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Consolation in 2 Cor. 5:1-10

FREDERICK W. DANKER

Commentators, lexicographers, and grammarians, almost by consensus, render ἐφ' ᾧ in 2 Cor. 5:4 in a causal sense, with such variations as "because," "inasmuch as," "in view of the fact that."¹ Exceptional is Margaret Thrall's rendering "on condition that." She paraphrases: "For indeed, we who exist in the physical body groan with weariness. (But, for the Christian, this is a legitimate attitude to our physical existence only on condition that we do not want to be divested of somatic existence altogether, but rather to be further incorporated in the Body of Christ.)"²

¹ See, for example, Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, *The International Critical Commentary* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 148, ἐπὶ τούτῳ ὅτι = *propterea quod*. Hans Windisch, *Der Zweite Korintherbrief*, 9th ed., *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1924), p. 163, "angesichts der Tatsache, dass — ἐπειδή; rejecting "auf Grund wovon, weshalb," sponsored by Hofmann and Godet. Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I—II*, 4th ed., *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1949), p. 120, "weil." C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), p. 132, "almost certainly means *inasmuch as*." Blass-Debrunner, par. 235, 2, "darum dass, weil." Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), III, p. 272, "because." See also his *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965), pp. 128 to 131. Arndt-Gingrich, following Bauer, "for this reason that, because."

² Margaret E. Thrall, *Greek Particles in the New Testament*, "New Testament Tools and

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The paraphrase is obscure, but the reminder that Paul in this passage may be using ἐφ' ᾧ in the old classical sense of contractual terms puts us on the right track toward the explication of a difficult passage and its context.

The construction ἐφ' ᾧ is a recurring idiom in Herodotus and Polybius, as well as in the commercial texts of the Koine period.³ In the historians the phrase introduces the terms under which a treaty or an agreement is made. In a statement of commercial obligation it introduces the stipulations under which goods will be exchanged or duties performed. The emphasis placed on the words οὐ θέλομεν encourages the view that Paul has a contractual agreement in mind. He is willing to entertain the possibility before him, provided that certain conditions are met. The question is: What is being demanded of the apostle from the partner, who in this case must be God? The answer is provided in 5:1: his earthly house faces the prospect of dissolution, and 4:7-18 suggests that the apostle has death in mind.

Studies," III, ed. Bruce M. Metzger (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1962), p. 94.

³ For the papyri, see Edwin Mayser, *Grammatik der griechischen Papyri aus der Ptolemäerzeit*, Bd. II, 1 *Satzlehre* (Berlin und Leipzig: W. de Gruyter, 1926), pp. 214-15. Herod. I, 22, 4; III, 83, 2; V, 82, 3; VI, 65, 1; VII, 153, 3; 158, 5; VIII, 4, 2; Poly. I, 16, 9; 59, 7; III, 42, 6; IV, 29, 7; V, 76, 9-10; VII, 9, 13; VIII, 25, 2; IX, 27, 11; XI, 5, 5; XVIII, 39, 6; XXI, 29, 14; XXII, 7, 3.

However, Paul is willing to agree to the dissolution only on these terms: not merely a putting off of the body, but a putting on of the heavenly covering. His *ἵνα* clause explicates this very clearly: *ἵνα καταποθῆ τὸ θνητὸν ὑπὸ τῆς ζωῆς*, "that the mortal may be swallowed up in life."

Now it is true that even an apostle is scarcely in a position to dictate terms to the Almighty, especially in the face of something so inevitable as death. The bold language is an evident rhetorical device to underline the affirmation of v. 1: "For we know that if our earthly tent is dissolved, we have a habitation from God, a house made without hands, eternal, in the heavens." God is not viewed as a competitor from whom Paul must extort favorable terms. It is the Corinthians, with their distorted eschatological views, who prompt the apostle to express himself in these vigorous terms, for some of them had denied the possibility of a resurrection of the body (1 Cor. 15:12). Furthermore, in the context of our passage Paul defends himself against the charge that he is an inadequate apostle. On the contrary, he asserts, death is at work in him, but thereby the life of Jesus becomes apparent in his mortal body (4:11), and he anticipates that this mortal body will be clothed in something that transcends mortal sight. (4:18—5:1)

But how does the *ἐφ' ᾧ* construction fit into the context of groaning? Part of the answer depends on the correct interpretation of *ἐν τούτῳ* in v. 2. RSV, NEB, and the Jerusalem Bible understand the phrase in reference to the present bodily condition, and v. 4a, which is parallel in thought to vv. 2-3, appears to justify the interpreta-

tion.⁴ However, *ἐν τούτῳ* can also be construed *causally*, in the sense "for this reason" (cf. John 16:30; Acts 24:16; 1 Cor. 4:4).⁵ Indeed, in the absence of a clear antecedent, the first readers would in all probability have so understood it. But does the flow of thought on this interpretation coincide with the intellectual experience of the Hellenistic reader?

