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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Paul's Attitude Towards Empire

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Religion

by

Matthew Kwabena Appiah

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Abstract

The concept of imperialism has come to stay in the study of Paul and his letters. However, does contextual analysis of his selected texts support such claims of him being anti-imperial? Various arguments arise to challenge Paul to have used hidden codes and imperial ideology to counter the imperial propaganda of the Roman empire of his day. However, contextual analysis of Paul and his letters suggest otherwise. His pastoral care duties, coupled with a desire to win his natives, namely, the Jews, to accept Jesus Christ as the messiah prophesied in the Old Testament is key in his letters. Proponents for anti-imperial reading of Paul could only do so by reading into the text outside of its context, making it difficult to embark on anti-imperial approach exegetically. By this assertion, it encourages one to conclude that the Pauline letters are devoid of any hidden codes or counter imperial propaganda appeal to his audience. As such, it must be understood that Paul upheld civil authority (Roman empire) and encouraged his audience to do so.

Key Words: Empire, savior, Parousia, imperial cult, messiah,

List of Abbreviations

AUSS	-	Andrews University Seminary Studies
CBQ	-	Catholic Biblical Quarterly
ConBNT	-	Coniectanea biblica, New Testament
CTJ	-	Calvin Theological Journal
EJT	-	Evangelical Theological Dictionary
HTR	-	Harvard Theological Review
HTS	-	Harvard Theological Studies
JBL	-	Journal of Biblical Literature
JRS	-	Journal of Roman Studies
JSNT	-	Journal for the Study of New Testament
LEB	-	Lexham English Bible
NICNT	-	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC	-	The New Testament Greek Testament Commentary
NTS	-	New Testament Studies
RTR	-	Reformed Theological Review
SNTSMS	-	Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	-	Studies in Philology
TDNT	-	Theological Dictionary of the New Testament

WBC

-

Word Biblical Commentary

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Imperialism has become a growing and significant area of research in Pauline's studies over the years. The present, influenced by the past, has been interactive and educative between Paul and Empire. It has received much scholarly attention recently, especially from the late 90s. Notwithstanding criticisms received, Paul and Empire studies since the days of Richard Horsley and his three-volume work have shed more light on the interpretive context of the apostle and his letters. However, in contrast to these theme concepts in Pauline's letters, his compatriot, Peter, acknowledges that "There are some things in them that are hard to understand" (2 Peter 3:16, LEB).

While these confirm the nature of Paul's writing style as different from other New Testament writers, some scholars argue that his theology concerning various aspects of the socio-political issues of his time would be reflected in his letters and teachings.¹ In discussing these, there are three opinions concerning Paul's attitude to the Empire: anti-imperial, pro-empire, and those who believe there is no such thing as empire in the letters. Anti-empire advocate Edwin A. Judge, studying 1 Thess. 2:3-5, 8; 4:16; and 5:2-3, compared to Acts 17:8, suggest Paul "covertly" called for a change of ruler regarding Caesar and his imperial gospel. Equally, Dieter Georgi, a pioneer in this effect of Paul

¹ Ed Mackenzie, *The Quest for The Political Paul: Assessing the Apostle's Approach to Empire*, EJT (2011) 20:1, 40-50. Cf. Tim Goringe, 'Political Readings of Scripture' in J. Barton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 67-80. R. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to Read the Bible Politically* (Third Way Books; London: SPCK, 1989; second ed. London: SPCK, 2010). These including three volumes edited by Richard A. Horsley, emphasizes that Paul and the New Testament have a hidden political tone to which Scripture must be read as such. Horsley's works shall be explored much in this work.

and Empire, suggests that Paul's preaching in the Roman Empire and his letters criticized² the Roman government. However, in a counter-thesis against Paul's anti-empire reading, Najeeb Turki Haddad suggests that such claims and allusion to Paul are based on "half-truth information."³ Collin Battersby, addressing the challenges faced by those who read Paul in an anti-imperial manner, quotes Neil Elliot to have admitted that "there is no specific critique of the Roman Empire in Paul's letters and no explicit reference to the imperial cult"⁴ in his letters and preaching. Thus, there is no need to read Paul in an anti-imperial way.

Conversely, this calls for a rethinking concerning Paul and Empire, to which this work seeks to venture. While these arguments exist, I suggest Paul had no intention of politics or the Empire in view in his letters. This work would seek to analyze these scholarly divisions concerning the Pauline writings to assume a state that reflects Paul in his letters regarding no intent of sabotaging the empire by hidden codes.

Survey of Opinions on Paul's Attitude

While there exists a general division concerning Paul being pro-empire or anti-empire, it is also questioned whether the issue of empire was an underlying thought of Paul while writing to his audience in the churches. In discussing these concerns, we shall consider each point of view from these schools of thought. For anti-imperial proponents,

² Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991). See also, Dieter Georgi, "Who is the True Prophet," *HTR* 79 (1986): 100–126.

³ Najeeb Turki Haddad, *Paul in Context: A Reinterpretation of Paul and Empire*. PhD Dissertation, 15-16. Dissertations.2959. https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_dess/2959.

⁴ Collin Battersby, *A Critical Review of Three Readings of Paul and Empire*. www.academia.edu.

the essential point to read Paul in such a manner is echoed mainly by Richard A. Horsley, who recognizes Paul's anti-imperial gospel preaching as an essential theme in his letters, which reflects the imperial cult and ideology in them.⁵ Thus, to authenticate this, we must view Paul as using an Imperial 'language and ideology' in his writings to his audience. Ovidiu Hanc further argues that he made use of such terms that were familiar concepts in the Empire as elements of "imperial propaganda," making some scholars assume Paul's writings to include 'polemical parallelism' or "hidden transcripts of a subversive message" against the Imperial cult and Caesar.⁶ Thus, the fundamental paradox between these schools of thought concerning Paul's empire ideology in his letters points to his language and wording in building his theology. In the next chapter, we will explore various arguments to analyze scholarly debates while considering Paul's letters to ascertain the best option in our understanding of the Pauline theology in his letters.

Statement of the Problem

Paul's letters to the churches have been interpreted concerning his stance on the Empire. While selected texts from his writings are read from a pro/anti-empire

⁵ Richard A. Horsley, ed., "Introduction, Paul's Counter Imperial-Gospel" in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 140. In his introduction to the part three of the book, Horsley quotes Dieter Georgi, arguing that "Insofar as Paul deliberately used language closely associated with the imperial religion, he was presenting his gospel as a direct competitor of the gospel of Caesar... The "imperial" language found in Romans is paralleled and extended in Paul's other letters. Perhaps the most vivid examples come from Philippians and 1 Thessalonians." Dieter Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 83 quoted in Richard A. Horsley, ed., "Paul's Counter Imperial-Gospel" in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 140. Cf. Stanley Stowers, *A Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910).

⁶ Ovidiu Hanc, *Paul and Empire: A Reframing of Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of the New Exodus*. Tyndale Bulletin 65.2 (2014) 313-316., 315.

perspective, do such texts reveal or imply a prominent element in the thinking or writing of Paul in the assumed texts?

Purpose of the Thesis

Paul's letters have been variously interpreted concerning his stance towards the empire. Some scholars read him as being pro-empire and others as anti-empire. Still, other scholars question whether the issue of empire was a prominent element in Paul's thinking. This thesis aims to verify that Paul, by his use of 'imperial words,' had no hidden counter-imperial agenda in his letters.

Methodology

Since the thesis involves different aspects of exegesis, including exegesis of specific passages and background analysis, a contextual analysis (of each argument and text) approach shall be employed in assessing Paul's writings to determine the best course. Also, various historical precedents to his letters and audience shall be employed to help understand situations, making Paul write his letters with a more pro-empire attitude than an anti-imperial one.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

Over the twenty-first century, readers and expositors of Paul's letters have had varying opinions on his thoughts in his writings. Krister Stendhal is remarkable for his scholarly revolution in the rethinking of Paul. Stendhal did this by questioning its fundamental influence on Western theology at that time.⁷ He argued against the use of Paul's statement regarding women not being ordained as not "the established fundamental understanding for the Western theology."⁸ 1 Cor. 14:34-35 does not, according to Stendhal, justify denying the ordination of women. Since 1958, his debate has brought attention to Paul and his theology as the 'basis' for Protestant churches and theologians. It has opened the way for prominent Pauline scholars and theologians to rethink Paul regarding current Western issues.⁹ However, one could see Stendhal's argument as one that emphasized a 'stereotype' of women because of an application of a Pauline text more than a theological debate. Stendhal's argument may not be seen as a major theological issue but a societal regression approach to women at that time due to some misapplication of Paul's message.

⁷ Krister Stendahl, "The Bible and the Role of Women," originally published as "Bibelsynen och kvinnan," in *Kvinnan — Samhället — Kyrkan* (Stockholm: Svenska Kyrkans Diakonistyrelses Bokförlag, 1958), 138-67. Stendahl, "Paulus och Samvetet," *Svensk Exegetisk Arsbok* 25 (1960): 62-77; published in English as "The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West," *HTR* 56 (1963): 199-215; reprinted and most accessible in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles, and Other Essays* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 78 - 96. Stendahl further developed some of the same themes in *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*. Quoted in Richard A. Horsley, ed., "Introduction" in *Paul and Politics: Ekklesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2000), 1.

⁸ Stendahl. "The Bible and Women," 138.

⁹ John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed have produced a monograph to uncover "the actual and historical Paul who opposed Rome with Christ against Caesar." J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed, "Preface," *In Search of Paul: How Jesus' Apostle Opposed Rome's Empire with God's Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004). Cf. N. T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005). Adolf. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East: The New Testament Illustrated by Recently Discovered Texts of the Graeco-Roman World* (New York: George H. Doran, 1927).

In the context of our discussion, this revolution has spawned various scholarly arguments for studying the Pauline letters in the last decades. In discussing Paul's reaction to the 'socio-religio' issues of his time, scholars are divided over his language and how he reacted to the imperial cult of the day, especially as presented in his letters to his audience. We will investigate the various scholarly assertions concerning Paul and the empire of his day.

Against Empire

As indicated in the introduction, our attention is now drawn to the various arguments put forward by different scholars. In doing so, I will begin with Anti-imperial readings of Paul. I will assess various scholarly arguments concerning Paul and his selected texts, which are assumed to be read in an anti-imperial manner and shall evaluate them considering the 'general view of Paul in his letters.

We begin with Adolf Deissmann, a pioneer of reading Paul in the light of the imperial cult. In his view, he assumes Paul not to have been unconcerned about the socio-political uses of the day. He further challenges readers of Paul that "It must not be supposed that St. Paul and his fellow believers went through the world blindfolded, unaffected by what was then moving the minds of men in great cities, namely, the imperial cult."¹⁰ Thus, Paul in his missionary journey, encountered a system that was too good to ignore because its presence might influence his missionary work. Paul, by means of his 'gospel,' would react to the political environment as his audience, who were in the same circumstances. What we get from his thought would suggest that Paul and his

¹⁰ Deissmann, 340. Cf. Jeremy Punt, "Paul against Empire" in *Paul's Imperium, the Push and Pull of Empire, and the Pauline Letters*. Religion & Theology 23 (2016) 339 – 367., 347-351. Neil Elliott, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994).

audience had an interest in the Empire and what it propagated. Therefore, Paul would write to the welfare of his audience against the Empire which may not be verified to be true. In a similar argument by N. T. Wright, he assumes that “Already by Paul’s time it had become the dominant cult in a large part of the Empire, certainly in the parts where Paul was active, and was the means whereby the Romans managed to control and govern such huge areas as came under their sway.”¹¹ Thus, the Imperial Cult in Paul’s day had become popular in the Roman Empire and by “itself was the fastest-growing religion in Paul’s world.”¹² As it was purported to be, it was established and prided itself by the first century of Rome’s rise to empire. It was founded on its ‘Imperial propaganda’ theme of freedom, justice, peace, and protection from external enemies. These elements became the ‘propaganda’ theme for the Empire. Augustus, their emperor, who had saved the people from external enemies, gained the title of a “savior” after the civil war.¹³ These ‘themes,’ focused on the emperor, Augustus, “who accomplished and guaranteed them, could be spoken of as ‘euangelion,’ ‘good news’, ‘gospel’”¹⁴ to the people. As far as possible, the Roman Empire,¹⁵ represented by its citizens, had no issues with the concept

¹¹ N. T. Wright, *Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire*. Written in *Reflections*, vol. 2, 1998. www.ntwrightpage.com/category/articles. Accessed February 10, 2022. Michael Mann in describing the Roman Imperium assumes that “The interest of Rome lies in its imperialism. It was one of the most successful conquering states in all history, but it was the most successful retainer of conquests.” Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power* (1986). Quoted in Crossan and Reed, xi.

¹² Wright, ‘Caesar’s Empire and Its Ideology,’ 64.

¹³ “Augustus had consolidated his own position by declaring that Julius Caesar, his adopted father, had been divinized after his murder; most subsequent emperors paid their predecessors the same compliment, often with the convenient fiction of getting someone to testify that they had seen the late ruler’s soul ascending to heaven. The new emperor would then claim the title ‘son of god’, even though in most cases the sonship was adoptive.” Wright, 63.

¹⁴ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London: SCM, 1977), quoted in N. T. Wright, *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 63. “Paul too proclaimed one who was Lord, Savior, Redeemer, and Liberator. He announced one who was Divine, Son of God, God, and God from God. But Paul’s new divinity was Christ, not Caesar. His was a radically divergent but equally global theology.” Crossan and Reed, “On the Road to Damascus,” xviii.

¹⁵ For discussions on the rise of the Roman Empire, see, John Dominic Crossan, “Empire and the Barbarism of Civilization,” in *God and Empire: Jesus Against Rome, Then and Now* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004), 1-48.

of 'divinity' associated with the emperor, which was "obvious and uncontroversial." We should affirm that the Eastern part of the Empire had no issues with successive emperors being called 'son of god' since it came with a reward.¹⁶ If the citizens had no issues regarding such terms because of a reward, how would Paul have convinced them to believe otherwise? In answer to a rhetorical question in the preface of their book, J. D. Crossan and J. L. Reed argue that "Paul's Christian theology confronted nonviolently but opposed relentlessly"¹⁷ the imperial theology of Caesar and his Roman Empire. They further say that "Paul was a Jewish visionary following in Jesus' footsteps" and that "he opposed the mantras of Roman normalcy with a vision of peace through justice or, more fully, with a faith in the sequence of covenant, nonviolence, justice, and peace."¹⁸ Thus, they claim that Paul adopted a 'mild' approach as Jesus did in His time. In this respect, how do we assess the recognition of Roman consuls, Festus and Agrippa, who had seen no threat of Paul in contrast to the Imperial propaganda (Acts 25:15-22. Cf. Luke 23:1-5)?

In having this Imperial Cult background, Stanley Stowers argues that in his letter to the Romans, Paul intentionally employs language (and words) and counter-imperial

¹⁶ Wright, "Caesar's Empire and Its Ideology," 64-65. "In Paul's lifetime Roman emperors were deemed divine, and first and foremost, Augustus was called Son of God, God, and God of God. He was Lord, Redeemer, and Savior of the World. People knew that both verbally from Latin authors like Virgil, Horace, and Ovid and visually from coins, cups, statues, altars, temples, and forums; from ports, roads, bridges, and aqueducts; from landscapes transformed and cities established. It was all around them everywhere, just as advertising is all around us today." Crossan and Reed, "Preface, vi.

