back and forth here, but then that brings up the question Where is where is he in prison? Traditional view was Rome. The problem with Rome is that from Rome to Philippi, land, sea land eight months, probably one way and there's too much coming and going between Paul and Philippians to warrant that. Another possibility has been his imprisonment in Caesarea that's mentioned in Acts but again, it's the distance, the timing and so on. Doesn't doesn't quite quite fit. A lot of scholars have settled on that he's there. It's an imprisonment we don't otherwise know about in Ephesus, because Paul does mention some really deep struggles he had in the city of Ephesus. And we know he was there and you know, we know he and Timothy were there. And Raymond Brown estimates that a trip from from Ephesus to Philippi would take less than 10 days. So seven to nine days. So that would account for the coming and going.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 15:15

There could be a two week turnaround. (Right.)

Tony Chvala-Smith 15:18

So this also affects the date if it was if this letter was written. During an Ephesian prison, imprisonment, it's more like in the middle of Paul's ministry in the 50s, like 50s 678, somewhere somewhere in there. If it was from Rome, then it has to be quite late, like 61 to 63. But I think current scholarship has sort of settled on Ephesus as the best location for this simply to account for all the the comings and goings. So it's a little interesting background piece to it. (Yeah.) So, um, we've kind of covered in place and time, time date. And, and we've mentioned the, his loving relationships with the community. The basic issues that come up in this letter, there's one thing is that there's some internal strife within the community. And Paul mentions two women leaders by name, Euodia and Syntyche.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 16:13

And he calls them co-workers, as Tony was talking about the "co" being used quite a lot. But he's quite concerned. And he's actually asking that the person who's reading this letter who's brought this letter to them, and is probably reading and interpreting it for the congregation, that, that he work at bringing reconciliation between these two leaders. And lots of scholars say, you know, the mention of these two leaders and the fact that whatever their conflict is, is disrupting the whole is probably that these two leaders are our leaders of house churches. And again, when we're thinking about the church, that's all it is, is little house churches that may occasionally meet together in one, one place, but if in within the city of Philippi, the leaders of a couple of house churches are in conflict with each other, then that's going to be a disruptive, you know, undertone. And so he's that's the place where there's division, and it's it's mentioned in the beginning of the second chapter, but then, specifically, in the fourth chapter at the start of the fourth chapter. Yeah. And so, and we've been encouraging people to use the Fant book on the Introduction to the Bible. And this is one, there might be one other place, but this is the one that the only place that I really have an issue with their wording of things. And it's, it's so patronizing,

Karin Peter 16:15

Wait, whose wording of things?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 17:44

In Fant. In Fant as they're explaining what's happening in the in Philippi and the church. And they, they say, well, there's a couple of women who are bickering. And it's just like, Ohhhh....

Karin Peter 17:56

They're just downplaying the contributions of women and their leadership in the church. And now I'm feeling pissy!

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:06

Well, it's dismissive language. It's somehow Oh, women bicker (cat fight) but men have serious conversations. (Right) So, but that's one of the very few things in that, that book that, you know, somebody's attitude came through there. And,

Karin Peter 18:24

When was that written again?

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:27

The second edition is what 2001?

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:29

Yeah, okay. I'm gonna extend a little bit of grace, not very much,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:34

More generous of you,

Tony Chvala-Smith 18:35

By guys way older than me, Karin.

Karin Peter 18:37

Okay. Because I'm kind of like, you want to see bickering? I'll show you some bickering.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 18:45

But I think this is one of those places that you need to read carefully. And because otherwise, you can do that you can dismiss it. "Oh, well, there's just some, you know, some little gossip or power struggle, you know, power struggle." But Paul thinks this is an issue, because these are leaders, he calls them co-workers of mine, and co- leaders of this congregation. So I think that's, that's important just to get that bit of background.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:15

And if we, if we take that and go back to the start of the letter, Paul addresses the letter to the church and in in Philippi, and its bishops and deacons. Okay, so now, be careful here. Don't read back "office." This is the first generation,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 19:32

These are functions.

