BibleWorld
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THE APOSTLE PAUL
AND HIS LETTERS

EDWIN D. FREED
Carey A. Moore
first student
then colleague
always a friend
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This book is written following the author’s long career of teaching college students and many different church groups on various aspects of New Testament studies. The very favorable responses to that teaching provided the inspiration and motivation for writing. The aim of the author is to present evidence and then make suggestions, taking this into consideration, in order to enlighten readers about the most important circumstances that led to the writing of each letter of Paul. There is also a discussion of the content of each letter written in response to those circumstances.

Written for a broad group of interested persons, including students at various levels of instruction, pastors, church workers, and others interested in Pauline studies, this book provides new insights into Paul and his letters.

The discussion of Greek words, which helps to elucidate meanings of Paul’s thought that are often overlooked, is given for the non-specialist. Sometimes the discussion may seem difficult; but if it does, that is only because Paul’s thought is difficult and open to more than one interpretation. For this reason some readers may learn that some modern beliefs, no matter how deeply ingrained in their minds, and ancient biblical truths are not always the same things.

In order to make our study less complicated, there are no footnotes. However, there is a bibliography of older and newer titles on various subjects covered in our study. Throughout my career I have become influenced by many scholars, both in this country and abroad, to whom I acknowledge my debt in this general way. Insofar as I know, there is no book quite like this one, and I hope that some new insights into Paul as a person and his thought will help readers better understand that great man.

I try to present Paul and his thought in the light of his own time, not in the light of Reformation times or of our own time. There are certain things, therefore, that persons wanting to learn more about Paul and his letters should understand clearly.

Paul was not writing to persons who had been Christians for a long time and whose families had been Christians. In fact, the word Christian was not even in use among Christians themselves in Paul’s time, so for us the
term is actually an anachronism. Paul was writing for persons, both Jews and Gentiles, who had recently become converts, or were still in the process of becoming converts, to a religion that only after the time of Paul became known as Christianity. Therefore, when Paul wrote, he did not have in mind Christians of later times, much less of our own time. In truth he expected the end of the world to come soon, perhaps even before he died.

Frequently, not only from the pulpit, but also in meetings of sincere religious persons, we often hear words such as ‘Paul says that we are saved by the grace of God, not by our works’ or ‘We are saved by our faith, not by our works’. But Paul did not have modern Christians in mind at all when he wrote. Of course, this does not mean that those Christians cannot learn about moral life and faith from what Paul writes, but he was not telling them what to believe or what to do.

When studying any of Paul’s ideas, we should always remember that the contexts of those ideas are always those of new converts and the problems they faced after becoming converts. There was always the very real danger that converts, especially Gentiles, would revert to their past ways of life that were less than pleasing to Paul. Consequently, Paul stresses the need for moral probity of converts in the churches to which he was writing.

Paul’s ideas about justification (better termed ‘being made righteous’, as we shall learn) by virtue of faithfulness and not by works of the law actually occur clearly only in Galatians and Romans. Therefore, we must not read those ideas into his other letters where they do not appear. And Paul’s ideas about faithfulness, being made righteous, and grace are frequently overemphasized and misrepresented in discussions of the Reformation doctrines of ‘justification through faith alone’ or ‘salvation by grace alone’.

In contrast to the people in Paul’s churches, we can read all of his letters at the same time. It is easy for us, then, to read an idea that occurs in one letter into another where Paul did not have that idea in mind. The probability that people in one of his churches knew what Paul had written to other churches would, indeed, be very slight. This is true, of course, because he was addressing specific problems in each church. In fact, the only problem that Paul had to be concerned about which existed in every church was the behavior of the converts, both individually and socially. Paul does mention other churches, for example, with regard to this point when writing to the church at Corinth. He writes that he sent Timothy to remind the converts of his ‘ways in Christ Jesus’, as he teaches ‘them everywhere in every church’ (1 Cor. 4.17).

Works on Paul generally have stressed faith instead of his moral teachings. While faith is very important for Paul, it is usually faithfulness toward
God, rather than faith in Christ, with which he is most concerned. These are unique aspects of this book. I intentionally repeat significant points several times, because ‘repetition is the boon to learning’, as, I think, Benjamin Franklin said.

Readers will benefit most in their study if they use a modern translation of the Bible along with this book. The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and the Revised English Bible (REB) are good editions. Translations in this text are those of the NRSV, except where noted otherwise. If you read the specified passages in Paul’s letters and Acts, you will probably find those writings becoming more meaningful as you try to understand the stories behind them. Look at the map occasionally to grasp the extent of Paul’s travels.

For a more advanced treatment of Paul and his concerns for the morality of his converts see the author’s forthcoming work on The Morality of Paul’s Converts to be published by Equinox Press.

My sincere thanks to Professor Philip Davies of the University of Sheffield, Janet Joyce and Valerie Hall of Equinox for their respective roles in making the publication of both books possible. And my special thanks to Audrey Mann, who has been so helpful in many ways in preparing the final copy of the manuscript, and to my wife Ann for reading it and for helpful suggestions.

Acknowledgements

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ABBREVIATIONS

AB  Anchor Bible
AnBib  Analecta Biblica
ABRL  Anchor Bible Reference Library
AGJU  Arbeiten zur Geschichte des antiken Judentums und des Urchristentums
ANTC  Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
BCBC  Believers Church Bible Commentary
BECNT  Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
BETL  Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BNTC  Black’s New Testament Commentaries
CBCNEB  Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible
CBNTS  Coniectanea Biblica New Testament Series
CBQ  Catholic Biblical Quarterly
EC  Epworth Commentaries
HNTC  Harper’s New Testament Commentary
HTR  Harvard Theological Review
ICC  International Critical Commentary
JSNT  Journal for the Study of the New Testament
JSNTSup  Journal for the Study of the New Testament, Supplement Series
LEC  Library of Early Christianity
LTPM  Louvain Theological & Pastoral Monographs
LXX  Septuagint, Greek translation of the OT
NCB  New Clarendon Bible
NCBC  New Century Bible Commentary
NIV  New International Version
NICNT  New International Commentary on the New Testament
NIGTC  New International Greek Testament Commentary
NIVAC  NIV Application Commentary
NovT  Novum Testamentum
NovTSup  Novum Testamentum, Supplements
NRSV  New Revised Standard Version
NT  New Testament
NTG  New Testament Guides
OBS  Oxford Bible Series
OT  Old Testament
REB  Revised English Bible
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<tr>
<td>RNBC</td>
<td>Readings: A New Biblical Commentary</td>
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<td>RNT</td>
<td>Regensburger Neues Testament</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBLDS</td>
<td>Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series</td>
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<tr>
<td>SBT</td>
<td>Studies in Biblical Theology</td>
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<td>SP</td>
<td>Sacra Pagina</td>
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<td>SNTIW</td>
<td>Studies of the New Testament and Its World</td>
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<td>SNTSMS</td>
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<td>Tyndale New Testament Commentaries</td>
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INTRODUCTION

How and Where the Story Began

The story behind all the writings of the New Testament began with Jesus of Nazareth who grew to adulthood in the plains and hills of Galilee. There he ‘began to teach beside the sea’ (Mk 4.1), and his magnetic and persuasive personality attracted a few faithful persons who ‘left everything and followed him’ (Lk. 5.11).

Jesus’ first followers, who were all Jews, began a movement within Judaism in Galilee with him as the central figure. Those Jews believed that Jesus was, indeed, the long-awaited Messiah (Christ). It is fitting, therefore, to think of that movement as the Messiah (Christ) movement. The writer of Acts refers to it as ‘the sect of the Nazarenes’, of whom Paul was ‘a ring-leader’ (Acts 24.5; see also 5.17; 15.5; 24.14; 28.22). The Greek word translated as ‘sect’ is *hairesis* and means ‘choosing’ or ‘choice’ and does not imply separation as the English word ‘sect’ frequently does. Paul did not belong to a group of Jews who had separated from Judaism but to a group that had different opinions or principles from others in Judaism. For example, ‘The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, or angel, or spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge all three’ (Acts 23.8). Acts uses the designation ‘sect’ for both Pharisees and Sadducees (Acts 5.17; 15.5).

Paul eventually joined that group of Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, but most Jews never were persuaded to join it. The Messiah movement gradually came to regard itself as a new religion, but it did not become known as Christianity until after New Testament times.

In his letters Paul tells us little about his travels and the establishment of his churches. In order to fill that void, we have to turn to the book of Acts, already mentioned, as an important source of information for the study of Paul and the story behind his life and work.

Most scholars agree that Acts was written by the author of the gospel of Luke and that Luke and Acts are two volumes written by the same person. That author, whom tradition has called Luke (see below) became the first biographer of Paul. But, as with the gospel of Luke, the book of Acts was shaped by the author’s own religious convictions, literary style, and special motives for writing (see Chapter 1 below).
In Paul’s undisputed letters (see below) we have his actual words, which may not always be the case in Acts. His letters are responses to situations in individual churches and only by those responses can we determine his views. Moreover, if the people in Paul’s churches had always agreed with him and obeyed his instructions, we would know little about his religious insights and his intense moral convictions. These observations help us to understand his thinking about God, Jesus and the morality, or more importantly, perhaps, the lack of it, among the members of his churches.

Moreover, Luke is not always consistent in what he reports about Paul, and sometimes what he says is different from information derived from Paul’s letters. For example, the author of Acts narrates details about Paul’s vision near Damascus (Acts 9.1-19), but later has Paul give different details in speeches about the event which he attributes to Paul himself (Acts 22.6-16; 26.12-18). Turn to the passages in Acts and notice the similarities and differences in the accounts. At the same time, we cannot be sure that Paul says anything in his letters specifically about his experience on the road to Damascus (see Gal. 1.15-17 and discussion later).

Again, Acts mentions Saul as a name for Paul and says that he preached in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9.19-20). And Acts has Paul say that he was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, brought up in Jerusalem, and studied under the great Jewish Rabbi, Gamaliel (Acts 22.1-3). In his letters Paul mentions none of these things. On the other hand, Acts and Paul agree that he was a strict Pharisee (Acts 23.6; 26.4-5; Phil. 3.4-5) and that he persecuted members of the Christ movement (Acts 8.1-3; 9.1-5; 22.4-8; 26.9-15; 1 Cor. 15.9; Gal. 1.13, 22-23; Phil. 3.5).

Such observations make the task of trying to determine the definitive story behind Paul and his letters more difficult than if we had to consider only Paul’s letters. As we go along we shall learn more about our task itself and its results, which sometimes leave us with still unanswered questions about Paul.

How many followers of Jesus there were in the movement when Paul joined it we do not know. However, we do know that in the earliest decades of its history all other persons were overshadowed by the personalities of Peter and Paul. Although the writer of Acts reports activities of both men, we can learn more about the real Paul through his letters. We can use them to supplement, modify, and perhaps sometimes correct the account of Acts. Through the work of both men, Peter among Jews and Paul among Gentiles, the movement spread throughout the Roman world north of the Mediterranean Sea. Paul became the key figure in the spread of the Christ movement, especially to Gentiles, a fact confirmed by the book of Acts.
According to Acts, from Galilee the Christ movement reached Jerusalem where its first followers, all Jews, had become convinced that Jesus was their long-awaited Messiah (see Acts 1.1–8.3). The new movement grew and flourished as a party within Judaism in Jerusalem and Judea. Gradually Greek-speaking Jews and non-Jews (Gentiles) were taken into it.

Under the leadership of Peter and James and other early followers of Jesus the movement spread through Judea, Samaria, and back to Galilee. As a result of the death of Stephen (Acts 6–8; 11.19) and internal controversy concerning the question of requirements for admission of Gentiles to the movement (Acts 15.1-21; Gal. 2.1-14), it then spread to Antioch in Syria (Acts 1–12).

**Significant Phenomena behind the Story**

While Jerusalem remained as the center of the Jewish branch of the Christ movement, Antioch became the center of the Gentile branch. From Antioch the movement, which became known as ‘the church’ (e.g. Acts 5.11; 8.1, 3; 9.31) and ‘the Way’ (e.g. Acts 9.2; 19.9; 22.24; 24.14, 22), spread through predominantly Gentile cities in Asia Minor, Greece, and then to Rome.

The spread of the church from Jews to Gentiles was one of four significant phenomena that gave rise to the writings of the New Testament. The other phenomena were the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in 70 CE, with the consequent dispersion of Jesus’ followers from Jerusalem; the persecution of some Christians under the Roman Emperor Domitian (81–96 CE); and the rise of heretical teachers and teachings within the church during the end of the first and the beginning of the second centuries. The undisputed letters of Paul and some material in the book of Acts originated during and as the result of the mission of the church to Gentiles.

**Date and Arrangement of the Letters**

Although we cannot determine the precise date of any letter, sometimes the sequence in which the letters are discussed below may not be far from the chronological order in which they were actually written. However, we cannot be certain of the date for any letter, because none is dated. No original letter of Paul, nor, for that matter, any other original New Testament writing, has survived. However, certain clues within the New Testament indicate that Paul’s letters are the earliest Christian literature known to us.

Acts gives us one important clue. Paul was in Corinth when Gallio was the proconsul of the Roman province of Achaia in Greece, of which Corinth
was a main city (Acts 18.12-17). Gallio was in office for a year sometime between 51–53 CE. Since Paul wrote to the Thessalonians soon after his visit (Acts 17.1-13), the date of 1 Thessalonians would be about 51–52 CE and is usually regarded as the earliest of Paul's letters. The letters to Corinth were probably written shortly after that, then Galatians and Romans, and finally Philippians and Philemon. Most scholars agree that those letters were written between the years 48–65 CE. We will discuss the letters in that order.

The letters of Paul are the only writings that have survived from the first generation of Jesus' followers. As a result of his missionary zeal, one fourth of the New Testament was either written by him or came to be attributed to him.

The author of 2 Peter provides another clue in helping to determine the date of Paul's letters. He writes that the beloved brother Paul wrote, 'speaking of this as he does in all his letters' (2 Pet. 3.15-16). This indicates that Paul's letters had been circulated as a collection before 2 Peter was written, probably during the end of the first century or the early part of the second century. Paul's letters are, therefore, the earliest New Testament writings known to us. The gospels, although they tell us about Jesus who lived several decades earlier than Paul, had not yet been written.

The arrangement of Paul's letters is not according to date or subject matter but according to length, from the longest to the shortest. Our main concern, however, is not with the chronological sequence and arrangement of the letters but with the situations that gave rise to each and Paul's responses. Sometimes his response to a particular situation provides a clue for determining the approximate time period during which a letter was written.

**Context and Nature of the Letters**

Paul's letters were all written within the broad context of the Roman Empire, where the chief cultural feature was Hellenism, Greek culture as spread outside the Greek mainland. Within the context of Hellenism, which included political, social, economic, and religious aspects, there were Jews in every large city who kept Diaspora Judaism (Judaism outside of Palestine) alive in environments that were often very threatening. Although Paul certainly was familiar with Diaspora Judaism and with many aspects of Hellenism, he seldom alludes to society outside the church groups to whom he was writing. His letters, therefore, are not intended for the larger society. Rather, Paul is concerned almost entirely with specific communities of converts themselves.
Paul wrote his letters spontaneously; therefore, they do not represent a systematic statement of doctrine but are a diverse collection of writings directed toward diverse situations. With the possible exception of Romans, no letter was planned and carefully thought out in great detail before he wrote it. Although the content of his letters was largely his, Paul did not write them in his own hand but dictated his thoughts to a secretary, as we know, for example, from Rom. 16.22: ‘I Tertius, the writer of this letter, greet you in the Lord’. However, sometimes Paul wrote a notation at the end, as in 1 Cor. 16.21: ‘I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand’ (see also Gal. 6.11; Phlm. 1.19).

Paul’s letters, then, reflect spontaneous and hastily dictated thoughts through which we learn his feelings and his advice to converts in the religious communities he helped to establish. Therefore, we must try to understand each letter in relation to the situation that occasioned it. We must also try to understand Paul’s ideas in the contexts in which they appear, not in the light of our own religious training or theological convictions.

Undisputed and Disputed Letters

Scholars do not universally agree that all of the letters in the New Testament ascribed to Paul were actually written by the apostle himself. There is virtually unanimous agreement that 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians, and Philemon are authentic letters. For that reason we can think of them as undisputed letters. For reasons given in the chapters that follow, many scholars doubt the authenticity of either one or more among 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians. Although they are disputed letters, we study them along with the undisputed letters. Unless indicated otherwise, when I use the words ‘letters of Paul’, I mean the undisputed letters.

Because many scholars think Paul did not write the letters to Timothy and Titus, they are not included in our study, even though they show influence from Paul.

Specific situations that evoked the writing of each letter, along with Paul’s response to those situations, are presented. Evidence for determining both the situations and Paul’s responses to them is derived mostly from the letters themselves, our primary source for the most reliable information.

Paul as a Person

Throughout his letters Paul reveals a variety of emotions, perhaps made more sensitive as the result of his becoming a follower of Jesus the Messiah,
The Apostle Paul and His Letters

his religious experience on the road to Damascus, and the problems in his churches. Distressed because of the behavior of some Corinthian converts, he wrote to them ‘out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears’ (2 Cor. 2.4; see also 1 Cor. 3.1-4). To the misbehaving, self-indulgent converts at Philippi Paul says:

For many live as enemies of the cross of Christ; I have often told you of them, and now I tell you even with tears. Their end is destruction; their God is the belly; and their glory is in their shame; their minds are set on earthly things (Phil. 3.18-19).

Paul shares in the pain, joy, sorrow, and fears of others (1 Cor. 2.3; 2 Cor. 1.23–2.11; Gal. 4.19-20). Sometimes he is patient and tolerant (1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14-15), sometimes intolerant, impatient, even angry (2 Cor. 7.8-9; Gal. 1.1-24; 2.4-5; 4.16-17). He came to the Corinthians ‘in weakness and in fear and in much trembling’ (1 Cor. 2.3) and with speech ‘not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power’ (1 Cor. 2.4). And the Corinthians say that Paul is humble when present but bold when absent (2 Cor. 10.1).

When dealing with his adversaries, Paul’s language is often polemical and coarse (2 Cor. 10.2; 11.12-31; Gal. 1.6-10; Rom. 16.17-18; Phil. 3.18-19). Sometimes his emotions get the better of him. To be specific, he wishes the troublemakers at Galatia ‘would castrate themselves’ (Gal. 5.12), and he calls his adversaries at Philippi ‘the dogs’ and ‘the evil workers’ (Phil. 3.2). At the same time, Paul became emotionally strong because he survived numerous dangers and hardships (2 Cor. 11.21-29; see also 1 Cor. 4.8-13; 2 Cor. 1.3-10; 4.7-12; 6.4-10; 7.4-7; Phil. 4.10-14), and he is ‘under daily pressure’ because of his ‘anxiety for all the churches’ (2 Cor. 11.28).

The things just mentioned help us to understand that Paul was not a systematic theologian who thought out things logically in advance. Nothing in his letters indicates that he was intellectually discerning or even that he had a superior education. Rather, he was profound in feeling, not in intellectual acumen. Evidence indicates that he was driven more by personal faithfulness toward God, experience of the Holy Spirit, certain beliefs about Christ, and powerful moral convictions than by systematic thought. Perhaps those convictions came partly as the result of his special religious experience (see below). But the crisis at Galatia caused by the troublemakers of the circumcision party of Jews in the Christ movement did more than anything else to shape Paul’s peculiar ideas about faithfulness and the Jewish law, especially circumcision. They insisted that if Gentiles wanted to become converts they first had to be circumcised and then also...
obey the Jewish law. We shall learn more about these things in the chapters that follow.

*Paul and the Christ Movement*

We have learned about the Christ movement as a name for early followers of Jesus. Now let us think a bit more about that phrase. It is more accurate to refer to the members of that movement and of Paul’s churches as brothers, believers, or saints, the designations used in Paul’s letters and Acts, than as Christians (see below). From the start, Jewish followers of Jesus had a primary (‘first in order of time or development’) belief in common: Jesus is (was) the Christ (Messiah). Such persons were in a period of transition from some former religious status, either from Judaism or paganism or no religion, into a religion that not until several decades after Paul became known as Christianity. Paul does not use that designation, and neither it nor the term ‘Christian’ was known in his time.

When Paul joined the Christ movement, it was beginning to spread out from Palestine, the land of its origin, into the Greco-Roman world northward and westward into lands north of the Mediterranean Sea. This happened as the result of dissensions between Jewish and Gentile converts in the mother church in Jerusalem (Acts 6.1–8.8).

We do not know how long Paul himself had been a member of the Christ movement before he wrote his first letter. But we are certain of one thing: Paul was writing to Jews and Gentiles who had recently joined the Christ movement. Therefore, it is also appropriate to refer to the members of Paul’s churches as converts, a more neutral and inclusive term, which I prefer.

Paul and the converts in his churches were the first generation of persons belonging to the Christ movement. None of Paul’s adult converts was born into ‘a Christian family’ where Christian faithfulness and life were assumed, much less practiced. Indeed, many converts formerly worshiped Greco-Roman deities or belonged to mystery religions (secret religious cults) and practiced lifestyles quite different from those advocated by Paul, who lived in accordance with his strict Jewish monotheism and moral upbringing. And Paul was often fearful that some of his converts, especially Gentiles, would revert to their former status of unfaithfulness and immorality. This was always one of Paul’s main concerns and a fact constantly to be remembered by us who study Paul and his letters.

Paul, the Greek-speaking Jew, appeared at just the right time to accelerate the spreading of the Christ movement in the Greco-Roman world. Perhaps only someone like him, who did not know the earthly Jesus, could,
like Jesus, reject certain requirements of the law regarded by some other Jewish converts as crucial for Gentiles wanting to join the Christ movement.

The Independence of Paul’s Churches

Apparently the churches of Paul were not bound by traditional teachings of Jesus or by doctrines of an institutional church. There are few sayings of Jesus known from the gospels preserved in Paul’s letters. Sometimes, though, he does refer to a teaching of Jesus that he had learned from members of the Christ movement to reinforce some point he is making (1 Cor. 7.10-12; 11.23-26).

We can learn about the independence of the converts in the church at Corinth. They boasted of their own knowledge or wisdom (1 Cor. 1.18–4.21). Paul does not oppose such knowledge if it is understood as a gift of God and does not become an excuse for improper conduct. And according to Paul, new converts at Galatia were ‘called to freedom’ but were not to use that freedom as an opportunity for wrongdoing (Gal. 5.13-26).

We must try to appreciate the freedom, vigor, and independence of Paul’s churches that occasioned the letters which he wrote in response to problems in them. Indeed, if all had gone well in Paul’s churches, we would not have his letters, because there would have been no need for him to write. And we can be certain that Paul’s responses to problems in his churches were greatly influenced by his own convictions as a pious Jew. Paul’s faithfulness to the only God in existence, his devotion to the moral teachings of God’s law (discussed later), and his special religious experience of the risen Jesus as his Lord were the primary motivations for his repeated emphasis on moral life. Moral probity was the basic dogma in all of Paul’s churches.

The Designation ‘Christian’

It is certain that most Christians today who read Paul’s letters think he himself was a Christian and was writing to other Christians. However, Paul, the gospel writers, and most other writers of the New Testament either did not know the word or simply did not use it. Moreover, no writer of the New Testament addresses his writing ‘to Christians’.

In the New Testament the word is used only three times, two of them in Acts. In the first passage the writer says that in Antioch ‘the disciples were first called “Christians”’ (Acts 11.26). The Greek ending *ianos* means ‘followers of’ or ‘partisans of’ (see ‘Herodians’ in Mk 3.6; 12.13; Mt. 22.16). So ‘Christians’ were literally the ‘Christ party’, that is, followers of Jesus as
the Christ. According to Acts, Jews referred to Jesus’ first followers as ‘the sect of the Nazarenes’ (Acts 24.5) and ‘this sect’ (Acts 28.22). Here the word usually translated as ‘sect’ is *hairesis*, which, as we have already learned, indicates a difference of opinion from others. If you read the contexts of Acts 24.5 and 28.22, you will see that there were groups of Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah, in contrast to other groups of Jews who did not do so. In fact, in Acts 28.22 some leading Jews in Rome, whom Paul had called together, say to him that they want to hear what he thinks because they know that this sect is everywhere spoken against.

Perhaps those Jews in Rome knew that among some pagans the word Christian was being used with a sense of reproach, ridicule, or scorn. That is the view of some pagan authors who wrote a few decades after Paul. The Roman historian Tacitus (born c. 56 CE) says that a class of persons called Christians, hated by the people, was tortured by the Emperor Nero (54–68 CE) after the devastating fire in Rome for which he was being blamed. Tacitus also says that the name ‘Christians’ originated from ‘Christus’, who was put to death by Pilate (*Annals* 15.44.2).

Suetonius, Roman historian and biographer (born c. 69 CE), tells about Emperor Claudius (41–54 CE) expelling Jews from Rome and says that ‘the Christians, a class of men belonging to a new and evil superstition’, were put to death (*Nero* 16). And Pliny (born c. 61 CE), Roman governor of Bithynia in Asia Minor, calls Christianity ‘a perverted evil and outrageous superstition’ (*Letters* 97).

The words of the leading Jews in Rome reported in Acts 28.22 reflect the public gossip of the time with respect to members of the Christ movement.

In the second passage in Acts where the word Christian is used King Agrippa says to Paul: ‘Are you so quickly persuading me to become a Christian?’ (or ‘play the Christian’; Acts 26.28). His words surely must be taken as a sneer. Agrippa was a member of the notorious Herod family who got his education in Rome and spent much of his time there, where he probably learned about the word ‘Christian’, with its derogatory meaning. At any rate, it appears that the designation ‘Christian’ did not originate among Jews or Christians but among pagans either in Antioch (Acts 11.26) or Rome.

Instead of ‘Christians’, Paul and other early followers of Jesus used different designations when referring to members of the Christ movement. The most frequent were ‘brothers’ (in every letter of Paul; often in Acts), ‘saints’ (Greek, ‘holy ones’; 1 Thess. 3.13; 1 Cor. 1.2; 6.1-2; 2 Cor. 1.1; 13.12; Rom. 1.7; 12.13; Phil. 1.1; 4.22; Phlm. 1.5; see also Eph. 1.1, 15; 3.8; Col. 1.2; Acts 9.13, 32, 41), and ‘believers’ (1 Thess. 1.7; 2.10; 1 Cor. 14.22;
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Rom. 13.11; often in Acts). Because the term ‘Christian’ occurs so rarely in the New Testament, and because Jesus’ followers used other designations to refer to themselves, it is unlikely that the term originated among Jesus’ first followers. Therefore, it is an anachronism to use the word ‘Christian’ with reference to Paul and other early followers of Jesus.

Origin of the Designation ‘Christian’
We learn nothing about the origin of the designation ‘Christian’ from Acts 11.26 and 26.28. Although we cannot be certain about its origin, for a plausible answer to the question turn to 1 Pet. 4.12-19, where the term is used for the third and last time in the New Testament.

In 1 Pet. 4.14-19 ‘Christian’ is a term of reproach used during a time when some persons bearing that name were persecuted:

If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed… But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name… Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good.

This passage implies that Christians were persecuted simply because they bore that name and reflects the pagan view that the designation was one of reproach or scorn. And from the passage we also learn that Christians continued to do good in spite of their suffering, which is exactly what Paul would have wanted them to do (1 Thess. 5.15; Gal. 5.16-26).

The fact that in 1 Peter Christians are placed in antithesis to immoral persons is evidence that the designation bore with it the distinction of moral character. The emphasis of early followers of Jesus, especially Paul, on moral probity must have become evident to all pagans with whom they associated. And since that morality was often in marked contrast to the behavior of pagans, Jesus’ followers readily became the victims of ridicule.

Christians became exemplars of moral life. Remember that Paul most often addresses the persons to whom he writes as ‘saints’ (‘holy ones’), but that was not just a designation used for members of his churches. It was not just coincidence that believers and saints became designations for members of the Christ movement. Being saints was a way of life. This idea would seem ridiculous to pagans, because even the stories about their divine beings were filled with immoral actions among the deities themselves.

In the New Testament 1 Pet. 4.12-19 is positive evidence that the designation ‘Christians’ implied living moral lives, and only in 1 Peter is it given the moral characterization.
Outside of the New Testament, statements of Pliny, who was quoted earlier and who wrote about 115 CE to Emperor Trajan (98–117 CE), are significant. About the Christians he writes:

[They] were accustomed to meeting on a certain day...and singing a hymn in alternate verses to Christ as to a god, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to do any wicked deeds, never to commit any fraud, theft, or adultery, never to lie, nor break a promise, nor deny a trust when asked to make it good (Letters 97).

The passages from 1 Peter and the statement of Pliny provide the best insights into what it really meant to be a Christian. And the moral convictions of such persons ultimately harked back through Paul to the example of Jesus of Nazareth.
Chapter 1

PAUL AND THE BOOK OF ACTS

Acts provides the setting for understanding Paul’s life as a Jew who joined the Christ (Messiah) movement and for his letters. Moreover, certain primary ideas of Paul and some of his activities are reported not only in his letters but in Acts as well. For these reasons we begin our study with several things concerning Paul mentioned in Acts, because it provides some insight into the story behind the person of Paul, his mission travels, and his letters.

Common Features in Paul’s Letters and Acts

Paul tells us very little about himself, his special religious experience while on the way to Damascus to persecute followers of Jesus, or his subsequent travels to the numerous cities where he helped to establish churches. In order to learn more about those things, we turn to the book of Acts for help. The simpler term ‘Paul’ is generally used when referring to his letters collectively. The following important features occur in both Paul and Acts:

(1) Paul speaks of his life as a Jew: ‘You have heard, no doubt, of my earlier life in Judaism... I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors’ (Gal. 1.13-14; see also 2 Cor. 11.22; Rom. 11.1; Phil. 3.4-6). ‘I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but brought up in this city [Jerusalem] at the feet of Gamaliel, educated strictly according to our ancestral law, being zealous for God, just as all of you are today’ (Acts 22.3: see also Acts 26.4-5).

(2) Paul persecuted followers of the Christ movement, whom he later calls ‘the church of God’: ‘I was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it’ (Gal. 1.13; see also Gal. 1.23; 1 Cor. 15.9; Phil. 3.6). According to Acts, the Christ movement was also known as ‘the Way’ (Acts 9.2, 13-14; 18.25-26; 19.9, 23; 22.4-5; 24.14, 22), which Paul persecuted. He asked the high priest ‘for letters to the synagogues at Damascus,
so that if he found any who belonged to the Way...he might bring them bound to Jerusalem’ (Acts 9.2; see also Acts 19.9, 23).

(3) Paul had a special religious experience, frequently, though not entirely correctly, called a ‘conversion’ (see below). He may refer to that experience as ‘a revelation of Jesus Christ’ and then he says a bit later that God ‘was pleased to reveal his Son in me’ (Greek text; Gal. 1.12, 15-16; see also 1 Cor. 9.1; 15.8). Acts reports Paul’s special religious experience in much more detail (Acts 9.1-19; see also Acts 22.6-16; 26.12-18).

(4) Paul believed that God called him to preach his Son ‘among the Gentiles’ (Gal. 1.15-16; 2.2, 8-10), a mission that both Paul (1 Thess. 2.16; Rom. 1.5, 13; 2.24; 11.11-25; 15.7-27; 16.26) and Acts emphasize (Acts 9.15; 13.44-49; 14.24-28; 15.3-29).

(5) The words ‘brothers’, ‘saints’ (‘holy ones’), and ‘believers’ are used to designate those belonging to the Christ movement or ‘the Way’ (see above). This ‘Way’, however, was not just ‘a movement’. It was a particular way of life – moral life (Acts 18.24-26; see also Acts 19.9, 23; 22.14, 16, 22). This fact will become obvious throughout our study.

(6) Paul’s intention is to get to Rome. According to Paul, he had often intended to visit the converts there but was prevented from doing so. He plans to stop at Rome on his way to Spain (Rom. 15.22-33; see also Rom. 1.8-15). According to Acts 19.21, during his troublesome times at Ephesus, Paul decided to go through Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem and then, according to Acts, says, ‘I must also see Rome’. While Paul was in Jerusalem, ‘the Lord stood near him and said, “Keep up your courage! for just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome” ’ (Acts 23.11). Thus, the author of Acts has the Lord confirm Paul’s intention to go to Rome mentioned earlier. According to Acts 25.11–27.1, Paul set sail for Rome because he had appealed to the emperor. Paul and Acts agree, then, that Paul, after going through Macedonia and Achaia to Jerusalem, intends to go to Rome (Rom. 15.22-33; Acts 19.21).


Besides Paul’s own letters, the book of Acts, the earliest history of the movement that became known as the Christian church, records the work of Paul as a mission preacher among Jews and Gentiles, especially Gentiles. Titled Acts of Apostles in the Greek New Testament, it is the second volume written by a person whom tradition has named Luke, ‘the beloved physician’, (Col. 4.14) and a co-worker of Paul (Phlm. 1.24; see also 2 Tim. 4.11).
Evidence from the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts has led to the view, almost universally accepted among scholars, that the gospel of Luke and Acts are, indeed, two works written by the same author. Both are addressed to the same person, Theophilus (Lk. 1.3; Acts 1.1), and the words ‘in the first book’ (Acts 1.1) indicate that Luke intended the second volume to complement the first. Common vocabulary, similarities in literary style, and some of the same religious beliefs also support the view of common authorship.

Theological themes in the last verses of the gospel of Luke are picked up and complemented in the first part of the book of Acts. According to Lk. 24.36-53, followers of Jesus are last reported as being in Jerusalem, from whence ‘repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations’ (Lk. 24.47). The disciples are referred to as ‘witnesses’ in Lk. 24.48, and Acts begins with the disciples in Jerusalem, from where they are to be ‘witnesses’ not only ‘in Jerusalem’, but also ‘in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1.8). Jesus’ promise that the disciples would experience ‘power from on high’ (Lk. 24.49), alluded to in Acts 1.4, is fulfilled with the gift of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2.1-4. And the ascension of Jesus is reported in the gospels only in Lk. 24.50-51 and Acts 1.9-11.

Whether the volumes of Luke and Acts ever were circulated as one work, we do not know, and if they were, we do not know how they became separated. Nor do we know the original title of the two-volume work or the titles of the individual works if not published simultaneously.

There is little, if any, evidence for believing that Luke knew any of Paul’s letters firsthand. However, several decades after Luke some Christian writers have knowledge of a collection of Paul’s letters. The author of 2 Peter knew such a collection, because he writes: ‘Our beloved brother Paul wrote to you...speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand’ (2 Pet. 3.15-16). The author of 2 Peter is correct on both points. Paul had become a beloved brother in the eyes of the early church, because the author places his letters on a par with ‘the other scriptures’ (2 Pet. 3.16). In Paul’s letters there certainly are some things hard to understand, as you will learn as we study them.

Since in Acts Luke shows such a great interest in Paul, it may be that the publication of Luke–Acts together, or of Acts separately, provided the inducement for the collection and circulation of the Pauline corpus. On the other hand, it could be that the circulation of the Pauline letter collection provided the motivation for the publication of Luke’s work, especially Acts. We do not know when 2 Peter was written, but most likely sometime during the first quarter of the second or perhaps near the end of the first
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century. However, these are some of the things in the story behind the writing and publication of Luke–Acts and of the Pauline letter corpus that we do not know.

The gospel of Luke deals with the life and teachings of Jesus from his birth to his ascension. In the book of Acts Luke continues his story where the gospel left off by telling about the Christ movement from Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1.9-11) to the time of Paul’s arrival in Rome and his preaching there (Acts 28.11-31).

**Possible Sources for Acts**

As with the gospel of Luke, the book of Acts probably contains sources used by the author, although they are hard to identify. Luke says that he had been given information ‘by those who from the beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word’ (Lk. 1.2). That statement implies that Luke had some special sources of information and that he was not present at every event mentioned in his book.

One source seems to stand out in Acts: the passages containing the change from the third to the first person in the narrative of Paul’s journeys. For that reason those passages are known as the ‘we sections’ or ‘we passages’ (Acts 16.10-17; 20.5-16; 21.1-18; 27.1–28.16). See, for example, ‘When he [Paul] had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia... We set sail from Troas’ (Acts 16.10-11); ‘They went ahead and were waiting for us in Troas; but we sailed from Philippi’ (Acts 20.5-6).

Such passages and others like them seem to be notes from a travel log or diary inserted by someone into the narrative. Of course, if Luke himself actually traveled with Paul – as reported in early Christian tradition and as some scholars still believe – then the source was Luke’s own notes, which he himself inserted into the narrative.

Besides the ‘we sections’, scholars have tried to identify various other sources or traditions for the narrative about the church at Jerusalem (e.g. Acts 1.6–2.40; 3.1–4.31), as well as a source that appears to reflect a special interest in the church at Antioch (e.g. Acts 11.19-30; 15.3-33), and perhaps also a source for some passages in Acts 6–8. But because it is difficult, if not impossible, to identify particular sources in Acts, scholars have recently stressed that Luke is a creative author in his own right, both in the gospel of Luke and in the book of Acts. We can be certain that whatever sources Luke used he adapted to his peculiar literary style. Or perhaps, as some scholars believe, ‘If Luke used sources for Acts, he composed them all himself’.
Acts as History

From the prefaces to Luke (Lk. 1.1-4) and Acts (1.1-5), it is clear that Luke intended to write a history, at least in the ancient sense of ‘history’. Ancient history writing is not to be understood as an account of events as they actually happened. Moreover, ancient historians, including Luke, composed the speeches of the characters in their stories. And those speeches were written in the literary style of the authors and were usually intended to convey their own ideas, not those of the speakers.

From the preface to Luke’s first volume (Lk. 1.1-4) we learn that other persons had written before him. Although the words ‘Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account’, may be somewhat exaggerated, Luke was aware of predecessors in the field of history writing. But perhaps his predecessors were only the authors of the gospels of Mark and Matthew, both written before Luke’s gospel and which he used in composing his own. However, by using the words ‘after investigating everything carefully’, ‘an orderly account’, and ‘so that you may know the truth’, Luke makes it clear from the start that he wanted to do a better job than his predecessors (Lk. 1.3-4).

We know nothing about the person Theophilus to whom Luke addresses both works. The name means either ‘friend of God’ or ‘beloved by God’, so some commentators think Theophilus was not a real person. Instead, Luke may have used the name to represent every true believer, although we do not know if he was a ‘Christian’. Or, by addressing his works to Theophilus, Luke may have wanted to show that they were intended for a wide public, especially Gentiles, of whom Theophilus was representative. Since Theophilus is addressed as ‘most excellent’ (Lk. 1.3), and since the Roman procurators Felix and Festus are addressed in the same way (Acts 23.26; 26.25), perhaps Theophilus was also a Roman official. If Theophilus was a Roman official, that might help to explain why Luke always writes favorably about such persons.

In his gospel Luke three times reports that the Roman procurator Pilate found Jesus not guilty of any of the charges against him (Lk. 23.4, 14, 22). In Acts, Luke writes that the magistrates at Philippi released Paul and his companions (Acts 16.35-39) and that the Roman proconsul Gallio refused to act as a judge when charges were brought against Paul (Acts 18.12-17). Luke wants his readers to understood clearly that Paul was a Roman citizen, and he does so by repeating the statement several times (Acts 16.37, 38; 22.25-29; 23.27). Moreover, Luke also reports that Paul was usually treated well by Roman officials, who were among the wealthier citizens (Acts 13.4-12; 16.25-39; 18.12-17; 19.35-41; 23.6–26.32; 28.7-10).
The ‘proconsul, Sergius Paulus, an intelligent man...wanted to hear the word of God’. And after Paul made the magician Elymas blind for trying ‘to turn the proconsul away from the faith’, the proconsul ‘believed, for he was astonished at the teaching of the Lord’ (Acts 13.4-12).

After a near riot in the theater at Ephesus, a city known as ‘the temple keeper of the great Artemis’, (a goddess worshipped throughout the Roman Empire), the town clerk dismissed the crowd (Acts 19.35-41). Read Luke’s account of the whole story in Acts 19.1-41, and see how tactfully he narrates the story to show how the town clerk defends Paul against his accusers. The clerk says, ‘You ought to be quiet and do nothing rash. You have brought these men here who are neither temple robbers nor blasphemers of our goddess.’ Charges should be brought in the courts and before the proconsuls. The town clerk concludes his remarks by saying, ‘There is no cause that we can give to justify this commotion’. Then ‘he dismissed the assembly’ (Acts 19.36-41).

Earlier in the account of the story about Ephesus Luke wrote that Paul ‘wished to go into the crowd, but the disciples would not let him’. Then Luke adds, ‘Even some officials of the province of Asia, who were friendly to him, sent him a message urging him not to venture into the theater’ (Acts 19.30-31).

These observations indicate that Luke may have had a politically apologetic motive for writing as well as a historical one. He wanted to show that, as the offshoot of Judaism, the Christ movement (the incipient Christian religion), like Judaism, should be accepted as a legal religion in the Roman Empire.

An important historical truth to be learned from Acts is that women played an important role, along with men, in the Christ movement. Their role, already evident in the gospel of Luke (Luke 7.36–8.3; 10.38-42; 23.27-28; 24.22-24), is prominent also in Acts. Women are regularly mentioned with men among converts: ‘certain women’ and Jesus’ mother (Acts 1.14); unnamed women (5.14; 8.12; 9.2); ‘leading women’ (17.4, 12); Sapphira (5.1-10); Tabitha (9.36-41); Lydia (16.14-15); Priscilla (18.2, 18, 26); and widows (6.1; 9.41).

**Acts as Theology**

A careful reading of Luke–Acts reveals that Luke did not intend to write only a historical account. He believed that God, through the power of the Holy Spirit, was directing the affairs about which he wrote. Luke stresses the importance of the early followers of Jesus as his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the ends of the earth (Acts 1.8). Indeed, Luke is very

According to Luke’s theological point of view, the spread of the Christ movement to Gentiles was made possible because of the Jews’ rejection of Jesus (Lk. 4.16-30; Acts 2.22-24, 36; 3.11-18; 4.8-11; 7.51-53; 13.26-31; 28.25-29). According to Paul, however, God set him apart before he was born to proclaim his Son ‘among the Gentiles’ (Gal. 1.15-16).

The clue to Luke’s view of the Jewish rejection of Jesus and the Gentile mission is to be found in the story of the rejection of Jesus by his own people at Nazareth (Lk. 4.16-30; see also Mk 6.1-6; Mt. 13.54-58). Only Luke reports that the Jews wanted to kill Jesus (Lk. 4.28-30). That the Jews killed Jesus becomes a repeated theme in Acts (Acts 2.23; 3.15; 5.30, 36; 13.28; see below). In Paul there is only one passage where he says that the Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death (1 Thess. 2.15). Because of the anti-Jewish attitude uncharacteristic of Paul in 1 Thess. 2.13-16, many scholars think those verses are a later insertion by someone else.

Already in his gospel Luke has a special interest in the influence of the Holy Spirit. Statistically, among the first three gospels writers, Luke uses ‘Holy Spirit’ fourteen times, more often than Mark (four) and Matthew (five) together. The main characters in Luke’s gospel are moved by the Holy Spirit: the Baptist (1.15), Mary (1.35), Elizabeth (1.41), Zechariah (1.67), and Simeon (2.25-27). ‘Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan and was led by the Spirit in the wilderness’, and ‘Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee’ (Lk. 4.1, 14).

As we have observed, Luke mentions the ‘power from on high’ at the end of his gospel (Lk. 24.49) and begins Acts with a statement that Jesus had given instructions to the apostles ‘through the Holy Spirit’ (Acts 1.2). The Holy Spirit would give them the power to be the Lord’s witnesses (Acts 1.8) and came upon Jesus’ followers at Pentecost (Acts 2.1-21), and from then on it was at work in the apostles, the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2.14-18, 33), Peter (Acts 4.8), Stephen (Acts 6.10), and Paul (Acts 9.17; 13.9). ‘Living in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit’, the church increased in numbers (Acts 9.31).

The worshipers at Antioch were told by the Holy Spirit to set apart Barnabas and Saul for the work to which it had called them (Acts 13.2). And, ‘It has seemed good to the Holy Spirit’ and to the apostles to place
upon Gentile converts ‘no further burden than these essentials’ – prohibi-
tions for Gentile converts (Acts 15.28-29).

Negatively, Paul was ‘forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in
Asia’ and ‘the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them’ to go into Bithynia (Acts
16.6-7).

The Speeches in Acts

Speeches interspersed in the narrative play a significant role in ancient
history writing. Luke was an expert at composing speeches. And the many
accounts of miracles he reports show that he was as adept at telling stories
as he was at composing speeches. In short, he was a better theologian and
storyteller than a historian.

Speeches embellished the works of ancient history writers. In Acts, as in
other ancient histories, speeches by the same speaker are repeated, but
never in the same way. For example, Luke has Paul speak three times in his
own defense, first, at the barracks in Jerusalem (Acts 22.1-21); second,
before the governor Felix (Acts 24.10-21); and third, before King Agrippa
varies what Paul says about himself as a Jew, his special religious experi-
ence, and his persecution of members of the Way. Then compare those
speeches with Luke’s account of Paul’s vision in Acts 9.1-9 and notice
further variations.

Particularly in Acts, speeches make the narrative as a whole more per-
sonal and dramatic, give an opportunity for editorial comment, and pro-
vide intellectual and religious inspiration for readers. If we leave out Paul’s
equal number to Peter and Paul with eight speeches by each apostle. The
speeches of Peter are reported in Acts 1.16-22; 2.14-36; 3.12-26; 4.8-12;
5.29-32; 10.34-43; 11.5-17; and 15.7-11. Besides Paul’s defense speeches
already mentioned, other speeches of his are in Acts 13.16-41; 14.15-17;
17.22-31; 20.18-35; and 23.1, 6.

The Speeches and Luke’s Theology

Along with the longer and more formal speeches, there are also shorter

The speeches in Acts provide the best insight into Luke’s theology;
therefore, let’s look at a couple of them, beginning with Peter’s speech at
Pentecost in Acts 2.14-36. Please turn to it now and notice these beliefs:
the coming of Jesus fulfilled Old Testament prophecy; Jesus’ miracles give
proof of his favor with God; in accord with God’s plan, Jesus was crucified
by lawless men (Jews); God raised Jesus the Messiah from the dead; Jesus is exalted at God’s right hand; and God made Jesus both Lord and Messiah.

Is it likely that Peter, the fisherman from Galilee, could compose an impromptu speech like that? Or, is it more likely that Luke, probably with a copy of the Greek Old Testament (Septuagint) before him, wrote the speech after rather careful preparation?