¹⁷ Crossan and Reed, vi. "

¹⁸ Crossan and Reed, vii. "But with Paul, with dusty, tired, much-traveled Paul, came Rome's most dangerous opponent—not legions but ideas, not an alternative force but an alternative faith." Thus, while the Roman Empire was founded through wars of victory that brought freedom, justice, and peace to its citizens, and the making of the emperor as lord and savior to them, who had achieved such a great height in their sight, Paul countered the Imperial ideology and opposed it in a style and approach that makes the Roman approach and its claims to be 'morally' unacceptable but instead, to accept a Lord and Savior who had through a nonviolence means achieved that to all and not only to Roman citizens, who shall in His return make the whole world peaceful. Cf. P. A. Brunt, "Laus Imperii," in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 26-27.

arguments to Octavian, who had built an empire ideology centered on himself.¹⁹ In like manner, Dieter Georgi observes that with the use of Imperial terms such as “*euangelion*,” “*pistis*,” and “*eirene*,” being ‘central themes and concepts of the Roman Imperial religion’²⁰ in the book of Romans and Paul associating them to Jesus Christ, his ‘preferred’ lord to Caesar, he evoked the Roman political theology which his nonviolent ‘gospel’ seeks to counter.²¹ Thus, “ parallels ” exist between the emperor's cults and Christ in Paul’s letter to the Romans, which Keith Hopkins believes are ‘striking’ to ignore.²² Thus, by using these parallel ‘Imperial’ terminologies, Paul opposed Caesar as not the ‘true king’ of the world but Jesus. In doing so, he challenged the allegiance and loyalty of the citizens to Caesar, the Imperial ‘gospel’ of peace and security provided by Caesar, making him a ‘savior’ to the Empire, and the ‘justice’ to which his conquest had brought to the citizens, because it was through a violent means of war as opposed to that of Christ, by nonviolence means. However, parallel wording cannot be a fundamental argument against Paul having had hostile intentions toward the Empire since they are too general and definitive at the same time.

In considering the true ‘savior,’ as challenged by Paul, Richard A. Horsley illustrates that “the political insurrectionary crucified by the Romans,” Jesus Christ,

¹⁹ Full analysis of the issue is discussed in the chapter 2 of his book, *Rereading of Romans: Justice, Jews, and Gentiles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

²⁰ For detail discussion on this matter, see Dieter Georgi, *God Turned Upside Down*, Richard A. Horsley, ed., *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 149-150.

²¹ Georgi, *Theocracy in Paul's Praxis and Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 83. Georgi further the argument by asserting that Paul, in placing Jesus where Caesar now is, only concurs to what the “*princeps* claimed to be: representative of humanity, reconciler and ruler of the world.” Georgi, 99. Cf. Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 199. Deissmann, 346-384. Brunt assumes Paul not only to have an Imperial language in the book of Romans alone but other letters too, including Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.

²² Deissmann, 3. For full discussion of the terminologies, see pages 343-378.

whom Paul preaches as a “fundamental gospel” was assumed through an anti-imperial theology to have been “enthroned as the true Lord of the world and was imminent to return in the (eschatological) *parousia* (a reference to an imperial entrance to a subject city).”²³ Thus, Horsley does not only see coveting of a prerogative of Caesar but an opposition that would rather defeat Caesar and be the ‘true savior.’ His *parousia* would then ‘guarantee’ the ‘peace and security’ expected by the citizens through His divine kingship. However, in Romans, it may be suggested that Paul’s main argument (1:16,17) focuses on salvation in the general sense concerning the Jew and the Gentile through faith. Paul’s attention is not drawn to the return of Christ but for all to accept Him as their ‘means’ of reconciliation to God (Rom. 5:10. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:18-20; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20-22).

Equally, moving from the future savior assumption, Georgi also argues that Paul, in Romans, criticizes these claims of Imperial ‘peace’ that Augustus had won for the Empire through wars in Romans. In quoting Romans 1:3-4, Georgi argues that it is a ‘formula’ that spoke “of the origins and significance of the royal messiah Jesus,”²⁴ to which Paul preaches to be the ‘true king and peacemaker.’ Georgi further argues extensively that:

²³ Here Horsley concludes that Paul in writing to the Philippians concerning the death of Christ on the cross, “The Philippians would hardly have been unaware that since the battle of Actium they already had a savior who was their lord and that the government of Philippi had long since been established as a Roman colony of army veterans (to which they were subordinate, politically and socially). Philippians also indicates that Paul was not alone in his opposition to the imperial gospel. The portrayal of ‘Jesus’ exaltation and entrance into heaven in the ‘pre-Pauline’ hymn that he cites in Phil. 2: 6 - 11 must have suggested the events surrounding the [death] of a *princeps* and his heavenly assumption and apotheosis.” Horsley, “Introduction,” *Paul’s Counter-Imperial Gospel*, 141. See Georgi, *Theocracy*, 72-74.

²⁴ Georgi, *God Turned Upside Down*, 150. In arguing through this principle, Georgi only assumes Paul’s counter-imperial hidden message to parallel the divinity of Caesar and his successors as ‘sons of god.’ He argues that by indicating the biological lineage of Jesus Christ to David, Paul was projecting Jesus to also have had a ‘royal’ lineage as did the successors of Julio Caesar. Thus by His resurrection, through the pronouncement of the Spirit, He was elevated to a ‘divine sonship,’ making Him also God as in the case of Caesar and his successors. This, Georgi sees as an indirect parallel challenge to the Imperial Cult by Paul in Romans. However, this royal genealogy is not only limited to Paul but Matthew and Luke in the gospels

“The adversary is rather a different figure, a power that in fact considers itself politically and religiously central, a force that claims universal dominion in the political and social realm but bases this claim on a religion and theology: the Roman Caesar. Here, in Romans, there is a critical counterpart to the central institution of the Roman Empire.”²⁵

However, it could be argued that since Christianity was seen as a ‘cult’ or had not been accepted as a state-recognized religion by then, anything about it could be seen as a threat to the Empire.²⁶ However, Everett Ferguson observes from history that “the church did not face many political issues from Rome and its governors (Acts 18:15) in the cities.”²⁷

In Romans, these Imperial terminologies seem to be used by Paul and in Thessalonians. As Seyoon Kim observes, many scholars, including Karl Donfried and Edwin Judge, conclude that the Thessalonians had a close “loyalty and commitment” to Rome and Caesar. Here, Donfried indicates that the “Thessalonians’ fortunes were determined by Roman interests” which made them “eager to develop ways to honor their Roman benefactors to sustain and increase their beneficence.”²⁹ Therefore, their allegiance to Rome made them more attached to the emperor (and the imperial cult),

too (Matt. 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38). In these accounts, there is a direct link between the patriarchal lineage and Adam and David. The last two are associated with ‘sons’ of God in Scripture, creating room for the argument that Paul is not first to associate such term to ‘special’ people of Scripture. David as a patriarch is included, not by his royalty but by virtue of his status in the family bloodline.

²⁵ Georgi, 150. By his assertion, Paul introduces Jesus into the Empire as a direct rival and ‘adversary’ to the Imperial Cult.

²⁶ Everett Ferguson, “The Church and the Empire” in *Church History, Volume One: From Christ to the Pre-Reformation. The Rise and Growth of the Church in its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005), 40. Here, in discussing how early emperors reacted to the rise of Christianity, Ferguson observes from history that *the church did not face much political issues from Rome and its governors (Acts 18:15) in the cities. However, by numerous uprisings of the Jews concerning Christianity as a whole, it brought widespread disturbances concerning the ‘teachings’ of the Christians in the Empire which led to the expulsion of the Jews from Rome over their ‘agitation over Chrestus’ (Suetonius, Claudius 25.4).* However, the political atmosphere changed when Nero was emperor of Rome. While seeing Christianity as a threat and protecting his rule, Tacitus records of him considering Christianity a “deadly superstition” (Tacitus, Annals 15.44) deserving punishment for which he used the burning of Rome in A.D 64 to do so.

²⁷ Ferguson, 40.

²⁹ Donfried, 215-19.

which “led them to view” the emperor's coming into the city as very important. The Thessalonian coins minted in 27 B.C. had Julius Caesar’s image with the legend ‘god’ (θεος) on the front side and Octavian (Augustus) on the opposite side, giving an impression of Augustus being ‘son of god’ (υἱος θεού).³⁰ Therefore, Paul’s proclamation of Jesus Christ as “Lord” (κυριος) and “Son of God” (υἱος θεού) in the Thessalonian letters and his use of ‘*parousia*’ in 1 Thess. 4:15 (1 Thess. 2:19; 4:15; 2 Thess. 2:8), concerning the coming of Christ, in which His arrival is paralleled to the visitation of the emperor’s arrival to a city in glory, with his subjects coming to welcome him at the entrance and led back into the city only mimics that which the Thessalonians knew were ‘titles’ used for the emperor and his visits to the city.³¹ This leads Judge to argue that Paul’s reference to a future return of Jesus Christ in 1 Thessalonians be “seen as transgressing the edicts’ ban of prediction on the death of the ruler and therefore a change of ruler.”³² They argue that Paul purposely used parallel terms or words to draw a direct distinction between Jesus Christ, the true “Lord,” and Caesar, the imposter “Lord”³³ by his counter-message.³⁴ In building his anti-imperial discourse, Judge argues in favor of an anti-imperial reading of 1 Thessalonians by linking the account of Acts 17 in connection to the letter of 1 Thessalonians. Thus, he links the accusations against Jason in Acts 17 concerning “the decrees of Caesar” to Paul’s preaching (1 Thess. 2:3, 4, 5, 8; 4:16; 5:2–3) in the Thessalonian letter. Paul, he contends, intentionally called for a new ruler in the

³⁰ Hendrix, “Thessalonians Honor Romans,” 170-73.

³¹ Kim, 5. See Helmut Koester, “Imperial Ideology and Paul's Eschatology in I Thessalonians” in *Paul and Empire: Religion and Power in Roman Imperial Society*, Richard A. Horsley, ed. (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 158-166.

³² Judge, “Decrees of Caesar at Thessalonica,” 3-5.

³³ Haddad, *Paul in Context*, 2. Here he further argues that “Though parallel language may aid in our study of Paul, the argument that Paul incorporated parallel terminology to subvert Rome must be reevaluated.”

³⁴ Both Acts 22 and 25 bear witness to the fact that Christianity was not a treat to Rome but Judaism.

person of Jesus Christ, to which the anger of some “unconverted Jews” and Thessalonians had aroused because he had by his ‘gospel’ violated “the decrees of Caesar,” which was prohibited.³⁵ However, since the issue of Christianity seems not to be a major public ‘concern’ for the Empire (or the emperor), it is evident that disturbances from the Jews concerning their ‘religion’ (Acts 23:27-29; 25:13-22) in a counterargument after Paul had preached in several cities led to these public disturbances to which the governors were worried. (Acts 17:1-9; 21:17-36).

In the discussions, it could be suggested that Paul's accusations are based on ‘assumptions’ from the texts. These anti-imperial proponents are reading more into the text than is in the text. However, concerning 1 Thessalonians 5:3, in which Paul ‘attacks’ the imperial ideology of ‘peace and security,’³⁶ Donfried suggests that the Thessalonian believers suffered persecution and martyrdom (2:14) by their refusal to take oaths of loyalty (Paphlagonia oath of loyalty) which had resulted in their current state of condition. Therefore, Paul “attempts to assure the community that those who have died will not be forgotten and that those who are alive at the parousia will not have precedence.”³⁷ This could be seen as an encouraging message in which Paul exalted his audience to a continual rebellion against Caesar's oath. If Donfried is to be taken right of Paul, then one could assume Paul of political activism, but Paul, in his desire for his listeners, does not expect any of them to go through persecution or martyrdom (Acts

³⁵ Judge, 1-7. For discussion on the degrees see, T. B. Mitford, “A Cypriot Oath of Allegiance to Tiberius,” *JRS* 1 (1930): 75–79. Mikael Tellbe, *Paul Between Synagogue and State: Christians, Jews, and Civic Authorities in 1 Thessalonians, Romans, and Philippians*, ConBNT 34 (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2001).

³⁶ It refers to the emperor and his dynasty who had proclaimed ‘peace and security’ by their many wars which had brought them victory.

³⁷ Donfried, 219-223. Cf. Kim, 7.

26:29). While there is evidence of cheers of endurance to his audience (Romans 8:31-35; 1Cor. 4:12; 2Cor. 4:9), Paul seems to have ‘cautioned’ his audience concerning yielding to fear of persecution because those persecuting them (namely the Jews more than the Roman Empire, because they disturbed him a lot in his missionary missions more than any other group according to Luke’s narrative in Acts)³⁸ shall be condemned by Christ at His coming (Gal. 6:12; 1Thess. 2:13-16; 2Thess. 1:3-12; 2Tim. 3:10-17). Thus, Paul saw the Jews as a threat more than the Empire (1Thess. 2:14-16) to his ministry and audience. However, in imitating the words of Jesus Christ (Matt. 5:10-12), he admonished them concerning ‘suffering for righteousness’ sake and entreated them to do good to them that persecuted them (Romans 12:14. Cf. Matt. 5:44) since recompense belonged to God alone (Deut. 32:35; Romans 12:19; Cf. Isa. 35:4), who shall at the end of time repay their persecutors.³⁹

While there seems to be an inferred reading of Paul in an anti-imperial manner, the book of Philippians remains a significant source for scholars who read him from that background.⁴⁰ Philippians 2:6-11 and 3:20-21 are critical texts used in this argument. These passages not only draw a direct contrast between Christ and Caesar but

“Also employ the politically evocative term ‘*politeuma*’ (commonwealth) and the equally evocative imagery of the ‘*kyrios/soter*’ coming to deliver the believers as the Roman emperor might come to a provincial city to rescue his beleaguered subjects with his overwhelming forces.”⁴¹

³⁸ Both Ferguson and Acts testify that Christianity in its early years proved no threat to the governors apart from the Jewish leaders who from the time of Christ had seen it to be a threat to them. Therefore, their rejection and resistance towards Christ and His people shall be recompensed.

³⁹ Thus Paul was concerned about the final day of ‘God’s vengeance’ on His enemies to which his audience were to be faithful to God to finally avenge their enemies more than them yielding to the persecution because of fear.

⁴⁰ Erik M. Heen, *Phil 2:6-11 And Resistance to Local Timocratic Rule: Isa theos and the Cult of the Emperor in the East*, 125-154.

⁴¹ Kim, 11.

By these concepts, N. T. Wright assumes Paul to be a traveling “ambassador” who offers people a ‘new religious experience’ in hoping for a ‘new king’ other than Caesar to whom they must align their loyalty.⁴² Here, Wright assumes Paul to have offered the Philippians a more preferred king, who is ‘stronger’ to conquer the emperor to whom they have placed their confidence. But if Paul had such thought, one may argue that it was only a ‘spiritual war’ and not a physical war since the Christians were few in contrast to them that followed the emperor (Acts 1:15; 2:41. Cf. John 18:33-36).

But Heen, making much emphasis on ‘isa theo’ (godlike/equal) as used in Philippians 2:6b, assumes the term “has a long history in the Greek ruler cult and the first century C. E. was applied to the Roman emperor.”⁴³ So, it could be stated that this terminology was not new to the Philippians. Paul only used that in contrast to both lords of whom his preference was Christ. However, a significant concern comes into play as we consider in one moment the people switching their allegiance from one whom they have seen conquering cities and bringing peace and stability to them to one whom His native people are against. He is supposed to have been resurrected. But from the perspective of James C. Scott, Heen observes that.

“the interaction between public discourse controlled by the elite and the hidden and disguised discourses of the subordinate illuminates the social function of the Roman imperial cult in the Greek cities of the eastern Empire.”⁴⁴

⁴² Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” 174, 166-67; see Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective*, 40-58. He further argues that Paul in talking about Philippians 2:5-11, was only challenging the Philippians not on ‘moral’ grounds to work out their own salvation with ‘fear and trembling’ but seeing that Caesar’s Rome offer a ‘free’ salvation to all who holds allegiance and loyalty to him, draws their minds to the fact that his counter salvation must be held in similitude by obeying its new lord and the rules thereof “rather than the one their culture is forcing upon them,” 73-74. But it could be seen that these provinces paid tributes and taxes to the emperor and therefore his ‘protection’ and ‘salvation’ offered to them not free.