Tony Chvala-Smith 19:33

Right. It's overseers and servants, right. But he separates them out to the church in Philippi. With its overseers and servants, that indicates that if he's going to name Euodia and Syntyche and want this conflict somehow to be reconciled, there they are bishops and deacons. They are they are among the leaders of these communities. So I think that's just an important side note. There were women leaders in Paul's churches in the first generation, that's very important for us to keep keep on the radar. So other issues and letter chapter three he deals with, you know what we use the term Judaizing opposition, meaning that it's very possible that like in Galatia, it's people who have come, who's who say, hey, Philippians, we have a better way, you're not fully Christian yet, you Gentiles. You need to be circumcised. And and Paul totally calls that out in in chapter three, as a real Jew, who who can trace his pedigree and who is who identifies that he was a Pharisee. I mean, he he says, No, don't don't do that. Right. So that's, that's an important part in chapter three.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 20:51

And that would also maybe help us to date it earlier. And at Ephesus is that this is a pre-emptive warning, rather than an after-the-fact. "What were you thinking?" Because they've because they have given in, so that.

Tony Chvala-Smith 21:07

Absolutely, yeah. Another issue in the letter is help, trying to help the church imagine a future without Paul. So that's in chapter one, where Charmaine mentions that, you know, he's, he's in prison, he's, he believes he could be executed, he believes he could die. And, and yet, in chapter one he's trying to lay out that, it's really interesting, God will see this work through without me is a kind of a way to put what's going on in chapter one, whether with me, without me God will see this work through. So he's trying to get them to think about beyond beyond Paul, which is, I mean, actually, that's what a good leader would do you always, how do you how do you replace yourself, right? And then something we'll spend more time on is that he another issue, it's not an issue, it's where he centers, he centers, the centers the letter, but then also centers, tries to center the Christian life on imitating Christ's own self-emptying. And we'll we'll come to that

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:11

Self-emptying of...

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:13

Christ, Christ, who was in the form of God, empties himself of all privilege and power and takes on human form, and suffers and even dies on on, dies on the Roman version of the electric chair. I guess it's in chapter two. It's a marvelous hymn actually. And so,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 22:32

And becomes a slave. And I think that's really profound language in, in this culture.

Tony Chvala-Smith 22:38

And so what Paul's trying to do in this whole, whole letter is help the readers keep rethinking their their Christian lives in terms of the image of Christ as one who, who self-abdicates. Right, who's who self-empties, who deposes himself in order to be there within for others. That's, that's the heart of the Christian ethic Paul is trying to uphold here. So those are some of the things going on in this very short, but very full and amazing letter that's quite, quite, it's quite a delight to read. It's an upper after you've read Galatians.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:17

Unless you like being angry, and then you go back to Galatians.

Karin Peter 23:21

Well, there are days where that may be.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 23:25

So the Explore part and start with any questions or observations that you might have, Karin.

Karin Peter 23:32

So I did, I did have one that caught my, my attention. And when I was reading about Philippians, a lot of the language about there's a lot of discourse about Paul's giftedness, with language and the tone of the letter and his compassion for the people, etc, etc. But then, let's see, I was reading a piece by Aquiles Ernesto Martinez, who is a Bible scholar who immigrated to the US from Venezuela. So he's looking at it from his cultural perspective. And he names that in the piece that I'm going to share. And I gather from his piece that he's concerned about the same kind of things that we've talked about multiple times, which is when we read Paul's letters, we can't, we can't just translate it to our context. So I'll share with you what he says. And then I have a question about it at the end, okay. He says that Paul attacks some unknown Jewish adversaries, and raises questions about religious and civil discourse in a multi ethnic context. He counteracts people who insist on having Gentile convert circumcised, so we've talked about that, denouncing the practice as mutilation and calls it's advocates, dogs, evil workers and enemies of the cross of Christ and discounts several aspects of his own Jewish pedigree as rubbish. So those are all little quotes out of the letter. So here's here's where it caught my attention, we can understand Paul as shaming opponents in the situation of conflict and irreconcilable ideological differences. Okay, we can understand him in that way if we want to. But in a contemporary context of boundary crossing, pluralism and respect for others, do we think such rhetoric is appropriate for constructing religious and especially Christian identity? And I thought that was really interesting in our content, our current context where there's a lot of name calling, and a lot of othering, and et cetera, et cetera. So how do we take care when using Paul's letters? How do we, how do we not fall into that?

