

“Philippians 2:6 and Functional Inequality within the Godhead”

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Introduction

I have fooled all of you. You might even say that I have perpetrated the old “bait and switch” move in order to get some warm bodies into this presentation. There are so many fine presentations to choose from in this hour that I can imagine that there are only two types of people who have wandered into this presentation today: (1) those who know me and who, as a friendly gesture, want to support me, and (2) those who don’t know me, read the title of my presentation advertised in the ETS program, and wanted to hear someone address what has become a fairly hot theological topic—functional inequality among the members of the Trinity. What I have done to get you in here is not too unlike my college days when the ministry I was involved in *advertised* to the student body that a “humorist” would be performing in the Student Center of my state university. When the students arrived for the “show,” it turned out that the “humorist” was really just an evangelist who was kind of funny. Of course, I look back now and think perhaps that was a bit of a dirty trick to play on them and that common decency would have required that we be a little bit more up front with our intentions. But no such compunction has stopped me from doing it again today to get you all in here.

Don’t worry. There won’t be any mildly humorous evangelists standing in for me today, nor will I surprise you with an altar call when I finish reading. However, I will be approaching the issue of functional inequality in the Godhead in a way that you perhaps did not expect when you first read the title of my presentation. What might have you expected, having

read my title? First, it would have been natural for you to assume that I would be commenting on the text Philippians 2:6. In this regard, you might have expected for me to rehearse the history of interpretation of Philippians 2:6-11. You might have expected that I would expound upon the genre of this little passage and how many commentators consider it to be a hymn about Christ. You might have expected that I would do a diachronic and synchronic analysis of the enigmatic term ἀρπαγμῶν and set forth a thoroughgoing defense of what I believe to be its prevailing sense: either *raptus*, *res rapta*, *res rapienda*, *res retinenda*.¹ Second, you might have expected a theological exposition Trinitarian theology. In this regard, you might have expected that I would put some new spin on the nature of the economic Trinity, on the way that the Persons of the Trinity relate to one another with respect to Their roles and essence. Or perhaps that I would wade into the debates about Complementarianism and Egalitarianism and how Paul related Trinitarian relationships to Male-Female relationships in the home and in the church.

While all of these are worthy topics within themselves, I will not spend the majority of this session talking about these issues (though I may have to touch on them here and there throughout the presentation). Rather, I propose to zero in on a single little exegetical item contained in Philippians 2:6 that has implications for these broader theological issues. What is

¹I regard ἀρπαγμῶν to be concrete and passive. See pages 20 through 38 in my master's thesis for an argument for this meaning (Dennis Burk, "The Meaning of *Harpagmos* in Phillipians 2:6" [Th. M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000], 20-38). "Scholarly discussion has arranged these four terms under two interpretive rubrics: *active* and *passive*. *Raptus* is generally associated with what is known as the *active* translation of ἀρπαγμῶν. Even though *raptus* itself is passive, it is employed as the active label because it emphasizes the action of the verb as abstracted from any concrete object. For this reason, *res* is not included in the label, but *raptus* stands alone. Generally speaking, those who translate ἀρπαγμῶν as *raptus* do so with an active nuance—for instance *snatching*, *seizing*, or even perhaps *robbery*. However, *raptus* can be understood to denote a passive nuance, in which case ἀρπαγμῶν is suggested to mean *rapture*. In both of these, no concrete object is in view, and the abstract, verbal character of the noun comes through. ¶*Res rapta*, *res rapienda*, and *res retinenda* have come to be known as the *passive* interpretations. These three labels are considered passive because each of them translates ἀρπαγμῶν as denoting a concrete object that receives the passive action of the respective Latin verbal. Therefore, *res* ('thing') appears in each of these three passive labels. Thus, the translations properly indicated by the passive labels are as follows: 'a thing having been seized' (*res rapta*), 'a thing yet to be seized' (*res rapienda*), and 'a thing yet to be retained' (*res retinenda*)" (Ibid, 13-14).

