

# The Plumb Line

A Teaching Ministry of Fellowship Bible Church



The Ends of the Ages:  
Pauline Eschatology,  
Ecclesiology, and Ethics

# Fall/Winter 2021

	TOPIC		TOPIC
1	<b>The Eschatology of Judaism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not the Last Chapter</li> <li>• The Contours of Hope</li> <li>• The 'Ends of the Ages' Have Come</li> </ul>	9	<b>The Church and Israel</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Various Theories</li> <li>• Paul's View</li> <li>• "One New Man"</li> </ul>
2	<b>The Beating Heart of Judaism</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Microcosm of Creation</li> <li>• The Place Where God Dwells</li> <li>• The Fulfilled Temple</li> </ul>	10	<b>The Embedded Church</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christ &amp; Culture</li> <li>• Israel Extended</li> <li>• An Embedded Culture</li> </ul>
3	<b>The Once and Future King</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• String Theory for Hermeneutics?</li> <li>• Lineage of Hope</li> <li>• The Last 'Seed' Covenant - David</li> </ul>	11	<b>The Embedded Church - Part 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What God did for Israel</li> <li>• What God has done</li> </ul>
4	<b>Come Out and Be Separate</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Holy Nation</li> <li>• Bondage &amp; Deliverance</li> <li>• The Return from Exile</li> </ul>	12	<b>The Spirit of Adoption</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Meaning of Passover</li> <li>• The Firstborn</li> <li>• A Royal Priesthood</li> </ul>
5	<b>The Eschatological Spirit</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Promise of the Spirit</li> <li>• The Now and the Not Yet</li> </ul>	13	<b>A People for God's Own Possession</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christian Narcissism</li> <li>• A Restored Focus</li> <li>• The 'One Another's of Paul</li> </ul>
6	<b>A New Day Has Dawned</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Day of YHWH</li> <li>• The Day of the Lord</li> <li>• If Any in Christ...New Creation!</li> </ul>	14	<b>A City Set Upon a Hill</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Come Unto Me..."</li> <li>• Pillar of Truth in the World</li> <li>• A City on a Hill</li> </ul>
7	<b>A New People for a New World</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Effect of the Fall on Humanity</li> <li>• The Wall of Division Removed</li> <li>• The New Center - the Church</li> </ul>		
8	<b>The Church 'in Christ'</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worldview Symbols</li> <li>• The Church and Israel</li> <li>• Metaphors of Unity</li> </ul>		

**Lesson 1 – The Eschatology of Judaism**  
**Text: Isaiah 2:2-4; Micah 4:1-3**

*“It is of major importance to appreciate the sense of eschatological newness which transformed and continued to sustain Paul’s theology and not to let it be wholly discounted in favour of theological convictions easier to translate into modern terms.”*  
(James D. G. Dunn)

When one hears the word ‘Eschatology,’ one’s mind automatically goes to the back of the book – either to the Book of Revelation in the Bible, or to the last chapter in just about any and every systematic theology ever written. 19<sup>th</sup> Century Reformed theologian Charles Hodge fairly typifies what one finds by placing Eschatology as Part IV – the last part of his three-volume Systematic Theology – and by starting that section with a treatment of the “State of the Soul after Death.” This is in keeping with the general thought that eschatology has little to do with *this* life and time, and everything to do with the *age to come*. In our day, Wayne



Charles Hodge (1797-1878)



Wayne Grudem (b. 1948)

Grudem also places “The Doctrine of the Future” at the end of his systematics, though he begins the section with ‘The Return of Christ.’ Grudem is explicit about placing this theological discussion last in his series of topics: “As we begin the final unit of this book, we turn to consider events that will happen in the future. The study of future events is called ‘*eschatology*,’ from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means ‘last.’”<sup>1</sup>

There is a logic to this systematizing of biblical doctrine, and it certainly has its place within the overall scheme of biblical doctrine. There are things that have yet to happen, and death, the intermediate state, the return of Christ and the General Resur-

---

<sup>1</sup> Grudem, Wayne *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1994); 1091.