Now turn to Paul’s speech in the synagogue at Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13.16-41). It is especially significant because it helps us to separate beliefs of the early church from later doctrines. The speech begins with a brief history of Israel, not always accurate when judged by the Old Testament, to the time of David. From David’s lineage ‘God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised’ (Acts 13.23; see also 13.26; and discussion of ‘Savior’ below). Paul, the gospel writers, and Acts all mention that Jesus was a descendant of David.

Here are some theological ideas found in Peter’s speech at Pentecost that reappear in Paul’s speech at Antioch in Pisidia: fulfillment of scripture in Jesus’ coming (Acts 2.16-36; 13.23, 27-41); Jesus’ coming was a part of God’s plan (Acts 2.16-36; 13.22-25); Jews were responsible for Jesus’ death, although in Paul’s speech this was because of ignorance and failure to understand the words of the prophets (Acts 2.22-23, 36; 13.26-30); God raised Jesus (Acts 2.24, 32; 13.30-35); Ps. 16.10 was fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 2.31; 13.35); and forgiveness of sins was made possible through Jesus (Acts 2.21, 38; 13.33-39).

Please read several other speeches of Peter and Paul to learn further how the speeches serve as a medium for conveying the thoughts of the author who wrote them. In spite of some differences, due to different occasions and audiences, the vocabulary, literary style, form, and much of the content are usually the same, no matter who does the speaking. If there were no speeches in Acts, Acts would be like the gospels without words of Jesus.

According to Luke, as we have learned, the Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus. Although some Jewish officials were, perhaps indirectly, responsible for Jesus’ death, the blame for his death was gradually shifted from Rome to ‘the Jews’ as the Christ movement spread throughout the Roman Empire. Crucifixion was a Roman, not Jewish, method of execution. We have learned that one of Luke’s motives for writing Acts was to win the approval of Rome for the Christ movement as a religion. If Luke was to succeed in that effort, obviously he did not want to blame the Romans, who were, in fact, ultimately responsible for Jesus’ death.

Luke reports that in Paul’s speech at Antioch in Pisidia he tells the Jews that from David’s posterity God ‘brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus’ (Acts
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13.23). ‘Savior’ (soter) and ‘salvation’ (soteria) are favorite words of Luke. The word ‘Savior’ does not occur in Mark and Matthew, and occurs only once in John (4.42). Perhaps some of you will remember that at Jesus’ birth the angels announce to the shepherds: ‘to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord’ (Lk. 2.11). Compare Lk. 1.47, where Luke has Mary say, ‘My spirit rejoices in God my Savior’. Here God, not Jesus, is Savior. In Lk. 1.69 Zachariah says that God ‘raised up a horn of salvation for us’ (Greek text). And in Acts 5.31 Luke reports that Peter and the apostles say, ‘God...exalted him [Jesus] at his right hand as Leader and Savior’.

These passages from Luke and Acts with respect to Savior are unlike anything Paul says. In the undisputed letters of Paul ‘Savior’ occurs only in Phil. 3.20, where Paul says that from heaven ‘we are expecting a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ’. Here Jesus’ role as Savior is still to come. According to Paul, believers are not brought into salvation in their present lives. They will experience it at Jesus’ coming again, when their humble bodies will be transformed and become ‘conformed to the body of his glory’ (Phil. 3.21). Remember that the author of 2 Peter says that in Paul’s letters there are some things hard to understand (2 Pet. 3.16). This is one of those things.

The belief that Jesus was a Savior would appeal to any Gentiles present in the synagogue. However, it must not, according to Luke, supplant the long-held view by members of the Christ movement that Jesus was the Messiah. In Luke’s birth narrative three theological views are combined: ‘Savior, who is Christ the Lord’ (Savior, Christ, and Lord). It would not have been easy to convince Jews, who knew from their scriptures (Old Testament for Christians) that God was their Savior, to believe that now Jesus is their Savior.

Belief in Jesus as Savior came into the theology of the church rather late; therefore, we find the belief only in the latest writings of the New Testament. The passage from Luke’s birth narrative, quoted above, is almost certainly later than the body of the gospel of Luke (see also Jn 4.42; 1 Tim. 1.1; 2 Tim. 1.10; Tit. 1.3-4; 3.6; 2 Pet. 1.1, 11; 2.20; 3.2, 18; 1 Jn 4.14; Jude 1.25). If you read these passages, you will notice that sometimes God is the Savior, sometimes Jesus.

We have said that most Jews did not accept Paul’s belief that Jesus was the Messiah. One of the first obstacles the Christ movement had to overcome was the thinking of some Jews that John the Baptist might be the Messiah. Some of the first followers of Jesus had been disciples of John the Baptist. When Luke wrote his gospel, apparently John was so popular that some people were questioning whether he might be the Messiah.
Luke writes that ‘all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Messiah’. In what follows John at least evades the question, if he does not deny what the questioners want to know. Notice that they were questioning in their hearts, but John answers as if he had heard what they were wondering (Lk. 3.15-17).

By the time Luke wrote Acts the sect of John the Baptist had become strong enough to be a challenge to the Christ movement. Therefore, in Acts Luke leaves no doubt about the questioning and has John emphatically deny that he is the Messiah: ‘What do you suppose that I am? I am not he. No, but one is coming after me’ (Acts 13.25). The same kind of emphatic denial on the part of the Baptist is also reported in Jn 1.19-20, 29-30; 3.25-28.

The Relationship between Luke and Paul

In light of ancient tradition and evidence within Luke–Acts, we think that Luke was a Gentile convert who regarded Paul as the greatest missionary to Gentiles. Luke’s Greek, for example, is some of the best among New Testament writers. Like Paul, Luke was concerned with spreading the Christ movement to the Gentiles. In fact, Luke reports that Paul was instrumental in establishing Gentile churches throughout most of the Roman Empire. And this is confirmed by Paul’s own writings to several churches in the empire. Remember to look at the map occasionally.

That Luke had a special interest in Paul as the apostle to the Gentiles is clear from the fact that he devotes most of the second half of Acts to the mission activity of that apostle. Since Luke also records biographical material about Paul (Acts 7.58–8.3; 9.1-30; 21.37–22.29; 23.6; 26.1-23), he apparently had a personal interest in Paul as a person. Luke may have shared in Paul’s work (Phlm. 1.24; see also Col. 4.14; 2 Tim. 4.11) and sometimes even traveled with him. That Luke and Paul knew each other continues to be a popular view based on the references just listed and on the ‘we passages’ in Acts, which we have already mentioned. Those passages may imply that the author was with Paul on at least some of his travels.

Luke’s special interest in Paul may reflect a possible motive for part of the story behind Acts. According to Acts 19.21 (see also Acts 23.11), Paul had expressed a desire to go to Rome. This coincides with Paul’s wish in Rom. 1.15 and 15.22-29. But according to Acts 25.10-13 and 26.32, Paul was sent to Rome because as a Roman citizen he had appealed to the emperor. In Rome, Paul was under guard and presumably awaiting trial (Acts 28.16, 30-31). Perhaps, then, Luke’s account of Paul’s encounters with Roman authorities and his release without trials at various times in
Acts were intended to serve as evidence that in Rome Paul should also be acquitted and released. Perhaps Luke intended to write a third volume to deal with Paul’s trial and its outcome, but we have no evidence that his intention was ever carried out.

The view that Luke was writing to help win Paul’s acquittal is now largely abandoned by scholars. Two statements in Acts itself give reason for believing that Paul was already dead when Luke wrote. In his farewell speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus (Acts 20.17-35), Paul says that they will see his face no more (Acts 20.25). And according to Acts 20.38, there was grieving among the elders because they would not see Paul any more. Such statements, however, are likely to be recorded only after history has proven them true. In other words, Paul was probably already dead when Luke wrote Acts.

Date and Place of Writing for Luke–Acts

The question of Paul’s death has a bearing on the date of writing for the gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. If Paul was still alive when Luke wrote, the date of Acts would probably be between about 60–65 CE. If when Luke wrote, Paul was dead, perhaps martyred during the reign of Nero (54–68 CE) about 64 CE, the date of Acts would be somewhat later.

Evidence in the gospel of Luke may indicate that it was written after the fall of Jerusalem to Rome in 70 CE. Most scholars think that the words of Jesus reported only in Lk. 21.20, 24 about seeing ‘Jerusalem surrounded by armies’ and ‘trampled on by the Gentiles’ (Roman soldiers) are a prophecy after the event. It seems quite likely that no gospel was written before the fall of Jerusalem in 70 CE. There is general agreement that Luke used Mark and perhaps Matthew when he wrote his gospel. Luke, then, was probably written about 90 CE and Acts somewhat later.

We do not know the place of composition for Luke–Acts. Tradition has suggested Rome, the Roman province of Achaia, Caesarea, and the Decapolis, a region east of the Jordan River in Palestine. Besides these places, scholars have also suggested Ephesus and Antioch in Syria. However, these are some of the things that remain unknown to persons wanting to know the complete story behind Paul’s life and letters.

Luke and the Letters of Paul

Acts nowhere reveals with certainty that Luke knew any of Paul’s letters. Indeed, there are several major differences between Acts and Galatians with respect to biographical material about Paul. His journey to Arabia
(Gal. 1.17) is not mentioned in Acts. According to Paul, when he was in Jerusalem (Gal. 1.18-24), the believers there glorified God because of him. Acts, on the other hand, reports that when Paul ‘attempted to join the disciples’ in Jerusalem, ‘they were all afraid of him’, and some Hellenists ‘were attempting to kill him’ (Acts 9.26-30). And ‘through the Spirit’ Paul was told not to go on to Jerusalem’ (Acts 21.12, 31). These differences between the accounts of Paul and Acts can hardly be reconciled.

In Acts Paul is no longer faced with the same kinds of problems and dangers as in his letters. Paul writes to the Corinthian believers, ‘To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands’ (1 Cor. 4.11-12). He was ‘persecuted’ (2 Cor. 4.9), endured ‘afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings’, and other sufferings (2 Cor. 6.4-5), and was ‘afflicted in every way’ (2 Cor. 7.5). In Acts Paul is a hero superior to other Jews and even rises above Roman officials, as we have learned. If this is history, it is written retrospectively out of admiration for Paul, whose popularity and influence survived because of his letters.

Remember that Luke and Paul agree that Paul was especially interested in converting Gentiles to the Christ movement. It is plausible, therefore, to think that Luke’s comments about the Jews’ hostility toward Paul in Jerusalem were made in an attempt to free the movement from its Jewish affiliations and demands.

In our study of Galatians we shall learn more about the controversy between the Jewish branch of the Christ movement in Jerusalem, which insisted that Gentiles becoming converts should be circumcised and obey Jewish dietary laws, and the Gentile branch at Antioch, which rejected those demands. On three occasions in Acts (10.1–11.18; 15.1-29; 21.17-26) Luke shows familiarity with that controversy, but each time the dispute is settled amicably.

According to Acts 15.1-29, an assembly (conference) was held at Jerusalem to discuss and settle the matter about requirements for Gentile converts. It was decided that Gentile converts should ‘abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled [lacking in some Greek manuscripts] and from blood’ (Acts 15.20; see also 15.29).

The first prohibition alludes to meat from an animal that had been dedicated and sacrificed to some pagan god during worship. Usually only inedible parts of the animal were burned in the sacrifice, so the rest of the meat was good for human consumption. Since such meat was frequently sold in market places, Gentiles were accustomed to buying and eating it without any qualms.
We shall learn later what Paul says about idolatry and eating meats sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8.1-8; 10.1-31; see Exod. 34.11-16; Lev. 17.8-9). Eating meat from a strangled animal, that is, from which the blood had not been properly drained, was strictly forbidden by Jewish law (Gen. 9.4; Lev. 3.17; 17.10-14; 19.26; Deut. 12.16, 23-28; 15.23). Some Gentiles frequently attended synagogue services; those who did would already be familiar with the Jewish position on idolatry and eating meat from a strangled animal. However, for Paul the most controversial point at Galatia, as we shall see, was the circumcision of Gentiles. Luke was aware of the controversy, because he begins his record of the conference at Jerusalem by saying, ‘Certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (Acts 15.1). That important point is not mentioned in the prohibitions.

The word translated as ‘fornication’ is *porneia*, which Paul frequently uses for illicit sexual relationships of any kind (1 Cor. 5.1; 6.13, 18; 7.2; 2 Cor. 12.21; Gal. 5.19; see also Eph. 5.3; Col. 3.5). Gentile converts in Paul’s churches were not used to the stringent moral requirement demanded by Paul. Naturally, then, he was always concerned that they should not return to their pagan idolatrous and immoral ways of life.

Paul does not mention the prohibitions stated in Acts either in Gal. 2.1-10 or elsewhere. Rather, he says that when he was in Jerusalem the Jewish ‘pillars’, James, Cephas (Peter), and John, only wanted Barnabas and him to remember the poor, which they had been eager to do. Luke says nothing about that. Moreover, Paul says that when Peter came to Antioch he ‘opposed him to his face’, because he hypocritically ate with Gentiles (Gal. 2.11-14). In Acts 14.24–15.41 Luke never mentions a personal confrontation between Paul and Peter. Luke knew about the controversy but not necessarily from Paul’s letters. Apparently he wanted to record the spreading of the Christ movement from Jews to Gentiles as harmonious and without the controversy reflected in Paul’s letters.
We have been able to guess reasonably at several likely secondary motives for the story behind the writing of Acts. But Luke’s primary purpose was to record the spread of the Christ movement from Jews to Gentiles through the work of the Holy Spirit in the apostles in two stages. The first stage concerns the spread of the movement from Jerusalem throughout Palestine and into Syria, largely among Jews, under the leadership of Peter. The second stage concerns the movement from Antioch to Rome and from Jews to Gentiles through the mission activity of the apostle Paul. The book of Acts, therefore, divides naturally into two main parts: the Jewish mission in Acts 1–12 and the Gentile mission in Acts 13–28. Yet this division, as with others proposed, is not perfect. Paul’s special religious experience is narrated in the first section, in which Peter is the main character. And the assembly (conference) in Jerusalem, of which Peter is the leader, comes in the second section, in which Paul is the main character.

Because Luke regularly pauses to summarize the progress of the Christ movement, it is easy to outline his narrative: (1) introduction: preface, ascension of Jesus, and choice of Judas’ successor (1.1-26); (2) the coming of the Holy Spirit and Peter’s speech at Pentecost (2.1-46), with a summary in 2.47; (3) Peter preaching and performing miracles in Jerusalem, believers have all things in common, some persecution by opponents, and the choice of seven special persons to distribute food among the needy (3.1–6.6), with a summary in 6.7; (4) Stephen, his speech, and martyrdom, and the spread of the Christ movement into Judea, Galilee, and Samaria (6.8–9.30), with a summary in 9.31; (5) the spread of the movement from Judea to Antioch in Syria under the leadership of Peter (9.32–12.23), with a summary in 12.24; (6) the church grows throughout Asia Minor under the leadership of Paul (12.25–16.4), with a summary in 16.5; (7) the church moves into Europe (16.6–19.19), with a summary in 19.20); and (8) Paul works in Greece, is tried in Jerusalem, and goes to Rome (19.21–28.29), with a final summary in 28.30-31.
Acts begins with the disciples and the women waiting for the Holy Spirit, which Jesus had promised (Acts 1.1-14; see also Lk. 24.49), and Peter’s speech about Judas who betrayed Jesus and the choice of his successor (Acts 1.15-26). Then Luke tells about the coming of the Spirit upon the crowd at Pentecost (Acts 2.1-13), followed by a speech of Peter (Acts 2.14-36) and the hearers’ response to it by repenting and being baptized (Acts 2.37-43). Then Luke reports a brief successful experience in communal living, when believers sold their possessions and gave something to those in need (Acts 2.42-46). The writer’s summary statement that the Lord added to the community every day those who were being saved (Acts 2.47) brings the opening section of Acts to a close.

The Work of Peter in Jerusalem

Luke narrates the work of Peter in Jerusalem, where he performed miracles and preached to any who would listen, in spite of occasional persecution. Luke interweaves speeches with the narrative in a typical manner (Acts 3.1–5.42). A second trial of communal living failed because of the dishonesty of one man and his wife (Acts 4.32–5.11). Seven Hellenists (that is, Jews who spoke Greek) were chosen to help with the distribution of food among needy believers (Acts 6.1-6). The section closes with a summary of the success of mission activity in Jerusalem under Peter’s leadership, even among the priests, who were the most aristocratic Jews (Acts 6.7).

Before the summary in Acts 6.7 Luke had said that every day, both in the temple and at home, the apostles ‘did not cease to teach and proclaim Jesus as the Messiah’ (Acts 5.42). Such statements and others like them clearly indicate that the Christ movement originated among Jews who believed that Jesus was their Messiah and that they set out to convince other Jews of their belief.

Stephen, his Speech, and Death

Luke’s comment that ‘the Hellenists complained against the Hebrews’ (Aramaic-speaking Jews; Acts 6.1) indicates friction within the Jewish wing of the church in Jerusalem. Luke then gives an account of Stephen, one of the Hellenists appointed to help distribute food to their neglected widows (Acts 6.2-6), and his murder (martyrdom; Acts 6.8–8.1). The death of Stephen results in a persecution of the church in Jerusalem and a dispersion of believers (Acts 8.1).

In reporting the death of Stephen Luke introduces his readers to Saul, a devout young Jew, also called by his Roman name Paul (Acts 7.58–8.1;
Paul, as we have learned, became a leader in the Jewish persecution of Jesus’ followers (Acts 8.3). However, this persecution turned out positively, according to Luke, because, as a result, the church spread throughout Judea and Samaria, largely under the leadership of Philip, another Hellenist, and Peter, a conservative Jewish believer in Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 8.1-40). Later those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose after Stephen’s death traveled to Phoenicia (Acts 8.1), the island of Cyprus, and Antioch, ‘and they spoke the word to no one except Jews’ (Acts 11.19-26).

**The Work of Philip**

Philip, one of those chosen to distribute food to the needy widows (Acts 6.1-6), went to the city of Samaria ‘and proclaimed the Messiah to them’ and ‘the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ’ (Acts 8.4-12). The words ‘about the kingdom of God’ reflect the Jewish view that when the Messiah came God’s reign would be established on earth. After hearing the words of Philip, some people ‘were baptized, both men and women’ (Acts 8.12-13).

Because baptism by Philip did not bring the Holy Spirit to the converts in Samaria, the apostles at Jerusalem sent Peter and John to confer the Spirit upon them. Here we learn about an important development of the early church. In 1 Thess. 1.5-6 and 4.8 Paul writes that when converts became believers they received the gift of the Spirit from God, but there Paul does not connect the gift of the Spirit with baptism. In Acts 2.38 we read that Peter says to his Jewish brothers in Jerusalem: ‘Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’. Here the Holy Spirit is given, presumably by God, after baptism and forgiveness of sins. No further action by Peter or other apostles was necessary. Keep this in mind as we proceed with our study.

**Baptism and the Authority of the Apostles**

Now read the story of Peter and John and their action with the converts in Samaria (Acts 8.14-18). They prayed that the converts might receive the Holy Spirit, ‘for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit.’

There is a similar passage in Acts 19.1-7. Paul found some disciples at Ephesus who had been baptized only with John’s baptism and who had ‘not
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even heard that there is a Holy Spirit’ (see also Acts 1.5; 11.16; 18.24-25). After Paul heard the disciples’ words that ‘they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus’, he laid his hands on them, and ‘the Holy Spirit came upon them’ (Acts 19.5-6).

From the passages about Philip, Peter, John, and Paul we learn several important things concerning members of the Christ movement and the ecclesiastical authority in the developing church. First, some of the earliest Jewish followers of Jesus were originally disciples of John the Baptist and had been baptized in water in the way John baptized his followers. But those baptized persons did not receive the Holy Spirit.

Second, the work of Philip and Peter and John in Samaria concerns the power of the apostles Peter and John from Jerusalem. A basic teaching of Acts is the power or authority of the apostles in the church there. Philip did not have the power to confer the Spirit through his baptism of converts. Instead, ‘the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles’ hands’ (Acts 8.17-18). This is the ‘power’ (exousia) that Simon the magician wanted to buy from Peter and John (Acts 8.9-24). And this power, along with a synonymous word (dynamis), is symbolized through the doing of other various kinds of miracles by the apostles.

Baptism, the Holy Spirit, and the Laying on of Hands

With respect to the Holy Spirit and the power of the apostles from Jerusalem, we can learn some steps in the development of the concept of baptism and the Holy Spirit.

(1) Paul believed that God gave the Holy Spirit to converts who turned from idolatry to faithfulness toward God. They ‘receive the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Thess. 1.6; 4.8, Greek text; see also Acts 5.32; 10.44-46; 15.8; Rom. 5.5). In 1 Thessalonians Paul says nothing about baptism in connection with the giving of the Spirit.

(2) Converts are baptized without any reference to Jesus or the Holy Spirit (Acts 8.35-39; 16.14-15, 33-34; 18.8). Passages of this kind are the most frequent in Acts and probably show influence from the practice of John the Baptist. Sometimes we must wonder, though, how the person doing the baptizing always seemed to have the water available for baptism, presumably by immersion. The Greek word baptizo means ‘to dip’ or ‘immerse’. With that question in mind, check out the passages just listed.

(3) Persons are baptized in the name of Jesus without any reference to the Holy Spirit (Acts 8.1-16; see also Acts 8.12; 1 Cor. 1.13-15).

(4) Baptism in the name of Jesus brings the Holy Spirit upon believers (Acts 2.38-41).
(5) Baptism in the name of Jesus is followed by the apostles laying their hands on the persons baptized in order for them to receive the Spirit (Acts 8.14-18; 19.1-7).

We have learned that according to Acts 19.4-6, Paul baptized some disciples of John the Baptist at Ephesus in the name of the Lord Jesus and that when Paul had laid his hands on them, ‘the Holy Spirit came upon them’. Here, by the laying on of hands, Luke attributes to Paul the same apostolic authority as that of Peter and John of Jerusalem (Acts 8.14-18). However, Paul believed that his authority did not come from ‘a human source’, nor was he ‘taught it’, but he ‘received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ’ (Gal. 1.11-12). Eventually he came to believe that God set him apart before he was born and revealed his Son in him that he might proclaim him among the Gentiles (Gal. 1.15-16). Recall that Paul acknowledged he had persecuted ‘the church of God’ (Gal. 1.13).

Authority in the early church seems to have developed in the following stages: (1) Paul’s ‘the church of God’ (1 Thess. 2.14; 1 Cor. 1.2; 10.32; 11.16, 22; 15.9; 2 Cor. 1.1; Gal. 1.13) became (2) the church of the apostles (Gal. 1.17–2.14), who glorified God because of Paul (Gal. 1.24). (3) For Luke the apostles of the church, with their authority (Acts 1–5; 8.14; 15.4-29), rather than the church of the apostles, became more important. By saying that Paul laid his hands on baptized persons for them to receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 19.4-6), Luke places Paul, along with Peter and John, (Acts 8.14-18), in the third stage. Thus, from accounts in Acts concerning baptism we learn something about the development of apostolic authority in the early church.

Paul’s Views on Baptism

Paul learned the rite of baptism from the early church before him, but he gave it a completely new significance. In 1 Thessalonians, his earliest letter, he does not mention baptism. In 1 Cor. 1.13-17 Paul alludes to baptism in the name of Jesus, but there he attaches no importance to it. In fact, he says he baptized only a few persons, so that no persons can say they were baptized in his name. And he adds: ‘For Christ did not send me to baptize but to proclaim the gospel’ (1 Cor. 1.17). In 1 Cor. 6.11 Paul links the Spirit with baptism, but he never mentions the laying on of hands anywhere.

By the time Luke wrote Acts, the giving of the Spirit was sometimes associated with baptism; and the latest feature added to the rite of baptism was the laying on of hands. The laying on of hands became a prominent
rite in the later church in its own right apart from baptism (1 Tim. 4.14; 5.22; Greek text; 2 Tim. 1.6; Heb. 6.2).

Jewish converts were familiar with the ceremony of the laying on of hands as practiced in different contexts and with different meanings: on an animal about to be sacrificed (Exod. 29.10; Lev. 1.4; 4.4, 24, 29; 8.14; 16.21; Num. 8.10-12), on a sinner about to be stoned (Lev. 24.14), to bestow a blessing on someone (Gen. 48.14; see Mk 10.13-16; Mt. 19.15; Acts 9.12-17; 28.8).

According to Acts 6.1-6, the laying on of hands was a commissioning ceremony performed by authoritative apostles before ‘the whole community of the disciples’ upon the seven men appointed to minister to the neglected widows. They were already ‘full of the Spirit and of wisdom’ before they were chosen. The same kind of ceremony was later performed on Barnabas and Saul after the Holy Spirit had said they should be set apart for its work (Acts 13.1-3). Baptism is not mentioned in either of the occasions. Paul nowhere mentions the laying on of hands. Later we shall learn about his views on baptism and the Holy Spirit.

When Paul links the Spirit with baptism, the effectiveness of the Spirit in the lives of the persons baptized, not the rite itself, is the significant thing. Some converts at Corinth were baptized (Greek, ‘washed’) and made righteous ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’. They are, therefore, no longer living as the unrighteous (1 Cor. 6.9-11). They have died to sin and rise to newness of life (Rom. 6.1-4; see Chapter 8 below).

Paul writes to the Galatians: ‘As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3.27-28; see also 1 Cor. 12.13). The word translated as ‘clothed yourselves’ (endyomai) is an important one and should not be overlooked, because for Paul it has moral implications. We shall learn about the meaning of that word in the discussion of Galatians in Chapter 7. According to Paul, racial, social, and gender bias all disappear within the community of baptized persons.

For Paul baptism means the transformation of converts from immoral life into moral human beings who live under the influence of the Spirit. The significant thing is that the Spirit, not baptism, is the source of moral life. This is true throughout all of Paul’s letters. In Acts, Luke stresses the power of the Spirit as the motivating force of the apostles in forwarding the Christ movement. In Acts the Spirit is rarely, if ever, given as the source and guiding force for the moral life of those baptized.
Luke interrupts the account of the early mission activity of the Christ movement among Jews to report Paul’s vision on the road to the city of Damascus, where he intended to persecute believers (Acts 9.1-19). We have learned how Luke narrates Paul’s experience first and later has Paul recount it twice, with variations in the three accounts. Moreover, Luke has a special interest in angels and visions both in the gospel and in Acts. We’ll consider only places where the word ‘vision’ actually occurs.

In Luke an angel spoke to Zechariah, and the people ‘realized that he had seen a vision’ (Lk. 1.8-22). When the women at the tomb did not find Jesus’ body, they reported ‘that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive’ (Lk. 24.22-23).

In Acts the following persons were said to see visions. ‘The Lord said to Ananias in a vision’, and Saul ‘has seen in a vision a man named Ananias’ (Acts 9.10-12). Cornelius ‘had a vision in which he clearly saw an angel of God coming in and saying to him’ (Acts 10.3-8). Peter ‘saw the heaven opened... Then he heard a voice saying... Peter was greatly puzzled about what to make of the vision’ (Acts 11.5-17). Peter has another vision (Acts 12.6-11). Paul had a vision of ‘a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us”’. When he had seen the vision’ (Acts 16.9-10). ‘One night the Lord said to Paul in a vision’ (Acts 18.9). Paul tells Agrippa, ‘I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision’ (Acts 26.19).

Now read Luke’s stories of the births of John the Baptist and Jesus in Luke 1–2, and notice how often an angel is used to motivate the characters and induce belief. All of this, along with the differences in the accounts of Paul’s vision on the Damascus road, makes it impossible for those who want to learn the truth about the stories to distinguish between historical fact and religious faith in Luke’s narratives.

Can there be any doubt that Luke uses the images of angels and visions in Acts to give credibility to those main characters Peter and Paul, just as he uses the same images in his gospel to lend credibility to the main characters John and Jesus? We shall consider Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus further in the next Chapter.


More Work of Peter


As a dynamic Jewish believer, Peter at first was against a mission to Gentiles. But in a vision, already referred to, he became convinced otherwise and said: ‘I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right [literally, ‘works righteousness’] is acceptable to him’ (Acts 10.34-35).

That God shows no partiality among ‘everyone who fears him and does what is right’ is a Pauline idea, as in Rom. 2.6-11, for example (see also Eph. 6.9; Col. 3.25). There Paul’s expression is ‘working good’ (Greek, ergazo plus agathos), which has the same meaning as Luke’s phrase ‘works righteousness’ (ergazomenos dikaiosynen). In truth, God is partial, but his partiality is not determined on the basis of nations or races but on morality: anyone in every nation who does what is right is acceptable (dektos) to him.

For Paul such righteousness excludes distinctions between slave and free and male and female in the community where ‘all are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3.28). We shall learn more about Paul’s concept of righteousness in our discussion of his letters to the Galatians and Romans.

Through the story of Cornelius and Peter and the rest of the narratives in Acts 10.34–12.23, we become increasingly aware of the controversy concerning requirements for Gentiles who wanted to become converts, a controversy reflected especially in Paul’s letter to the Galatians. We also sense Luke’s effort to play down the controversy and to reconcile the Jewish and Gentile branches of the church. In closing the section, Luke says only, ‘The word of God continued to advance and gain adherents’ (Acts 12.24).

The Work of Paul and his Companions

With the establishment of the Gentile branch of the church in Antioch, Luke focuses on the protagonist in the second half of Acts – Paul, the chief apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 12.25–28.31). During their first missionary journey, Paul and his companions preached and made converts on the island of Cyprus and in the cities of Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Attalia in south central Asia Minor and in Antioch in
The Apostle Paul and His Letters

Syria (Acts 13.1–14.28; please trace these cities on the map). However, some men from Judea (probably Jerusalem) went to Antioch and insisted that Gentile converts had to be circumcised, according to the law of Moses (Acts 15.1). Paul and Barnabas debated the issue with the persons from Judea but failed to persuade them. So representatives from both sides met in a conference at Jerusalem to consider the question, about which we have already learned the outcome (the prohibitions stated in Acts 15.19-28, 28–29).

After the conference in Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas pay a return visit to the churches in the cities of south central Asia Minor that they had previously established, including Derbe, Lystra, and then through Galatia and Phrygia and on to Macedonia (Acts 15.36–16.10). However, because of a disagreement concerning Mark, who had left them earlier, Paul and Barnabas separated. Barnabas teamed up with Mark, and Paul took Silas with him. The churches were strengthened in the faith and added numbers daily (Acts 16.5).


Paul’s Arrest, Trials, and Voyage to Rome

At Jerusalem Paul and his companions were welcomed warmly by ‘the brothers’. Later James and the elders listened to Paul tell about ‘the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry...’. And they ‘praised God’ (Acts 21.18-20). In Galatians Paul also says that some Jews in Jerusalem ‘glorified God’ because of him (Gal. 1.22-24). However, some Jews told him that other Jews heard he was teaching Gentiles to forsake the law, but he became reconciled to them. After seven days some Jews from Asia incited the crowd by accusing Paul of disobeying the Jewish law. As a result, he was arrested (Acts 21.27-36). He defended himself before the Roman tribune (Acts 21.37–22.21); about to be scourged, Paul reminded the tribune that he was a Roman citizen (Acts 22.22-29).

The tribune turned Paul over to the Sanhedrin, the Jewish high court (Acts 22.30–23.10). After Paul spoke to the Sanhedrin, the Jews plotted to
kill him, but some Roman soldiers secretly took him to Caesarea (Acts 23.12-35). At Caesarea Paul was tried before Felix (52–60 CE), the Roman procurator, also before his successor Festus (60–62 CE), and then Agrippa, before whom Paul made a long defense (Acts 24.1–26.23). It was decided that if Paul as a Roman citizen had not appealed to the emperor, he could have been set free (Acts 26.24-32). According to Acts 23.11, the Lord had told Paul to be courageous, because as he had testified about him at Jerusalem, so he should also bear witness at Rome. It was only natural for Luke to write later that ‘it was decided that we were to sail for Italy’ (Acts 27.1).

Acts 27.1–28.14 is the narrative of Paul’s voyage to Rome. At Puteoli, one of Italy’s main seaports, Paul was received by some ‘brothers’. The designation ‘brothers’ indicates that Paul found some Jews in Rome who believed that Jesus was the Messiah. The words that follow, however, show that other Jews did not believe and that Paul was unsuccessful in trying to convert them. Later Paul summoned local Jewish leaders among the community of Jews in Rome, before whom he testified about the kingdom of God and tried ‘to convince them about Jesus both from the law of Moses and from the prophets’ (Acts 28.23). Paul’s reference to the law and the prophets indicates that he was trying to persuade the Jewish disbelievers that Jesus was the Messiah. This interpretation is confirmed by Luke’s words in Acts 28.31 that Paul was ‘proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ’.

Those Jews, however, went away because, according to Luke, it had been prophesied (Isa. 6.9-10; see Lk. 8.10) that they would not understand (Acts 28.25-27). Therefore, the message of salvation was given to the Gentiles (Acts 28.28).

Recall that a theme of Acts is that because the Jews rejected Jesus the Christ movement turned to the Gentiles. In Acts 9.15 Luke says that the risen Jesus had told Paul to carry his name before the Gentiles. According to Acts 18.5-6, after the Jews opposed Paul because he was testifying to them that ‘the Messiah was Jesus’, Paul says: ‘From now on I will go to the Gentiles’ (see also Gal. 1.16; 2.7-10). It was only fitting, then, that Luke closed his story in Acts with a summary which reports Paul preaching to Gentiles in Rome ‘with all boldness and without hindrance’ (Acts 28.30–31).

Luke’s account of Paul’s arrest and trials is surely not historical in every detail. It may be, though, that Paul’s appeal to the Roman emperor provides the ‘historical’ reason for Paul’s being sent to Rome. However, the evangelistic reason for Paul’s visit to Rome had earlier been stated by Luke in words from the risen Jesus to Paul while a captive in Jerusalem: ‘Keep up
your courage! For just as you have testified for me in Jerusalem, so you must bear witness also in Rome’ (Acts 23.11).

Summary

Apparently Luke wanted to be regarded as a historian, and his prefaces, among other features, reflect the style of contemporary historical writing. Although Acts may not be history in the sense of a record of what actually happened, our knowledge of the Christ movement and the earliest history of ‘the church’, which eventually became known as Christianity, would be much poorer if Acts had not survived. And the speeches and the miracle stories, along with the religious ideas associated with them, indicate that without the book of Acts the New Testament would be lacking a major literary and religious work.

Certainly, the story behind the writing of Acts is motivated historically and theologically. Acts presents the first history of the Christ movement, a religion in transition that eventually became known as Christianity, as it spread from Jerusalem to Rome. Theologically, Luke believed this happened because the Jews had rejected Jesus and thus made it possible for the Gentiles to hear the message of salvation. And the theme of Acts, stated in Acts 1.8, that the apostles should be witnesses ‘to the ends of the earth’ comes to fulfillment with Paul’s ‘proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ’ in Rome to all who came to him. With an awareness of both historical events and religious values, Luke has written his story about Paul in Acts to its climax.
We have learned that according to Paul’s letters and the book of Acts, Paul believed that God had called him for a mission to the Gentiles. Acts stresses that God and the Holy Spirit were the main motivating forces behind Paul’s work (e.g. Acts 13.2-9; 14.24-28; 15.12). From Paul’s letters we shall learn the same thing.

Members of the Christ movement shared the beliefs and practices of Judaism but also developed certain beliefs about Jesus. As a member of that movement Paul probably received teaching that Jesus of Nazareth was God’s long-expected Messiah, that God raised him from the dead, that he would come again (1 Thess. 1.3, 10; 4.14; 5.23), and that through Christ God made it possible for converts to obtain salvation (1 Thess. 5.9-10).

But what were Paul’s own primary (‘first in order of time or development’) mission messages that he proclaimed to all who were willing to listen, both Jews and Gentiles? The emphasis here is on primary. Since Paul usually began his preaching in a synagogue (e.g. Acts 9.20; 13.5, 15; 14.1; 17.10-11), we begin with his message to the Jews.

For Jews

Jesus Is The Messiah (Christ)
In the time of Jesus and Paul the Jews had a renewed hope for the coming of the Messiah. This is the reason his first followers added the title ‘Christ’ to his name. The Hebrew word *messiach* comes from the verb meaning ‘anoint’, so the word *messiach* means ‘anointed one’. The Greek equivalent of the word is *christos* or ‘Christ’. The idea goes back to the ancient Hebrew concept of kingship, whereby during a coronation ceremony a priest or prophet, as the Lord’s representative, took a container of oil and smeared it on the head of the man chosen as king. Hebrew kings, therefore, were known as ‘the Lord’s anointed’ (1 Sam. 2.10; 12.3; 16.6; 2 Sam. 1.14-16; 19.21).
Hence, the idea developed that a future messiah would come from the lineage of David, the most prestigious Hebrew king, who would lead his people from the present evil age into a new and glorious age of righteousness and peace. Some Jews, including Paul (Gal. 2.16; Rom. 1.3) and Peter (Acts 2.31; 3.18-20; 5.42; Mk 8.29 = Mt. 16.16 = Lk. 9.20), came to believe that Jesus of Nazareth was that long-expected Messiah.

In Gal. 1.22 Paul says that he was ‘still unknown by sight to the churches of Judea that are in Christ’. The Greek word translated as ‘church’ did not have the institutionalized meaning associated with it then as in later decades. ‘Church’ (ekklesia) really means ‘meeting’, ‘assembly’, or ‘community’. So, in its context, Paul’s expression ‘churches in Christ’ indicates that the churches were groups or assemblies of Jews in Judea, little groups to be sure, that accepted Jesus as the Messiah (Christ), in contrast to other Jews that did not. Paul uses a similar expression in 1 Thess. 2.14: ‘the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea’. As we have learned, Paul concludes the part of his discussion in Galatians about the Jews and himself by saying, ‘They glorified God because of me’ (Gal. 1.24). Notice especially Paul’s emphasis on God in the contexts of the passages from 1 Thessalonians and Galatians. We shall learn more about Paul’s emphasis on God later.

The author of Acts says that after Paul’s special religious experience he ‘confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah’ (Acts 9.22). Later in the synagogue at Thessalonica Paul argued with the Jews ‘from the scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead’. And then he adds: ‘This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you’ (Acts 17.2-3).

Such preaching caused Paul a real problem, because the Jews were not expecting a Messiah who would suffer and die on a cross. Paul came up with an answer to the problem by developing theological ideas that devout Jews could understand, because of their faith in God. God put forward Christ ‘as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith’ (Rom. 3.23-25; see also 2 Cor. 1.5-7; Rom. 5.6; Phil. 1.29; 3.7-11). A more primitive statement about the death of Christ is in 1 Thess. 5.9-10: ‘God has destined us not for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we may live with him’. Paul had not yet developed his idea about atonement through blood (discussed later) before he wrote his first letter.

To all who were suffering persecution in any way Paul gives the assurance of being glorified with Christ provided they suffer with him (Rom. 8.16-17). If you read these passages in their contexts, you will learn that God is behind all of Paul’s thinking, even in what he says about Christ.
Paul’s Primary Messages and their Development

We shall learn more about Paul’s ideas when we study each of his letters.

For Gentiles

God Alone Is God

The polytheism of the pagan world in which Paul traveled was the greatest threat to the Christ movement. Throughout that world there were numerous beliefs in ‘so-called gods’ and ‘many gods and many lords’ (1 Cor. 8.5). Gentiles were accustomed to bestowing the titles ‘son of god’ and ‘lord’, even ‘god’, upon their heroes, as the following examples from inscriptions show.

Emperor Augustus was referred to as ‘Caesar, son of a god, the god Augustus’, and ‘the most divine Caesar’. Nero was called ‘son of the greatest of the gods, Tiberius Claudius’. Sacrifices were made ‘on behalf of the god and lord emperor’, that is, Augustus. Herod the Great was called ‘King Herod Lord’.

Persons accustomed to believing such things about their popular men would always be receptive to learning about some new son of god or lord. According to Acts 14.8-18, the people at Lystra said of Paul and Barnabas, ‘The gods have come down to us in human form!’ When the people were about to sacrifice to Barnabas as Zeus and Paul as Hermes, their response was: ‘You should turn from these worthless things [idols and pagan gods] to the living God’ (Acts 14.15).

Most of the Jews to whom Paul was proclaiming messages about Jesus as the Messiah were committed already to faithfulness to their God alone. Faithfulness toward the only God, along with the morality it required, was Paul’s first primary message for Gentiles. His reported statement in Acts 14.15 is reflected in 1 Thess. 1.6-10, the key for understanding his thought and mission activity among Gentiles in its earliest stage. He says that the converts in Thessalonica, who received the word ‘with joy of the Holy Spirit’ [Greek text], became exemplary ‘to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia’, and ‘in every place your faith in God has become known’. Paul had learned how the Thessalonian converts ‘turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God’.

No matter what Paul later believed about Jesus, besides his being the Messiah, God remained uppermost in his mind. The sacred law (Torah) of the Jews contained the declaration of monotheism recited in every Jewish synagogue: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone’ (Deut. 6.4). Although Paul came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and Lord, for him Jesus was not God. Paul wanted his converts to know and
believe that there is ‘no God but one’ and that the God of the Jews alone was God: ‘For us there is one God, the Father...and one Lord, Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 8.4-6). We shall learn more about Paul’s concept of Jesus as Lord in Chapter 9.

**Faithfulness toward God and the Holy Spirit**

In 1 Thess. 1.5 Paul writes that ‘our message of the gospel’ came to the converts there ‘not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit’. The converts also received ‘the words with joy of the Holy Spirit’ (1 Thess. 1.6; my trans.). In 1 Thess. 4.8 Paul writes that God ‘gives his Holy Spirit to you’. And, as we have learned, here the Holy Spirit is given by God without any reference to the baptism of converts.

In Acts there are passages that indicate converts received the Holy Spirit at the time of their baptism (Acts 2.38; 5.32; 9.1-6). Other passages indicate that the Spirit came upon converts when they first turned to God, without any reference to baptism (Acts 5.32). According to Acts 10.44-48, ‘While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard the words. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.’ Then Peter says that those people ‘have received the Holy Spirit just as we have’, and he ordered them to be baptized (see also Acts 11.1-18). Later, at the conference in Jerusalem, Luke has Peter say essentially the same thing about the Gentiles who turned to God: ‘God...testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us’ (Acts 15.7-8).

At the same conference the Jewish believers listened to Paul and Barnabas tell about the deeds God had done through them among the Gentiles. Then James states his opinion: ‘Simeon [Peter] has related how God first looked favorably on the Gentiles...I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God’ (Acts 15.14-19). James, however, does suggest the prohibitions for Gentile converts already mentioned. The passages from Acts support the view in 1 Thess. 1.6-10 that Paul’s primary mission among Gentiles was to convert them from idolatry to faithfulness toward God.

**For Jews and Gentiles**

*Jesus Is Son of God and Lord*

Among Gentiles the distinctively Jewish concept of a Messiah meant nothing. Why? Because pagans thought oil was to be used for rubbing the sore muscles of athletic heroes, not for smearing on their heads. Consequently, Paul and other leaders of the Christ movement developed beliefs about
Jesus as Son of God and Lord, titles with which Gentiles were familiar, in order to help win converts among them. Recall what we learned earlier about this.

Recall also that Paul believed God set him apart to proclaim his Son among the Gentiles (Gal. 1.16). According to Acts, soon after his vision of the risen Jesus, Paul was proclaiming Jesus as the Son of God in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9.20). That proclamation was meant for all persons attending the synagogues, including any Gentiles who were there, as some frequently were.

It was natural for Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah to believe that he was also the Son of God and Lord. This was true because Jews had come to think of a special king or messianic figure to come also as the son of God. The most notable example in the Old Testament is the offspring of David, of whom God says: ‘I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me’ (2 Sam. 7.14). A psalmist speaks of an unnamed future king, who was expected to come from the lineage of David, as being in a filial relationship with God (Ps. 89.3-4, 19-29). The author of Ps. 2.7 (quoted with reference to Jesus in Acts 13.33; Heb. 1.5; 5.5) says of some unknown anointed king: ‘You are my son; today I have begotten you’. In this father/son relationship the son of God was thought to be dependent upon and obedient to God. Obedience is an attribute Paul came to attribute to Jesus (Rom. 5.19; Phil. 2.8) and subsequently also to require of believers. Paul believed that God worked through him ‘to win obedience from the Gentiles, by word and deed’ (Rom. 15.18; see also 2 Cor. 2.9; 7.15-16; 10.5-6; Rom. 16.19, 26).

Although ‘Son of God’ is not actually used in the Old Testament as a title for the messiah, there are passages in the Jewish apocalypse known as 2 Esdras, written about the end of the first century CE, where God calls the deliverer to come ‘my son the messiah’ (2 Esd. 7.28-29). The writer of 2 Esdras also writes that the Most High (that is, God) says that at the final judgment ‘my Son will be revealed’ (2 Esd. 13.32; see also 2 Esd. 13.37, 52; 14.9). Compare 1 Thess. 1.10: ‘to wait for his Son from heaven’ (see also 1 Cor. 15.28). Thus, the idea of a special messianic figure to come was thought of as the Son of God. It would be natural, therefore, for a Jew like Paul to think of Jesus as both the Messiah and Son of God and that God had revealed to him that insight (Gal. 1.15-16).

In the Psalms of Solomon, a Jewish work from the mid-first century BCE, the word messiah is used for the first time with reference to the messianic ruler to come: ‘And he will be a righteous king, taught of God, over them... their king will be the Lord Messiah’ (Pss. Sol. 17.32; see also 18.7). These
quotations help us to understand the background of Peter’s statement in Acts 2.36 that God made Jesus ‘both Lord and Messiah’.

In apostolic preaching the two titles were often combined – ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ (Acts 11.17; see also Acts 15.26; 20.21). In every letter Paul uses the combination Lord and Messiah as in the *Psalms of Solomon* in various ways: ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess. 1.1; 1 Cor. 1.3), ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess. 1.3; 1 Cor. 1.7), and ‘Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1 Cor. 1.8).

As we have learned, pagans were used to thinking of their heroes as sons of god, lords, and even gods. Little wonder, then, that in his letters Paul stresses that the God of the Jews is the only God and that Jesus is the Son of God and Lord (discussion later).

*Development of Paul’s Beliefs about Jesus*

It seems plausible to think that Paul’s beliefs about Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, and Lord did not all happen through a sudden flash of light or a divine revelation. The changes in Paul’s attitude, thought, and actions hardly came about through a sudden conversion. He had seen followers of Jesus who were suffering because of persecution from some Jews like himself. Indeed, according to Acts, Paul had witnessed the stoning of Stephen and even approved of his death (Acts 7.58-8.1). Whether and how much of the account in Acts is historical is uncertain. However, we can be sure that Paul saw persecutions of the same kind and that they got to his sensitive being.