this item? It is a little noticed *grammatical* issue in this verse that is pivotal for our interpretation of this text. And this is the “switch” of the “bait and switch.” You thought you were coming for *theology*, but I’m actually going to talk to you about *grammar*. So while you just “shiver your timbers” there for a moment in total shock and awe, let me just say at the outset that one of my ancillary concerns is that we see how important grammar is for exegesis and thus for theology. Too many exegetes think that all that needs to be said about Hellenistic Greek Grammar has already been said.² Let me say that I could not disagree more with this notion. I will not be too disappointed if you don’t end up agreeing with my interpretation of this text at the end of the day. But if I can convince you that careful attention to *syntax* is still an important component of New Testament theology, then this session will not have been a wash.

So, once again, what is the grammatical issue at hand in Philippians 2:6? The Greek text of Philippians 2:6 reads as follows, “οἱ ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπαρῶν οὐκ ἄρπαγον ἡἰσάτο τὸ εἶναι ἰσαῖα θεῷ” (who, although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something that he should grasp for). Now, I’ve already tipped my hand in my translation as to where I come out on some of the interpretive disputes surrounding this text. But the grammatical issue that I want to address concerns the double-accusative at the end of this verse. The first accusative is ἄρπαγον, the second accusative is the infinitive phrase τὸ εἶναι ἰσαῖα θεῷ. To be more specific, the issue I want to discuss centers on the significance of the definite article in the second accusative. The question that I will ask and answer in this session is,

²J. J. Janse van Rensburg, “A New Reference Grammar for the Greek New Testament: Exploratory Remarks on a Methodology,” *Neotestamentica* 27 (1993): 135; Lars Rydbeck, “What Happened to New Testament Greek Grammar after Albert Debrunner?” *NTS* 21 (1975): 424-27. I want to affirm the sober judgment of Richard A. Young who said, “The common assumption that everything in Greek scholarship has already been accomplished has stifled a generation of Greek scholarship and needs to be abandoned” (*Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* [Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994], x).

“What is the significance of the definite article in the articular infinitive *toVeihai iṣa qew* (literally, ‘*the* being equal with God’)”?

N. T. Wright and the Conventional View

N. T. Wright proposed an answer to this question in a little article that he wrote for the *Journal of Theological Studies* in 1986. He follows the conventional wisdom on this point and argues that the definite article has the same significance with verbal nouns (i.e. infinitives) as it has with any other noun. What significance does the definite article have with other nouns? Well, let us remember that the Greek definite article is not unlike the English definite article in certain respects. Often times, the definite article functions almost like a *pronoun* and points back to another noun that was mentioned in the preceding context.³ For instance, in John 4:40, we read that Jesus “remained” with the Samaritans for “two days.” A couple verses later we read that, “after *the* two days, [Jesus] went out from there into Galilee” (John 4:43). What “two days” in verse 43? *The* two days mentioned two verses earlier in verse 40. A theologically significant example is found in James chapter two. In James 2:14 we read, “What is the benefit, my brothers, if a man says that he has *faith* but he has no works? Can *the* faith save him?” Now, notice the definite article in the second half of the verse. It’s not just any “faith.” It’s, “*the* faith” just mentioned in the first part of the verse. The faith that will not save is *that* “faith” just mentioned that doesn’t have any works. In this case, the definite article is the functional equivalent of a demonstrative pronoun. That’s why the NASB, for example, renders this verse,

³It is not necessarily like a pronoun in every sense. It is like a pronoun in that it points to an antecedent.

“Can *that* faith save him?”⁴ When the definite article refers back like a pronoun to another noun in the preceding context, grammarians call this phenomenon *anaphora* \uh-'naf-uh-ruh\.

