

CHAPTER
TWO

THE PAUL OF THE LETTERS:
A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE

LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

Although the term “Roman Catholic” suggests a range of highly specific concepts and practices shaped by Reformation controversy, it is not at all clear how any list of such particularities—Marian piety, for example, or papal authority, or celibate priesthood—derives from or provides a perspective on the letters of Paul. The “Catholic tradition” as such, however, is both broader and deeper than a set of polemical postures, embodying the sort of “universal and inclusive” connotations suggested by the term. This is the tradition that very much derives from the canonical Scriptures, that is shaped by the creed, that is enlivened by the work of the Holy Spirit, and that expresses itself in a variety of individual and communal practices proper to what Paul calls “the body of Christ.” It is a tradition that expresses its interpretation of Scripture above all in forms of worship and piety, but that also draws on all the resources of a splendid intellectual tradition formed over some 1,500 years prior to Reformation battles.

In this essay, I approach the letters of Paul as a Catholic in this older and broader tradition, defined not by a single standpoint (either in Paul or in the interpreter) but in a conversation among standpoints, trying to avoid whenever possible the sharp alternatives of “either-or” in favor of a more balanced (even when dialectical) “both-and.” I am perhaps the least likely person able to identify what is distinctively Catholic in this reading of Paul, although I suspect that the attention I give to the resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as to the church as the body of Christ, may owe something to the tradition in which I was raised and which I still embrace.

Selection of Sources

Every construal—or “vision”—of Paul involves decisions concerning which sources are to be considered and how they are to be read. Most scholars seeking to describe Paul’s life, for example, depend on a critical assessment of the Acts of the Apostles and his letters. Claims to ignore Acts and rely solely on Paul’s letters always turn out to be exaggerated—Acts is indispensable for reconstructing Paul’s life.¹ In contrast, the search for Paul’s “thought” requires ignoring Acts—those are Luke’s speeches, not Paul’s²—and focusing exclusively on Paul’s own literary productions as the expression of his thought. These are in general sound decisions, and I agree with them. I do think it important, however, to state my own understanding of them.

First, the process is inevitably selective. Selection from among the sources is necessary, precisely because the sources do not agree in every respect. Acts and the letters are distinct in authorship, genre, and purpose.³ The thirteen canonical letters ascribed to Paul are no less diverse in circumstance, rhetorical form, style, and function.⁴ But selection also arises from the predilections of readers, who inevitably approach “Paul” with presuppositions concerning the apostle that derive from factors other than the close exegesis of the sources.⁵ A preference for certain letters as more revealing of Paul’s thought than others is difficult to avoid and may even have heuristic value. The legitimate construction of Paul based on such selection, however, can easily turn into an illegitimate exclusion of other constructions based on other selections. The nature of the sources demands that every construction of Paul should be regarded as work in progress rather than a finished edifice.

Second, scholars need to be wary of abstraction. “Paul’s thought” or “Paul’s theology”⁶ does not exist apart from and prior to the com-

1. See, e.g., J. Murphy-O’Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1996).

2. M. L. Soards, *The Speeches in Acts: Their Contents, Context, and Concerns* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994).

3. The failure to account for these is the critical flaw in Philip Vielhauer, “Zum ‘Paulinismus’ der Apostelgeschichte,” *EvT* 10 (1950–51): 1–15.

4. For a treatment of each letter, see L. T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (3rd ed., Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), 231–401.

5. As an example, see D. Boyarin, *A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1994).

6. The efforts under this title run from the modest, as J. Fitzmyer, *Pauline Theology: A Brief Sketch* (2nd ed.; Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), to the massive, as in J. D.

positions that alone serve as evidence. We make contact with "Paul's thought" only through the rhetoric of specific letters. Like other writers, Paul probably discovered what he thought in the process of composition. Certainly, the diversity of expression and argument found in his letters shows that Paul was not a systematic thinker. As occasional responses to specific circumstances in his churches or in his ministry, the letters elicit specific modes of expression and argument. A romantic, individualistic notion of Paul's authorship needs revision.

Third, I differ from the majority of critical scholars in the selection of relevant Pauline compositions. Since the late nineteenth century, a broad consensus of scholars has considered only seven of the canonical letters "authentic," that is, written by Paul himself during his ministry, with the six remaining letters "disputed" to a greater (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus) or lesser (Colossians, Ephesians, 2 Thessalonians) degree, and assigned to one or more "Pauline schools" writing after Paul's death.⁷ So broad is this consensus that the other "visions of Paul" in this volume may be based exclusively on the so-called "undisputed letters": Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 Thessalonians, and Philemon.

I find the reasons for rejecting six letters to be both formally and materially flawed.⁸ There are as many variations in style and theme among the undisputed letters as between the undisputed and disputed. The Pauline corpus, in fact, falls into a number of clusters. Each group has strong internal connections and strong differences from the other clusters: (1) Romans/Galatians; (2) 1 and 2 Thessalonians; (3) 1 and 2 Corinthians; (4) Philemon, Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians; (5) 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus. The differences between the six rejected and the seven accepted by the majority of scholars are a matter of degree rather than of kind. The two Thessalonian letters are as different in style and theme from Romans and Galatians as 1 and 2 Corinthians are different from 1 and 2 Timothy. The differences across the entire collection, moreover, are just as likely to be due to circumstance, subject matter,

Bassler, D. M. Hay, and E. E. Johnson, eds., *Pauline Theology* (4 vols.; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994–1997).

7. For a short history of the debate that led to the present consensus, see L. T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 35A; New York: Doubleday, 2001), 42–54.

8. For a close consideration and critique of the criteria, see Johnson, *First and Second Timothy*, 55–90.

and rhetoric, as they are to a difference in authors.⁹ The evidence of the letters as well as what can be known of the patterns of Paul's ministry in the end support the position that Paul's coworkers and delegates formed a "school" even during his lifetime, significantly shaping the correspondence. All thirteen letters should be considered as authored by Paul during his lifetime, in the sense that he "authorized" their composition, even if he did not directly write any of them.¹⁰

The Letters

If statements made about "Paul" in this essay are drawn from the thirteen canonical letters written in his name, it is appropriate briefly to characterize that correspondence.

1. Paul's letters are occasional in the sense that they respond to specific circumstances that evoke the treatment of topics and the rhetoric deployed. They are real letters for actual readers, not literary exercises that happen to use the epistolary genre.¹¹
2. They are official correspondence from the leader of a religious movement to assemblies of that religious movement. Even the letters written to individuals (Philemon, Timothy, Titus) have at least a semipublic function, dealing with religious experiences, convictions, and behavior.¹²
3. The letters are the least-favored response to community issues by the apostle. His instinct is to visit communities in person, and when that is not possible, to send personal delegates to represent him. Visits, delegations, and letters form a complex web of communication between Paul and his churches. The letters represent only a portion of a larger conversation.¹³

9. New insight is yielded when individual disputed letters are put in conversation with undisputed letters individually; see, e.g., L. T. Johnson, "Oikonomia Theou: The Theological Voice of 1 Timothy from the Perspective of Pauline Authorship," *HBET* 21/2 (1999): 87–104, and "1 Timothy 1:20: The Shape of the Struggle," *1 Timothy Reconsidered* (Colloquium Eusemianum Paulinum 18; Leuven: Peeters, 2008), 19–39.

10. Johnson, *Writings of the New Testament*, 239–42.

11. See S. K. Stowers, *Letter Writing in Greco-Roman Antiquity* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986).

12. See L. T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Early Christianity: A Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998).

13. M. M. Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Examples of Timothy and Titus," *JBL* 111 (1992): 641–62.

4. Given such a small sample, Paul's letters are remarkably diverse with respect to length and letter type.¹⁴ The diversity in rhetorical style, invention, and arrangement is as obvious in the undisputed as it is in the disputed letters.
5. The letters are complex in composition. They contain elements of standard rhetorical formulations,¹⁵ community traditions,¹⁶ and authoritative texts,¹⁷ as well as stances taken by readers to which the letter responds,¹⁸ all of which help shape the "thought" of each composition. They are complex also in terms of production: the letters are sometimes dictated,¹⁹ they are often cosponsored,²⁰ and they contain elements (such as midrash and diatribe) that suggest a communal setting for the formation of certain complex arguments within them (see, e.g., Rom. 9–11; Gal. 3–4).²¹

While such observations steer us away from a romantic notion of authorship and the expectation of finding Paul's personality or the systematic theology of a religious genius, they steer us at the same time toward an appreciation for an apostle who establishes and nurtures churches and responds to them by letter when he cannot visit them in person, and who works out arguments demanded by diverse circumstances within the fellowship of coworkers. Still, the letters do allow some judgments concerning the religious sensibility and intelligence that authorize and guide their composition. The test to which such judgments must be held is simple: Are they supported sufficiently by

¹⁴ See H. J. Klauck, *Ancient Letters and the New Testament: A Guide to Context and Exegesis* (Waco, TX: Baylor Univ. Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Such as lists of virtues and vices (e.g., Rom. 1:29–32); lists of hardships (e.g., 2 Cor. 11:21–29); catalogues of household ethics (Eph. 5:21–6:9).

¹⁶ E.g., creeds (1 Cor 8:4–6); hymns (Col. 1:15–20; 2 Tim. 2:11–13).

¹⁷ A still helpful survey of Paul's usage is E. E. Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, repr. 1981).

¹⁸ The classic example is 1 Corinthians: Paul responds to queries (and perhaps slogans) of the assembly; see J. C. Hurd, *The Origin of 1 Corinthians* (London: SPCK, 1965).

¹⁹ See E. R. Richards, *The Secretary in the Letters of Paul* (WUNT 2/42; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1991).

²⁰ Paul writes eight letters with others: 1 Cor. 1:1; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:2; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Phm. 1:1.

²¹ Midrash is a social activity involving a teacher, students, and texts of Torah in a lively exchange; diatribe also has as its first social setting the classroom in which teacher and students are dialogically engaged.

evidence drawn from across the canonical letters, and conversely, are they contradicted by any of the canonical letters?

The Search for a Center

The history of Pauline scholarship is to a significant degree the quest for a central composition, influence, idea, or perspective that can control the diversity of the correspondence. Excluding six letters is itself an expression of the search for a singular, internally coherent Paul.²² But since even the seven “undisputed” letters resist homogenization, some scholars focus exclusively on the so-called “great” letters (Romans, Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians),²³ or they simply decide to take Romans as the least “occasional” and most “systematic” of Paul’s letters²⁴ and treat it as representing the essential Paul, with the other six undisputed letters read in light of Romans.

Other scholars have sought leverage in some aspect of Paul’s cultural and religious context — his “symbolic world.” From the Greco-Roman side, researchers examine the possible links between Paul and Epicureanism²⁵ or Paul and Stoicism.²⁶ The argument has been made that Paul most resembles Hellenistic Jews like Philo, especially in his understanding of the law.²⁷ Others exploit Paul’s roots in Palestinian Judaism, specifically in the perceptions specific to a Pharisee,²⁹ or the dualistic understanding of history provided by apocalyptic.³⁰ Finally, some have

22. Consistency in style and theme was the driving force in determining the “authentic” letters from the start; see F. Schleiermacher, *Über den sogenannten Ersten Brief des Paulus an den Timotheus: Ein kritisches Schriftstudium an J. C. Gass* (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1807).

23. The classic theological studies of Paul by Bultmann and Käsemann focus almost exclusively on these letters: R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, vol. 1 (trans. K. Grobel; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1951); E. Käsemann, *Perspectives on Paul* (trans. M. Kohl; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971).

24. See J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

25. See N. W. Dewitte, *St. Paul and Epicurus* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minneapolis Press, 1954).

26. E.g., T. Engberg-Pedersen, ed., *Paul in His Hellenistic Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

27. See H.-J. Schoeps, *Paul: The Theology of the Apostle in the Light of Jewish Religious History* (trans. H. Knight; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961).

28. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

29. Classically, W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

30. J. C. Becker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

made the kerygma of the pre-Pauline Hellenistic church the basis for Paul's thought.³¹

Efforts have not been lacking to find a thematic center that might enable some control over the disparate evidence. Scholars who select Romans and Galatians as the essential Paul, especially when they read from a Lutheran perspective, have found Paul's struggle with the law and the theme of righteousness by faith as the center of his thought.³² Remarkably enough, scholars reading the same compositions from the standpoint of the so-called "new perspective" find Paul's engagement with the story of Israel as the key to his thinking.³³ Still other readers of Romans and Galatians see an implied story about Jesus as the "narrative substructure" of Paul's theology.³⁴ Another classic option argues that Paul is defined by eschatological categories and that participation "in Christ" is the central Pauline conviction.³⁵

Each effort has served to highlight things that might otherwise not have been seen. But none of the proposed "centers" meets the evidentiary test: faith and works are absent from the Corinthian and Thessalonian correspondence, for example, and the story of Israel seems of little concern in Colossians, the Thessalonian letters, Philippians, or 2 Timothy. A strong case can be made for an implied story of Jesus lying behind Romans, Galatians, the Corinthian letters, and Philippians, but it is less obviously a premise in the Thessalonian or Prison Letters.

If the correspondence discourages us from seeking a single proposition, perspective, or premise as the center of Paul's thought or concern, we are nevertheless able to characterize the sensibilities at work in its production. Here, the positive results of the quest for a Pauline center can be affirmed. His grounding in Greco-Roman culture is evident in his writing rhetorically crafted letters to communities,³⁶ in

31. W. Bousset, KYRIOS CHRISTOS: *A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings to Irenaeus* (trans. John E. Steely; Nashville: Abingdon, repr. 1970).

32. See S. Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

33. N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992).

34. The pioneering figure is R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

35. A. Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: Holt, 1931).

36. See, e.g., M. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of 1 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1991).

his—acquaintance with commonplaces of moral philosophy,³⁷ and above all in a religious sensibility that builds on experience, yet insists on the use of reason.³⁸ Paul's loyalty to his Jewish heritage is marked by his explicit concern for the destiny of Israel as God's people and his intense engagement with Torah; his symbolic framework and specific diction are shaped by the Jewish Scriptures.³⁹ The influence of Hellenistic Judaism is found in his use of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) as Scripture,⁴⁰ and in his concern for strong boundaries separating the community from paganism. Palestinian Judaism appears in his claim to be a Pharisee, in his interpreting the LXX according to modes that are recognizably proto-rabbinic,⁴¹ and in an apocalyptic understanding of history.⁴²

Much more difficult is the question of what holds these dimensions together. What distinguishes this authorial voice from that of a Philo or of a Hillel? An answer must be adequate to account for Paul's turn from persecutor to an apostle, his preaching and founding of communities, and the experiences, convictions, and commitments he shares with such communities as he addresses their problems. I speak of experiences, commitments, and convictions, because the matrix out of which Paul's correspondence emerges is first of all not conceptual but existential, less a matter of abstract thought than of religious concern.⁴³ Paul put his mind and heart to work in the interpretation of three religious realities.

First was his *personal religious experience*, which included not only his encounter with the risen Jesus and his call to be an apostle (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8; Gal. 1:15–16; 1 Tim. 1:12), but also his mystical experiences of prayer—including speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:18) and a vision of

37. See esp. A. J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989).

38. The similarity between Paul and Epicurus owes at least something to the fact that they shared the same type of religious sensibility, that of moral transformation; see L. T. Johnson, *Among the Gentiles: Greco-Roman Religion and Christianity* (ABL, New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 2009).

39. See the detailed expositions in R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1989), and *The Conversion of the Imagination: Paul as Interpreter of Israel's Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

40. See C. D. Stanley, *Arguing with Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004).

41. See N. A. Dahl, "Contradictions in Scripture," in *Studies in Paul* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 159–77.

42. See D. A. Campbell, *The Delicrance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

43. See J. B. Wallace, *Switched into Paradise* (2 Cor 12:1–10): *Paul's Heavenly Journey in the Context of Early Christian Experience* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2011).

heavenly places (2 Cor. 12:1–5)—and a continuing sense of empowerment through the Holy Spirit that came from the exalted Christ (Phil. 4:13). When Paul speaks of being “in the Lord” (1 Cor. 4:17; 9:1–2) or “in Christ” (1 Cor. 15:31; 2 Cor. 2:14, 17), he is not referring to concepts but to personal experience that binds him mystically to Jesus.⁴⁴

Second was the *religious experience of his readers*, whom he saw as existing in the energy field of the Holy Spirit, who also placed them “in Christ” (1 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 3:26) and Christ “in them” (Rom. 8:10). His letters assume and appeal to the presence of the Spirit not as an ideal to be desired but as a factual reality.

Third was the *complex of traditions and practices of the community already in place* when Paul became a founder of churches and writer of letters: the practices of baptism (Rom. 6:1–11; Gal. 3:27; Eph. 4:5; Col. 2:12; Titus 3:5) and the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:17–34), confessions of faith (Rom. 10:9; 1 Cor. 8:4–6; 12:3; 1 Tim. 3:16), and above all traditions concerning Jesus: the facts of his life and death, the witness to his resurrection, and the shape of his human character (see in his use of them in his letters but in his explicit statements concerning conversation and communion with the church in Jerusalem and its leadership (Rom. 15:19, 25; 1 Cor. 15:3–8; 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9; Gal. 1:18; 2:7–10).

The combination of these elements makes Paul’s letters distinctive among other first-century religious and philosophical literature, as well as other New Testament compositions. Paul’s teachings move into, out of, and around such experiential and traditional elements. They are present in diverse degree and manner in all the letters. Together they characterize the distinctive voice that we recognize as Paul’s. These realities, called “gospel of God” or “gospel of Christ” (Rom. 1:1; 1 Cor. 15:1; 2 Cor. 2:12; Gal. 1:7; Eph. 1:13; Phil. 1:27; Col. 1:23; 1 Thess. 2:2; 2 Thess. 1:8; 1 Tim. 1:11; 2 Tim. 1:8; Phlm. 13), are foundational for Paul and his communities. They create also a real tension with

44. Note the intensely personal character of Paul’s statements in Galatians: “I live, no longer I, but Christ lives in me; insofar as I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in [or: the faith of] the Son of God, who has loved me and given himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20); “May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (6:14); “I bear the marks of Jesus on my body” (6:17). In this essay, I use the New American Bible translation of the New Testament.

elements of Paul's symbolic world—above all his prior understanding of Torah—that demands resolution through interpretation. Everything is read through the religious experience of Paul and his readers.

The Significance of Christ

All these religious experiences and traditions center on the figure of Jesus Christ.⁴⁵ It is Christ who inaugurates the new age, indeed the new creation. It is in light of Christ that all previous understandings of God must be evaluated. Christ marks both the end and the goal of history: he is the "eschatological Adam." He is more than simply another human leader; he is "God's Son," whose existence carries with it the destiny of humanity as a whole. Because Christ is so important, Paul's understanding of him is complex. Paul can speak of Jesus Christ in several modes of discourse. He uses historical language, mythical language, even ontological language, sometimes side by side.⁴⁶

Paul's perception of Jesus begins with and is shaped by the resurrection. There is no evidence that Paul knew Jesus before his death, and his encounter with the risen Lord is the start of his apostolic ministry: "I have seen the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 9:1). Paul lists himself as the last (and least) of those to whom Jesus appeared after his death (15:3–8). His own experience of Jesus as the risen one, however, has more than merely personal significance: Paul experienced the truth of the good news and the power that was at work in the community that preceded him. "Whether it be I or they," he declares of the resurrection, "so we preach and so you believe" (15:11).

Jesus' resurrection is more than resuscitation or simple vindication. With other early believers, Paul above all proclaims Jesus to be "Lord," with the term *kyrios* bearing all of the theophoric resonances established by the LXX's use of the title for the proper name of God.⁴⁷ The resurrection is Jesus' exaltation "to the right hand of God" (Ps. 110:1), where he "intercedes for us" (Rom. 8:34). It is because the exalted Jesus exists

45. An older but splendid treatment of Pauline Christology is L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of Saint Paul* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1959).

46. Historical: Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal. 4:4); mythological: "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19); ontological: when Christ hands over the kingdom to God, then "God will be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).

47. E.g., Gen. 2:4; Ex. 3:15, 16; 34:6; Pss. 24:1; 25:1; Isa. 53:1.

now as Lord, sharing fully both the presence and the power of God, that he is able to help those whom he has chosen (Phil. 4:13; 1 Thess. 3:11–13; 1 Tim. 1:12; 2 Tim. 4:17–18), that makes him share as well in the divine role of judge over humans (Rom. 2:16; 2 Cor. 5:10), and that makes his future *parousia* a revelation of the full triumph of God in the world (1 Cor. 15; 1 and 2 Thessalonians).

For Paul, then, the title *Christos* (“Messiah”) captures only a part of Jesus’ significance. His exaltation as Lord extends his dominion far beyond the bounds of Israel. Paul takes pains to establish the real if paradoxical role of Jesus as Israel’s Messiah (Rom. 9–11)—paradoxical not least because in human terms (i.e., in the terms of contemporary Jewish expectation, “according to the flesh”), Jesus appeared as a failed if not a false Messiah, and the majority of Jews failed to recognize him in any sense as their Anointed One. For Paul and his readers, however, Jesus is Messiah or Christ precisely as “Lord,” for he exercises God’s rule over all things. Jesus is more than the ruler or restorer of the Jewish people; he is the ruler and restorer of all humanity.

Central to the understanding of Christ’s resurrection in Paul’s letters is the work of the Holy Spirit. Believers can proclaim “Jesus is Lord” because they are “in the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:3). The resurrected Jesus, in turn, has become “a life-giving spirit” (15:45), a description that evokes the distinctive attributes of God within Scripture.⁴⁸ The realm of the Spirit within which Christians exist—which, in fact, “indwells” them (Rom. 8:9)—and the realm of the resurrected Lord therefore coincide, so that Paul can speak of the Holy Spirit being in them (Rom. 8:11) and of their being in the Holy Spirit (8:9), of Christ being in them (8:10) and of their being in Christ (8:1).

At times, Paul speaks of the Spirit in explicitly personal terms (1 Cor. 2:11); at other times, the term suggests an energy field or power that touches and transforms (12:13). In both usages, the Spirit appears as a medium that serves to connect subjects who would otherwise seem impossibly distant: the Spirit links an executed Messiah as risen Lord both to God and to humans (see esp. 2 Cor. 13:13). The Spirit transcends space and time to join persons across space and time, enabling Paul to speak of the resurrection not simply as a past event, but as an

48. See 2 Kings 5:7; Neh. 9:6; Job 36:6; Ps. 70:20.

existential reality of the present suffusing both Jesus and the believers with the power and presence of God. The Holy Spirit provides humans with access to God through Christ, and the Holy Spirit works to transform humans into the image of Christ (3:17–18).

Jesus' resurrection can be considered "historical" in the sense that witnesses can testify to his appearances within time and space (1 Cor. 15:5–8). But it far transcends the historical, because Jesus now shares the life and power of God (15:24–28, 45). The resurrection is therefore an eschatological event; it transcends the categories of ordinary historical sequence and introduces a radically new element into human existence. It is a "new creation" (*kainē ktisis*), in which "old things have passed away; behold all things are new" (2 Cor. 5:16–17). The God who "raised Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Rom. 4:25) is the one who "gives life to the dead and calls into being what does not exist" (4:17). Understanding Jesus as cosmic Lord (Phil. 2:10–11) motivates Paul's mission to the Gentiles. If Jesus is Lord of all, then the God revealed by Jesus is the God of all humans: "Does God belong to Jews alone? Does he not belong to the Gentiles, too? Yes, also to Gentiles, for God is One" (Rom. 3:30).

Paul's letters do not therefore portray Jesus as a new lawgiver like Moses. In fact, Paul tends to compare himself to Moses (Rom. 9:1–3; 2 Cor. 3:7–18; 2 Tim. 3:8–9). Jesus instead reveals a new form of humanity, and the "new covenant" that he institutes "in his blood" (1 Cor. 11:25) is inscribed in human hearts through the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 3:3–6). Paul speaks of Jesus as the "last Adam" and compares him to the original human in Genesis. Whereas the first Adam established humanity in sin and disobedience, Christ established Adam in grace and obedience (Rom. 5:12–21); whereas the first Adam was merely human ("a living being"), the eschatological Adam has, through resurrection, become "a life-giving spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Those who are "in Christ," therefore, have assumed a new form of humanity as well (Gal. 3:26; 6:15; Eph. 4:22–24; Col. 3:9–11).