*Paul’s Special Religious Experience*

According to Acts, while on the way to accomplish his persecuting mission, Paul had a special visionary and auditory religious experience. We have already learned that Paul says he had ‘a revelation of Jesus Christ’, that God revealed his Son in him, and that he ‘was violently persecuting the church of God and was trying to destroy it’ (Gal. 1.12, 15-16). Although never narrated by Paul in his letters, it seems plausible to assume that some kind of impressionable experience changed him from being a persecutor of to being instead a follower of Jesus.

Although Paul’s special religious experience is usually referred to as a conversion, that term is not wholly appropriate. It is very difficult to determine the nature of the phenomenon reported in Acts and even more difficult to explain it and to determine how much it influenced Paul’s thought and work. No matter how that may be, we must try to understand it from his perspective, not ours. Therefore, we must turn to Paul’s letters to try to
find clues to how he was influenced by what he believed was a special religious experience that had a lasting effect on his life and work.

We have already learned that Luke has a special interest in the phenomena of angels and visions. There are two more supernatural phenomena in Luke’s account of Paul’s experience on the way to Damascus: the light and a divine voice. First of all, let’s learn what Paul does not say. He never mentions either of these phenomena in the same way as reported in Acts. In Acts the light is mentioned in the account of Paul’s vision (9.3; 22.6, 9, 11; 26.13) and with Peter’s vision while he was in prison (12.7).

Paul mentions divine light only once, but it is quite different from its use by Luke in Acts. Paul says, ‘God…who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God’ (2 Cor. 4.6). The image of a divine voice is used in Acts 7.31; 9.4, 7; 10.13, 15; 11.7, 9; 12.22; 22.7, 9, 14; 26.14. Paul uses ‘voice’ only in Rom. 10.18 and 15.6; both times it is that of human beings.

We have already learned that in both Acts and in Paul’s letters, Paul speaks of his life in Judaism. He stresses that fact in Galatians: ‘my earlier life in Judaism…I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people…for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors’ (Gal. 1.13-14).

On this evidence, it is hard to believe that Paul would have thought he was completely converted in any sense of the term. He neither completely changed from no religion to religion nor from one religion to another. He did not forsake Judaism, because he never gave up his basic monotheistic belief about God nor the moral convictions stemming from the Jewish law (discussion later). His beliefs about Jesus were simply added to his Judaism.

Although Paul’s letters indicate that he never completely forsook his Judaism, they sometimes reveal an inner struggle concerning his old ways of Jewish life under the law and his life in Christ under the Spirit. It is probably better, therefore, to think about the phenomenon that is reported in Acts – if, indeed, it occurred as reported – as a special religious experience rather than as a conversion.

Paul’s special religious experience may actually have been more subjective than objective, in contrast to the accounts in Acts, which emphasize objective details. Paul writes, though, ‘Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?’ (1 Cor. 9.1) and ‘Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me’ (1 Cor. 15.8). In these passages the same verb horao is translated first as ‘seen’ and then as ‘appeared’, accurate translations. However, horao was widened to mean ‘to see’ in the sense of to ‘experience’ or ‘perceive’, as, for example, in Gal. 2.7, 14; Lk. 3.6; Jn 3.36; Acts 2.27; Heb. 11.5.

Since in 1 Cor. 9.1 Paul does not refer to appearances of Jesus as in 1 Cor. 15.3-8, horao in 1 Cor. 9.1 could be taken in the widened sense:
'Have I not experienced Jesus our Lord?' Moreover, there are passages in Paul that support a subjective religious experience. In Gal. 1.15-16 Paul says that God ‘was pleased to reveal his Son in me’, not ‘to me’ as in the RSV and NRSV; ('in and through me', REB). And Paul writes, ‘shone in our hearts’ (2 Cor. 4.6) and ‘Christ who lives in me’ (Gal. 2.20). We should note here the difficult passage in 2 Cor. 12.2-10, one that has aroused a lot of debate among scholars, especially over who Paul’s ‘a person’ refers to. Here are some lines for you to think about:

I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows. And I know that such a person – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows – was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.

Whether Paul or someone else is the ‘person’ is a question for which no one knows the answer. At any rate, it seem to me that the experience Paul records is more subjective than objective, and that is why I mention it here. In addition to that passage, Paul writes about special religious experiences in other places (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 1.30–2.5; 2 Cor. 13.5-10; Gal. 3.28; Rom. 8.1-11; Phil. 2.1-13). If you read the passages listed, you will learn that there is a deep, personal and spiritual religious quality about which Paul writes. He wants the converts to acquire that quality as they see it exemplified in his own unique mission personage (see below).

Perhaps the most crucial passage not only for understanding Paul’s view about righteousness and the law, but also for understanding his new religious experience is Gal. 2.19-21. Here are parts of that passage relevant to our discussion:

For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life [literally, ‘what’] I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In the first line the ‘I’ and the ‘I’ in the third line is the Greek pronoun ego. Not used in the rest of the paragraph, its presence emphasizes the personal aspect of what Paul is saying more than if left unexpressed with the verb alone. In the fifth line the words translated as ‘I live by faith in the Son of God’ are in Greek en pistei zo te tou hyiou tou theou. The Greek adjective te emphasizes the en pistei (‘in faith’) preceding it. And the genitive after the te, as many scholars now believe, indicates that the faithfulness is that of the Son of God (as in the footnote in the NRSV), not that of Paul or believers.
This said, I believe that in order to better understand what Paul means, the phrase should be translated thus: ‘I live in (by) faithfulness, the faithfulness of the Son of God’. Here, as in similar phrases, the faithfulness is that of Jesus, not that of Paul.

Paul believes he shares in the faithfulness of Jesus. That sharing is part of his mystifying, if not mystical, experience of the risen Christ – ‘Christ lives in me’ – as with the phrases ‘in Christ’ (often in the letters to Corinth, eg., 1 Cor. 1.3; 3.1; 4.15, 17; 15.8; 2 Cor. 2. 14, 17; 7.17; 12.2, 9; see also Gal. 2.4; 3.28; 5.6; Rom. 8.1-2) and ‘Christ in’ (2 Cor. 11.10; Gal. 2.20; Rom. 8.10).

Whatever the details might have been, Paul’s special religious experience was an inner transformation of his being that transcends living under the law and brings new life for God. But Paul does not tell how these experiences actually happened to or for converts. Paul could imagine Christ as a spiritual being and life in Christ as spiritual. Without personal knowledge of the earthly Jesus, Paul could enthusiastically help to spread the Christ movement from its Jewish origins in Jerusalem to the lands of the Gentiles. There are times when we simply cannot fully comprehend the religious experiences of Paul and of the early church.

Introspection, Retrospection, and Progression

Paul says that after his revelation from God he did not confer with anyone, nor did he go to Jerusalem to see the apostles. Rather, he went away into Arabia, returned to Damascus, and then after three years he went up to Jerusalem. Fourteen years later he went up to Jerusalem again, where he told the authorities about the gospel he was proclaiming among the Gentiles (Gal. 1.11–2.2). During these so-called hidden years of his life Paul had plenty of time to think about his new career as a mission preacher and about what his messages would be.

As with other ideas of Paul, the idea that God was responsible for his mission activity as a member of the Christ movement developed more fully as he progressed with his work and writing. In that time his memory tended to become selective. The more he became engrossed in the present, the more his memories of the past receded. Yet, while memories of details from the past recede, present convictions, especially when challenged by different opinions, become stronger. For Paul the time, nature, and details of his special religious experience were no longer important. Only the experience itself, with its great effect on his life, and its results became significant. The conviction that even before he was born God was responsible for the event and the mission resulting from it was the result of retrospection (Gal. 1.15-16).
In 1 Thess. 1.1-5 he says nothing about himself personally being called, but the conviction that God is responsible for the activity of him and his fellow workers is quite clear: ‘Our message of the gospel came to you not in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction’. Notice that Paul says, ‘our message’. Later in 1 Thess. 4.7 he writes that ‘God did not call us to impurity but in holiness’ (see ‘called to be saints’ in 1 Cor. 1.2). Notice that Paul says ‘us’, not ‘me’. In the same way, he and others had ‘been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel’ (1 Thess. 2.4), and Paul includes himself with others ‘as apostles of Christ’ (1 Thess. 2.7). From the beginning of his mission activity Paul believed that the call of him and his fellow workers included a moral purpose, as is clear from the contexts of the passages cited. Along with faithfulness toward God, the moral imperative became the dominant emphasis in all of his letters.

The first and simplest statement of Paul’s own call is in 1 Cor. 1.1: ‘Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God’. See also 2 Cor. 1.1: ‘an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God’. Whereas in 1 Thess. 1.5 Paul refers to the message of the missionaries as ‘our message’ (see also 2 Cor. 4.3), in Gal. 1.11 he says emphatically: ‘For I want you to know...that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ’.

When Paul boasts of ‘visions and revelations of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 12.1), he does not appeal to them as the basis for his work, even though he can boast of such experiences. Rather, Paul wants his converts at Corinth to take as evidence for his mission work only what they see in him or hear from him (2 Cor. 12.6). In this instance his authority has its origins in the power that comes from his sufferings (2 Cor. 12.7-10). When Paul appeals to his religious experience in Gal. 1.11-17, his appeal is presented not as the basis for his views, but as the reason for his preaching among Gentiles.

In Galatians, where Paul opposes his adversaries most strongly on the basis of his developing convictions, the statements about his call become more personal and extensive. Instead of ‘called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God’ (1 Cor. 1.1), Paul includes Christ with God as the source of his apostleship: ‘Paul, an apostle – sent neither by human commission nor from human authorities, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father’ (Gal. 1.1).

As Paul reflected on his experience as a member of the Christ movement, he believed that, as with the Hebrew prophet Jeremiah, God had called him even before he was born for religious work (Gal. 1.15; see Jer. 1.5).
When writing to the converts in the church at Rome, Paul’s statements about his call and its purpose are more detailed and include a summary of his theology as part of his call. Perhaps the reason for this is that he is writing to a church he did not help to establish, or even visit. In Rom. 1.1-5 he writes, again retrospectively:

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, the gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith[fulness] among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name.

It seems plausible that Paul came to the theological convictions about Jesus as the Son of God and Lord only after a long period of introspection and retrospection. At the same time, he came to the practical conclusion that if he wanted to win Gentiles it was not necessary for them to be circumcised and obey Jewish dietary laws.

Paul’s theology became more complicated as he thought further about God and Christ and Jews and Gentiles and their relationship to both God and Christ. But all the while, God remained primary in his thinking. This is true even in the most ‘Christian’ passages in his letters. In Rom. 3.29-30 Paul asks: ‘Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one.’ In Rom. 4.24–5.5 Paul says:

[Righteousness] will be reckoned to us who believe in him [God] who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification (righteousness). Therefore, since we are justified (made righteous) by faith[fulness], we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have attained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God…and hope does not disappoint us, because God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us.

Later we shall learn more about Paul’s concepts of being justified (made righteous) and justification (righteousness) and faithfulness.

Evidence seems to indicate that Paul’s primary aim was to convert Gentiles from idolatry to faithfulness toward God, who is the only God – ‘no God but one’ – and Jews to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Since ‘sons of gods’ and ‘lords’ were a ubiquitous phenomenon in Paul’s world, he also taught that Jesus was the Son of God and the only Lord – ‘one Lord, Jesus Christ’ – in order to help him accomplish his mission (1 Cor. 8.4-6).
Paul as a Mission Personage

Paul’s conviction that God had set him apart as an apostle to the Gentiles and the situations in his churches helped him develop a peculiar mission personage. That personage – ‘a person distinguished for presence and personal power’ – manifested itself in the way he thought and wrote, especially in his use of the first person, whether ‘I’ or ‘we’. This is probably the best way to explain Paul’s use of ‘we’ in certain contexts where he becomes deeply personally and emotionally involved with the persons to whom he is writing. An excellent example of this mission quality is 1 Thess. 2.9–3.5:

We worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God... We dealt with each one of you like a father with his children... We also constantly give thanks to God for this... We were made orphans by being separated from you... We longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. For we wanted to come to you... When we could bear it no longer... When I could bear it no longer.

For other examples of the same kind read 1 Cor. 1.23; 4.8-21; 9.1-12; 2 Cor. 12.11-21; Gal. 2.18-21; and Rom. 8.22-25. As a mission personage Paul, naturally, differed from other mission personages, whether friendly or adversarial.

As a mission personage Paul was always deeply involved with the communities of converts he addressed. When ministering to a community confronted with specific problems, Paul’s mission personage developed more fully only as he helped each community discover its own communal personage. So each community as a personage of its own tended to focus on the personage of the apostle ministering to it. Other missionaries had their distinctive mission personages, and when they ministered to one of Paul’s communities, some converts began to focus on them instead of Paul. Paul differed from his adversaries in that he expected his converts to focus not on him as a person, but on his message (1 Cor. 1.10-17; Gal. 2.4-10) and on his personal behavior (1 Cor. 10.31–11.1; Rom. 16.17-20; Phil. 3.17). Paul tells the Corinthian converts to be imitators of him and reminds them of his ‘ways in Christ Jesus’ as he teaches them ‘everywhere in every church’ (1 Cor. 4.16-17).

We have learned some things about the story behind the life of Paul as a person, his primary messages for Jews and Gentiles, and his peculiar mission personage. In the chapters that follow we will learn more about Paul’s messages as we study the stories behind the writing of his letters and the ideas contained in them.
Chapter 4

PAUL’S EARLY LETTERS: 1 AND 2 THESALONIANS

1 Thessalonians

We have learned the story behind Paul as a person, his primary ideas, his mission travels, and his mission personage. While on journeys he wrote letters to the churches he had visited, with the exception of Romans, of course, since he had never been to Rome. We are concerned mostly with the letters almost universally believed to be authentic, and secondarily with the disputed letters.

Now, as before, we shall focus our study primarily on what Paul says in his letters and secondarily on material from Acts. And we focus our study on Paul’s moral teachings.

Background and Purposes of the Letter

According to Acts 17.1-9, in a synagogue at Thessalonica Paul explained and tried to prove from the scriptures that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead. And then he said: ‘This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you’. Some Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with ‘many of the devout Greeks’ (Gentiles) and ‘not a few of the leading women’. Other Jews became jealous, caused an uproar in the city, and took Paul before the authorities. But after receiving bail from a man called Jason, they let Paul and Silas, his co-worker, go. This action coincides with Luke’s favorable portrayal of Roman authorities elsewhere with respect to their treatment of Paul. Acts later mentions two fellow workers of Paul from Thessalonica (Acts 20.4).

Paul had visited Thessalonica and Athens before his arrival at Corinth (Acts 18.1-34). From Athens Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen the converts in their faithfulness and moral life and to exhort them to stand firm in spite of their sufferings (1 Thess. 3.1-5). Timothy met up with Paul (Acts 18.5) with the good news of the Thessalonians’ faith and love (1 Thess. 3.6). Paul wrote to tell the converts that his anxieties were relieved.
Unfortunately, Timothy did not bring Paul only good news from Thessalonica. In his travels Paul often met opposition and even hostility. Jews at Thessalonica forced him to leave (Acts 17.1-15). At Philippi Paul and his co-workers had ‘suffered and been shamefully mistreated’. But ‘in spite of great opposition’, they ‘had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God’ (1 Thess. 2.2).

Although ‘approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel’, Paul was subjected to the same kinds of slanders often directed against unethical itinerant preachers who were out to make some easy money quickly and who sought their own glory through deceitful and flattering speech. In 1 Thess. 2.1-12 Paul defends himself against such charges. God is a witness that Paul and his co-workers seek to please God, not humans, that they do not use such tactics. On the contrary, the converts and God know that the apostles’ conduct toward the believers was ‘pure, upright, and blameless’. They even did their own work night and day, so that they might not be a financial burden on anyone.

As a mission personage, Paul is at his best here: ‘But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us’ (2.7-8; see also 2.11).

After becoming believers in God, converts were expected to give up the worship of idols and were taught more stringent moral standards than they were used to as pagans. Naturally, there was always the temptation for Gentile converts to return to their former pagan ways of life. Naturally, as well, Paul does not want them to do that. The converts had been taught how they ought ‘to live and to please God’.

Paul’s verb (peripateo) translated as ‘live’ literally means ‘walk’. As with its counterpart in the Old Testament, it always has moral implications, so it came to mean walk in the sense of ‘conduct one’s life’ or ‘live’. It might well be translated as ‘behave’, because in every letter Paul teaches converts how to live moral lives. In fact, the Thessalonians were doing just that, but they ‘should do so more and more’.

From the beginning, faithfulness toward God, certain beliefs about Jesus, and moral probity were inseparably linked together in Paul’s teaching for converts. As a result, believers were often ridiculed, rejected socially by their former associates, and even oppressed. But, after all, according to Paul, that is only part of the believers’ lot (1 Thess. 2.13-16). Paul writes to express his joy that the Thessalonians had remained faithful and obedient to what they had been taught and to express his desire to visit them again (1 Thess. 1.2-10; 2.17–3.10).
Gentiles and Polytheism
As in Paul’s other churches, there were many idolatrous Gentiles in the church at Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1.9; 2.16). Remember that polytheism was the most characteristic feature in the pagan world of Paul’s time and was the greatest threat to the survival of the Christ movement and the developing religion.

The fact that Paul remained a strict monotheist, even after he became a member of the Christ movement and came to believe in Jesus as the Son of God and Lord (read again 1 Cor. 8.4-6) is so important for understanding his thought. Were Paul to believe that Jesus was God, that belief would have been contrary to his Jewish monotheism. Paul’s God is the center of his faithfulness, beginning with 1 Thessalonians.

The most crucial text for understanding the centrality of God in Paul’s mission preaching is 1 Thess. 1.8: ‘In every place your faith in God has become known’. The Greek words beginning with ‘your faith’ are *he pistis hymon he pros ton theon* and are much more dynamic than the English translation indicates. The second *he* indicates that ‘faithfulness’ should be understood a second time for emphasis. The preposition *pros* indicates mental direction toward, and the article *ton* after it is also for emphasis – the God – and implies the ‘only’ or ‘one’ God’, not a pagan deity. Paul’s words, then, mean: ‘Your faithfulness, your faithfulness toward the one God’ (see 1 Cor. 8.4). The Thessalonian converts had ‘turned to God (Greek, *pros ton theon*) from idols, to serve a living and true God’ (1.9).

Notice that I have used the word ‘faithfulness’ instead of ‘faith’ to convey Paul’s concept of believing. I do so because I think that is how Paul as a Jew understood it. It is most frequently translated as ‘faith’ in the NRSV, although ‘faithfulness’ is used, for example, in Gal. 5.22 and Rom. 3.3.

Paul was surely influenced by the idea behind the Hebrew word *emunah*, which included an active quality, including a moral response. For Paul *pistis* included action. He says so himself in 1 Thess. 1.3 – ‘work (ergon) of faithfulness’.

In 1 Thessalonians we have plenty of evidence that shows Paul’s God is the center of his faithfulness, not only here but also in the rest of his letters. Notice that Paul calls his message ‘the gospel of God’ (2.2, 8-9). He does use ‘the gospel of Christ’ in 3.2, but there Timothy, ‘a co-worker for God’, is the one to proclaim it. In 2 Cor. 11.7 Paul says that he proclaimed ‘the gospel of God’ without financial reward – as in 1 Thess. 2.9. In Rom. 1.1 Paul writes that he was called ‘to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God’. And in Rom. 15.16 he says that by the grace of God he became ‘a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God’.
Paul does use the phrase ‘the gospel of Christ’ in 1 Thess. 3.2; 1 Cor. 9.12; 2 Cor. 9.13; 10.14; Gal. 1.7; and Phil. 1.27. However, if you read those passages in their contexts, you will learn that in most of them Paul is defending himself overtly or covertly against his critics and that God is primary in Paul’s thought. Were some of the apostles criticizing Paul for preaching too much about God?

When thinking about Paul’s message as primarily the message of ‘the gospel of God’, we should consider some statistical evidence in support of that view. This is clear in Paul’s use of the phrases ‘church of God’ and ‘churches of God’. He uses ‘church of God’ in 1 Cor. 1.2; 10.32; 11.22; 15.9; 2 Cor. 1.1; Gal. 1.13 and ‘churches of God’ in 1 Cor. 11.16. The phrase ‘church of Christ’ is mentioned nowhere in letters attributed to Paul, either in the undisputed or disputed ones, and ‘churches of Christ’ appears only in Rom. 16.16, a passage many scholars think is not from Paul himself.

This information seems to confirm the view that Paul’s primary message to Gentiles was, indeed, the gospel of God. Those who acknowledged faithfulness toward him became known as ‘the church of God’. At the same time, Jesus may well have been worshiped as Lord in some of the churches, as 1 Cor. 1.2 seems to indicate: ‘To the church of God…to those who are sanctified (made holy) in Christ, called to be saints (holy ones), together with all those who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours’. However, this is the only passage of its kind. The name of Jesus was probably invoked in services of worship (see Rom. 10.13, discussed later).

There can be little doubt that the first followers of Jesus continued to worship God either in the temple at Jerusalem or in synagogues near where they lived. Since Gentile followers of Jesus would not have been permitted to participate in Jewish worship, even in the synagogue, without having been circumcised and become accepted as Jews, such Gentiles met in houses of believers (see ‘the church in your house’ in Phlm. 1.2).

The converts at Thessalonica had suffered persecution the same as Paul and his co-workers. But in spite of that, their faithfulness toward God had become so well known that there was no need to speak about it. Yet Paul was concerned that their persecution might weaken their faith. One of his purposes for writing was to bolster their faith, so he sent Timothy to ‘strengthen and encourage’ them, so that no one’s faith ‘would be shaken by these persecutions’ (1 Thess. 3.2-3). The converts were destined for that, as Paul had told them beforehand. Yet, in spite of Timothy’s good news, Paul prayed that he might see them ‘face to face and restore whatever is lacking’ in their faith (3.6-10).
Believers and their Behavior. Paul also writes to strengthen the converts morally. He prays that God might strengthen their 'hearts in holiness' so that they 'may be blameless' at the coming of the Lord Jesus (1 Thess. 3.13). The NRSV is not as precise here as Paul's text, in which holiness is associated with blameless, not with hearts. Paul really says, 'blameless in holiness', as most commentators agree. In 4.1-12 Paul becomes specific in saying how the converts can achieve that status in life and reminds them that they were not called 'to impurity but in holiness'.

Paul's Greek cannot be conveyed the same way in English because there is only one word for 'holiness'. Paul uses two different words for holiness. The one with 'impurity' is hagiasmos. The ending mos signifies the process of becoming holy, not the resultant state, for which the word is hagiosyne, the word Paul uses in the phrase 'blameless in holiness'. In other words, according to Paul, when pagans become converts, they enter a process of becoming holy. Paul addresses them as 'holy ones', usually translated as 'saints'. They receive instruction in believing and in morality. Paul wants the process of their becoming completely holy ('blameless in holiness'), that is, the state of hagiosyne, which Paul wants converts to attain before the Lord comes. 'Blameless' means 'free from fault'.

One more thing here helps us to better understand what Paul is telling the converts. 'Impurity' is not the most apt translation for his word akatharsia, because in the Old Testament the Hebrew equivalents (tam') and tam'h) sometimes mean ritual or ceremonial impurity. But Paul means physical moral uncleanness, as is clear in the contexts of its use in 1 Thess. 2.3 and 4.7. Paul uses akatharsia with the same meaning in 2 Cor. 12.21; Gal. 5.19; Rom. 1.24; 6.19; see also Eph. 4.19; 5.3; Col. 3.15. Elsewhere in the New Testament it occurs only in Mt. 23.27, where it has the same meaning.

Paul, of course, has plenty of support in his scriptures for persons being morally blameless and pleasing God. God told Abraham, his favorite Old Testament character, to be that kind of man: 'Be pleasing before me, and be blameless' (Gen. 17.1). The Hebrew words here really mean 'follow my ways and be blameless', and the word translated as 'blameless' (tamim) may also be taken as 'perfect': 'Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God' (Gen. 6.9); Job was 'blameless and upright, one who feared God and turned away from evil' (Job 1.1; see also Job 2.3; Ps. 15.2-5; Prov. 20.7).

Paul expected no more of his converts than he did of himself. He calls God and them to witness 'how holily and righteously and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers' (1 Thess. 2.10). Paul's adverbs, which I translate accordingly, and the verb ginomai ('perform', NRSV) stress the moral
behavior of the apostles. According to Paul, with God’s help, holy and blameless conduct is possible, so he prays for God to strengthen them and to keep their spirit and soul and body blameless. God who calls converts for the purpose of becoming holy is faithful, and he will do his part if they do theirs (1 Thess. 5.23). That this is the proper understanding of what Paul is saying is clear because of his commands in 4.1-12 and 5.12-22, which reads: ‘Hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil’.

Being blameless in conduct may sound strange, even impossible, to some modern ears, including those of many of our readers. No one has to believe what Paul says, as many have not believed for too long, but that is not to say that Paul does not say it. Perhaps Christians have too long emphasized Paul’s teaching about ‘faith’ and ignored his moral demands for the faithful.

The End of the Age and Believers Who Had Died
The Thessalonians had been taught that the end of the present age was coming very soon and that then Jesus would return (1 Thess. 1.9; 3.13; 4.13-18; 5.23). But that had not happened. In the meantime, most Thessalonians had continued to love and help one another as the need arose. Some, however, apparently had taken the attitude that ‘If the End is coming soon, why work?’ Paul, therefore, had to admonish those people to get to work, help one another, and not be idlers (1 Thess. 4.9-12; 5.12-24).

Since the second coming of Jesus had not taken place, and since some believers had already died, friends and relatives of the dead were concerned about the ultimate destiny of those persons. Would they miss Jesus’ coming? Paul writes to restore their hope and to assure them that, indeed, the dead believers would be the first to rise and meet Jesus at his coming (1 Thess. 4.13-18).

The terms scholars use to describe Paul’s vivid, visionary language in 1 Thess. 4.13-18 are ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘eschatological’. ‘Apocalyptic’ is used to describe the kind of thought that is typical of a genre of Jewish literature known as apocalypse. The Apocalypse of John (Revelation) in the New Testament is a good example of such writing. Both ‘apocalyptic’ and ‘apocalypse’ are derived from the Greek word apokalypto which means ‘reveal’ or ‘uncover’. The following ideas are generally included in apocalyptic thought: the coming of a future glorious age in contrast to the existing evil age; a fierce struggle in which the forces of good will eventually overcome the forces of evil; and the belief that the new age will begin with the last judgment and the resurrection of at least the righteous dead.

Eschatological thought or eschatology is really one aspect of apocalyptic beliefs. The word ‘eschatology’ is derived from two Greek words, eschaton,
meaning ‘end’, and logos, meaning ‘word’. So eschatology is literally ‘the word about the last things’ or what is to take place at the end of the present age. This refers to everything associated with the finality of human existence and the world: death, judgment day, heaven and hell, and the resurrection of the dead. ‘Apocalyptic eschatology’ or ‘apocalypticism’ are used with reference to both a system of thought and a religious movement. In Paul’s thought, belief in the second coming of Christ was also a part of his apocalyptic eschatology.

According to Paul, all the apocalyptic eschatological events he so vividly describes in 1 Thess. 4.15-17 would happen when least expected – ‘like a thief in the night’. But how literally should we take Paul’s highly apocalyptic/eschatological language? Did Paul actually think that God himself would blow the trumpet? Or did he even think there would be a trumpet (see 1 Cor. 15.21-28)? If Paul really believed that physical bodies would rise up into the clouds to heaven (1 Thess. 4.17), he did not think in the same way later in 1 Cor. 15.50 where he writes: ‘Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God’. And also in 1 Corinthians 15, where he discusses the resurrection of the body, Paul talks about ‘spiritual’, not ‘physical’, bodies as those to be raised.

After all, though, we have learned that Paul was not a systematic thinker or theologian and that he wrote spontaneously. He might, therefore change his mind sometimes as he continued to think and rethink about his new religious experience. But what follows is the most important part of his teaching about what comes after death.

**Paul’s Challenge to Those Still Living**

The message Paul wants to convey to the converts at Thessalonica is that believers who die ‘will be with the Lord forever’. With that thought in mind they are to ‘encourage one another’ (1 Thess. 4.17-18). Even Paul’s eschatological language includes advice for persons living in a community of believers. They have nothing to worry about, because they are ‘children of light and children of the day…not of the night or of darkness’ (1 Thess. 5.5). In Jewish thought light and darkness were symbolic for good and bad behavior. The phrases ‘sons of light’ (Paul’s actual words) and ‘sons of darkness’ occur in the Qumran Scrolls, Jewish writings found in caves west of the Dead Sea in 1947.

In the Qumran Scrolls the phrases mentioned are used of the contrast between the faithful and the godless. In highly eschatological language, eschatology and morality are strongly associated. The sons of righteousness are in contrast to the sons of perversity (*The Manual of Discipline* 3.20-21). In the *War Scroll* the final war is to be fought between the sons of
light (righteous members of the Qumran Sect) and the sons of darkness (the evil, faithless nations of the world), and the sons of light will prevail. Paul also uses the images of light and darkness with moral implications in 1 Cor. 4.5; 2 Cor. 4.6; Rom. 2.17-19; 13.11-14; see also Eph. 5.8-14).

Paul shared the view of the Jews and Jesus and his followers that the end of the age was coming soon. For Paul the important thing is that believers be morally prepared for the end, so that whether they are awake or asleep they may live with Christ (1 Thess. 5.9-10). Converts are to be sober and to continue their faith and love (1 Thess. 5.1-11). Paul’s word translated as ‘be sober’ (nepho) means not only ‘abstain from an alcoholic beverage’, but it also includes the sense of being morally alert to avoid evil. The English word ‘sober’ also means ‘marked by sedate or gravely or earnestly thoughtful character or demeanor’. The context gives substance to this meaning.

When Paul says, ‘build up each other’ (1 Thess. 5.11), his word for ‘build up’ (oikodomao) again has moral overtones. Originally it meant to build a house, but then it came to be used metaphorically, as always by Paul, of developing moral character. Paul is really telling the Thessalonian believers to encourage each other in growing morally and spiritually. Above all, for Paul, it was important that believers behave properly by holding fast to what is good and abstaining from every form of evil (1 Thess. 5.12-22).

In his final prayer Paul asks that God may sanctify the believers entirely and that their whole beings may ‘be kept sound’ and blameless at the coming of Christ. The word translated as ‘sanctify’ is hagiazo, and its basic meaning is ‘make holy’. The word hagioi, meaning ‘holy ones’ (‘saints’), is derived from it. The word translated as ‘sound’ is holokleros and means ‘complete’ (footnote in NRSV) in a moral sense. God who calls believers is faithful, and he will do his part (1 Thess. 5.23-24).

A passage from a Jewish writing known as the Wisdom of Solomon enlightens our interpretation of Paul’s teaching that converts should become blameless. The author writes: ‘For even if we sin we are yours, knowing your power; but we will not sin, because we know that you acknowledge us as yours. For to know you is complete righteousness’ (Wis. 15.3). Here the word for ‘complete’ is holokleros, the same as Paul’s, yet the NRSV renders it as ‘complete’, instead of ‘sound’ as in 1 Thess. 5.23. And the word translated as ‘righteousness’ is the same one Paul uses in 1 Thess. 3.13, where he says that the converts should be ‘blameless in holiness’ (hagiosyne).

One more thing from the Wisdom passage throws light on Paul’s views. The writer says that knowing God is ‘complete [perfect] righteousness’. Paul writes to the converts in Galatia and asks how they, who did not know
God but came to know him and be known by him, can become slaves again to former evils (Gal. 4.8-11). And Paul exhorts the converts at Thessalonica not to commit certain vices ‘like the Gentiles who do not know God’ (1 Thess. 4.1-8). These statements imply that converts who have turned to God and have the Holy Spirit given by him have the obligation to strive to become complete (perfect) in holiness or righteousness.

It is curious how translators and commentators often translate Paul’s words in different ways when they convey ideas that contradict the long-established view that converts are justified by faith, not by works (more on this subject later).

**Summary**

Although not worked out in detail, the essence of Paul’s theology and ethics is clear in 1 Thessalonians. Because ‘Jesus died and rose again’, God made it possible for believers to obtain salvation (1 Thess. 4.14; 5.8-9). But salvation comes in the future for those who have received the Holy Spirit and live and please God as they had been taught (1 Thess. 4.1-8). Believers have to do their part in making the ‘hope of salvation’ become reality.

Paul stresses moral conduct much more than is generally recognized. The Thessalonians are to ‘abound in love for one another’, so that God may strengthen their hearts, so that they may be ‘blameless in holiness’ before God at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 3.12-13). Paul repeats this message in more detail in his closing prayer: ‘May your [plural] spirit and soul and body be kept sound [that is, free from moral defect or morally complete] and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess. 5.23).

**2 Thessalonians**

If Paul actually wrote 2 Thessalonians, he must have done so shortly after writing 1 Thessalonians, because the first letter had not accomplished all he intended. Some scholars, however, question Paul’s authorship of 2 Thessalonians on the basis of vocabulary, style of writing, and viewpoint with respect to the coming of the End. With respect to vocabulary, for example, the expressions ‘not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed’ (2 Thess. 2.2), ‘through belief in the truth’ (2 Thess. 2.13), and ‘so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly’ (2 Thess. 3.1) occur nowhere else in letters of Paul universally regarded as authentic.

Scholars who question Paul’s authorship also ask why Paul would write a second letter to the same church dealing with the same subjects so soon after the first letter. Perhaps those who doubt the authenticity of 2 Thessa-
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Ionians do so especially because of the different eschatology. In 1 Thess. 5.1-3 Paul says that 'the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night' and 'When they say, “There is peace and security”'. The writer of 2 Thess. 2.1-10, however, writes to correct the mistaken view 'that the day of the Lord is already here'.

The references to another letter purporting to be from Paul (2 Thess. 2.2, 15; 3.14, 17) are highly suspect for these reasons: forged letters would hardly appear in Paul’s lifetime; the signature is faked and is intended to give the letter authenticity and would be more likely in a first, rather than in a second, letter. And although the signature in 2 Thess. 3.17 is the same as the one in Gal. 6.11 (‘with my own hand’), the lack of reference to ‘large letters’, as in Gal. 6.11, and the words of explanation in 2 Thess. 3.17 seem to support dubious authenticity.

The popular contemporary Jewish idea was that before the end of the present age evil forces would be embodied in a particular person and this is reflected in 2 Thessalonians. That person – referred to as ‘the lawless one’ in 2 Thess. 2.3 – would rebel against God and his people, though eventually he would be defeated by the Messiah who would usher in the new age. Therefore, according to the writer of 2 Thessalonians, since this person and his ‘rebellion’ (2 Thess. 2.3) have not appeared, the day of the Lord cannot have already come.

No matter who wrote 2 Thessalonians, from the letter itself we can determine four reasons for its having been written: (1) to compliment and encourage converts for their steadfastness and faithfulness during suffering and afflictions (2 Thess. 1.3-20); (2) to correct a mistaken view of Jesus’ second coming (2 Thess. 2.1-12); (3) to express the author’s thanks and praise (2 Thess. 2.13-17), ask his readers to pray for his work, and to convey his confidence in them (2 Thess. 3.1-5); and (4) to admonish the idle and those who are being busybodies (2 Thess. 3.6-15).

The author responds to the situations that gave rise to the letter by saying, first of all, that God thinks it just to repay with affliction those who are afflicted (2 Thess. 1.6). To those who thought the day of the Lord had already come, the author says that the rebellion and the lawless one must come first (2 Thess. 2.3). And to the idle, the author says emphatically: ‘Anyone unwilling to work should not eat’ (2 Thess. 3.10).

Summary

Much of 2 Thessalonians is written in apocalyptic, eschatological, mythological language not like that in the undisputed letters of Paul. The thoroughly vengeful tone of the author against those who are unrighteous and
disobey is unlike Paul. Nevertheless, through this language the author assures his readers that they need not be concerned about the coming of the End so long as they live in accordance with the traditions they were taught. However, it is not clear what ‘the traditions’ were. And the author’s absence of genuine concern for his converts’ moral life is quite different from that of Paul (but see 1.3; 3.4, 13).
Chapter 5

PAUL’S EARLY LETTERS: 1 CORINTHIANS 1–6

The Beginning of the Church at Corinth

From Acts 18.1-18 we learn about the founding of the church at Corinth and Paul’s stay in the city for more than a year and a half. There he first met a Jew named Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and he stayed with them. They worked together at the same trade of tentmaking. From the house of Titius Justus, who reverenced God, Paul did his mission work.

Aquila and Priscilla had come from Rome because the Emperor Claudius (41–54 CE) had expelled the Jews from that city. Suetonius says this happened as the result of constant disorders of the Jews ‘instigated by Chrestus’ (Claudius 25). ‘Chrestus’ is surely a reference to Christ; but since Jesus was crucified in the time of Emperor Tiberius (14–37 CE), he would not have been alive during the time of Claudius. However, the word ‘Chrestus’ seems to indicate the presence of Jewish members of the Christ movement in Rome as early as the time of Claudius. Aquila and his wife apparently came from that group of Jews, but what they believed about Jesus we do not know. Presumably they shared Paul’s view of Jesus as the Messiah, because Luke reports that at Corinth Paul was busy ‘testifying to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus’ (Acts 18.4-6). The Jews, however, opposed and reviled Paul because of his preaching. Then, in typical fashion, Luke writes that Paul says, ‘From now on I will go to the Gentiles’ (Acts 18.5-6). Aquila and Priscilla accompanied Paul on some of his journeys and became his co-workers (Acts 18.1-3, 18; 1 Cor. 16.19; Rom. 16.3; see also 2 Tim. 4.19).

Apollos Comes onto the Scene

At Ephesus Aquila and Priscilla met the Jew Apollos. Our only sources of information about him are Acts 18.24-28 and what we can deduce from Paul in 1 Corinthians. From Acts we learn that he was ‘an eloquent man, well-versed in the scriptures. He had been instructed orally in the Way of the Lord.’ He was ‘burning with the Spirit’ (Greek; the same phrase occurs
in Rom. 12.11). And he ‘taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John’ (Acts 18.24-25). As a native of Alexandria, capital of Egypt, Apollos lived in a city second only to Rome as an influential metropolis. Within the city there was a large colony of Jews, from whom there came a voluminous and diverse religious literature, including the translation of the Hebrew scriptures into the Greek language of the time and known as the Septuagint (abbreviated LXX). This fact explains his knowledge of the scriptures and his instruction in ‘the Way of the Lord’.

But what did the instruction of Apollos include? In the Old Testament ‘the way of the Lord’ always had implications for moral life. God chose Abraham to ‘charge his children and his household...to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice’ (Gen. 18.19). ‘The way of the Lord is a stronghold for the upright, but destruction for evildoers’ (Prov. 10.29; see also Judg. 2.22; 2 Kgs 21.22; Jer. 5.4-5). It is useless to speculate on what Apollos taught about Jesus because there is no hint.

Although Apollos ‘knew only the baptism of John’, there is no evidence that Apollos was ever baptized by any follower of Jesus, as were the disciples of John at Ephesus (Acts 19.1-7). Perhaps Apollos stressed himself too much in baptizing persons, because that was a point of controversy between Paul and him at Corinth (see 1 Cor. 1.11-17 and discussion below). Apollos would not have needed the laying on of hands to bring the Spirit after baptism (Acts 8.14-17; 19.5-6), because he was already ‘burning with the Spirit’.

Several passages in 1 Corinthians, besides the one in 1 Cor. 1.11-17, show how the converts at Corinth may have compared Apollos with Paul. Paul says he did not proclaim the ‘mystery of God to you in lofty words of wisdom’ (1 Cor. 2.1; see also 1 Cor. 2.2-5; 2 Cor. 11.6), implying, of course, that Apollos did. Implying that unlike Apollos, he does not need a letter of recommendation because the Corinthians themselves are his letter written on their hearts, ‘known and read by all, a letter of Christ...with the Spirit of the living God...on human hearts’ (2 Cor. 3.1-3). And Paul’s angry words about the ‘super-apostles’ (2 Cor. 11.5; 12.11) may show how sensitive he had become to the Corinthians’ exaltation of Apollos.

After Apollos spoke boldly in the synagogue, Aquila and Priscilla took him aside and ‘explained the way of God to him more accurately’ (Acts 18.24-26). ‘The Way of the Lord’ could be taken as a Lukan stylistic variant for ‘the Way of God’ that follows. Luke says that Paul had made Elymas the magician blind because he did ‘not stop making crooked the straight paths [ways] of the Lord’ (Acts 13.10; see also Deut. 28.28-29). Here the Lord is...
God because the words are an allusion to Deut. 28.28-29. This gives some reason for taking the ‘Lord’ in the phrase ‘the Way of the Lord’ in Acts 18.25 as God.

In contrast to the phrase ‘the Way of the Lord’, the expression ‘the Way of God’ does not occur in the Old Testament, and it occurs in the New Testament only in Mk 12.14 (= Mt. 22.16 = Lk. 20.21). There Jesus’ critics, in an attempt to entrap him in his talk, flatter him with compliments about his teaching of ‘the way of God in accordance with truth’. That statement leaves us as much in the dark as the one about the explanation of Priscilla and Aquila.

We cannot be certain what Priscilla and Aquila actually explained to Apollos, but we may get some clues from the texts themselves. Perhaps Apollos was told to accept Jesus as the Messiah, since that is what he preached to the Jews in Achaia after he left Aquila and Priscilla (Acts 18.27-28). One would think that the belief that Jesus was the Messiah would be one of the first things Apollos was taught. But, as we shall see, that may not have been the case.

So what about the explanation of Priscilla and Aquila? Let me suggest an answer that might not be so far out as it may seem at first. Under the influence of Hebrew thought, the word ‘way’ (Greek, hodos) had come to be used metaphorically in a moral sense as a way of behavior, including thinking and acting. We have already learned that Paul criticized Apollos for stressing himself too much among baptized converts at Corinth. In 1 Cor. 3.1–4.6 Paul has to remind Apollos that he, Peter, and Paul are ‘God’s servants, working together’ for the Corinthians as God’s people. Therefore, the only wisdom worth having is not human wisdom but that which comes from God. The men mentioned are all to be regarded also as ‘servants of Christ’.

Aquila and Priscilla were hosts to Paul before they met Apollos, and he also worked with them. Consequently, they would have learned to know Paul very well and that he believed God, not humans, was responsible for his calling and message. God establishes the mission preachers in Christ and commissions them and gives his Spirit in their hearts (2 Cor. 1.21). At the proper time ‘each one will receive commendation from God’ (1 Cor. 4.5). All things are to be done ‘for the glory of God’ (1 Cor. 10.31). Paul and his co-workers do not commend themselves (2 Cor. 4.5-6; see also Gal. 1.5, 24; Phil. 2.11; 4.20). To accept praise from converts was not a way of life consistent with the way of God.

We have learned that according to Acts Luke believed that the apostles of the church and their authority had become more important than the
church of God, the church of the apostles. Although Luke places Paul among the authorities of the church, Paul himself never forgot that he was a slave of Christ and God’s fellow worker.

The words that Apollos knew only the baptism of John indicate that he was a member of the Baptist sect, perhaps one who accepted John as the messiah. He had also been taught things concerning Jesus, but perhaps he had not yet been persuaded that Jesus, not John, was the Messiah. Priscilla and Aquila might, then, have convinced him of the messiahship of Jesus. This supposition is supported by the statement in Acts that in Achaia Apollos ‘powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the scriptures that the Messiah is Jesus’ (Acts 18.28).

In times of social, political, or religious advancement people in society tend to venerate their leaders, and some leaders may even exalt themselves. Such a situation had developed at Corinth, and Apollos became a hero who was esteemed by his followers. As an eloquent man and adept in the scriptures, Apollos was an excellent candidate for veneration. According to the Corinthians’ standards, Paul’s bodily presence was weak and his speech contemptible (2 Cor. 10.10).

Aquila and Priscilla may have helped to deflate Apollos’ ego. They may have convinced him that Paul’s way of life, including his thinking about God and Jesus and his behavior among converts, was more accurately representative of the way of God. At any rate, Priscilla and Aquila had apparently taught Apollos well. Paul refers to him as ‘our brother Apollos’ and urged him to visit Corinth again (1 Cor. 16.12). However, Apollos was not yet ready to do so, perhaps because he did not want to risk reviving the dissensions Paul had tried so hard to overcome.

Paul at Corinth

Paul began his mission activity in Corinth in the synagogue where he testified ‘to the Jews that the Messiah was Jesus’ (Acts 18.4-5). When the Jews opposed him, he left the synagogue and went to the house of Titius Justus who was ‘a worshiper of God’ (Acts 18.7). The church in Corinth probably began in Justus’ house, and its members included Jewish and Gentile converts (Acts 18.4, 8; 1 Cor. 7.17-20; 9.19-21; 12.2). Most converts came from the poorer classes, but there may have been a wealthy and influential minority (1 Cor. 1.18–3.4; 11.17-22). Although Silas and Timothy were co-workers with Paul at Corinth (Acts 18.5; 1 Cor. 4.17; 16.10; 2 Cor. 1.19), Paul claims to be the first to ‘plant’ the church there (1 Cor. 3.5-10; see also 4.15; 9.1-2).
At Corinth the Jews took Paul before the tribunal and accused him before Gallio the proconsul of ‘persuading people to worship God in ways that are contrary to the law’. Again, Luke presents a Roman official in a favorable light by saying that Gallio refused to be a judge concerning the matters of Jewish law and dismissed the meeting (Acts 18.12-16). Paul stayed with the Corinthians for a year and a half, ‘teaching the word of God among them’ (Acts 18.11).

The things mentioned are important because they help to substantiate what we learned earlier about God as the only God and about Jesus as the Messiah being the primary messages of Paul. And the rejection of Jesus by the Jews is given as the reason why Paul turns to the Gentiles. The story about Paul and Gallio shows Luke’s motive of presenting Roman officials in a favorable way in an effort to help persuade Rome to make the religion of Paul and the Christ movement, the religion in transition, a legal religion.

According to 1 Cor. 2.3, Paul was not very confident when present among the Corinthian converts, admitting that he came to them ‘in weakness and in fear and in much trembling’.

Paul’s Correspondence with the Church at Corinth

In contrast to the Thessalonian correspondence, the letters to the Corinthians are long and reveal a continuing discussion, perhaps over a long period of time, between Paul and the church at Corinth. On Paul’s part, most of the conversation in 2 Corinthians is boastful, even assertive.