⁴³ Heen, 125.

⁴⁴ Heen, 126.

It is of great concern to see Scott argue against Paul from the perspective of the public ‘orators’ of the eastern part of the Empire. While we may agree with him that it is possible, there is no precise evidence that Paul adopted hidden or disguised discourses in his public speeches. It is evident from Luke’s account that Paul’s missionary trip engagements with the people were mainly inside the Jewish synagogues in the gentile cities (Acts 13:4-5, 14-15; 14:1; 16:11-13; 17:1-5; 18:1-6,19), and in public places of meeting (17:22-25; 19:8-10; 20:7-12). However, Luke attests to Paul having hosted guests in his privately rented apartment when he was arrested in Rome (28:30-31). Equally, on few occasions in his journey due to Jewish insurrections, Paul moved outside of the synagogue to a riverside (Acts 16:11-13), reasoned with people in a marketplace (16:16-17), spoke to the people in the Areopagus (17:22-25), and used the “hall of Tyrannus” when the Jews had continually spoken evil regarding the “Way” (19:8-10). In examining Luke’s accounts, one could argue that Paul loved speaking in public rather than private places. Issues of private audience accommodation were only conditional and not a routine practice (20:7-12. Cf. 28:30). Paul had only one message, “proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 28:30-31. Cf. Acts 26:19:23), and it is this message that had brought tensions between himself and the Jewish communities in the gentile world (14:19-20; 17:13-14; 18:12-17; 19:8-10, 21-40; 20:1-5). Therefore, with these arguments put forward, it becomes difficult to prove Paul to have resisted Rome, perhaps by direct or indirect means.

This influence of the Eastern cities of the Greeks, Heen continues that “the Eastern civic tradition of assigning ‘divine honors’ (*iso theoi timai*) to Roman imperial rulers, the attribution of the term *isa theo* to Jesus Christ in a ‘hymn’ sung by Pauline

communities can be seen as a particular mode of resistance to the local urban elite's articulation of imperial rule."⁴⁵ Thus, he agrees with Scott in Philippians 2 that Paul, whether open or through a hidden means, employed this term for Christ in rivaling the emperor in his public and private discourses with the people. Scott strongly emphasizes that hidden discourses are "spoken off stage" in response to the social dynamics programmed in the public transcript. He further argues that "the private discourse of the subordinate spoken behind the backs of the dominant is, predictably, highly critical of the public transcript" and that in this private discourse, the subordinates experience a "realm of relative discursive freedom, in a privileged site for nonhegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse" to which he assumes that the hymns by the Christians of the Eastern churches "may provide such a middle term between the hegemonic and public transcript of the cities of the East and the potentially subversive deconstruction of it that took place among some of the early followers of Christ out of earshot of the local authorities."⁴⁶ Thus, in public, Paul spoke 'kindly' concerning the Empire, but 'off stage,' he incited the people against the Empire. If that were so, things could be difficult, as freed enslaved people and those who had gained Roman citizenship and were enjoying its benefits would not see any good in protesting the Empire. Also, from the response to Scott's earlier concern, one would understand that reactions had come from the Jews and

⁴⁵ Heen, 126.

⁴⁶ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990), 2, 25. For discussions on the Transcript used publicly and privately, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 53. Stephen Mitchell, "Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Roman Asia Minor; JRS 80 (1990): 183, Klaus Bringmann, "The King as Benefactor: Some Remarks on Ideal Kingship in the Age of Hellenism," in *Images and Ideologies: Self-Definition in the Hellenistic World*, Anthony Bulloch et al.; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 16. Frederick W. Danker, *Benefactor: Epigraphic Study of a Graeco-Roman and New Testament Semantic Field* (St. Louis: Clayton, 1982). See also C. R Jones, *The Roman World of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), 104-14. Holland Hendrix, "Benefactor/Patronage Networks in the Urban Environment: Evidence from Thessalonica," *Semeia* 56 (1990): 39-50.

not the emperor nor his commissioners regarding what Paul taught (Acts 18:12-17. Cf. 24:22-23; 25:1-4, 13-16, 23-27).

From these disguised discourse arguments, N. T. Wright, in commenting about Philippians 3, argues that it be borne in mind that not all at Philippi at the time of Paul were Roman citizens. But with the cherished advantage of being a citizen of Rome and or being its ally, Paul contrasted this citizenship (earthly/Romish, vv. 17-19) to the heavenly. Thus, Paul contrasted the “corrupt and pretentious” nature of the worldly or Roman citizenship to the heavenly one by alluding to a Jewish theme of the ‘God of Heaven’ in the book of Daniel. A God who is sovereign and ruler of the earth and had their ‘safety’ at hand by delivering them from the hands of their enemies through the ‘true savior/messiah,’ Jesus Christ. He raised him from the dead as a promise to everyone who accepts Jesus as Lord and Savior and not Caesar (Acts 13:28-35; Romans 4:22-25; 8:11; 10:8-13). Therefore, Roman citizenship is not enough to guarantee one’s ‘peace and security’ as promised by the emperor but through the working of God in Christ. In extending further his argument on Paul’s counter-imperial message in Philippians, he argues that Paul cited Ps. 57:3-5 to strengthen his argument that God fulfilled those promises in Christ and that His resurrection is also a promise to all who accept Him as Lord and Savior to experience the same and not by their allegiance to Caesar which Wright sees as a “fresh reading”⁴⁷ of imperialism by Paul. In his conclusion, N. T. Wright assumes that

⁴⁷ Wright, ‘Paul and Empire,’ *Paul in Fresh Perspective*, 71-72. “Caesar has been a servant of the state, by winning military victories, by putting up money for public works, and so on; we therefore hail him as lord and entrust ourselves to him as our savior... 'the death of the cross'. We are here witnessing the rebirth of a symbol. The cross, as I said before, was already a powerful symbol in the ancient world. It spoke both of politics (the unstoppable military might of Rome) and of theology (the divinity of Caesar, whose power

“When I began to study Paul's theology of creation and covenant, Messiah and apocalyptic, I had no thought whatever of this political dimension. Likewise, most of the scholars who have recently drawn attention to the political dimension have eschewed any interest in Paul's wider theology. But I persist in thinking that these usually differentiated strands were in fact woven tightly together into the single fabric of his theology and life.”⁴⁸

Pro-Empire

In the above discussions, anti-imperial scholarship was assessed and evaluated in contrast to the broader theology and letters of Paul. Since most of the allusions in their arguments are based on personal assumptions and not on concrete evidence, they could not have had any critical theological issues at stake. However, their assertions could have been wrong concerning Paul's attitude to Empire. While thinking about Paul's theology and Wright's assertion of a political theology woven into his life and theology, other schools of thought have emerged that differ from such a position. Ovidiu Hanc, commenting on the anti-imperial reading of Romans, believes that to judge Paul from his background as a Pharisee is wrong. While defending Paul against an anti-imperial reading of his letter, he argues that although the Pharisees were politically influential, their political involvement only represented precise contextual instances rather than basic stereotypes that portray the movement's standards.⁴⁹ The Pharisees were extremely into the Mosaic Law and its ritual purity. Therefore, interpreting Paul on politically oriented grounds is inappropriate. Reading Paul's theology as an anti-imperial agenda is to

stood behind that of his armies). The early Christian use of the cross as a symbol was not simply a creation out of nothing. It took genius to see that the symbol which had spoken of Caesar's naked might now spoke of God's naked love. And I think that the genius in question belonged to Paul.” Wright, 72. Thus, Wright sees Paul taking what is due Caesar to Christ which is a counter imperialism.

⁴⁸ Wright, 79.

⁴⁹ Hanc, 313.

“interpret historical data in a subjective manner.”⁵⁰ Thus, Paul did not write to the Romans as a ‘political activist’ but was resonating with Isaiah’s context of the ‘Servant of God.’⁵¹

In his dissertation, “Paul in Context,” Najeeb Turki Haddad argues against the reading of 1 Thessalonians as anti-imperial. He observes that such proponents link Acts 17:1-9 concerning “defying the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king” (Acts 17:6-7) to the Thessalonian letter and that it must be read into 1 Thess. 2:3-5,8; 4:16; and 5:2-3. By this, they presume Paul called for a change of ruler, which Caesar’s decrees forbade.⁵² By these accusations, it led to many of Paul’s audience, the Christians, to suffer persecution and, at large, martyrdom.⁵³ While these may result from such a case, Najeeb argues that Paul in 1 Thessalonians “does not seem to be concerned about martyrdom” but “is concerned with the fate of the dead believers.”⁵⁴ While there is an assumed Imperial parallel language (shared motif) by Paul in connecting the Jewish messianic prophecies linking the Messiah to David’s house to Jesus Christ, his new

⁵⁰ Hanc, 313, 314.

⁵¹ Hanc, 314. He further explains that Paul forms a ‘New Exodus’ framework based on the Isaianic texts concerning the Servant of the Lord. This ‘Servant’ he exclaims brings deliverance ‘par excellence’ alluding to the Exodus experience of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan. This deliverance envisioned in the liberation of the Christians in the New Exodus is rooted in the Old Testament’s theology concerning the Servant of the Lord and the grand deliverance such as with Israel from Egypt. This he sees as a ‘divine prerogative’ of God and therefore Paul in Romans 13 is not challenging his audience against the Empire but submitting it to ‘God’s supreme authority.’ While Paul might have used the imperial language in a ‘parallel’ sense of subversion, interpreting him outside this OT theology misses his theological framework (I agree. Paul postured himself as an interpreter of the Jewish Scripture, not as a political insurrectionist.). By his emphasis on ‘obedience,’ Paul’s message is inconsistent with the Imperial Cult/Empire. It excludes any form of anti-imperial hidden message in the letter to the Romans.

⁵² Najeeb Turki Haddad, *Paul in Context: A Reinterpretation of Paul and Empire*. PhD Dissertation. Dissertations.2959. https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_dess/2959/, 3-7.

⁵³ For discussion on martyrdom in 1Thessalonians, see Edwin A. Judge, *The Decrees of Caesar at Thessalonica*, RTR I (1971): 1-7. Donfried, “Imperial Cults of Thessalonica,” 223. However, Seyoon Kim argues against such notion of Paul discussing martyrdom but was concerned with the dead Christians whom the community of Christians mourned. Cf. Seyoon Kim, 7-10.

⁵⁴ Haddad, 6,7. Kim, 8.

Messiah, to critique Augustus, both Najeeb and Kim argue that it is a ‘strange view’ and that in 1 Thessalonians there are no hidden or explicit views about the Jewish roots of the Christian faith or an eschatological fulfillment of a Davidic prophecy discussed by Paul.⁵⁵ Thus, Paul’s ‘assumed inquiry’ into the ‘death of the emperor’ does not originate from his uplifting of Jesus Christ to have fulfilled the Davidic prophecies concerning the Messiah in the Old Testament (Isa. 55:3). It must be concerned to us that Paul’s attention was drawn to the ‘believers’ belief in Christ,’ in connection with eschatology. Paul’s mention of the Jews in 1 Thessalonians is about the hostility the Church faced from them in Thessalonica (1 Thess. 2:14-16) and their ‘killing of Jesus and the prophets.’⁵⁶ Therefore, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul is concerned with the believers’ belief in Christ concerning their dead companions, even under persecution from the State and the Jews. With the believers under persecution, Paul encouraged them with Christ’s return. With lost hope of losing their dead relatives forever, he admonishes that their dead relatives and companions will be raised to life again. Therefore, it has no relation to the emperor’s visit to his vassal kings and cities.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ However, it is argued by J. Harrison that since Seyoon Kim’s argument is selective, it excludes 1Thess. 1:10 which is regarded as a messianic reference to Jesus. See J. Harrison, *Paul and the Imperial Authorities*, 69 n 90. (cf. J. Albert Harrill, *Paul and Empire: Studying Roman Identity after the Cultural Turn. Early Christianity 2 (2011), 281-311. 2011 Mohr Siebeck, 287*). This assertion by J. Harrison is refuted by Najeeb Haddad by arguing that other Pauline passages that refers to ‘God’s son’ emphasizes the close relationship between God and Christ through whom God brings an eschatological salvation to His people (1Cor. 15:24-28; Gal. 2:20; 4:4-8; Rom. 5:8-11; 8:3,32).

⁵⁶ Haddad, 9. Charles A. Wanamaker observes that “Paul draws a comparison of the Church’s persecution to that of those in Judea to have suffered similar situations by the same unbelieving Jews of Paul’s gospel.” Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, NIGTC* (Grand Rapids MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 86 (cf. 114-116).

⁵⁷ Earl J. Richard, *First and Second Thessalonians, SP 13*, Daniel J. Harrington, ed., (Collegeville: The Liturgical, 1995), 232. Cf. Kim, “Christ and Caesar,” 8-10. Here, Kim argues that Paul’s message is not anti-imperial, in that it did not depend on the prevalent Imperial language of the time. (Is this what you mean? The sentence is confusing.)

In the letter to the believers in Philippi, it is argued by N. T. Wright and Peter Oakes to read Philippians 2:9-11 and 3:2-21 as a “coded” or hidden language in which Paul contrasts allegiance to Christ as the actual ‘Lord’ over Caesar. In doing so, Wright sees a direct contrast between Christ and Caesar in Paul’s usage of ‘κύριος’ and ‘σωτήρ,’ which were common imperial terms at his time to contrast Christ by making Caesar a parody.⁵⁸ Therefore, in doing so, Paul draws attention from Caesar to Christ from the Philippian believers who suffer persecution because they refused to join the Imperial Cult.⁵⁹ Oakes, extending the argument, claims Paul puts Christ above Caesar, which leads to obedience to Him other than Caesar from his audience.⁶⁰ He observes an ‘emphasis on cherished values of Christ against paganism and societal ethics of the day’ as discussed in Romans.⁶¹ Thus, they assert Paul to have challenged both the authority and the ethics of the emperor and the societal values by ‘the message of Christ,’ the gospel of Jesus Christ, and righteous living, making Paul’s message anti-imperial.⁶² However, such arguments by Wright and Oakes are ‘falsely’ read into the texts. These assertions could only be an unwitting admission that they cannot obtain a desired anti-imperial interpretation with a

⁵⁸ Kim, 11. Cf. N. T. Wright, “Paul’s Gospel and Caesar’s Empire,” in *Paul and Politics*, ed. R. A. Horsley (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2000), 160-83.

⁵⁹ Kim, 13.

⁶⁰ Peter Oakes, *Philippians: From People to Letter*, SNTSMS 110 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 140-45, 150.

⁶¹ While he believes this emphasis by Paul brought suffering to his audience, he rejects Gordon Fee’s assertion that Paul’s audience suffered persecution because of their refusal to participate in the Imperial cult. Cf. Kim, “Anti-Imperial Interpretation of Other Pauline Epistles,” 13. Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 197.

⁶² Peter Oakes, “Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians,” *JSNT* 27 (2005): 301-22; p. 320).

standard explanation.⁶³ Paul did not purposefully insert such words to incite the believers to act against the emperor or the cult by switching loyalties.⁶⁴

Since Paul's argument does not include a case for Jesus' messianic fulfillment of the Davidic kinship through political means, Kim argues that Paul's statement in Philippians does not connote a challenge to Caesar and his empire but his "Christology was rather in the category of, and derived from, the Jewish ascription of universal lordship to Yahweh."⁶⁵ Thus, in inferring into the text to the Philippians concerning hidden codes and transcripts used to rival Caesar, there seems to be no indication of such apart from 'a reading into' the texts.

In analyzing 'all' arguments put forward by anti-imperial proponents, Ed Mackenzie argues that

"There is, however, need for caution... the position that Paul deliberately sought to undermine the empire – practically or ideologically – is negated by the absence of any explicit critique in Paul's theology... and that Paul's theology implicitly subverted imperial ideology or that Paul's view of the church challenged imperial society – have more to commend them, but err insofar as they depict this as a central focus of Paul's theology. Paul sought to minimize potential conflict with the Roman Empire, focusing instead on God's work in Christ, its implications for the communities of Christ-followers, and the coming consummation of God's kingdom."⁶⁶

⁶³ Kim, 15.