N. T. Wright argues that just as the article often carries this *anaphoric* \,an-uh-'for-ik\ significance with other Greek nouns, so it could possibly have an anaphoric significance when used in connection with the Greek infinitive. But in Philippians 2:6, what does Wright link “*the* being equal with God” to? Wright contends that “*the* being equal with God” refers back to “the form of God” mentioned in the first part of the verse. The exegetical result is that “equality with God” equals the “form of God.”⁵ These two phrases (“equality with God” and “form of God”) are but two ways of referring to one reality. Are you beginning to see how this little noticed grammatical point has momentous theological import? If these two phrases are equivalent, then we have to say that Jesus had “equality with God” in his preexistent unity with God the Father because it is clear that “equality with God” was connected to his existing “in the form of God.” Since the two phrases refer to the same thing, then he must have possessed both because they are one.

An Alternative View

I would like to propose an interpretation that allows for the “equality with God” to be a reality that is distinct from the “form of God.” What I mean is, that although Jesus existed in the form of God, He did not want to grasp after being equal with God. That is, although he was in his *essence* God, he did not want to become *equal* with God in every respect. What is it about

⁴These two examples are taken from Daniel B. Wallace’s *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 219.

⁵“A further reason, not usually noticed, for taking *tolēi hai iōsa qew* in close connection with *oī ēn morfh/ qeou’ uparcwn* is the regular usage of the articular infinitive (here, *tolēi hai*) to refer ‘to something previously mentioned or otherwise well known’” (N. T. Wright, “*ar-pag-mol’* and the Meaning of Philippians 2:5-11,” *Journal of Theological Studies* NS 37 [October 1986]: 344).

the syntax of this verse that allows me to argue for such an interpretation? Contrary to N. T. Wright, I argue that the definite article in “*the* being equal with God” does not refer back to the “form of God.” There is no *anaphoric* link between these two phrases. Therefore, if one wants to argue that these two phrases are semantic equivalents, one will have to do so on other grounds because there is little if any grammatical basis for the supposed *anaphoric* link. If I am correct in arguing that there is no *anaphoric* link, then this observation allows us to consider the possibility that the “form of God” and the “equality with God” refer to two different realities. They should not be identified with one another. But before we can allow this *theological* conclusion, we have to consider the *grammatical* arguments that militate against an alleged *anaphoric* link.

But before I turn to these arguments, I need to make something clear. Although I’ve been picking on the remarks of N. T. Wright’s little article he wrote in 1986, we would do well to notice that he is merely articulating the conventional wisdom concerning the significance of the definite article in the articular infinitive. He is not the only commentator making this claim.⁶ As noted above, the conventional wisdom holds that the article has the same significance with verbal nouns (i.e. infinitives) that it has with other nouns. If you read Blass-Debrunner-Funk’s section on the articular infinitive (the NT grammar book that many still consider to be the state of the art reference grammar), you will find the conventional view articulated very well (and I

⁶“On grammatical grounds τὸ ἐἶναι ἰσοῦ ἐστὶν λαμβανόμενον ἐν στενῇ συνδέσει μετὰ τοῦ ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπαρῶντος καὶ δύναται ἀποδοθῆναι ‘ἡθεὶς ἰσοῦς θεοῦ’” (Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 216). “The definite article in τὸ ἐἶναι implies that this second expression is closely connected with the first, for the function of the definite article here is to point back to something previously mentioned (BDF 399, 1). Therefore τὸ ἐἶναι ἰσοῦ should be understood thus: ‘the equality with God of which we have just spoken equivalently by saying ἐν μορφῇ θεοῦ ὑπαρῶντος’” (Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, WBC, vol. 43 [Waco, TX: Nelson, 1983], 84). “This, then, is what it means for Christ to be ‘in the “form” of God’; it means ‘to be equal with God,’ not in the sense that the two phrases are identical, but that both point to the same reality” (Gordan D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995], 207). “...the definite article...is probably anaphoric, pointing to ‘something previously mentioned or otherwise well known’” (Ibid, note 62). Kenneth Grayston even goes so far as to say that τὸ ἐἶναι ἰσοῦ and μορφῇ θεοῦ are “equivalent phrases” (*The Letters of Paul to the Philippians and the Thessalonians*, Cambridge Bible Commentary: New English Bible [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967], 27).

quote), “In general the anaphoric significance of the article, i.e. its reference to something previously mentioned or otherwise well known, is more or less evident.”⁷ So Wright and others seem to be following the settled grammatical conclusions of Blass-Debrunner-Funk.⁸ But is Wright correct in following Blass-Debrunner-Funk in their judgment concerning the articular infinitive? I think he is not correct for at least two reasons.