It is virtually certain that the two letters to the Corinthians do not accurately represent the sequence of Paul’s correspondence with the church at Corinth. From 1 Cor. 5.9 it becomes clear that 1 Corinthians is not Paul’s first letter to Corinth. Why? Because Paul says: ‘I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral persons’ (see also 1 Cor. 5.11). Obviously, if Paul says in 1 Corinthians ‘I wrote to you’, that letter cannot be his first one to Corinth. So, apparently, Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian church is lost. This observation has led many scholars to suggest that although 1 Corinthians is a unity, 2 Corinthians is comprised of several fragments of Pauline letters. Therefore, it is generally proposed that the story behind Paul’s correspondence with the church at Corinth may have developed somewhat as follows.

Paul’s first letter is lost. 2 Cor. 6.14–7.1 interrupts the flow of thought between 2 Cor. 6.13 and 7.2. In 2 Cor. 6.14–7.1 Paul exhorts his readers not to be associated with persons who are unrighteous. This is the same subject about which Paul says in 1 Cor. 5.9-13 he wrote to the Corinthians. For these reasons 2 Cor. 6.14–7.1 may be a fragment of Paul’s first letter,
which is lost. The first letter was probably written soon after the founding of the church at Corinth by Paul, Silas, and Timothy (Acts 18.1-17; 2 Cor. 1.19) and after a subsequent visit there by Apollos, the eloquent Jew from Alexandria (Acts 18.24–19.1; 1 Cor. 1.12; 3.5-6). Apollos, it seems, caused some of the problems in the church at Corinth. Paul probably wrote his first letter to Corinth, the one lost, from Ephesus about 53–54 CE.

Paul’s second letter to Corinth is 1 Cor. 1–16. Three of Paul’s fellow workers, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, brought news from Corinth (1 Cor. 16.15-18). Some persons there from the family of Chloe in Corinth had informed Paul about dissensions and quarreling among the church members (1 Cor. 1.10-17; 11.17-22). And Paul had received a letter, perhaps delivered by the three men mentioned, from Corinth (1 Corinthians 7). These circumstances provided the immediate occasion for a second letter to Corinth that appears in the New Testament as 1 Corinthians. It was also probably written from Ephesus, perhaps sometime early in the year 54 CE.

The third letter to Corinth is lost, but a fragment of it may be preserved in 2 Corinthians 10–13. For several reasons many scholars think that the second half of 2 Corinthians was written before the first half (2 Cor. 1–9). A reason for thinking so is that there is a very noticeable change in mood between the two parts. All of a sudden, in 2 Cor. 10.1 Paul’s mood changes from one of personal warmth, satisfied feelings (2 Cor. 1.3-7), mutual love and forgiveness (2 Cor. 2.5-11), confidence, joy, and comfort because of the Corinthians’ zeal for Paul (2 Cor. 7.4, 11-13) to misunderstanding and hostility. The ill feelings persist to the end of 2 Corinthians 10–13. It is unlikely that such basically opposite moods for such a long period would represent Paul’s thinking while writing the same letter.

After Paul first wrote to Corinth, the situation worsened, so he had to send Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4.17; 16.10), and he hoped to send Apollos also (1 Cor. 16.12). Paul himself visited the city a second time, and it was a ‘painful visit’ (2 Cor. 2.1; 13.2). Titus had been in Corinth to raise money for the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8.6; see also 12.18; 1 Cor. 16.1-4). These were the mission circumstances leading up to the third letter (2 Corinthians 10–13), known as ‘the painful letter’ because it was written ‘out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears’ (2 Cor. 2.2-4, 9; 7.5-9). It was probably written from Ephesus also in 54 CE.

After the painful letter, things apparently improved in Corinth, so Paul’s fourth letter was one of reconciliation. It is also lost unless, as many believe, a fragment has survived in 2 Corinthians 1–9, excepting, of course, 2 Cor. 6.14–7.1. Paul had threatened a third visit to Corinth (2 Cor. 12.14; 13.1).
He started for Corinth via Macedonia (Acts 20.1; 2 Cor. 2.12-13). While he was in Macedonia, Titus returned to him from Corinth with news that the Corinthians had repented and were again zealous for Paul (2 Cor. 7.5-9, 13). As the result of Titus’ return with the good news, Paul wrote his last letter to Corinth (2 Corinthians 1–9) from somewhere in Macedonia (Philippi?), probably late in 54 CE. After the reconciliation we do not have a letter from the Corinthians to Paul; therefore, we do not know if the spirit of reconciliation between Paul and the converts at Corinth was lasting.

Paul must have received some letters in response to his preaching, teaching, and writing. Since the news from Chloe’s people was probably delivered orally, the letter from Corinth mentioned in 1 Cor. 7.1 is the only one that we know about, and the news in it was discouraging. Paul replies to that letter systematically, and from Paul’s reply we learn the things about the church in Corinth that are discussed in the pages that follow.

The Situation at Corinth and Paul’s Response

Divisions among Members

The church was divided into groups, each with its favorite leader. Having a favorite person to venerate was a typical trait of the people who lived in the Hellenistic (pertaining to Greek culture as it existed in the Roman world) environment of New Testament times. Seneca, a Stoic philosopher of Paul’s era, quoting from the earlier philosopher Epicurus (342–270 BCE), advises his pupils to choose a man of noble character, to keep him in their minds, and to live as though he actually saw all their actions (Moral Epistles 11.8-10). Perhaps Paul says so much about the converts’ imitation of him because he was aware of that Stoic idea (recall 1 Thess. 1.6; 2.14; see also 1 Cor. 4.16; 11.1; Phil. 3.17).

In every new church there were likely to be differences of opinion concerning matters of faith, religious practices, and moral standards. At Corinth the situation was so bad that there were dissensions and actual quarreling among believers who were uniting around certain leaders of various groups. Perhaps some of those persons had belonged to one or another of the Greco-Roman mystery religions. Those religions were cults that got the name ‘mystery religions’ because their members practiced secret initiation rites. Such religions also promised their initiates a better life in this age and eternal life in the next. In those cults initiates developed a special attachment to the one who initiated them. To such persons the Jesus sect must have seemed to be only another, though perhaps better, mystery cult.
The first problem among members of the church at Corinth Paul had to deal with was the division over baptism. In the phrase translated as ‘united in the same mind’ the word for ‘united’ is *katartizo*, the precise meaning of which must not be overlooked. The word was used by the Greeks for aligning broken bones so that they would heal perfectly. It meant to ‘fit’ or ‘join together’. Metaphorically, it meant to ‘perfect’ or ‘bring into the proper condition’.

Paul wanted the converts to be properly joined together again, no longer with any divisions among them. Moreover, he wanted persons who were baptized to develop a special relationship with Christ, not with the one who baptized them. This is why Paul writes as he does about his baptizing and preaching among the converts (1 Cor. 1.12-17). To the persons divided over baptism he says that he is thankful he baptized only a few persons, because Christ did not send him ‘to baptize but to proclaim the gospel, and not with eloquent wisdom, so that the cross of Christ might not be emptied of its power’ (1 Cor. 1.14-17).

Besides divisions in the church itself, some believers were claiming a special kind of wisdom and raising questions about sexual practices, eating meat from an animal that had been dedicated to an idol, conduct at worship, spiritual gifts, life after death, and a collection for the poor saints (‘holy ones’) in Jerusalem. Moreover, some persons were beginning to doubt Paul’s apostolic authority. And Paul is conscious of being under attack (1 Cor. 9.1-3; 2 Cor. 11.5; 12.11), not so much from individuals as from the church as a whole. Tension and discontent are evident throughout 1 Corinthians.

In Corinth there may also have been persons known as Gnostics because they participated in a religious phenomenon called Gnosticism. Gnosticism got its name from *gnosis*, a Greek word meaning ‘knowledge’. Gnostics, ‘the knowing ones’, believed that they could gain salvation through a special esoteric knowledge, rather than through faith. They also subscribed to a rigid dualism whereby all matter, including the created world and human bodies, was evil and that only spirit (as opposed to flesh) was good. So Gnostics usually went to two extremes. Some practiced asceticism, that is, withdrawal from the world. By doing this they hoped to free their souls, sparks of the spiritual or divine, from their evil bodies and to experience God through their special knowledge. Other Gnostics were indifferent toward morality, sometimes even were immoral. They reasoned that if the body was evil to begin with, it did not matter what they did as Gnostics.

These were the kinds of things Paul had to deal with in the church at Corinth.
Paul’s Rivals

Paul’s chief rivals in Corinth were Apollos and Peter, a ‘pillar’ (Gal. 2.7-10) in the Jewish branch of the Christ movement in Jerusalem. Apollos, the gifted speaker, was probably Paul’s chief rival. Certain passages indicate that the Corinthians were comparing the two men (1 Cor. 1.12; 3.4-6, 21-22; 4.6; 16.12). Some persons thought Apollos was superior to Paul, who had to defend himself by saying that he did not proclaim to them ‘the mystery of God...in lofty words or wisdom’. Rather, his words came ‘with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power’, in order that their faithfulness might not be based on the wisdom of humans ‘but on the power of God’ (1 Cor. 2.1-5).

A lesser rival to Paul was Cephas or Peter. Perhaps he and other conservative members of the Christ movement had come to Corinth and were causing problems concerning requirements for Gentile converts, as they did later at Galatia. In Paul’s churches in Galatia those persons were insisting that Gentile converts had to be circumcised and obey Jewish law (see Chapter 7). Perhaps members of the circumcision party were winning some followers at Corinth.

Some persons who were following leaders other than Paul apparently claimed a special ‘wisdom’ (1 Cor. 1.17-19; 2.1-13; 3.18-23; 2 Cor. 1.12) or ‘knowledge’ (1 Cor. 8.1-13). Paul describes such knowledge as the kind that ‘puffs up’, or makes those who possess it ‘arrogant’, and leads to moral insensitivity (1 Cor. 4.6, 18-19; 5.2-3; 8.1-3; 13.4-5). In contrast to such wisdom or knowledge, which is human and earthly wisdom (1 Cor. 1.20; 2.5, 13; 2 Cor. 1.12), Paul stresses the kind of wisdom that comes from God and from knowing Christ (1 Cor. 1.20-24, 30; 2.6-7). Paul deals with these matters in 1 Corinthians 1–4.

Immorality

We have learned how Paul dealt with the problems concerning baptism and wisdom and knowledge. But there were more serious problems for him. The worst thing that had been reported to Paul was the immorality of some converts, a kind so bad – incest – that it was not found even among pagans (1 Cor. 5.1). The Corinthians had not yet fully understood that being converted to faithfulness toward God and the acceptance of certain beliefs about Jesus imposed the obligation of living a new life of righteousness. Paul charges them to remove unrighteous persons from their midst (1 Cor. 5.2-5, 13) and not to associate with immoral people (1 Cor. 5.6-13). The verses in 1 Cor. 5.9-13 contain a reference to Paul’s earlier letter to Corinth which, as we said, is lost.
5. Paul’s Early Letters: 1 Corinthians 1–6

It is easy to overlook two important points in 1 Cor. 5.6-13. First, Paul implies that one evil person in a community can corrupt the whole community and then uses a metaphor from the Passover festival to illustrate his point. A little yeast penetrates the whole batch of dough. As Jews preparing for the Passover festival searched out any leavened bread in the house to destroy it, so they are to cleanse out the old yeast that they may be a new lump. Since the Passover lamb (Christ) has already been sacrificed for believers, the festival is to be celebrated as a cleansing of evil from the group: ‘Therefore, let us celebrate the festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth’ (1 Cor. 5.8). Thus, in the religion in transition the Passover in Judaism becomes a festival commemorating moral life.

The second point to observe is how Paul emphasizes his desire for the sanctity of the community. He not only tells the believers to cleanse out the old yeast, but he also tells them three times what they should do about immoral persons. The evil man who has committed the incest should ‘have been removed from among’ them (1 Cor. 5.2). The believers are ‘not to associate with sexually immoral persons’ (1 Cor. 5.9-12). And believers are to ‘drive out the wicked person from among’ them (1 Cor. 5.13, a direct quotation from Deut. 17.7). Notice that immorality is the reason, repeatedly emphasized, for expulsion from the community of believers. It is even more significant to know that at no time in any letter does Paul say that someone is to be expelled from the community of believers for failing to believe something about Jesus. This fact is important for learning about the totality of Paul’s message, especially because so often faith in Jesus is stressed to the neglect of the moral conduct of those who have the faith.

Lawsuits before Unbelievers
Before Paul’s readers became converts they were used to having their differences on legal matters settled in public courts of law. According to Paul, mature believers should be able to agree among themselves on such matters, not take their case ‘before the unrighteous, instead of taking it before the saints’ (1 Cor. 6.1-8). Paul’s severe criticism of the immoral behavior of the converts is in sharp contrast to the behavior expected of persons who want to belong to the kingdom of God. But Paul never tells what he means by ‘the kingdom of God’ (1 Cor. 6.9). Is it the religion in transition? The community of believers? The church? All would be included in the Christ movement.
Morality and the Kingdom of God

Paul does not often mention the kingdom of God. But when he does, although he never says precisely what he means by it, his perceptions about the kinds of persons who will not get into it and those who will are quite clear. Converts have to be moral human beings worthy of entering into it (see again 1 Thess. 2.11-12; see also 2 Thess. 1.5). Believers should regard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit, and their bodies are to be used for the glory of God (1 Cor. 6.9-20).

In Gal. 5.16-21 Paul lists a number of evils – desires of and works of the flesh – and then tells the converts in Galatia, as he had warned them before: ‘Those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God’ (Gal. 5.21; see also Eph. 5.5). Paul writes to the Romans: ‘The kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom. 14.17).

The passages cited speak for themselves, as does 1 Cor. 6.9-11, a crucial passage for understanding Paul’s moral teachings with respect to the kingdom, as well as for his concept of converts being called for the purpose of becoming righteous. ‘Wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God.’ A list of unrighteous persons follows. Then Paul says: ‘And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in (with) the Spirit of our God.’

Here Paul’s language is more emphatic and clearer than is brought out in most translations. Paul begins by saying ‘The unrighteous’ (NRSV, ‘wrongdoers’; Greek, adikoi). ‘Used to be’ clearly means that some converts had been unrighteous persons of the kind Paul mentions but that they no longer are after their baptism. ‘Washed’ refers to baptism, and the other two verbs are synonymous with it. The verb translated as ‘sanctified’ is hagiazo and means, as we have learned, ‘to set apart as holy’. As the Jews, including Paul, understood it, it meant ‘to set apart as holy for God’, or ‘dedicated to God’. The REB has it that way: ‘You have been dedicated to God’. The word translated as ‘justified’ is dikaioo and means ‘to make, declare, pronounce, declare righteous’. Persons made righteous are placed in contrast to the unrighteous, which some converts had formerly been. In other words, Paul is saying that when converts have been made righteous through the rite of baptism and the Spirit they have their past sins forgiven. I really believe that for most Christians today the idea of being made righteous is more easily understood than the vague concept of being justified.

After baptism converts were expected to remain righteous or free from sinning again. In 1 Cor. 15.33-39 Paul tells the converts that bad compan-
ionships corrupt good morals, and then he exhorts them: ‘Come to a sober and right mind, and sin no more’. That he means what he says is quite clear from the way he states it also later in Rom. 6.1-2: ‘What then are we to say? Should we continue to sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin [in baptism] go on living in it?’ (See discussion in Chapter 8.)

What Paul Does Not Say
Sometimes in order to fully understand Paul’s thought, it is important to learn what he does not say. With regard to the kingdom of God, he never once mentions faith as a requirement for entrance into it. In this respect Paul’s teaching about the kingdom of God is like that of Jesus, who also never mentions faith as a requirement for entrance into it. Of course, we might say that for Paul moral life is the best evidence of faithfulness.

About Repentance. The view that Paul believed that believers should not continue to sin after baptism is supported by the fact that he says very little about repentance and forgiveness. This is true in spite of the fact that genuine repentance was a main teaching in much of Judaism in Paul’s time and was stressed by John the Baptist and Jesus. We might expect that in trying to convert Gentiles from their sinful ways to faithfulness toward God, Paul would frequently urge repentance and forgiveness. However, he mentions repentance only three times (2 Cor. 7.8-10; 12.21; Rom. 2.4).

Paul first brings up the subject of repentance with reference to his adversaries at Corinth. In 2 Cor. 7.8-10 he speaks about making the Corinthian converts sorry because of the harsh letter he had written to them. He rejoices that the grief it caused them led to repentance. And then he adds: ‘For you felt a Godly grief [literally, ‘grief according to God’ – kata theon]... For Godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation and brings no regret, but worldly grief produces death.’ The words ‘brings no regret’ translate a single word in Greek (ametameletos), and it is a kind of wordplay with the word ‘repentance’ (metanoia). Metanoia really means ‘a change in the inner person’. And ametameletos can also mean ‘about which no change of mind can take place’. So, then, what Paul is saying in 2 Cor. 7.8-10 is that he has become convinced that the Corinthian converts are now on his side and no longer on the side of his adversaries. Titus has assured Paul of the obedience of all of them, so Paul is greatly encouraged by their changed behavior (2 Cor. 7.13-16). This also means that, with respect to their religion, the converts are now on the right track, on the way toward salvation.
The lack of morality on the part of some Corinthian converts was part of the problem for Paul in the controversy with his adversaries (1 Cor. 12.17-18). According to 2 Cor. 12.21, a passage almost certainly written before the one in 2 Cor. 7.8-10, Paul is afraid that when he visits the Corinthians again he ‘may have to mourn over many who previously sinned and have not repented of the impurity, sexual immorality, and licentiousness that they have practiced’.

The words translated as ‘previously sinned’ are significant and really are enlightened by Rom. 3.15. There Paul says that God ‘in his divine forbearance had passed over the sins previously committed’. The persons who continued to commit the vices mentioned in 2 Cor. 12.20 had not yet been baptized and had their previous sins forgiven. If they had been, Paul would have demanded their expulsion from the church as he did for the immoral man in 1 Cor. 5.1-2 and 5.13. Such converts still belonged to that group at Corinth who would not inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6.9-11).

The substance of being made righteous by the forgiveness of past sins is the abandonment of evil deeds and even evil desires. After converts had turned to God from idols and subsequently been made righteous and forgiven of sins previously committed – symbolized in the rite of baptism – there should be no need for repentance and further forgiveness. From his religious instruction as a Jew Paul knew that true repentance should effect a genuine change in the lives of converts. That is what Paul hoped for when he wrote 2 Cor. 12.21 and which he thought had been accomplished when he wrote 2 Cor. 7.8-10. In the meantime the misbehaving converts had been made righteous by having their previous sins forgiven through baptism. They were now on the side of Paul for the upbuilding of their moral character (see 2 Cor. 12.19) and no longer on the side of his adversaries, whose morality was questionable.

Paul writes about God granting repentance only in Rom. 2.4. There he is talking about pagans who have rejected God: ‘Do you not realize that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?’ By their ‘hard and impenitent heart’ they will receive God’s wrath on the day of judgment. This is the only time Paul uses the word ‘impenitent’ (ametanoetos).

Once again, Paul shares the ideas of Judaism. God established repentance and forgiveness for sinners; but as a God of the righteous, he did not establish repentance for the righteous but for sinners like Manasseh in the apocryphal Prayer of Manasseh 1.8: ‘You, O Lord, God of the righteous, have not appointed repentance for the righteous...but you have appointed repentance for me, who am a sinner’. Sirach says: ‘Do not say, “I sinned, yet what has happened to me?” for the Lord is slow to anger. Do not be so confident of forgiveness that you add sin to sin. Do not say, “His mercy is
great, he will forgive the multitude of my sins”, [see Rom. 6.1-2] for both mercy and wrath are with him, and his anger will rest on sinners’ (Sir. 5.4-6; see Rom. 6.1-11). Jesus came ‘to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance’ (Lk. 5.32; see also Mk 2.17; Mt. 9.13). Paul never mentions repentance as a requirement for baptism as it is in Acts 2.38; 13.24 and 19.4-5.

About Forgiveness. In strong contrast to his Jewish predecessor Jesus, who often speaks about forgiveness, Paul rarely mentions it. He uses two verbs, *aphiemi* and *charizomai*, that may be translated with the English word ‘forgive’. He uses the former in that way only in Rom. 4.7 in the immediate context of Abraham’s example of faithfulness. The larger context is that of God’s forgiveness of the past sins of converts and their being made righteous through the faithfulness of Jesus, not works of the law (see Rom. 3.21–4.12). Recall here what we learned about the faithfulness of Jesus in our discussion of Gal. 2.20 and Paul’s special religious experience.

In Rom. 4.7 *aphiemi* is used in a direct quotation from Ps. 31.1: ‘Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin’. Paul prefaced the quotation by saying that David (who, according to Paul, wrote the Psalms) speaks a blessing upon the person to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works. Paul is speaking in the context of prospective converts becoming righteous, not persons already made righteous, as the words about believing on God ‘who makes the ungodly (impious) righteous’ (Greek; Rom. 4.5) and about ‘the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin’ (Rom. 4.8) clearly show.

*Charizomai* is the verb from which the noun *charis* (‘grace’) comes and means literally ‘graciously confer’ and therefore ‘pardon’ or ‘forgive’. It is used with the meaning ‘graciously confer’ in 1 Cor. 2.12, where Paul speaks about understanding ‘the gifts bestowed (graciously conferred) on us by God’ through the Spirit which is from God. *Charizomai* is used the same way also in Gal. 3.18; Rom. 8.32; Phil. 1.29; 2.9; and Phlm. 1.22. Paul uses *charizomai* in the sense of forgive only in 2 Cor. 2.5-11, in the context of members of the Corinthian community forgiving fellow members, and in 2 Cor. 12.13 with reference to the converts’ forgiveness of him. Both times, as with repentance, the broad context of Paul’s comments is the practical circumstance of the converts’ relationship with him and his adversaries.

Paul mentions forgiveness on the part of God only in Rom. 4.7, and there it is used with reference to the past sins of potential converts. Elsewhere Paul speaks of forgiveness only on the part of converts toward fellow con-
verts. A confession of sins or repentance may have been required of converts before baptism, the effect of which was the forgiveness of sins and being made righteous. If so, Paul must have received the idea from earlier tradition and made converts aware of it. However, there is no evidence for it in what Paul says.

There is no evidence in Paul for a doctrine of repentance and forgiveness of sins committed after baptism. On the contrary, in connection with his only discussion of baptism, Paul says: ‘What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means!’ (Rom. 6.1-2). After baptism converts were not to continue to sin.

Paul’s Thought and That of Hebrews

Perhaps the best evidence to support the interpretation of Paul’s thought on repentance and forgiveness just given is a passage from the letter to Hebrews. It was not written by Paul but by someone who may have been reflecting on Paul’s message. The author says (Heb. 6.4-5; 10.26-27):

For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened [that is, baptized], and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away [into unbelieving and godless ways]... For if we willingly persist in sin after having received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful prospect of judgment, and a fury of fire.

The writer of Hebrews is talking about persons who sin willingly after baptism and about the consequences of such sin. He seems confident, however, that his readers are still on the right track because he assures them: ‘Even though we speak in this way, behold, we are confident of better things in your case, things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints (holy ones), as you still do’ (Heb. 6.9-10; see also 12.17).

According to the author of Hebrews, the sins of converts have been finally dealt with through the gracious sacrifice of Christ and the enlightenment that came with their baptism. Therefore, in the clearest statement in the New Testament of the second coming of Christ, the author writes: ‘So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him’ (Heb. 9.28; see 1 Thess. 1.10).

Thus, for the post-Pauline author of Hebrews, who says so much about faith, baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit were not valid thenceforth apart from continuing in faithfulness and works, which are required
for ultimate salvation. So the writer feels it necessary to encourage his readers: ‘Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds’ (Heb. 10.23-24). Only because his readers are continuing to work, love, and serve can the writer of Hebrews assure them of the better things that belong to salvation (Heb. 6.9).

The author of Hebrews was only carrying Paul’s argument in Romans to its logical conclusion. According to Paul, through baptism and being made righteous converts were freed from sin, but a continuation in their new existences free from sin was required for ultimate salvation. So, the conclusion about the ineffectiveness of repentance after baptism was the only one to which the author of Hebrews could logically come. He was simply completing the ideas of Paul by saying explicitly what Paul had left implicit.
Chapter 6

**PAUL’S EARLY LETTERS: 1 CORINTHIANS 7–16 AND 2 CORINTHIANS**

**1 Corinthians 7–16**

*About What the Corinthians Had Written to Paul*

In 1 Cor. 7.1 Paul begins to deal with the matters about which the Corinthians had written to him. Since they had only recently become converts, they did not yet have enough experience as believers to deal properly with certain social and religious problems confronting them. From Paul’s reply to the Corinthians’ letter, we can deduce certain questions they had asked. What about sexual relations between unmarried, even married, people? Shall believers remain single or get married? Is it right to get a divorce, especially for a person whose spouse is not a believer? Shall believers continue to eat meats from an animal sacrificed to a pagan god? What role, if any, shall women have in public worship, and how are both men and women to behave and to dress on such an occasion? What is the real meaning of the Lord’s Supper, and how about our conduct at the Supper? How shall believers who have special talents use them in the church?

As Gentiles, some converts had shared the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul. But perhaps when attending the synagogue or as converts to Judaism, they had learned about the Pharisaic belief in the resurrection of the physical body. Apparently they asked Paul to explain what was meant by that idea. And, finally, what was their responsibility concerning the offering for the poor saints in Jerusalem? These were some of the subjects about which the Corinthians must have written to Paul.

*Paul’s Response to the Corinthians’ Letter*

*About Marriage.* Paul responds to the matters about which the Corinthians had written by beginning each time with the introductory phrase ‘now concerning’ (1 Cor. 7.1, 25; 8.1; 12.1; 16.1). The advice Paul gives concerning marriage is to be understood in light of his conviction that the end of the age was soon coming. This is clear from the phrases ‘in view of the impending crisis’ (that is, the nearness of the End; 1 Cor. 7.26), ‘the
appointed time has grown short’ (1 Cor. 7.29), and ‘the present form of this world is passing away’ (1 Cor. 7.31). Paul believed that each person should remain in the state he or she was at the present time, whether single or married, circumcised or uncircumcised. The single person, however, would be more likely to be concerned ‘about the affairs of the Lord’ (1 Cor. 7.1-40). The married person would be more concerned about pleasing a spouse.

**Paul and the Commandments of God.** In writing about each person leading the life God has assigned, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, Paul says that neither is anything, ‘but obeying the commandments (entolai) of God is everything’ (1 Cor. 7.17-20). Paul uses the same word for ‘commandment’ (entole; singular of entolai) again in 1 Cor. 14.37, where he is speaking about behavior during worship. He writes that what he says is ‘a command (entole) of the Lord [Jesus]’, an allusion to instruction that had been transmitted under the name of Jesus and which Paul had learned when he became a member of the Christ movement. When prophesying or speaking in tongues, ‘all things should be done decently and in order’.

In the contexts of both passages where he uses the word *entole* for ‘commandment’ Paul is speaking about the kind of behavior expected of converts, so now we can begin to see what kind of law Paul believes is effective for them.

Paul uses the same word several times in Rom. 7.8-13 with reference to the commandment not to covet. After an involved discussion, he concludes: ‘The law (nomos) is holy, and the commandment (entole) is holy and just and good’ (Rom. 7.12). As in this passage, *entole* is parallel to *nomos* in the summary of Paul’s love ethic in Rom. 13.8-10: ‘Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law’ (nomos). Then Paul says that ‘any other commandment (entole) is summed up in this word: “Love your neighbor as yourself”’.

Thus, *entole* and *nomos*, which is Paul’s usual word for the Jewish law, are both used with reference to specific commands concerning moral behavior expected of converts. There is after all a real law for Paul in spite of his peculiar religious experience of Jesus the Messiah. We shall learn more about Paul and the law for converts in our study of Romans.

**About Eating Meat from a Sacrificed Animal.** In 1 Cor. 8.1–11.1 Paul responds to the problem of eating meat from animals sacrificed to idols. Before they became converts Gentiles were accustomed to buying meat in the market place from animals that had been offered in sacrifice to pagan gods. Since only a small, inedible, portion of the meat was actually burned
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in the sacrifice, the rest was fine for human consumption. However, when they became converts, former pagans were taught to believe that the God of the Jews was the only God that really existed. Idols of wood, stone, or metal were just those things – not gods. Paul says that persons who know that the God of all who believe in him is the only God that exists can eat meat from animals sacrificed to idols with a clear conscience. But if in doing so those who have the proper knowledge about God offend the consciences of others who do not have such knowledge, they should not eat idol meats and thus cause their fellow believers to stumble morally (1 Cor. 8.1-13).

Paul Defends Himself. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul digresses from the subject of idol meats to defend himself on several matters. He raises questions about his own apostleship and that of other mission preachers. His own freedom comes from having been called through an experience of the risen Christ, and he does not give up that freedom as a proclaimer of the gospel. As was customary for Jewish rabbis, Paul is free to refuse pay for his work, in contrast to others, especially Greek teachers, who receive pay from their pupils (1 Cor. 9.1-27). Does Paul not have the right to receive pay for his service, as other apostles, because the law in Deut. 25.4 says so? Nevertheless, he has not made use of the right because he does not want to ‘put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ’ (1 Cor. 9.12).

About Idolatry. In 1 Cor. 10.1–11.1 Paul returns to the subject of idolatry. By using the Israelites’ experience in their desert wanderings, he warns his readers against the dangers of idolatry (10.1-13). The spiritual drink and food God gave the Israelites in the desert prefigured the Lord’s Supper. The rock from which God gave the water was Christ, because Paul thought that already in the time of Moses Christ was participating in the work of God. But with most of the Israelites ‘God was not pleased’ because they did not behave themselves. Their immorality was their downfall.

Paul brings the matter right down to the church at Corinth in an effort to prevent the recently converted believers from reverting to pagan worship. ‘Now these things occurred as examples for us, so that we might not desire evil as they [the Israelites] did.’ Converts should ‘not indulge in sexual immorality, as some of them did’, nor return to idolatry, nor test God’s ability to provide the power for them to resist temptation (1 Cor. 10.1-13).

The sanctity of the Lord’s Supper must be maintained (1 Cor. 10.14-22). Those who are free to eat idol meats with clear consciences should take into consideration the scrupulous consciences of others (1 Cor. 10.23-30). In sum, participating in the Lord’s Supper and worshiping idols cannot go
together. Pagans ‘sacrifice to demons and not to God... You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons’ (1 Cor. 10.21). Whatever believers do, and whether they eat or drink, they should ‘do everything for the glory of God’. The Corinthians are to be imitators of Paul as he is of Christ (1 Cor. 10.31–11.1).

About the Lord’s Supper. When celebrating the Lord’s Supper some wealthier members of the church brought their own food and went off into a corner by themselves, eating and drinking in a carousing manner and ignoring those who were too poor to bring food. Those who eat their own food, thinking only of themselves, ‘show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing’ (1 Cor. 11.17-22). The behavior of the believers led to social divisions in the church, and Paul could not praise them for their actions. According to Paul, the Lord’s Supper is a solemn occasion, initiated by Jesus himself in remembrance of him, and it is to be observed accordingly (1 Cor. 11.23-34). In 1 Cor. 11.27-34 Paul stresses the moral readiness of believers to participate in the Supper. Persons are to examine themselves to see if they are worthy of eating the bread and drinking the cup of the Lord, not in the unworthy selfish manner described in 1 Cor. 11.17-22.

About Conduct at Worship. Paul deals with conduct at worship in 1 Cor. 11.2–14.40, including the Lord’s Supper and the conduct of those who participate in it (1 Cor. 11.17-34). Although women are permitted to pray and prophesy in public worship (1 Cor. 11.5, 13), Paul’s Jewish upbringing makes it mandatory that they be veiled when doing so. The statement that ‘women should be silent in the churches’ (1 Cor. 14.34) contradicts what Paul says elsewhere about women participating in worship. For that reason 1 Cor. 14.34 may be a non-Pauline insertion, as some scholars believe. Paul’s teaching about early worship is so important that we must consider it with some care.

In the clearest passage in the undisputed letters of Paul that deals with early church worship (1 Cor. 14.1-25) it becomes evident, as with the passage dealing with the Lord’s Supper, that the converts were as confused in their worship as they were in their morals. It was even possible that if they were all speaking in tongues and an outsider or unbeliever should enter, that person might think the worshipers are out of their minds (1 Cor. 14.23). So Paul stresses that ‘all things’, including a psalm, a teaching, a revelation, speaking in tongues (ecstasy), and prophesying, should ‘be done for building up’ (1 Cor. 14.26-33).
The noun translated as ‘building up’ is oikodome, and in the New Testament it is always used in the sense of ‘edification’. It is from the root of the verb oikodomeo, and the two words are favorites of Paul and occur twenty times, fifteen in the Corinthian letters. The significant thing is that in every instance Paul uses the words in contexts with implications for the moral life of converts. Paul wants them to be edified in a way that leads to their moral and spiritual growth.

Indeed, for the purpose of such building up, that is, growth in moral and spiritual life, the Lord gave authority to genuine apostles: ‘Now, even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for tearing you down, I will not be ashamed of it’ (2 Cor. 10.8). Paul writes to the converts angrily in order that when he visits them again he may not have to be severe in using the authority that the Lord gave him ‘for building up and not for tearing down’ (2 Cor. 13.10; see also 2 Cor. 12.19). These ideas of Paul concerning worship and upbuilding in the church appear also in later letters.

Paul exhorts the converts at Rome to pursue the things making for a peaceful life and for the upbuilding of one another. Converts ought not eat or drink what they want if such action offends fellow converts who may be sensitive about eating foods they regard as improper. ‘If your brother is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love’ (Rom. 14.15-21; see also 1 Cor. 8.11-13). In the Romans context, as elsewhere, Paul speaks of upbuilding or edification of converts in their relationships with each other. His words, especially in Rom. 15.2, make this clear: ‘Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor’. The word translated as ‘please’ is aresko, which means ‘please’ with the idea of service given willingly to others, a part of early church worship in the truest sense of the term.

In contexts where either a Greek verb (latreuo) or noun (latreia) meaning ‘worship’ is used there is also a distinctive blending of the idea of worship and moral life. Words for worship occur first in the letter to the Romans. The basic meaning of the Greek words sometimes translated as ‘worship’ is service. In the New Testament such service is always used with reference to God, not to humans. Paul uses the verb latreuo that way in Rom. 1.9 where, in writing to prepare the church at Rome for his visit, he says that he serves (latreuo) God with his spirit in the gospel of God’s Son. He uses it in a similar way in defence of himself against some Jews at Philippi: ‘For it is we who are the circumcision, who worship (latreuo) in the Spirit of God (worship God in Spirit) and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh’ (Phil. 3.3). Again Paul links worship inseparably with morality, as the words ‘have no confidence in the flesh’, as
against the Spirit, indicate. Worship (latreia) is one of the things that belong to the Jews (Rom. 9.4).

In Rom. 1.25 Paul uses the verb latreuo (here, meaning ‘to serve’) and one ‘to worship’ (sebazomai) together. He is reproving the Gentiles because they did not become converts. They ‘worshiped and served the creature [idol] rather than the Creator’ [God]. Paul says that the converts worshiped idols as a part of their immoral lives (see especially Rom. 1.18-32). In strong contrast, he describes true worship in Rom. 12.1: ‘I appeal to you...by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (reasonable) worship’ (latreia). This passage is part of Paul’s description of the new life in Christ (Romans 12–14). The word translated as ‘spiritual’ (logikos) may also be taken as ‘reasonable’. When converts worship God, it means that their inner spiritual lives and their outward behavior conform to his will.

The passages on worship show that it was the blending of worship and moral life that first distinguished early converts in their worship from that of pagans. In the religions of the Greco-Roman world of Paul’s time emotional rapture was a chief feature of worship. In the worship of Dionysus, god of wine, ecstasy caused by excessive consumption of the beverage was the usual and accepted norm. While emotional expressions, such as speaking in tongues and other modes of joy and enthusiasm, were a part of early worship among converts, excesses were discouraged, and drunkenness was considered debauchery. Instead of being saturated with wine, converts were to be filled with the Spirit.

About Spiritual Gifts. Believers at Corinth claimed various spiritual gifts, including the working of miracles, prophesying, teaching, and the highly emotional phenomenon known as speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12.1-11). Paul uses the example of the human body and its parts to show how the various gifts should be used. Because all gifts are given by the same Spirit, they should be used for the good of the whole church, not for the satisfaction of individuals (1 Cor. 12.12-31). In a superb chapter (1 Cor. 13.1-13), Paul says that love is the most excellent gift, surpassing even faith and hope. The believers, therefore, are to make love their aim and to use their gifts for building up, decency, and order in the community of believers (1 Cor. 14.1-40). Whenever Paul uses the word translated as ‘building up’ or ‘edification’, it has the metaphorical meaning of developing moral and spiritual maturity, the most important purpose of worship.

About the Resurrection of the Dead. Some converts apparently still did not comprehend the belief in the resurrection of the body as Paul had taught it
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Finally, in 1 Corinthians Paul deals with various matters, including the Corinthians’ responsibility for the contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem, his plans to visit Corinth, and possible visits also by Timothy and Apollos. He exhorts the believers to stand firm in their faith (fulness) and to do all they do in love and sends greetings. He closes the letter with a personal greeting and benediction (1 Cor. 16.1-24).

Summary

As a whole, 1 Corinthians informs us honestly about the serious problems in an early church established by Paul and his companions. The problems range from divisions and quarreling among the members to serious moral problems and misunderstandings in early services of worship. But there is also the beautiful, lyrical chapter on the superiority of love (1 Corinthians 13) and the one giving assurance of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15).

2 Corinthians 10–13

The Situation in Corinth That Evoked These Chapters

Assuming that 2 Corinthians is not a unity, especially because of the drastic change in mood between chs. 1–9 and 10–13, we begin the story of 2 Corinthians with chs. 10–13. As we already learned, these chapters are possibly a fragment of a lost letter and clearly show that the situation at Corinth had
gotten worse. Paul’s long letter (1 Corinthians) had certainly not alleviated the differences between Paul and his rivals. In fact, the differences had intensified to the point that the parties involved had united against Paul.

**Paul and his Rivals**

It may be that some new mission competitors had come to Corinth and were causing a new kind of unrest in the church there. Apparently they had claimed to be superior to Paul in some way or other, perhaps in their ability to persuade their hearers through clever rhetoric. However, Paul must have become reconciled with Apollos, because he does not mention his name in 2 Corinthians. Some of Paul’s competitors apparently were Jewish, as his terse statements about his own Jewish background seem to indicate: ‘Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I’ (2 Cor. 11.22). And most importantly, Paul says, ‘Are they ministers of Christ?... I am a better one’ (2 Cor. 11.23). Paul writes that he is ‘not at all inferior to these super-apostles’ (2 Cor. 12.11) and tries to prove it.

Paul’s rivals no longer merely question his authority. They heap up accusations against him, so from beginning to end Paul is on the defensive in 2 Corinthians 10–13. The pronouns ‘I’ and ‘myself’ in 2 Cor. 10.1 immediately indicate that he as a person is under attack.

The converts accused Paul of being humble when present but bold when away from them (2 Cor. 10.1-6). He has acted ‘according to the flesh’ (Greek text; 2 Cor. 10.4) and boasted a bit too much about his authority (2 Cor. 10.8). Although Paul presents a strong case in his letters, he is weak when present, and his speech is contemptible (2 Cor. 10.10). He has been excessively forward in his dealings with the converts (2 Cor. 10.13-18). Apparently the converts took Paul’s not accepting pay for his mission activity, as he had done in some other churches, as a sign of insincerity and lack of authority as an apostle (2 Cor. 11.7-11). He had written to the Corinthians that love is the most excellent gift (1 Cor. 13.1-13) and that they should pursue love (1 Cor. 14.1); and now, apparently, they are accusing Paul of not loving them, but God knows he does (2 Cor. 11.11).

The church at Corinth maintained that it was in a less favored position than Paul’s other churches and that Paul had not sufficiently demonstrated the marks of true apostleship (2 Cor. 12.11-13). The converts even accused Paul of trying to take advantage of them and of being deceptive by sending Titus to manipulate their contribution to the fund for Jerusalem. Paul had made much of not asking for money for his work while in Corinth (1 Cor. 9.3-18), but now he has become ‘crafty’ and pocketed the contribution himself (2 Cor. 12.14-18).
Little wonder, then, in light of such accusations, that Paul is hurt and angry when he writes the four chapters of his painful letter (2 Corinthians 10–13). Moreover, the particular persons at Corinth, whom Paul refers to as super-apostles and disguised as Satan (2 Cor. 11.5, 12-15; 12.11), were an additional thorn in his side. But whether those super-apostles were conservative Jewish converts from the branch of the Christ movement in Jerusalem, or other believing or pagan itinerant preachers and miracle workers, or perhaps Gnostics, we do not know. Nor do we know if they helped to undermine Paul’s position at Corinth or if it was already undermined and they only helped to make the situation worse.

Paul’s Response to the Situation

Paul begins his reply to the Corinthians’ accusations by saying that he has not written anything he would not say when present and that both his authority and his conduct come from God and Christ (2 Cor. 10.1-18). Then in 2 Cor. 11.1–12.18 he presents his qualifications as an apostle. He virtually accuses the boastful Corinthian believers of thinking that Christ belongs to them rather than that they belong to Christ. But then he does a lot of boasting himself (2 Cor. 11.1–12.13). Paul may be unskilled in speech but not in knowledge, so he is not inferior to the super-apostles (2 Cor. 11.1-6). He did not accept support from the converts in Corinth because he did not want to burden them. It is his opponents who are deceitful and disguise themselves as true apostles of Christ (2 Cor. 11.7-15).

Paul can even outdo his opponents in Jewishness; and, more importantly, he is a better minister of Christ. The proof of this is his many sufferings for the sake of Christ (2 Cor. 11.16-33). But Paul’s greatest qualification as an apostle comes from ‘visions and revelations of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 12.1-13). We have already learned that we cannot be sure if in his statement about knowing ‘a person in Christ…caught up to the third heaven’, he is speaking about himself or someone else. At any rate, he wants the converts to know that he is not at all inferior to the super-apostles, an assertion he has made before (2 Cor. 12.11-13).

Paul plans to visit the Corinthians a third time when he will be as severe as the situation requires. He reiterates that he does not want to burden them with financial support because he loves them and is not after their money. He has been speaking as a person responsible only to Christ for their welfare. Paul exhorts his readers to examine themselves to see whether they are maintaining their faithfulness and not failing to live as morally responsible believers (2 Cor. 12.14–13.10).

In 2 Cor. 12.20 Paul writes that when he comes to Corinth he may find the Corinthians not as he desires and that they may find him not as they
want. Here the word taken as ‘find’ is *heurisko*, the meaning of which goes deeper than our word ‘find’, usually used in the sense of finding something that has been lost or discovering something new or different. However, for Paul, *heurisko* contains the idea of being under inquiry, close observation, or examination. Elsewhere, as in 2 Cor. 12.20, he uses it with reference to character traits. Stewards should ‘be found trustworthy’ (1 Cor. 4.2). If Paul and his co-workers were not preaching the resurrection of Christ, they would even be ‘found to be misrepresenting God’ (1 Cor. 15.15). If the converts are not found prepared with their gift for the holy ones in Jerusalem, Paul and they would be humiliated (2 Cor. 9.4; see also 2 Cor. 11.12; Gal. 2.17; Rom. 7.21; Phil. 2.7; 3.9). Again, the language of Paul shows concern for morality that is generally overlooked. When he returns to Corinth, the leaders and he will find out or learn the genuineness of each other’s character. The scrutiny of the characters of all persons, including his own and that of his co-workers, as well as that of his adversaries, was necessary.

Finally, Paul exhorts the converts to mend their ways (RSV, REB) or ‘put things in order’ (NRSV). The deeper meaning of Paul’s word *katartizo* was mentioned in connection with 1 Cor. 1.10, where he asked the Corinthians to be perfectly joined together in the same mind to overcome their dissensions. Paul wants all the believers at Corinth to be perfectly joined together themselves and with him. His word *katartizo* shows the depth of his feelings toward the troubled Corinthians when confronted with divisive mission preachers.

2 Corinthians 1–9

After Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 10–13, he later regretted what he had said. This appears obvious from the fact that he refers to those chapters, or parts of them, as a painful letter (2 Cor. 2.2-4; 7.8). In contrast to chs. 10–13, which are sometimes disjointed, chs. 1–9 (excepting 6.14–7.1) are a coherent unit. And in contrast to the last section of 2 Corinthians, which is filled with divisive misunderstanding and seeming irreconciliation, the first section (2 Corinthians 1–9) exudes happy harmony and comforting reconciliation. It is, therefore, with deliberate forethought that Paul begins the body of this section with an emotional thanksgiving to God: ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to console those who are in any affliction with the consolation with which we ourselves are consoled by God’ (2 Cor. 1.3-4). How different this beginning is from the one in 2 Cor. 10.1. There the pronouns are ‘I’ and
‘myself’. Here they are ‘us’, ‘our’, and ‘we’, and they set the mood for the following chapters. Paul goes on to say that because of God’s comfort it is possible to share comfort in mutual affliction (2 Cor. 1.5-7).

In 2 Cor. 1.12–7.16 (omitting 6.14–7.1), Paul discusses the main issues on which there has been misunderstanding but in a much gentler tone. He had no ulterior motives for writing as he did, and he changed his plans for visiting Corinth so that his visit might not be another painful one (2 Cor. 1.12–2.4). Paul asks that any member who has caused pain be forgiven by the community of believers and says frankly that anyone they forgive he will forgive (2 Cor. 2.5-11). He admits that he could not concentrate on his mission work in Troas because he had not heard from Titus soon after he delivered the painful letter. Now Paul thanks God that his subsequent work in Macedonia was successful (2 Cor. 2.12-17).

The Corinthian believers themselves are the best evidence of his qualifications as an apostle. This was made possible, of course, through God in the Spirit (2 Cor. 3.4-6). Commenting on Exod. 34.29-35, Paul says that the Lord or the Spirit has shown greater glory in the preaching of the gospel than at the giving of the law to Moses (2 Cor. 3.7-18). Paul denies that he had practiced cunning, because he does not preach about himself but about ‘Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus’ sake’ (2 Cor. 4.1-6). Then in the following verses, as in the ones preceding the quotation, Paul’s thought returns to God: ‘God’s mercy’, ‘God’s word’, ‘in the sight of God’, ‘the image of God’, ‘the God who said’, ‘the glory of God’, ‘power belongs to God’, and so on.