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 26:04

So there's a couple ways I would start to address this, and I wouldn't necessarily address it, all the issue all the sides of it, but the first one is that it the, the dogs are coming from outside. And so he is for warning them, of what the consequences are of if they take on the things that they're teaching. And so there's, it's not so much about valuing everybody's ideas who are in the congregation, but warning them about something that will dilute what they believe in it. And related to that, then the other side of it is, as far as identity, this group does not have a deeply established Christian identity, yet, they're just growing their children in their faith. And so in that case, there is this need to I don't know if I'd say protect, but to give them a place where it's safe to grow in their faith, what's while still giving them room to question it, because the questioning is the growing right, but but to give them a safe place, where these things that there are learning can take root, so that then they they are confident in what they believe, and that this belief can change, but it won't be extinguished. So I would say that that's one of the dynamics and that, you know, and I would say that that's even true today is that you want to give people the basics, you want to if they're learning how to swim, you want to teach them how to do the basic strokes before they start doing synchronized swimming, and synchronized swimming being a symbol for taking in all kinds of different dance and choreography and all of these things. But first of all, they need to know how to breathe, and how to do so, so until they have that, then they can't branch out into these other ways or accept that other people have other ways of seeing things. But it's pretty clear in almost all of Paul's letters, that within the community, there is not uniformity of ideas and belief that they're all there, that people are all in different stages of encountering Christianity, trying to figure out what it's going to cost them, where they have, how much they want to take it in, and live in this alternate kind of way of being in their culture. So it's, it's that's already there, that the mix of ideas is already there. And what Paul is

concerned about is whether or not they're going to get a good start, they'll have deep roots, that then they can diversify as they go.

Tony Chvala-Smith 29:07

So I'm just gonna piggyback on that. And then what the commentator said, when I follow what the commentator is arguing in terms of application. But here's, here's one little issue, then that's related to what Charmaine is saying, Paul, find a form communities will use the word communities of inclusion where there are no higher lower inside outside where there's no, you know, there's the ethnically better to be in the ethnically worse to be Paul's trying to form communities of inclusion. And whoever these dogs are, they're trying to come back in and forming communities of exclusion. And so this is always this is always a this is a perennial challenge in Christian faith. How do you how do you make space for the freedom that comes in Christ, but also create boundaries that protect the freedom you have in Christ. And so while indeed we do, we have to be careful not to take Paul's rhetoric and just willy nilly apply it to, you know, to Hindus and Buddhists. And that's, that's totally inappropriate usage. But in terms of the community itself, we want to have, we want to create communities that do it, what Paul's communities did that have boundaries, that protecting inclusion, and that, that call out exclusion. That's what Paul was doing. So this is another another way to kind of look at that. And actually, the letter itself gives us a way, a way to reframe what the commentator was saying, and that's in chapter two, about the whole business of self emptying. I think so.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 30:43

Before, yeah, it shall be the experience part.

Karin Peter 30:47

But it really brings us back to looking at the texts sufficiently to establish some context.

