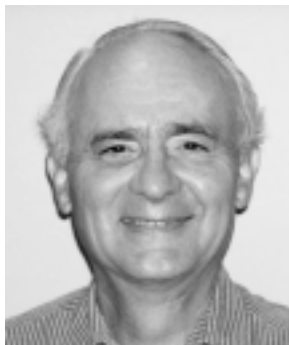# Adjectival φαῦλος in James 3:16

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Corpus Paulinum (27 Aug 2013)

Might there be a word play on "Paul" in the final phrase of James 3:16?

πᾶν φαῦλον πρᾶγμα "every evil thing"

πᾶν Παῦλον πρᾶγμα "every Paulish thing"

If the name Παῦλος "Paul" appeared within close textual context of Ja 3:16, a word play would be apparent. Obviously, that is not the case. But if Ja 2:14-26 is reacting against a text or reputed teachings of Paul,[1] then "Paul" would be in the echo chamber of James' performance arena.

Phonetics. In this alliterative phrase, the initial "ph" sound of φαῦλον in the written text could naturally be attracted to the "p" sound of the initial consonant of the preceding and following words. Further, the first syllables of all three words contain the same "ah" vowel sound (using the historical Koine pronunciation), which might further encourage attraction to an initial "p" sound for the middle word. See the last three words of Ja 1:2, πειρασμοῖς περιπέσητε ποικίλοις ("you fall into various trials") for an alliterative triplet using initial "p," as well as other consonance or assonance features. James uses many rhythmic and alliterative doublets and triplets. Dibelius (p37) mentions, among others including the above, these examples:

Ja 1:1,2. χαίρειν ‖ χαράν		grace . . . joy
Ja 1:25. παρακύψας ‖ παραμείνας	having looked . . . having remained	
Ja 3:6. φλογίζουσα ‖ φλογιζομένη	setting on fire . . . being set on fire	
Ja 3:7. δαμάζεται ‖ δεδάμασται	is tamed . . . has been tamed	

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[1]For such a proposal, see Hengel **Anti-Pauline**.

To which may be added:

Ja 1:12f. πειρασμόν ‖ πειραζόμενος ‖ πειράζομαι

testing . . . being tested . . . I am tested

Ja 1:24. ἀπελήλυθεν ‖ ἐπελάθετο   went away . . . forgot

Ja 3:8. δαμάσαι ‖ δύναται   to tame . . . is able

Usage. φαῦλος is used 5 other times in the Greek NT: 2 Cor 5:10. Rom 9:11 (both "evil," in contrast to ἀγαθόν "good"), Tit 2:8 ("[having nothing] evil [to say of us]"), Jn 3:20 ("evil things"), Jn 5:29 ("evil things," in contrast to ἀγαθά "good things"). None of these is in a noun phrase with πρᾶγμα "practices," though both John instances coordinate φαῦλος with a form of the cognate verb πράσσω "practice, do." There are no other Greek NT or Septuagint combinations of φαῦλος and πρᾶγμα. φαῦλος occurs 10 times in the Septuagint (5 in Proverbs, 3 in Job, and 1 each in Maccabees and Sirach), mostly in the milder sense "worthless."

Classical usage is milder still; instances of φαῦλον πρᾶγμα are usually translated as "trifling matter/affair," "light task," unimportant business" (Aristophanes Lysistrata line 14, Isocrates Evangoras 59, Plato Republic 2:374e, Plato Phaedo 95e, Plato Symposium 213c, Xenophon Anabasis 6:6).

Comment
Glenn Holland, 2013

I wonder if your argument is bolstered by the Latin equivalent *paulus* "small," which might occur to any audience members familiar with Latin. We might expect that at least some would hear the phrase as "every Paulish thing," whether the author intended them to or not, and the effect on the audience is ultimately more important than authorial intention. This is one reason why the Jesus movement and later the Church acknowledged the role of the Spirit in its work and message.

Works Cited

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