rection are all important life facts and biblical doctrines that constitute the Christian's living hope. We are reminded of Paul's emphatic, *"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most pitiable."*<sup>2</sup> But there is also the inevitable reality that by placing the study of Eschatology at the end of our doctrine, we also place it entirely at the end of our thoughts. Not, to be sure, out of thought entirely; indeed, the future forms too much of many modern evangelicals' thoughts as they attempt to interpret biblical prophecy through current world events. Rather what is meant here is that the future becomes entirely that, and does not impinge upon our understanding of what God has done in the past and is doing in the present. It will be the central argument of this study that this mental phenomenon is seriously detrimental to properly understanding God's redemptive work, and of the theology and ethics of the Apostle Paul. Paul did not place eschatology at the end of his letters or at the end of his thoughts, but rather incorporated the believer's *hope* (for that is really what biblical eschatology is all about) into the whole of his theological, ecclesiological, and ethical system. It is with eschatology in mind that the apostle, after summarizing events from the Old Testament, writes, *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."*<sup>3</sup>

"Upon whom the ends of the ages have come." This is eschatological language, yet applied to the present and not the future. The reason for this verbiage is rooted in something that Christian treatments of the subject Eschatology often omit: that Judaism itself was an eschatological religion; the Jews had an eschatology. This fact will, of course, be admitted by all Christian theologians. But it will often be sidelined by comments about how the Jews failed to understand the 'Two Mountains' aspect of their theology, or how the Jewish hope has now been delayed until the Millennium due to the Jewish nation's rejection of her Messiah, Jesus. Within Reformed theology there is little discussion at all regarding the Hope of Israel beyond the truth that this hope is fully and finally answered in Jesus Christ. But what is missed by this misapprehension or

---

<sup>2</sup> I Corinthians 15:19

<sup>3</sup> I Corinthians 10:11

neglect of the Jewish eschatology is the underlying worldview of the Apostle Paul, and how that worldview – radically transformed as it was by his encounter with the risen Christ – thoroughly informed the apostle’s teachings on the Church (Ecclesiology) and the believer’s life and duties in both the Church and the world (Ethics). It is the contention of this study that not only was Judaism an *eschatological religion*, but also that the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus was an *eschatological Jew*. Understanding Paul’s own view of the hope that God had firmly engrained within Judaism can only improve our understanding of Paul’s teachings, and therefore our understanding of the Church, the believer’s role in it, and the role of both in the world. That, at least, is our goal.

The fundamental premise undergirding this study is that the Jewish religion in which Saul of Tarsus was steeped had a distinct and thorough-going *expectation* that the God of Israel was going to return to His people and to His Temple. This was the hope of Israel and constituted her eschatology. Upon his encounter with the crucified-but-risen Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul came to the realization that Israel’s God *had done what He promised to do*; that He had indeed intervened once again in history, on behalf of his people. This element of eschatological *fulfilment* then both reconfigures Paul’s understanding of the ancient biblical text and fully informs his ‘Christian’ theology, ecclesiology, and ethics. In other words, for the Apostle Paul eschatology was as much about *what had been fulfilled* as it was about what was yet to be completed. This explains the ‘now and not yet’ aspect of so much of Pauline literature, the fact that YHWH had returned in power, though in a manner not fully expected, and had brought to fulfilment all of the ancient promises of restoration in and through Jesus Christ. N. T.



N. T. Wright (b. 1948)

Wright comments in his *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, “I shall argue that Paul, with this complete and striking Jewish hope in his head and his heart, believed both that it *had already* been fulfilled in Jesus and the spirit, and that it

*was yet to be more completely fulfilled.*"<sup>4</sup> Later in the same section Wright adds that "what was foundational for Paul: *that which Jewish eschatology looked for in the future, the overthrow of the enslaving evil powers and the establishment of YHWH's reign instead, had truly been inaugurated in and through the messianic events of Jesus' death and resurrection.*"<sup>5</sup> In order to understand how Paul derived his comprehension of the fulfillment of Jewish eschatology through his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, one must first have a basic understanding of the contours of Jewish eschatology in Paul's day.

### **Creation & Covenant:**

When one considers the scope of redemptive history starting with Genesis 1 and moving through the entire Old Testament, it is easy to see how Judaism was always and integrally eschatological. The two focal points that determined the hope of Israel (and of the whole world) are Creation and Covenant. These two lines of redemptive historical thought were both kept in focus throughout Israel's history, and each contained cosmic 'unfinished business' that fairly demanded the intervention of YHWH to set things right. Add to this the faithfulness of Israel's God – something never relinquished in the mind of the faithful Jew – and you have the essence of Jewish eschatology, the hope of both Israel and of the world through Israel. But this eschatology was by no means something that was developed through philosophy; it was derived organically from the revelation of God in Scripture. God *intended* to set all things right, and He *intended* to do it Himself.