Tony Chvala-Smith 30:53

Yeah, exactly. Should we take a look at this piece from chapter two. And what we'll offer right now, we're still in Explorer mode will offer right now is just give some analysis of this passage, but then we're going to come back to it later. So in a different vein, so scholars for decades and decades have identified this passage as poetic, and is not Paul's usual language, except for one thing he added to it. And it was what we have here is an early Christian hymn. Most scholars who studied it, even though it's in Greek would say there may have been an Aramaic precursor to it. So that means that this hymn comes from the earliest, earliest Christian community, which in poetic language is trying to, to praise, praise what has happened in Christ, and to just and to describe it, but in poetry. And so it starts out let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God that we're forming with there's is more Fae, we get more from the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited the Greek word behind exploit, there's a word that means clutch and grab onto. So in other words, thus far in the hymn, Christ was, you can read it as Christ was in the beginning with God fully equal with God, and yet did not, did not, did not try to clutch it, his deity is divinity, but emptied Himself poured himself out, taking on the form of a slave, in other words, becoming, becoming the most vulnerable and marginalized in the Roman Empire. Being born in human likeness, and being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death. And this is a point in the Greek poetry, where it looks like Paul has added the phrase, even death on a cross, right,

so, so the one who was exalted as divine has now become not only human, emptied Himself and become human, but has even gone further become a slave and even gone further been publicly executed,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 33:08

and probably in between the being a slave and being executed as being despised. Yeah, I think that's why his own followers.

Tony Chvala-Smith 33:19

So this hit this, this hymn starts with an image of dissent. And then notice where it goes next. Therefore, God has highly exalted Him, if you could translate it from Greek as "super exalt". So other words, bringing him up even higher than he was before. Ie This is poetic language about the resurrection, and gave him the name that is above every name. Well, for for, for Jewish people, the name that is above every name is the unspeakable name of God in the Old Testament. Even the name is above it, so that the name of Jesus every knee should bend and every in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord Kiryas, in Greek, so commonly, that the divine name in Greek speaking synagogues, which was never, never pronounced, but you would you can just insert the word Kiryas, Lord, in place of it, to the glory of God, God the Father. So in other words, there's, there's the descent, and then the super exultation. And so, for Paul, this, this is a this is a hymn that he presumes the Philippians know and sing or chant it, it must have been sung or chanted by varieties of Christian communities. In fact, Charmaine has mentioned before that that letter that comes from a Roman governor, and in plenty who is writing to the Emperor Trajan, around the 100 or so, saying, I got these people who are Christians, what are we supposed to do with them? I, I explored them and I discovered that it's really kind of a harmless superstition, really, they, they they sing, they sing a hymn to Christ as to a god And, and so it's very possible this this is that hymn and that this is this hymn was sung sung or chanted widely in early Christian communities. So Paul assumes familiarity with it. Paul believes that this hymn captures the essence of the we'll call it the Christ event. And for him, it also then gives the gives the ethical mooring points for the community. Right, so this is where theology or Christology and ethics link.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 35:33

So that's placed in I think, a really pivotal place within this book. It's right in the middle, basically. And, and I think that says a lot, because it's saying, what we're going to revolve around here is who is Christ. And the advice and the admonitions and things like that follow, we keep coming back to this is about Christ. You know, it's not about Paul, because even in that place that you've mentioned, where he kind of d values, some of his Jewish background, he does it because he says, These things which would have made me in in the upper crust of Jewish society, I count as nothing compared to what it is that I found in Christ, it's rubbish compared to what this is that I found in Christ. And so, you know, again, that's, it's like, he's reminding them what this is all about, you know, and all the things that the thanking, and all the generosity that they've provided for him, is he would see in line with, they're trying to live out this Christ, follow this image of Christ. And everything that follows is drawing from this image of Christ,

Tony Chvala-Smith 36:58

You can find it everywhere. So in the start of the letter, you know, there's there's there are there are Christian preachers who are glad I'm in prison, you know, cuz it's a chance for them to get ahead or something. But Paul's like, whatever, I don't care, as long as Christ is preached, I'm fine. That's an example of self emptying. If Pafford itis emptied Himself, by risking his life to come to Paul, he wants God and since the key to want some way, the way forward for them is through mutual self emptying, and, and so then the one that Charmaine mentioned in chapter three, so it's like this, this, it's, it's so cool, how in this letter, who Christ is, and how we are to live, are linked in the closest possible way, and linked around that word, to empty.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 37:48

And I think if you can, I'm just so glad this got included in this letter, because it really gives you, if you ever want to figure out who Paul was, what's motivating him, this is it. This the centrality of Christ is because of this, about who Jesus is, what he did, and what kind of an example he is, as well as you know, the varying ideas, of Silva of salvation, Jesus's salvation, that are just the still emerging and still haven't quite found words that are consistent in this time period. But if you want to a good sense of Paul's impulse, it comes from here.