In spite of his suffering, Paul has not been driven to despair or defeated, because his mind is fixed on things eternal, not on things temporal (2 Cor. 4.7-18). Like Paul, believers have the assurance of a ‘heavenly dwelling’. This metaphor seems to represent a later phase of Paul’s thought on the resurrection of the body than in 1 Corinthians 15 (2 Cor. 5.1-10). The Spirit already joins the present with the future. Thus, the Spirit provides continuity between one’s present and future life. Perhaps Paul wants most to assure the converts that the next life will be better than the present one, because they will then be with the Lord. No matter, though, converts still conduct their lives by faith, not by sight. And the judgment still looms before them, when all will be responsible for what they have done in this life (2 Cor. 5.6-10).

Although Paul and the Corinthians have been reconciled, he continues to remind them of his apostolic work. God has entrusted him and his co-workers with the message of reconciliation. It is for God, urged on by the love of Christ. Theologically, Paul wants the converts to know that Christ
died for them, and morally it means that they no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them. Paul comes to a high point in his conception of morality for converts: ‘If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God’ (2 Cor. 5.17-18). This was made possible for converts because God was in Christ reconciling them and the world to himself. Converts' past trespasses are not counted against them, and Paul urges them to be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5.11–6.2).

Theologically, reconciliation is made possible because God made the sinless Christ ‘to be sin...so that in him we might become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor. 5.21). Paul’s idea of converts becoming new creations and the righteousness of God, along with other passages, are further evidence for believing that after converts are baptized they were expected to remain free from sin. In our study of Galatians we will consider Paul’s idea of new creations in depth.

In 2 Cor. 6.3-13 Paul reviews his hardships in a less boastful way and expresses his joy and comfort at the improved relationship with the Corinthians. In 2 Cor. 7.5-16 Paul returns to the subject of his travels left off in 2 Cor. 2.12-13. His tone is gentle as he expresses his joy at the good news brought by Titus. The painful letter hurt both Paul and the Corinthians. But, in spite of that, the letter had a good result – it caused them to repent. Titus shares Paul’s joy at their repentance. (Recall our discussion of repentance in Paul.) Reconciliation has been accomplished. And Paul’s statement that he has ‘complete confidence’ in the converts (2 Cor. 7.16) is in sharp contrast to his expressions of boldness against them with which he began the painful letter (2 Cor. 10.1-3).

2 Corinthians 8 and 9 deal with the subject of the collection for the poor saints in Jerusalem mentioned at the end of 1 Corinthians. Gently and tactfully Paul urges his readers to give voluntarily and generously, not because he commends it but willingly and cheerfully. ‘The one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.’ ‘God loves a cheerful giver’ (2 Cor. 9.6-7). Notice how Paul emphasizes that the converts’ giving is a good work and that as a result they will have blessings in abundance, and God will ‘increase the harvest’ of their righteousness.

Summary

1 Corinthians gives us excellent insight into one of Paul’s churches as its members faced difficult moral problems and challenges from competing mission preachers. Because of those problems, 2 Corinthians provides a clearer understanding of Paul as a person. We see him not as a great intel-
lectual but as a man with strong emotions. In 2 Corinthians 10–13 he is dejected and angry, but in 2 Corinthians 1–9 he is happy and confident.

Several decades after Paul wrote his letters, early Christians collected the writings that they thought best told the story of their religion in the name and Spirit of Christ. When Paul’s letters were collected and arranged for publication near the end of the first century CE, or perhaps a little later, Paul’s change in mood between the two fragments of his letters, which have been incorporated as parts of 2 Corinthians in the New Testament, was apparently detected. As a result, chs. 1–9 of 2 Corinthians were placed before chs. 10–13, in order to conceal the animosity between Paul and one of his most widely known churches. The assurance of comfort with which 2 Corinthians begins would, like the thanksgiving in 1 Corinthians 1, commend the letter to Christian readers.
Chapter 7

LETTERS FROM PAUL’S MID-CAREER: GALATIANS

Common Core of Material in Galatians and Romans

A casual reading of Galatians and Romans indicates that those two letters are closely related because there is a common core of subject matter. Both deal with Abraham’s faith, the Jewish law and its function, union with Christ, slave and free, and flesh and spirit. They both center on the belief that faithfulness, not circumcision and other ceremonial aspects of Jewish law, is the primary requirement for Gentiles being made righteous and becoming members of the Christ movement or the religion in transition. And in both letters Paul quotes from the Old Testament to support his arguments (see further under Romans in the next Chapter).

The address, ‘to the church es of Galatia’ (Gal. 1.2), indicates that Galatians is distinctive in that it is directed toward several churches in a particular region, not just to one church. And since Paul addresses his readers as ‘Galatians’ (Gal. 3.1), the letter must have been intended for a group of churches somewhere in the Roman province of Galatia (please see the map).

Where Did the Galatians Live?

The author of Acts nowhere mentions the word ‘Galatia’ in his narrative of Paul’s journeys, although he twice uses the expression ‘region of Phrygia and Galatia’, although in reverse order (Acts 16.6; 18.23). This may indicate that when Paul writes ‘to the churches of Galatia’ (Gal. 1.2), he meant the churches at Antioch in Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, that he established on his first journey (Acts 13–14). But since this is uncertain, some scholars suggest that by ‘the churches of Galatia’ Paul was addressing churches in the northern part of the province, more properly referred to as ‘Galatia’ because it was the original region taken over and settled by the Gauls. But neither the writer of Acts nor Paul ever refers to Pessinus, Ancyra, or Tavium, cities in north Galatia where churches might have been established. In short, we
do not know the precise destination of the letter addressed ‘to the churches of Galatia’. However, the churches were located somewhere within the Roman province of Galatia.

In Gal. 4.13 Paul writes that ‘it was because of a physical infirmity’ that he ‘first announced the gospel’ to them. The words translated as ‘first’ are to proteron and may be translated as ‘at first’ (RSV; ‘first’, NRSV), ‘formerly’, or ‘originally’ (REB), or ‘the first of two occasions’. Paul’s language probably indicates that he had visited the churches of Galatia twice before he wrote to the converts there. Perhaps the visits took place during separate journeys. Or, perhaps, they occurred during his first journey, when Paul established the churches of Galatia (Acts 13.13–14.18) and the second when he visited them again on his return to Attalia before he sailed for Antioch (Acts 14.19-26). At any rate, during these visits, whenever they occurred, Paul apparently was unaware of the problem that had developed and that occasioned his letter to the churches of Galatia. In fact, Paul had been satisfied with the faith and manner of life of the Galatians as new converts (Gal. 3.1-5; 5.7-10).

**When Was Galatians Written?**

Some scholars regard Galatians as the earliest of Paul’s letters and therefore written from Antioch in Syria at the end of his first journey about 48 or 49 CE. Because of its close affinities with Romans, we deal with Galatians after Paul’s earliest letters, those to Thessalonica and Corinth.

If we were not familiar with Galatians and Romans, we would learn little, if anything, from 1 Thessalonians and the Corinthian letters about Paul’s concept of Gentiles being made righteous by faithfulness, not works of the law. For that reason it is reasonable to believe that he arrived at the more advanced theological beliefs he writes about in Romans only after his experience with the converts in the churches of Galatia.

Along with Romans, we treat Galatians as coming from the middle period of Paul’s mission activity. Moreover, as we shall see, it appears quite likely that the situation in Galatia and Paul’s response to that situation did much to motivate Paul to compose his letter to the Romans. Galatians, therefore, could have been written from Antioch, Ephesus, or Corinth about 53–55 CE. However, neither the precise destination nor the place of writing nor the date can be accurately determined.

**The Main Problem in Galatia**

Several sentences in Gal. 1.1-10 and Gal. 3.1-5 indicate that certain persons had been working against Paul after he had visited them. He writes: ‘I
am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel' and 'O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?"

The words 'a different gospel' (Gal. 1.6) appear also in 2 Cor. 11.4, where the language is conditional ('if you receive...a different gospel') and, therefore, illusive. But in Gal. 1.6 the 'different gospel' is a demand that Gentiles be circumcised and obey Jewish law. And instead of 'false apostles' in 2 Cor. 11.13, Paul writes about 'the circumcision faction' in Gal. 2.12 who want 'to compel' Galatian Gentile converts to be circumcised (Gal. 6.12-13).

Paul’s adversaries in Galatia were probably fellow Jewish believers from Jerusalem or, perhaps, Gentile converts within the churches of Galatia who were practicing Judaism. They not only believed that Jesus was the Messiah; they also believed that Jesus brought God’s covenant with Abraham to fulfillment. Why did Paul’s Jewish adversaries think so?

Jews believed that they were the descendants of Abraham and that only Jews, no one else, should share in God’s promises to him. Jews who joined the Christ movement believed that in order to share the blessings Jesus had given one had to become a member of the Jewish people by first becoming a convert to Judaism. The only proper way to become a convert to the Christ movement, therefore, was to become a Jew first. The acceptance of Judaism, of course, meant that men had to be circumcised and all persons observe Jewish dietary laws and keep the sabbath holy. The new religion, then, would be a kind of glorified Judaism but without the spiritual freedom in Christ that came by living under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The 'false brothers (pseudadelphous) secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus’, wanted converts to be circumcised (Gal. 2.4; see also Gal. 5.1, 13). It was the loss of this freedom, freedom in Christ, which Paul so deeply experienced and so zealously taught, that he regarded as the major threat to the churches of Galatia. This was the situation with which Paul had to deal in his letter to the churches there.

It is important to learn that Paul was not condemning observance of the law for the law’s sake. Rather, he was concerned that the Galatians were failing to live by the Spirit. Living by the Spirit made the rites of circumcision and dietary laws unnecessary (Gal. 3.1-5; 5.1, 13-25; and elsewhere). Living by the Spirit is the point Paul most stresses in his letter to the Galatians, because for persons who do that circumcision and dietary laws are insignificant.
Paul'sResponse to the Problem

Paul's Jewish adversaries are usually referred to by scholars as Judaizers because they wanted converts to observe Jewish practices. Paul’s reply to them is personal and polemical, direct and defensive. He wishes that everyone who advocates a gospel contrary to that preached by him would ‘be accursed’ (Gal. 1.8-9). He even wishes that those who unsettle the Galatian converts ‘would castrate themselves’ (Gal. 5.12).

Galatians 1.1-4 is a brief statement of Paul’s own theology as a monotheistic Jew committed to life in Christ. Paul’s belief in the resurrection gave significance to the death of Jesus. However, the words ‘who gave himself for our sins’ (Gal. 1.4; see also 1 Cor. 15.3-4) should be taken with reference to sins committed before forgiveness through baptism – ‘while we still were sinners’ (Rom. 5.8). Recall again: ‘previously sinned’ (2 Cor. 12.21) and ‘sinned previously’ (2 Cor. 13.2) and ‘passed over the sins previously committed’ (Rom. 3.25).

In these passages Paul is speaking about sins before baptism. He was not interested in the forgiveness of converts’ sins after their baptism but in their not sinning again (recall earlier comments on this point). Moreover, Christ’s giving of himself was for a moral purpose: ‘to set us free from the present evil age’ – the evils of this world right now. And all happened in accordance with the will of God.

Paul argues that the law of Moses was always secondary to faithfulness because Abraham believed God before the law was ever given. The law served negatively to make mankind aware of sin which kept humanity in slavery to sin. But the law was ineffective in helping mankind attain righteousness in God’s sight. By accepting the ceremonial aspects of the law converts would be returning to the bondage of ‘the weak and beggarly elemental spirits’, which they worshiped before they came to know God. Only the gift of the Holy Spirit brings freedom, makes believers true children of Abraham, and thus children of God, and enables them to live truly moral and righteous lives.

Paul and his Adversaries (Autobiographical)

Galatians 1.6–2.14 is mostly autobiographical. (Recall our earlier discussion of Paul’s special religious experience.) Because some opponents had not only attacked his message but his personal qualifications as well, Paul declares that his apostolic authority comes from Jesus Christ and from God, not humans (Gal. 1.1). Instead of the usual thanksgiving, Paul expresses his indignant astonishment that the Galatians are so quickly for-
saking their original teaching for another gospel (Gal. 1.6-9). Paul did not become moved to preach the gospel through human efforts but ‘through a revelation of Jesus Christ’, a possible allusion to his experience on the way to Damascus reported in Acts 9.1-19. Galatians 1.10-12 may give the immediate reason for the letter.

Before Paul became a member of the Christ movement he was one of the great majority of Jews who refused to accept Jesus as the Messiah. He tells the Galatian believers of his sound Jewish training, admits his earlier persecution of followers of Jesus (see ‘any who belonged to the Way’ in Acts 9.2), and confesses that God called him to preach to the Gentiles (Gal. 1.13-17). Paul then relates his travels after his vision and maintains that he had begun his missionary work before meeting authorities in the church at Jerusalem. When he did meet them, they acknowledged his successful work among the Gentiles and glorified God because of it (Gal. 1.18–2.4).

A confrontation at Antioch between Peter and Paul did not lessen Paul’s conviction about ‘the truth of the gospel’ for Jews and Gentiles as he had preached it (Gal. 2.5-14). At Antioch Peter ate with Gentiles until some of his fellow conservative religious brothers came there from Jerusalem. Then ‘he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction’ (Gal. 2.12). Peter’s insincerity convinced Paul to assert that both Jews and Gentiles are made righteous by faithfulness, not by works of the law (Gal. 2.15-21). Paul defends this thesis in Gal. 3.1–5.1 and throughout Romans 1–11. It is important, therefore, that we understand what Paul means by being made righteous and faithfulness.

Righteousness through Faithfulness

Although Paul felt that he had been a superior Jew (Gal. 1.14; Phil. 3.4-6), he had to live and practice his trade (1 Thess. 2.9; 1 Cor. 4.12; Acts 18.1-4) among Gentiles as well as Jews. While practicing his trade and doing mission work at the same time, it would not be too difficult for Paul to moderate his attitude toward the Jewish law in order to make his work more effective among Gentiles. He found it convenient to become all things to all persons that he might win some. To the Jew he became a Jew to win Jews. Although not himself under the law, he became as one under the law to win those observing the law. To those without the law, he became like one of them to win some of them, though not himself without law toward God yet under the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9.19-23).

When eating among Gentiles he probably could not obey all Jewish dietary laws. Even Peter, the more conservative Jew, learned that such observance was not practical among Gentiles in Antioch (Gal. 2.11-14). Both in and outside of Palestine there were Jews as individuals and as groups who
ignored some external observances but observed other laws. Where it was impractical or impossible to obey certain legal requirements, it was easy to conclude that such requirements were not binding under the circumstances. Apparently Paul's personal religious experience helped to lead him to precisely that conclusion. Converts living by the Spirit did not need to observe the ceremonial aspects of the law, such as circumcision and dietary regulations. This is evident from his words to the Roman converts: ‘Now we are discharged from the law (nomos), dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit’ (Rom. 7.6; see Chapter 9). Led by the Spirit, converts are not under ceremonial aspects of the law (Gal. 5.18). There were, however, ‘just requirements of the law’ that Paul still believed were valid for all converts, as we shall learn in our study of Romans.

Before his special religious experience Paul thought that the law separated Jews and Gentiles, but after that experience, he came to believe the law (nomos), as it was generally understood, should no longer be a barrier to either Gentiles or Jews who wanted to join the Christ movement. During Paul’s former life as a strict Pharisaic Jew, faithfulness toward God and the law were the determining factors in his life. But after his special religious experience, in addition to his profound faithfulness toward God, he learned certain beliefs about Jesus, along with a renewed concern for moral life, life by the Spirit. The law should not prevent Jews or Gentiles who were faithful toward God from becoming members of the new ‘Israel of God’, for whom neither circumcision nor uncircumcision ‘but a new creation’ was important (Gal. 6.15-16; see below).

In Gal. 2.16 Paul says: ‘We know that a person is justified (made righteous) not by the works of the law but through the faith[fulness] of Jesus Christ’ (see below). We must be sure to understand what Paul means by ‘the works of the law’. When Christians today speak about faith versus works, works is usually understood in the sense of ‘good works’ or ‘good deeds’. But this completely misses the point Paul is making about righteousness through faithfulness, not works. Paul sometimes uses the Greek word ergon, meaning ‘work’, with reference to something good to be done (e.g. 1 Cor. 15.58; 2 Cor. 9.8-10; 11.15; Gal. 6.10; Rom. 2.6-10) or to some evil to be avoided (e.g. Gal. 5.19-21; Rom. 13.12). But when Paul speaks about righteousness, faithfulness, and works, he means works of Jewish law. And when he contrasts faithfulness and works of the law (Gal. 2.15-16; 3.2-5, 10-12; Rom. 3.20-28), it is crucial to understand that he does not mean all aspects of the law. He usually means works of the law in a specific and limited sense, mostly with reference to circumcision and dietary regulations, not the law as a whole, and not works in the sense of good deeds.
It is clear from several statements in both Galatians and Romans that Paul did not negate all Jewish law for converts. To the Galatians he writes: ‘The whole law (nomos) is summed up in a single commandment, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself”’ (Gal. 5.14; from Lev. 19.18). This statement is clearly addressed to Gentile converts, and Paul writes the same way also in Rom. 13.8-10.

At least once Paul uses the expression ‘work of the law’ in an ethical sense. In Rom. 2.14-16 he says that when Gentiles who do not have the law ‘do instinctively what the law requires’, without having the law, ‘are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.’ Then their consciences and their ethical deliberations about right and wrong are enough to account for their deeds ‘on the day when...God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all’.

With respect to faithfulness versus works, Paul stands in contrast to the writer of James, who does place faith and works as deeds of mercy in antithesis (Jas 1.25; 2.14-26). If, indeed, the writer of James knew Paul’s letters, he misunderstood Paul because Paul never places faithfulness and deeds of kindness in antithesis.

The modern dichotomy of faith and good works as deeds of love and kindness, not works of the law, is false. It is contrary to what Paul himself says at every phase of his development and writing. Therefore, we must recognize Paul’s prevailing emphasis on moral probity as necessary for remaining in the communities of believers with which he was concerned (see 1 Cor. 5.1-2, 9-13; 6.9-11).

**Paul’s Words** Dikaioo and Dikaiosyne. The word translated as ‘justified’ or ‘reckoned as righteous’ (footnote, NRSV) in Gal. 2.16 and elsewhere is dikaioo. Except for 1 Cor. 4.4 and 6.11, it occurs in Paul’s undisputed letters only in Galatians and Romans (see 1 Tim. 3.16; Tit. 3.7). Along with adjectives of moral meaning, dikaioo means to ‘make, declare, reckon, or pronounce righteous’ (dikaios). The noun form from the verb is dikaiosyne and basically means the characteristic of the righteous person (ho dikaios), the one conforming to the will of God in thought and deed, and hence ‘righteousness’ or ‘uprightness’. This is the way it is used in the Septuagint, with which Paul was very familiar. See, for example, Gen. 15.6: Abram ‘believed the Lord; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness’. ‘Righteousness’, therefore, is a preferable translation of Paul’s dikaiosyne to ‘justification’. Although justification is a meaning given in modern translations, it is not listed in most lexicons. ‘Justification’ got into Pauline studies under
the influence of Martin Luther and Reformation theology, especially in
Germany, and incorrectly, I think, is still retained in many such studies.

According to Paul, then, being made righteous (literally, ‘righteoused’) really means receiving forgiveness of past sins. This is possible only by God’s grace (a point Paul elaborates in Romans) through the faithfulness of Christ; see below), not through the observances of ceremonial laws.

Several times we have spoken about Paul and the book of Acts. The word *dikaioo* occurs only once in Acts (13.39) and *dikaiosyne* only four times (Acts 10.35; 13.10; 17.31; 24.25). At no time does the writer of Acts reveal any sure knowledge of Paul’s so-called doctrine of ‘justification by faith in Jesus’. In his speech at Antioch in Pisidia Paul speaks about Jesus whom God raised from the dead, and says that through Jesus ‘forgiveness of sins is proclaimed’. The writer of Acts also has Paul say: ‘by this Jesus everyone who believes [in God; see ‘grace of God’ in Acts 13.43; see also 13.44-47] is made righteous [or ‘set free’, NRSV; *dikaioo*] from all those things from which you could not be made righteous [NRSV, ‘freed’; *dikaioo*] by the law of Moses’ (Acts 13.36-39; my trans.). Although here Luke echoes a Pauline idea about believing and freedom from the law, a translation of *dikaioo* with ‘justify’ would not be appropriate.

In Acts 10.35, a passage mentioned earlier, Peter says that the person who reverences God and practices righteousness (*ergazomenos dikaiosyne*; lit., ‘works righteousness’) is acceptable to him. In Acts 13.10 and 17.31 *dikaiosyne* is to be taken as ‘righteousness’. In Acts 24.24-25 Luke has Paul speak before the governor Felix ‘concerning faith in Christ Jesus’ and ‘discuss justice (*dikaiosyne*), self-control, and the coming judgment’. Here *dikaiosyne* could be taken in the broad sense of ‘justice’ (NRSV), although ‘righteousness’ is quite appropriate, especially in light of the future judgment.

The Faithfulness of Christ

In Gal. 2.16 Paul’s words (*dia pisteos Iesou Christou*), which I have translated earlier as ‘through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ’ are translated as ‘through faith in Jesus Christ’ in the NRSV and the REB. However, in the NRSV ‘the faith of Jesus Christ’ is given as an alternative translation in a footnote to Gal. 2.16 and similar phrases elsewhere. The correct choice between the two translations cannot be made solely on the basis of Greek grammar, so neither translation is definitely grammatically incorrect. Therefore we have to look for other reasons for choosing ‘faithfulness of Jesus’, a crucial point, I think, for understanding Paul’s thought overall in a way not yet generally accepted.
Paul’s word *pistis*, which is often better translated as ‘faithfulness’, included intellectual assent to certain beliefs, such as ‘We believe (*pisteuo*, verb) that Jesus died and rose again’ (1 Thess. 4.14) and ‘Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures’ (1 Cor. 15.3). Because of the words ‘we believe that’, it is generally agreed that Paul received this statement of faith from tradition before him. Indeed, with respect to the creedal statement in 1 Cor. 15.3, Paul says that he passed on to his readers ‘what I in turn had received’. Moreover, when Paul gives his own statements about Jesus’ resurrection, he always says that God raised Jesus, not that Jesus rose on his own power (see, e.g., 1 Thess. 1.10; 1 Cor. 6.14; 15.12-17; 2 Cor. 4.14; Gal. 1.1; Rom. 4.24-25; 8.11).

For Paul *pistis* is more than intellectual assent to certain abstract or philosophical propositions. In the Septuagint the Hebrew noun *emunah*, for which ‘faithfulness’ is a good meaning, is often translated with *pistis*. The psalmist, for example, writes: ‘The word of the Lord is righteous, and all his works are done in faithfulness’ (Hebrew; LXX, *pistis*; Ps. 33.4). In Isa. 11.5 we read: ‘And righteousness (*LXX, dikaiosyne*) shall be the belt of his loins and faithfulness the belt of his hips’. In the Hebrew text of both passages the ideas of righteousness and faithfulness are placed together in a parallel construction, with reference to God in the psalm passage and to the messianic ruler (Isa. 11.1-10) in the Isaiah passage. Paul writes that God ‘is faithful’ (*pistos*, adjective) in keeping his promises (1 Thess. 5.24; 1 Cor. 1.9; 10.13; 2 Cor. 1.18).

Paul attributes the qualities of righteousness (1 Cor. 1.30; Rom. 5.18-21) and obedience (Rom. 5.19; Phil. 2.8) to Christ, and he also says that converts ‘become the righteousness of God’ (2 Cor. 5.21). Would it not be natural, therefore, for Paul to think also of the faithfulness of Christ? This seems to be a plausible suggestion in light of Isa. 11.5 where righteousness and faithfulness are attributes of the messianic figure. Paul knew Isaiah 11, because in Rom. 15.12 he quotes Isa. 11.10 as part of his proof from scripture that Christ became a minister to the circumcised (Jews) to confirm the promises of God to the patriarchs and for the hope of Gentiles.

We have already learned that in Gal. 2.20 Paul says that Christ lives in him and that the life he now lives he lives ‘in faithfulness, the faithfulness of the Son of God’ (*en pistei zo te tou huiou tou theou*). Paul believes he shares in the faithfulness of Jesus. As with the phrases ‘in Christ’ and ‘Christ in’, Paul’s sharing in Christ’s faithfulness is a part of his mystical, that is, ‘spiritually significant’, experience of the risen Christ. Or, should we say ‘mysterious’, in the sense of ‘inscrutable’, experience?

There is nothing in the undisputed letters of Paul like the statement in 2 Tim. 3.15, for example, that the sacred writings ‘are able to instruct you
for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus’. The Greek translated as ‘through faith in Christ Jesus’ is *dia pisteos tes en Christo Iesou*. Here the article *tes* with the preposition *en* stresses that the faith is in Christ in the same way the article *te* with the genitive *huiou tou theou* stresses the faithfulness of the Son of God in Gal. 2.20 and elsewhere in Paul. Compare the statement in 2 Tim. 3.15 with similar but distinctively different phrases of Paul himself in Gal. 2.16, 20; 3.22; Rom. 3.22, 26; and Phil. 3.9. None of Paul’s phrases with reference to faithfulness is the same as the phrase ‘through faith, faith in (*en*) Christ Jesus’ in 2 Tim. 3.15.

As we have learned, Paul believed he shared the faithfulness of the Son of God. In Gal. 2.16 the ‘we’ in the clause, ‘and we have come to believe in [*eis, not *en*] Christ Jesus’, represents Paul and others, including Peter, who may well have shared Paul’s ideas with respect to righteousness and the law. This is true since Paul reprimands Peter for being hypocritical because, contrary to the law, he ate with Gentiles. Paul’s reprimand would be pointless if Peter had not at least partly shared his ideas, especially about food laws (Gal. 2.11-14). Paul’s words in Gal. 2.12 that Peter feared the circumcision party may indicate that Peter himself was not fully committed to the position of the Judaizers. There is no indication that when Peter was entrusted with a mission to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles (Gal. 2.7-9) that originally the content of their mission preaching was different. In fact, Paul says that God was working through both of them (Gal. 2.8). Only in retrospect does Paul say that he and other Jews, especially Peter, became converts in order to be made righteous through the faithfulness of Christ and not on the basis of the law. This coincides precisely with Paul’s statement, also made only in retrospect, that God had set him apart for mission work to the Gentiles even before he was born (Gal. 1.15-16).

In Gal. 2.16 the words ‘we have come to believe in [*eis, ‘with regard to’] Christ Jesus’ are to be understood in the sense of being persuaded that Jesus was the Messiah (Christ). In other words, Paul and other Jews, including Peter, joined the Christ movement, because they became committed in a relationship to Jesus the Messiah in order to be made righteous through his faithfulness, not through works of the law. Paul uses believing with *eis* in only two other places (Rom. 10.14; Phil. 1.29), and in both instances it has the sense of relationship or commitment.

*Paul and the Messiah*

We must not forget that although Paul is a devotee of Christ, his monotheism is the primary theological conviction behind all he writes. Paul writes: ‘Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God’ (Gal.
2.19). Then comes the part about Paul being crucified with Christ, he is no longer living, and Christ lives in him, which we have already discussed. Now he lives by faithfulness, the faithfulness of the Son of God. It is Christ’s faithfulness that lives in Paul as a matter of experience rather than intellectual faith. Perhaps we understand Paul’s thought more accurately if we think of the faithfulness of believers as experiencing Christ’s presence in their lives rather than believing in the person of Christ. In Gal. 2.15-21, then, Paul argues against the Judaizers by saying that God’s grace (2.21) makes the ‘righteousing’ of Gentile converts possible through Christ’s faithfulness to death, not on the basis of works of the law.

The term ‘grace’ (charis) as Paul uses it in Galatians hardly has the same doctrinal meaning it has in Romans. This is true especially if we read Galatians without thinking of Romans. If you read Gal. 1.3, 6, 15; 2.9, 21; 5.4, and 6.18 and then read Romans, you will see why I say this. At any rate, the words ‘save’ (sozo) and ‘salvation’ (soteria) occur nowhere in Galatians. So when Paul wrote that letter and the letters before it, he had not yet thought out a doctrine of grace and salvation and Jesus’ role in it. And whenever Paul does speak about ‘grace’ in Galatians, as in Romans, he always associates it with the idea of being made righteous or righteousness (see Gal. 2.21; 5.4), never with the idea of ultimate salvation, which for Paul, even in Romans, is to come in the future. But the converts’ ultimate salvation depends upon their continuing to live under the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. That is the subject of Paul’s discussion in Galatians 5–6.

Righteousness and Faithfulness of Believers
Paul places the attributes of righteousness and faithfulness together in a very popular passage: ‘The one who is righteous will live by (ek) faithfulness’ (Gal. 3.11; Rom. 1.17), a quotation from Hab. 2.4. The Greek preposition ek would better be translated as ‘from’ (indicating source), with the understanding that faithfulness, not the law, is the source of life.

Paul uses the quotation from Hab. 2.4 to support his statement, ‘It is evident that no one is justified (made righteous) before God by the law’. Paul’s version corresponds neither to the Hebrew nor to the Greek text. The Hebrew reads, ‘The righteous [man] lives by his [own] faithfulness’ (toward God); the Greek reads, ‘The righteous person shall live by (from, ek) my [God’s] faithfulness’. By omitting the pronouns ‘his’ and ‘my’ Paul does not cite either text exactly. Perhaps he wants his readers to think of the faithfulness of God. This view would correspond to his idea that ‘God is faithful’ (1 Thess. 5.24; 1 Cor. 1.9; 10.13; 2 Cor. 1.18). Paul writes to the converts at Rome that the unfaithfulness of some Jews does not nullify the
faithfulness of God (Rom. 3.3). And in the same context he uses the terms ‘faithfulness’, ‘righteousness’, and ‘truth of God’ synonymously (Rom. 3.3, 5, 7).

The author of Hebrews also quotes Hab. 2.4 (Heb. 10.38) and transfers the pronoun ‘my’ (Greek, mou) of the LXX text from after faithfulness to after righteous. So the text of Hebrews reads, ‘My righteous one shall live by faithfulness’. In this way the author attributes the faithfulness to the Christian believer.

In Gal. 3.11 the quotation from Hab. 2.4 is part of a context that comes at the end of Paul’s statements about the faithfulness of Abraham. This may indicate that faithfulness in the quotation from Hab. 2.4 is that of believers in God, as with the faithfulness of Abraham. Or if the interpretation of Gal. 2.15-16, 26, and 3.22 given above is correct, then the faithfulness is that of Christ, not that of the believer. The meaning of the quotation would then be: ‘The righteous person shall live through the faithfulness of Christ’. And ‘shall live’ probably means ‘have eternal life’ as in 1 Thess. 5.10; Gal. 6.8; Rom. 2.7; 5.21; 6.22-23; 8.13. Nothing in the context indicates that Paul means ‘faith in Christ’. However, a belief that Christ ransomed the Galatian converts from the curse of the law (Gal. 3.13) may be included in the faithfulness of the believer if such faithfulness is intended. In light of Paul’s primary emphasis on God, he probably had in mind faithfulness toward God, as with Abraham and as with the Hebrew text of Hab. 2.4.

The life of a righteous person, according to Paul, comes from faithfulness, not from observance of the law, in contrast to Lev. 18.5: ‘You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances; by doing so one shall live’. In Rom. 2.13 Paul agrees with that principle: ‘For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified’ (deemed righteous). As a theologian Paul’s thought is sometimes inconsistent, but his demands for moral life are always consistent. The words in Rom. 2.13 and other passages in Paul indicate that he never intended that faithfulness made the observance of all Jewish law obsolete. Indeed, the quotation from Habakkuk implies that the unrighteous person, although that person has faith, will not live. For Paul faithfulness and righteousness are inseparable.

The Example of Abraham. Several times in Galatians and Romans Paul says that Abraham’s faithfulness was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gal. 3.6; Rom. 4.3, 9, 22; see Gen. 15.5-6). It was reckoned to him as righteousness because he believed God before he was circumcised. Circumcision was only a sign of God’s covenant with Abraham, because his righteousness came
through his faithfulness while still uncircumcised and long before there was law. All Paul’s discussion, of course, is to support his argument that converts are made righteous through faithfulness, not works of the law.

In Gal. 3.6–4.22 and Rom. 4.1-16 (Chapters 8–9 below) Paul writes about the faithfulness of Abraham. He was the first person who became righteous through faithfulness toward God. In Gal. 3.6-7 Paul quotes Gen. 15.6 to show that Abraham, the father of many nations, ‘believed God’, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, so you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham’. Since Abraham lived long before Moses, to whom the Jews believed God gave the law, Abraham’s faithfulness was an example of the gospel coming before the law in order to show that God would make the Gentiles righteous on the basis of their faithfulness toward God (Gal. 3.8, 14). Thus, ‘The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you”’ (Gal. 3.6-9). So all persons, including Paul’s adversaries, the Judaizers, who share in the promise that in Abraham all the nations would be blessed must also share his faithfulness toward God (Gal. 3.6-9). Paul never gave up his belief that the Jews were God’s special people. He simply broadened the concept to include all persons who through their faithfulness toward God are children of God in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3.26).

In support of the principle of righteousness through faithfulness, Paul first argues that it would be absurd for those who received the Spirit as the result of their faithfulness, not works of the law, to revert to observance of the law (Gal. 3.1-5). Instead of bringing blessings, the law brings a curse on whoever breaks the law; but Christ redeemed those who had faith that they might receive the Spirit through faithfulness (Gal. 3.10-14). Paul’s main argument, of course, is that God makes the Gentiles righteous (dikaioi), just as he did Abraham, from faithfulness toward God, not by works of the law.

The law does not annul God’s promises made in the covenant with his people (Gal. 3.15-18). Before faithfulness came, the law served as a paidagogos, translated as ‘disciplinarian’ in the NRSV (Gal. 3.24-25). Paul’s use of the word paidagogos (literally, ‘a boy-leader’) indicates that he had the moral aspects of the Jewish law in mind. In Greek society the paidagogos, usually a trusty slave of the family, took boys to school and provided them with writing materials, including ink. The paidagogos was also responsible for teaching the boys the fundamentals of proper behavior in accordance with the society in which they lived.

Since Christ came, however, believers in God who are baptized in the Spirit of God (see 1 Cor. 6.11) are liberated from the law’s demands.
Believers no longer need the law as a *paidagogos*. In the community of believers, there is no distinction among Jew or Greek (Gentile), slave or free, male or female. ‘All of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3.23-29). Jews, as well as Gentiles, have been sinful, so the faithfulness of Christ makes it possible for Jews who already have faithfulness toward God to have their past sins forgiven. Thus, Jews and those Gentiles who have only recently acquired faithfulness toward God are now eligible to share equally as beneficiaries of God’s promises.

In Gal. 3.23-25 there is the clearest evidence that the faithfulness in the passages we have been considering is that of Christ, not that of the believer. Paul uses these phrases: ‘before faith[fulness] came’, ‘until faith[fulness] would be revealed’, ‘until Christ came’, and ‘faith[fulness] has come’. These phrases indicate that Paul clearly identifies Christ with the faithfulness that was to come and has come. The sentence in Gal. 3.22 means, then: Christ is the personification of God’s faithfulness to his promises, and Christ’s faithfulness makes it possible for all (Gal. 3.28; compare ‘for there is no distinction’ [Acts 15.9; Rom. 3.22; 10.12]) who share his faithfulness toward God to become the beneficiaries of God’s promises.

### Baptism and Living by the Spirit

In Gal. 3.27 Paul writes: ‘As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ’. As an initiation rite, baptism was unique in that it linked baptized converts to the spiritual Christ in a moral way. Paul’s word translated as ‘clothed yourselves’ (*endyomai*) shows influence from the Hebrew scriptures. Putting on clothes is a metaphor for assuming inner moral or spiritual qualities or a different status in life. For example, ‘I put on righteousness and clothed myself with judgment like a mantle’ ([LXX Job 29.14]) and ‘Your priests shall clothe themselves with righteousness’ ([LXX Ps. 131.9; see also Ps. 34.26]).

Because converts were immersed in water, naked or scantly clothed, they dressed themselves again after being baptized. They came to share a new kind of moral and spiritual existence through life in Christ. They are now under the obligation to remain sinless, as we learned. All arguments to deny that Paul means baptized converts should remain sinless are futile. If we honestly want to know what Paul says, we should take him at his word whether we believe it or not.

We are trying to understand the thought of Paul and his letters in light of his times, not of the Reformation era or of our own time. This is especially important with respect to his views about faithfulness, baptism, forgiveness of past sins (that is, being made righteous), and not sinning after baptism.
The views of some Christians today may often differ from those of Paul. It may be hard to acknowledge that some modern beliefs, however satisfying they may be for personal life, are rather often not the same as those of ancient biblical authors. Those authors' views have often been modified by later interpretations and traditions.

According to Paul, Christ came to redeem those under the law and to give them a new status as children of God. Through the Spirit of his Son sent by God in their hearts, believers can call God ‘Father’ (Gal. 4.1-7). Now that Gentile believers know God and are known by him, how can they think of returning to pagan gods and pagan ways (Gal. 4.8-11)?

Paul makes a personal appeal to the Galatian converts to manifest the same affection and confidence as when he, sick and miserable, first visited them. The Judaizers, for their own selfish glory, have changed the Galatians (Gal. 4.12-20).

Paul’s last argument is an allegory on the story of Abraham and his wife Sarah and her slave Hagar. The descendants of Sarah, the free woman, inherit God’s promises and have the freedom of the Spirit. Persons born from the slave Hagar are under the law. Christ has set the Galatian converts free, so they should not ‘submit again to a yoke of slavery’, the law (Gal. 4.21–5.1). The Galatians cannot be completely free and be partly bound to the law by receiving circumcision. If they do, ‘Christ will be of no benefit to’ them. Only ‘faith[fulness] working through love’ counts for anything. Those who unsettle the converts should ‘castrate themselves’ (Gal. 5.2-12).

Paul knew very well that the recent converts from paganism might be – and perhaps already were – abusing their newly acquired freedom in Christ. For believers, all God’s law is summed up in the commandment to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Gal. 5.14; see also Rom. 13.8-10). This can be done only through living by the Spirit and not satisfying the desires of the flesh. ‘Flesh’ (sarx) is the term Paul uses for that part of the human being that is responsible for sinning. The desires of the flesh represent an entirely different set of attitudes and actions from the desires of the Spirit (Gal. 5.13-26).

Living by the Spirit, with faith working through love, means mutually helping one another through gentleness, not pride, to refrain from wrongdoing. The law of agriculture that whatever one sows, that will one also reap is equally true in human relationships. Those persons who live by the desires of the flesh ‘will reap corruption from the flesh’, but those who live by the Spirit ‘will reap eternal life from the Spirit’ (Gal. 6.8).

From the endings of several letters of Paul, we know that he usually dictated them to a secretary and that he also usually added a personal greeting.
The Apostle Paul and His Letters

in his own hand (1 Cor. 16.21-24; Rom. 16.21-23). He closes the letter to the Galatians with a personal greeting. Others may boast about the number of persons receiving circumcision, but Paul glories only in Christ’s cross. The marks on Paul’s body designate him as a slave of Christ. Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything but only a new creation by the Spirit (Gal. 6.11-18).

Converts as New Creations
The expression ‘new creation’, used earlier by Paul in 2 Cor. 5.17, by itself does not tell us very much. The word (ktisis) translated as ‘creation’ may also be taken as ‘creature’. ‘Creature’ is probably better, because it is more personal and fits well with Paul’s emphasis on persons and their behavior as converts no longer under the law. The important thing is the whole new being, not the one circumcised or uncircumcised.

Several passages help us discern Paul’s understanding of the unique life of members of the new community of believers, ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6.16), as new creations. Let us pause a moment here to reflect on how Paul’s Judaism still stands out, although a devout follower of Christ who is in him. Converts are believers in God, a new community of ‘Abraham’s offspring’, because they ‘belong to Christ’ (Gal. 3.29). They are no longer the ‘Israel according to the flesh’ (1 Cor. 10.18). Although converts belong to Christ, they are, nevertheless, ‘the Israel of God’. In Christ Jesus all are children of God through faithfulness toward him.

Converts ‘have clothed themselves’ with Christ in a moral way (Gal. 3.27). All are one in Christ Jesus so that there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female’ (Gal. 3.28). God has sent the Spirit of his Son into converts’ hearts (Gal. 4.6). As new creations (creatures) believers conduct their lives by the Spirit and do not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5.16). Persons who are made righteous through faithfulness toward God ‘have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ’ and have God’s love poured into their hearts by virtue of the Holy Spirit that has been given to them (Rom. 5.1, 5). Those who were reconciled to God through the death of his Son shall be saved by (in; Greek en) his life (Rom. 5.10).

Because Paul’s ideas of converts becoming new creations is largely a matter of his own personal experience, it is impossible for us to completely understand his inner feelings and convictions. He seems to speak of Christ as a kind of medium in which converts live. Perhaps we can think of it as compared with the atmosphere around us. Just as we need air for life, converts have no life without Christ. We breathe air, and the air is in us and is part of us, and we are in it. So it is with Paul’s experience of Christ.
Christ is in him, is a part of him, and he is in Christ. Again I say that Gal. 2.19-20 is the best passage for understanding his mystical experience with reference both to God and Christ. Through the law Paul died to the law that he might live to God. With Christ Paul has been crucified, so he no longer lives, but Christ lives in him. And the life he now lives in the flesh, he lives in ‘faithfulness, the faithfulness of the Son of God’.

Paul’s ideas foreshadowed those of later Rabbis, who used the expression ‘new creation’ and phrases similar to it to describe converts to Judaism. The following Rabbinic sayings illustrate the point. ‘If any one brings near [to God] an idolater and converts him, it is as if he had created him.’ ‘He who brings a person under the wings of the Shechinah [God’s presence] is regarded as if he had created him.’ ‘A proselyte who embraces Judaism is like a newborn child.’ The thought behind all these sayings is that God would not punish converts for sins committed before their conversion to Judaism.

According to Paul, for converts who live as new creations (creatures) the difference between right and wrong is quite explicit, as different as this age and the next. Good conduct is the work of God and the fruit of the Spirit; wrong conduct is the works of the flesh. The kingdom of God consists of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, not food and drink (Rom. 14.17). Whatever else may have been a part of God’s plan for members of ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6.16), it embraced simple goodness in human beings, goodness not delayed to the next life, but genuine moral character in this life, along with a new spiritual experience.

It is not accidental for Paul that the same root of *dikaioo* and *dikaiosyne* means freedom from sins and moral goodness or being righteous. Naturally, Paul ties his ideas of forgiveness and goodness to Christ. Although he never tries to explain how, the faithfulness of Jesus and his death and resurrection made possible the transition from the old sinful existences of converts to new creations. In baptism converts die with Christ to sin and rise to righteousness (*dikaiosyne*), pass from slavery to freedom, from the works of the flesh to the fruit of the Spirit, and from control by evil to the power of God. If we attempt to explain how the transition takes place, we do an injustice to the vividness and objectivity of Paul’s descriptions. It is enough to acknowledge the emphatic demand of Paul that converts remain the new creations they have become.

The idea that persons who are faithful toward God should be free from sin was present in Judaism during the time of Paul. The wisdom of God ‘will not dwell in a body involved in sin’ (Wis. 1.4). The writer of Sirach says that those who work with the wisdom of God ‘will not sin’ (Sir. 24.22). Judas Maccabaeus exhorted his fellow Jews ‘to keep themselves free from
And Sirach advises his readers: ‘Have you sinned, my child? Do so no more, but ask forgiveness for your past sins. Flee from sin as from a snake; for if you approach sin, it will bite you’ (Sir. 21.2; see also Sir. 17.25; 18.20–21; 26.28; 38.10; 2 Esd. 15.24–28).

Paul thinks of persons who are new creations in Christ in a moral and spiritual sense. The righteousness of God becomes the righteousness of those persons as well. In Jewish writings an emphasis on righteousness was a regular part of Jewish eschatological belief, especially in the thought of Isaiah. In the following passages, translated from the Septuagint, the language is similar to that of Paul in 2 Cor. 5.17–21 and elsewhere. ‘Do not remember the former things, and the ancient things do not consider. Behold, I shall do new things’ (Isa. 43.18–19). ‘By myself I swear, righteousness shall surely go out of my mouth; my words shall not be turned aside… Righteousness and glory shall come to him… By the Lord they shall be made righteous’ (Isa. 45.23–26). ‘Listen to me, you who are perishing, who are far from righteousness. I have brought near my righteousness, and I will not delay the salvation which is from me’ (Isa. 46.12–13). ‘I will not relax until her [that is, Jerusalem’s] righteousness goes out as light… And the Gentiles shall see your righteousness and kings, your glory’ (Isa. 62.1–2; see also Acts 9.15; 1 Cor. 4.8). ‘And they shall be called generations of righteousness…so shall the Lord cause righteousness to spring up and exultation before all the Gentiles’ (Isa. 61.3, 11). ‘And you shall be righteous for me, says the Lord’ (Isa. 54.17; see also Isa. 51.6–8).

The three passages below are from Jubilees and reveal interesting parallels to the language and thought of Paul in Galatians and Romans.

After this they will turn to me in all righteousness and with all [their] heart and soul…and I shall create a holy spirit in them, and I shall cleanse them so that they will not turn away from me from that day and forever (Jub. 1.23).

Mount Zion will be sanctified in the new creation for a sanctification of the earth; through it will the earth be sanctified from all sin and from uncleanness throughout the generations of the world (Jub. 4.26).

And he made for all his works a new and righteous nature, so that they should not sin in all their nature forever, but should always be all righteous, each in his kind (Jub. 5.12).

The ideas expressed in these passages foreshadow those of Paul and anticipate those of Rabbis after his time who taught that humans should imitate God in holiness and righteousness. The text that served as the basis for rabbinic discussions is Lev. 19.2: ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy’. The following is a quotation from the Talmud, a collection of Rabbinic writings several centuries after Paul:
Holiness, according to Abba Saul, is identical with imitation of God. The nature of this imitation is defined by him thus: ‘I and he, that is like unto him (God). As he is merciful and gracious, so be you (humans) merciful and gracious.’ The Scriptural phrases ‘walking in the ways of God’ (Deut. 11.22) and ‘being called by the name of God’ (Joel 2.26, 32), are again explained to mean, ‘As God is called merciful and gracious, so be thou merciful and gracious; as God is called righteous, so be thou righteous; as God is called holy, so be thou holy’.

