2.4. Paul's personal ταπείνωσις

As mentioned already, Paul applies the ταπείν-semantic directly to his person and his self-understanding, and, thus, semantically molds his own personal fortune to the concept of humility. In Phil 3:20-21 Paul picks up in an anaphoric sense the lexicon that he had used already in 1:27-2:3: In chapter 1 the exhortation to exercise “your citizenship in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (ἀξίως ... πολιτεύεσθε: 1:27) was followed up by Paul’s admonition to practice ταπείνοφροσύνη (2:3); in chapter 3 Paul finalizes the polemics against the “enemies of the cross” (3:18-19) by deriving the unique socio-religious status of the Philippian community from its eschatological hope. In the argumentative frame of chapter 3, and similar to 1:27ff., Paul makes πολίτευμα and ταπείνωσις to be an interacting lexicon: “But our citizenship is in heaven, and it is from there that we are expecting a Savior ... He will transform the body of our humiliation” (3:20-21, NRSV).

2.5. Language of subordination

In his study: “Epiktet und das Neue Testament” from 1911, Adolf Friedrich Bonhöffer already pointed out that in Greek-Hellenistic literature the ταπείν-semantic is frequently used synonymously to δειλός, δοῦλος, ἀγεν(ν)ής κτλ. Accordingly, Paul’s concept of ταπείνοφροσύνη has to be seen in close affiliation to his language of subordination: it is not accidental then that Paul, already in the letter’s prescript, introduces himself – and his co-worker Timothy – as “slaves of Christ” (δοῦλοι Χριστοῦ: Phil 1:1) to his audience. In his previous writing to the Christ-believing community in Rome, he had made use of this expression in a formal sense for the first time (Rom 1:1; but cf.: Gal 1:10). In Philippians, however, Paul explores more comprehensively what the role of a δοῦλος really implies: since Jesus himself had chosen the image of a slave when he shifted roles from one who was equal with God (Phil 2:6) to one who waived his rights and was finally crucified (Phil 2:7-8), the acceptance of the slave-model will consequently mean no less than an appropriate imitation of Christ, which holds an eschatological promise.

It is typical of a slave to be obedient to his master: Even Jesus has practiced in an ultimate sense obedience and submission (γενόμενος ὑπήκοος: Phil 2:8). As the highest paradigm of ταπείνοφροσύνη Jesus thus also exemplifies how obedience and the role of a slave correspond. In that Paul defines his ministry as a δοῦλος Χριστοῦ, he presupposes for himself the attitude of the ὑπακοή. He

20 Translation according to: J. Reumann, Philippians, 261.
21 Cf. A. Bonhöffer, Epiktet, 65.