Tony Chvala-Smith 38:31

And this by the way, too, in my view, that this was hymn and Paul's interpretation of it in the letter gives us a better way in the contemporary world, to understand how to relate to world religions, and, and those who are different from from Christians and different cultures and so on. And what's the primary, the primary at the heart of the Christian ethic has to be some kind of sense of humility, and a willingness to let go, and not cling, not grasp, but empty. Whatever, whatever one thinks of, of one's religion oneself, you, you have to be able to let go of that in a way in order to get it back and,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 39:16

and beyond that, there's this sense that you have to be willing to serve, to be for the least. And that's what that's what demonstrates the power that the God has the in Jesus is being willing to serve others so they can see what it is that God is offering in Christ. And so that again, works well for interfaith and even ecumenical kinds of conversations. Are we willing to serve those who may even dismiss us? You know, as as Christians see us as not saying, Are we willing to serve them so that the reality of Christ has room.

Tony Chvala-Smith 40:06

And once again, it's important to say that language and concepts can always be misused and used to abuse people. And so one one would have to be careful even with this image, not to say, oh, women should be servants. Right? Right. In other words, you could turn this magnificent hymn and what Paul sees as ethic for the whole community, you could turn it into a kind of bizarre justification for the subjugation of women or there's that, that would be totally contrary to but but once again, you have to pay attention to what you're doing with language. And if you are in the Spirit of the language, right, and the Spirit here of this, of this hymn would never sustain that, especially in the letter where Paul's referring to women as his co workers, or bishops and deacons.

Karin Peter 40:53

So, yeah, well, I think it also has the opportunity to equalize. So I'm thinking about the two leaders, he names bishops and deacons was one of Bishop and was one an overseer and one a servant, which would be you know, a place of conflict as well. If they both empty themselves, now they're on the same level, regardless of where they started. So it's a an equalizer of status, I guess, within the community.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:25

And in the Roman world, status markers were so important and sought after my gosh,

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 41:34

because they they solidified your value within the society.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:40

But Paul thinks that in Christ all those status markers have been erased. Right, now as apostle, he will sometimes pull that on you if you if,

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:51

you cross him.

Karin Peter 41:55

like all good apostles would do so if you're out there apostles listening.

Tony Chvala-Smith 41:59

If you want to reintroduce hierarchical categories, which the Galatians do which the Corinthians Do if you want to reintroduce upper lower better, worser, Paul, Paul's gonna be all over you for that as your patron. But when when the relationship between Paul and his readers is friendly, loving solid, he doesn't go there, right? Not at all he, he wants, he really thinks Christian community should be like this. And there's a lesson, there's a lesson in that if you want to transpose it further into Community of Christ. There's a lesson there about priesthood and not priesthood. These are functions, not status markers. And so if you if you turn those into status markers, you're totally missing the point of what it is, but also totally missing the point of what Paul would understand ministry to be about per this letter.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 42:55

Any other questions?

Karin Peter 42:57

Nope. That was that was my main question. Philippians is a pretty easy read.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 43:04

quite enjoyable.

Karin Peter 43:06

When you go through it. I did just want to make a note for the for our listeners have a common mishap that happens when you're writing the word Philippians. And that is that it's not Philip Ian's it's one L two

peas. And I see that a lot in people when people write Philippians. They use two L's one p so it's kind of like revelation as no S and Philippians has one L so just FYI, you got you got to

Tony Chvala-Smith 43:39

You got to think think Greek here because the name Philip in Greek Philippos "Horselover" is what it means in Greek. So 'íppos in Greek Greek is a horse and it has to two p's.

Karin Peter 43:55

Excellent horse lover, lover.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:03

Anything else Tony that you want to add?