Israel's hope was grounded in her belief that her God was the one true God, and not just one of many gods competing against one another and wreaking havoc on the earth. Genesis teaches unequivocally that the chaos that this world is subject to is due, not to the gods, but to man's sin. Therefore, human rebellion and sin being a disruption and corruption of God's good Creation, there is woven into the Creation story itself the

---

<sup>4</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2013); 1061.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*; 1068; italics original.

implicit and explicit anticipation of God intervening to set things right again. God responds to Man's fall immediately with the promise of redemption,

*So the LORD God said to the serpent:*

*"Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle,*

*And more than every beast of the field;*

*On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.*

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman,*

*And between your seed and her Seed;*

*He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*

(Genesis 3:14-15)

The expectation of this promised Seed did not wait till Abram was called by God out of Ur but was present in the thoughts of the godly from Eve to Lamech, Noah's father.

*And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed **another seed** for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed."*

(Genesis 4:25)

*Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed."*

(Genesis 5:28-29)

The point of this narrative of the descendants of Adam through Seth is the continuation of the promise of a Seed, and indicates the generational sense of expectation which would continue throughout redemptive history even when the prophetic word pointed to a more distant fulfillment. The intensity of the promise, of course, increased with the call of Abram and the covenant God made with him, the associated promise containing the same word – *Seed* – that had constituted the antediluvian hope.

*Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: "By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only son – blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your **seed** all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice."*

(Genesis 26:15-18)

Paul offers a thoroughly Christological reworking of this promise in his epistle to the Galatians, showing that this Seed is fully accomplished in none other than Jesus Christ.

*Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it. Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, "And to seeds," as of many, but as of one, "And to your Seed," who is Christ.*

(Galatians 3:15-16)

The promise becomes more specific as the divine revelation progresses through the Pentateuch, with the distillation of the promised seed into first one tribe, then one Individual.

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

(Genesis 49:10)

*I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near;  
A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel,  
And batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.*

(Numbers 24:14)

Thus we see the promise of the Seed of Woman progressing with revelation – even as early as the Pentateuch – to the Seed of Abraham, to the seed of Judah, the promised King whose scepter shall not be yielded until all is accomplished. This line of prophetic thought resonates in Paul's own eschatological perspective. Having elsewhere and frequently claimed that Jesus Christ is the promised Seed, the apostle speaks of Him in terms reminiscent of the prophecies of Genesis 49 and Numbers 24,

*For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*

(I Corinthians 15:25-28)

Modern scholars consider Jewish eschatology to be an Exilic or Post-Exilic phenomenon, but a proper reading of the pre-Exilic, even pre-Exodus texts shows that es-

chatological hope is an essential part of the true faith from the very beginning. Israel did not invent an eschatology, she inherited it. "Israel believed that the god who had chosen to dwell on the hill called Zion was none other than the creator of the universe, and that the holy land was intended to be the new Eden."<sup>6</sup>

If Creation was one anchor of the hope of Israel (and the world), the Covenant was the other. Up until the call of Abram and the monergistic formation of the covenant from YHWH to him, the trajectory of history – both human and creational – was decidedly negative. "The line of disaster and of the 'curse', from Adam, through Cain, through the Flood to Babel, begins to be reversed when God calls Abraham and says 'in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"<sup>7</sup> Thus to Israel's faith that their God was the Creator of the universe was added the fact that this same God had chosen Israel to be His people, had made covenant with them and had pledged His very existence to the fulfillment of that covenant. The dream-vision that was given to Abram in Genesis 15 is the record of that divine, monergistic promise.