⁶⁴ In countering Wright and Oakes, Seyoon Kim argues that the Philippian texts in a parallel sense with other 'anti-imperial' texts of Paul, although evoking a comparison between Christ and Caesar, "are not meant to lead the Philippian Christians to counter the imperial claims politically ... it is used to describe Christ in order to encourage the Philippian believers to work toward unity among themselves with humility and self-giving service, just as in 1 Thess. 4:13-18 it is so used to assure the Thessalonian Christians of the salvation of the dead and surviving believers." Kim, 15.

⁶⁵ Kim, 15. However, Kim assumes a sense of political implications of the Jewish Yahwehism by some Jews including the 'Zealots,' who understood God's universal rule to be achieved by a means of political resistance especially to the Romans, who now ruled them. However, Paul's Christology buildup does not influence a political resistance attitude of the Zealots to his audience. (agreed) summary of Kim's argument on that and my personal view.

⁶⁶ Mackenzie, *The Quest for the Political Paul*, 40–50.

Thus, for Mackenzie, the concept of Paul as an anti-imperial is only a theological approach without any clear case against him. Paul's concern for his audience and churches remains focused on God's work in Christ, saving humanity from sin into His 'coming kingdom.'

In summary, from the two main arguments put forward concerning Paul and the Empire, it is much observed that while anti-imperial readers argue in favor of the use of 'hidden' and 'coded' messages based on the 'prevalent' imperial language, proponents for a pro-empire reading argue from the point of view which directs attention to the Jewish messianic fulfillment in Christ by God.

While these views present a deep interaction with the text, it is expedient for us to expound them on pro or anti-reading. It is convenient to further the debate on the best view concerning Paul and the Empire. However, we must assert that in advancing the investigation into Paul and the Empire, we consider Paul's general theological framework in his letters to the churches to read him as a pro-empire. He had no intention of subverting the Roman kingdom, which his background did not support him to favor.

Chapter Three

Paul's Related Scriptural Passages

In this section, I shall take up these issues (texts) of Paul in succession, beginning with Romans 13 and the issue of obedience to governments in authority as a subversive message. In brief, I shall argue that in all the selected Pauline texts, there never exists in them any clear counter-imperial messages to his audience whose faith he was always praying to be 'strong' and 'grow' in the 'knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ' to salvation (Acts 13:43; 20:24, 29-32; 2 Cor. 6:1-13; Gal. 1:6-10; Eph. 1:15-23; 4:25-32; Col. 1:3-14; Heb. 12:15-17).¹⁰³

Romans 13

Romans 13:1-7 remains an integral aspect of the texts considered by Paul concerning his counter-imperial messages. Viewing it in the context of imperial propaganda, Neil Elliot sees it as "a notorious exegetical problem and a theological scandal"¹⁰⁴ for scholars today. By this, he believes, it is used by 'tyrants' to "justify a host of horrendous abuses of individual human rights."¹⁰⁵ However, L. Berkhof suggests that a 'particular authority' to whose power one must obey is "instituted by God and therefore must be obeyed."¹⁰⁶ Berkhof argues that after the Fall, "God providentially

¹⁰³ Other NT authors likewise exalted the faith of their audience and the church at large. They cautioned them against falling away from the faith by listening to those who had 'gone from the faith.' See 2 Pet. 1:2-12; 3:14-18; Jude 4.

¹⁰⁴ Elliot, "Romans 13:1-7 in the Context of Imperial Propaganda," 184.

¹⁰⁵ Elliot, 184.

¹⁰⁶ L. Berkhof, "Introduction," in John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the apostle to the Romans*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1947), 477-479. Full discussion on Calvin's thought on Romans 13, see P. J. Strauss, *God's Servant Working for Your own Good: Notes from Modern South African Calvin's Commentary on Romans 13: 1-7 and the State*, HTS 54/ 1&2 (1998), 26-29.

called civil authorities for the lawful and just government of the world.” Thus, resistance to these powers is “resistance to the ordinance of God.”¹⁰⁷ While these opposing views exist concerning Romans 13:1-7, it is evident that there is either an ‘abuse of civil power’ to which people react, or they merely disobey them generally, as seen in some societies.

In contrast to Berkhof’s view concerning the power behind civil authorities, if civil authorities acknowledge God, then it necessitates all, especially the Christian, to acknowledge ‘civil power’ as from God and therefore must be obeyed (Eph. 6:1, 5-9; 1 Tim. 5:17; 2 Pet. 2:17-19). However, in our ‘democratic’ world in which people elect leaders to authority through voting by constitutional rights, how do we ascribe powers behind ‘civil authorities’ to the divine, especially in the context of abuse of power? Thus, Romans 13:1-7 indirectly reminds leaders, including ‘civil powers,’ of a ‘God-given’ prerogative to serve the people according to His will.¹⁰⁸ Under this tense servant-authority relationship, some scholars like Victor Paul Furnish argue that Romans 13:1-7 may be seen as an ‘interpolation into the letter,’ mainly because Paul addresses the subject nowhere else in his letters.¹⁰⁹ He believes “these verses contradict Paul's thought elsewhere in several particulars,” citing 2 Cor. 4:4, Gal. 1:4, and 1 Cor. 7:31. Thus, Paul is considered here to be too ‘hypocritical’ to ascribe exaltation of such nature to the ‘Empire’ without an assumed ‘hidden’ thought behind it. However, I argue that this

¹⁰⁷ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, tr. by H. Beveridge; (1962 reprint in two vols; London: James Clarke, 1962), II, 669.

¹⁰⁸ The dreams of Pharaoh in Genesis 41 may suggest to us of God’s interest in the affairs of humans so that through these rulers He cares for us. Also, the prophecy concerning Darius about 150 years before his birth for a mission regarding the return of the Jews could be a perfect example of ‘civil powers’ to acknowledge God as their source of power. See Prov. 8:15-16; Jer. 27:5-8; Dan. 2:21; 4:32; 5:18-23; 1 Kgs. 10:9.

¹⁰⁹ Victor Paul Furnish, *The Moral Teaching of Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 117. James Kallas, “Romans XIII. 7: An Interpolation,” NTS 11 (1964-65): 365-74; Elliott, *Liberating Paul*, 217-18. See Charles H. Talbert, “A Non-Pauline Fragment at Romans 3:24-26?” JBL 85 (1966) 287-96 for discussions on ‘interpolation’ in Pauline letters.

thinking may be seen as a contradiction to Paul's thought in his other letters. A reference to Titus 3:1-2 suggests that Paul's objective was to ensure his audience was obedient to the 'civil powers,' and that they were reminded to "be subject to the rulers and the authorities."¹¹⁰ He encourages them "to obey, to be prepared for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all courtesy to all people." (Titus 3:1-2, LEB). Thus, Paul could not contradict himself by asking his audience in Rome to be 'disobedient' towards the Empire (or emperor) and speak otherwise elsewhere.¹¹¹

These discussions lead us to another interesting aspect of the book of Romans: the purpose of writing. Why is Paul, who had not visited the church in Rome before (Romans 1:11-13) and knew not the congregation there, interested in writing to them? Could this letter be influenced by his meeting with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth (Acts 18:1-2) or merely by a push from his pastoral duties as he could not visit them as planned? Peter Stuhlmacher observes this complexity and argues "The more clearly the exegete can

¹¹⁰ Furnish doubts the authenticity of the Pauline authorship of the book of Titus. He sees it as a deuteron-Pauline. However, it is helpful to notice how Paul engaged 'secretaries' to aid the writing of his letters. While there may be differences in writing styles and words, the theology remains similar. For full discussion see Harry Y. Gamble, "Amanuensis" in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, 249. Cf. W. O. Walker Jr., "The Burden of Proof in Identifying Interpolations in the Pauline Letters," *NTS* 33 (1987) 610-18. E. E. Elis, 'Pastoral Letters' in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin, eds. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 452-457; M. W. Holmes, "Textual Criticism" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 623-624.

¹¹¹ Robert Martyr Hawkins believes that Romans 13:1-7 be seen as an interpolation which "distorted rather effectively Paul's real thought" in the epistle. He further argues that Paul, in presenting the crucified Christ to the Romans needed to "be at his best." Thus by this gospel, he would have avoided "all the dubious paths of subtle disputation so that his readers should not be bewildered." Robert Martyr Hawkins, *The Rediscovery of the Historical Paul* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1943), 14-20, 291-92; 'Romans: A Reinterpretation', *JBL* 60 (1941), pp. 129-40. If Hawkins' assertions are to be true, then it concurs with other scholars like James D. G. Dunn who argues in favor of the historical development between the Jews and Rome. (James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1988), 768-69; "Romans 13:1-7 — A Charter for Political Quietism?" *Ex Auditu* 2 (1986): 55-68). The Jewish agitations concerning taxation (Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.50-51) and the expulsion of the Jews from Rome (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44) could put the Gentile Christians in Rome at 'risk' if they were to accept the Jews into their congregations. For a comparative discussion on interpolations in Romans, see Leander E. Keck, 'What Makes Paul Tick' in *Pauline Theology. Vol. III: Romans*, David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 10-16. Dunn, "Romans 13:1-7-A Charter for Imperial Quietism?" *Ex Audi tu* 2 (1986): 55-68.

demonstrate why Paul wrote Romans and what his purpose was, the better modern readers will be able to come to grips with it.”¹¹² Thus, it will help modern readers limit their ‘guesses’ of exegete towards the content of Romans concerning its purpose. Dennis Haugh, concurring to a ‘high’ view of Paul’s purpose of writing to the Romans, believes he “wrote to secure the assistance of his audience in delivering the collection for Jerusalem and a subsequent new missionary venture in Spain (15:22-31).”¹¹³ He argues it was “an attempt by Paul to exercise a leadership role within the communities of Roman Jesus followers.” With this argument, Haugh discusses that “In order to establish his leadership within a community he had never met, Paul wrote to establish a common identity with the Romans.”¹¹⁴ However, Paul B. Fowler argues that “Romans is a carefully constructed letter from Paul to the church in Rome, written to address a specific set of circumstances in Rome.”¹¹⁵ Thus, Fowler saw a need to visit or write to the church in Rome as a necessity for these corrections in the theology and the lifestyle of the congregation to be addressed, although Spain was the priority (Rom. 15:24,28). In all, these arguments reflect a facet of the whole scenario in Paul’s letter. In discussing the theological framework of the book of Romans, N. T. Wright argues for “a Jewish theology for the Gentile world, and a welcome for Gentiles designed to make the Jewish

¹¹² Peter Stuhlmacher, “The Purpose of Romans,” in *The Romans Debate*, K. P. Donfried, ed. (Peabody, MSS.: Hendrickson, 1991), 231.

¹¹³ Dennis Haugh, *Addressing Roman Jews: Paul's View on the Law in the Letter to the Romans* (2013), 34. Electronic Theses and Dissertations. 822. <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/822>

¹¹⁴ Haugh, 34, 35.

¹¹⁵ Paul B. Fowler, *The Structure of Romans: The Argument of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 1. Martin Luther equally argues that the purpose was “to break down all righteousness and wisdom of our own, to point out again those sins and foolish practices” which through Christ had been ended and that “he who has been made righteous does works of righteousness.” Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*. trans. W. G. Tillmans and J. A. O. Preus, H. C. Oswald, ed., 55 vols.; vol. 25 (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1972), 3.

world jealous”¹¹⁶ be seen as the basis for writing Romans. While Romans 11:1-11 seems to suggest so, in the letter, Paul both draws the attention of the Jews and Gentiles to ‘salvation in Christ’ while individually addressing their shortfalls in spiritual and social matters. It could be said that Paul provoked both ends. His ‘critique’ of the gentile lifestyle in 1:18-32 and the boasting in the Law by Jews in 2:17-29 exemplifies this act of Paul. Paul, while having a collection for the saints in Jerusalem and support for his missionary journey to Spain in mind (15:23-33), also wrote to the church in Rome to address the socio-religious differences in real-life engagement of both Jews and Gentiles in the church, especially, as the Jews were returning to Rome after the death of Claudius (A D 54). Issues of wanting to ‘establish his leadership in the church’ may be seen as contrary to the standards of his missionary work (Acts 15; 2 Cor. 3; 11:9; 12:13-17; 1 Thess. 2:9; 2 Thess. 6-9).¹¹⁷ With the above in context, one may conclude by aligning with Donfried in his introduction to the “Romans Debate” that “There also appears to be a developing agreement that it is unwise to speak of a single purpose in Paul’s writing to Rome.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ N. T. Wright, ‘Romans and the Theology of Paul’ in *Pauline Theology. Vol. III: Romans*, David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 20.

¹¹⁷ Ambrosiaster, *Commentaries on Romans and 1-2 Corinthians*. trans. G. L. Bray. T. C. Oden and G. L. Bray, eds. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2009), 1. Cf. William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), xlili. Krister Stendahl, “The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” in *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 78-96. Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2004), 445. Paul S. Minear, *The Obedience of Faith: The Purposes of Paul in the Letter to the Romans* (Naperville Ill.: A. R. Allenson, 1971), 5-6.

¹¹⁸ Donfried, “Introduction 1991: The Romans Debate Since 1977- Consensus” in *The Romans Debate*, lxi-lxx. In other developments James D. G. Dunn argues that “The fact that each of the above reasons for Romans can find such clear support from within the letter itself points to the obvious conclusion: *that Paul had not simply one but several purposes in view when he wrote*. Indeed, such a conclusion is more or less required by the character of the letter itself; *no single suggested reason on its own can explain the full sweep of the document*.”- Dunn, “The Purposes of Romans” in *Dictionary of Paul*, 563. Emphasis supplied. Here, Dunn, Joseph Fitzmyer, and Philip Esler cite support for his mission, explication of his gospel and healing divisions, especially between “Gentile and Jewish Christians.” Dunn, *Romans* (Dallas: Word

From knowing the purpose of writing the letter to the Romans, we discuss the texts of Romans 13:1-7. As we continue, Romans 13:1-7 is quoted below and discussed thoroughly.

“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed. (Romans 13:1-7, ESV).”

While N T Wright assumes this text “makes a good deal of sense when read against the background of the Roman situation,”¹²⁰ I would suggest that this “Roman background” should be understood in the context of restoring social reconciliation between the authorities of Rome and the church, especially regarding the returning Jews.¹²¹ Since Paul is addressing two different groups simultaneously in his letter, it

Books, 1988), 1. Iv-viii. George Smiga, “Romans 12:1-2 and 15:30-32 and the Occasion of the Letter to the Romans,” *CBQ* 53, no. 2 (1991): 257-73, 272.

¹²⁰ N. T. Wright, “Romans and the Theology of Paul,” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3, David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 62. Here, Wright argues that since the Jews had been expelled and were returning, the Romans already had ‘stereotyped’ them, and their return to the church could spark their belief of it as a cult. This the church must guard against any uprising or antisocial behavior that could ruin the church.