A common rhetorical theme in Paul's time was consolation. Seneca's essays on the subject of death are familiar to all, and Greek literature, especially the tragedians, includes the consolation for death through death as one of numerous consolation topics. Death itself can be a boon. Thus Philoctetes laments:

Woe, woe is me
O Death, O Death, how often have I
called,
Day after day, and you could never come!
(Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, ll. 796—98)

Similarly Antigone cries out:

But if I die before my time,
Gain would I call this.
For he who bears such misery as I,
How would he not, by dying, count it
gain? (Sophocles, *Antigone*, ll. 461
—64)

The thought finds an echo in Paul's anguished strain in Phil. 1:21.

Of pertinence for the elucidation of 2 Cor. 5:1-10 is the fact that the groaning or the lamenting is prompted by the contrast between the gain that results from

⁴ Lietzmann translates "in diesem (Leibe sind)," interpreting *καὶ γὰρ οἱ ὄντες ἐν τῷ σκήνει* (v. 4) as Paul's own explanation. Windisch, p. 161, expands with *σκηνώματι*.

⁵ Plummer, pp. 144—45, leans toward the association with *σκήνος* but says "'herein' makes good sense, looking forward to *ἐπιποθοῦντες*."

death and the sufferer's present situation. In Paul's case the groaning is in proportion to the desire for the future blessing, the body equipped for celestial existence. Vv. 3 and 4 expand on this theme. The clause εἰ γε καὶ ἐνδυσάμενοι οὐ γυμνοὶ εὐρεθησόμεθα is an echo of 1 Cor. 15:35-37. As in the latter passage the apostle expresses himself somewhat satirically: "Provided, of course, that we are not found naked having put it on." The mode of expression is a kind of oxymoron.⁶ Investiture naturally excludes nakedness, that is, unrealized potential. The clause, then, is a strong affirmation that he will be clothed. Full maturation versus nakedness.⁷ The

⁶ Cf. Job. 22:6, "Stripped the naked of their clothing." In Eph. 3:2, the words εἰ γε ἠκούσατε κ.τ.λ. do not suggest that the addressees may not have heard of the type of message entrusted to Paul. Rather, the writer aims to say: "I am a bondsman in behalf of the Gentiles. What else could you expect? Surely you could be misinformed about the mission of notorious Paul! But if the news didn't reach you, note what I said earlier in this letter" (cf. 1:9-10). In Eph. 4:21 the point is: "You must excuse me for mentioning this. I am aware that you know it well." Likewise in Col. 1:23, the εἰ γε clause introduces what is to be taken for granted, and the rhetorical form exposes the alternative heresy as scarcely worthy of consideration. In Gal. 3:4 the words εἰ γε καὶ εἰκῆ are highly satirical. Paul says: "You may have something there! Begin in the Spirit and end with the Law, and then what have you got?" In brief, Pauline εἰ γε clauses appeal to what ought to be self-evident, and the clause in 2 Cor. 5:3 does not suggest apprehension on Paul's part.

⁷ Edward E. Ellis argues for an ethical connotation in his article "2 Corinthians v. 1-10 in Pauline Eschatology," *New Testament Studies* VI, 1960, 211-224; see esp. 221. The nakedness in his view is moral exposure at the judgment. Karl Hanhart, in a paper delivered at the Society of Biblical Literature, Dec. 1967, follows Ellis' accent on the ethical dimension, but interprets ἐνδύσασθαι of the "hidden 'life in Christ,' " received now by faith and with a "plus" of glory

heavenly habitation is put on over the mortal body, and the body thereby reaches its anticipated goal. As the seed mentioned in 1 Cor. 15:35 ff. does not reveal the full possibilities of its existence as a seed until it is put into the ground, so the Christian does not attain his maturity until the mortal is covered with the immortal. As life in 1 Cor. 15:36 is realized after death, so in 2 Cor. 5:4 life is held as the prospect after death, to be realized as an endowment at the parousia (cf. 1 Cor. 15:51-54). That the maturation will certainly take place is expressed in v. 5. God is in charge of the entire process and brings it to completion (κατεργασάμενος). In addition, He gives Paul the ἄρραβὼν of the Spirit.

Commentators unanimously overlook the relation of the term ἄρραβὼν to the ἐφ' ᾧ construction. In commercial agreements, one of the cosignatories may include a down payment (ἄρραβὼν) as a guarantee that he will carry out his end of the bargain.⁸ Paul's reason for accepting the agreement mentioned in v. 4, and his basis for the intense longing in his groaning, is the down payment of the Spirit (cf. 1:22; Rom. 8:16, 23). The Spirit already activates his life and will complete His work when death is swallowed up in life, and the body is raised a σῶμα πνευματικόν (1 Cor. 15:44), that is, when it is totally possessed by the Spirit for the fulfillment of the Spirit's purpose.

It is this eschatological expectation that differentiates from non-Christian usage

either at death or at the parousia. Hanhart convincingly defends the apostle against a shift in eschatological position. On the association with 1 Cor. 15, see Lietzmann, p. 117.