Tony Chvala-Smith 44:04

I think we've we've covered kind of some of the main issues and done some exploring the letter. Now it's time to experience. And just

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 44:10

before we go into the experience part, just to remind people that our goal in this part of our podcast is to approach the Scripture by considering how it's highlights. It highlights the experience of real people, whether that's the writer, whether that's the recipient, whether it maybe connect with our own lives with real the realness there. And so we will see if something in their reality can speak to ours today. So we're going to approach the Scripture as human authored writings that are heavily flavored by their worldview, culture, language, blind spots, their own personal situations. And because we do not see Scripture as As God dictated words, but as the author's attempt to write down their experience of God, at work in the world and their time as they best understand it. And so we need to just be aware that their cultural norms are not the things that we should be trying to take on. But what are the things that they're pointing to that are beyond that are timeless. And so we can't determine if a scripture is valuable by whether or not it says exactly what we would say today, you know, sometimes that's our measure, right is, well, I wouldn't say that. And it's like, well, this is 2000 years ago, of course, they wouldn't say what we would say because their world is completely different. But what things do cross that time period that can help us connect to the God that they point to and the God that we we yearn for so. So the purpose of Scripture is to give us a window into someone else's relationship with God, and to see what might be useful to us in our own relationship with God. And with that, we're gonna go to our scripture, and I'll just scroll down here. And the passage that this, the early Christian hymn, passage that I'm going to be looking at is the one that comes just before it. So this is what setting us up for that particular scripture. And I'm just gonna go ahead and read it out loud, and we'll come back to it in bits and pieces, so you don't get it all the first time, don't worry. So Philippians 2:1-5. If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete, Paul is saying, Be of the same mind, having the same love being in full accord and of one mind. And then he has these little other pieces that adds on. Do nothing from selfish ambition and conceit, but in humility, regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. And I would suggest there that when it says "others", it's also implying quite strongly community. Let the same mind be in you, that was in Christ

Jesus, which is the beginning of what the hymn that Tony was, was looking at earlier. So this is you can see now how it's kind of setting up the, the recital of this hymn that people are familiar with. He's He's preparing them for it, but he's also helping them to see what's happening in their own context in their own congregation. So where I'd like to go with this is first to acknowledge that this is a passage that sometimes gets misused. I'm not sure if you've ever seen it. But I've seen this passage used or parts of it, to shame a group into uniformity. Or to suggest that, that everyone must think the same way or believe the same way. And for people who use this in that way, they usually insinuate, or come right out loud and say, oh, yeah, you need to think like me, you know. And then we can all be uniform, and we can be a one mind in Christ. So that's, that's one of the ways I've seen it misused. Another thing that is done in this passage is to separate out the statements and three, four, and five, or three and four, especially, where people will just say, do nothing from selfish ambition, or conceit, and humility, regard others as better than yourselves.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 48:58

Let each of you look not to your own interests, but the interests of others. And when they do that, they're not tying it to the top part, which is that these are what follow as you make room for those other pieces up above, and they really need to go together. Because those three and four especially can be really used, especially with the marginalized, to keep them in their place. When there's a hierarchy or a patriarchy. It's a it's a way to wield scripture, to tell people that they need to be more humble, they need to not challenge leaders. They they need to be more interested in their leaders security or the or the financial well being at times, then have their own needs for survival. So I just want to note that these do get misused. Also, I would note that the people who tend to you Use these verses and throw them around, are usually already securely ensconced in the power structures. And they are not in my experience really good examples of keeping their ambition or their conceit or their self interest in check. And that's just something to ask yourself when you see people misusing any part of this passage. So I think there are two ways of reading this passage that are both really constructive. And both give a lot of room. I'm really glad you asked your question earlier, Karin, both assume that individuals can think and act differently, and still be one in mind with Christ. And so there's a couple of ways. The ways I'm going to describe it is a cookie recipe. So you look at those ingredients in the one, one and two, saying, if you have these ingredients, encouragement, and you're encouraging each other in Christ, you're loving, accepting, you share in the Spirit, you have compassion and sympathy. Well, then if you have those ingredients, you can make a darn good cookie that's going to really satisfy your community and help them to grow. You will have the mind of Christ at work in your midst if you're if you have these ingredients. And then some of these ingredients the Spirit has already given us and some of them are ones that we have to generate or grow in our midst. But they do not require us to all be robots with the same programming, or way of thinking, or even our same way of acting in the world. These are ingredients and they're there, you've got your in the mind of Christ. A second way of looking at this passage is as an ongoing work in progress. I really want you to focus on one and two, you will notice that it says if there is any encouragement, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, then there's something happening. And you are one in your in one mind in Christ simply because you are trying to make room for the attributes that are listed, you may not be good at them. Probably most of us are not naturally good at all of those things, or maybe even any of them. But if they are always before us, and we want to spirit's help in growing them in our community, then we are already in the mind of Christ, we already have the same mind in Christ. So in this one a