¹²¹ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16. Word Biblical Commentary 13B*, Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988). 354-355. Here, Dunn discusses the few who ruled politically and controlled the masses and minority groups. With issues of tax payment pending on these minority groups, coupled with the unpredictable nature of the government, it was expedient for the audience to pay heed to paying the taxes to avoid any future maltreatment. Then he argues: “So Paul’s opening exhortation was simply the common-sense wisdom of the great mass of the powerless living within the power structures of the corporate state. Since politics was the business of so few, the rest who wanted to be about their own business naturally took it for granted that they must operate within the constraints laid down by the ruling authorities.”

could be asserted that this appeal was a ‘direct address’ to the expelled Jews who were returning after the death of Claudius. As Wright argues, the return of the Jews, coupled with an expectation of a possibility of an ‘antisocial behavior’ by the Jews from the Roman authorities must be avoided by the church. Thus, Paul, in writing this should be seen as a pastoral care appeal in which he admonishes his audience, mainly the Jews, to avoid any possibility of resistance because the Jews and the church were a minority group whose status did not have much influence in the city of Rome. Since an earlier uprising had caused their expulsion, William S. Campbell observes, “The riots possibly resulted from radical Hellenists preaching a law-free gospel to Gentiles and God-worshippers associated with the synagogue,”¹²² they were now appealed to in order not to repeat such issues again or join other minority groups who resist the government instructions.¹²³ It is improbable that Paul, who had benefited from the Empire through his citizenship, would criticize it. As S. C. Mott observes, “Paul is shown to have found civil authority as a source of deliverance (Acts 23:10). He appeals to his rights as a Roman citizen (Acts 16:37; 21:39; 22:25).”¹²⁴ Therefore, Crossan and Reed’s earlier assertion that Paul’s theology and message “confronted nonviolently but opposed relentlessly”¹²⁵ could be rendered a deviation from what Paul probably meant.

¹²² William S. Campbell, “The Rule of Faith in Romans 12:1-15:13: The Obligation of Humble Obedience to Christ as the Only Adequate Response to the Mercies of God” in *Pauline Theology*, vol. 3, David M. Hay and E. Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), 266.

¹²³ As Dunn observes the vulnerability of the Jews because of their past experience with the authorities in Rome, he argues that Paul admonished the church that since “Little gatherings of Christians, living in the capital city, without political power, dependent on the good will of the authorities, who could be very arbitrary and unpredictable in their rulings regarding minority ethnic or religious groups, were only acting prudently if they sought to avoid giving any cause for offense.”- *Dunn, Romans 9-16*, 355. Thus, the audience had to obey the civil authority for their own good. Cf. Ben Witherington and Darlene Hyatt, *Paul's Letter To The Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 304-324.

¹²⁴ S. C. Mott, “Civil Authority” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 92.

¹²⁵ Crossan and Reed, vi.

Further, it is equally recognized that James Scotts' private argument of hidden transcripts may not apply to Paul in Romans 13. Since Paul could not visit the Church apart from him being sent as a prisoner (Acts 28:17-31), Luke's account concerning Paul's arrival in Rome could be used to defend against issues of private teachings contrary to what he had written to them for their public hearing. Luke's account in Acts 28:28-31 suggests that Paul's attempt in 'private teaching' first addressed the Jewish leaders at Rome (v. 17-20) concerning his arrival in chains and not as they expected. While the leaders did not reject Paul (v. 21), they equally bade him speak "concerning this sect, we know is spoken against everywhere" (v. 22). Paul then, in talking about the "kingdom of God" and "persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets" only used what was known to the Jews from their Scriptures to address them concerning the Christian 'sect' and Jesus Christ, whom they must accept as their messiah/savior, the good news they should not reject.¹²⁷ Thus, contrary to Scott's argument of hidden transcripts, Paul's attention was drawn to the Jews and their rejection of Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah who will come to save them and establish the peace of God with them (Ezek. 34:25-29. Cf. Isa. 48:18; 54:10, 13).¹²⁸ Therefore, if Paul had intended to subvert the Empire politically, Romans 13:1-7 could have been a significant discussion upon his arrival in his private encounter with those that came to him (Acts 28:30-31). However, Luke's account presents a religious 'theological appeal'

¹²⁷ Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts: Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Clinton E. Arnold, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 1435-1438. (NB. Page numbers are from digital edition and may be different from printed/book version). Here Schnabel contends that "Paul first argues that there is a connection between Israel, which had always been obstinate, and those Jews in Rome who refused to accept Jesus as Savior. He goes on to substantiate this point by a long quotation from Isa 6:9-10. Third, he asserts that God has taken the initiative in sending his salvation to the Gentiles, who will listen to the message of Jesus Christ," 1435-1438.

¹²⁸ Schnabel, 1438.

to the Jews who still reject Jesus Christ and show concern about the ‘Christian sect.’¹²⁹ Since there are no such indications, it would draw attention to Wright and Sander’s earlier claim regarding imperial terms such as ‘savior’ and ‘gospel.’ These themes found in Romans are connected to themes from the Old Testament with which Paul draws attention to God’s divine acts of salvation, which bring peace and, therefore, ‘good news’ to all who believe in Jesus Christ.¹³⁰ Parallel language does not necessarily mean a subversion of the Empire since such words were already used before the Empire.¹³¹ Such terms were employed to communicate prophetic utterances fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Therefore, from the arguments above, it is asserted that Paul, knowing the political developments between the Jews and the Romans, coupled with the recent expulsion by Claudius and the authorities’ probable expectation of another uprising coming from the Jews (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Suetonius, *Claudius* 25.4; Pliny, *Letters* 10.97), he sought to restore a ‘good’ social relation between these two groups. First, he addresses the issue by helping them to understand that their obedience to these authorities is as to God and vice versa. This is because “all authorities” are established by God (see, for example, Dan. 2:21; 4:32; 5:18-23. Cf. Jer. 27:5-8).¹³² Thus, rejecting their authority is as rejecting the counsel of God, which shall incur their wrath (Deut. 25:1; Prov. 14:35;

¹²⁹ Schnabel, 1441-1443, 1445.

¹³⁰ E. Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 5-6. Cf. Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 35. He argues that Romans “is most fruitfully understood when it is read as an intertextual conversation between Paul and the voice of Scripture.” Wright, “*Romans and the Theology of Paul*,” 30.

¹³¹ Gerhard Friedrich, “euangelizomai” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Abridged in One Volume. Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey William Bromiley, eds. (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1985), 267–273. Allan J. McNicol, “Gospel, Good News,” ed. David Noel Freedman, Allen C. Myers, and Astrid B. Beck, *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 521–522. Zachary G. Smith, “Gospel Genre,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹³² Here Dunn argues that “Paul draws on the resources of Jewish wisdom.” Romans 9-16, *WBC*, 340-341. See Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*. Roy D. Kotansky (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 781-782.

16:14; 20:2; Eccl. 8:2; 10:4-6). Thus, through these authorities, God remits rewards or punishment to people (Ezek. 25:14). Therefore, to please God, they must obey the city authorities for their good. This will prevent them from incurring God's wrath and secure the civil authorities' approval (Deut. 12:17; Prov. 8:15,16). To demonstrate this, Paul edges them to be responsible for paying taxes, which had been one of the significant issues, especially at the beginning of the reign of Nero.¹³³ The Jewish Christians (and the Church in Rome) were to act as good citizens to avoid civic conflicts.¹³⁴ This will prevent future possibilities of clashes with the civil authorities.

In summary, the text of Romans 13:1-7 does not support any purported counter-imperial message from Paul in its historical and theological sense. With Paul's pastoral care to visit Rome (1:10-15), the return of the Jews after Claudius' death, the doctrinal challenge that faced the Church (as addressed by Paul in the letter), and the upcoming tax payment from the government was a considerable concern¹³⁵ that needed to be addressed. To this, Paul writes to the Church, edging them to be faithful to their calling in Jesus Christ and be responsible citizens as God expects them to be. However, this appeal by itself is weak when read from an anti-imperial point of view since Paul did not know his

¹³³ Ferguson, *Church History*, 38; Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Michigan: Zondervan, 1979), 59-62, (62).

¹³⁴ Dunn, "Living as Good Citizens" in *Romans* 9-16, 353-354, 356-361. This does not mean blind obedience, however. There are biblical examples in which people acted against public authorities to obey God was a right act (e.g., Exod. 1:17; Dan 3:10-12; 6; Acts 5:29. Cf. Matt. 17:25; 22:21; Mark 12:17). By extension, Dunn affirms that "Paul's political realism also meant that he gave no thought to the Zealot option which was currently gaining strength within Palestine itself. Nor is there any indication that his readers were in any danger of being seduced by that option: however realistic it might appear to be in Palestine, it could hardly be entertained, even on theological grounds, within Rome itself. But neither did he advocate a policy of withdrawal from the corruption of the metropolis, as though the desert or the Qumran alternative could provide a model for Christians in general or for Roman Christians in particular. That too was a nonstarter. Political realism for Paul meant living *within* the political system even if that meant living to a large extent in the terms laid down by that system." 360.

¹³⁵ N. T. Wright, "Romans," in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 719. Tacitus, *Annales* 13.50-51. Witherington, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 315.

audience personally, and most of the Jews were not in favor of Christianity. This would make things difficult if he intended to use it to win their trust and lead them to resistance. Thus, from history, Paul would understand that the Jews had not been victors over these empires, even from the Maccabean revolts.

1Thessalonians 5

As one of the ‘pastoral exhortations of Paul,’ the letter to the Thessalonians remains a crucial factor in our understanding of how Paul used the Jewish apocalyptic expectation of the Day of the Lord to address his audience who thought the day had already come.¹³⁷ While Paul’s primary thought in the letter is about praising the faith of the Thessalonians (2:1-4:8),¹³⁸ he equally addresses the issue of death and the coming of the Messiah at the end of time (4:9-5:11). Thus, the first letter to the Thessalonians was written to the Church at a time when there was a lack of instruction (2:17-3:5) and probably, many of the converts, mainly Gentiles (Acts 17:4; 1 Thess. 1:9), had become weak in the faith of the gospel they received from Paul. This calls into question Donfried’s argument of ‘loyalty and commitment’ to the Empire to maintain the ‘beneficence received from the emperor.’¹³⁹ Thus, for the Church, issues of loyalty to

¹³⁷ For full discussion on Jewish eschatological expectations of the eradication of evil, see Paul J. Achtemeier, *Romans: Interpretation. A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, James Luther Mays, ed., (Louisville: John Knox, 1985), 4-9. Here, Achtemeier argues that the Jewish apocalyptic view understands God’s activity to consist in a final transformation of reality, with the introduction of a new age. Yet for all that, the apocalyptic view did not understand God to be active in present history or in the lives of individuals. Only when he brings history as we know it to a close and inaugurates a new age will He act decisively to restore His creation in the future, when God would intervene to begin a new age.

¹³⁸ Esler, *1 Thessalonians*, 216.

¹³⁹ Donfried, 215-19. Thus, there is a deviation of purpose of the letter by Donfried. Internal evidence of the letter suggests a ‘revival’ of faith and encouragement to see loved ones dead again at the return of Christ and not to counter a ‘social’ benefit of an entire city by which the audience might not be interested in although they face persecution.

Caesar and the empire were not a central issue, but one that centered on faith and bereavement concerning their dead ones.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, Paul had to remind them of the preaching they heard (2:1-12), their reception of it (vv. 13-16), and the joy it filled the apostle's heart (vv. 17-20). However, Paul also had to address the issues of immorality (4:1-7) and idleness (4:9-12). He further discussed the issue of eschatology (4:13-14), especially regarding the return of the Lord Jesus Christ (4:15-5:3). The longing of the apostle to return to them (2:17-3:5) could make one assume that he wanted to complete his teachings with them, as well as correct the errors of immorality, and the setting of dates regarding the Lord's return (4:1-5:3).¹⁴¹

One major issue in this letter regarding our thesis is the use of imperial words associated with Christ, as Hendrix suggested. However, Philip Esler, while discussing an insight from Robert Funk in Greek letter writing, presents a social-relations approach in using such familiar words and states:

“in the Greek world, the letter was designed to extend the possibility of friendship between the parties after they had become separated—that is why *parousia* (‘presence’ or ‘arrival’), *philophronesis* (‘affectionate kind treatment,’ ‘friendship’), and *homilia* (‘being together,’ ‘communion,’ ‘conversing’) are basic to the conception of the Greek letter. Funk suggests that Paul must have thought of his presence as the bearer of charismatic, even ‘eschatological,’ power, even though he certainly does not equate his *parousia* with that of Christ, and this theme is more clearly seen in 1 Cor 5:3–5 than in 1 Thessalonians.”¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Scott Gambrill Sinclair, "The Letters of St. Paul [Lecture Notes]" (2017). *The Scott Sinclair Lecture Notes Collection* 5, 12. <https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2017.sinclair.01>

¹⁴¹ John Byron, "1 and 2 Thessalonians." Scot McKnight, gen. ed., *The Story of God Commentary Bible*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 1, 9, 21.

¹⁴² R. W. Funk, "The Apostolic Parousia: Form and Significance," in W. R. Farmer, C. F. D. Moule, and R. R. Niebuhr (eds.), *Christian History and Interpretation: Studies Presented to John Knox* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 265. H. Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis n. Chr* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1956) quoted in Philip F. Esler, "1 Thessalonians" in *The Pauline Epistles*, Oxford Bible Commentary, John Muddinin and John Barton, eds. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 216. See I Thess. 3:6.

Thus, while Hendrix may assume the association of parallel imperial words in the epistle, it may be argued that such words were already familiar in Greek letters which might not be a suspicion for comparison between Christ and Caesar in Paul's letters.¹⁴³ Ed Mackenzie discusses concerning Adolf Deissmann's claim of 'polemical parallelism' between the terms used in early Christian churches and the imperial cult by suggesting that Deissmann's claim of parallel words such as 'κυριος' and 'ευαγγελιον' used by Paul to challenge the imperial cult "is notoriously subjective,"¹⁴⁴ predominantly those "focusing on ideological conflict – make questionable appeals to parallels between the language applied to Jesus and that applied to the emperor."¹⁴⁵ For he contends that "the identification of such parallels has been widely criticized"¹⁴⁶ and that "several scholars have noted the risk of finding parallels where none exist."¹⁴⁷ A. Smith, an anti-imperial proponent, agrees that "key terms such as parousia, apantesis, and asphaleia (ασφαλεια, 'security') which Paul uses 'were not politically innocuous.'"¹⁴⁸ Thus, Paul uses a writing style known to all people then to communicate in the language understood by his audience which was not politically inclined. As Esler argues, Paul wants them to focus

¹⁴³ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1–2 Thessalonians*, Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, eds., Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 94.

¹⁴⁴ Mackenzie, *The Quest for the Political Paul*, 40-50, 43; cf. Deissmann, "Light from Ancient East," 388-389.

¹⁴⁵ Mackenzie, 43.

¹⁴⁶ W.A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1983), 51-73. B. Holmberg, *Sociology and the New Testament: An Appraisal* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990) 90-103. For a critique of recent views, see J. J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Studies of the NT and its World (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 75-154.

¹⁴⁷ Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 28-30.

¹⁴⁸ A. Smith, "Unmasking the Powers: Toward a Postcolonial Analysis of 1 Thessalonians," in *Paul and the Roman Imperial Order*, ed. R. A. Horsley (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity Press International, 2004), 48. Emphasis mine. Cf. Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 9-10.

on who they are and what they have believed which has made them different from other groups. Thus maintaining their social identity even in his absence.¹⁴⁹

In dealing with issues of eschatology, Paul first addressed the Thessalonians regarding their departed brethren (4:13-18). While some grieved and had lost hope of not seeing their loved ones again (v. 13), Paul assured them of the resurrection of Christ to be a ‘motivating factor’¹⁵⁰ to them, that, as God raised Jesus from the dead (vv. 14-15), so will it be, that at the coming of the Lord from heaven, all their dead in the Lord (Christ) shall be restored to them, and together with the living, to be with the Lord forever (vv. 16-18). Thus an assertion by Judge regarding “the decrees of Caesar,” which was prohibited¹⁵¹ but engaged by Paul, may not be consistent with the argument of Paul to the audience as he encouraged them regarding their lost ones. As I earlier argued regarding Judge’s association of Acts 17 and the ‘decrees of Caesar,’ it is evident that disturbances from the Jews concerning their ‘religion’ (Acts 23:27-29; 25:13-22) in a counterargument after Paul had preached in several cities led to these public disturbances to which the governors were worried (Acts 17:1-9; 21:17-36).¹⁵² According to Acts 17:7-9, the

¹⁴⁹ Esler argues that “Thessalonians can be interpreted as an attempt by Paul to establish and maintain a desirable social identity for his Thessalonian converts in the face of the allure and threats posed by rival groups, and in relation to past, present, and future” Esler, 219, 221. Cf. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul And The Thessalonians. The Philosophic Tradition Of Pastoral Care*. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987). 95. Cf. Charles A. Wanamaker, *1,2 Thessalonians*. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, eds., *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 12. He argues that “The object of Paul's missionary preaching and teaching was twofold. He sought to gain converts to the distinctively Christian beliefs and behavior patterns which he proclaimed, and then he sought to form his converts into a new community in order to provide them with a context in which their new faith and commitment to God could develop and mature.”