First, a careful reading of Blass-Debrunner-Funk reveals that their grammar never intended to communicate that the definite article *always* bears an anaphoric significance when used with the articular infinitive. In fact, BDF says that when the articular infinitive is “***Without this anaphoric reference***, an infinitive as subject or object is usually anarthrous.”⁹ BDF concedes that the articular infinitive is sometimes found “Without” an anaphoric reference. Furthermore, BDF goes on to divide its treatment between those examples which are “Anaphoric” and those which are “Less clearly anaphoric.”¹⁰ Therefore, BDF provides the careful exegete with several reasons to exercise caution before alleging an anaphoric use of the articular infinitive. In their judgment, the articular infinitive simply does not *always* bear this meaning.

Second, Wright is not correct in following BDF’s judgment because the NT evidence shows that BDF has overstated the significance of the definite article in connection with the infinitive. And here is where I will introduce the heart of my grammatical argument against the

⁷F.Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and rev. Robert W. Funk (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 205, §399 [henceforth BDF].

⁸Blass-Debrunner-Funk is not alone in its judgment. See also: A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 4th ed. (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1934), 1065 [henceforth “Robt.”].

⁹BDF, 205, §399 [emphasis mine].

¹⁰Ibid.

alleged anaphoric function of the articular infinitive. And this is it: Whenever the definite article is connected to the infinitive, it always does so in order to clarify a *structural* relation. In other words, the definite article gets connected to the infinitive in order to clarify the *case* and/or *function* of the infinitive. Why does the *case* and/or *function* of the infinitive need clarification in Philippians 2:6? As Dan Wallace observes, it needs clarification because without the definite article, we would not be able to distinguish the accusative object from the accusative complement following the verb “consider” (ἡγήσατο).¹¹ The article is required in order to mark this *structural* relation.

Allow me to elaborate on the significance of the definite article in this object-complement construction. So let’s turn our attention for the moment to the syntax of the double-accusative in Philippians 2:6. Whereas we would normally expect to find only one accusative direct object of any given verb, there are at least fifty-six verbs in the New Testament which can take two accusatives.¹² In this scenario, one accusative is the direct object, and the other accusative is the complement. The complement *predicates* something about the direct object. For example, Paul writes, “I consider these things a loss” (Phil 3:7). ***These things*** and ***a loss*** are both in the accusative case. ***These things*** is the direct object, and ***a loss*** describes ***these things***. Sometimes there is the potential for confusion in distinguishing the accusative object from the

¹¹Daniel B. Wallace first raised this grammatical issue in his *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 186, 602. I subsequently argued in favor of his judgment in the fourth chapter of my Master’s Thesis written under his supervision (Denny Burk, “The Meaning of Harpagmos in Philippians 2:6” [Th. M. Thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000], pp. 39-55). However, I think that the argument that I made in that thesis was not compelling on this point because ultimately the project was too large to be done effectively in one part of one chapter of a master’s thesis. Moreover, although I tried take into consideration every articular infinitive in the New Testament, I did not and could not give a *comprehensive* account of the grammatical significance of the articular infinitive. I focused on the narrow question of how this small grammatical observation helps to illuminate the meaning of ἀρπαγμολ’ in Philippians 2:6. Therefore, I am proposing in my Ph.D. dissertation to achieve a comprehensive account of the significance of the definite article plus the infinitive in New Testament Greek.

accusative complement. For this reason, Dan Wallace has set forth a set of rules that help us to distinguish the object from the complement in this situation.¹³ The object will either be a *pronoun* or a *proper name*, or it will have the *definite article*. In Philippians 2:6, the only way we can distinguish the accusative object from the accusative complement is by the definite article at the beginning of the infinitive. If you pull the article out, the whole sentence is thrown into disarray. So the article does not show up here in order to link “equality with God” to the “form of God.” The definite article is here to distinguish the object (“equality with God”) from the complement (“a thing to be grasped after”).