⁸ Citations in Mayser, p. 214. See also Paulys *Realencyklopädie*, IV, A, 1 (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1931), s. v., "Symbolaion," col. 1086.

Paul's use of the theme of death—more accurately, in his case, the theme of departure—as a consolatory topic. Nor is it necessary to conclude that Paul is here making a shift from his conviction, expressed in 1 Thessalonians 4, 1 Corinthians 15, and Romans 8, that the Parousia effects the change for the body.⁹ Paul is not arguing for an interim state in which the dead enjoy the benefits guaranteed by the Parousia. What he does say is that he has no fear of death, for he is certain that the heavenly habitation awaits him. The Parousia will bring him to full realization, and his mortal body, like a seed, will reach full maturation and not be found naked.

At the same time death will not place him at a disadvantage. Dead or alive, the full consummation will come. Indeed, those who emphasize that Paul could not be entertaining the view that death is a prospect here actually put Paul into contradiction, while intending to spare him from it. For Paul is at pains in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, Rom. 14:8-9, and 1 Cor. 15:51 to console the bereaved by assuring them that their departed loved ones will not be at a disadvantage. It would be unlikely that the apostle, who exhorted others not to despair in the face of death's reality, should himself reflect anxiety over temporary disembodiment. Far from making a shift in his eschatological position, Paul introduces a consolatory motif that he had not previously employed. Death can even be an

advantage, not because it brings the departed immediately into the benefits of the end of the end-time (this it does not do) but because it effects part of a transition which also those who are living at the time of the Parousia (1 Thess. 4:13-18) must undergo, for all must be changed, since flesh and blood (in their present condition) cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 15:50). If Paul must go out of the body, his consolation is that he will be in a position in which he faces the Lord. This seems to be the point expressed in the combination of ἐνδημεῖν and the preposition πρὸς (2 Cor. 5:8). Disembodiment is no tragedy. It is, at the worst, only temporary, and Christ will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep (1 Thess. 4:14). What is more, the dead rise first (1 Thess. 4:15-17). On the other hand, Paul, while suggesting that after death we will walk by sight and not by faith, does not answer the question how one who is asleep in the Lord could enjoy the advantage expressed in v. 7 (διὰ εἶδους).

Examination of Phil. 3:12 supports the interpretation here presented. The context preceding Phil. 3:12 engages us in thought similar to that in the context of 2 Cor. 5. Paul speaks of his conformity with Christ in death and brings this thought into association with his hope of resurrection. This resurrection is not merely survival after death but a participation in the resurrection life of Christ. But there is a condition introduced by the ἐφ' ᾧ phrase for participation in that life. The condition is that the apostle accept the share of suffering that falls to his lot. This is a consolation both to the apostle and to the Philippians, who are not to be distressed by Paul's suffering. The sufferings are

⁹ Windisch, pp. 157, 172—75 argues that Paul's altered circumstances prompted a change in Paul's eschatological expression. The apostle, according to Windisch, anticipates receipt of his new dwelling at the moment of death, pp. 161—62. See Heinz-Dietrich Wendland's critique *Die Briefe an die Korinther*, 5th ed. *Neues Testament Deutsch*, VII; (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1948), pp. 129—32.

part of the redemptive process. Paul must accept these sufferings if he is to attain the resurrection from the dead, for he must be identified with Christ from beginning to end. Christ Jesus went to glory via the path of ignominy and shame. His apostle must do the same if he is to participate in the ultimate goal. Christ went on to glory through suffering. He who claims to be connected with Christ must do likewise. Only if he accepts the terms of shared suffering, including the possibility of imminent death (cf. 1:20 ff.), will Paul attain his objective. We might therefore translate: "Not as though I had already received it or had already reached my goal, but I go on in the hope of reaching it on those terms under which Christ Jesus first reached me." The stipulation of the agreement whereby Paul is assured of success is identification with Christ in His sufferings. Hence Paul says in Col. 1:24 that he fills up his allotted share of the sufferings of Christ.¹⁰

¹⁰ On other ἐφ' ᾧ construction in Paul, see F. Danker, "Romans 5:12, Sin Under Law," *New Testament Studies*, XIV (1968), 424—39.

In summary, if death should climax Paul's labors and he should be excluded from the number who are living at the Parousia, his authority as an apostle would in no way be diminished. He who warned the Corinthians that their misuse of the Lord's Table had been responsible for the death of a number in their fellowship (1 Cor. 11:30) is himself suspect, owing to his experiences, but he rests his case with the Lord, who is the strength in his own weakness (2 Cor. 13:4; cf. 4:11-12). On the other hand, the consolation he seeks in and through death, in view of the extremities to which he is exposed, might suggest to the Corinthians that he has shifted from his former attack on their own ridicule of the resurrection hope. Does Paul now anticipate a disembodied existence? No, he accepts death on the condition that he will receive the changed body promised previously in 1 Cor. 15. But in death and through death he will stand facing the Lord, who will at His appearing bring what has been promised.

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