¹⁵⁰ Weima, 710.

¹⁵¹ Judge, “Decrees of Caesar at Thessalonica,” 3-5.

¹⁵² See Cornelius R. Stam, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*, (Worzalla: Stevens Point, Wisconsin, 1984), 7. Stam expounds that “The Apostle's kinsmen at Thessalonica, however, unlike those at Berea, did not, as a whole, receive the Word with open hearts and minds. Paul's preaching rather won for him their deep and lasting enmity. Thus, unlike the “many” Jews who believed at Berea, only “some” among the Thessalonian Jews believed – and again, in contrast to “some” of the *Jews* who believed,

unbelieving Jews of Paul's gospel had 'stirred up' the city and alleged that Paul had done "contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus."

However, as Stam observes,

*"But it was generally the Jewish unbelievers who stirred up the Gentiles against the Gentile believers. At Philippi, it appears, the persecution arose directly from the pagan owners of the demon-possessed girl. But at Thessalonica it was the Jews who 'set all the city on an uproar' charging the believers with violating Caesar's laws (Acts 17:5-7). Again at Berea it was the Jews from Thessalonica who 'came thither also' and stirred up the people against Paul (Acts 17:13)."*¹⁵³

Thus, the Jews who did not believe Paul's gospel incited the city against him. From the Lukan account, one could observe that had it not been for these 'allegations,' the city authorities and the Gentiles would have had no issues with his gospel. Since the Jews saw his preaching as a threat to their religion, they would retaliate.¹⁵⁴ However, F. F. Bruce contends that a "militant messianism" from the East, which Claudius had identified as a "general plague which infests the whole world,"¹⁵⁵ was spreading throughout the Roman Empire among the Jewish communities. While Paul and his companions had not been involved in any "militant messianism,"¹⁵⁶ the unbelieving Jews, as our studies had earlier revealed, who had by resistance in various 'messianism uprisings' countered the Empire

we read the words: "and of the devout Greeks a *great multitude*, and of the chief [i.e., distinguished] women, *not a few*" (Acts 17:4)."

¹⁵³ Stam, 28. Emphasis supplied. Gordon D. Fee equally argues that "the nascent Christian faith tended to cut across all of these various sociological and commercial boundaries, *which was very likely one of the reasons it was suspect and thus destined for its share of persecution*, as the (very brief) narrative in Acts 17 indicates." Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*. New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 6. Emphasis supplied. Cf. Wanamaker, *1,2 Thessalonians*, 6.

¹⁵⁴ John Byron observes that Paul's letters to the Thessalonians parallels the salvific story of Israel. As God used Moses to rescue Israel, so He does to the Thessalonians by sending His Son, Jesus Christ. "Jesus is the one who died and rose again (1 Thess. 1:10; 4:14) and is coming again (1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15 -17; 5:23; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2:1) to judge the world (1 Thess. 4:6; 5:2; 2 Thess. 1:5 - 10; 2:8)." Byron, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 9-10. Cf. Wanamaker, *1,2 Thessalonians*, 6.

¹⁵⁵ F. F. Bruce, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, gen. eds., *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 45 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 7.

¹⁵⁶ Bruce, 8, 9.

should be associated with such “plague” that affected the world then. By the besiege of Jerusalem from the Roman soldiers to the Jews in 70 A. D., one could attest that the Jews, not Paul nor the Christians, were of much concern to the emperor.

As we turn to the other aspects of Paul concerning the coming of the Lord, which some had believed to have already occurred (5:1), it must first be inferred from the text that Paul believed Christ would return at his time (“then we who are alive, who remain.” 4:17, LEB) and admonished the Thessalonians to believe that it had not yet been fulfilled.¹⁵⁷ By this conviction concerning Christ, Paul taught that God had already begun to inaugurate the new age (and creation), with its fullness to be established when Jesus returns to judge all humankind.¹⁵⁸ Thus, the present is a time of decision for or against Christ Jesus.¹⁵⁹ This may indicate that for Paul, the parousia of Jesus may not be as of ‘joy and happiness’ *to those who reject Him* as paralleled to the coming of Caesar in which his subjects in praise go to meet him. *Christ’s return is a ‘vengeance on His enemies.*¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Weima, 711. “Paul’s description of the coming destruction that will fall upon not only this “superman of Satan,” but also his followers, who are persecuting the believers in Thessalonica, is ultimately a message of comfort to the

apostle’s readers, because this future judgment will vindicate their faith, punish their enemies, and demonstrate that God’s judgment is just (cf. 1:5–10).”

¹⁵⁸ Here Esler argues that “Paul does not need to tell them about dates and times, because he had already done that. Paul explicates the day will come quite unexpectedly. It will be a time of joy for some and terror for others. Both Isaiah (Isa 27:13) and Zephaniah (Zeph. 1:14—18) contrast the scene respectively. Paul in no doubt is *painting a happy future for them and an unhappy one for sinful out-groups,*” (Please use a complete sentence. Where does the quote begin?) 1210. Emphasis mine.

¹⁵⁹ Byron, 10. “They are living in an eschatological tension between the death and resurrection of Jesus and his final return and triumph. Living between these events requires hope for daily living. Paul has infused these letters with hope; yet at the same time he doesn’t overlook their current circumstances or attempt to mitigate them. Indeed, as we will see, Paul not only readily acknowledges that they are suffering; he is worried that it may have knocked some of them off course (1 Thess. 3:1 – 5). But he encourages them to place their hope in the God of Israel, who will ultimately bring them through to the end (1 Thess. 5:23; 2 Thess. 3:3).”

¹⁶⁰ Since Paul is alluding to an OT imagery, Jeffery Miller argues that “The Old Testament day of judgment involves punishment on God’s chosen nation (Zeph. 1:4), other specified nations (e.g., Egypt in Jer. 46:10), or humanity in general (Zeph. 1:18). God will ‘visit’ the world in a military attack that will result in the

Therefore, inferring from the above, in the context of our thesis focus, 1 Thess. 5:3, a key text regarding Paul’s attitude to empire, should be read in the context of Paul contrasting those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with those who do not believe in Him. As Kim argues, it is more problematic to assume that Paul’s eschatological formulation was paralleled by the prevalence of the imperial cult in Thessalonica,¹⁶¹ thus making him use imperial terminologies. In addition, eschatological motives are also found in his other letters, not just in the Thessalonians. Furthermore, since such words were not strictly of imperial origins, their occurrence in the Thessalonian letters does not constitute a critique of the imperial cult.¹⁶² From the text, Paul argues that the ‘day of the Lord’ is “coming in the same way as a thief in the night,” which is unpredictable (5:1-3). And since it is unexpected, those living in sin and forgetful of the Day will be ‘caught unprepared’ as when a thief comes at night. They shall not escape its judgments, even though they seem to be enjoying “peace and security” by their association with worldliness and their denial of Jesus Christ.¹⁶³ His coming shall be to them as “a sudden destruction” to their peace and security, like the birth pains of a pregnant woman catch her suddenly, of which she has no control and shall not escape, because the time of

world’s complete and irreversible disruption. He will serve as judge over humanity on an individual and national scale during this fearful day of terror (Isa 2:10–21; Zeph. 1:14–15). Jeffrey E. Miller, “Day of Judgment,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016). In the New Testament, the Day of the Lord is in direct relationship with the return of Jesus: He shall judge the living and the dead (Acts 10:42; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5; John 5:22). The Day of the Lord is referred to as the Day (you need to decide whether to capitalize this word day or not and be consistent.) of the Lord Jesus’ return (1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:14; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16). Matthew’s gospel account envisages this Day as a day of judgment (Matt. 10:15; 11:22, 24; 12:36), for Jesus compares the day of judgment or His return to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Matt. 10:15; 11:24; Cf. Isa. 13:19; Jer. 49:18; 50:40; Amos 4:11; Zeph. 2:9).

¹⁶¹ Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 8.

¹⁶² Kim, *Christ and Caesar*, 9-10.

¹⁶³ Wanamaker, 11. He contends that “...the significance of Jesus was explained in terms of deliverance from impending divine judgment against the ungodliness and wickedness that characterized the present age. In other words, eschatological salvation from imminent divine judgment formed a key part of Paul’s mission preaching.”

delivery has come.¹⁶⁴ Thus, Paul parallels the coming of Jesus to the Old Testament allusion concerning the ‘Day of the Lord,’ a judgment day. This OT allusion may be seen as a direct opposite to Judge’s argument regarding the ‘visitation of the emperor’s arrival to a city in glory with his subjects coming to welcome him.’ Contrary to Judge’s assertion, Christ’s return is not a time of praise for the ‘world’ but of judgment, unlike the emperor whose visit to the city would be joyous and glorious. Moreover, Christ will take His people to a city he has prepared for them (1 Thess. 4:17. Cf. John 14:1-3), whereas the emperor’s visit brings his subjects back into the city where they came out to meet him at the entrance. These marked contrasts add weight to the possibility that Paul had an OT ideology regarding the Day of the Lord in mind rather than the visit of an emperor.

In summary, one may assume that in 1 Thess. 5 (especially verse 3), Paul was contrasting the realities of the politics of the day to his gospel of Christ. Although it may be assumed that some coins minted at Thessalonica contained slogans like ‘freedom and security’¹⁶⁵ announcing the city’s relationship to the emperor and Rome, it must be inferred that Paul, in his anticipation for the return of Jesus in allusion to the Day of the Lord, cautioned the Thessalonian believers regarding their belief that Jesus had already returned. They have failed to heed Paul’s warning regarding the date setting for Christ’s return (5:1-3) and that Christ’s coming will be literal and visible (4:15-17).¹⁶⁷ False teachers had misled them to believe the misconception that Christ’s coming would be

¹⁶⁴ Contrary to Helmut Koester’s assertion that Paul promotes ‘battle’ against the empire, Kim stresses the difficulty of seeing Paul doing so in the texts. For “Paul calls the church to *wait* for the day of the Lord or the *parousia* of the Lord Jesus, the Son of God, with faith, love, and hope, not succumbing to the *Zeitgeist* of the Roman Empire and the contemporary Hellenism (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:13-18).”

¹⁶⁵ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Eldon J. Epp, ed., (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006), 49-51.

¹⁶⁷ James A. Grant, *1 & 2 Thessalonians. The Hope of Salvation*. R. Kent Hughes, gen. ed., Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 125.

spiritual (from the Gnostics),¹⁶⁸ which made them lose their focus and were being “tossed to and carried” about by the wind of erroneous doctrine (Eph. 4:14). Such a situation had an alarming negative impact on their spiritual life and conduct (as can be seen in 3:6-15). To this, Paul writes to correct their error. Paul does not, by his gospel in this context, propagate a ‘militant savior’ who will come to rival the emperor. While persecution engulfed these believers, it was not because of the alleged breach of the ‘decrees of Caesar’ but because of their new way of life. F. F. Bruce writes: “If the Thessalonian Christians found themselves enduring persecution because of their new faith and way of life, let them reflect that this was the common lot of Christians. In this respect, they stood in the noble succession of the churches of Judea.”¹⁶⁹

2 Thessalonians 2

In this section, I will discuss Paul's continuous response to the Thessalonian church, especially concerning their faith and correcting false doctrines. Also, in the context of our main thesis discussion, the identity of the ‘lawless one’ shall be examined as it relates to Paul and Empire. Since anti-imperial readers of the letter treat both 1 and 2 Thessalonians together in terms of eschatology and the use of imperial language, I will not discuss issues of imperial language, which have already been amply discussed above. The second letter to the Thessalonians is a response to the report Paul heard concerning

¹⁶⁸ Esler, *2 Thessalonians*, 239. Maarten J. J. Menken, *2 Thessalonians. Facing the End with Sobriety (New Testament Readings)* (London: Routledge, 1994), 98.

¹⁶⁹ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 25. James A. Grant argues that “The Christians were faced with a serious charge — treason against Caesar. *And the charge had some truth to it. No, these Christians did not want to rebel against the rule of Caesar, but they would not worship him as the Lord.* That was reserved for Jesus alone. In that way there was no other king but Jesus Christ. That was a difficult stance to take in the Roman Empire, and Paul knew that it would bring about suffering and affliction.” Grant, *1 & 2 Thessalonians.*), 14.

what was happening in the church after his departure. The church faced severe persecution (1:5-12) while struggling with end-time excitement. Idleness became more serious in their ranks, as they anticipated Christ's return (3:6-15).¹⁷¹ Therefore, Paul, in his letter, responded to encourage them concerning their faith in persecution (1:3-5). He then corrected their understanding concerning the coming of the Lord (2:1-5).¹⁷² And he encouraged them to be disciplined (3:6-15). Thus, Paul, in his second epistle to the church, reminds them of what he had already told them (2 Thess. 2:5; 3:10). Since some of his epistles contained elements of eschatology, it must be noted that Paul did not write to give a 'complete eschatology' but instead focused on the issue of Christ's Second Coming.¹⁷³ This casts doubt on Harrison's argument that Paul gave a more pronounced eschatological and apocalyptic response in 1 and 2 Thessalonians than in his other epistles to counter Augustus' inaugurated eschatological age of bliss.¹⁷⁴ However, in 2 Thessalonians, Paul emphasized the revelation of Satanic appearance before the coming of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁵

Considering the above summary of 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2, I will focus my discussion on the possible identity of this 'lawless man.' In the quest to identify the man of lawlessness, scholars have suggested several suppositions. F. F. Bruce indicates that some Jewish apocalyptic predictions had postulated that "A general revolt by Israel

¹⁷¹ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 25. Some of the Thessalonian believers had given up on their work because of a possible 'false hope' by the false teachers who came into the church after Paul's departure.

¹⁷² Stam, 79. Esler, *2 Thessalonians*, 235.

¹⁷³ Bruce, 246. He contends that "the severity of the Thessalonians' persecution made them think that the eschatological birth pangs had begun (cf. Isa 66:7) and that the Day of the Lord had arrived—much as, at a later date, the severity of the persecution of Christians under Septimius Severus 'disturbed the minds of the many' and encouraged the opinion that the Parousia of Antichrist was then 'already approaching.'"

¹⁷⁴ Harrison, "Paul and the Imperial Gospel," 78, 88-95.

¹⁷⁵ Esler, *2 Thessalonians*, 236

against the law of God was foretold for the end-time” (Jub. 23:14–23).¹⁷⁷ However, the discussion from 1 Thessalonian 2 does not support such claims as this ‘rebellion’ is a worldwide event more than a restricted area or people. Notwithstanding, Bruce assumes this ‘figure’ to be Antiochus IV, the Seleucid king associated with the Maccabean revolt as discussed earlier.¹⁷⁸ The problem with such an assertion is that Paul’s prediction regarding this revelation of the ‘man of sin’ concerns a future time when Christ’s return is imminent.¹⁸⁰ Antiochus’ wars in Judea were conducted when Christ had not even been born, so he does not fit this prediction. Also, though his sacrifice of a pig on the altar in the Temple in Jerusalem and the setting up of an image of Zeus in the Temple were forbidden acts, there is no indication whether by these acts he sought to challenge ‘every other so-called god.’ Moreover, at the time of Christ, Antiochus had already been dead since 164 B. C.; therefore, he could not be the figure in 2 Thess. 2.¹⁸¹

In the context of this discussion, I assert that this ‘lawless man,’ who opposes God and shall be revealed in the ‘future’ as against the time of Paul, is the ‘Antichrist,” as projected in the prophetic books of Daniel (8, 11) and Revelation (chapter 13).¹⁸² In a

¹⁷⁷ Bruce, 248. Cf. W. D. Davies, “Paul and the People of Israel.” *NTS* 24 (1977–78) 4–39, 8. Here Davies identifies the *ἀποστασία* foretold here with “the refusal by Jews to receive the gospel; this refusal is ‘a rejection of God’s will and is the work of Satan.” However, Bruce argues that “if the authenticity of 1 Thess. 2:15, 16 be accepted, as it is by Davies, it is difficult to see how the Jews could make any advance on the great refusal which had already taken place—unless 2 Thessalonians represents a rather different perspective from 1 Thess. 2:15, 16.” Thus the Jewish claim is refuted.