*So He said to him, "Bring Me a three-year-old heifer, a three-year-old female goat, a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a young pigeon." Then he brought all these to Him and cut them in two, down the middle, and placed each piece opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds in two. And when the vultures came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away. Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, horror and great darkness fell upon him. Then He said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions. Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete." And it came to pass, when the sun went down and it was dark, that behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram...*

(Genesis 15:9-18)

This combination of the Creator God making Covenant with Abraham and his descendants forms the core of Israel's eschatology. "Israel's eschatology thus grew from

---

<sup>6</sup> Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 283.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*; 262.

within the very heart of monotheism and election. If there is one God, responsible for the world; and if this God has called Israel to be his people; then there must be a future for the world in which this God will set everything right, restoring and renewing creation – and this future must fulfil the promises made to Israel in particular.”<sup>8</sup> This hope becomes a recurrent theme in the Prophets, with the salvation of Israel’s God bringing renewal and peace not only to Israel but to the whole world – the New Earth.

*Now it shall come to pass in the latter days  
That the mountain of the LORD’s house shall be established on the top of the mountains,  
And shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.  
Many people shall come and say,  
“Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.”  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.  
He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people;  
They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*

(Isaiah 2:2-4)<sup>9</sup>

*“For as the new heavens and the new earth  
Which I will make shall remain before Me,” says the LORD,  
“So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass  
That from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another,  
All flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the LORD.*

(Isaiah 66:22-23)

The actual experiences of Israel through these centuries hardly motivated hope; it would seem at many times that the promises had fallen flat. The Davidic Kingdom was divided, the land lost and the Temple destroyed. Yet ultimate restoration of both Israel and the whole creation still formed a consistent theme throughout the exilic prophetic writings, not least among them Daniel, in which the most definite predictions yet were made as to the time of restoration. The faithful among Israel did not hold fast their hope on the basis of outward events; far from it. They maintained their eschatological expectation due solely to the *faithfulness of their covenant God*. “Israel would finally be

---

<sup>8</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2013); 1045.

<sup>9</sup> *Cp.* Micah 4:1-3

rescued *because this God kept his promises*: the promises to Abraham, the promises of Exodus and Deuteronomy, the promises of the Psalms, Isaiah, and the rest.”<sup>10</sup> This ingrained faith in the faithfulness of Israel’s God undergirds the ‘trustworthy saying’ Paul writes to Timothy,

*For if we died with Him,  
We shall also live with Him.*

*If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.*

*If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

*If we are faithless, He remains faithful;*

*He cannot deny Himself.*

(II Timothy 2:11-13)

### **The Contours of Hope:**

Paul speaks to the believers of Thessalonica as being different from their pagan neighbors, who were ‘without hope.’<sup>11</sup> Indeed, this lack of hope is what described all Gentiles (and still does) before they are graciously brought in to the covenant people of God.

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, **having no hope and without God** in the world.* (Ephesians 2:11-12)

This is a very significant verse in terms of determining the apostle’s own perspective both as a Jew (before his conversion) and now as a believer in Jesus Christ. To be ‘without hope’ and ‘without God’ in this world is one and the same thing; the two clauses are complimentary, the latter explaining the reason for the former. This, by inversion, defines the fundamental characteristic of the covenant: *hope*. Those who are outside the covenant are ‘without hope’; those who are inside, have hope. But ‘hope’ is just a four-letter word for ‘eschatology,’ as Wright comments, “It would be very odd for

---

<sup>10</sup> PFG; 1054. Italics original.

<sup>11</sup> I Thessalonians 4:13

a Dictionary of Judaism not to have a substantial entry on ‘Hope’, even if, after the scholarly custom for preferring five syllables to one, such an entry might be called ‘Eschatology.’”<sup>12</sup> This comment is a very important corrective on the modern and common misconception of eschatology: it is not about the future, it is about *hope*. Whenever one reads the word ‘hope’ in the Scriptures, one is reading an eschatological passage, regardless of whether it has anything to say about Gog and Magog, nuclear weapons, or the Antichrist. The most undeniable feature of historic Judaism, even since the Fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, is its indomitable hope (even if that hope is now tragically misplaced). Prior to the First Advent of Christ, that hope was for the faithful of Israel the inner light that shone forward and illuminated to their hearts ‘the age to come.’ “Israel’s ancient scriptures told a story which stretched out its arms to encompass the distant past and the ultimate future.”<sup>13</sup>



James D. G. Dunn (1939-2020)

In order to more fully understand Paul’s theology, one must also understand the role that *hope* (aka ‘eschatology’) played in that theology. To assume that Pauline Eschatology looked merely and entirely to the future is to misunderstand it completely, and in so doing, to also misunderstand Pauline Ecclesiology and Ethics. James D. G. Dunn writes, “it is of major importance to appreciate the sense of eschatological newness which transformed and continued to sustain Paul’s theology and not let it be wholly discounted in favour of theological convictions easier to translate into modern terms.”<sup>14</sup> It is critical to grasp that, for Saul of Tarsus, the encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus did not result in a ‘new religion,’ but rather the fulfillment of the eschatological expectation – the *hope* – that he had cherished along with all faithful Israel. To understand the struc-

---

<sup>12</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 1043.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*; 1045.