But why does Jesus, among all humans, have this distinctive representative significance? In Romans 1:4, Paul contrasts Jesus' human existence ("descended from David according to the flesh") and his divine exaltation: "established as Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness through resurrection from the dead." In other passages, how-

ever, Paul uses language that suggests the fullness of God's presence in Jesus before the resurrection and even before his human birth. In Galatians 4:4, he states that the Son, "born of a woman, born under the law," was "sent by God," which suggests a prior existence; likewise in Romans 8:3, Paul speaks of God sending "his own Son." Paul's midrashic interpretation of the wilderness experience in 1 Corinthians 10:1–4 identifies the rock that followed the ancient Israelites with Christ.⁴⁹

Christ even has a role in creation (1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16) and participates fully in the divine, being "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6), and being "the image of the unseen God" (2 Cor. 4:4; Col. 1:15; 3:10). In Christ "dwells the whole fullness of the deity bodily" (Col. 2:9), and "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ" (2 Cor. 5:19). Jesus is not for Paul just another human. He is, in a way no one else is, God's Son (see especially Rom. 8:29, 32; 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Cor. 1:19; Gal. 1:16; 2:20; Eph. 4:13; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 1:10). Within twenty-five years of Jesus' execution, Paul makes this affirmation of belief: "For us there is one God, the Father, from whom all things are and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things are and through whom we exist" (1 Cor. 8:6). Similarly, he states: "For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:5).

Precisely such a strong position concerning the status of Christ as God's Son makes more dramatic Paul's depiction of his human condition as an "emptying out" (*kenosis*), in which Christ does not regard being in the form of God as "something to be grasped" but takes on the form of humans as an expression of humility (Phil. 2:7–8). This classic statement in Philippians is matched by a series of reversal declarations in 2 Corinthians: "For our sake he made [Christ] to be sin who did not know sin, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21); "for your sake he became poor although he was rich, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (8:9); "he was crucified out of weakness, but he lives by the power of God" (13:4).

The frequent assertion in Paul's letters that Christ "gave himself" for humans (Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 5:2; 1 Tim. 2:6; Titus 2:14), therefore, can

⁴⁹ W. A. Meeks, "And Rose Up to Play: Midrash and Parables in 1 Corinthians 10:1–22," *JSNT* 16 (1982): 64–78.

legitimately be read also as God's "giving himself" to humans through Christ (Rom. 8:31–39). From such statements concerning "God's Son," the reader can properly infer conclusions concerning the character of God. But they also point us to the last important aspect of Christ's significance in Paul's letters, namely, his human character.

On this point it is particularly important not to draw a false inference from Paul's statement in 2 Corinthians 5:16, "even if we once knew Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know him so no longer." Paul here refers to the perception of Jesus apart from his encounter with the risen Lord, a perception that regarded Jesus simply in human terms and not "according to the spirit." That Paul does not indicate thereby his present unconcern or even disregard for the humanity of Jesus is shown by his statement in 1 Corinthians 12:3, "nobody speaking by the spirit of God says, 'Jesus be accursed.'" In fact, Paul's positive appreciation for the humanity of Jesus is impressive.

It is true that Paul's letters do not contain substantial portions of gospel material, which is not surprising in occasional letters addressing specific circumstances. We find no reports concerning Jesus' miracles and few of Jesus' sayings in Paul's letters. Still, simply at the level of fact, the letters reveal a significant knowledge of the human Jesus. Paul asserts that Jesus had a human birth, was Jewish, and had a mission to the Jews: "God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to ransom those under the law" (Gal. 4:4). Similarly, he declares that "Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, to confirm the promises to the patriarchs" (Rom. 15:8). Jesus is legitimately, "according to the flesh," the Jewish Messiah (9:5). Indeed, Jesus is descended from David "according to the flesh" (1:3; see also 2 Tim. 2:8). Paul considers as authoritative the few sayings of Jesus to which he refers, concerning divorce (1 Cor. 7:10), payment for preaching (9:14; see also 1 Tim. 5:17), and the end times (1 Thess. 4:15). It is highly likely that in Galatians 4:6 and Romans 8:15–16, Paul refers to shared community traditions concerning Jesus' distinctive Aramaic prayer to *Abba*.

Paul's letters are particularly dense in their references to the end of Jesus' human life. He explicitly quotes the words that Jesus spoke over the bread and the cup "on the night he was handed over," initiating a new covenant in his blood—identifying these words as a tradition

received by him and handed on to his readers (1 Cor. 11:23–25). He also explicitly connects the death of Jesus to the Passover celebration of the Jews: “Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed” (5:7). That Jesus underwent a trial before human judges is the best reading of 1 Cor. 2:8: “none of the rulers of this age knew; for if they had known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” A trial before Pontius Pilate is explicitly reported in 1 Timothy 6:13. Paul’s allusion to Psalm 69:9 in Romans 15:3 suggests that Jesus underwent abuse and humiliation: “For Christ did not please himself; but as it is written, ‘The insults of those who insult you fall upon me.’”

That Jews in Jerusalem were actively involved in Jesus’ death is explicitly stated in 1 Thessalonians 2:13–16, a passage whose authenticity has been challenged but which surely derives from early Pauline tradition: “. . . the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and persecuted us; they do not please God, and are opposed to everyone.”⁵⁰ The letters attest to Jesus’ death by crucifixion (1 Cor. 1:23; 2:2; 2 Cor. 13:4; Phil. 2:8; Gal. 3:1; Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20), his burial (Rom. 6:4; 1 Cor. 15:4), and his appearance to a variety of witnesses, including Paul himself (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:4–8; Gal. 1:15–16).

Such statements of fact do not appear as part of a sustained narrative but occur incidentally, which makes them all the more impressive as evidence for Paul’s knowledge of and appreciation for the human Jesus. They attest as well to Paul’s enmeshment within the larger Christian movement and to the ubiquity as well as antiquity of the story of Jesus. Ubiquity is as significant as antiquity: Paul can assume that his readers in Rome are as familiar with the facts concerning Jesus as are his readers in Corinth or Galatia. That these facts can be ordered to correspond to the gospel sequence also supports the hypothesis that Paul knew, alluded to, and applied aspects of the story of Jesus in his letters.⁵¹

The crucifixion of Jesus—in the social/symbolic world of the Roman Empire the most shameful of all deaths⁵²—is particularly

50. See J. A. Weatherly, “The Authenticity of 1 Thess. 2:13–16: Additional Evidence,” *JNT* 42 (1991): 79–98.

51. See L. T. Johnson, *Living Jesus: Learning the Heart of the Gospel* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), 99–115.

52. M. Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross* (trans. J. Bowden; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977).

important in Paul's letters. First, the cross is a scandal or stumbling block preventing Jews from accepting Jesus as their Messiah (Rom. 9:30–33; 1 Cor. 1:23). This is so, as Paul declares in Galatians 3:13, because the manner of Jesus' death certified that, by the standards of Torah, he was cursed by God: "For it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who hangs on a tree'" (Deut. 21:23). In the ancient world, the manner of one's death indicated the character of one's life. If Jesus died as one cursed by God, then he could not be the source of righteousness and life, and any claim by believers that he was the Messiah was invalidated. The issue of "Christ and the law," which plays such a central role in Galatians and Romans—and to a much lesser degree and in a slightly different manner in Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy, and Titus—arises precisely out of the cognitive dissonance created by the experiential claims of the resurrection and the brutal fact of crucifixion. In those letters, consequently, "the cross of Christ" functions as the key hermeneutical lens for the reinterpretation of Torah (see especially Rom. 9–11 and Gal. 3–4).

Second, the cross is the supreme sign that God "did not spare his own Son" for the sake of humans, but "handed him over for us all" (Rom. 8:32). Jesus' death was a sacrifice (1 Cor. 5:7), in which "God set [him] forth as an expiation . . . by his blood" (Rom. 3:25), an act that sealed a new covenant between God and humans in his human blood (1 Cor. 11:25; see 2 Cor. 3:6). Jesus' death was a sacrifice "for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3; cf. Rom 3:25), the complete proof of God's love for humans: "God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). As such, the cross represents God's power present in human weakness (1 Cor. 1:18–24; 2 Cor. 13:4), the pure "grace/gift" of God that constitutes, with the resurrection, the "gospel" (Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1–4; Eph. 2:8–14).

Third, the cross is also an expression of the human Jesus' character, namely, the faith he shows toward God and the love he displays toward other humans. Scholars debate the difficult expression *pistis Christou*. Should it be taken as believers' faith in Christ or as Christ's faith in God?⁵³ There are strong reasons for holding that in some key

53. See the various essays in M. F. Bird and P. M. Sprinkle, eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ: Exegetical, Biblical, and Theological Studies* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009).

passages—above all in Rom. 3:21–26—Paul speaks of the faithful human response of Jesus to God as an essential dimension of his sacrificial death.⁵⁴ The expression “obedience of faith” in Romans 1:5 and 16:26 indicates how Paul understands the equivalence between the two terms, and the development of the statements made concerning faith in 3:21–26 in terms of obedience in 5:12–21 indicates that Paul thinks of faith in terms of obedience.⁵⁵

The most convincing evidence is provided by Philipians 2:8, where Paul speaks of Jesus’ self-emptying in this fashion: “he humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even death on a cross” (see also Gal. 2:16, 20; 3:22; 26; Phil. 3:9; 1 Tim. 3:13; 2 Tim. 1:13; 3:15). Paul understands the human character of Jesus in terms of faithful obedience revealed above all in his death on a cross. In similar fashion, Jesus’ human character is shown by his “giving himself” in death for others: thus Paul speaks of “[liv[ing]] by the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me” (Gal. 2:20; see also 2 Cor. 5:14; Eph. 3:19; 5:2; Phil. 2:3–4; 1 Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13).

Finally, the cross—as shorthand for the manner and disposition of Jesus in his death—appears in Paul’s letters as a pattern for community behavior.⁵⁶ Paul speaks of acting according to “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16) in the context of a reminder of the cruciform character of life in the community, in which strength expresses itself in service to the weak (1 Cor. 1:18–2:16). Similarly, he tells the competitive Galatians that they should “bear one another’s burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). His recounting of the *Kenosis* of Christ in Philipians 2:6–8 has the purpose of encouraging readers to think as Christ did (2:5) in order to shape a community ethos in which “each look[s] out not for his own interests, but [also] everyone for those of others” (2:1–4). The faith and love displayed by Christ in his death is the pattern for moral dispositions within Paul’s communities.

The understanding of Jesus in Paul’s letters is richly complex, embracing Jesus’ relationship with God—even in creation and in the

54. L. T. Johnson, “Romans 3:21–26 and the Faith of Jesus,” *CBQ* 44 (1982): 77–90.

55. L. T. Johnson, *Reading Romans: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (Macon, GA: Selwyn and Helwy, 2001), 83–99.

56. See W. A. Meeks, *The Origins of Christian Morality* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), 61–65, 86–88.

history of Israel—his human life, and his exalted present existence; his status as God's Son and his kenotic life for others; his presence in the Holy Spirit and in the hearts of believers. All these aspects of Jesus are for Paul "grace," the distinctive gift that God gives to those in the new creation.

The Meaning of Salvation

Among the most important of the experiences, convictions, and commitments that bound Paul and his readers was that the living God was acting on and for them through the risen Lord Jesus, and that their existence had been and was still being altered through the power of God. The good news from God in which they stood was also saving them (1 Cor. 15:2); the good news was the "power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes" (Rom. 1:16). Although expressions of it vary, the conviction that God was at work to save humans is constant across Paul's letters.

Two basic aspects of the conviction should be emphasized from the start. First, salvation is not something accomplished by humans by their own efforts, but is accomplished by God through the death and resurrection of Jesus and the power of the Holy Spirit. Second, salvation has to do not with the accidental circumstances of life so much as the essential conditions of human existence; liberation is not from social or political oppression,⁵⁷ but from forces that constrain and distort personal freedom and community integrity. The basic human problem lies less in the inadequate or even harmful structures and systems of society than in the twisted recesses of the human heart. The solution must therefore apply primarily to personal transformation and secondarily to social change.