My argument against Blass-Debrunner-Funk in this respect is borne out by the fact that no articular infinitive in the NT is clearly anaphoric, and the overwhelming majority of them are clearly not anaphoric. There are at least 327 occurrences of the articular infinitive in the NT.¹⁴ Of that 327, well over half of them (201 to be exact) are the object of a preposition.¹⁵ In

¹²For Daniel Wallace’s complete list of such verbs, see his article titled, “The Semantics and Exegetical Significance of the Object-Complement Construction in the New Testament,” *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (1985): 96, n.23. An abbreviated list can be found in his *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 183.

¹³These rules correspond directly with the rules for distinguishing subject from predicate nominative (Wallace, “Object-Complement Construction,” 103-105; *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 184-85). Wallace notes that Eugene Van Ness Goetchius first suggested the analogy between these two constructions (Eugene Van Ness Goetchius, *The Language of the New Testament* [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965], 46; 142-44).

¹⁴A computer search of the GRAMCORD database produced this number. The statistics that follow are the result of my own search of the GRAMCORD database and of a comparison of these results with Votaw and Boyer (James L. Boyer, *Supplemental manual of information: infinitive verbs* [Winona Lake, Indiana: Boyer, 1986]; Clyde W. Votaw, *The Use of the Infinitive in Biblical Greek* [Chicago: Published by the Author, 1896]).

¹⁵Matt 5:28; 6:1; 6:8; 13:4; 13:5; 13:6; 13:25; 13:30; 20:19; 20:19; 20:19; 23:5; 24:12; 26:2; 26:12; 26:32; 27:12; 27:31; Mark 1:14; 4:4; 4:5; 4:6; 5:4; 5:4; 5:4; 6:48; 13:22; 14:28; 14:55; 16:19; Luke 1:8; 1:21; 2:4; 2:6; 2:21; 2:27; 2:43; 3:21; 5:1; 5:1; 5:12; 5:17; 6:48; 8:5; 8:6; 8:40; 8:42; 9:7; 9:18; 9:29; 9:33; 9:34; 9:36; 9:51; 10:35; 10:38; 11:1; 11:8; 11:27; 11:37; 12:5; 12:15; 14:1; 17:11; 17:14; 18:1; 18:5; 18:35; 19:11; 19:11; 19:15; 22:15; 22:20; 23:8; 24:4; 24:15; 24:15; 24:30; 24:51; John 1:48; 2:24; 13:19; 17:5; Acts 1:3; 2:1; 3:19; 3:26; 4:2; 4:2; 4:30; 4:30; 7:4; 7:19; 8:6; 8:6; 8:11; 8:40; 9:3; 10:41; 11:15; 12:20; 15:13; 18:2; 18:3; 19:1; 19:21; 20:1; 23:15; 27:4; 27:9; 28:18; Rom 1:11; 1:20; 3:4; 3:26; 4:11; 4:11; 4:16; 4:18; 6:12; 7:4; 7:5; 8:29; 11:11; 12:2; 12:3; 15:8; 15:13; 15:13; 15:16; 1 Cor 8:10; 9:18; 10:6; 11:21; 11:22; 11:22; 11:25; 11:33; 2 Cor 1:4; 3:13; 4:4; 7:3; 7:3; 7:12; 8:6; 8:11; Gal 2:12; 3:17; 3:23; 4:18; Eph 1:12; 1:18; 6:11; Phil 1:7; 1:10; 1:23; 1:23; 1 Thes 2:9; 2:12; 2:16; 3:2; 3:2; 3:5; 3:10; 3:10; 3:13; 4:9; 2 Thes 1:5; 2:2; 2:2; 2:6; 2:10; 2:11; 3:8; 3:9; Heb 2:8; 2:15; 2:17; 3:12; 3:15; 7:23;

every single instance, the article occurs *only* to identify the case of the infinitive because prepositions require case in order to have meaning.¹⁶ None of them indicate an anaphoric link to some other element in the immediate context, and I don't think anyone would dispute that claim. Of the other 126 articular infinitives not governed by a preposition, the vast majority are clearly not anaphoric.¹⁷ Of the 80 genitive and 1 dative examples, these clearly denote a meaning associated with the *case* of the article. The same is true with the 23 nominative and 22 accusative infinitives (which are identical in form). All of these infinitives have the definite article in order to clarify a case relationship. If there are any that denote anaphora, it would only be among the nominative/accusative examples, and even then there are only a handful.¹⁸