good synonym for mind is disposition. Basically, your shared yearning, to let Christ disposition, have room in you by encouraging others in their efforts to know and follow Christ, offering constellation eighth see that as comfort or support to others, listening together for the Spirit's voice, practicing compassion, and simply notice it's practicing. It's not we got that down, and now we can move on to something else. And that and all of these things, then attune you to Christ already. Well, I'm where Christ is already in your community. And it allows his mind to be found in ours.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 53:49

And both individually and as a group. And, and this is really interesting, because we get to find Christ mindedness, especially when we are struggling to find harmony in the group. So the struggle is not failure. It's its success. Because it's a sign that Christ is actively reshaping us. And so I think that's a another helpful way of in either of these models that you can see that different views on a lot of different things are not required. And maybe even you could belong to different political parties. But the fact is that if your core is centered in Christ, and that you're trying to make these make room for these things in your life and your life together, if you're trying to live like Christ, basically, it means you are of the same mind. So, and you'll notice that those two statements, the verses three and four, are directly related to the first two as I mentioned earlier, and I would say that those things in three and four are the things we get to choose to turn down. Some of these are survival kinds of things that we have in our lives, but they can become our gods, they can become all encompassing. And so these are the things we get, we can figure out how do we want to turn down our selfish ambition or conceit? How do we want to turn down that desire that many of us have to know that we're better than somebody? But how do we turn that down, because when that's turned up, those things in the verses one to two are really hard to make room for. And then the last is connected to, to the ones in three, to not look just to your own interest, but to the interests of others. But again, you can't do those, unless you've turned down your self interest and decided that there's something else that you need. So only when we shift our attention and caring to others, and we can be so full of ourselves. Even when we hate ourselves, we're still the main focus, it's still taking up the whole viewfinder. There's no There's no room for other people's realities. And sometimes our self interest, being interested in ourselves is really convenient. Because it can make us oblivious to the injustice of the world around us, especially those that we may have some that we may be contributing to in some way. And so I think that's why some people do go to the letting your own things become the whole focus is because it's just really a lot easier to block out those uncomfortable realities, that we might be able to do something about, by the way. So we need to don't turn down our self interest, so that the interest of what's good for community or creation, and other individuals can have some space. I think one of the things the the pandemic has helped a lot of us see is how much our self interest can completely blind us, to others needs and the realities of others. And we can go back to that self interest as an excuse for not having compassion or being concerned about the health or welfare of others. So little bit of a sermon on this passage, but it's leading us into the questions I would like you to consider taking with you. So the the goal of all of these, this passage is to invite us to Let Christ be our center together, not just individually, though that's there, but also together as a community. And so all through my notes, here's some questions.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 58:12