At the most basic level, the terms for salvation (*śōzō*, *śōtēria*) point to a change from a negative to a positive condition.⁵⁸ Paul's letters do not envisage humans in the manner common since the Enlightenment,

57. Paul is more conservative than not regarding social institutions (see Rom. 13:1–7; 1 Cor. 7:17–31). It is possible to infer anti-imperial nuances from Paul's language, but it is impossible to conclude that Paul considered the empire to be the root cause of human alienation. For a summary of the inferences, see N. T. Wright, "Paul and Empire," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul* (ed. S. Westerholm; Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 285–97.

58. See Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, 85–94.

as independent agents; rather, they view humans as always defined by relationship to powers that either enhance or diminish their authentic existence. Humans are either ruled by powers that hold them captive (see Rom. 5:14, 17; 6:12) or establish them in freedom by "the reign of God" (Rom. 14:17; 1 Cor. 4:10; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:5; Col. 1:13; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 1:5; 2 Tim. 4:1, 18). The good news proclaimed by Paul is that God's power to rule is superior to that of hostile forces and, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, has brought believers within the sphere of power exercised by the Holy Spirit.

Thus, Paul speaks of "the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins that he might rescue us from the present evil age" (Gal. 1:3–4); similarly, the Thessalonians await the Son who "delivers us from the coming wrath" (1 Thess. 1:10). The rule of God is not theoretical but actual; it is a matter of power (*dynamis*, see Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 3:5; 2 Tim. 1:7), authority (*exousia*, see 1 Cor. 8:9; 9:4; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; 2 Thess. 3:9), and energy (*energeia*, see 1 Cor. 12:6, 11; Gal. 3:5; Eph. 3:20–21; Col. 1:29; 1 Thess. 2:13; Phlm. 6).

Paul can speak of slavery or captivity to cosmic powers (Rom. 8:38; Gal. 4:3; Eph. 2:1–10; Col. 1:13), to death (Rom. 5:21; 1 Cor. 15:26; 2 Tim. 1:10), to the flesh (Rom. 7:25; 8:3; Gal. 5:13, 16), to sin (Rom. 6:6; 7:11; 1 Cor. 15:17; Gal. 2:17; 3:22; Eph. 2:1; 1 Thess. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:24; 2 Tim. 3:6), and to law (Rom. 6:15–23; 2 Cor. 3:6–18; Gal. 5:1; Col. 2:8–23). Rescue from such negative forces, in turn, can be expressed in terms of freedom (Rom. 6:18, 20; 8:2; Gal. 5:1, 13), spirit (Rom. 5:5; 7:6; 8:2; 1 Cor. 2:4; 12:13; 2 Cor. 1:22; 3:17–18; Gal. 3:2–3; 4:6; Eph. 1:17; 2:18; Phil. 1:19; 2:1; Col. 1:8; 1 Thess. 1:5–6; 2 Thess. 2:13; 2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 3:5; Phlm. 25), and life (Rom. 5:2; 8:2; 2 Cor. 2:16; 4:10; Col. 3:3–4; 1 Tim. 4:8; 6:19; 2 Tim. 1:1). Salvation is not, however, simply a matter of repair or of restoration in the human condition; it is a matter of elevation to a higher state of being. Thus, Paul emphasizes in his contrast between Adam and Christ "how much more" is the gift of God in Christ than was the harm done by Adam (Rom. 5:12–21). Humans are not simply rescued from physical death to enjoy empirical life. They are rescued from the death that stands for alienation from God and are given a share in the life that is distinctive to God. Paul thus speaks of the gift of "eternal life" (Rom. 2:7; 5:21; 6:22–23; Gal. 6:8; 1 Tim. 1:16; 6:12; Titus 1:2; 3:7).

The change that God effects in the world is a reality greater than any single discourse can capture. Paul's letters use several metaphors drawn from the social and religious realities of Greco-Roman and Jewish culture.⁵⁹

1. In diplomatic language, the condition of distance from God is expressed in terms of alienation (2 Cor. 5:18–20; Eph. 2:12); God's action is expressed in terms of reconciliation (Rom. 5:10–11; Eph. 2:16); Christ is an ambassador (Rom. 5:11; 2 Cor. 5:18) or mediator (1 Tim. 2:5) who effects peace between God and humans (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14–17; 2 Thess. 3:16).
2. In economic language, the condition of distance from God is expressed in terms of slavery (Rom. 6:6, 17; 8:21; Gal. 4:1, 8–9; Titus 2:9); God's action is expressed as redemption (Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14); Christ's death is a ransom (1 Tim. 2:6) that "purchases" believers (1 Cor. 6:20); the result is freedom (Rom. 6:18; 8:21; 2 Cor. 3:17; Gal. 5:1).
3. In forensic language, God is the righteous judge (2 Tim. 4:8) who responds to the deeds of humans with wrath (Rom. 1:18; 2:5; 9:22; Eph. 2:3; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10) or mercy (Rom. 9:23; 11:31; Gal. 6:16; 2 Tim. 1:16–18, 3:5), but judges without respect to appearances (Rom. 2:11; 3:22; Eph. 6:9; Col. 3:25). The condition of alienation from God is expressed as unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18, 29; 6:13; 2 Thess. 2:10; 2 Tim. 2:19), lawlessness (Rom. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:14; 2 Thess. 2:7; 1 Tim. 1:9; Titus 2:14), transgression (Rom. 2:23; 5:14; Gal. 3:19; 1 Tim. 2:14), faithlessness (Rom. 3:3; 11:20; 1 Tim. 1:13), or disobedience (Rom. 11:30–32; Eph. 2:2; 5:6; Col. 3:6). Christ is the one who is righteous (1 Cor. 1:30) through faith (Rom. 1:17; 3:22, 25; Gal 3:11); the result of God's action through Christ is human righteousness—being in right relationship with God (Rom. 5:17, 21; 6:13–20; 8:10; Gal. 5:5; Eph. 4:24; Phil. 3:9; Titus 3:5).

⁵⁹ My thought here is influenced by M. E. Boring, "The Language of Universal Salvation in Paul," *JBL* 105 (1986): 269–92.

4. In cultic language, the human condition of separation from God is expressed by sin (Rom. 3:9; 5:12, 21; 1 Cor. 15:56; Gal. 3:22; Eph. 2:1; Col. 1:14; 1 Thess. 2:16; 1 Tim. 5:24; 2 Tim. 3:6); the work of Christ is found in a sacrificial death for sins and a covenant in his blood (Rom. 3:21–25; 8:32; 1 Cor. 11:25; 15:3; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 1:4; Col. 1:14), leading to atonement and human “access” to God (Rom. 3:25; 5:2; Eph. 2:18; 3:12), with the result being “sanctification” or “holiness” (Rom. 6:19, 22; 15:16; 1 Cor. 1:2, 30; 6:11; Eph. 1:4; 5:26; Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 4:3, 7; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Tim. 2:15; 2 Tim. 1:9; 2:21).

5. In kinship language, humans are potential heirs of God (Eph. 1:14, 18), who while children are like slaves not yet in possession of the promise (Gal. 3:15–29; 4:1–3). Christ is the Son whom God sends to ransom/liberate humans (4:4), and through the Holy Spirit, makes them adopted children of God (Rom. 8:15, 23; Gal. 4:5–6), conformed to the image of the Son, who is the “firstborn among many brothers” (Rom. 8:29).

No single metaphor is the most important or governs the others. Paul uses them rather as roughly equivalent symbolic modes for expressing a reality that cannot be fully communicated by any of them. Indeed, Paul mixes the metaphors, so that the language from one logically distinct set finds a place within another (see, e.g., Rom. 5:1–8).

The theme of salvation as treated in Paul’s letters also has a distinctive temporal dimension.⁶⁰ Emphasis on the present reality of God’s rule in the world—made manifest in the resurrection of Jesus and the work of the Holy Spirit among believers—is everywhere attested. Paul employs the past and present tenses when speaking of this work, and he constantly iterates the word “now” (*нын*) to stress the presence of the new creation (see, e.g., Rom. 3:26; 5:9; 8:1; 13:11; 16:26). There is an “already” to God’s triumph in the world, a point that Paul needs to make particularly to believers who worry that those who have died

60. The expression “already/not yet” is commonplace in Pauline studies and is perhaps most classically associated with O. Cullmann, *Salvation in History* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967).

will miss out on that victory. Paul tells the Thessalonians that their hope for the future is grounded in the fundamental triumph of God over death as demonstrated through the resurrection of Christ (1 Thess. 4:14; 5:9–10).

Paul is forceful in his assertions concerning the present reality. The Galatians have experienced and can point to works of power among them (Gal. 3:1–5), as have the Corinthians (1 Cor. 1:5; 4:20; 12:27–28; 2 Cor. 12:12), the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 1:5), and the Colossians (Col. 1:11). At the most basic level, the cosmic forces inimical to humans have been thwarted through the death and resurrection of Christ (Rom. 8:31–39; 1 Cor. 3:22–23; Eph. 2:1–10; 3:10; 4:7–8; Phil. 2:10; Col. 2:14–15), and “those who have been saved” have a freedom given by the Holy Spirit to live in a new way of obedience to God (Rom. 6:1–14; 8:1–13). More than that, they are gifted with new capacities of faith, hope, and love (see 1 Thess. 1:2–3; cf. 1 Cor. 13:13), as well as diverse manifestations of the Spirit (Rom. 12:3–8; 1 Cor. 12:1–11; Eph. 4:1–16).

Yet, God’s triumph is not complete in the empirical order; the new creation is not fully realized among humans. A sense of reservation is demanded by the hard facts on the ground: sin continues within communities (1 Cor. 5:1–5; Gal. 5:16–21; Col. 2:16–23; 1 Tim. 4:1–4; 5:20–25; 2 Tim. 2:15–26; 3:1–9; Titus 1:10–11), death and illness remain powerful (1 Cor. 11:28–32; 1 Thess. 4:13), and cosmic forces continue to threaten (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 11:14; 1 Thess. 2:18; 2 Thess. 2:9; 1 Tim. 1:20; 5:15). Just as Paul needed to remind the Thessalonians that God’s victory had been won in principle, so he was required to remind the Corinthians that their arrogant behavior—as though they “have already grown rich . . . become kings” (1 Cor. 4:8)—was inappropriate. The resurrection of Christ was the “firstfruits” of God’s triumph (1 Cor. 15:23), in which they participated through the gift of the Holy Spirit (12:12–13). But their own behavior revealed how much they had still to mature to become fully “spiritual” rather than “fleshy” (3:1–4), adult rather than childish (13:11–13; 4:20). They still had to change (15:53). God’s full triumph over sin and death must still be accomplished (15:25–26, 54–57). Paul declares, “in hope we were saved” (Rom. 8:24), precisely because God’s rule has not yet fully been experienced.

Paul's letters are strikingly diverse concerning that future triumph.⁶¹ Three letters sketch fairly elaborate apocalyptic scenarios. First Thessalonians 4:13–18 expects both the living and the dead to be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and always be with the Lord; 2 Thessalonians warns against a panic generated by the announcement of the Lord's arrival and sets out the public events that must occur before the climactic moment (2 Thess. 2:1–12); 1 Corinthians lays out the stages between the resurrection of Jesus and the handing over of the kingdom by the Son to God, who will then be "all in all" (1 Cor. 15:20–28). Less elaborately, Philippians 3:20–21 speaks of waiting for "a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ [who] will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring all things into subjection to himself."

Language about an "appearance from heaven" of Jesus Christ is found also in 1 Timothy 6:15–16 and 2 Timothy 4:1, as well as Titus 2:13, which speaks of awaiting "the blessed hope, the appearance of the glory of the great God and of our savior Jesus Christ." The link between that appearance and the destiny of believers is asserted by Colossians 3:4, "When Christ your life appears, then you too will appear with him in glory"; and by 2 Timothy 2:12, which affirms that "if we have died with him we shall also live with him; if we persevere we shall also reign with him." All such statements connect a visible appearance and a public participation.

But Paul can speak of the "revelation" of God's children through the groaning birth pangs of creation with no reference to a visible "coming of the Lord" (Rom. 8:18–25), and he is also capable of using strongly platonic terms when he speaks of individuals "going home to the Lord" at the point of leaving the body, with no reference at all to a public, apocalyptic, appearance (2 Cor. 5:1–9).⁶² Similarly in 2 Timothy 4:18, Paul says that God "will bring me safe to his heavenly kingdom." In 2 Corinthians 5:10, Paul concludes with a thoroughly traditional statement of Jewish eschatology, in which God judges the deeds of humans, except that the role is now played by Christ: "For we must all appear

61. See J. Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia: An Eschatological and Theological Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997).