Time forbids us from discussing all the relevant texts in detail, but let me just mention one example. There are several instances in the New Testament in which the nominative article *to* marks the infinitive as the subject of the sentence. Dan Wallace writes, "Normally a subject will have the article (unless it is a pronoun or proper name)."¹⁹ This observation is not invariable, but it is generally the case. Therefore, we are not surprised to find in Romans 7:18 that Paul prefers the articular infinitive over the infinitive without the article. He writes, "*the* wishing is

7:24; 7:25; 8:3; 8:13; 9:14; 9:28; 10:2; 10:15; 10:26; 11:3; 12:10; 13:21; Jas 1:18; 1:19; 1:19; 3:3; 4:2; 4:15; 1 Pet 3:7; 4:2.

¹⁶"It is the *case* which indicates the meaning of the *preposition*, and not the preposition which gives the meaning to the case" (Robt., 554).

¹⁷Matt 2:13; 3:13; 11:1; 11:1; 13:3; 15:20; 20:23; 21:32; 24:45; Mark 9:10; 10:40; 12:33; 12:33; 15:15; Luke 1:9; 1:57; 1:73; 1:77; 1:79; 2:6; 2:21; 2:24; 2:27; 4:10; 4:42; 5:7; 8:5; 9:51; 10:19; 12:42; 17:1; 21:22; 22:6; 22:31; 24:16; 24:25; 24:29; 24:45; Acts 3:2; 3:12; 4:18; 4:18; 5:31; 7:19; 9:15; 10:25; 10:47; 13:47; 14:9; 14:18; 15:20; 18:10; 20:3; 20:20; 20:20; 20:27; 20:30; 21:12; 23:15; 23:20; 25:11; 26:18; 26:18; 27:1; 27:20; Rom 1:24; 6:6; 7:3; 7:18; 7:18; 8:12; 11:8; 11:8; 11:10; 13:8; 14:13; 14:21; 14:21; 15:5; 15:22; 15:23; 1 Cor 7:26; 9:10; 10:13; 11:6; 11:6; 14:39; 14:39; 16:4; 2 Cor 1:8; 2:1; 2:13; 7:11; 8:10; 8:10; 8:11; 8:11; 8:11; 9:1; 10:2; Gal 3:10; Phil 1:21; 1:21; 1:22; 1:24; 1:29; 1:29; 2:6; 2:13; 2:13; 3:10; 3:21; 4:2; 4:10; 1 Thes 3:3; 4:6; 4:6; Heb 5:12; 10:7; 10:9; 10:31; 11:5; Jas 5:17; 1 Pet 3:10; 4:17; Rev 12:7.

¹⁸These are the texts suggested in BDF, §399.1-2: Matt 15:20; cf. 15:2, 23; Mark 9:10; 12:33; Acts 25:11; Rom 4:13; 7:18; 13:8; 14:13; 1 Cor 7:37; 11:6; 14:39; 2 Cor 2:1; 8:10; 9:1; Phil 1:21, 24, 29; 2:6, 13; 4:10; Heb 10:31; Rev 13:8.

present in me, but *the* doing of the good is not.” Now if Paul had not used the article in this text to clarify the *case* of these two infinitives, it would have been syntactically possible to misconstrue his meaning. If we were to remove the definite articles from Paul’s text, we could plausibly translate the infinitives adverbially, “it is present in order to desire for me, but not in order to do the good.” Such an understanding is perhaps unlikely, but the presence of the definite articles removes any potential confusion about how these infinitives are *functioning* in this sentence. The definite articles provide the *structural* clues we need to identify the subjects of these two clauses.