In Gal. 5.25 Paul reminds the Galatian converts: ‘If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit’. Here the verb translated as ‘be guided’ is stoicheo and is usually translated as ‘walk’ in the sense of ‘live’ or ‘conduct one’s life’. It really means walk in a straight line or stay in rank or, also, metaphorically, ‘be in line with’, ‘agree with’, or ‘submit to’. At any rate, it is an exhortation with moral implications, and this is in line with the context, which is emphatically moral. The statement in Gal. 5.25 is preceded with the passage on the works of the flesh contrasted with the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5.25 is followed by the exhortation, ‘Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another’ (Gal. 5.26). The verb translated as ‘competing against’ (prokaleo) is somewhat more forceful and means to ‘challenge’ or better, ‘provoke’. Paul tells the Galatian converts that in light of being new creations neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything (Gal. 6.15). All baptized converts, whether Jewish or Gentile, serve in the new life of the Spirit’ (Rom. 7.6). They are new creations (creatures).

Summary

From beginning to end Galatians is an eloquent, spirited, emotional defense of Paul’s conviction that Gentiles who become converts to faithfulness toward God are made righteous before God by the forgiveness of past sins in baptism, through the faithfulness of Christ, not ceremonial observances of the law, especially circumcision. Remember that ‘faith in Christ’ is an alternative, although a less preferable one to ‘faithfulness of Christ’. For believers the only law is that of faithfulness working through love under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

What would have happened to the churches of Galatia and other churches if the Judaizers had had their way? Would Christianity, like so many other sects within Judaism, have died out and the New Testament never written? Galatians is an extremely important writing in the story behind Paul and his letters. The story behind Galatians gave rise to Romans, to which we now turn.
Galatians provides an excellent introduction to the study of Romans. We have learned that Galatians and Romans are closely related in that they have common subject matter, center on the same theological viewpoint, and evidence considerable use of the Old Testament. In fact, most of Paul’s quotations from the Old Testament occur in Galatians and Romans and are used to support his theme of sinners being made righteous by the grace of God through the faithfulness of Christ, or by faith in Christ, not works of the law. But in Romans, as in Galatians, Paul is equally concerned, if not more so, that converts live moral lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit. They must live according to the Spirit, not according to the desires of the flesh, a theme stressed in Galatians.

Subjects common to Galatians and Romans are righteousness through faithfulness; Abraham’s faithfulness as an example; the nature and function of the Jewish law; being one with Christ; and Christ as the one who frees believers from ceremonial laws. Moreover, in both letters, and only there, Paul quotes Hab. 2.4 to strengthen his argument on righteousness (Gal. 3.11; Rom. 1.17). Also in both, Paul alludes to Lev. 18.5 to show that Jews are obligated to live by the law (Gal. 3.12; Rom. 10.5). The idea that believers are reckoned among the descendants of Sarah and her son Isaac is present in both letters (Gal. 4.21-31; Rom. 9.6-13). And the command to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19.18) is quoted as the sum of moral living under the guidance of the Spirit (Gal. 5.13-15; Rom. 13.8-10).

In spite of their similarities, Galatians and Romans are markedly different in style and mood. Galatians was hastily and angrily written with little forethought. Romans, on the other hand, is a calm, confident presentation, presumably written after careful deliberation. Most of the subjects in Galatians are worked out in more detail in Romans, though more systematically and in a much gentler tone than in Galatians.
Why and When Did Paul Write Romans?

Paul did not found the church in Rome, nor had he ever been there (Rom. 1.13; 15.22-29). Perhaps this is why there is no obvious evidence of any opponents, opposing teaching, or specific problems being addressed by Paul. It is certain, of course, that he was writing to persons who were in the process of becoming, or had recently become, converts, some Jews but mostly Gentiles (Rom. 1.13; 11.13-14; 15.8-13). Again we must remember that Paul was writing for his own time, not for any time in the future.

According to Romans 1 and 15, the immediate purpose for writing was to have the letter serve as a substitute for a visit intended but never accomplished (Rom. 1.8-15). Paul hoped to visit the Roman church in passing on an anticipated trip to Spain (Rom. 15.22-29). But such plans hardly account for the involved theological arguments that are presented between the first and fifteenth chapters.

In some manuscripts of Romans the words ‘in Rome’ are lacking in Rom. 1.7 and 1.15, and there are manuscripts of the letter in which the doxology in Rom. 16.25-27 appears after Rom. 14.23 or after Rom. 15.33 or after both Rom. 14.23 and Rom. 16.23. It appears likely, therefore, that there were several early editions of Romans.

Romans 15 is important for a reason other than for providing a possible clue to the occasion for the letter. In Rom. 15.25-32 we learn that Paul was planning to take a goodwill collection from the Gentile churches to the poor Jewish saints in Jerusalem and afterward to appear before the Gentile church in Rome. Thus, Paul appears in his role as a minister of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5.18-20) in attempting to unite the Jewish and Gentile branches of the developing church.

Many scholars believe Romans 16 was not originally a part of the letter to Rome, because Paul would not know so many persons to whom he sends greetings (Rom. 16.3-15) in a church he had not established or even visited. Chapter 16, therefore, may originally have been a separate letter recommending Phoebe (Rom. 16.1-2), a deaconess in the church at Cenchreae, to the church in Ephesus or some other place where Paul was more likely to have had many friends. Most scholars agree that because the vocabulary and style differ from Paul’s, the doxology in Rom. 16.25-27 was not written by him but was added by someone else.

Although there are differences of opinion about why Paul wrote Romans, most scholars agree that it was written sometime while on his last missionary journey, soon after mid-first century CE.
Romans as a Letter for General Circulation

For the reasons given, we must try to determine a purpose for writing Romans other than the apparent one stated as an intention to visit Rome in Rom. 1.9-15 and 15.22-33. Because of the many similarities between Galatians and Romans, there must be some connection between the purpose of Galatians and that of Romans. We may assume, therefore, that the situation in the churches of Galatia – where the Judaizers were insisting that Gentile converts had to be circumcised had set Paul to thinking about his developing religion and the Jewish law. Paul responded to the situation in Galatia hastily and angrily and without enough time for careful thought. The situation in Galatia, however, forced Paul, as still a monotheistic Jew but also as one devoted to Christ, to think through his own position regarding the place of the law for both Jews and Gentiles who wanted to join the Christ movement. After careful consideration, apparently using what he had written in Gal. 2.15-21 as a kind of outline for his thought, Paul wrote Romans. In Romans 1–8 Paul elaborated his views about converts being made righteous through faithfulness, not works of the law.

It is logical to think that once Paul had put his views into writing, he would want people in as many churches as possible to know about them. Some scholars think, therefore, that Romans was originally written as a cyclical letter, that is, one intended for general circulation.

It seems likely that after sending copies of the letter to some other churches, an edition was prepared for the church in Rome, the center of the Gentile world. This is the edition of the letter that became incorporated into the New Testament.

A circular letter would serve as an authoritative statement of the developing religion, which later became known as Christianity, by the well-known and highly-respected apostle to the Gentiles. As a Jew, Paul’s theological beliefs about and his devotion to Christ had matured as the result of his experience with the churches of Galatia. Although we may never be certain of the specific occasion for Romans, the situation just described is the most plausible story behind that great letter.

Insofar as I know, the first occurrence of the term Christianity as a phenomenon separate from Judaism appears in a letter of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch in 69 CE, after Paul’s death. Ignatius writes: ‘It is perverse to talk about Jesus Christ and to participate in Judaism. For Christianity (Christianismos) did not come to believe with regard to Judaism, but Judaism with regard to Christianity, into which every tongue believing on God was brought together’ (To the Magnesians 10.3). Although Ignatius
is anti-Judaism, his phrase ‘believing on God’ indicates that for a while after Paul’s time faithfulness toward God was the main criterion for entrance into Christianity as a religion separate from Judaism.

In his letter To the Philadelphians 6.1 Ignatius writes in opposition to Judaism; yet he says, ‘It is better to hear about Christianity from a circumcised man than about Judaism from an uncircumcised person’. But Ignatius will have nothing to do with either group of persons ‘if they do not speak of Jesus Christ’. Nevertheless, it is God whom Ignatius thanks that he has a good conscience toward the Philadelphians.

These passages from Ignatius help to confirm the view that faithfulness toward God was Paul’s primary message in his mission work and that beliefs about Jesus as the Messiah, Son of God, and Lord were secondary.

Paul’s Arguments

The thesis of Romans is the ‘righteousing’ of converts by virtue of the faithfulness of Christ (or by faith in Christ), not works of the law. In the course of his arguments Paul discusses these issues: rejection of Christ by Gentiles and Jews; God’s wrath upon both Jews and Gentiles; righteousness by God’s grace through faithfulness; new life in Christ; freedom from sin; being children of God through the Spirit; God’s election of some Gentiles before Jews and the ultimate inclusion of all Jews in the community of believers, which Paul calls ‘the Israel of God’ in Gal. 6.16; and concern for weak fellow believers.

Romans 1 and Related Passages

Sometimes it is very difficult to tell what Paul means in Romans. This is true in part because we as his interpreters are so far removed from the circumstances that occasioned the letter. And it is due in part because of his language, which is frequently open to different interpretations, with nuances that are easily overlooked.

Romans 1 contains key verses for understanding what Paul means by faith (pistis). He begins by saying: Paul, a slave of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God...the gospel concerning his Son...Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith[fulness] among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name (Rom. 1.1, 5).

The antecedent of ‘through whom’ is ‘Jesus Christ our Lord’, so it would not make sense to understand Christ as the object of faithfulness. Paul means, then, ‘for the obedience of faithfulness toward God among all the Gentiles for the sake of Christ’s name’.
Paul addresses Romans ‘to all God’s beloved in Rome’ (Rom. 1.7; see ‘beloved by God’ in 1 Thess. 1.4). He thanks his God through Jesus Christ for all the converts there because their faithfulness (toward God) is announced in the whole world (Rom. 1.8). See again 1 Thess. 1.8: ‘Your faithfulness, faithfulness toward God has gone out into every place’ (my translation). As with 1 Thessalonians, Paul begins the letter to Rome with an emphasis on God that continues throughout. According to Paul, obedience includes a moral element, and in this respect it is closely related to faithfulness. Because of Adam’s disobedience to God many persons became sinners, but by virtue of Christ’s obedience many were made righteous (dikaioi; Rom. 5.19). In Rom. 6.15-23 Paul thanks God that the Roman converts, who were once ‘slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted’.

Here the crucial words are ‘form of teaching’ (typos and didache) and ‘entrusted’ (paradidomi). Typos is literally a ‘stamp’, ‘mark’, ‘impression’, or ‘image’ and in the ethical sense, ‘example’, ‘pattern’, or ‘model’. Didache is teaching that means ‘what is taught’, and for Paul it was almost certainly moral instruction in preparation for baptism, the context in which it is used. Converts were not only entrusted to such teaching; they were also ‘committed’ to it (RSV). Typos is better taken as ‘pattern’ or ‘model’, which imply imitation. The teaching is a model after which converts are to pattern their lives.

It is clear that for Paul this model of teaching was as binding upon the converts at Rome as the law was for Jews. This teaching for the purpose of moral life was a new revelation of God’s will for those who are now members of the community of believers.

The obedience Paul talks about is for the purpose of righteousness (eis dikaiosyne), so that converts may present themselves as ‘slaves to righteousness for sanctification’, that is, for the process of becoming holy. This is what the word for sanctification, hagiasmos, literally means, as we have learned (1 Thess. 4.3, 7; 1 Cor. 1.30; Rom. 6.22).

Righteousness is the goal of Paul’s mission in trying to bring about the obedience of faithfulness among all the Gentiles (Rom. 1.5). And this is the kind of obedience Paul wants to win on the part of the Gentiles (Rom. 15.15-19; 16.19, 26; see also 2 Cor. 2.9; 10.6).

After beginning the letter with the usual preliminaries of greetings and thanksgiving and then expressing his desire to visit the church in Rome (Rom. 1.1-15), Paul states his view in a forceful way (Rom. 1.16-17):

I am not ashamed of the gospel; it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the
righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’

The words ‘for salvation’ (eis soterian) are better taken as ‘working towards’, ‘directed toward’, or ‘leading toward’ salvation, as many commentators take them. The preposition eis used for purpose always looks toward the future when used by Paul, as it does here. This will become clear from what follows.

The words translated as ‘has faith’, a totally un-Pauline expression, are literally ‘who believes’ (verb, pisteuo). For reasons that follow God is to be understood as the object of believing here (recall comments on Gal. 3.11 above). In fact, God is central throughout Paul’s discussion. In the immediate context Paul is talking about God and why the Gentiles do not have the righteousness that comes from faithfulness toward God. Even though Gentiles knew better, they continued in their idolatrous ways through all kinds of immoral behavior: ‘Though they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him… They exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator’ (Rom. 1.21, 25). And a few verses later Paul says: ‘And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind and to do things that should not be done’ (Rom. 1.28).

Romans 1.32 is a key passage for understanding Paul’s view of the law for converts: ‘They [Gentiles] know God’s decree’ that those who practice the vices Paul has just listed not only do them but applaud those who commit them. The word translated as ‘decree’ (REB, ‘just decree’) is dikaioma, a most significant term, which Paul uses only in Romans. Here Paul thinks of God as a lawgiver who decrees death for Gentiles who commit certain immoral/unethical acts not in accordance with the dikaiomata of God.

Dikaioma (plural, dikaiomata), like dikaiosyne, is derived from the same root as dikaioo. Dikaioma means ‘a concrete expression of righteousness, the expression and result of the act of pronouncing righteous’. Dikaioma is usually translated as ‘regulation’, ‘requirement’, ‘commandment’, or decree’ and came to mean ‘a person or thing pronounced (by God) to be just, right, righteous’. In the Septuagint dikaioma is used in parallel with prostagma and entole, synonymous words meaning ‘injunction’, ‘ordinance’, or ‘commandment’, and krima, ‘judgment’ (e.g. Gen. 26.5; Num. 36.13; Deut. 4.40; 6.1; 7.11; Ps. 17.23).

In addition to Romans dikaioma occurs in the New Testament in Lk. 1.6, where it is used as in the Septuagint. Zechariah and Elizabeth are characterized as ‘righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments (entolais) and regulations (dikaiomasin) of the Lord’. The
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writer of Hebrews (9.1, 10) uses *dikaiomata* to refer to the ritualistic regulations or ordinances for worship under the first covenant. For the author of Hebrews the blood of Christ, as the mediator of a new covenant, made such regulations unnecessary because through his blood Christ brought the redemption which those regulations had sought to accomplish but failed to do so.

In Rev. 12.17 the synonymous word *entolai* has the same meaning as *dikaiomata* in the sense of ‘commandment’ or ‘ordinance’: ‘Then the dragon...went off to make war on the rest of her children, those who keep the commandments (*entolai*) of God and hold the testimony to Jesus’ (see also Rev. 14.12, quoted below).

The meaning of *dikaiomata* in Rev. 15.4 is uncertain. In a passage alluding to the Exodus and the song of Moses, it could mean ‘righteous deeds’, ‘just decrees’, or ‘sentences of condemnation’. The Lamb is made to sing, with reference to God the Almighty: ‘All nations will come and worship before you, for your judgments (*dikaiomata*) have been revealed’. In Rev. 19.8 the meaning seems to be ‘righteous deeds’ (so NRSV, REB): ‘For the fine linen is the righteous deeds (*dikaiomata*) of the saints’.

With the above passages as background, we turn now to the use of *dikaioma* elsewhere in Romans, the only letter in which it occurs. Later, when speaking to such Gentiles, who by God’s grace had become converts, Paul asks: ‘What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace?’ His answer, as we have seen, is an emphatic ‘By no means!’ (Rom. 6.15-19). And then in language so strong he felt some apology was necessary (Rom. 6.19), Paul urges the obedience of the Roman converts, ‘who once were slaves of sin’ but ‘have become obedient from the heart to the model of teaching to which you were entrusted’ (pledged; Rom. 6.17).

The Jews addressed by Paul in Romans 2 already have faithfulness toward the one true God. Paul is not castigating them because they do not have such faithfulness. Indeed, he assumes it. Rather, he criticizes them because they did not behave as the law required but misbehaved. Even if some were unfaithful in that respect, their unfaithfulness would by no means annul the faithfulness of God (Rom. 3.1-4).

The faithfulness of God becomes a main theme of Paul in Romans in dealing with both Jews and Gentiles. God did not reject his people (Rom. 11.1). ‘The gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable’ (Rom. 11.29). Paul’s summary conclusion as regards God’s faithfulness with respect to both Jews and Gentiles is stated in Rom. 15.8-9: ‘For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the circumcised on behalf of the truth of God in order that he might confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy’.
The passages from Romans 1 and related passages clearly show that Paul is thinking about the idolatry of the Gentiles and their refusal to come to faithfulness toward the one true God of the Jews. On the basis of these passages, the words translated as ‘through faith for faith’ (ek pisteos eis pistin) in Rom. 1.17 above should be taken as ‘from one faith to another faith’. The righteousness of God is revealed when the Gentiles convert from their idolatrous religion to the developing religion of Paul with its faithfulness toward the true God. Thus, they become converts from one faith to another faith.

The suggested understanding makes sense, especially in light of the fact that again Paul’s language and thought show influence from the Septuagint. In Psalm 83 the psalmist writes about his anticipation of experiencing the presence of God in the temple in Jerusalem as he was going up to that place: ‘Blessed are all who dwell in your house...who go from [one] power to [another] power; the God of gods shall be perceived in Zion’ (Ps. 83.5-8; 84.5 in Hebrew). The psalmist is writing about going from the power of the pagan world around him on the way to God’s presence in the temple in Jerusalem. The Greek phrase translated as ‘from one power to another power’ is ek dynameos eis dynamin and corresponds exactly to Paul’s ek pisteos eis pistin, ‘from one faith to another faith’.

This interpretation is confirmed by the reference to ‘the living God’ in Ps. 83.2 and the second part of 83.7: ‘The God of gods shall be perceived in Zion’. Both expressions, ‘the living God’ (see 1 Thess. 1.9) and ‘the God of gods’ were generally used in contrast to the lifeless idols of pagan gods. In the same way, Paul writes about converts going, or refusing to go, from the pagan world of idolatry to faithfulness toward the living God, the God of gods of the psalmist’s faithfulness. The parallel is obvious. Moreover, the Greek word for ‘power’ is dynamis, the same word Paul uses when he says that the gospel is ‘the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes’. Psalm 83 (84) ends with the statement: ‘Blessed is the person who sets his hope on you’ (God).

In support of our understanding of Paul’s language and thought in Rom. 1.16-17, we turn to a passage he had written earlier. In 2 Cor. 3.18 there is a phrase comparable to ‘from one faith to another faith’: metamorphoumetha apo doxes eis doxan. It may be translated as ‘transformed from one glory to another glory’. The NRSV reads: ‘transformed...from one degree of glory to another’. The converse of this is, ‘They exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling a mortal human being or birds or four-footed animals or reptiles’ (Rom. 1.23). These passages confirm our understanding and translation of ‘from one faith to another faith’ in Rom. 1.17.
The words in Rom. 1.16-17 serve as a connecting link between the introductory verses and the first main section of the letter (Rom. 1.18–8.39), in which Rom. 3.21-31 gives Paul’s main argument. In Rom. 1.18–8.39 Paul discusses the way persons become righteous before God. But for Paul ultimate salvation comes in the future. This is clear not only from the words ‘for salvation’ in Rom. 1.16 but also from his words near the end of the letter. There he reminds his readers that all must stand before God’s judgment seat and give account of themselves to God (Rom. 14.10-12; see also 2 Cor. 5.10; Rom. 2.1-11).

Paul argues in Rom. 1.18–3.20 that both Gentiles and Jews are under the wrath of God because they rejected the way to righteousness offered by God through Christ. The Jews have been judged by their law and the Gentiles by their consciences, which have served as a law for them (Rom. 1.18–2.29). The Jews have been at an advantage because God gave them the scriptures and made them his special people through the covenant with Abraham (Rom. 3.1-8). But despite their advantage, Jews, like Gentiles, are under the power of sin (Rom. 3.9-20).

Romans 2.25-29 and Related Passages
When Paul speaks about faith (pistis), he usually means faithfulness toward God, especially when writing with reference to Gentiles. But what about the nature of faith with respect to Jews who already have faithfulness toward God and who might want to join the Christ movement? The starting point for understanding Paul as a member of the Christ movement and his understanding of Jews with respect to faithfulness and the law is Rom. 2.25-29.

Circumcision is of value for those who obey the law, but for those who do not, circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ‘So if those who are uncircumcised keep the requirements of the law, will not their uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?’ Here the words ‘the requirements of the law’ translate to dikaiomata tou nomou.

Notice that Paul uses dikaioma again with reference to Gentiles and obeying certain requirement of the law. Paul has in mind those Gentiles who, although they ‘do not possess the law, do instinctively what the law requires, these, though not having the law, are a law to themselves. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts’ (Rom. 2.14-15). The word Paul uses here for ‘law’ is the one he most frequently uses – nomos.

A little later he writes that circumcision is really not a matter of the law for Jew or Gentile. The Jew is not one who appears as such, nor is circumcision that which appears in the flesh. ‘Rather, a person is a Jew who is one inwardly, and real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and
not literal’ (Rom. 2.27-29). ‘Such a person’, says Paul, ‘receives praise not from others but from God’ (Rom. 2.29). Here, again, and into the next chapter (Romans 3) Paul’s thinking about the law reflects something of Hebrew law (Torah) itself. Consider, for example, Deut. 10.16, ‘Circumcise, then, the foreskin of your heart’, and Deut. 30.6, ‘The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart…in order that you may live’ (see also Lev. 26.41-42; Jer 4.4; 9.25-26; see also Jub. 1.23). The word Paul has been using for ‘law’ is the usual one – nomos. (We will consider Paul’s words for law further in our discussion of Romans 7 in the next chapter.)

The sense of the whole passage in Rom. 2.25-29 is that what God requires (the dikaiomata) is not meant for people of a particular race and who have marks such as circumcision on their bodies. Rather, what God expects of all people is a distinctive kind of life, whether or not they are Jews. In this respect Paul was different from other Jews of his time because he was neither ‘orthodox’ Jew nor ‘orthodox’ Christian, in the modern understanding of those terms. Paul was a Jew whose views on the Jewish law were unique because he had a special religious experience of Jesus, which also made him a unique member of the Christ movement.

Paul’s use of the phrase ‘the requirements (commandments) of the law’ (ta dikaiomata tou nomou; Rom. 2.26) clearly indicates that he does not negate all Jewish law. That he has in mind something which is in effect law, that is, ‘rules of conduct established and enforced by the authority’, is made certain not only by the use of the term dikaiomata, but also by the addition of the words ‘the law’ (tou nomou). Of course, for Paul God was the supreme authority, and his Torah (nomos) was teaching about his will for all people.

What Paul is really saying in Rom. 2.25-29 is that there is a kind of righteousness which God expects and which, if practiced by Jew and non-Jew, is effective before God. Compare here especially Acts 10.35: ‘In every nation anyone who fears him [God] and does what is right (works righteousness) is acceptable to him’.

Like Jesus, Paul stands in the unique moral tradition of the Hebrew prophets. For the prophets, for Jesus, and for Paul, religion is not a matter of outward signs or ceremonies, but of the heart and life (of many passages, see, for example, Deut. 10.16; 30.6; Jer. 4.1-4; Mic. 6.8; Amos 5.10-15; Mk 7.20-23; Mt. 5-7; 12.33-37; 15.18-20; Lk. 6.43-45).

Romans 3.21-31 and Related Passages
Jews have the advantage because they have been entrusted with the law. If some were unfaithful, their unfaithfulness does not nullify the faithfulness
of God. Yet Jews are no better than Gentiles because all have sinned, and Paul quotes from Pss. 13.1-3 and 52.2-4 to prove his point that no person will be made righteous before God ‘by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin’ (Rom. 3.20). This is an important point. It is not that the Jews do not have faithfulness toward God but that through the law they become aware of sin. ‘But now’, says Paul, ‘apart from the law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed…the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe’ (in God; Rom. 3.21-22). All persons, Jews and Gentiles, are made righteous, that is, have their past sins forgiven by God’s grace as a gift, by the redemption that is in Christ Jesus made possible through his faithfulness. Before the faithfulness of Christ came this would have been impossible. So Paul stresses his main point again: ‘We hold that a person is justified (made righteous) by faith [toward God] apart from works prescribed by the law’ (Rom. 3.28).

God is the God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews, ‘since God is one; and he will justify (make righteous) the circumcised on the ground of faith[fulness] and the uncircumcised through that same faith’ (Rom. 3.30). But, then, leave it to Paul, he asks: ‘Do we then overthrow the law by this faith?’ And then he answers: ‘By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law’ (Rom. 3.31). By the end of our study of Romans we will understand this apparent contradiction.

Now is a good time to learn that not only is God the object of ‘believe’ (pisteuo), ‘faith’ (pistis), and ‘faithful’ (pistos). God is also the object for the negative counterparts of those words, ‘be unfaithful’, ‘disbelieve’ (apisteo), ‘disbelief’, ‘unfaithfulness’ (apistia), and ‘unbelieving’, ‘unfaithful’ (apistos). In Rom. 3.1-4 Paul speaks about the advantages of the Jews and then asks: ‘What if some disbelieved (apisteo), does their unfaithfulness (apistia) annul the faithfulness (pistis) of God? By no means!’ (Greek; see also Rom. 4.20; 11.20, 23). In his discussion specifically about believers and unbelievers in the Corinthian letters God is always the object to be understood. Here are two examples: ‘If an unbeliever (apistos) invites you’ (1 Cor. 10.27) and ‘Tongues…are a sign not for those who believe (pisteuo) but for the unbelieving (apistos); Greek; 1 Cor. 14.22; see also 1 Cor. 6.6; 7.12-15; 2 Cor. 4.4; 6.14-15).

In Rom. 3.21-26 Paul elaborates the main subjects dealt with in Galatians, with the new elements of being made righteous by God’s grace and redemption. He states his thesis clearly and forcefully about the righteousness of God disclosed apart from the law through the faithfulness of Christ in Rom. 3.21-22, quoted above, and then continues (Rom. 3.23-25):
All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified (made righteous) by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith...to show his [God’s] righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed.

This long and difficult sentence is crucial for interpreting all of Romans. The problems of interpretation are made more difficult by the fact that several words do not occur, or rarely occur, elsewhere in Paul, so it is hard to know how to understand them.

First of all, whose faithfulness is meant by Paul? Was the ‘sacrifice of atonement’ (Greek, *hilasterion*; RSV, ‘expiation’) one that Jesus made by his own faithfulness to his death? Or does the expiation of Jesus become effective through believers’ faith in him? Whatever it is, Paul says that God acted ‘to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies (makes righteous) the one who shares the faithfulness of Jesus’ (Rom. 3.26; my translation). Because Jesus was faithful to death – ‘expiation by his blood’ – God shows his own righteousness in making sinners righteous by passing over their sins previously committed. My translation ‘who shares the faithfulness of Jesus’ is confirmed by the same expression in Rom. 4.16: ‘who share the faithfulness of Abraham’ (NRSV; ‘who have Abraham’s faith’, REB).

Were the translators of the NRSV so committed to the doctrine of ‘justification by faith in Jesus’ that they could translate the same phrase as ‘the faith of Abraham’ but not ‘the faith of Jesus’? Obviously, neither Paul nor his translators would want to say ‘faith in Abraham’.

Paul uses the word translated as ‘redemption’ (*apolytrosis*) elsewhere only in 1 Cor. 1.30 and Rom. 8.23, but not in the same way. *Apolytrosis* was used in connection with the manumission of a slave by his master, who received a payment of ransom for the slave’s freedom. Paul seems to be saying that Jesus paid the ransom for sinners through his death. ‘Expiation’ (*hilasterion*) is part of the language of religious sacrifices and is used by Paul only in Rom. 3.24, where the NRSV rendering is very good. Although Paul does not say how Jesus’ death was the blood of sacrifice for which God makes sinners righteous, his thought reflects the Jewish idea that the death of righteous persons was effective for the expiation of the sins of others.

The following verses from 4 Maccabees (my translation), a Jewish work written about the time of Paul, show where Paul was coming from. The writer is teaching the view that the death of righteous persons is an expiation for the sins of the people. He illustrates his view with the example of
seven Jewish brothers who gave their lives in the time of persecution by Antiochus IV (175–163 BCE) rather than disobey the laws of their religion. In the first passage Eleazar, one of the sons, while being tortured to the point of dying, says: ‘Make my blood a cleansing [from guilt] for them [the Jewish people], and take my life as a ransom [‘giving one’s life for that of another’] for them’ (4 Macc. 6.29).

The second passage is the author’s praise for the seven brothers: ‘These men, then, having been made holy (sanctified) by God…having become, as it were, a ransom for the sin of the nation. Through the blood of those godly men and through the expiation (hilasterion) of their death, the divine providence saved Israel, which had been evilly treated’ (4 Macc. 17.20-22; see also 4 Macc. 1.11; 9.24; 12.18: 18.4).

Observe the words and ideas common to Rom. 3.21-26 and 4 Maccabees: God is responsible for the outcome of the ones making the sacrifice; persons are saved by godly men, the brothers and Jesus; and expiation (hilasterion) by blood; make holy, idea of ransom or redemption, and sin.

Paul was surely familiar with the Hebrew idea that sins of others can be expiated by blood. Consider, for example, LXX Lev. 17.11: ‘For the life of all flesh is its blood, and I have given it to you [for use] on the altar to make expiation (exilaskomai) for your souls; for its blood shall make expiation (exilaskomai) for the soul’. As we know from Greek inscriptions from the time of Paul, it was customary for pagans to give expiatory gifts, called hilasteria, to the gods. An inscription from Cos, where Paul once stopped (Acts 21.1), says that ‘the people…gave an expiatory gift (Greek, hilasterion) to the gods for the salvation (Greek, soteria) of the son of god, Augustus’. In light of such evidence, it would have been easier for Paul’s readers to understand what he was saying than it is for us.

The observations just made provide helpful insight into some of the story behind Paul’s thought. Paul’s words ‘whom God put forth as an expiation (hilasterion)’ correspond to those on the Greek inscription. But instead of the people presenting the expiatory gift, according to Paul, God put forth Christ Jesus with his blood as an expiation. Thus, Paul combines elements from Hebrew and pagan thought about sacrifices. And God does this ‘to prove…that he himself is righteous and that he justifies [makes righteous] the one who shares the faithfulness of Jesus’ (Rom. 3.26).

Paul is saying that the righteousness of God comes to believers who have faithfulness toward him because of Christ’s faithfulness, not because of believers’ faith in Christ. So Paul’s language in Rom. 3.22 could be understood as ‘the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe in God’. Acts 26.18 clearly shows the difference between
what Paul says about faithfulness in Romans and what Paul is reported as saying when reporting his special religious experience. Luke reports that Paul says Jesus said to him: ‘among those who are sanctified [made holy] by faith, faith in me’ (Greek, pistei te eis eme).

Because of Jesus’ faithfulness toward God, even to death, God makes sinners righteous. All through Romans 3 God, not Jesus, is the subject. This fact supports the understanding just stated. Romans 3.25-26, then, would mean that persons who share the faithfulness of Jesus toward God are the beneficiaries of Jesus’ expiatory sacrifice. Thus, we let Paul remain the great monotheist he was. Nevertheless, the different interpretations show how difficult it is to understand what Paul means sometimes in Romans.

The Example of Abraham
Paul supports the discussion in Rom. 3.21-31 with the example of Abraham. Abraham’s faithfulness made him righteous in God’s sight before his circumcision. His righteousness, therefore, was the result of his faithfulness, not of his circumcision (Rom. 4.1-12). So all believers, Jews and Gentiles alike, are the true descendants of Abraham and share God’s promise to him (Rom. 4.13-25). The consequence of righteousness through faithfulness is reconciliation of sinners to God (Rom. 5.1-11). As the result of Adam’s sin, sin came into the world ‘because all have sinned’. But because of Christ’s righteous obedience, all people who receive the abundance of God’s grace are made righteous (Rom. 5.12-21).

Jesus’ Death and Resurrection
Paul sometimes links Jesus’ death with his resurrection, and his death also has theological implications. ‘Christ died for the ungodly’ (impious; Rom. 5.6), and his death was a sign of God’s love (Rom. 5.8). The essence of Paul’s view of the death and resurrection of Jesus is that they made the forgiveness of converts’ past sins (‘sins previously committed’; Rom. 3.25) by the grace of God possible. Jesus ‘was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification’ (righteousness; Rom. 4.25). But the righteousness of converts does not mean that they are assured of ultimate salvation. Ultimate salvation depends upon their continuing to live by the Spirit, that is, living moral lives free from sin.

It is significant to observe that whereas believing or faithfulness is usually mentioned in connection with, or as a requirement for, being made righteous, believing is mentioned with salvation (eis soterian, ‘for salvation’) only in Rom. 1.16 and believing with being saved only in Rom. 10.9-10. In both of these passages Paul is clearly referring to the potential experience of
converts, both Jews and Gentiles, who are to be made righteous or forgiven of their past sins through baptism (see the discussion in the next Chapter).

Paul says that Jesus’ death brings reconciliation to God and ‘much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life’ (Rom. 5.10). Paul’s words later in Rom. 14.10 support the view that salvation comes in the future. ‘For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God... So then, each of us will be accountable to God.’ We must remember that in spite of Paul’s theology, he never forgets his Jewish conviction of ultimate judgment, with consequent reward and punishment. He says so several times. Paul uses scripture to support his point by saying that every knee shall bend and every tongue praise God. ‘So then’, says Paul, ‘each of us will be accountable to God’ (Rom. 14.11-12; from Isa. 45.23).

Paul was still a Jew, even after his special religious experience when he was on the way to Damascus to persecute followers of Jesus. He still believed in the Pharisaic idea of a coming judgment, an idea of Jesus also. This is the best explanation for the fact that the word ‘grace’ is not once used in any passage by Paul where the word ‘save’ or ‘salvation’ occurs.

**Romans 5.15-19**

In Paul’s involved discussion on Adam and Christ in Rom. 5.12-21 the term *dikaioma* appears again (Rom. 5.15-19):

> The free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. And the free gift is not like the effect of the one man’s sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification. If, because of the one man’s trespass, death exercised dominion through that one, much more surely will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness exercise dominion in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.

> Therefore just as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. For just as by the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man’s obedience the many will be made righteous.

If the thought of Paul seems obscure, it is because his Greek abounds in obscurities. Now let’s look at some words in the translation and Paul’s Greek and learn how he uses words from the root of ‘righteous’ and ‘righteousness’. The words translated as ‘brings justification’ are *eis dikaioma* and may be understood as ‘a concrete expression of righteousness’ because it is the result of *dikaiosis* used later. Moreover, it coincides with ‘the gift
of righteousness’ and ‘will be made righteous’. ‘Act of righteousness’ is *dikaioma* and ‘leads to justification’ (*eis dikaiosin*).

Paul has chosen the word *dikaiosis* deliberately. As we have learned, the suffix *sis* added to the verbal root of the noun means that the action intended by the word is not completed but is still in the process of becoming complete. For Paul, the sinner’s righteousness is not completed but is a process still in being and moving toward ultimate consummation. This is in harmony with ‘will be made righteous’ in the last line of the quotation.

The ‘righteousness’ of believers means the forgiveness of only their past sins. *Eis dikaiosin* means that converts are still in ‘the process of’ becoming righteous. The word for ‘condemnation’ is *katakrima*, which Paul has chosen deliberately, rather than *katakrisis*, a much less severe word (see 2 Cor. 3.9; 7.3). The condemnation Paul is talking about is for persons who have not become members of the new community of believers, ‘the Israel of God’. They have not entered into the process which leads to eternal life. Their condemnation is final (see 2 Cor. 3.7-18). But there is ‘no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8.1).

The verses quoted may be summarized thus: Adam’s misdeeds led to condemnation for all persons; Jesus’ concrete expression of righteousness leads to the process for making all persons righteous to eternal life by God’s grace through Christ.

I have tried to bring out the sense of Paul’s Greek as best I could in harmony with his thought about righteousness elsewhere. That the interpretation is the one intended by Paul is clear not only from his use of the words *dikaiosis* and *katakrima*, but also from what follows in Romans 6, to which we now turn.

**Baptism of Converts**

Since we have already considered passages from Romans 6 several times, it can be summarized briefly here. It is the key to understanding Paul’s theology and his ethics. Although believers are made righteous by having their past sins forgiven through the rite of baptism, that does not mean they can continue to sin in order to be forgiven again by God’s grace (Rom. 6.1-2, 15). God’s grace is not that gracious. By immersion into the water, baptism symbolizes the converts’ death to sin. Symbolically also converts rise from the water of baptism to ‘walk in newness of life’ (Rom. 6.3-4) freed from sin (Rom. 6.18), and with the obligation to be slaves of righteousness, no longer slaves of sin. The ultimate reward is eternal life (Rom. 6.5-23). The new state of baptized converts places upon them the obligation to live moral lives. Paul deals with this obligation in Romans 12–15.
Before we continue our study of Romans in the next chapter we consider briefly two passages from Qumran that throw light on our study thus far.

**Paul and the Sect of Qumran**

We have learned that Paul’s thought often shows influence from the Old Testament, especially the Septuagint. It seems that sometimes Paul also shares ideas with the Jewish sect at Qumran. We turn to two passages from the *Manual of Discipline* (1QS).

Exactly what was required of persons wanting to enter the Sect of Qumran or into a community of believers in Paul’s churches we do not know. In the community of Qumran the Holy Spirit was associated with the ceremonies of entrance into the sect, just as it was with the initiation rite of baptism of converts entering a community of believers. As with Paul’s converts, persons who entered the Qumran Sect were forgiven of all their past sins. And Qumran initiates were also expected to ‘conduct their lives perfectly in all the ways of God’ (1QS 3.9-10).

Paul addresses the members of communities to which he writes as ‘holy ones’ (saints), and the same description is sometimes used with reference to members of the Qumran community. The holy ones of Qumran were instructed to live according to the rule of the community. The first several lines of the *Manual* state rules for the community (1QS 1.1-10):

[The holy ones are] to live according to the way of the community; to seek God…and to do what is good and right before him, just as he commanded by the hand of Moses and by the hand of all his servants the prophets; to love all that he has chosen and hate all that he has rejected; to abstain from all evil and hold fast to all good; to practice truth and righteousness and justice upon earth; and to walk no longer in the stubbornness of a guilty heart and lustful eyes, doing all evil; to bring all who presented themselves to do the statutes of God in a covenant of loving kindness to be united in the counsel of God; to live perfectly before him…and to love all the sons of light…and to hate all the sons of darkness.

With the passage from Qumran compare these passages from Paul, most of them from Romans, and notice the similarities in language and thought. ‘For you are all children [lit., ‘sons’; see earlier quotation] of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness… See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all… Hold fast to what is good; abstain from every form of evil’ (1 Thess. 5.5, 15, 21; see also 1 Cor. 10.6-8; 2 Cor. 5.10; 9.8; Gal. 5.16-26; 6.10; Rom. 2.5-10). ‘For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodli-
ness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth’ (Rom. 1.18; see also Rom. 1.24-27). ‘Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect... Hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good’ (Rom. 12.2, 9). ‘Let us then lay aside the works of darkness and put on (clothe ourselves with) the armor of light’ (Rom. 13.12; see also Rom. 16.19). ‘Drive out the wicked person from among you’ (1 Cor. 5.13; see also 1 Cor. 5.1-2, 9-11).

Penalties for violating the rules of the Qumran community were severe, often for offenses that we might think minor. For lying about his property the guilty one was punished for a year, and a fourth of his food was withheld. Speaking disrespectfully of another was punishable for a year. For speaking evilly about God the punishment was death. Members were punished even for interrupting another speaking, sleeping during a meeting, and laughing loudly. Members guilty of some offenses were forbidden to participate in various aspects of the community for varying periods of time and might be permanently expelled. Recall Paul’s command: ‘Drive out the evil person from among you’ (1 Cor. 5.13; see also 1 Cor. 5.1-2, 9-11).

As at Qumran, the holy ones (saints) at Rome had become obedient from the heart to the model of teaching to which they had been committed (Rom. 6.17; see also Rom. 16.17). Apparently, as with Paul’s converts, persons could decide whether or not to enter the group at Qumran (1QS 1.18). Apparently also, as converts made some sort of commitment to faithfulness toward God and to certain beliefs about Jesus, so, too, initiates into the Sect of Qumran made a comparable commitment of faithfulness toward God and toward the Teacher of Righteousness, the religious leader of the sect (1QpHab 8.1-3; 1QS 1.16-17).
Chapter 9

LETTERS FROM PAUL’S MID-CAREER: ROMANS 7–16

Living by the Spirit

We left our study of Romans with ch. 6 and the baptism of converts. The new life that converts live after their baptism is life in the Spirit, and such life discharges them from the law (Rom. 7.1-6). Paul says that the law not only made him aware of sin but even caused him to sin because of its prohibitions. For example, the law said, ‘You shall not covet’, so Paul coveted all sorts of things. But the law was good in that it made Paul recognize his sin as sin, yet the law was powerless to keep him from committing sin (Rom. 7.7-25). By sending his Son, God did what the law could not do – freed him from the law of sin and death through ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ’ (Rom. 8.1-11). Through the Spirit, then, believers become children of God (Rom. 8.12-17). Paul wrestles with his own thoughts on these subjects, beginning with Romans 7.

Romans 7–8

We have learned that Paul maintains that baptized converts who had their past sins forgiven through baptism should remain free from sin. At first glance, Romans 7 may give the impression that Paul would not even think of human sinlessness. Romans 7 is a difficult and controversial chapter; therefore, some comments on it are necessary to show how it relates to Romans 6 and 8. Please turn to Romans 7, and be patient while we engage in some serious exegesis as we try to explain it as simply as possible.

Remember that Paul writes with a view to making converts, especially among Gentiles (see Rom. 1.5-6), to the Christ movement and to reassure present converts about living under the power of the Spirit. It is especially important to understand this when Paul is talking about the law and the behavior of converts. When Gentiles do instinctively the things required by the law, even though they do not have the law, they are a law to themselves and show thereby the work of the law written on their hearts (Rom.
2.14-15). In the same way, the Jew is not one in appearance, nor is circumcision what appears ‘in the flesh’; but the Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is of the heart, ‘in spirit not in letter’ (Greek; Rom. 2.28-29). The words ‘in the flesh’ (en sarki), ‘in spirit’ (en pneumati), and ‘in letter’ (grammati; the law) provide some of the clues for understanding Romans 7.

Romans 7.7-13: The Jews and the Law
Romans 7 may be divided into two basic parts: 7.1-6 and 7.7-25. The clue to the first part is Rom. 7.4, in which Paul speaks to Jews (‘those who know the law’). Jewish converts (referred to as ‘brothers’ and ‘you’) ‘have died to the law through the body of Christ’ (Rom. 7.4) that is, through Christ’s death, symbolically shared through immersion in baptism. The purpose of belonging to Christ, the Christ raised from the dead, is to ‘bear fruit for God’ (Rom. 7.4). While living in the flesh as pre-converts, their experiences of sin brought on by the law were working ‘to bear fruit for death’ (Rom. 7.5).

Romans 7.6 closes the first section of the chapter and makes the transition to the next section: ‘But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit’. In Rom. 7.6 ‘discharged from the law’ is the same thing as ‘died to the law’ in 7.4. And what held pre-converts fast was life in the flesh. The old way of living in or by the flesh is the opposite of the new way of living in or by the Spirit. Up to this point Paul has only implied that the law was responsible for sin in the lives of Jewish pre-converts. In v. 6 the law is called a written code (gramma) and is contrasted with life in or by the Spirit.

Romans 7.6, then, harks back to Rom. 2.12-13 and 2.27-29 and looks forward to what follows. Romans 7.6 is the first verse of an inclusio, of which the last part is Rom. 8.1-4:

There is therefore now no condemnation (katakrima) for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

The ‘now’ of Rom. 7.6 reappears in Rom. 8.1 where Paul resumes the discussion of the newness of life in Christ or life by the Spirit discussed in Rom. 6.1–7.6. Romans 7.7-25 has intruded into the discussion of the present life of converts and must, therefore, refer to the past. Romans 7 and 8
cannot, then, be taken as expressing simultaneous experiences of converts. Rather, they deal with successive experiences, first that of pre-converts and then that of converts.

*The 'I' in Romans 7*

We can never be certain whether the 'I' represents Paul writing autobiographically or using a literary device or describing converts' experiences before and after joining the Christ movement. Several passages elsewhere show Paul's tendency to use 'I' when commenting on basic religious experiences (1 Cor. 6.15; 10.29-30; 13.1-3, 11-12; 14.11-23; Gal. 2.18-21; Rom. 3.5-8). The 'I' was part of Paul's mission personage. Although Rom. 7.7-25 are written from Paul's perspective as a convert, he never hints at the kind of struggle described there when alluding to his own special religious experience or his life as a pre-convert. It is hard to believe that Paul would think that persons living in the newness of the Spirit (Romans 6 and 8; 7.1-6) would sink so dismally from it (Rom. 7.7-25) and then say: 'For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death' (Rom. 8.2; see also Rom. 6.14). The 'I', then, represents no person in particular but every person in general who does not live in Christ and share in the experience of the Spirit. Paul does not mention the Spirit anywhere in Rom. 7.7-25.

In Rom. 7.7-25 the point is not the antithesis between the 'desires of the Spirit' and the 'desires of the flesh' and the 'works of the flesh', and the 'fruit of the Spirit', as it is in Gal. 5.16-25. Rather, the flesh (sαρx) is opposed by the mind (νοῦς) or the inmost self (ὁ ἐσοφός ἄνθρωπος; lit. 'man within' or 'inner man'). For the converts who are 'in the Spirit' the Spirit is to overpower the flesh (Rom. 8.5-13; Gal. 5.16). The 'body of sin' and the 'body of death' (Rom. 6.6; 7.24; 8.10) have been destroyed.

The 'now' of Rom. 7.6 and 8.1 will, according to Paul, be fully realized only in the future. Converts who continue to live according to the flesh will die, but if by the Spirit they put to death the deeds of the body, they will live (Rom. 8.13). They have the first fruits of the Spirit and groan within themselves, awaiting the redemption of their bodies (Rom. 8.23). However, this groaning is not to be equated with the exclamation of the wretched man in Rom. 7.24. That is a cry out of the past – before the 'now' of Rom. 7.6 and 8.1 – a groaning that, according to Rom. 8.18-30, looks to the future. All of this accords with Paul’s ideas about morality and salvation as expressed elsewhere. In describing the human struggle to do what is right while not under the influence of the Spirit, Paul writes in a way that would be comprehensible to both Jews and Gentiles in the Roman community of
converts (see below). Throughout the discussion the basic portrayal of the inner struggle is clear, but it is made more complicated by the varying phraseology used by Paul to describe it.