62. See J. Dupont, SYN CHRISTOI: *l'union avec le Christ suivront Saint Paul* (Bruges: Éditions de l'Abbaye de Saint André, 1952).

before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive recompense, according to what he did in the body, whether good or evil" (5:10). Similar statements about God's judgment of human deeds occur in Romans 2:2–11 and 14:10.

Paul's eschatological language is so diverse in part because he could not possibly know what the future would be and was forced to use a variety of available dictions to express his confidence in God's full victory, and in part because his sketch of the end times was fitted to the specific sort of pastoral issues he was addressing. Paul had the hope that his fellow Jews would hear the good news and become part of the restored people of God, so that "all Israel" might be saved (Rom. 11:26); he expected that the final enemies of death and sin would be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:55–57); he was convinced that believers would be transformed so that they could "be with the Lord always" (2 Cor. 5:8; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:17; 2 Tim. 4:18) and share in his glory (Rom. 8:30). But it is in the nature of the topic that such expectations and desires must remain fluid, even for one whose experience of the resurrection was personal and direct (1 Cor. 9:1).

Paul's concern for the future is concentrated primarily on the victory of God in the world and only secondarily on the participation of believers in that victory. Apart from a handful of statements, his letters evince little interest in the destiny of believers after the moment of victory, and none in the eternal destiny of individuals. His language about salvation is almost entirely social in character. In distinction from Paul's diction concerning righteousness, which addresses the character of the human relationship with God—and is available to Abraham as well as Jesus, to Gentiles as well as to Jews (see Rom. 3:21–4:23)—his discourse concerning salvation connotes participation in a presently-being-rescued community. To "be saved" in Paul's letters does not indicate one's future destiny with God, but one's present inclusion in God's visible people.⁶³ Thus, Paul's discussion of God's call and "predestination" (8:29–30) in Romans 9–11 is misread when understood as dealing with the destiny of individuals, and Paul's expectation that "all Israel will be saved" (11:32) does not mean that all Jews will go to heaven, but indicates

63. L. T. Johnson, "The Social Dimensions of *sozotia* in Luke-Acts and Paul," *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*, ed. E. H. Lovering (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 520–36.

Paul's hope that all Jewish people will eventually be included in the people whom God is presently shaping out of Jews and Gentiles.

Paul focuses most on the "in-between-time" of salvation, when believers are to "conduct [themselves] as worthy of the God who calls [them]" (1 Thess. 2:12; Eph. 4:1), and to "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). In the present, they are to "stay alert and sober" (1 Thess. 5:6); they are to engage the world "as though it were not," knowing that the frame of this world is passing away (1 Cor. 7:29–31); they are to be "separate" from the world of idolatry and corruption (2 Cor. 6:14–18); and they are to be "children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine like lights in the world" (Phil. 2:15).

Protected by the armor of faith, hope, and love (1 Thess. 5:8), and wearing "the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17), believers must engage in spiritual combat with the cosmic powers that continue to oppress, corrupt, and destroy humans (6:12–15; Rom. 16:17–20; 2 Cor. 10:2–6; 2 Thess. 2:5–12; 1 Tim. 4:1; 5:15), and they seek to be educated by the gift of God in Christ so that they might "reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live temperately, justly, and devoutly in this age" as they await the appearance of Jesus Christ (Titus 2:12–13). Refusing to conform themselves to the present age, they are renewed in mind so that they can "discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect" (Rom. 12:2).⁶⁴ Such efforts are not in service of "saving one's [individual] soul," but in service of building a saved community.

The Role of the Church

The term "church" (*ekklesia*) occurs in all of Paul's letters except 2 Timothy and Titus, and even in these letters, Paul's concern for the congregation of believers is evident. Believers gathered in groups that were much like the associations (*ekklesiai*) common in Greco-Roman culture.⁶⁵ The Pauline *ekklesia* drew from and used the basic structure of

64. See L. T. Johnson, "Transformation of the Mind and Moral Discernment in Paul," *Early Christianity and Classical Culture: Comparative Studies in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (ed. J. T. Fitzgerald; NovT Supp 110; Leiden: Brill 2003), 215–36.

65. See esp. P. Harland, *Associations, Synagogues, and Congregations: Claiming a Place in Ancient Mediterranean Society* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

such associations, just as the Diaspora synagogue already had. As many other voluntary associations, Paul's communities met in households (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:15, 19; Col. 4:15; Phlm. 2).⁶⁶

In Paul's letters, *ekklēsia* refers primarily to the local assembly; only in Ephesians does the term take on a greater, more cosmic, meaning. Nevertheless, Paul made efforts to link local associations in a variety of ways: he wrote to churches throughout a region (Gal. 1:2); he reminded local assemblies of common belief (1 Cor. 1:2), teaching (15:11), and practice (11:16; 14:33–36); he encouraged the exchange of letters among communities (Col. 4:16); he wrote a circular letter to a number of churches (Ephesians);⁶⁷ he reminded readers of his (and their) connection to a larger movement leading out from Jerusalem (Rom. 15:19–20; Gal. 1:18–2:10). He worked to create a larger sense of fellowship (*koinōnia*) among assemblies through organizing and completing a collection from among Gentile communities for the Jerusalem church (Rom. 15:25–33; 1 Cor. 16:1–4; 2 Cor. 8–9; Gal. 2:10).⁶⁸

With an important exception (Romans), Paul either directly (in the case of the Thessalonians, Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Philippians) or indirectly (as in the case of Colossians) founded the assemblies to which he wrote, and he appointed the delegates (Timothy, Titus, Tychicus) who represented him in churches. Consistent with his calling (Gal. 1:16; 2:7; Eph. 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:7), Paul's foundations were either exclusively or dominantly Gentile (Galatians, Thessalonians, Philippians, Colossians), although he never foreswore care for his fellow Jews, with the result that some of his churches were ethnically mixed (1 Corinthians). Paul claims the authority that came to him with his prophetic/apostolic calling (2 Cor. 10:7–11; Gal. 1:15–16) as a witness to the resurrection (1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8–10), and as one who possessed the Spirit of God (7:40). He did not tolerate the interference of rival missionaries in churches established under his apostolic authority (e.g., 2 Cor. 10:12–11:15; Col. 2:16–23; 1 Tim. 1:3–11, 19–20; 4:1–3; 2 Tim. 2:16–26; Titus 1:10–14).

66. W. A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1983).

67. Johnson, *Writings*, 359–71.

68. See now, D. J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts* (WUNT 2/248; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009).

Paul's churches also had local leadership that managed the community in the apostle's absence. The letters do not reveal much about such leadership, and there is no reason to think that arrangements were absolutely consistent in every church, but the evidence contained in the letters corresponds with what is known about the social structure of first-century associations and synagogues. A board of elders (*presbyterion*, 1 Tim. 4:14) administered the community by exercising leadership (Rom. 12:7–8; 1 Cor. 16:15; 1 Thess. 5:12), teaching (Gal. 6:6; 1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 5:17–18), settling disputes (1 Cor. 6:1–8; 1 Tim. 5:19–22), and managing finances—as in collecting for and distributing to the needy (1 Tim. 5:3–16). The position of superintendent (*episkopos*, Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:2; Titus 1:7) probably involved special leadership obligations—such as hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2–5)—within the framework of the board.

Practical chores were carried out by male and female helpers (*diakonoi*, Rom. 16:1; Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3:8, 11), who may well have made possible by their practical assistance the community acts of worship. The most obvious candidates for leadership positions in the assembly were the heads of the households within which the association met and who supported the movement financially (see 1 Cor. 16:15–17, 19; Phlm. 7). Paul expected recognition and submission to be paid to such local leaders (1 Cor. 16:16; Col. 1:7; 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:12–13).⁶⁹

Although Paul's churches can be identified in terms of their geographical location, they are more than simply voluntary associations gathered because of shared occupations or interests. Paul sees them as brought into being by the call of God (see 1 Cor. 1:9; Eph. 4:1, 4; Col. 3:15; 1 Thess. 2:12; 2 Thess. 2:14; 2 Tim. 1:9). They are therefore “the church of God” (*ekklēsia tou theou*, 1 Cor. 1:2; 10:32; 11:16, 22; 15:9; 2 Cor. 1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Thess 2:14; 1 Tim. 3:5, 15) or “the church of Christ” (Gal. 1:22). God's Holy Spirit, therefore, should be not only the source of its life and power (Rom. 8:9–10, 14–15; 1 Cor. 2:4–14; 12:13; Gal. 3:2–5; 4:6; Eph. 2:18–22; Phil. 1:12, 27; 1 Thess. 1:5–6; 4:8; 2 Tim. 1:7; Titus 3:5), but also the guide to its behavior (Rom. 7:6; 8:4–6; 1 Cor. 14:2–32; 2 Cor. 12:18; Gal. 5:16–25; Eph. 4:3–30; Phil. 2:1–4; 1 Thess. 5:19; 2 Tim. 1:14).

69. See Johnson, *First and Second Timothy*, 218–25.

Since the same Holy Spirit was also the source of knowledge and speech within communities (1 Cor. 12–14), it is no surprise to find that Paul's letters reveal a tension between the ordinary processes of association governance and charismatic authority (1 Cor. 11:3–16; 14:33–40; 1 Thess. 5:19–20).

Because Paul's churches were intentional communities that had powerful religious experiences and convictions but only a fragile place within their social world, they inevitably experienced a variety of tensions that Paul had to address in his letters. These problems, much more than any theoretical positions, shape Paul's thought. He is not a systematic but a practical or pastoral theologian, whose best thought is given to tracing the links between religious experience and conviction and consistent community practice.

Some tensions had to do precisely with the boundaries of the community vis-à-vis the surrounding culture. Take the necessity to be "holy," that is, "different." With regard to Gentile culture, some requirements were obvious: Paul says that believers should "turn from idols" (1 Thess. 1:9), and he demands of his readers that they separate from idolatry completely (2 Cor. 6:14–18), refusing to participate in "the table of demons" (1 Cor. 10:21) or to return to the spiritual activities associated with "dumb idols" (12:2; 14:23). Yet he puzzles with his Corinthian readers over the legitimacy of eating meat that had been sacrificed to idols if it does not cause a brother to stumble (8:1–13). Although Paul explicitly rejects philosophy as a wisdom contrary to the cross (1:18–31; Col. 2:4–8), he makes use of the commonplaces of Greco-Roman moral teaching. And although he eschews powerful rhetoric for the same reason (1 Cor. 2:1–5; 2 Cor. 10:10–11), even such disavowals reveal a rhetorical strategy. Most significant is the fact that Paul does not envisage the community as "going out of the world" (cf. 1 Cor. 5:9–10); the disposition of eschatological detachment ("as though not") is compatible—indeed, demands—continued engagement in the ordinary social activities of the earthly empire (7:17–35).

Establishing "holiness" with respect to Judaism was more delicate, above all since holiness was the defining characteristic of Jews in the ancient world. Because of their commitment to the one God who was "different" from all other gods, Jews were demonstrably "different" from all other nations (Gentiles). Paul's churches are both continuous and

women praying and prophesying in the community (11:3–16). But the more female activity takes place within the conventions of the household, the more restrictive Paul becomes; he wants them to pray and prophesy with heads covered (11:3–16), forbids them teaching in the assembly (14:33–36; 1 Tim. 2:11–15); encourages domestic roles for them (1 Tim. 5:3–16; Titus 2:3–5), and within marriage wants wives to show submission to their husbands (Eph. 5:21–33; Col. 4:18; 1 Tim. 2:11).⁷³ Part of the difficulty, and also the excitement, in reading Paul is found in the ways in which he struggles to reconcile egalitarian ideals and social realities.

That Paul does struggle in this fashion is one of his noblest qualities. His concern is steadily on the formation of a community ethos more than the benefit of individuals, and he constantly urges his readers to move from self-preoccupation to a concern for the whole (1 Cor. 13:1–13; Phil. 2:1–4). His focus is shown by the two major metaphors he uses for the association. The church is a building (*oikos*) whose foundation is Christ (1 Cor. 3:11), and it is built up by the efforts of preachers and prophets (3:12–15; 14:1–12). Indeed, all members of the community, when they act out of love, can “build up” the church (8:1–2; 1 Thess. 5:11).