<sup>14</sup> Dunn, James D. G. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1998); 180.

ture of Paul's theology, ecclesiology, and ethical teaching, therefore, we must first understand the contours of the hope of Israel to which he adhered.

The development of Jewish eschatology during the Old Testament era incorporated various strands of prophetic expectation, and did so often in a nonlinear and somewhat intuitive manner. This is to say that there was no 'official' eschatology within Second Temple Judaism, not even within the various sects that made up Second Temple Judaism. We know that the Pharisees believed and hoped for the resurrection and the Sadducees did not. We know that the Essenes, and particularly the Qumran community, believed that the existing temple was hopelessly corrupt and that the 'New Earth' was already being inaugurated within their own fellowship. Saul of Tarsus, a devout Pharisee, would have followed the general contours of eschatological hope found within that subset of Second Temple Judaism, but even within Pharisaism and its associated rabbinicism there was a fair amount of heterogeneity. Nonetheless there were some themes that were, if not uniformly present, at least notably prevalent in every strand of Jewish thought aside from the relative thoughtlessness of the Sadducees. Here is a brief summary of the contours of the hope of Second Temple Israel.

1. **The Rebuilt and Reconsecrated Temple.** Ever since the destruction of Solomon's Temple by the Babylonians, Israel had been seeking a restoration of that place where YHWH had caused His Name to dwell. The vision given to Ezekiel of the glory of YHWH departing from the Temple was emblazoned on the minds and hearts of both Exilic and Post-exilic Israel. The Jews had returned from Babylon to Jerusalem and the temple had been rebuilt, but the *Shekinah* had not descended upon that structure of Zerubbabel's day, the temple that witnessed the prophetic ministry of Haggai and Zechariah. In Jesus' day, this building had been greatly embellished by Herod the Great and his successors, but a large minority among the Jews - not least the Essenes - still considered the building to be essentially a counterfeit, lacking entirely the presence of God.

2. **The Restored Davidic Monarchy.** The Branch that would arise from the stump of Jesse – a fairly clear reference to the fallen house of David – became a consistent prophetic element both prior to the Exile (Isaiah) and during the Exile (Ezekiel). It was again Ezekiel through whom YHWH promised the regathering of Israel under one shepherd, God’s servant David. *“I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them – My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd.”*<sup>15</sup> There is a fair degree of ambiguity among the rabbinic writings as to whether this restored Davidic rule was also the Messiah, but his association with the restored fortunes of Israel as God’s people and as a sovereign nation was as uniform a belief among Second Temple Jews as any other element of their eschatology.
3. **The Return from the Exile/the New Exodus.** There is a strong sense within both the post-Exilic prophets and the intertestamental rabbinic writings, that the return from Babylon was neither full nor final. The fact that Israel remained a vassal state – of Persia, then of Greece, and finally of Rome – without a Davidic king, was sufficient in itself to indicate that the Exile was still on-going. Add to that the absence of the *Shekinah* in the rebuilt temple, and the fact that many Jews still lived in the *Diaspora*, and it was generally concluded that YHWH had yet to fully bring His people back. A significant thread within this eschatological fabric was that when YHWH did intervene on behalf of Israel, restoring her truly and fully, this would also mean the salvation of the nations through Israel (*cp.* Isa. 52:7-12).
4. **The Gift of the Holy Spirit.** From the time of Moses God had promised to ‘circumcise the heart’ (Deut. 10:6) of His faithful, to ‘remove the foreskin of the heart’ (Deut. 10:16) so that they might indeed obey Him and live before Him. The meaning of this spiritual surgery is made clearer through the prophecy of the new heart in Ezekiel 36, that it entails the gift of the Holy Spirit: *“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk*

---

<sup>15</sup> Ezekiel 34:23

*in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.*"<sup>16</sup> Paul recognizes that this promise has been fulfilled in the regeneration that comes through faith in Jesus Christ (*cp.* Rom. 2:28-29).