Think of a group or congregation that you've been part of which of these attributes were or are present there. And there's the encouraging others in their efforts to know and follow Christ, offering consolation

to others listening together for the Spirit's voice, practicing compassion and sympathy for each other. And the reason that I wanted to bring that out is that sometimes, if we're in a bad situation with a congregation or with a group, we may not recognize that some of those things are there, and that they may just need some growing, they might need some encouragement to, to let those have more room. And so how might they be grown? And then, for us ourselves, it's hard to imagine living in a completely different way. And this is part of Paul's message to the Philippians. They're going from most of them are Gentiles, maybe all of them. And they may have some, some experience with Judaism. But for the most part, they're coming from Gentile culture. And they don't know how to be this Christian thing. And so that's where you see Paul, saying, well, use me as an example. You don't have other examples around you use me or use our team, as an example. So I want you to think about who do I know, that has been a good example of one or more of these dispositions, these ways of having the mind of Christ in you, and then take a moment to say which of these if any, is calling to me to incorporate more fully to the, ask the Spirit to help give space in me? So there's a first run at this And then, in order to make room for the mind of Christ in me, which of these tendencies do I want to turn down? And maybe getting to the one place is the hardest part, but ambitions, plans that only benefit me, self assurance that I'm always right. Desire to think of myself as better than others, or focus on my own interests. Which of these? Do I want to turn down? So there's room for this other thing that being centered on Christ makes possible, and then the ouch question. At least I think it's an ouch question. I always have to have at least one. And then this goes back to making self interest, our whole our whole view, whose interests have I been ignoring? In society, in my family, in the groups or congregations I'm part of. And that's kind of self explanatory. We sometimes are actively ignoring these things, sometimes passively. But almost always a good question to ask ourselves.

Karin Peter 1:01:35

Charmaine, when you were walking us through this scripture, what came to mind and a lot of our listeners, were unfamiliar with this until they encountered Community of Christ more deeply. And that is what we call faithful disagreement, which is a way to be unified in Christ, even with diverse opinions and perspectives and ideas, but to, to focus on what keeps us as community in the blessings of community, even in the midst of all of that diversity that we have. So if you are unfamiliar with that, the Faithful Disagreements statement is somewhere on Community of Christ's web page. And maybe I can get get the editors or Brittany to post a link to that when we upload this episode so that people can find that and read that because that's a real hallmark of Community of Christ on how we handle this kind of discord together.

Charmaine Chvala-Smith 1:02:41

There's effort to say, Oh, of course, we're going to have we're going to be in different places, but it doesn't mean that Christ isn't at work or Christ isn't calling us forward together. Yeah. I'm so glad you thought of that.

Karin Peter 1:02:56

Okay, so with that, and you know, you are really good for the ouch questions. germane I always wait to see which one's going to be most painful. I've got my own. I got my own choice out of your multiple choice question there. But are there any last thoughts or comments you want to make about this letter to the Philippines? Before we close it?

Tony Chvala-Smith 1:03:20

I think, yes, a favorite passage of mine. That's right in chapter one. That is totally applicable to Community of Christ, right now. And when I quote this passage, keep in mind that it's that it was written by a guy who thought he might die before he got to see everything fulfilled. And it's that passage in chapter one, verse six, where Paul says, I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion, ie God, that God who began a good work among you will bring it to completion. That passage gives me hope.

Karin Peter 1:04:02

Yeah, absolutely. Very much a part of the Restoration tradition, as well. Okay, so I found something I wanted to close with that I thought Paul might approve of, including his letter to the Philippians. It actually comes from Jan Richardson, who allows people to use her work as long as you say where you got it. So this is a portion of a poem. Oh god of wisdom. We come and it's out her for her book in wisdoms path, found this. I'm just going to read the last stanza. "And yet to your table, we come hungry and for your bread. We come thirsting for your wine, we come singing your song in every language, speaking your name in every tongue in conflict and income. communion in discord and in desire. We come, oh god of wisdom, we come." So Paul had a hymn or a poem in the middle of Philippians. So we'll close with Richardson's words that are very hymn like as well. So thank you Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith, for walking us through Philippians today, our next episode will be first and second, Timothy. So we're going to see where the early church went post, Paul, and have a little discussion about that. That should be interesting. So I hope you join us for that episode of new brew. Until then, I'm Karin Peter. We've been with Tony and Charmaine Chvala-Smith. This is New'Brew. Thanks so much for listening.

Josh Mangelson 1:06:02

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