Because this is a building inhabited by the Holy Spirit, the church is also a temple (*naos*), which is required to be holy (1 Cor. 3:16–17).⁷⁴ The church is also a body (*sōma*), indeed, the “body of Christ” (*sōma Christou*, Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:27). It has drunk the one Spirit and become one body (1 Cor. 12:13), all of whose members contribute to the health and growth of the body as a whole (12:12–31). The Holy Spirit is the source both of the unity of the body and the diversity of the gifts exhibited by the members (12:4–11; Eph. 4:1–16). The two metaphors coalesce in the complex imagery of Ephesians: through Christ the whole structure is held together and grows into a temple sacred in the Lord; in him you also are being built together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Eph. 2:21–22).

73. For a survey, see M. Y. MacDonald, “Women in the Pauline Churches,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, 268–84.

74. See L. T. Johnson, “Edification as a Formal Criterion for Discernment in the Church,” *Sevante Review* 39:4 (1996): 362–72, 373–84.

discontinuous with Judaism.⁷⁰ Discontinuity is due to the majority of Jews not recognizing Jesus as Messiah (Rom. 9:31–33) and the majority of Paul’s converts being Gentiles (9:25–30). But by defining the promise made by God to Abraham in terms of the Holy Spirit, Paul argues a form of continuity: the Gentiles, who have received the Holy Spirit, are also children of Abraham and children of the promise (Gal. 3:7–18; 4:1–7). They belong, in short, to the “Israel according to the Spirit” (cf. 4:21–31) that God uses in his mysterious dialectical plan to save even Israel “according to the flesh” (Rom. 11:1–36), in accord with his faithfulness to his promise (15:8–13). It is in this dialectical sense that Paul can speak of the Gentile churches in Galatia as “the Israel of God” (Gal. 6:15–16).

The church’s relationship to Torah is correspondingly complex. It is impossible to understand “Christ” without the symbols of Torah, impossible to understand the significance of God’s promises without the stories and prophecies of Torah. Paul therefore appropriates for his readers all the narratives, prophecies, and wisdom traditions of Torah, reading them all, to be sure, through the lens of a crucified and raised Messiah. The sticking point is the law in the proper sense. Paul has no difficulty with Jewish believers keeping the commandments, which he declares are “holy and righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12). The gift of the Holy Spirit, indeed, enables believers to fulfill “the righteous decrees of the law” (8:4). Obedience to what God commands is basic: it is not circumcision or uncircumcision that counts, but keeping God’s commands (1 Cor. 7:19); God makes such obedience the basis of judgment for both Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 2:1–29).

At the same time, Paul is adamant that Gentiles not be required to keep the Mosaic law, the symbol for which is the ritual of circumcision (1 Cor. 7:17–20; Gal. 2:3, 15–21; 5:2–6; Phil. 3:2–4; Col. 2:11). Gentiles are also not to observe all the ritual observances by which Jews marked themselves as distinctive among the Gentiles (Gal. 4:9–10; Col. 2:16–18; 1 Tim. 4:3–4; Titus 1:14–16). What Paul means by the righteous requirement of the law seems to be the moral commands that continue to have validity in the new creation, namely, the Decalogue

70. See J. M. G. Barclay, “Paul, Judaism, and the Jewish People,” in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul* (ed. S. Westerholm; Chichester, West Sussex; Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 188–201.

and the law of love from Leviticus 19:18 (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:14; see 1 Tim. 1:8–11).⁷¹

Other issues in Paul's churches arise from the internal tensions created by the gap between utopian ideals and social realities. Paul subscribes to the ideal expressed by the baptismal formula in Galatians 3:28, that "you are all one in Christ Jesus," with a breakdown of the status markers of ethnicity, class, and gender: "neither Jew nor Greek . . . neither slave nor free person . . . not male and female" (see also 1 Cor. 12:13; Col. 3:10–11). These egalitarian ideals, however, conflicted with deeply embedded conventions—above all in the conservative institution of the household, where the associations met.

The tension is obvious in the case of "Jew/Greek." Paul himself asserts the primacy of Jews in God's call and ultimate plan (Rom. 1:16; 11:1–36) and declares that Jews have an advantage (3:1–4; 9:1–3). Why should this advantage not apply to community practice? Why should Gentiles not seek to be included in such an advantage (Gentians)? In mixed communities, furthermore, the ideal of "neither Jew nor Greek" would seem to mean the Jewish believers' disadvantage, especially in matters of table fellowship: Gentiles give up nothing, but Jews must give up being Jewish in order to eat with Gentiles (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8–10; Gal. 2:11–14).

The ideal of "neither slave nor free" found little practical realization in Paul's churches. Paul considered the condition of actual slavery negligible in terms of God's call (1 Cor. 7: 21–24), and although he considered the escaped slave Onesimus a brother rather than a slave (Phlm. 16), he nevertheless returned him to Philemon, his owner (v. 12). And his household instructions do little to mitigate the harsh realities of social captivity (Eph. 6:5–9; Col. 4:22–25; 1 Tim. 6:1–2).⁷²

The case with "not male and female" is more complex. In one respect, Paul is more liberated than any other ancient author. He recognizes the role of women in the missionary field (Rom. 16:1–16; 1 Cor. 16:19; Phil. 4:1–2); he asserts mutual rights of women and men in marriage (1 Cor. 7:1–6) and acknowledges the legitimacy of celibate existence dedicated to the Lord (7:7–11, 25–40); he recognizes the practice of

71. See A. J. Hultgren, "Paul and the Law," in *The Blackwell Companion to Paul*, 202–15.

72. See D. Martin, *Slavery as Salvation: The Metaphor of Slavery in Pauline Christianity* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1990).

Because Paul seeks the edification ("building up") of the community, he is also consistently anti-elitist, opposed to members of the churches who compete for higher status than others through ritual circumcision (Gal. 5:19–21), knowledge (1 Cor. 8:1–2; 1 Tim. 1:7; Titus 1:14), spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 14:20–22), ascetical practices (2 Cor. 11:22–29; Col. 2:21–23) or mystical experiences (Col. 2:18). He sees such competition as a form of envy that destroys true fellowship (Gal. 5:15–21). Paul exhorts his readers to carry out the pattern of "life for others" exhibited by Christ, seeking unity and reconciliation by means of those powerful and wise and wealthy becoming weak and foolish and poor so that others might become strong and wise and prosperous; this is what he means by having "the mind of Christ" (1 Cor. 2:16; Phil. 2:5).

In his most sustained reflection on the nature and task of the church, Paul proposes that the role of the church is to be the place in the world where the work of Christ in reconciling humans to God should be realized in practice by the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:1–22) and the harmony between male and female (5:32). The task of the church, he suggests, is to be a sacrament of the world's possibility (3:10).⁷⁵

75. See now, Te-Li Lau, *The Politics of Peace: Ephesians, Dio Chrysostom, and the Confucian Four Books* (NovT Supp 133; Leiden: Brill, 2010).

RESPONSE TO LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

THOMAS R. SCHREINER

What strikes me in reading Luke Johnson's essay is the remarkable extent to which I agree with him. If we think historically about the matter, such harmony is not surprising, for the Reformed and Roman Catholics have much in common theologically, despite the differences that remain. Furthermore, the twenty-first century is radically different from the sixteenth, for in a world that is in many respects post-Christian, evangelicals and Catholics have been reminded of what they share in common. In addition, Johnson doesn't emphasize Catholic distinctives in his essay; he reads Paul historically in terms of Paul's own social location.

I must apologize to those who want to see sparks fly, but a balanced assessment needs to identify the many (I don't have space to list all!) places where Johnson and I agree. I remember many years ago reading Johnson's *The Writings of the New Testament*, and the pleasant surprise I experienced when I found that he dissented from critical orthodoxy in seeing all thirteen of the Pauline letters as authentic. Johnson's mind has not changed. He continues to say that we must use the entire Pauline corpus to construct his theology. Such a conclusion, for those of us immersed in New Testament scholarship, is quite astonishing and gratifying. Johnson recognizes that Paul did not write a systematic theology, but his letters were directed to specific situations. Hence, we must pay close attention to the social situation addressed and the rhetorical strategies Paul devised. In other words, the differences between the Pastoral Letters and other Pauline letters are accounted for (in part) by the circumstances addressed in the Pastorals.

The importance of experience and tradition is also sketched in nicely by Johnson. Paul's theology grew out of a powerful experience with Jesus Christ, one that was shared by those in his churches, and Pauline traditions reflect on the significance of that experience. The Holy Spirit was not a theoretical construct but empowered believers to

live in a way that was pleasing to God. Believers also celebrated their faith in baptism and the Lord's Supper, which marked them off as a community separate from their society.

I especially resonate with Johnson in his emphasis on the centrality of Jesus Christ. Jesus is the last Adam, the inaugurator of the new creation. The new creation commenced with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead, and he now reigns at God's right hand as the exalted Lord. Paul believed that Jesus was preexistent and that he shared the same identity as God without compromising monotheism. Jesus will be the end-time judge of all, as the Lord of all humanity.

Nor does Jesus' exalted status diminish his humanity. He was the Messiah, and his earthly life was important for Paul. Perhaps Johnson could have emphasized even more the allusions and echoes of Jesus' traditions in the Pauline letters, though he does acknowledge the importance of Jesus' sayings. Johnson is no Bultmannian, for the earthly life and obedience of Jesus mattered to Paul. The cross of Jesus Christ plays a foundational role in Pauline thought, for through it human beings find forgiveness, presumably because Jesus' death was sacrificial in nature.

When it comes to Paul's soteriology, I agree that no metaphor takes center stage in Paul's thinking. Johnson rightly sees that Paul describes salvation from a number of different angles: friendship, liberation, forensic, sacrificial, and familial. Salvation, according to Paul, is multifaceted and hence is unpacked with a variety of metaphors. It seems to me that Johnson and I are similar to one another in describing Pauline soteriology in this regard, especially when he says the already but not yet plays a key role in Paul's understanding of salvation.

Johnson rightly sees that churches in Paul are local, and yet the unity of the entire church both creedally and practically is also emphasized. Paul does not conceive of spiritual life as a private mystical experience but as a communal and social experience in which Christians are committed to other believers. The church was conceived of as the new people of God, as the Israel of God.

I hope I have communicated my appreciation for Johnson's essay and for the significant concord between us. Still, we are not carbon copies of each other. There are differences as well. Perhaps it would help to say something about approach. Johnson is a modern scholar, trained in the historical critical method, a shrewd reader of the literary and social

dimension of texts. He is keenly and rightly aware of the human dimension of the Pauline writings. Such a standpoint is a helpful corrective to systematic readings of Paul that ignore or minimize the historical context in which the letters were written.

Still, the focus on Paul's social location and history, which is the standpoint Johnson adopts, has some liabilities. In particular, the theological richness and profundity of Paul's thought are not explored in the same depth that we find in the history of the church. Today we particularly study the Scriptures in their historical setting, but we have something to learn from our ancestors who also studied it as the Word of God. It is not that Johnson denies the latter; it just doesn't play much of a role in his exposition of Paul's thought. For instance, Jesus' death is said to be expiatory and sacrificial, and Johnson connects such to human sin, but he doesn't explore deeply what this means and how the two are connected. The two realities (human sin and divine forgiveness) are noted, but they are not explicated in relation to one another, as they are, say, in Cranfield's commentary on Romans 3:21–26. If such a theological reading is pursued, there are good reasons to conclude that Paul doesn't limit himself to expiation but also includes propitiation here.

In the same way (I suppose my Reformed reading of Paul emerges here), Johnson says little about the role the law plays in Paul's thought. In Jewish thought the law was considered to be a pathway to life. Paul's understanding is radically and shockingly different, for the law exacerbates sin (Rom. 5:20; 7:5, 7–25; Gal. 3:19). The quick comment Paul makes on the matter in 1 Corinthians 15:56 reveals that Paul's negative assessment of the law can't be restricted to polemics. The law uncovers the rebellion, the stubbornness, the idolatry, and the self-worship in the human heart. Johnson does write about sin and redemption and forgiveness. It isn't absent. Nevertheless, the stunning grace of God that justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) (the claim that faith rather than works saves) is noticeably absent. Johnson emphasizes that believers live new lives (more on that below), but the foundation of the new life, where human works are radically lacking, receives short shrift. The joy and wonder of forgiveness ascribed to God's grace in Jesus Christ crucified and risen need to receive more attention in Johnson's treatment of Pauline theology.