¹⁷⁸ Bruce, 250.

¹⁸⁰ William. H. Shea, ‘Early Development of the Antiochus Epiphanes Interpretation’ in *Symposium on Daniel: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, F. Holbrook, ed., Vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Biblical Research Institute of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1986) 269–274.

¹⁸¹ An attempt by Emperor Gaius in A.D. 40 to have his statue set up in the Jerusalem temple, in assertion of his claims to divinity was rejected by the Jews (Philo, *Legat.* 203–346; Josephus, *Antiq.* 18.261–301). Accordingly, Antiochus is not the only person who tried or decided to set up an image in the Temple.

¹⁸² Jacques B. Doukhan, *Daniel: Vision of the End* (Andrews University Press, 2000), 89-92.

contrast parallelism, Jacques Doukhan¹⁸³ makes series of parallel descriptions that link this figure regarding the ‘man of sin’ in 2 Thess. 2 to the king/beast figure in Daniel 8, 11 and Revelation 13. In discussing this ‘figure,’ it is interesting that the majority of scholars do not associate it with the emperor or the imperial cult, which would have made claims of rivaling imperial propaganda in the city by Paul possibly. Their non-associative here may indicate no proximity of Paul to have had any subversive or hidden thought against the imperial cult.¹⁸⁴ In observation by Doukhan, the king of the north challenges God and seeks to usurp Him (Dan. 11:36, 37). In parallelism, in chapter 8, the little horn rises to the heavenly hosts (vv. 10, 11) against the ‘Prince of princes’ (v. 25). Equally, the king of the north defiles the sanctuary and abolishes the daily sacrifice (Dan. 11:31), while in Daniel 8 the little horn also defiles the sanctuary (verse 11) and takes away the daily sacrifices (v. 12). The king of the north establishes himself in the ‘Beautiful Land,’ an expression symbolizing Palestine (Dan. 11:16, 41, 45), and attacks the holy covenant (vv. 28, 30). The little horn grows toward the ‘Beautiful Land’ (Dan. 8:9) and destroys the ‘holy people’ (v. 24). Like the king of the north, the little horn of chapter 8 originates from the north (v. 9). The king of the north and the little horn die the same death. The king of the north comes to his end without the help of anyone (Dan. 11:45), while the little horn ‘will be destroyed, but not by human power’ (Dan. 8:25; cf. 2:45). Now with these parallels, we consider the similarities of these in comparison to 2 Thess. 2 and Rev. 13:1-10, where the man of sin and the beast, respectively, sit, oppose and exalt

¹⁸³ Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile*. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2000), 160-162. <https://www.getnotdeceived.com/parallels-of-daniel-8-and-daniel-11.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Gene L. Green, *The Letters To The Thessalonians*, D. A. Carson, gen. ed., *The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 289-291. Cf. Bruce, Wanamaker, 339-342. Fee, *Letters to Thessalonians*, 245-246.

themselves above all that is worshipped or called god (2 Thess. 2:4/ Rev. 13:6). They sit in the temple of God (2 Thess. 2:4/ Rev. 13:4). They show themselves to be God (2 Thess. 2:4/ Rev. 13:4, 6). They come according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders (2 Thess. 2:9/Rev. 13:2). They blasphemes God (2 Thess. 2:4/Rev. 13:5) and will be destroyed by God (2 Thess. 2:8/Rev. 13: 10).¹⁸⁵ All these parallels strongly suggest that in contrast to historical fulfillment, this figure that Paul identifies as the man of sin and lawlessness is the Antichrist who appeared after pagan Rome and shall be active until the coming of Christ.¹⁸⁶

Ranko Stefanović argues that “the word *apostasia* (translated as “falling away”) regularly denotes political or military rebellion, in this case, against God.”¹⁸⁷ Thus Paul is referencing an entity who, in an upcoming religious uprising, shall oppose God through his earthly evil forces and agents.¹⁸⁸ In the context of that great rebellion, the man of sin will be revealed. The word “man” occurs here with the definite article (*ho anthropos*), which shows that Paul was referring to *a definite figure or power in operation at his time.*

¹⁸⁵ Ranko Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ. Commentary on the book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2004), 399-412. Cf. Jacques B. Doukhan, *Secrets of Revelation: the Apocalypse through Hebrew Eyes* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 2002), 114-116.

¹⁸⁶ Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 405.

¹⁸⁷ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 248. Bruce argues that “‘ἀποστασία,’ ‘the rebellion,’ a Hellenistic formation, corresponding to classical ἀπόστασις, denotes either political rebellion (as in Josephus, *Vita* 43, of the Jewish revolt against Rome) or religious defection (as in Acts 21:21, of abandonment of Moses’ law). Since the reference here is to a world-wide rebellion against divine authority at the end of the age, the ideas of political revolt and religious apostasy are combined.” Ranko Stefanović, *Notes- Thessalonian Apocalypse*, Lecture Notes, Eschatology, Fall 2021.

¹⁸⁸ Doukhan, emphasizing this point argues that “The interpretation of this intricate passage is not easy (Dan. 11:1-39, concerning the Antichrist/king of the North). At this stage, the message we could at least decipher in Dan. 11:5-39 is the announcement of a bringing together of two ‘spiritual’ forces, one, Babel of a religious nature, usurping God’s power, and the other, Egypt of a secular and political essence. This interpretation is, by the way, supported by the vision of Dan. 2 which also describes the period coming after Rome, i.e., the same period, in terms of clay (a religious power) and of iron (a secular and political power). This bringing together is apparent with the North-South fight but also with their common opposition to God’s people in the perspective of the end. *Vision of the End*, 88. By spiritual, he argues concerning ‘evil forces’ that work through these agencies to which the Antichrist shall carry on as predicted of him to try to usurp God’s power and seek to be worshipped.

While it is true, it must be understood that this figure is only influenced by Satan as his earthly agent. F. F. Bruce argues of the lawless one in relation to the mystery that

“The “mystery of lawlessness” is a satanic counterpart to the mystery of God’s purpose; at present, it works beneath the surface, but when the due time comes for its disclosure, it will find its embodiment in the manifested ‘man of lawlessness.’ Until then it is under restraint... The restrainer keeps the lawlessness mystery in check “until he is removed.”¹⁹⁰

This argument concurs with Paul’s thought in the text because the Thessalonian text reveals that “The coming of the lawless one is *by the activity of Satan* with all power and false signs and wonders” (2 Thess. 2:9, emphasis mine) which we see from the Antichrist that he gains his authority, power, and throne from Satan/Dragon (as observed by Doukhan). The parallels discussed above showed the little horn/beast receive from Satan his authority, throne, and power to work signs and lying wonders to deceive those who accept a lie and shall be destroyed by God. By these activities, the Old Testament background reveals Satan as one who opposes God and His people (Zech. 3:1-5. Cf. Rev. 12:7-12). Contrary to anti-imperial reading of the Thessalonian letters, it is clear that Rome, in its imperial propaganda, Pax Romana,¹⁹¹ had prided itself in achieving ‘peace and security’ for the people through their conquest and not probably by an authority received from ‘Satan.’¹⁹² Thus, the imagery painted by Paul predicts a figure more than imperial Rome (or the cult). Hans LaRondelle has argued that since the ‘antichrist-beast’ plays a “major role in the final events” that lead up to the judgment of the seven last

¹⁹⁰ Bruce, 253. Emphasis supplied. He relates this mystery as an antithetic to the τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον, “the mystery of our religion,” in 1 Tim 3:16. Stam argues that Judas Iscariot is the man of lawlessness because of he is called ‘son of perdition’ (John 17:12; 6:70). Stam, 95. Munck also associates the prophecy with Judas. But Judas hardly fits this prophecy since the NT records of his death (Matt. 23:3-5; Acts 1:18), which does not support Paul’s prophecy. See Stam, 95.

¹⁹¹ Jewett, 49-51.

¹⁹² Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 343-378.

plagues and Armageddon in the last days, the ‘antichrist-beast’ cannot be identified with “ancient Rome and its imperial cult.”¹⁹⁶ That suggests that the performances of these activities of rebellion and exaltation by the man of sin and lawlessness are associated with the Antichrist at the end of time.¹⁹⁷ This is because both Paul and Daniel, as well as the book of Revelation, assume this figure will be fully open and active shortly before Jesus returns, thus in the last days. This will annul any argument in favor of the imperial cult or Rome in the Thessalonian letters since, in all three descriptions the man of sin (or Antichrist/beast) is associated with the end time. In contrast, imperial Rome does not lead to the end of time. Thus, in describing the man of sin in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, Paul foresaw the great apostasy that would occur sometime before the return of Jesus Christ through the activities of the little horn, the Antichrist.¹⁹⁹

Thus, by exegesis, Paul’s caution begins with the verb *exapataō* (Let no one deceive) you. Here, Paul suggests that the Day of the Lord has not yet come because the apostasy and the man of lawlessness have not yet come. Therefore, the Thessalonians needed not to be deceived. The context suggests that the man of sin was already at work, but his identity had not yet been revealed, and his complete revelation would occur in the future. Although Paul’s description of this figure reminds one of the activities of Antiochus Epiphanes IV, Pompey, or Caligula in the Jewish apocalypses, the lawless one

¹⁹⁶ Hans K. LaRondelle, *How to Understand the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible* (Bradenton, FL: First Impressions, 2007), 297.

¹⁹⁷ Stefanović, *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 402, 405.

¹⁹⁹ Esler argues here that this rebellion from the Antichrist “refers to the dramatic breakdown of the legal, moral, social, and even natural order which is predicted in certain Israelite and NT texts of the period before the end (Jub. 23:14-21; 2 Esd. 5:1-13; 2 Tim. 3:1-9; Jude 17-19).” Esler, 1216. Cf. Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, 523-524, 624-626.

being referred to by Paul was still being restrained.²⁰⁰ This indicates that he was still active during Paul's time. Therefore, he could not be represented by any of these personalities. He was at work and will be active until the Lord returns.²⁰¹ Because he works under the influence of Satan, he will be consumed by Christ (vv. 8-10) when He returns. Because he deceives those who follow him, they will also bear the punishment of sin at the time of judgment.

However, Paul illustrates some clues to identify this man of sin. He identifies Satan as the source of his lawlessness. The result of his lawlessness will be condemnation at the coming of Christ. Equally, his activities will deceive many, who will be condemned. By way of victory for the Thessalonian believers, the one who will defeat him is Christ, whom they must wait for because He has not returned as some purport to be. But a key indication from Paul is that this personality sits in the temple to oppose every so-called god and shall seek to rule over everything worshipped. In rejecting an Old Testament association with Daniel 11, Furnish argues that "Paul, therefore, is employing a familiar theme to portray the supreme evil character of the coming Lawless One and his usurpation of God's place in the world."²⁰² However, Hans K. Larondelle argues that this figure was "as pointing to the desecration of God's temple by the same

²⁰⁰ Jeffrey A. D. Weima, "The Slaying of Satan's Superman and the Sure Salvation of the Saints: Paul's Apocalyptic Word of Comfort (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17)" *CTJ* 41 (2006): 67-88, 81.

²⁰¹ "The aim is neither to describe the end-time events nor to forecast when they will take place. It is to show that the Day of the Lord cannot possibly have arrived, because the lawless one remains at work." Victor Paul Furnish, *1 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians*. Abingdon New Testament Commentaries. Ed. Victor Paul Furnish. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007. 155.

²⁰² Weima, "The Slaying of Satan's Superman and the Sure Salvation of the Saints: Paul's Apocalyptic Word of Comfort (2 Thessalonians 2:1-17)," 81.

apocalyptic opponent of Christ, called by John the antichrist (1 John 2:18).²⁰³ He further argues that

“The identity of several linguistic key expressions used in 2 Thess 2 with expressions used in Dan 11:36, Ezek. 28:2, and Isa 11:4 (see margin of Nestle's Greek NT), leads to the conclusion that Paul draws his antichrist description from a conflation of three OT revelations about anti-God powers: (1) the historical rise and desecrations of the Anti-Messiah in Dan 7:25; 8: 10- 13; 11 :36-37; (2) the demonic nature of the self-exaltation and self-divinization of the kings of Tyre and Babylon in Ezek. 28:2, 6, 9, and Isa 14:13-14; and (3) the final destruction of the wicked one by the glorious appearance of the royal Messiah, in Isa 11:4”²⁰⁴

Thus, by using OT literary allusions for the NT information regarding the Antichrist, patterns in Daniel, Ezekiel, and Isaiah help for “the historical and theological-identification of ‘the man of lawlessness’ in 2 Thess 2.”²⁰⁵ Since the man of sin’s apostasy will finally climax when he sits in the temple by changing divine worship systems to his own, a historical-typological application of the Synoptic Apocalypse and a contextual application of Dan. 8 and 11 is helpful.²⁰⁶ Thus, the coming of the Antichrist and its activities could be paralleled to Rev. 13 concerning the ‘beast’ who shall come out of the sea.²⁰⁷ This end-time figure fits correctly in the context of Paul’s description in 2

²⁰³Hans K. Larondelle, “Paul's Prophetic Outline In 2 Thessalonians 2,” Andrews University Seminary Studies, Spring 1983, Vol. 21, No. 1, 61-69, 62.

²⁰⁴ Larondelle, 63. He parallels some imageries here,

2 THESSALONIANS

2:4a (Allusion):

. . . he that exalteth himself . . .
against all that is called God

2:4b (Allusion):

. . . he sitteth in the temple I sit in the seat of God . . .

2:8 (Allusion):

. . . the lawless one, whom . . .
the breath of the Lord Jesus shall slay with his lips

OT PASSAGES

Dan 11:36

he shall exalt himself . . .
above every god . . .

Ezek. 28:2:

as, of God, setting himself forth thou didst
set thy heart as God. the heart of God.

Isa 11:4:

and with shall he slay the breath of his
mouth . . . wicked.

²⁰⁵ Larondelle, 63.

²⁰⁶ Larondelle, 68.

²⁰⁷ “And one of its heads *appeared* as though slaughtered to death, and its [fatal wound had been healed. And the whole earth was astonished *and followed* after the beast. ⁴*And they worshiped the dragon because*

Thessalonians 2. In fulfilling all descriptions by Paul, allusions to Daniel 8 and Revelation 13 could be seen that “In any event, just as the Anti-Messiah in Dan 8 is suddenly destroyed "not by human power" (vs. 25), and as "the king of the north" is suddenly destroyed with no human helper (Dan 11:45), so will the Antichrist be destroyed by the splendor of Christ's appearance, "by the breath of his mouth" (2 Thess 2:8; cf. Isa 11:4).”²⁰⁸ Contrary to other possibilities of his restrain before his final revelation, it is only God that could do that and not any means because of Satan’s role in its activities.²⁰⁹

Therefore, from these OT literary allusions and a historical-typological application of the Synoptic Apocalypse and a contextual application of Dan. 8 and 11, in contrasting it to Rev. 13: 1-8, only end-time apocalyptic Antichrist could fit this description of 2 Thessalonians 2.