In Rom. 7.7-13 Paul is still addressing primarily Jews. They would understand that the law makes them aware of wrongdoing and of their struggle to do what the law requires. The law itself is not evil (sin), but without the Spirit persons who try to follow it are powerless and subject to death, not life. In reality, ‘The law (*nomos*) is holy and the commandment (*entole*) is holy and just and good’ (Rom. 7.12). Every Jew would acknowledge that. The trouble is not the law but the impulse to do evil in spite of what the law says.

Romans 7.14 is a transitional verse. The law is spiritual (*pneumatikos*), that is, it comes from God, not humans. The person without the Spirit is ‘fleshy’ (*sarkinos*), ‘sold under sin’. Jews, of course, believed that their law was given by God, and most Greeks and Romans believed that all laws had their origin with the gods (or God). Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 BCE) had said that all human laws were nourished by one divine law. Plato begins the *Laws* by having the Athenian ask the Cretan Kleiniass: ‘To whom do you attribute the reason for your laws, to (a) god or to some human (*anthropos*)?’ The Cretan replies: ‘To a god, most rightfully to a god. We Cretans call Zeus our lawgiver, and in Lacedaemon…people claim Apollo as theirs’. (See discussion of ‘the law of God’ below.) This information helps us to understand the story behind Romans 7, written for both Jews and Gentiles at Rome.

The expression ‘sold into slavery under sin’ harks back to Romans 6, where Paul says that those who are baptized live in newness of life and are no longer enslaved to sin; they are freed from sin. The expression also looks forward to Romans 8 and the idea that life in Christ or life by the Spirit has freed converts from the law of sin and death.

*Romans 7.15-25: Gentiles and the Law*

In Rom. 7.15-25 Paul speaks with reference particularly to Gentiles, so in Rom. 7.15 ‘law’ (*nomos*) no longer refers only to the Jewish law, as in Rom. 7.7-14, but slips into the meaning it sometimes has in Rom. 7.21-23. There sometimes it is any influence or motive that leads to the control of a person’s will. Even though it fails, Paul can agree that the law is good because it makes persons aware that they are doing what they know they should not do.

*The Struggle To Do What Ought To Be Done.* The struggle of the human being to do what ought to be done, or what is right, but does not do it is a recurring theme in Greco-Roman literature, including some from the
time of Paul. Plato had written that in all the things we do and say ‘the inner man (tou anthropou ho entos)) should be the most powerful [part] of the man’ (anthropos); Plato, Republic 9.589A; see also Euripides, Medea 1070-1073; Plato, Laws 5.1). See Rom. 7.22: ‘according to the inner man’ (kata ton eso anthropon).

From Paul’s own time Ovid (43 BCE–18 CE) writes: ‘I perceive and approve the better things; I give way to the worse’ (Metamorphoses 7.19-20); see also Diodorus of Sicily (c. 60–30 BCE) 1.71.1-4; Plutarch, On Moral Virtue. Tied in with this inner struggle is the Greek concept of error or fault. Words used to express that concept are translated as ‘sin’ in the New Testament. The Greek verb Paul uses is hamartano, which originally meant ‘miss the mark’, especially of a thrown spear. In general it came to mean ‘fail in one’s purpose’, ‘go wrong’, and then ‘do wrong’, ‘err’, or ‘sin’. The nouns Paul uses for ‘sin’ are hamartema and hamartia, which originally meant ‘failure’, ‘fault’, ‘error’, and then ‘sin’.

In discussing the peculiar characteristics of error Epictetus (c. 55–135 CE) writes (Discourses 2.26.1-4: ‘Every error involves an inconsistency. For since he who errs does not want to err, but to do right, it is clear that what he wants he does not do...what he wants he does not do and what he does not want he does’ (see also Plato, Republic 336E).

In this passage from Epictetus the noun translated as ‘error’ is hamartema, a word Paul uses for ‘sin’ in 1 Cor. 6.18 and Rom. 3.25, a synonym for hamartia, which is used in Romans 7. And the verb translated as ‘errs’ is Paul’s verb for ‘to sin’ (hamartano). This is another part of the story behind Paul’s thought in Romans 7 that helps us to understand where he was coming from. At least some Gentiles in the community of converts in Rome would have understood Paul when he was talking about sin and sinning and the inner struggle.

Although the phrase ‘the law of God’ (Rom. 7.22, 25; 8.7) occurs occasionally in the Jewish scriptures and would, therefore, be understood by Jews as referring to their law, Paul never uses that phrase anywhere else to refer to the Jewish law in all that he says about it. He uses it only in the context of describing the inner struggle of the person without the Spirit to do what is right (Rom. 7.15–8.8). The significance of the phrase ‘the law of God’, then, is that it provides a clue that in Rom. 7.15-25 Paul is writing specifically with Gentiles in mind. ‘The law of God’ is a Stoic expression. With Paul’s discussion of the person’s inner struggle and the law of God as opposed to another law compare the following passages from Epictetus’ Discourses.

Epictetus can speak about the gods and about God. He speaks about ‘the wretched laws of ours’ in contrast to ‘the laws of the gods’ (Dis. 1.13.5).
‘This is the law that God has established’ is stated in the context of a discussion of the good and evil and of the moral purpose (Dis. 1.29.1-5).

Nothing else is able to conquer the choice [of what is moral], but it conquers itself. For this reason also the law of God [ho tou theou nomos; Paul’s phrase] is most excellent and most just...For this is a law of nature and of God: ‘Let the better always prevail over the worse’ (Dis.1.29.13-21).

What is the divine law? (Dis. 2.16.28; see also 3.24.42).

Am I not wholly directed toward God and his commands and ordinances? (ouchi d’ holos pros ton theon tetami kai tas ekeinou entolas kai ta prostatagmata) (Dis. 3.24.114; recall earlier discussion of Paul’s words for commandments and ordinances).

These are the laws sent to you from him [God], these are his ordinances; you ought to become an interpreter of them, to these you ought to subject yourself, not to the laws of Masurius and Cassius [prominent Roman lawyers of Paul’s time] (Dis. 4.3.12).

Almost all men admit that the good and the evil are in ourselves, and not in the things outside (Dis. 3.20.1).

The principal task in life is this: separate matters and distinguish them [from one another] and say to myself, ‘Things outside are not under my [power]; choosing [what is moral] is under my [power]. Where shall I seek the good and the evil? Within, in the things that are mine (Dis. 2.5.4-5).

In spite of obvious differences between Paul and Epictetus because of Paul’s unique thought as a Jew and member of the Christ movement, the similarities are striking. This does not mean that Paul had read from Stoic philosophers. However, certain well-known ideas were prevalent in the air of the Greco-Roman world, and Paul had breathed in that air deeply. He used those ideas in composing his discussion of the person without the Spirit and not living in Christ for the benefit of his Roman Gentile readers. Uniquely for Paul, ‘the law of God’ stood in sharp contrast to ‘the law of sin and death’ from which ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ sets converts free. For by sending his Son God did what any law or laws, Jewish or Greco-Roman, could not do, ‘so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit’ (Rom. 8.3-4). Thus, for converts the law and the Spirit are actually brought together in Rom. 8.4. This has resolved the inner conflict for all converts who previously had lived without the Spirit and would do so also for all persons who might want to become converts.

Romans 7.25b is a summary of life without the Spirit and of life not lived in Christ: ‘So then, with my mind, I [myself, autos ego, that is, the person not ‘in Christ’ (Rom. 8.1) and without the Spirit], am a slave to the law of
God, but with my flesh I am a slave to the law of sin’. Romans 7.25b is not the answer to the rhetorical question of Rom. 7.24, the answer of which is implied in Rom. 7.25a. Romans 7.25b anticipates the answer that follows in Romans 8.

Romans 8.1-4
Paul’s words translated as ‘the just requirement of the law’ are to dikaioma tou nomou. In the preceding passages Paul has used dikaioma with reference to Gentiles (Rom. 1.32; 2.26) and to all persons who are to be the recipients of God’s grace through their being made righteous (Rom. 5.16, 18). In Rom. 8.4 Paul uses it in a discussion of law with reference to persons who are ‘in Christ’, that is, are already made righteous.

The passage in Rom. 8.1-4 is comparable to the one in Rom. 7.21-25 in that Paul speaks about two aspects of law. ‘The law of sin and of death’ (Rom. 8.2) is the Jewish law as it was understood by persons not living in Christ and experiencing life by the Spirit. That law was powerless in itself to effect righteousness. But because of the efficacy of the work of God through his Son, the condemnation, a life of sin and death brought by the law, was transformed into the potentiality for restoring life anew as God himself requires. The law referred to as ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’, as the antithesis of ‘the law of sin and death’ (Rom. 8.2), is a way of life in which converts ‘set their minds on the things of the Spirit’. The Spirit is the distinctive mark of the convert, not the flesh. According to Paul, persons who live by the Spirit ‘set their minds on the things of the Spirit’ and fulfill ‘the just requirement of the law’ (Rom. 8.4-5; see Addendum). The antithesis of this is: ‘The mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law (nomos) – indeed it cannot’. We will learn more about Paul and the law as we continue our study of Romans.

Paul’s idea of predestination in Rom. 8.28-30 may seem to contradict much that we have learned. Those verses also appear to make the notion of a future judgment irrelevant. However, his idea of predestination can be understood only in light of such a judgment. The words ‘those who love God’ (Rom. 8.28) show that predestination does not refer to the choice of certain persons for salvation or condemnation before their births. Rather, Paul has in mind the people who love God as his chosen people (see, e.g., Deut. 6.5; 7.7-11). They were chosen ‘to be conformed to the image of his Son’ (Rom. 8.29; recall discussion above). They are ‘God’s elect’ whom he ‘justifies’ (makes righteous; Rom. 8.33) and ‘who have the first fruits of the Spirit’ (Rom. 8.23). God has also glorified them (Rom. 8.30).
According to Paul, God was working through him for the ultimate salvation of Jews as well as Gentiles. From the beginning God had predestined certain persons, but the point is that they were predestined for righteousness, not for ultimate salvation (Rom. 8.28–30). This is a very important point in the theology of Paul.

Unlike the terms ‘predestine’ and ‘make righteous’, which are used together in Rom. 8.28–30, the terms ‘predestine’ and ‘save’ never occur together in the letters of Paul. In truth, Paul uses his word for ‘predestine’ (proorizo) elsewhere only in 1 Cor. 2.7 but in a different sense (compare Eph. 1.5, 11, which may echo Paul).

In spite of what we have said, Paul’s concluding words in Rom. 8.30 are perplexing: ‘whom he justified (made righteous) he also glorified’. This is the only place Paul uses the verb ‘glorify’ (doxazo) in the past tense (edoxasen). In Rom. 8.17 he uses the verb syndoxazo (the only place it is used in the New Testament) in the aorist subjunctive with future meaning: ‘if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him’ (Christ). In 2 Cor. 3.18 Paul speaks of converts being transformed from one glory to another and in 2 Cor. 4.17 of being prepared for an eternal weight of glory exceedingly. These passages speak of future ultimate glorification. If by ‘glorified’ in Rom. 8.30 Paul means that the final glorification of righteous converts is assured, it is the exception that proves the rule. The rule is stated in Rom. 5.2: ‘We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God’. Converts who have been made righteous have only ‘obtained access to this grace in which we stand’ (Rom. 5.2).

After the discussion of the law in Romans 7–8 and its relationship to those who are in Christ Jesus and live by the Spirit, Paul wrestles with the problem of God and his reaction toward those Jews who have rejected Jesus.

Romans 9–11

In Romans 9–11, a major section of the letter, Paul struggles with the problem of God as he tries to explain the rejection of Christ, especially by his own people, the Jews. Paul must often have wrestled with the problem of the Jews’ rejection of Christ in light of God’s promises to them. Since in Romans 9–11 he discusses in more detail the points raised in Romans 3 concerning the Jews’ rejection of Christ, Romans 9–11 may have been a separate section – perhaps a dissertation – which Paul inserted here. One argument in favor of chs. 9–11 as an insertion into the letter is that Rom. 12.1 would follow naturally after Rom. 8.39.
Rejection of Jesus by the Jews

In Romans 9 Paul begins by saying that he feels deep sorrow and incessant anguish in his heart. He wonders if God reneged on his promise to Abraham. No, because the true descendants of Abraham are not physical descendants but the persons whom God selected (see Gen. 18.9-21; 21.12-14; 25.21-23). But does this mean God acted unjustly? No, because God has mercy on whom he has mercy (see Exod. 33.19) and hardens the heart of whom he will (Rom. 9.1-18). God can choose whomever he wants to, Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom. 9.19-29). Throughout, Paul either quotes from or alludes to passages from his scriptures to support what he is saying.

Romans 9.30–10.13 are key verses for understanding Paul's thought with respect to righteousness on the basis of faithfulness, not works of the law. Paul discusses the quest for righteousness on the part of Jews first and then of Gentiles. He wrestles with the problem of the Jews being God's special people who received his promises and yet did not have the righteousness of God. The problem for Paul is not that the Jews have not been faithful toward God. That is why he writes twice that no one who believes in God will be put to shame (Rom. 9.33; 10.11, from Isa. 18.16; see discussion below). The Jews are at fault because they do not pursue righteousness on the basis of faithfulness but on the basis of the law. That is Paul's argument, so let's see how he defends it.

The Stone of Stumbling and What It Is. Paul says that the Jews have stumbled over the stone of stumbling and quotes a combination of Isa. 28.16 and LXX Isa. 8.14: 'Behold, I am placing in Zion a stone of stumbling and a rock of stumbling, and the person who believes on him shall not be put to shame' (Rom. 9.32-33). In this compound quotation from the Septuagint the words translated literally as ‘a stone of stumbling’ (lithon proskommatos) and as ‘a rock of stumbling’ (petran skandalou) are synonymous and, therefore, mean the same thing. But the question is to whom or to what did Paul intend them to refer?

In spite of the fact that in the later New Testament writing of 1 Peter (2.4-8) the stone of stumbling is used with reference to Christ, there is nothing in the immediate context in Romans to support that view. This is in sharp contrast to the passage in 1 Peter, where the writer also quotes from or alludes to several passages from the Septuagint, including Isa. 28.16. In 1 Peter, however, the writer’s introductory comment makes it clear that the quotation is used with reference to Christ: ‘Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight’ (1 Pet. 2.4).
The quotation in Rom. 9.32-33 follows after the statement that the Jews pursue righteousness not on the basis of faithfulness but on the basis of works. Paul’s whole point is that the Jews have misplaced the emphasis: they have put the emphasis on the law and not on their faithfulness toward God. They have failed to recognize God as the basis and end of the law, so they have rejected him. As some scholars now believe, the stone of stumbling, therefore, probably refers to the law instead of Jesus. Paul uses similar expressions elsewhere with reference to a cause of stumbling for converts, perhaps even to the law itself in Rom. 11.9-12. But the Jews still have a chance because Isaiah says, ‘The person who believes in him [God] will not be put to shame’.

The words ‘in him’ in the sentence quoted in Rom. 9.33 are not in the Hebrew or Greek text of Isa. 28.16, so the Jews whom Paul was addressing would naturally have understood God as the object of believing. However, the words ‘in him’ could be an insertion into the text of Isa. 28.16 from the Greek text of Isa. 8.14 where the object of believing is clearly God. And, indeed, Paul probably means the ‘in him’ in Rom. 9.33 to refer to God rather than to Christ. Paul has not mentioned Christ anywhere in the context of his long discussion since Rom. 9.1-5. His discussion centers on God and the Jews’ relationship to him and to the law. Paul assures the Jews that the person who believes in God will not be put to shame. Because of their faithfulness toward God, by his grace, God will make it possible for them to come into the community of believers faithful toward God and, therefore, ultimately for them to be saved. But they must pursue righteousness on the basis of their faithfulness toward God and not on the basis of the law. And, just as importantly, the Jews must believe certain things about Jesus. Indeed, these things are the whole point of Paul’s discussion in Romans 10 and 11.

If the cause of stumbling does refer to Jesus, then the ‘on him’ refers to Jesus as the Christ (Messiah) crucified. This earliest and most important belief about Jesus was very hard for most Jews to accept, because they could not conceive of a Messiah who died on a cross. The best reason for this interpretation is that Paul refers to the crucified Christ as a cause of stumbling to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles in 1 Cor. 1.23. There the word meaning ‘a cause of stumbling’ is skandalon, the same word as in the second part of the quotation from Isa. 28.16, quoted by Paul in Rom. 9.32-33. He uses the same word in Gal. 5.11 in the discussion with his adversaries: ‘But, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? Then the cause of the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished’ (Greek text). Here Paul seems to be saying that if circumcision were still maintained as law then there would not be any concern about
Christ crucified. However, circumcision, as part of the law, is no longer a stumbling block because Christ died to bring freedom from that law. Moreover, in Galatians 5 the cause of stumbling for the Jews is not just the crucified Christ but also the freedom those persons have who conduct their lives by the Spirit, not by the law (Gal. 5.13-26). Gal. 5.11 and its context help to enlighten and confirm the suggested interpretation that the law is the cause of stumbling in Rom. 9.32-33 (Gal. 2.4-6 is also important here).

In Rom. 9.5, Paul’s last reference to Christ, he lists the things that originate with the Jews, and then he adds that ‘from them, according to the flesh, comes the Messiah’. Although not in the Hebrew text of Isa. 28.16, the words ‘in him’ are inserted after ‘believes’ in some manuscripts of the Septuagint. They were inserted by Jewish translators of the passage with reference to the Messiah, as we know from later Judaism. Since in the context Paul is talking only to Jews, he may have in mind Jesus as the Messiah as the object of their believing. But in light of the whole context in Romans 9, and in light of Paul’s discussion in Gal. 5.11 and its context, the best interpretation is that the cause of stumbling in Rom. 9.32-33, according to Paul, is the law.

In Rom. 10.1-4 Paul continues with his concern about the Jews’ relationship to God. He prays to God on behalf of their salvation (hyper auton eis soterion). This probably means to come into the new community of believers, ‘the Israel of God’. Paul also testifies to their zeal for God. But he says too that their zeal is not according to knowledge. The Jews are ignorant of the righteousness of God, seek to establish their own righteousness, and do not submit to the righteousness of God, that is, righteousness on the basis of faithfulness toward God, not on the basis of the law. ‘For Christ [as the Messiah] is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes’ (that is, has faithfulness toward God). That is how ‘they may be saved’ in Rom. 10.1 and for which Paul prays.

Acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah was the primary belief about Jesus necessary for Jews who wanted to become members of the Christ movement, as we have learned from the first apostolic preaching reported in Acts. There it is said that after his religious experience on the road to Damascus Paul himself ‘confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving from the scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah’ (Acts 9.22). Sometimes Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection are associated with Jesus as the Christ (Acts 2.23-24, 32-36; 3.13-26; 4.10-26; 17.1-4). These things may help to support the argument that in the quotation from Isaiah in Rom. 9.33 Paul had Jesus as the (crucified, risen?) Christ in mind. However, in light of the emphasis on God in the whole context, the cause of stumbling
for the Jews was the law because they put it over ‘the righteousness that comes from faith’ (Rom. 10.2-4).

The Belief That Jesus Is Lord

In Rom. 10.5-13 Paul discusses the subjects of righteousness and salvation for all persons, Gentiles as well as Jews. Here we come to the ultimate of Paul’s views of beliefs about Christ. He says that ‘the word’ in a quotation from Deut. 30.14 is ‘the word of faith (pistis) that we proclaim’. Then he continues:

If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes for righteousness (eis dikaiosynen) and with the lips confesses for salvation (eis soterion). For the scripture says, ‘No one who believes on him will be put to shame.’ For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord is over all and gives his riches to all who call upon him. ‘For everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved’ (Rom. 10.9-13).

Here there is no doubt that a condition for being saved is belief about Jesus, as well as faithfulness toward God. Paul also goes beyond the belief that God raised Jesus from the dead, expressed in earlier letters, and includes the confession that Jesus is Lord (see also Phil. 2.11). But, as we have learned, for Paul salvation still lies in the future, and that is why I have translated the phrases eis dikaiosynen and eis soterian as ‘for righteousness’ and ‘for salvation’, respectively. Again, the preposition eis indicates that the action is not yet complete but is still moving toward the goal specified. The translations of the RSV and the NRSV, ‘is justified’ and ‘is saved’, are misleading. Paul’s verb for ‘save’ (sozo) in Rom. 10.9 is a future passive and is correctly translated as ‘will be saved’ in the NRSV. But in 10.10 the words translated as verbs are nouns. The REB version is better: ‘leads to righteousness’ and ‘leads to salvation’. A good translation for eis would be ‘with a view toward’. Faithfulness toward God is the first step for making converts righteous by the forgiveness of their past sins and for leading toward salvation. And now Paul also adds as another step toward ultimate salvation the confession that Jesus is Lord.

When Paul wrote about Jesus as Lord, he was using formulas familiar to his readers. As we have learned, the title ‘lord’ was applied to Roman emperors before the time of Paul, especially in the East. Again, from ancient inscriptions we obtain the following information. A Ptolemy of Egypt (Ptolemies is a title used with respect to a line of Egyptian kings during the Hellenistic era from 323–330 BCE) was called ‘the lord king
god’. Herod the Great and Agrippa I and Agrippa II were given the title ‘lord’. An Egyptian papyrus from the year 1 CE mentions sacrifices and libations ‘on behalf of the god and lord Emperor’ (Augustus). During the time of Nero (54–68 CE), when Romans was probably written, ‘lord’ was a title applied to him by officials in towns and cities throughout the East. Compare ‘Nero Kyrios’ with ‘Kyrios Iesous’ (1 Cor. 12.3). Compare ‘Nero the lord’ with ‘the Lord Jesus Christ’.

We should observe that in writing about Paul’s appearance before King Agrippa, Luke reports that the procurator Festus says to Agrippa that Paul had appealed to the emperor and that he decided to send Paul to Rome but adds: ‘Concerning him I do not have anything [definite] to write to my lord’ (literal trans.; Acts 25.26). Notice that Festus says ‘my lord’. For Paul the important thing was that for his converts Jesus was to be the only Lord, and he uses three phrases to convey his feelings: ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’ (sixteen times), ‘Jesus Christ our Lord’ (four times), and ‘Christ Jesus our Lord’ (three times).

Paul’s word translated as ‘confess’ is homologeo and really means ‘to say the same thing’, ‘agree’, ‘acknowledge’, or ‘confess’. Paul uses homologeo only in Rom. 10.9-10, but he does use the related word exhomologeo in Rom. 14.11; 15.9, and Phil. 2.11. In the first two passages it is appropriately translate as ‘praise’, and in the third with ‘confess’. We have learned that Phil. 2.6-11 is very likely part of an early creed or hymn inserted by Paul. One might wonder how much of our conception of ‘confess’ Paul really meant and if his statements about confessing Jesus as Lord are a true reflection of his personal faith. Or, were they, perhaps more politic (‘having practical wisdom’) and mission oriented? After all, Paul’s goal was to win Gentile converts, as he wrote to the converts at Corinth: ‘I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some’, and he does so ‘all for the sake of the gospel’, so that he might ‘share in its blessings’ (1 Cor. 9.22-23). When in Rome did Paul do as the Romans do?

Jesus may first have been acknowledged as Lord, as well as Messiah, in the community of believers in Jerusalem. According to Acts, Peter preaches from Jerusalem: ‘God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus’ (Acts 2.36). Jesus may have been acknowledged as Lord in the church in Corinth, because when writing about their conduct at worship Paul says: ‘No one can say [lege, not homologeo] “Jesus is Lord” except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12.3). The important thing to observe here is that the Holy Spirit is associated with acknowledgment of Jesus as Lord. The Holy Spirit is what sets believers apart from unbelievers.

Before Romans Paul never mentions believing in conjunction with Jesus as Lord. Although Paul uses kyrios with reference to Jesus several times in
Galatians (1.3, 19; 5.10; 6.14, 18), not once does he say anything about believing or confessing in connection with the term.

Finally, we should observe that in Rom. 10.10 righteousness (eis dikaiosynen) and salvation (eis soterian) are used in parallel, which means that they are essentially the same thing for Paul. He has used ‘righteousness’ (dikaiosyne) four times in Rom. 9.30-31 and six times in Rom. 10.3-6 before Rom. 10.10. On the other hand, Paul has not used the verb dikaioo, usually translated as ‘justify’, since Rom. 8.33, nor does he use it anywhere in Romans after that. There is, then, hardly any justification for translating Paul’s eis dikaiosynen as ‘is justified’ (NRSV) instead of ‘for righteousness’ (REB, ‘leads to’ for eis before the nouns, which conveys Paul’s meaning precisely). The righteousness of converts was the main thing on Paul’s mind.

There is an interesting and informative incident reported in the anonymous tract known as The Martyrdom of Polycarp. Polycarp was the bishop of Smyrna in Asia Minor (early-second century CE). In the tract a police captain suggests that Polycarp venerate the emperor and says, ‘What harm is it to say, “Lord Caesar”…and to be saved?’ (8.2) Remember that emperors and other prominent officials were frequently thought of as ‘saviors’. In Romans is Paul reflecting another aspect of local color in linking belief in Jesus as Lord with being saved in order to give his message appeal?

Evidence seems to indicate that (1) as recent as the time when Paul wrote Galatians he had not yet worked out a doctrine of Jesus as Lord and Savior, if he ever really did (for Jesus as Savior in Paul see next Chapter); (2) for those who believe in God, Jesus, not the emperor is ‘our Lord’; (3) by linking God with Jesus, Paul remains a strict monotheist; and (4) Paul remains a monotheist even after the confession of Jesus as Lord (Rom. 10.9). Paul would never acknowledge Jesus as ‘the lord king god’ as does the inscription quoted above. Compare those words with ‘one God, the Father…one Lord, Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 8.6) and ‘confess Jesus...is Lord...believe...God raised him from the dead’ (Rom. 10.9) and ‘confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...to the glory of God the Father’ (Phil. 2.11).

At first glance, it appears that in Rom. 10.5-13 Paul identifies Jesus with God; but that is not true, even though the line Paul draws between the two is very fine. Up to 10.9 Paul is speaking about Christ, but beginning with verse 10.10 his thought returns to God. So believing on him in 10.11 refers to God, not Jesus, and the Lord in 10.13 is the Lord God as in the Greek text of Joel 3.5 that Paul quotes, not Jesus as Lord of 10.9. This is true for two reasons.

First, according to Paul elsewhere, it is the one God who is the God of Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom. 10.12; see also Rom. 3.29-30). And in Rom.
9.5 Paul says, ‘God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.’ The REB is a more forceful rendering: ‘May God, supreme above all, be blessed forever! Amen.’

Second, in Rom. 11.33, as in 10.12 Paul speaks of the riches of God, and in Phil. 4.19 the distinction between God and Christ is quite clear: ‘My God will fully satisfy every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus’. Paul would never utter the confession of Thomas: ‘My Lord and my God!’ (Jn 20.28). With respect to Jesus as Lord there are fundamental differences between the writer of Acts and Paul, to which we now turn.

What Paul Does Not Say
Perhaps, again, we can best understand Paul’s thought from what he does not say. The writer of Acts uses the prepositions *epi* and *eis*, or noun without a preposition when writing about believing ‘in’ or ‘on’ Jesus as Lord (see Acts 9.42; 11.17; 16.31; 18.8; 20.21; 24.24; 26.18). With the single exception in Gal. 2.16 that makes the rule and which we discussed earlier, Paul never uses a preposition with expressions of believing about Jesus.

The phrases in Acts correspond to the expressions of Paul’s epitomizers in Ephesians and Colossians. Here are some examples: ‘I have heard of your faith in (*en*) the Lord Jesus’ (Eph. 1.15); ‘We have heard of your faith in (*en*) Christ Jesus’ (Col. 1.4); ‘the firmness of your faith in (*eis*) Christ’ (Col. 2.5; see also 1 Tim. 1.14; 3.13; 2 Tim. 1.13). Paul never writes about faith in or believing in Christ as do the writers of Acts, Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles (see, for example, 1 Tim. 1.16; 2 Tim. 3.15). Nor, on the other hand, do those writers speak of the faithfulness of Jesus as Paul does. There is, however, a single exception in Eph. 3.12, where the writer conveys Paul’s thought about the faithfulness of Jesus exactly: ‘in whom [Jesus] we have access to God...through the faith of him’ (*dia tes pisteos autou*). Here the author has conveyed Paul’s idea of the faithfulness of Jesus precisely. Although we may not always understand what Paul says, sometimes what he does not say helps us to better understand what he does say, as well as what some other writers of the New Testament say. The silence of Paul is mostly ignored in trying to understand his basic ideas.

In the Hebrew scriptures one of the expressions for God is ‘the Lord God’, and it is used in the Greek equivalent *kurios ho theos* or *ho kurios theos* many times in the Septuagint and sometimes in the New Testament (e.g. Rev. 1.8; 4.8; 19.6). But Paul never uses those expressions, and he is careful to distinguish between God and Jesus. Apparently his Jewish monotheism
made it important that in the world of polytheism where he preached he make the distinction clear. The basic text for understanding Paul on this point is 1 Cor. 8.4-6, one mentioned several times. Elsewhere Paul makes the distinction between God and Jesus clear, especially in the salutations of his letters: ‘God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Thess. 1.1; see also 1 Cor. 1.3; 2 Cor. 1.2; Gal. 1.1, 3); and ‘God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2 Cor. 1.3). Yet, believing that Jesus was Lord was next to having faithfulness toward God and was the highest expression of belief about Jesus. But according to Paul, Christ himself did not count equality with God a thing to be snatched at (Phil. 2.6). And, also according to Paul, the confession of Jesus as Lord was to be done for the purpose of glorifying God the Father (Phil. 2.11).

Although Paul always distinguishes between God and Jesus, in his own mind he does not make a similar distinction between Jesus as Christ and Jesus as Lord. So he can speak of ‘Jesus Christ our Lord’ and ‘our Lord Jesus Christ’. The Pauline distinction between Lord and God with reference to Jesus disappeared in later Christian theology. Specific examples of this are to be found in the gospel of John. Thomas’ words about Jesus as Lord and God reflect the author’s own theology as stated in the prologue to the gospel: ‘The Word [Jesus] was with God, and the Word was God’ (Jn 1.1; see also 1 Tim. 1.11; Tit. 2.13). There is nothing comparable to these passages in Paul’s letters. Although our arguments are from silence, here Paul’s silence is our chief learning.

The closest Paul comes to making an identification of Jesus with God is in 2 Cor. 4.4: ‘the glory of Christ, who is the image (likeness) of God’. Notice, though, that immediately after that statement, as before it, God is primary in Paul’s thinking. The ‘image’ or ‘likeness’ does not mean the same as God, because Paul speaks of man (aner) as ‘the image and glory of God’ (1 Cor. 11.7). Paul would not say that man is the same as God. According to Paul, God had also predestined some persons to share the image of his Son (Rom. 8.29; see also 2 Cor. 3.18). In all of these passages Paul was probably influenced by the story of the creation of man in Genesis.

Jesus as Lord symbolizes a relationship with those converts who believe Jesus is their Lord, as against all other lords of the polytheistic world. The significance of the title is not theological but experiential: ‘The Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom’ (2 Cor. 3.17; see also 1 Cor. 12.4; 2 Cor. 13.14); and ‘No one can say Jesus is Lord, except by the Holy Spirit’ (1 Cor. 12.3). Paul uses the phrases implying ‘experience’ elsewhere. The gospel came to the Thessalonians ‘in the Holy Spirit’ (1 Thess. 1.5; Rom. 14.17); ‘righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy
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Spirit’ (Rom. 14.17); ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God’ (1 Cor. 6.11); ‘mysteries in the Spirit’ (1 Cor. 14.2); ‘sharing in the Spirit’ (Phil. 2.1); and ‘God’s Spirit dwells in you’ (1 Cor. 3.16; Rom. 8.9, 11).

Paul also uses the phrases ‘in the Lord’ (1 Thess. 5.12; and often) and ‘in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (1 Cor. 15.31; Rom. 8.39). These expressions are synonymous and closely related to the phrases ‘in Christ’, ‘Christ in’, and ‘with Christ’, Paul’s most creative attempts to convey the experience of the spiritual Christ effective in the lives of believers who are new creations. In his mission work Paul’s personal experience of the risen or spiritual Jesus as Lord convinced him that he had greater authority than any of his rivals, even those who had known the earthly Jesus.

The bottom line, then, is that the title Lord is used by Paul not only to invoke the belief of converts who were familiar with the many lords of the polytheistic world, but equally to inspire the new life in Christ lived by and in the Spirit. The spirit of paganism was polytheism, with its many gods and lords. It was that spirit with which Paul was contending when he taught that faithfulness toward God and belief about Jesus as Lord were best experienced when living under the influence of the Spirit.

Romans 12–15

In the last major part of the letter (Romans 12–15), Paul tells how believers, as God’s people, should demonstrate their being made righteous by moral living. This is necessary because ultimate salvation lies ahead. Believers are on the right path, but they can lose their way.

In contrast to Romans 1–11, parts of which almost defy accurate interpretation, Romans 12–15 is so clear that there is little need for lengthy or detailed comments. The standards of morality emphasized in these chapters must have seemed out of reach, especially to Gentiles not used to such demanding moral life-style.

The Morality of Believers

The theme of Romans 12–15 is stated in Rom. 12.1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual (reasonable) worship (service). Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God – what is good and acceptable and perfect.

Believers must do their best in exercising the gifts given to them (Rom. 12.3-8). Genuine love works for the good and harmony of all, tries to over-
come evil with good (Rom. 12.9-21) and manifests itself in good citizenship (Rom. 13.1-7). Love for one another should be the only obligation (Rom. 13.8-10), and this is the more imperative because of the nearness of Christ’s coming again (Rom. 13.11-14). Genuine love is conscientious about the scruples of others (Rom. 14.1-23). And in a community of believers those who are strong should help the weak (Rom. 15.1-13).

Paul apologizes for writing so frankly to a church he had not visited and reiterates his desire to visit Rome (Rom. 15.14-33). As we noted in our introduction to Romans, ch. 16 may originally have been a separate letter of recommendation for Phoebe to one of Paul’s churches, perhaps the one at Ephesus.

**Summary**

In Romans, as in Galatians and his other letters, Paul was not writing for Christians of all time. He believed the end of the age was coming soon, perhaps before he died. He was writing for persons who had recently become converts to faithfulness toward God and to certain beliefs about Jesus. Converts were forgiven their past sins by God’s grace. Paul uses the terms ‘washed’, ‘sanctified’, ‘made righteous’, ‘reconciled to God’ to express the same idea (read 1 Cor. 6.11 again, and see also 2 Cor. 5.16-21; Rom. 5.8-11). The forgiveness of past sins is expressed symbolically in the initiation rite of baptism, whereby converts share Jesus’ death through their immersion and share in his resurrection by rising to newness of life lived under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Converts must also share Paul’s belief that Jesus as the Messiah is also Lord and Son of God. However, faithfulness toward God remains the primary presupposition behind Paul’s life and all his teaching.

Even baptized persons must not revert to their past life of sin and evil, but live moral lives because their ultimate salvation depends upon that and will be finalized in the future: ‘All will stand before the judgment seat of God… So then, each of us will be accountable to God’ (Rom. 14.10-12).

Romans, the longest, most difficult, and most influential of Paul’s epistles, apparently arose from his desire to share his religious convictions about communities of believers with a church he had not visited but for which he had a deep concern. But we may never really know the full story behind Paul’s letter ‘to all God’s beloved in Rome, who are called to be holy ones’ (Rom. 1.7).
Chapter 10

Paul’s Latest Letters: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, and Ephesians

These letters are considered together because the author of each was in prison when he wrote and because in each he purports to be Paul (Phil. 1.7, 13-14, 17; Col. 4.3, 10; Phlm. 1.1, 8-14, 23; Eph. 3.1; 4.1). The traditional place of Paul’s imprisonment is Rome. However, in modern times scholars have suggested that Paul was in prison at Ephesus when he wrote some or all of these four letters, although there is actually no conclusive evidence in the New Testament for an imprisonment of Paul in Ephesus. If Paul was in prison in Ephesus, then conceivably one or more of these letters could have been written from there. Any of the letters written from Ephesus would belong to the mid-period of Paul’s career and be close to the time of Galatians and Romans, or about 54–58 CE. If written from Rome, these four letters probably date from about 59–63 CE.

Philippians

How the Church at Philippi Began
According to Acts 16.11-15, Paul’s work at Philippi began with a group of women who were meeting together, apparently for worship. One of them, Lydia, who sold purple fabrics, was either a Jewish woman or a Gentile convert who ‘was a worshiper of God’. She invited Paul and his companions to her house, and they visited her (Acts 16.15, 40). The first church in Philippi may well have begun in Lydia’s house. Although in his letter to the Philippians Paul mentions the names of some women in the church at Philippi (Phil. 4.2-3), he does not mention Lydia. Since the persons Paul mentions have Gentile names, it is likely that the first converts at Philippi were mostly Gentiles.

Is Philippians a Fragmented Work?
Philippians is universally regarded as a genuine letter of Paul. Many scholars, however, think that it is not a unified work but comprised of fragments
from several letters to the church at Philippi. Here are some reasons why they think so.

Paul twice uses the word ‘finally’ (Phil. 3.1; 4.8), which indicates that there are two closings. There is a sudden and harsh change of tone between Phil. 3.1 and 3.2. If Paul was writing to thank the Philippians for sending gifts to him, as seems clear from Phil. 4.10-20, it is strange that he would not get to the point earlier in the letter.

Since there is no universal agreement about what constitutes the several fragments of Philippians, many scholars defend the unity of the letter. They give counter arguments to those above. Paul could have decided to stop writing when he used ‘finally’ and then thought about some other things he wanted to say. The harshness of tone, with its sudden occurrence, is no different from similar outbursts of Paul’s emotions at other places (e.g. 1 Cor. 15.35-37; Gal. 3.1-4; 4.21; 5.12; Rom. 16.17-18). Finally, already in Phil. 1.28 Paul refers to opponents, and they can be taken as the ones also mentioned in 3.2 and 3.17-19.

Any discussion of the fragment theory is at best only hypothesis. Although scholars generally agree that Paul wrote all of Philippians, many disagree about when, where, and why he wrote the whole letter or its several parts. For these reasons we deal with it as a unity.

**Purpose of Philippians**

As we now have the letter, the immediate purpose for writing seems to be to thank the Philippian converts for gifts brought to Paul during his imprisonment (Phil. 4.10-20). The letter of thanks was probably sent to Philippi with Epaphroditus who had brought Paul the most recent gift from the Philippians (Phil. 2.25-30).

There is no strong evidence in Philippians of any major problems in the church at Philippi. Occasionally Paul seems to exhort believers to be united (e.g. Phil. 1.27-28; 2.1-5; 4.2-3). Some scholars think the words ‘Beware of the dogs... look out for the cutting-up-party’ (Greek; Phil. 3.2) reflect a problem with Judaizers like that in Galatia. Paul’s word for ‘cutting up’ is *katatome*, a wordplay with *peritome*, ‘cutting around’, or ‘circumcision’. Because of the cutting of the flesh, the ‘cutting-up-party’ refers to those who advocate circumcision. But those words may be only a warning to the Philippian converts to be on their guard if some troublemakers should come to Philippi.

The gentle words in Phil. 1.15-18 about his rivals seem to rule out any serious division or problem in the church at Philippi as a whole. About his rivals Paul says only, ‘What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I
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Paul did not use such gentle words in 2 Corinthians 10–13 or in Galatians where serious problems threatened the churches. Philippians is certainly Paul’s warmest and most friendly letter. Moods of joy, appreciation, and thanks run through it from beginning to end. Paul longs for the Philippian believers ‘with the compassion of Christ Jesus’ (Phil. 1.8). The converts are persons whom he loves and longs for, his ‘joy and crown’ (Phil. 4.1).

Paul Writes about himself, his Aspirations, his Plans, and Moral Probity

Paul begins Philippians with a greeting ‘to all the saints (holy ones) in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the overseers and servers’ (Phil. 1.1). We cannot be sure what the words translated as ‘bishop’ (episkopos) and ‘deacon’ (diakonos) really mean. The former is used only here in the undisputed letters of Paul and is literally a ‘watcher over’ or ‘ overseer’. From pagan inscriptions before Christian times we learn that episkopoi served in pagan temples, so their service was in some way religious. It seems, therefore, that at Philippi the episkopoi served a primarily religious function, not an administrative or organizational one. According to 1 Tim. 3.1-7, an episkopos is to ‘be above reproach’ morally (see also Tit. 1.7-9). Perhaps at Philippi the episkopoi were the guardians of morality.

Paul does use the term diakonos, usually translated as ‘servant’, elsewhere, and it always has a religious implication (1 Cor. 3.5; 2 Cor. 3.6; 6.4; 11.15, 23; Gal. 2.17; Rom. 13.4; 15.8). Only in Rom. 16.1 may the term diakonos be taken as an official or officer in a church. In Phil. 1.1 the diakonoi most likely were persons who served in some practical capacity. They may have helped to serve at meals of believers, perhaps poured the wine, or perhaps looked out for the poor among them (see Acts 6.1-3).

After the greeting and thanksgiving (Phil. 1.1-11), Paul writes about personal matters. He refers to his imprisonment and to some fellow preachers who are not as scrupulous as he is (Phil. 1.12-18). Paul is torn between wanting to die and be with Christ or to remain alive, which is more necessary for the sake of the Philippians. To die would be his gain, but to remain alive would be better for his churches (Phil. 1.19-26).

In Phil. 1.25 Paul writes that he is convinced that he should remain alive and continue with all the Philippian converts for their ‘progress and joy of the (your) faith’ (literal trans.), so that when he returns to them he may share in their ‘boasting in Christ Jesus’. The phrase ‘boasting in Christ Jesus’ in Phil. 1.26 indicates that faithfulness toward God is meant in Phil. 1.25. The phrase would make no sense if faithfulness toward God were not meant. In Phil. 1.27 the statement about the converts living their lives ‘in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ’ is a moral emphasis. So the
statement about ‘standing firm in one spirit’ and ‘with one mind for the faithfulness of the gospel’ (Phil. 1.27) is a call from Paul for a united moral front against immoral forces.

A manner of life worthy of the gospel may lead to some opposition and suffering on the part of believers (Phil. 1.27-30). Paul reminds the Philippian converts that their salvation is from God. Then Paul says: ‘For to you it has been granted for the sake of Christ, not only to believe in him (eis auton), but also to suffer for his sake’ (Phil. 1.29). This sentence is very important for understanding what Paul says, so I have translated it literally from the Greek, because the NRSV is misleading. Now let’s look at it.

The word for ‘granted’ is charizomai, and it has ‘grace’ (charis) in it. Because of the Philippians’ experience from those opposing them, Paul does not want them to think that God has forsaken them. Their suffering for God’s sake is to be regarded as a gracious gift from him for the sake of Christ. The object of both believing and suffering here is God of the preceding verse to whom the converts owe their salvation; therefore, the ‘in him’ refers to God, in whom converts believe and for whom they suffer for the sake of Christ. Paul does not want the Philippians to think that because of their suffering God has let them down.

A polite exhortation to live together harmoniously and a possible fragment of a creed or hymn stressing Christ’s humility and obedience to God follow (Phil. 2.1-11). The Philippians ought to remember Christ’s example (Phil. 2.12-18). Paul plans to send Timothy and Epaphroditus to the church at Philippi soon (Phil. 2.19-30).

The warning ‘Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the cutting-up-party’ (Phil. 3.2; recall comments on this verse above) is directed toward some trouble makers. Paul and his fellow converts are ‘the circumcision, who worship in (by) the Spirit of God and boast in Christ Jesus and have no confidence in the flesh’ (Phil. 3.3). Paul stresses the Spirit, not circumcision (see also Gal. 6.12-15; Rom. 2.25-3.2). In Phil. 3.7-11 Paul goes on to stress his relationship to Christ.

Confronted with the possibility of death, nothing matters any more for Paul except knowing Christ Jesus his Lord. For Jesus’ sake he became a loser by giving up all past things in order that he might gain Christ and be united with him spiritually. For Paul, ‘living is Christ and dying is gain’ (Phil. 1.21). He states the result of his experience first as a devout Hebrew and then as a transformed person. Paul has a righteousness not of his own based on the law but on faithfulness. Note well that Paul does not say that he no longer has righteousness or that he is not righteous. But his present righteousness comes to him from God directly through Christ’s faithfulness, not by obeying the law. Paul’s righteousness, made possible by God,
depends upon Christ’s faithfulness. The phrase ‘based on faithfulness’ (*epi
te pistei*) further explains the earlier phrase, the righteousness ‘that comes through the faithfulness of Christ’ (*ten dia pisteos Christou*). The faithfulness is that of Christ, not that of Paul (Phil. 3.9).

Paul has given up all things for the sake of union with the spiritual Christ. By sharing in Christ’s suffering, Paul is literally sharing the form (*summorphizo*) of Christ’s death. This he does so that somehow he may attain the resurrection from the dead (Phil. 3.10-11). Paul has not yet gotten to the resurrection, the goal toward which he is headed, so he is striving to be worthy of it (Phil. 3.7-16). For this reason his life is not yet ‘made perfect’ (footnote, NRSV; Phil. 3.12). The verb translated as ‘made perfect’ is *teleioo* and literally means ‘bring to completion’ or ‘complete’. When used of persons, it means ‘bring to ethical or spiritual maturity or completeness’. It has the meaning ‘made perfect’ in Phil. 3.12. In Phil. 3.15 the adjective *teleios*, which comes from the same root, is used with the meaning of moral maturity or completeness.

It is clear that Paul has become satisfied with his present life as being morally mature, to say nothing of his being perfect. Here is what he says: ‘Let those of us then who are mature (morally perfect) be of the same mind’ (Phil. 3.15). ‘Be of the same mind’ is literally, ‘Let us set our minds on this’. ‘This’ refers to the ‘goal’ in 3.14. ‘Goal’ is *skopos*, ‘a mark to be aimed at’, by an archer, for example. It is for the prize of God’s call to the resurrected life (Phil. 3.11-16). Paul’s final challenge to believers who are morally mature (perfect) is that they aim for the resurrected life.