Perhaps this is the place to bring up another theme. The centrality of faith in Paul's thought is neglected. Perhaps that is not a fair way to put it, for Johnson is a firm believer that *pistis Christou* refers to the faithfulness of Christ rather than faith in Christ.⁷⁶ Space is lacking to investigate this matter in detail here.⁷⁷ I remain unconvinced. Jesus is described as the obedient one (Rom. 5:19; Phil. 2:8), but there is no unambiguous text in Paul where his obedience is described as his faithfulness. The use of *pistis Christou* with verbal forms does not support a subjective genitive (Rom. 3:22; Gal. 2:16; 3:22), for the verbal and nominal phrases are there for emphasis. What is lost here, then, is the nominal emphasis on faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. In other words, a critical element of Paul's theology is that human beings are saved by faith and not works, that salvation doesn't come fundamentally by doing but by trusting, not by achieving but by receiving.

Still, Johnson rightly says that believers are transformed by the Holy Spirit and do what is pleasing to God. Paul was not an antinomian. He believed the life of the Spirit should be lived out in his congregations. Too often those who grasp that salvation is given by faith instead of works deny this feature in Pauline thought. Johnson rightly spies the importance of good works, but he neglects the importance of faith relative to salvation in Pauline theology.

One of the refreshing characteristics of Johnson's writings is his willingness to contravene critical orthodoxy. He rightly says that personal transformation is the foundation for social change and finds no basis for the notion that the empire was the object of Paul's criticism. As Johnson says, the root problem is with the evil that resides in human hearts. We are all tempted to read Paul so that he fits with our own political and cultural biases, and a regular dose of Johnson helps us see matters more clearly.

I want to pick out a few matters before concluding my response. Johnson says election in Romans 9–11 is corporate, not individual. Before interacting with that claim, it is striking that Johnson says little about election in Paul's theology. Conceptually, it is a major theme (Rom. 8:28–30; 9:6–23; 11:1–7; 1 Cor. 1:23–31; 8:3; 2 Cor. 4:5–6; Gal. 1:6, 15–16; Eph. 1:4–5, 11; Col. 3:12; 1 Thess. 1:4; 5:9;

⁷⁶ I am using the form *pistis Christou* for convenience here.

⁷⁷ See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians* (ZECNT), Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 163–66.

2 Thess. 2:13–14; 2 Tim. 1:9). It is by no means limited to Romans 9. Indeed, God's election is tied closely to the notion that salvation is by grace, that no one gains it by works (Rom. 11:5–6). Nor is it convincing to say that Romans 9–11 is corporate and not individual. It is a both-and instead of an either-or. Romans 9–11 must be read together as one unit. When Paul indicts Israel because it did not believe (Rom. 9:30–10:21), he is thinking both corporately and individually. Israel as a whole did not believe, and at the same time individuals failed to believe.

When it comes to Israel's belief or unbelief in Romans 10, I have never heard scholars say that it is corporate but not individual. It is evident, after all, that individuals believe or disbelieve. But Romans 10 cannot be split apart from Romans 9 as if Romans 9 is only corporate, while Romans 10 is individual and corporate. After all, both chapters are about the salvation of Israel. Paul is almost willing to be damned because Israel is not experiencing the saving promises (9:3). And when Paul refers to "God's children" (9:8), to election, works, and calling (9:11), and to destruction and mercy and glory (9:23), he uses soteriological terms. I conclude that Paul speaks both corporately and individually in Romans 9 about election and salvation. He is not interested in resolving philosophically the problem of evil. Election is important to him because it grants all the glory to God in salvation (Eph. 1:6, 12), showing that it comes from his grace alone (Rom. 11:5–6).

I have space for a couple of quick comments on matters that are less central in Paul's thought. I am not sure what Johnson means by saying that Romans 11:26 doesn't teach all Jews will go to heaven. I agree if he is saying that there is no promise here of salvation for all Jews of all time. On the other hand, this verse does promise a future eschatological salvation for the Jews at the parousia of Jesus Christ.

I also agree with Johnson that Paul was not a social revolutionary, and he sketches in well the tensions between egalitarianism and hierarchy in Pauline thought. I would simply want to add that such tensions aren't contradictory. Paul wasn't a modern American. He didn't think about equality the same way we do, especially when it comes to the roles of men and women. Now that doesn't mean that he endorses or recommends slavery. He regulates an existing evil institution. Still, Paul's goal wasn't the transformation of society and its structures. He would be happy if such occurred, but it wasn't the fundamental object of his vision.

RESPONSE TO LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

DOUGLAS A. CAMPBELL

I applaud Johnson's accounts of the Catholic tradition, method, Paul's center, Christ, and salvation, and much that he says about the church. There are brief affirmations of the Melancthonian model and instances of language insufficiently sensitive to Judaism. But these seem to be occasional regrettable lapses peripheral to his main position. So I will raise here just one slightly different anxiety.

In some of his last paragraphs Johnson runs briefly over "the Household Codes," which appear at several points in the Pauline corpus either explicitly or in the background of the discussion (cf. 1 Cor. 7; 11:2–16; 14:33b–36; Eph. 5:21–6:9; Col. 3:18–4:1; 1 Tim. 5:1–6:2; Titus 2:2–5; also relevant are Rom. 1:14; 13:1–7; Gal. 3:26–28; Col. 3:11; and 1 Tim. 2:1–3, 8–15; 3:1). The issues implicit in Johnson's brief account of Paul's thinking here need to be explored further.

It is important to recall first that these codes were drawn ultimately from Greco-Roman culture. Hence largely the same system as Paul's is discernible in Aristotle's *Politics*. Cutting a long story short—and as Aristotle articulates with matchless clarity—this worldview suggests structuring communities with a series of intercalated binary oppositions. In each opposition one is inferior because less or irrational agents are obedient and ordered under the governance of superior rational agents. When this is done exhaustively—i.e., every binary opposition within an ideal community is named and ordered—the ideal community results: ordered, unified, and rational. The gods or God governs their/"his" people; the government governs its subjects; superior races govern inferior races; owners govern slaves; husbands govern wives; parents govern children; and so on.⁷⁸

Paul's programmatic advice to slaves and to women arises largely out of this way of thinking (see the texts noted above). But, as John-

78. A nice overview is Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others* (2nd ed.; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002).

son observes, this advice generates a “struggle” that “arise[s] from the internal tensions created by the gap between utopian ideals and social realities”; these ideals—elsewhere called egalitarian—are expressed by different texts, such as Galatians 3:28; 1 Corinthians 12:13; and Colossians 3:10–11. Johnson merely concludes here, however: “That Paul does struggle in this fashion is one of his noblest qualities.” And I found this rather unsatisfying, on several counts.

Johnson’s earlier decisions about Pauline authorship now seem less convincing. Although the un- and less-disputed letters structure female activity restrictively in terms of the Household Codes, they do not silence women in the church altogether. As Johnson well knows, charismatic speaking is still possible—the utterance of prophecy, prayer, and presumably glossolalia (cf. esp. 1 Cor. 11:5, 13). Moreover, other texts indicate that certain women had power over some men in Paul’s communities. Junia is an apostle (Rom 16:4). Phoebe is a patroness (Gk. *prostatis*; Rom. 16:1–2, 7). These women must have spoken to men authoritatively, at least at times. But 1 Timothy simply seems to unilaterally silence women in relation to men in any authoritative sense. Hence it seems likely that 1 Timothy is drawn from a later, more heavily institutionalized layer of texts that through institutionalization moved to curtail the more uncontrolled charismatic activity that was undertaken by women in the earliest days of the church. It is, in short, not genuine Pauline material. Consequently we need not lay responsibility for *completely* silencing women in the church at the feet of Paul. (This is not to deny that he endorsed their subordination in many respects.)

Even more importantly, Johnson’s discussions of Paul’s treatments of slaves and women fail to articulate a significant textual shortcoming in the Pauline data, which his own discussion then goes on to reproduce—the *absence of any significant conceptual work by either Christology or pneumatology* and, in tandem with this, the *absence of any charismatic account of the church* in these relations. Now Johnson *knows* about these absences but, as noted above, he cryptically characterizes them as a mere “tension” or “struggle” between utopian or egalitarian ideals and social realities. However, these tensions derive from a much more serious source than this. They actually come from all the things that Johnson has been cataloguing through the bulk of his essay about the present realities of Christ and the Spirit as the key constituents of the church—from the

activity of *God* in its midst!—which can hardly be dismissed as a mere ideal, a possibility, and one in tension with social reality. God is the definitive reality, and we must seek to structure our social locations, by way of the church, in obedience *to* that divine reality.

Moreover, this reality is named by Galatians 3:28 and its parallel texts, which take us precisely into an ecclesial community characterized by the Spirit, virtue, and a fundamental equality. At this point it seems that we simply have to admit that Paul's admonitions to slaves and women in terms of hierarchical Greco-Roman categories are inconsistent with central Christian truths that he spends much of his time advocating elsewhere. Consequently these texts should be reinterpreted and redeployed (and there are a number of options here, although I would recommend primarily a thoroughly christological approach).

Johnson might appeal at this point, however—although I emphasize the word “might”—to two dynamics he has already identified that could qualify the relevance of Christology to these issues. (a) Earlier he suggested that the liberation effected by Christian salvation “is not [at least ‘primarily’] from social or political oppression, but from forces . . . [that lie] in the twisted recesses of the human heart.” Personal transformation thus precedes social change. And this might suggest leaving Paul's advice to slaves and women where it is, as a secondary matter concerning social change. But Johnson's account of Pauline ethics here is problematic. Paul's understanding of people is irreducibly *relational*. Hence “personal,” “individual,” and “internal,” and “communal,” “external,” and “social” considerations *cannot be separated or prioritized*. (They can be distinguished.) Christological and pneumatological transformation affects both, as Johnson's account of the church in Paul as a personal *and* communal phenomenon makes clear. So this potential rejoinder would be invalid.

(b) Johnson also articulates a dynamic affirmed by Schreiner and Nanos at times that Christian reality is constrained by mere eschatological *inauguration* as against its completion or perfection. So he might suggest that Paul's hierarchical advice falls into the space yet to be perfected, and necessarily so, and consequently it can still be endorsed.

This is a widespread interpretative claim and raises complex issues that cannot be discussed in detail here. It must suffice to say, then, that there is something problematic about qualifying the acts of God

in Christ in a way that *limits* the effectiveness of that act presently and in a manner that is basically quantitative—so saying, for example, that only 40 or 60 percent of God's salvation has been effected in Christ, or some such. We are probably being betrayed by longstanding but deeply inaccurate Western ontologies if we speak in these terms, that is, conceiving of reality in terms of substances, often static, and hence different overlapping realities in terms of strict zero-sum relationships.⁷⁹ But it is unlikely that Christ's impact on our corrupt and sinful reality is a zero-sum game. It is more likely that it is in its deepest and most real sense complete and perfect but that our sinful reality overlies and obscures that completion (and we seem very close to Jewish apocalyptic at this point).

It is then the *simultaneous presence of two* opposed realities—although one is hardly worthy of that name—that creates the puzzling situation of both salvation and sin being present that we are currently trying to articulate, and not the partial absence of one, namely, salvation. And this suggests further that it would be unwise to qualify the importance of Christology and pneumatology for our social structures by suggesting that these are merely “inaugurated” dynamics with much still to come. There is a perfection and totality about the work of God in our midst that is directly implicit in the confession Jesus is Lord. We should consequently seek to apply Christology to our social realities as vigorously as we can, which is to say that we should seek to be as obedient as we can be to that reality as it summons us to obedience in our current social realities, many aspects of which resist its lordship and persist in sinful activities and oppressive structures (cf. 2 Cor. 10:1–6).