In summary, in 2 Thessalonians 2 (2:3-10), Paul predicts that before the Second Coming, there will be a rebellion against God, orchestrated by Satan through the appearance of the man of sin. The lawlessness was already operating ‘secretly’ in Paul’s day because God restrained its full revelation. Then, in the future, God would, at the proper time, remove the restraint on the man of sin, and he would be fully revealed for a

he had given authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, “Who is like the beast, and who is able to make war with him? And a mouth was given to him speaking great things and blasphemies, and authority to act was given to him for forty-two months. ⁶ And he opened his mouth for blasphemies toward God, to blaspheme his name and his dwelling, those who live in heaven.” Rev. 13:3-6, LEB. Emphasis mine.

²⁰⁸ Larondelle, 68.

²⁰⁹ Weima illustrates eight possibilities of the restrainer, namely: “(a) the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor (b) the principle of law and order and the political leaders in general (c) the proclamation of the gospel and the proclaimer (Paul or other missionaries) (d) the power of God and God himself (e) the Jewish state and James of Jerusalem (f) the presence of the church and the Holy Spirit (g) the force of evil and Satan (h) the false prophecy and the false prophet.” Weima, 82. However, he contends that the power of God and God Himself could be the restrainer.

certain period (vv. 3-4). By this act of God, there will be an outbreak of satanic activities, as Satan will launch the greatest deception ever witnessed in history.²¹⁰ Therefore, contrary to the notion that Paul attacked the Imperial order of his time in the Thessalonian texts, it is probable to argue that Paul's emphasis was on another 'figure' who was not a political figure of his time. Before Christ's return, Satan (2 Thess 2:9), through the 'lawless man,' the 'Antichrist,' will act in a highly deceptive manner, that will lead many to eternal destruction because they refused the 'truth' of the gospel of Christ. Therefore, "God sends them a powerful delusion] so that they will believe the lie, so that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but delighted in unrighteousness" (2 Thess. 2: 11-12).

Philippians 2:6-11 and 3:20-21

In the book of Philippians, we shall continue analyzing selected Pauline texts to examine their context in ascertaining a possible Imperial reading. A. Smith argues that linking an anti-imperial ideology to these texts becomes problematic.²¹¹ Thus, it must be first read in its context more than an assumed imperial propaganda.

Although practical matters condition the contents of the letter to the Philippians,²¹² Paul's main emphasis is on strengthening the commitment and faith of the

²¹⁰ "The picture of signs and wonders which will be worked by agents of evil before the End is reminiscent of Mk 13:22; Rev 13:14; 19:20. w. 11-12, 'For this reason,' presumably their failing to accept the love of the truth, God sends on them a power of delusion to make them believe in falsehood, 'so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness (*αδικία*) will be condemned.'" Esler, 1217.

²¹¹ Smith, 48.

²¹² Issues of faith, brotherly love, and living righteously are discussed by Paul in the letter. This he did in to encourage them to live in unity and in obedience to God.

Philippian Christians, as this was his regular aim.²¹³ He urges them to follow the example of Christ in union with him so they can grow into a Christlike attitude, guiding their beliefs and actions.²¹⁴ In treating the selected texts, I will employ a broad contextual analysis of the whole letter in relation to selected anti-imperial texts. This will help us understand that Paul, in this letter, was drawing a contrast between those who walk after the flesh by seeking earthly gains and those who, by Christ's example of humility, are 'behaving like citizens of heaven.' As Christ, through His humility, was exalted by God in heaven to sit at His right hand, so will He do to them that follow His example. Thus, the motif is a contrast between self-acclaimed righteousness and God's affirmation.²¹⁵ With this assertion, Michael Bird and Nijay Gupta argue as follows.

“In 2:1–4, Paul transitions from talking mostly about his imprisonment (chapter one) to the present life of the Philippian community. Paul encourages them to live cooperatively and to reject any sense of rivalry or individual superiority. Paul promotes humility and service, not self-promotion and boasting.”²¹⁶

By these warnings, N. T. Wright's assumption of “Paul to be a traveling ‘ambassador’ who offers people a ‘new religious experience’ in their hope of a ‘new king’ other than Caesar”²¹⁷ may be considered incorrect contextually. Here, A. K. Grieb's analysis may be helpful. While Paul does not consider a contrast between Christ and Caesar in the texts, Grieb argues that “Living the Christ-pattern has implications for *life together in*

²¹³ W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 84-107. Robert Murray, 'Philippians,' in *The Oxford Bible Commentary*, John Barton and John Muddiman, eds., (Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1179.

²¹⁴ Murray, *Philippians*, 1179. Cf. Ben Witherington, “Imitation, the Highest Form of Education” in Paul's Letter to the Philippians: A Socio-rhetorical Commentary, 83-84.

²¹⁵ G. F. Hawthorne, “Philippians, Letter to the” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 473.

²¹⁶ Michael F. Bird and Nijay K. Gupta, *Philippians*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 64-65.

²¹⁷ Wright, “Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire,” 174, 166-67.

community.”²¹⁸ By this, Paul admonished that as a church, they were “not to waste their time exalting rival leaders, setting up competitive factions, or indulging in those gifts of the Spirit that build up the individual at the expense of the community.”²¹⁹ As Bird and Gupta affirm this position, they argue that Paul appealed to the Philippians on “encouragement, consolation, Spirit-communion, compassion, and sympathy” among the congregation because “Paul wanted the Philippians to recall these earlier formative experiences”²²⁰ they had among themselves in the church (2:1-4; 4:2-7). Thus, while there might be issues of disunity in the church (2:14, 15; 3:15, 16), Paul encouraged them with the Christ example in chapter 2. Christ had achieved much and was commended by God. However, He remained humble even in fulfilling all these things. As Paul addressed ‘self-centeredness and disunity,’ he then draws attention to rival preachers who “preach Christ even from envy and strife. (1:15, 16; cf. 2:1-4).²²¹ As Paul was aware that in his absence, many other people, who at times were not consistent with his gospel, came to disturb the people by teaching contrary to what he had already taught, he warned the church against such people (3:1-4).²²² This indicates that Paul's seeking to draw a contrast between his gospel and those who come after him contradicts Wright's claim of a

²¹⁸ A. K. Grieb, “The One Who Called You: Vocation and Leadership in the Pauline Literature,” *Interpretation* 59.2 (2005): 154–165, here 163.

²¹⁹ Grieb, 163.

²²⁰ Bird and Gupta, 65. “Paul was appealing to the powerful experiences of compassion and love from God that initially transformed the Philippians and led them to salvation. In that case, *the gracious work of God would serve as an exemplary reminder to them: If you were so inspired and changed by the gracious love of God, ought you not to imitate that same other regard in the life you share in your community?*” cf. Murray, *Philippians*, 1184.

²²¹ M. D. Hooker, “Philippians: Phantom Opponents and the Real Source of Conflict,” in *Fair Play: Diversity and Conflict in Early Christianity*, I. Dunderberg, C. Tuckett, and K. Syreeni, eds., NovTSup 103 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 377–395. Cf. Bird and Gupta, *Philippians*, 15. They discuss possible scholarly views on the purpose of the letter.

²²² Hawthorne and Martin, *Philippians*, 211-217.

contrast between Christ and Caesar.²²³ Paul warns concerning these people: “Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the mutilation” (3:2). As Gordon D. Fee observes, although Paul does not identify who these people are here, “there is not a hint that they are present in Philippi as opponents of Paul and his gospel there.”²²⁴ However, the use of “mutilation” gives a clue as to which people he might have referred to.

Elsewhere in his letters, those ‘who boast in the flesh/circumcision’ are the Jews (Acts 11:2; 16:3; 21:20-21; Rom. 3:1; Gal. 2:9-14; 6:12-13). In his pastoral journeys and work, it was those of ‘the circumcision’ who disturbed him by ‘sowing discord’ into the believers so that some would not believe in Paul’s gospel (Gal. 3:1).²²⁵ Now fearing their opposition to destroy his work once again, Paul warns the people against their evil practices. In doing so, he predicts their work, behavior, and end as “the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose end is destruction, whose God is the stomach, and whose glory is in their shame, the ones who think on earthly things (Phil. 3:18-19).”²²⁶ In Romans 8:7-8, Paul argues that because such people seek righteousness through the flesh, they do not please God. The contrast here is with those who, through the Spirit, are of Christ.

²²³ By this argument, I disagree with N. T. Wright’s claim, which is based solely on chapter three, that Paul contrasts Christ and Caesar. Even in chapter 3, literal reading would suggest that Paul was contrasting his previous beliefs in Judaism to his belief in Christ. Nothing in the texts seem to suggest that ‘those who boast in the flesh’ represents Caesar.

²²⁴ Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, 5.

²²⁵ By identifying the Jews here, Paul points to their identity and behavior referred to as dogs, implying evil doers (Ps. 22:16,20; Isa. 56:10, 11; Matt. 15:26; Gal. 5:5). As he referred to them as ‘evil workers,’ he refers to them as those who interfere with his work and preach another Christ and gospel in 2 Cor. 11:3-4, 13-14. These people who in disguise come into the churches, by their deeds have condemned themselves to destruction.

²²⁶ Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 3.

Since Paul warns against boasting, he can only contrast it with humility. Thus, in Philippians 2, Paul appeals to the earthly life of Christ²²⁷ to the Philippians. Paul emphasizes “*Christ’s humble attitude and refusal to act selfishly* despite His equality with God.”²²⁸ Thus, in contrast to these Jews who oppose his gospel²²⁹, Christ, who being God, did not ‘boast’ of Himself to remain God, but in humility, He stooped so low as to be like humans. Thus in 3:21, Paul argues that if the flesh ends in destruction on earth, then those who are after the likeness of Christ shall be ‘citizens of heaven.’²³⁰ The word “πολίτευμα” (*politeuma*), translated as “commonwealth,” is only used here in the NT. In this context, it communicates its primary meaning of ‘place of citizenship.’²³¹ However, in the context of Paul’s argument, its verbal connotation (see Acts 23:1; Phil. 1:27) helps one to argue that, since some people (Acts 15:1-2; Gal. 6:12-13) are after the flesh and earthly recognition by which they receive worldly praise, which leads to their destruction, those who are of the ‘commonwealth of heaven’ are living the ‘manner of life’²³² after the similitude of Jesus Christ, who by His humility endured to the end and has received

²²⁷ Here I agree with Murray that “The first ‘in’ is ambiguous in Greek,” however, “the context favors ‘among’, i.e. in interpersonal relations.” Thus they must live the Christlike attitude among themselves as a ‘community’s way of life.’ Murray, *Philippians*, 1184. Bird and Gupta, 65.

²²⁸ John D. Barry, et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Phil. 2:6. Emphasis mine.

²²⁹ See Acts 15:1-2. Rom. 2:17-24.

²³⁰ Fee confirms on this point that “To be sure, *there is final vindication for the one who goes the way of the cross; but for believers the vindication is eschatological, not present.* Discipleship in the present calls for servanthood, self-sacrifice for the sake of others. Hence Paul concludes the narrative with a further call to “obedience” on the part of the Philippians (v. 12), which will take shape as God works out his salvation among them for his own good pleasure (v. 13); but for God to do so, they must stop the bickering (v. 14) and get on with “having the same love” for one another (v. 2) as Christ has portrayed in this unparalleled passage.” Fee, 257. Emphasis mine.

²³¹ πολίτευμα (*politeuma*), ατος (*atos*), τό (*to*): n.neu.; ≡ Str 4175; TDNT 6.516—LN 11.71 **place of citizenship** (Php 3:20+). James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997). Electronic edition

²³² Swanson, πολιτεύομαι (*politeuomai*): vb.; ≡ Str 4176; TDNT 6.516—LN 41.34 **conduct in one’s life**, lead one’s life (Ac 23:1; Php 1:27+)

‘heavenly approval’ and not earthly. Thus, Paul is encouraging the Philippians to live the heavenly life on earth while waiting for the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ.

In summary, the Philippian texts by which Paul is alleged to have used against the Imperial order are not consistent with the message and argument of Paul in the letter. While he warns the church against those who boast in and are after the flesh, the Philippian congregation must live the life of the citizens of heaven while on earth, even as they await their savior’s soon coming. The content of Paul’s argument in the letter refutes an idea of Imperial antagonism.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of Paul and Empire in the context of selected texts has been thoroughly examined to know whether those texts in their contexts allude to anti-imperial reading or may contain no hidden transcripts to subvert the imperial cult. Throughout our discussions, by a contextual examination of various texts, it is argued that the texts of Romans 13, 1 Thessalonians 5, 2 Thessalonians 2, and Philippians 2 and 3 do not, by their contexts, communicate any form of antagonism towards the Empire of Paul’s time. A political reading into the texts may be possible but difficult, as shown in our earlier discussion in Romans. It was argued in Romans 13 that the text was not a later interpolation by another author. Paul, by his OT teachings concerning respect for authority and the return of the Jews after the death of Claudius, cautioned them so they don’t face possible exit from Rome in the future. Therefore, Stowers’s argument of intentional imperial language wording by Paul in the letter to the Romans does not fit the case contextually. If Paul wanted to subvert the empire, he would not encourage his audience to pay taxes to the government. In 1 and 2 Thessalonians, it was argued that

while the church believed that Christ had returned and was losing focus on their faith by not heeding Paul's advice concerning the date setting for Christ's return, he encouraged them that it would be literal. Since it had not come, Paul longed for it in his day.

However, this coming of Christ is not possible until the revelation of the lawless one, the Antichrist, through whom Satan shall devise his final deception against God shortly before Jesus returns. Paul's eschatology here could only confirm other biblical sources to suggest that in the letters to the Thessalonians, he predicted an opposition by Satan which was already at work but whose revelation through the Antichrist shall be seen shortly before Christ comes. This is because God, the Restrainer, and not Paul's preaching of the gospel,²³³ has removed His act of restraining, and all who did not believe the truth of the Gospel shall perish in error. Thus, contrary to Donfried's view of the *parousia* as used in the Thessalonian letters, Paul does not, by its usage, transgress the mandates of Caesar by inquiring into his death. In connecting Acts 17 to the Thessalonian letters, they only make assumed linkage since it was the unbelieving Jews that 'framed' the accusation and not Paul. Issues of peace and security only parallel the lives of individuals living in darkness to those of the light. In the end, when God has moved off His restraining activity, Satan, through the man of sin, shall deceive them to perish, nullifying their deceived life of peace and security.

Finally, in the book of Philippians, it was argued that Paul, in contrast, does not have the Empire (or Caesar) or the Imperial Cult in mind. However, he contrasted the 'flesh-seeking' unbelieving Jews to the 'spiritual' believers in Christ. By this contrast, Paul parallels the life of the unbelieving Jews after the 'flesh', which leads to destruction

²³³ Green, 294, 295.

to the ‘spiritual,’ after the likeness of Christ, who is exalted in heaven, to the church. As they awaited the return of Christ, they must conduct themselves in like manner on earth as He did and was exalted to heaven so that by the same experience as Christ, they shall be taken to heaven upon His return. Contrary to Wright’s claim that Paul offering a new experience to his audience, the concept of *politeuma* may be seen in its verbal usage as a way of life. By this, Paul admonished his audience to live the heavenly lifestyle while awaiting the coming of Jesus Christ. In these analogies from Paul’s selected texts, it was argued that by a contextual reading of the Pauline letters, he had no hidden imperial language in them. As his pastoral duties were essential to him, he encouraged the churches to be faithful to their faith in Christ to the end, until His return. Therefore, in contrasting the two major views regarding Paul and the Empire, in line with Ed Mackenzie, studies regarding Paul and politics or how he related to the empire will no doubt continue to thrive, and assumptions of the interpretive findings from its proponents are already impacting the broader theological world since the late 90’s. There is, however, a need for caution. The assertion that Paul deliberately sought to undermine the empire, whether practically or ideologically (in coded or hidden transcripts), is negated by the absence of any explicit critique in Paul’s theology and by the presence of texts indicating a positive regard for empire.²³⁴

²³⁴ Mackenzie, 47.

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