In a similar way, that’s what is happening in Philippians 2:6. Except in this text, the article marks the direct object and thereby distinguishes it from its accusative complement. Imagine for a moment the potential syntactical confusion that would result if we were to remove the definite article from the infinitive in Philippians 2:6. It would then be syntactically possible to take ἀρπαγμὸν as the direct object and to take the infinitive as an adverbial phrase, “He did not think about ἀρπαγμὸν so that he would not be equal with God.” Again, this understanding of Paul’s meaning might be unlikely, but it would be syntactically possible. The presence of the article clears away any possible ambiguity. These texts illustrate what I think is the case across the board with the articular infinitive in the New Testament. The article only appears with the infinitive as a *function word* and as a *case-identifier*. There is no clear evidence that the articular infinitive denotes *anaphora*.

Theological Implications

So now that we have swam to the bottom of the grammatical pool, let’s all come back up to the surface for some air. What is the theological upshot of this exegesis? We have removed

¹⁹Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 242.

any grammatical grounds for a necessary link between “form of God” and “equality with God.”

In the absence of an explicit link between these two items and in the absence of evidence showing that they are linked on other grounds, we should not assume too quickly that the two phrases are synonymous. In fact, I argue that they are not synonymous and that they refer to two separate realities. As I mentioned at the beginning, I think Paul intends the following:

“Although²⁰ Jesus existed in the form of God, he did not consider equality with God as something he should go after also.” In other words, although Jesus actually possessed an identical characteristic of His Father with respect to his deity (i.e. “he existed in the form of God”), he did not want to grasp after this other thing that was not his—namely, “equality with God.” So what is this “equality with God” if it is not something that he already possessed? The adversative “but” (ἀλλὰ) in verse 7 helps us to understand what “equality with God” means. “Equality with God” is something that would have prevented Jesus from his self-emptying, from his taking the form of a servant, from his becoming in the likeness of men. In his preexistent Trinitarian fellowship with his Father, Jesus decided not to go after “equality,” but to go after *incarnation*.²¹

This is the distinguishing characteristic of Jesus the *Son* from God the *Father*. Jesus is identified with His Father in one respect, but distinguished from Him in another respect. Jesus, before all time, preexisted in the form of God, but he did not forsake his role as the Son in order to be like God the Father in every way. God the Father would be the Father, and God the Son

²⁰I take the present participle ὑπαρῶν as concessive. See BDAG, s.v. μορφή 659.

²¹Although he reached his conclusion through an exegesis different than my own, in H. A. W. Meyer arrived at a theological conclusion that is very similar to mine, “in this pre-existence the Son appears as *subordinate* to the Father, as He does throughout the entire New Testament, although this is not ...at variance with the Trinitarian equality of essence in the Biblical sense. By the ἀρπαγμὸν ἡγεῖσθαι κ.τ.λ., if it had taken place, He would have wished to *relieve* Himself from his subordination” (H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical handbook*

would be the Son. God the Son would not strive to be the Father. On the contrary, he would pour himself out for the sins of many, having identified himself with the humanity of those he came to save.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my argument can be summed up as follows. Many commentators and grammarians see “form of God” and “equality with God” as semantic equivalents. This semantic equivalence is based in part on the erroneous assumption of a grammatical link between “form of God” and “equality with God.” This supposed grammatical link consists of an anaphoric use of the articular infinitive, “*the* being equal with God” (to λ ei η ai i β a qew λ). What I have shown is that this link has little grammatical basis and should be discarded. The theological result is that “form of God” and “equality with God” should not be regarded as synonymous, but as phrases that each has their own distinct meaning. Therefore, “form of God” is something that Jesus possessed by virtue of his deity, while “equality with God” is not. In fact, “equality with God” is best understood as something that Jesus rejected so that he could pursue incarnation.

So how did you end up in this session with me today? I don’t know. If it was because I baited and switched on you, I hope the switch was worth it. Thank you.