We must also recall in this relation that the church universal *has* already moved decisively beyond much of the hierarchical advice contained in the Household Codes by abandoning slavery. This was admittedly a long struggle, and sincere exegetes wrote much defending the literal teaching of the Bible against this trajectory. It nevertheless remains true that the church has now judged any construction of social reality in terms of the system of owner and slave as explicitly endorsed by Paul to be deeply sinful, and these texts need to be reread accordingly. But

⁷⁹ It is canvassed nicely by T. F. Torrance, in “Karl Barth and the Latin Heresy” *STJ* 39 (1986): 461–82.

exactly the same considerations apply to these texts' teachings vis-à-vis women, or sound reasons need to be supplied why this is not the case.⁸⁰

We must now add Galatians 3:28 to the conversation, a critical text that suggests not only the christological transcendence of the categories of ethnicity, class, and gender, but the christological transcendence of *those very categories*. That is, not only do Christology and pneumatology suggest the transcendence of class and gender hierarchies, but they call into question the existence of these binary oppositions in the first place because they are accounts of creation (at least in the corrupt reality that we currently occupy) that make no appeal to Christology. Hence they lack final legitimacy.

And this stands to reason. This binary conceptuality preceded Christianity by many centuries and seems to have been developed by Greeks. But Paul now knows that *Christ* is the inner rationale of creation (1 Cor. 1:30; Col. 1:15–20). *He* is the Wisdom of God in relation to whom all other created realities are to be understood. So it needs to be asked if created social realities ought to be structured in terms of binary oppositions *at all*. It is especially encouraging to note as we entertain this thought that Paul himself, when navigating complex social realities, manipulates binary oppositions quite flexibly. In much of 1 Corinthians he reformulates binaries, softens them, multiplies them, and sees movement across their borders running legitimately in both directions. We have a scriptural precedent, then, for questioning the construction of social reality in terms of what is really a neat set of vast oversimplifications, at which point further traditionally excluded groups must at least be welcomed into conversation.⁸¹

80. In this whole relation see Willard M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Core Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald, 1983); Wayne A. Meeks, "The Polyphonic Ethics of the Apostle Paul," *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics* (ed. D. M. Yeager, Washington, DC: Georgetown Univ. Press, 1988), 17–29; and J. Albert Harrill, "The Use of the New Testament in the American Slave Controversy: A Case History in the Hermeneutical Tension between Biblical Criticism and Christian Moral Debate," *Religion and American Culture* 10/2 (2000): 149–86. Also Demetrius Williams, *An End to This Strife: The Politics of Gender in African American Churches* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2004).

81. That is, LGBT groups, and perhaps also nonmonogamous traditions. David Horrell charts Paul's argumentative dynamics in 1 Corinthians perceptively in *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark [Continuum], 2005). I address the issues raised by Gal. 3:28 briefly in "The Gospel of Reconciliation, according to Gal. 3:28," in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, 39–65 (ed. C. G. Gunton, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2003), repr. as ch. 5 in *Quest*, 95–111 —although Dale Martin offers some salutary warnings about overly enthusiastic liberalist uses of even this text in *Sex and the Single Savior: Gender and Sexuality in Biblical Interpretation* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 77–90.

In conclusion, let me state clearly that I do not want to pillory Johnson for some brief and late-breaking remarks, and especially when we agree on so much, not to mention when he has spoken so wisely and sensitively in this relation already elsewhere. But I do want to suggest that in an extrapolated form his remarks characterize a great deal of deeply problematic Pauline interpretation. Moreover, what we have grasped in this relation does seem to push us beyond the conceptual boundaries Johnson articulates for Paul's thought at the beginning of his essay—the boundaries of a pastoral theologian speaking to practical issues by drawing on various resources to generate advice that is superficially diverse but basically theologically coherent. A more searching examination of Paul's Household Codes suggests the presence of a serious *inconsistency* in Johnson's thinking here. And this inconsistency has had serious consequences for the subsequent life of the church. Two large groups in particular have been affected dramatically by all this: slaves—and in recent centuries also people of color; and women, with the implicit oversimplified binary account of gender going on to marginalize other smaller groups as well.

That Paul's texts contain "tensions" at these points, then, is true. That this tension is addressed "nobly," however, is debatable. Rather, that these tensions should be transcended christologically, pneumatologically, and ecclesially is, it seems to me, a key lesson to learn from Johnson's generally faithful and uplifting account of Paul's thought with which I am in so much agreement—and, indeed, from which I learned so much.

RESPONSE TO LUKE TIMOTHY JOHNSON

MARK D. NANDS

Like Timothy Johnson's approach to Paul is commendable on many levels. His methodological sensibilities and confessional awareness, discussion of the role of Acts as well as preference of certain letters in any approach, concern about abstracting systematic thought and theology from evidence that is occasional in nature, and other such careful consideration of the elements involved in trying to understand and discuss Paul from the limited evidence available are refreshing to see articulated. I am not as clear about whether the disputed letters were from Paul or represented the views of a Pauline school with which Paul would concur. I would not think it best to rest major decisions about Paul on them based on the current scholarly consensus. I have not undertaken my own research on them yet or attempted to present a comprehensive portrait of Paul that would require weighing in on this matter (my own research has focused on the topic of Paul and Judaism, which these letters do not explicitly engage as much as some of the undisputed ones). Since the Paul I see in the undisputed letters is in on certain ways so different from the Paul of those who have made the judgments that have shaped the current consensus, it seems likely that my judgments about the disputed letters, and the reasons for making them, might be different too.

Johnson's discussion of the problem of any search for a center of Paul's thought or concern is prudent, and I agree with his judgments about the basic Greco-Roman and Jewish cultural elements that shape who Paul was and what he thought and taught. Helpful too is his discussion of the multiple religious experiences of Paul, of his audiences, and of others who shared their convictions about Jesus.

The overall discussion of Paul's view of Jesus and the implications for those who believe in him as Christ is wide-ranging and balanced. That Paul used the title *kyrios* to attribute to Jesus the name of God

expressed in the tetragrammaton seems improbable, although I see how the evidence can be read in that direction. There was plenty of room in Second Temple Judaism for divine mediators, and lots of overlap in how they were identified and discussed. Johnson's own argument emphasizes the lordship or rule associated with the title Christ. I suspect we find this emphasis on Lord in Paul rather than on Messiah, which seems to be more like a title, since the letters are largely, if not entirely, addressed to non-Jews and their concerns. The concept of Messiah is a cross-cultural one for them, while that of Lord and Savior are not. These are part of their native culture; attributing these to Jesus inscribes them in sharp relief to the reality they know: someone else is ostensibly lord and savior of the empire in which they live. That someone and regime does not make claims to be Messiah, that is, to be from the line of David according to the covenant promise of a descendent always ruling on the throne of Israel.

It was interesting to see that defining salvation begins by emphasizing it "is not something accomplished by humans by their own efforts." Who thinks it is? And the second emphasis is on "forces that constrain and distort personal freedom and community integrity," which is further defined as "the twisted recesses of the human heart" and contrasted with the alternative, "liberation is not from social or political oppression, or "the inadequate or even harmful structures and systems of society." This seems anachronistic for Paul's time, and it is inconsistent with many of Johnson's observations leading up to and concluding on pp. 88–89, that Paul's discussions of salvation are not about "the eternal destiny of believers" but "almost entirely social in character": it is about being rescued into a people God is shaping in this "in-between-time" and the social life that entails, in other words, politics.

Johnson's discussion of Paul's assemblies in terms of Greco-Roman associations and synagogues is helpful. So too is his note that Paul's letters address the practical issues that arise therein, rather than being theoretical or systematic in focus. Although I agree in general with his presentation of Paul's views when issues arose regarding his audiences' "pagan" contextual concerns, like idolatry and associated social behavior that entailed in normal life, I do not think that 1 Corinthians 10:1–13 suggests that Paul "puzzles" over the legitimacy of eating of idol meat. Rather, he begins an argument in chapter 8 that theoretically allows

for it, but by chapter 10 it becomes clear that he is driving that argument to a very different, very normal Jewish conclusion: he does not permit Christ-followers to eat if it is known to be such. But since they are not Israelites and thus not technically under God's Teaching for Israel (= Torah), Paul must fashion various ways to instruct them, including from the examples in Torah, from first principles, from concern for their neighbor, and so on, that they are now to be slaves of righteousness in ways that are not different, usually, from the ways that Jews live according to God's Teaching.⁸²

When Johnson discusses the Jewish complex of issues that arise for the non-Jews, which Paul's letters target, I disagree with several statements. Paul does not state that these non-Jews belong to "Israel according to the Spirit" in Galatians 4:21–31 (or anywhere else known to me), and it is unclear that he is speaking of the "Gentile churches as 'Israel of God'" in Galatians 6:15–16. Many other interpreters who do not otherwise share my views on Galatians also do not find that likely.

Johnson observes the centrality of Torah for understanding Christ and asserts that "Paul has no difficulty with Jewish believers keeping the commandments." That should be altered in my view to communicate that Paul believed it *necessary*: Jewish believers remain Jews and thus must observe the "Teaching" that God has given to Israel (cf. Rom. 3:28–31; 1 Cor. 7:17–19; Gal. 5:3). That is a propositional corollary to Paul's being "adamant that Gentiles not be required to keep the Mosaic law"; indeed, because they are not Jews, not circumcised into membership within Israel, to whom Torah was given as a gift to guide the life of those whom God set apart from the other nations! But it is not the case that "the ritual of circumcision" is "the symbol" of the Torah; rather, circumcision is the symbol of entrance into a people who are governed by Torah. Since these non-Jews do not receive circumcision, they are not under Torah in the technical sense that Jews are.

It is important to keep the role of circumcision as an entrance rite and Torah as that which governs those who are thereby marked as members, thus under its guidance, if we are to follow Paul's articulation of the implications of the gospel for those who are not Israelites, and who

82. See my "The Polytheist Identity of the 'Weak' and Paul's Strategy to 'Gain' Them: A New Reading of 1 Corinthians 8:1–11:1," in *Paul: Jew, Greek, and Roman* (ed. Stanley E. Porter; Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 179–210.

must not become Israelites but represent the end of the age claim of the gospel that those from the nations are now also being reconciled to the One Creator God of all the nations. It follows, logically, that those from Israel must remain Israelites, or God would be now only the God of all the nations except Israel, which would make no sense to an Israelite who proclaimed Jesus as Messiah.

When Johnson turns to the topic of how conduct at meals would be organized in order to explore the kind of social tensions created by Paul's gospel, the weakness in the way he has set out the issues (in accordance with the prevailing views, in contrast to what I have just argued in the above paragraph) become apparent. Johnson observes that to eat together the "Gentiles give up nothing, but Jews must give up being Jewish in order to eat with Gentiles." His references for this observation are Romans 14: 1 Corinthians 8–10; and Galatians 2:11–14. I have demonstrated why each of these texts suggests precisely the opposite:⁸³ that the problems for these non-Jews arose because these were Jewish gatherings in which normal Jewish dietary behavior was observed by Paul and the Jews involved as well as any non-Jews present (in Romans and Galatians).

The problem was not whether the non-Jews ate Jewishly according to the prevailing norms for non-Jewish guests when at a Jewish meal; it would be natural for them to do so when joining a Jewish subgroup. It arose when they would be treated merely as guests, as less than equals if they did not also become Jews. That ran counter to the proposition of the gospel that Jew and non-Jew in Christ were equal, albeit remaining different as a matter of principle. In 1 Corinthians the issue is different; it arises in the normal idolatrous space of non-Jewish communal life. Yet here too Jewish behavior is prescribed for non-Jews, not on the basis of technical appeal to Torah, as it would be for Jews, but on the basis of the example of Torah, the concern for the best interests of their fellow humans, and their association with God through Jesus Christ.

The net result is the same as that taught by Torah: they cannot eat idol food if it is known to them to be idol food. The social problem that they face, in my view, is how to negotiate their social lives when they

83. See my "The Myth of the 'Law-Free' Paul Standing Between Christians and Jews," *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations* 4 (2009): 1–21. (<http://escholarship.bc.edu/scjv/vol4/iss1/4/>).

are prevented by Paul's gospel from either becoming Jews or remaining idolaters, yet required to live Jewishly, to live according to Jewish communal norms, that is, to become members of Judaism without becoming members of Israel. They are betwixt and between two normative identities and associated norms for behavior, and thus experience problems in both their Jewish and idolatrous social contexts.

In these letters Paul seeks to instruct them how to behave and calls them to endure the marginality that behavior will likely bring for them as a result of the ambiguity of identity the gospel creates for them as non-Jews, and for Jews like Paul, as a result of teaching such views.

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Abbreviations. . . .

Introduction: Mich

1. **PAUL: A REFO** THOMAS R. S

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