Again Paul is influenced by the Jewish scriptures. In Deut. 18.13, where the writer is having Moses report to the children of Israel what he believed God had told him at Sinai, we read: ‘You shall be perfect before the Lord your God’ (LXX). The Greek word translated as ‘perfect’ is *teleios* and renders the Hebrew word *tamim*, which has the meaning ‘unblemished’ or ‘with no imperfection’. When used with reference to humans, it denotes persons without moral blemish, or morally blameless. For example, God says to Abraham: ‘Be blameless’ (Gen. 17.1). See also 2 Sam. 22.26 (LXX = 2 Kgs 22.26): ‘With the holy you will be holy, and with the perfect man you will be perfect’.

It seems that again scripture was the motivation for Paul’s goal of moral perfection, the goal he had for his converts before he wrote Philippians. See 1 Cor. 2.6: ‘Yet among the mature (perfect, *teleios*) we do speak wisdom’ and 1 Cor. 14.20 (Greek): ‘Do not be children in your thought but in evil be babies, and in your thought be perfect’ (*teleios*; see also Rom. 12.2).

Paul appeals to his fellow converts at Philippi, as elsewhere, to ‘be imitators’ of him and to observe those ‘who live according to the example
Paul’s Latest Letters

(model) you have in us’ (Phil. 3.17). We have learned earlier about Paul’s expectations for converts follow the model of him and his co-workers. He tells the Corinthians, ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’ (1 Cor. 11.1). The imitation of Christ should leave no doubt in anyone’s mind that Paul expected his converts to be morally perfect (see also 1 Thess. 1.6; 2.14; 1 Cor. 4.16; Rom. 12.2).

Apparently there were some immoral persons living among the converts in the church who even gloried in their shame. But they may either be beyond hope of salvation, or Paul is too depressed to worry about them: ‘Their end is destruction’ (Phil. 3.19). He exhorts the converts to follow his example in order to attain the heavenly glory in their ‘commonwealth in heaven’, from where their Savior is still to come (Phil. 3.17-4.1). Here is the only place Paul uses the word ‘Savior’, and he is yet to come, in order to transform the humble bodies of morally perfect believers to conform to ‘the body of his glory’ (3.20-21).

The women, Euodia and Syntyche, are ‘to be of the same mind in the Lord’, all are to pray and give thanks as the day of the Lord draws near and do what is loving and kind (Phil. 4.2-7). Philippians 4.8-9 is a compendium of virtues that were known in the best of pagan society, especially among the Stoics. In the Greek language the inclusive term for morality at its highest is arete. Usually translated as ‘virtue’, it occurs nowhere else in Paul’s letters. The virtues Paul lists may well have been known and practiced by those of the Philippians who were perfect, and he expects them and all the other converts to continue in their moral ways.

Paul concludes with statements of joy and gratitude for the Philippians’ gifts (Phil. 4.10-20). So the letter ends as it began – with joy and thanksgiving.

Summary
From the book of Acts we learn that the church in Philippi began with Paul’s preaching to a group of women who had met for worship (Acts 16.11-15, 40). Paul’s letter to the Philippians confirms the active participation of women in the church at Philippi. Philippians is a distinctive letter of Paul in that it shows an unusually warm and happy relationship between Paul and the converts who were not causing any major problem for him.

Colossians

Founding of the Church at Colossae
The book of Acts says nothing about Paul ever visiting the city of Colossae, and the author says that the Colossian converts had never seen him (Col.
Although we know where Colossae was located, it has not been excavated. Colossae, along with the neighboring cities of Laodicea (Col. 2.1; 4.13-16; Rev. 1.11; 3.14) and Hierapolis (Col. 4.13), was situated in the valley of the Lycus river in the Roman province of Asia. According to ancient tradition, the three cities were destroyed by an earthquake, perhaps during the time of Nero (54–68 CE). Colossae may have been destroyed before Luke wrote Acts, and its destruction may be the reason Acts says nothing about a visit of Paul there. It seems as though Paul’s fellow worker Epaphras (Col. 1.7; 4.12), a member of the church at Colossae, founded the church there and the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col. 4.12-13). The Colossians probably heard about Paul and his message from Epaphras (Col. 1.7, 23-29).

Laodicea was one of the seven cities in the Roman province of Asia where there were churches to which the author of Revelation wrote letters (Rev. 2.1–3.22). For some unknown reason Ephesus is the only one of those cities (see 1 Cor. 15.32; 16.8) mentioned in Acts in connection with Paul’s mission work. Perhaps some of the churches in those cities were founded by co-workers of Paul (for Laodicea see Col. 4.12-13), and they may have kept Paul informed about the situations there.

Like the church at Rome, the church at Colossae was not founded or even visited by Paul. The author includes the readers among those who had not seen him ‘face to face’ (Col. 2.1). So, the writer was not personally acquainted with the readers to whom the letter is addressed. He had only ‘heard’ from Epaphras about their ‘faith in (en) Christ Jesus’ and their ‘love in the Spirit’ (Col. 1.4, 7-8). But the address, ‘To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ in Colossae’ (Col. 1.2), shows that the church there was firmly established when the author wrote. This is further confirmed by his thankfulness for the Colossian believers’ faith in Christ Jesus and for the love which they have for all the saints (Col. 1.4). Again, I remind you that the real Paul never uses the phrase ‘faith in (en) Christ’.

Epaphras is described by the author as ‘our beloved fellow servant’ and as ‘a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf’ (Col. 1.7). Perhaps he was influenced by Paul while Paul was staying in Ephesus from where, according to Acts 19.10, ‘all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord’. Apparently Epaphras, working under Paul’s encouragement and supervision, helped to make that possible.

Is Colossians an Authentic Letter of Paul?
The letter to the Colossians purports to be from Paul (Col. 1.1; 4.18) and that he is suffering (Col. 1.24) and in prison (Col. 4.3, 18). However, some
scholars have questioned the authenticity of Colossians on the basis of its vocabulary, style of writing, and advanced Christology (that is, doctrine of Christ). For that reason I use the words ‘the writer’ or ‘the author’ instead of ‘Paul’ when referring to the author of Colossians, as I do also for Ephesians.

In order to observe the Christology of the writer consider especially Col. 1.15-20:

He [Christ] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.

With this passage compare Col. 2.8-15. Some scholars point out that the same kind of speculative Christology appears also in letters of Paul universally recognized as authentic (see, e.g., 1 Cor. 1.18-25; 8.5-6; 2 Cor. 3.17-18; Phil. 2.5-11). Please read the passages from Paul just listed to see if you think they do contain ideas like those in Col. 1.15-20.

The letter to the Ephesians reveals that its author was very familiar with much of the material in Colossians. Moreover, Colossians was included in both the canon of Marcion, one of the first Christian heretics (about 140 CE), and the Muratorian Canon (about 180–200 CE), named after its discoverer Muratori. These ‘canons’ are the earliest known collections of Christian writings. This seems to indicate that in the story behind Paul and his letters Colossians was clearly regarded as an authentic letter. Its authenticity was not questioned before the middle of the nineteenth century.

Arguments against Authenticity. If we want to be well informed about the story behind Paul and his letters, we should be familiar with some of the important arguments for and against the authenticity of Colossians. Below are some of them. They show how scholars approach a difficult problem when studying the story behind a writing of the New Testament in a more critical manner.

In Colossians there are thirty-four words or phrases that occur nowhere else in the New Testament and twenty-five words that do not occur in (other) letters of Paul. Here are some examples: ‘inheritance’ (Col. 1.12), ‘the whole fullness of deity’ (Col. 2.9), ‘worship of angels’ (Col. 2.18), and
‘seasoned with salt’ (Col. 4.6). In contrast to Paul’s (other) letters, the style of Colossians is cumbersome and grammatically poor. For example, Col. 1.9-12 and 1.24-27 are each one long sentence in the Greek text. The use of synonyms used close together and participles are characteristic of the writer’s style. Here are several examples from the Greek text of Col. 1.9-12: ‘praying’ and ‘asking’, ‘wisdom and understanding’, ‘endurance and patience’, ‘bearing fruit’, and ‘increasing in the knowledge of God’.

**Arguments for Authenticity.** Those who defend Pauline authorship offer counter arguments in addition to the one based on the canons noted above. The differences in vocabulary and style, they say, are to be explained by recognizing that Paul writes to address the situation in the church at Colossae, which was not like that in any other church. Paul is always able to adapt his language and thought to meet the situation at hand. With respect to the advanced Christology in Colossians, defenders of Pauline authorship suggest that some converts at Colossae were more philosophically minded than those in Paul’s other churches (see Col. 2.8-15). The writer links philosophy and empty deceit and exhorts the converts: ‘See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit…not according to Christ’ (Col. 2.8).

**Comparison of Colossians with Philemon**

Perhaps the most interesting, and yet the most difficult, questions concerning the authorship of Colossians arise from a comparison of that letter with the one to Philemon, a letter universally thought to be from Paul. The following appear in both letters: Paul and Timothy are together at the time of writing (Col. 1.1; Phlm. 1.1); mention of these friends of Paul, Onesimus (Col. 4.9; Phlm. 1.10), Archippus (Col. 4.17; Phlm. 1.2), Aristarchus (Col. 4.10; Phlm. 1.24), Mark (Col. 4.10; Phlm. 1.24), Epaphras (Col. 1.7; 4.12; Phlm. 1.23), Demas (Col. 4.14; Phlm. 1.24), and Luke (Col. 4.14; Phlm. 1.24); the sending of Onesimus to the recipients of the letter (Col. 4.7-9; Phlm. 1.10-12); and Archippus mentioned as a person of special importance (Col. 4.17; Phlm. 1.2). We should observe, however, that in Phlm. 1.24 the order of the names Mark and Aristarchus and Demas and Luke is reversed in Col. 4.10, 14. And in Col. 4.10 Aristarchus is referred to as a ‘fellow prisoner’, but in Phlm. 1.23 the same designation is used of Epaphras.

In comparing Colossians and Philemon we should also notice these things. Onesimus and Archippus, as we said, are mentioned in both letters. In Col. 4.9 Onesimus is referred to as one of the Colossians. Colossians
ends with a special message to Archippus (Col. 4.17). The letter to Philemon includes Archippus among the addressees (Phlm. 1.2). From these facts we can deduce that Onesimus was a member of the church at Colossae (Col. 4.9). If Onesimus and Archippus, mentioned in both letters, are indeed the same persons in both letters, then Archippus, as well as Onesimus, was probably also a member of the church at Colossae. If these things are true, then both Colossians and Philemon were sent to the church at Colossae. Presumably the letter to Philemon was sent with Onesimus when Onesimus was sent back to Colossae with Tychicus, presumably the bearer of the letter to the Colossians (Col. 4.7-10).

If, indeed, Colossians and Philemon were written to the same church, why would the author mention so many of his friends in both letters? Were the letters written at the same time and delivered by the same person? And why would the same writer send a letter to a prominent person, Philemon, presumably even a leader of the church at Colossae and not ever hint about the special problem there (see below)? All that we have said raises difficult questions that really cannot be answered in attempting to learn the complete story behind the letter to the Colossians and the letter to Philemon as well.

If Paul wrote Colossians, it came from the period of his imprisonment, probably in Rome, during the early 60s. If Paul was not the author, it was written by someone who used his name, but by whom and precisely when and where we do not know. If not written by Paul, Colossians belongs among those pseudonymous later writings in the New Testament occasioned by false teachers within the church. Its date would then be near the end of the first century.

Situation in the Church at Colossae

No matter who wrote Colossians, the situation which was the reason for its writing is clear from the letter itself. The church in Colossae was troubled by false teachings. The original teaching about God and Christ in a predominantly Gentile church (Col. 1.5-8) was threatened by elements of other religions becoming a part of it or being mixed with it. The main problem, then, was religious syncretism, a mixing of elements from several religions with what the Colossians had originally been taught.

The writer had learned from Epaphras about the Colossians and their love for all the holy ones (Col. 1.4, 8). But Epaphras must also have told the writer that the form of teaching originally given the Colossians was being watered down by foreign elements. As a result the author decided to write to the converts at Colossae and to send the letter with Tychicus (Col. 4.7-9).
when he returned the runaway slave Onesimus to his owner (see Paul’s letter to Philemon and the discussion below).

**The Writer’s Response to the Situation**

After the salutation and thanksgiving (Col. 1.1-14), we learn about the first syncretistic teaching. Some persons were acknowledging beings or powers in the universe on an equal basis with Jesus. For the writer, however, Christ is not just another step of a pyramid in believers’ thinking about God. Christ is the first and only step. The author writes that Christ is superior to all things in the world and the head of the church (Col. 1.15-20). So Christ alone can lead to the most complete knowledge of God. The words about being estranged in mind and doing evil (Col. 1.21) indicate the presence of Gentile converts in Colossae, and the writer exhorts them to live holy and blameless lives (Col. 1.21-23), a teaching of the real Paul. The writer explains his ministry to an unfamiliar church, expresses his loving concern for it, and exhorts its members to remain faithful to their original teaching (Col. 1.24–2.7). Then the author warns against strange philosophical notions and reminds the converts of the significance of their baptism, whereby they were forgiven of all their sins (Col. 2.8-15). The next verses indicate a number of syncretistic elements, including dietary regulations and certain taboos, the Sabbath and other ceremonial observances, ascetic practices, worship of angels, and a special kind of wisdom. Some of these things, for example, the reference to the Sabbath, indicate the presence of Jewish teachings. All of the false teachings, according to the author, are mere shadows of the sincere following of Christ, to whom believers owe their total allegiance. None of the false teachings does anything to help keep the believers from sinning (Col. 2.16-23).

Allegiance to Christ is clearly manifested in moral behavior. Therefore in the last two chapters of Colossians the author reminds his readers of what true moral life should be for persons who have been raised to newness of life with Christ through baptism (Col. 3.1-4). The words ‘So if you have been raised with Christ’ (3.1) seem to allude to rising from the water of baptism. Baptized converts who have given up their old sinful nature must resist passion, evil desire, and malicious speech (Col. 3.5-11). Love is the basis of all believers’ actions and leads to kindness, patience, forgiveness, and harmony in the community (Col. 3.12-17). This love is also reflected in proper relationships among members of believers’ families (Col. 3.18–4.6). Finally, the writer adds his personal greetings through Tychicus, the bearer of the letter, asks the Colossians to exchange letters with a sister church in Laodicea (Col. 4.7-17), and concludes with a greeting with his own hand in the name of Paul (Col. 4.18).
Summary
As with the letter to the church in Rome, the letter to the church in Colossae is written by an author who had not visited the church there. If not written by Paul, Colossians was written by a friend of Paul who was greatly influenced by the life and work of that noble apostle.

Colossians is important because it shows how beliefs and teachings from other religions were influencing the newly developing religion in a specific community. According to the author, there can be no competition with Christ because he is the center of all things, and all things center in him. No other supreme beings or powers are necessary for knowing God in faith and worship.

As we have learned, some of Paul’s friends mentioned in Col. 4.7-17, including Onesimus, the subject of the personal letter of Paul to Philemon, are also mentioned in Philemon. So we turn to that letter next in our attempt to learn the stories behind Paul’s letters and/or those purporting to be from Paul.

Philemon
The little letter to Philemon is a very personal note by Paul, the undisputed writer. It is addressed ‘to Philemon our dear friend and co-worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house’ (Phlm. 1.1-2). Early groups of believers met in the houses of certain members, so we refer to such early groups as ‘house churches’. Apparently a church met in the house of Philemon, and Apphia and Archippus may have been his wife and son. If the Archippus is the same person that is mentioned in Col. 4.17, then Archippus and Philemon both lived in Colossae (remember our discussion of that subject above).

No matter where Philemon lived, he had a slave named Onesimus, who definitely was a member of the community at Colossae known to Paul (Col. 4.7-9). Onesimus had run away and perhaps stolen something from the house of his master. Somehow or other he came to be in the same prison with Paul, and probably while with Paul he was converted. At least, this seems to be the implication of Phlm. 1.10: ‘I am appealing to you for my child, Onesimus, whose father I have become during my imprisonment’.

According to Roman law, the owners of slaves had complete authority over them, and runaway slaves were to be returned to their masters. Paul, apparently familiar with the law, wrote the note to Philemon graciously and tactfully requesting him to take back Onesimus for whom, as ‘a beloved brother’, Paul had developed a warm personal friendship (Phlm. 1.8-17).
Paul offers to repay Philemon anything owed him by Onesimus (Phlm. 1.18). Thus, Paul, familiar with Roman law, does his duty as a Roman citizen in sending the runaway slave Onesimus back to his owner. But at the same time, Paul requests Philemon to transcend the law by accepting Onesimus ‘no longer as a slave but more than a slave, a beloved brother’ (Phlm. 1.16). Paul feels confident that Philemon will share his spirit and comply with his request (Phlm. 1.21).

With regard to our discussion of ‘faith in Jesus’ and ‘the faithfulness of Jesus’, we should consider especially Phlm. 1.5-6. Paul thanks God for the faithfulness that Philemon has toward the Lord Jesus (ten pistin, hen echeis pro ton kurion Iesoun). This is the closest Paul comes to the expression of faith in Jesus as Lord. However, we must interpret Paul’s words here in light of 1 Thess. 1.8, where Paul compliments the Thessalonian converts for their faithfulness, faithfulness which they have toward the Lord Jesus, not toward other lords.

Philemon lived in Colossae, where religious syncretism was the main problem in the church. There was, therefore, a lot of competition with the Lordship of Christ. Obviously, Paul faced a great challenge under such circumstances. So he thanks God for Philemon’s loyalty to Jesus as Lord and not toward one of the many lords of paganism. Paul is glad that the same kind of faithfulness Philemon has toward the Lord is also directed toward all the saints and prays that the sharing of his faithfulness may be effective in the recognition of ‘of all the good that is in us for Christ’ (lit. trans. 1.6).

Summary
We do not know the outcome of Paul’s distinctive, warm, little personal note to the slave owner Philemon. But if Philemon complied with Paul’s request that he take the slave back as ‘a beloved brother’, Philemon became the living model of Paul’s teaching, exemplified by Paul himself in writing the letter, that ‘there is no longer slave or free...for all of you are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3.28).

This is the story behind the letter of Paul to Philemon. It may be that the conversion of Onesimus and later return to his master Philemon are among the circumstances that led to the writing of Ephesians. We turn to that letter now in an effort to learn the story behind it.

Ephesians

Founding of the Church at Ephesus
According to Acts 19.1–20.1, Paul found some disciples at Ephesus, who were disciples of John the Baptist. Acts says that they were baptized and
that when Paul laid his hands on them they received the Holy Spirit (recall discussion of this passage earlier). Paul stayed at Ephesus for two years and ‘argued persuasively about the kingdom of God’ in the synagogue and argued also in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. In typically exaggerated fashion Luke says that ‘all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord’ (Acts 19.8-10). It appears that Paul first brought the message about Jesus to some residents of Ephesus; therefore, he should probably be considered as the founder of the church there. Later Acts reports that Paul requested ‘the elders of the church’ at Ephesus to meet him at Miletus (Acts 20.17-38), where he spoke to them about God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus.

As we have learned in our study of Acts, Paul had difficulties at Ephesus; but, according to Luke, all ended up well. However, according to Paul, not all went well there. He writes that he ‘fought with wild animals at Ephesus’ (1 Cor. 15.32). But whether those beasts were wild animals fought in an arena, as some persons believe, or troublesome adversaries, as others think, we do not know. We have learned that many scholars today think that Paul was actually in prison for a while in Ephesus and that he wrote one or more of the letters dealt with in this chapter from there.

**Is Ephesians an Authentic Letter of Paul?**

Ephesians purports to be a letter from Paul (Eph. 1.1; 3.1), and many scholars still regard it as an authentic letter. However, in recent times many scholars have believed that it was written by a friend of Paul who wrote in Paul’s name. They think so for several main reasons.

*Arguments against Authenticity.* The words ‘in Ephesus’ are lacking in some ancient manuscripts of Eph. 1.1 – as indicated in the notes of the NRSV and the REB. With that omission, the address ‘to the saints who are also faithful in Christ Jesus’ tends to indicate that Ephesians was originally not intended for just one church.

The writer of Ephesians seems to be dependent on several letters of Paul, including Colossians, from which the author of Ephesians takes many words and phrases. Moreover, there are some eighty words or phrases in Ephesians that do not occur in genuine letters of Paul. One example of these is ‘created according to God’ (Eph. 4.24), translated as ‘created according to the likeness of God’ in the NRSV and as ‘created in God’s likeness’ in the REB. Another example is ‘in which is debauchery’ (Eph. 5.18), translated as ‘for that is debauchery’ in the NRSV and as ‘and the ruin that goes with it’ (that is, ‘drunkenness’) in the REB. At the same time, the
literary style of Ephesians, like that of Colossians, is cumbersome and repetitious – as the literal translations show – compared with the original and rapid style of Paul. See, for example, Eph. 1.3-14; 1.15-23; and 2.1-7, each of which is one long sentence in the Greek text.

Certain eschatological expressions, such as ‘in the ages to come’ (Eph. 2.7) and ‘to all generations’ (Eph. 3.21), indicate that the writer of Ephesians believed it would be a long time before the End came. Paul, on the other hand, believed that the End was near. According to Acts, at Ephesus Paul preached about the kingdom of God (Acts 19.8-10). Paul mentions the kingdom of God in several letters (1 Cor. 4.20; 6.9-10; 15.50; Gal. 5.21; Rom. 14.17). The writer of Ephesians mentions it only once but in a way unlike Paul: ‘the kingdom of Christ and of God’ (Eph. 5.5).

The idea that the church is a universal institution ‘built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets’ (Eph. 2.20) is contrary to Paul’s notion that Christ alone is the basis of the church. In Paul’s (other) letters, the church is generally a local community of believers. Moreover, the absence of greetings and names of fellow workers, except Tychicus, makes Ephesians a rather impersonal letter unlike (other) letters of Paul. Several passages in Ephesians may indicate that its author and his readers had never personally met (Eph. 1.15; 3.2; 4.21). The readers of Ephesians know its author only through his written message (Eph. 3.3-4; 6.18-20).

**Faith in and Faith of Jesus and Being Saved in Ephesians**

There are several important points, universally neglected in Pauline studies, in which the writers of Colossians and Ephesians differ from Paul. Those points help to show that although Paul’s undisputed letters are behind the stories of Colossians and Ephesians, Paul did not write the letters themselves.

In our study of Galatians we learned that faithfulness of Jesus is an accurate and preferable alternative to faith in Jesus in Gal. 2.16 and similar passages. We also learned that Paul never uses the phrase ‘faith in Jesus’ with *en* or *epi* as the preposition or with a noun without a preposition. In contrast, the writers of Colossians and Ephesians do use such language. Please review here what we learned in the last chapter in the discussion of ‘What Paul Does Not Say’ with respect to ‘faith in Jesus’ as an expression absent in Paul’s undisputed letters but present in Ephesians and Colossians.

Several other passages in Ephesians and Colossians reveal how the ideas of the authors of those works, who surely were familiar with Paul’s letters, differ from those of Paul himself. This is true especially with respect to Paul’s ideas of grace and salvation. In Ephesians the word ‘save’ occurs
only twice (Eph. 2.5, 8), where the phrases ‘by grace you have been saved’ and ‘by grace you have been saved through faith’ occur. In the undisputed letters of Paul there is nothing like that, nor is the context of those ideas Pauline. Words for salvation occur in Eph. 1.13 (‘the gospel of your salvation’; see Rom. 1.16 for the idea) and 6.17 (‘the helmet of salvation’). The word ‘Savior’ occurs only in Eph. 5.23, where Christ is said to be the Savior of the church, an idea absent in Paul’s undisputed letters. As we have learned, Paul mentions ‘Savior’ only once, is still awaited, and when he comes will transform lowly human bodies to conform to his glorious body (Phil. 3.20-21). Neither ‘save’ nor ‘salvation’ nor ‘Savior’ occurs in Colossians.

The combination of being made righteous and believing or faithfulness is common in Galatians and Romans but not that of being saved and believing as in Ephesians. Nor does the combination of being saved and grace ever occur in the undisputed letters of Paul. And only in Rom. 8.24 does Paul, unlike the writer of Ephesians, use a past tense (aorist) when referring to salvation. There, however, it refers to the time when the readers became converts, and it is qualified by waiting and hoping for redemption that is still to come. Believers’ hope for redemption comes from the fact that they received ‘the first fruits of the Spirit’ when they were baptized.

Who Wrote Ephesians?
Many scholars believe that Ephesians was written as an encyclical letter, perhaps by Paul, but more likely by a friend of his. A widely known suggestion is that the friend was the converted slave Onesimus and that he collected Paul’s letters and wrote Ephesians to serve as a cover letter to introduce the collection to other churches.

The fact that the little personal letter of Paul to Philemon has survived in the collection of Paul’s letters may be best explained if Onesimus collected the letters of Paul, wrote Ephesians as a cover letter, and then sent them on their way. If Onesimus went along with Tychicus to deliver the letter to Colossae (Col. 4.7-9), he would already have had in his possession Colossians and Philemon.

Although the view just presented remains attractive to some scholars, many have rejected it. Some who reject the view that Ephesians was written by Onesimus as a cover letter for the collection of Paul’s letters admit that it is theoretically plausible. However, they argue that it is based on assumptions not supported by concrete evidence. Moreover, recent authorities on Ephesians, although admitting it is an unauthentic letter of
Paul, think that it is more than a rehash of Pauline ideas and that it has its own specific purpose.

We have learned that according to 2 Pet. 3.15-16 Paul’s letters had been published as a collection when the author of 2 Peter wrote early in the second century. Apparently Paul’s letters never circulated individually except to the communities to which they were originally addressed. So when the church first became aware of Paul’s letters, it knew them already as a published collection. And Ephesians was a part of the original collection.

The publication of Paul’s letters as a collection with a cover letter is likely not only because of 2 Pet. 3.15-16, but also because of evidence in the book of Revelation. There we find a collection of seven letters (Rev. 2.1–3.22) addressed to seven churches in Asia (Rev. 1.4) with an introduction intended for the churches as a group (Rev. 1.4-20).

The suggestions that we have recorded may be close to the story behind the writing of Ephesians; but unless we accept Paul’s authorship (Eph. 1.1; 3.1), we may never know the real story which led to the writing of Ephesians.

**Purpose and Teaching of Ephesians**

With the exception of Galatians, Paul addresses his letters to individual churches, but he sometimes thinks of those churches as part of one large church. The author of Ephesians wrote to stress the one big church as a universal institution, to encourage unity within it, and to exhort church members to live lives worthy of their calling. The church is spoken of under such figures as the body of Christ, of which he is the head and Savior (Eph. 1.23; 4.15-16; 5.23), ‘a holy temple in the Lord’ (Eph. 2.21); see also (Eph. 5.22-33).

No matter who wrote Ephesians, throughout the letter there is a clear emphasis, as in the undisputed letters, on practical moral and ethical behavior of persons in the community of believers. The first chapter contains the greeting (Eph. 1.1-2), a blessing (Eph. 1.3-14), and a thanksgiving and prayer (Eph. 1.15-23). The author prays that God may give the believers ‘a spirit of wisdom and revelation’ as they come to know him, with their hearts enlightened to understand the hope to which God has called them among the saints and how great his power at work in Christ is among believers (Eph. 1.17-19). God had raised Christ from the dead, put him in heavenly places at his right hand, put him above every name in this age and age to come, made him the head of everything for the church, ‘which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all’ (Eph. 1.22-23).

The prayer consists of theological and literary language that seems to me much unlike that of Paul. Some of its terminology and ideas are more
characteristic of several Gnostic writings of a century later than those of Paul.

After ch. 1 Ephesians divides naturally into two main parts: Eph. 2.1–3.21 and Eph. 4.1–6.20. In the first section the writer stresses the salvation of Gentile believers by God’s grace (Eph. 2.1-10). Gentile and Jewish believers belong to the church, united ‘in Christ Jesus’ as members of ‘the household of God’ (Eph. 2.11-22). Gentile converts are reminded that before they became believers they were in a hopeless condition because they ‘were at that time without Christ’ and ‘without God in the world’ (Eph. 2.11-12).

In Eph. 3.1-21 the author (‘Paul’, according to Eph. 3.1) implies that he is in prison because the Jews became hostile when he preached the equality of Gentiles with Jews in the body of Christ (Eph. 3.1-13; see also Eph. 2.11). Through Christ Gentile converts are fellow heirs with Jewish believers in the church (Eph. 3.1-6). Finally, the author prays for the spiritual welfare of the readers (Eph. 3.14-19) and utters a doxology (Eph. 3.20-21).

The second section of Ephesians (Eph. 4.1–6.20) gives advice for moral living. Church members must live up to their calling by being unified in the Spirit for moral and spiritual upbuilding in love (Eph. 4.1-16); not live as non-believing Gentiles (Eph. 4.17–5.2); abhor immorality, deceit, and drunkenness (Eph. 5.3-21); practice the virtues of family life (Eph. 5.22–6.9); put on God’s armor of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and the Spirit (Eph. 6.10-17); and ‘pray at all times’ (Eph. 6.18-20). Ephesians ends with the author’s promise to send Tychicus to the readers and a benediction (Eph. 6.21-24).

Summary
Because it appears that the author of Ephesians takes many words and phrases from Colossians, because of differences in vocabulary and style of writing, because its eschatology and ecclesiology differ from those of Paul, and because of its close relationship to (other) letters of Paul, Ephesians may have been written by a friend or follower of Paul. If so, it was probably sent to all of Paul’s churches. No matter who wrote the letter, it was intended to encourage unity in the universal church. Members of the church must practice truth and righteousness, live in peace and by the Spirit, and be faithful. By doing this church members will have God’s armor in the long struggle against the evils of the world before the end of the age.

With Ephesians we end our account of what seem to be the most probable and plausible stories behind the letters of Paul, the earliest writings in the New Testament. Three of these letters, 2 Thessalonians, Colossians, and Ephesians, as we have learned, may not actually be written by Paul
himself, and they may, therefore, date later than the undisputed letters. If they are not from the hand of Paul, though, they certainly show influence from the mind of Paul.

This chapter concludes our study of the story behind the apostle Paul and his letters, including the book of Acts. All these writings originated as the result of the Christ movement, or the church, spreading from its beginnings within Judaism to reach Gentiles throughout much of the Roman world.
ADDENDUM: CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Paul and the Christ Movement

It is an anachronism to think of Paul as a ‘Christian’ in the same way as we think of Christians after ‘the church’ known to Paul had completely separated from Judaism several decades after his time. Paul was a Christian only in that he was a member of that party of Jews who came to believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Paul’s special religious experience, seemingly more subjective than objective, convinced him that God’s Son lived in him and that he lived in Christ. In retrospect Paul came to believe that God had called him even before he was born to take his message to the Gentiles. Historically, this happened because of the failure of the Christ movement to convince the majority of Jews of their beliefs.

As circumstances developed, members of the Christ movement, perhaps chiefly under the influence of Paul, also came to believe that Jesus was the Son of God and the only Lord. These beliefs became a practical necessity for winning converts among Gentiles in the polytheistic world of the times.

The Christ movement may properly be thought of as a religion in transition, whose members were coming into it from the religion of the Jews (Judaism) or from pagan religions or from no religion. It is appropriate to think of the community of believers as a renewed covenant community of God and his people, Jews and Gentiles alike, ‘the Israel of God’. Through the rite of baptism converts entered the community, in which there was no longer Greek or Jew, slave or free, for all ‘are one in Christ Jesus’ (Gal. 3.27-28).

Theologically, for Paul personally, he died to the law so that he might live to God. Crucified with Christ, Paul no longer lives but Christ lives in him. The life he now lives he lives by the faithfulness of the Son of God. Being made righteous does not come through the law, else Christ died for nothing (Gal. 2.19-21). Paul boasts in nothing except the cross of Christ, through whom things of the world, including circumcision, no longer matter. ‘Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything, but a new
creation is everything!’ Those who follow that rule are the Israel of God, (Gal. 6.13-16). The new creation, the Israel of God, is the people for whom Paul prays (Gal. 6.14-16). Such people who share the faithfulness of Abraham are now the true children of Abraham. It is this community, expressed in different ways, whom, I believe, Paul has in mind when in Romans he writes concerning the Jews about ‘full inclusion’, ‘grafted in’, and ‘has come in’.

We do not know how Paul became of member of the Christ movement, whose members he had previously zealously persecuted. For those who study the story behind Paul and his letters it is important to learn that after he became a member of that movement he did not give up his Judaism, including his devotion to some Jewish law. Next we consider Paul’s relationship with the Jewish people and his perception of the law for members of his churches.

**Paul and the Synagogue**

In the great Jewish institution known as the synagogue, law was the determining factor for study, worship, and life. There is no evidence in Paul’s letters or in the book of Acts to indicate that he was ever expelled from or that he disassociated himself from the synagogue. According to Acts, while on his missionary journeys, he regularly entered Jewish synagogues: in Salamis, on the island of Cyprus (Acts 13.5), Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13.14), Iconium (Acts 14.1), Thessalonica (Acts 17.1-3), Athens (Acts 17.16-17), Corinth (Acts 18.1-4), and Ephesus (Acts 19.1, 8-9). According to Acts, Paul was sufficiently respected and persuasive to gain converts among both Jews and Gentiles who attended the synagogue (Acts 13.42-49; 14.1-2; 17.1-4, 10-12).

Paul never writes anything about his own relationship or the relationship of his converts to the synagogue. This is understandable because he was writing to a majority of persons who were Gentiles, few of whom had ever become full converts to Judaism. This is probably the reason why converts assembled as churches in the houses of members (1 Cor. 16.19-20; Rom. 16.3-5; Phlm. 1.2).

One passage definitely indicates that Paul continued to be under the legal jurisdiction of the synagogue. In 2 Cor. 11.24-25, in narrating his sufferings as an apostle, he says that five times he received the ‘forty lashes minus one by the Jews’. Three times he was beaten with rods, and once he was stoned. Such lashings and stonings were standard punishments for various offenses to the law (e.g. Exod. 21.20; Lev. 24.15-16; Deut. 13.6-11;
Paul would hardly have been the victim of such treatment if he had not continued to be associated with the synagogue.

**Paul and the Jewish People**

As a person Paul was extremely complex. Who can claim to understand him completely? This difficulty is due in part to his background and training in Judaism, which was diverse and not entirely comprehensible. Many factors from that background and training have influenced the language and thought that went into his writings. His life and mission activity were motivated by his profound faithfulness to his God, and that remained his primary conviction. His special religious experience of Christ and the Holy Spirit, sometimes also not completely comprehensible to his interpreters, became a significant, but secondary motivating force in his life.

In developing his ideas of the relationship of God to ‘the Israel of God’, Paul was still primarily influenced by the scriptural ideas of God’s relationship to his people Israel. Secondarily, Paul was influenced by the Judaism of his own time, especially aspects of it reflected in the community at Qumran. As with that community, so with Paul, to do what was good and right before God was an obligation of faithful Jews from the time of Moses (1QSa 1.1-10). And in agreement with the Sect of Qumran and the Jewish scriptures, Paul thought that the covenantal relationship with God involved the commitment to obey the commandments of God (1QSa 1.16-17; 1QpHab. 8.1-3).

Paul came to believe that through the faithfulness of Christ God in his grace prepared the way that leads to ultimate salvation for all who were to come to faithfulness toward God and then also to certain beliefs about Jesus. As God had delivered his people Israel from bondage in Egypt and from Exile, so God in Christ was now reconciling to himself all sinners, both Jews and Gentiles, who had faithfulness toward God and held the prescribed beliefs about Jesus.

Apparently Paul thought that Jews were restored to the covenant again when they became converts and had their past sins forgiven through baptism into the new community of believers. When Paul debates in his own being about the salvation of his people, the Jews, he quotes a combination of Jer. 31.33-34, from Jeremiah’s idea of the new covenant, and Isa. 27.9: ‘And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins’ (Rom. 11.27). Once delivered from the bondage of sin and death (Gal. 5.1; Rom. 8.2, 21-25), members of the new covenant community of God had to serve God (1 Thess. 1.8-9), Christ (Rom. 14.18; 15.14-18) and one another
Converts living by the Spirit were to serve the Lord (Rom. 12.9-13).

In his developing thought as a Jew who came to share the faithfulness of Christ Paul uses a variety of terms and ideas. But no matter what terminology he uses, he has not the slightest notion that the developing religion superseded or replaced Judaism (Rom. 10.1-2; 11.1-12). Jews were not disinherited with the coming of Christ. Rather, the developing religion, as a new covenant community of God, was an institution that was not based on race, social status, or sexual bias but was open to all who were willing to enter on the same terms. And, according to Paul, Jews were making a number of distinctive contributions to the renewed community that Paul and other Jews believed came from God (Rom. 9.4-5; 11.17-36).

Although Paul was always mostly concerned with winning Gentiles to the Christ movement, the controversy in the churches of Galatia forced him to think about the ‘righteousing’ of Gentiles and what the consequences of his newly developed views would be for his own people, the Jews. In spite of his concern for Gentiles, his heart was still with them. Paul's ultimate objective was the eventual salvation of all Jews. His preaching to Gentiles, then, was to make the Jews jealous and thereby save some of them. Gentiles were just a wild olive branch grafted into the real olive tree of Israel (Rom. 11.17-27; see also Jer. 11.16; Hos. 14.6).

The wild olive was no good by itself and was usually unproductive. Grafting was a process normally used to give new life to the original tree. But Paul says that the branch grafted into the tree is ‘to share the rich root of the olive tree’ (Rom. 11.17). Gentiles who came to faithfulness toward God by necessity became part of the root of Judaism, but some Jewish branches were broken off because of disbelief (apistia) in God and were, therefore, temporarily cut off from the original tree, Israel. Apistia is always used by Paul for disbelief of Jews toward God and occurs only in Rom. 3.3; 4.20; and 11.20, 23. Paul’s main concern in Romans 11 is not to have the Jews left out in the cold with the coming of Jesus and the ‘righteousing’ and the eventual salvation of humankind.

That Paul did not think of the developing religion as superseding or replacing Judaism becomes clearer if we look again at some statements in the gospel of John (written perhaps about 70–120 CE). The author of John, as with Paul, says that some Jews came to belief concerning Jesus, but the language and thought of John are quite different from those of Paul. At the Passover festival ‘many [Jews] believed in his [Jesus’] name because they saw the signs that he was doing…Jesus would not entrust himself to them’ (Jn 2.23; see also 5.37-47). John writes that Jesus said the Jews would seek
him but not find him and that ‘where I am, you cannot come’ (Jn 7.34; see also 8.31-47; 11.45-53). Also, unlike Paul, the writer of John is not concerned with those who did not believe, including Jews. Those Jews who do not believe will die in their sins’ (Jn 8.24), and ‘their sin remains’ (Jn 9.41). The devil, not God, is the father of such Jews (Jn 8.44-47).

During the time of John, Christianity was becoming separate from Judaism, whereas for Paul the religion in transition was still authentic Judaism because of the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus’ faithfulness toward God led God by his grace to forgive the past sins of all who share his faithfulness. According to Paul, both Jews and Gentiles lose their identity – ‘neither Jew nor Greek’ (Gal. 3.28) – when they become members of the new covenant community of God, the roots of which are still in Judaism.

As with Paul, the Johannine author thinks that some Jews rejected Jesus. ‘He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him… (Jn 1.11) – a frequently repeated theme in John. In Paul’s letters there is nothing to compare with the ideas of supersession or replacement of things Jewish, as in John. According to John, Jesus himself became the embodiment of the attributes of God in the covenant relationship with his special people Israel. God’s loving kindness or graciousness (Hebrew, hesed) and truth (Hebrew, emeth) are inherent in Jesus himself, who was ‘full of grace and truth’ (Jn 1.14; see also 1.17). The temple at Jerusalem no longer has validity because the body of Jesus is the true temple (Jn 2.18-21). For Paul, believers ‘are God’s temple… For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple’ (1 Cor. 3.16-17; see also 1 Cor. 6.19; 2 Cor. 6.16). The ideas of John show how different from them those of Paul really are.

**Paul and the Law for Converts**

If, indeed, Paul never did become separated from the synagogue, it would be ridiculous to think that he disassociated himself from all Jewish law. Although Paul does not define that law explicitly, by reading between the lines we can make some plausible suggestions about it.

That law, or at least certain aspects of it, would be the one means whereby he could best begin communicating with prospective Jewish converts. Certain aspects of the law remained valid for Paul even after he became a member of the Christ movement. Those laws had lasting value not only for Jews but also for Gentiles who became converts to the Christ movement.

In Romans, especially from ch. 7 onwards, Paul talks more about the law and appears to be speaking more forcefully than anywhere else against it,
even the law in general, not just circumcision and dietary regulations. He does, indeed, seem to be saying that Christ has delivered converts from the law to give them freedom for life by the Spirit or for life in Christ and that Christ, therefore, brought the abolition of the law. A closer examination of his ideas, though, reveals that there is law that should be observed by converts. This becomes clear from several terms Paul uses almost exclusively in Romans, and they provide further evidence that the law was no problem for Paul until after the conflict with the Judaizers in the churches of Galatia.

In spite of Paul’s personal religious experience of Christ living in him and he in Christ, there is no evidence that he became completely separated from his former religion. His unwavering monotheism was his primary demand for Gentiles who wanted to become members of the Christ movement. In spite of his conviction that all persons are made righteous on the basis of faithfulness toward God, not works of the law, we can detect in his letters, especially Romans, aspects of the law that he believed were valid for all converts.

Along with his profound faithfulness toward God and his beliefs about Jesus, Paul believes that there is a very real law for believers. Ritualistic aspects of the Mosaic law, such as circumcision and dietary regulations, are not necessary for persons who live by the Spirit, not by the flesh. For them, irrespective of their race or status, moral probity is ‘the law of God’, to which they submit (Rom. 8.1-11). The law of God is the moral/ethical requirements of the Hebrew Torah, represented by the word nomos for Paul. Along with it, Paul uses the special terms entole and entolai and dikaioma and dikaiomata to represent the moral requirements for converts.

Paul thought of such instruction as the law of Christ that he was under, though not being without law of God (1 Cor. 9.19-22). Such laws are the law of Christ fulfilled by bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6.2). Such laws are the law written on the hearts of Gentiles who do instinctively what the law requires (Rom. 2.14-15).

The law represented by Paul’s special words is fulfilled by bearing one another’s burdens (Gal. 6.2). It is the law whereby ‘all who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law’. The doers of the law for converts, not the hearers of it, will be made righteous, and it is the law which those Gentiles who ‘do instinctively what the law requires’ are ‘a law to themselves’ (Rom. 2.12-16). The law is the law that is not overthrown but rather upheld by faithfulness toward God on the part of Gentiles.
(Rom. 3.31). It is the law (nomos) which, with the commandment (entole), ‘is holy and just and good’ (Rom. 7.12). It is the law that is ‘spiritual’ and ‘good’ and which causes an inner struggle to do what is right in the person not living in Christ and by the Spirit (Rom. 7.13-25).

According to Paul, the law for converts was ‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus’ that set Paul and his converts ‘free from the law of sin and of death’ (Rom. 8.2). The entolai and dikaiomata are ‘the law (nomos) of God’ to which the persons whose mind is set on the flesh and, thus, hostile to God cannot submit (Rom. 8.7). The law is that which is fulfilled by love of one’s neighbor and that is the only debt of the believer (Rom. 13.8-10). It is the law that is fulfilled by love (Rom. 13.10). The ultimate salvation of all converts depends upon their fulfillment of that law (Rom. 13.8-14).

Perhaps a passage in the book of Revelation reflects the necessity for faithfulness and works in the lives of converts not unlike that which we have discerned in Paul’s letters, especially in Romans. What Paul was saying in his complicated way in trying to characterize faithfulness and moral life, the writer of Revelation says clearly and succinctly: ‘Here is a call for the endurance of the saints (holy ones), those who keep the commandments (entolai) of God and hold fast to the faithfulness of Jesus’ (Rev. 14.12).

There is law, then, for Paul after all. The dikaioma tou theou, the ‘just requirement of God’ (Rom. 1.32); the dikaiomata tou nomou, the ‘just requirements of the law’ (Rom. 2.26), the dikaioma tou nomou, the ‘just requirement of the law’ (Rom. 8.4), and the entolai theou, the ‘commandments of God’ (1 Cor. 7.19), were still the law (nomos) for Paul. That law remained a requirement for him and for other members of the Christ movement (the religion in transition). Paul also came to include in that law certain commands of Jesus, ‘the law of Christ’, which he learned from existing tradition when he became a member of the movement. About himself Paul says: ‘To those outside (without) the law I became as one outside (without) the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law)’ (1 Cor. 9.21).

**Paul’s Language**

In his discussion in Romans 7 of the person not living in Christ and without the experience of life by the Spirit, and in his writing about the law for converts, Paul speaks in a way that would be understood by many Gentiles, as well as Jews, in the church at Rome. Recall the remarks about ‘the law of God’ in the discussion of Romans 7, and consider two passages from Epictetus quoted again here: ‘Am I not wholly directed toward God and his
commands (tas entolas) and ordinances (prostagmaata)’ (Dis. 3.24.114); ‘These are the laws (hoi nomoi) sent to you from him [God], these are his ordinances (diatagmaata); you ought to become an interpreter of them, to these you ought to submit yourself, not to the laws of Masurius and Cassius’ (Dis. 4.3.12).

The words in parentheses are either identical to or synonymous with those Paul uses in the passages I have cited in the discussion of law for Paul. The same words are frequently used in the Septuagint with the same meanings. The parallels in words and ideas are striking. Although Paul’s language and thought are undoubtedly most influenced by the Jewish scriptures, his phraseology would certainly help him in trying to win Gentile as well as Jewish converts.

Jews believed that the law was the gift of God, and Rabbis came to speak about ‘the gift of Torah’. The idea of Torah as a gift is blended with the Hebrew idea of God’s choice of Israel as his special people, beginning with the call of Abraham. Thus, Israel as the special people of God and the law were a blended union. The law had no significance apart from Israel, and Israel had no uniqueness without the law.

In the same way, converts became God’s special people living according to the moral instruction given them when they became converts. That instruction, some of which may have come to Paul from earlier tradition, coupled with similar instruction from Jewish law that Paul thought of technically in the terms we have described became the requirements for all converts.

Converts, as members of the new covenant community of God, and their moral instruction were a blended entity. That instruction had no significance apart from the community of God, and without such instruction that community had no uniqueness in the social world in which it originated.

For further study of the subjects discussed in this Addendum see the author’s forthcoming volume on The Morality of Paul’s Converts to be published soon by Equinox Publishing.
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