These four components of Jewish eschatology are, to be sure, an 'average' of the various strands of eschatological thought found in the rabbinic writings of the Second Temple era. They were not all present, nor all present to the same degree, in each and every writing, but there is a remarkable consistency in their appearance in Jewish thought of Paul's day. What is significant to this study is how significant these elements of expectation were present *in Paul's writings*. And they are found in the Pauline epistles as acts of God *already accomplished in Jesus*. In the next lesson we will unpack each of these elements of Israel's eschatological hope both as they are found in the Old Testament and as they are considered in Paul's writings with relation to Jesus Christ. It should become apparent in the course of this review, that the apostle did not place his eschatological expectations entirely in the future, but rather considered the hope of Israel to already have been answered by the advent of Jesus Christ.

### **The Key - The Resurrection of Jesus**

Paul, or rather Saul of Tarsus, did not reason this discovery out through a careful analysis of the Old Testament writings compared to the person and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Indeed, Saul was a violent oppressor of 'the Way' that constituted Jesus' disciples; he was no disciple himself. Although he was a devout Pharisee and educated by one of the most respected rabbins of his day, Gamaliel, Saul did not come up with the solution to Israel's quandary on his own. It took a providential event in his life to not only arrest him in mid-step, but also to recalibrate his understanding of Israel's hope around a person; a person whom God had raised from the dead.

The hope of the resurrection was not shared by all Jews - the Sadducees, by their adoption of Greek philosophy into their Jewish theology, denied that there would be a resurrection - but it was the expectation of most. This is because the internal logic both

---

<sup>16</sup> Ezekiel 36:26-27

of Creation and of Covenant demanded the concept of *everlasting life* and this, in turn, demanded the resurrection of at least the righteous. Death, if permanent, would constitute a complete victory of Sin and of Satan over the works of YHWH, and this simply could not be. Perhaps the key passage from the Old Testament that confirmed the Jewish expectation of resurrection was Daniel 12.

*At that time Michael shall stand up,  
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;  
And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time.  
And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.  
**And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,  
Some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.**  
Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament,  
And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.*  
(Daniel 12:1-3)

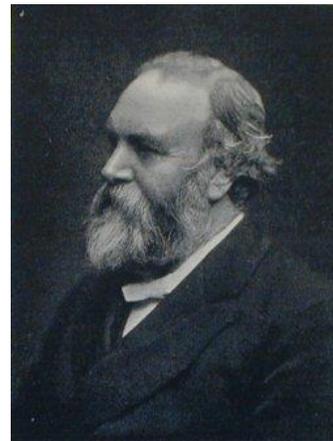
There were, to be sure, many 'evidences' for which the Jews were looking to mark the coming of 'the Day of YHWH.' The resurrection was one of these undeniable markers that YHWH had once again, fully and finally, acted on behalf of His people. It was, however, by its very nature *the final one*, for in the resurrection Death itself would be defeated. This was the promise of Israel's God, referenced by the Apostle Paul in his extensive treatise on the resurrection in I Corinthians 15,

*I will ransom them from the power of the grave;  
I will redeem them from death.  
O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction!  
Pity is hidden from My eyes.*  
(Hosea 13:14)

The same note is sounded by Isaiah,

*And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people,  
And the veil that is spread over all nations.  
**He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all  
faces; the rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth;**  
For the LORD has spoken.*  
(Isaiah 25:7-8)

It was the Jewish understanding through the divine revelation given to Moses, that Death had entered the world through Adam's sin; it was the universal 'wages of sin' to all mankind. Death was the disrupter of Creation. Death was also both the ultimate punishment of and separation from the Covenant. Thus the resurrection "was a genuine corollary from the fundamental Israelitish beliefs about God, man, the soul, sin, death and redemption."<sup>17</sup> No victory could be realized, no restoration proclaimed so long as Death continued 'to reign,' as Paul puts the matter in Romans 5. Therefore, "Resurrection would be, in one and the same moment, the reaffirmation of the covenant and the reaffirmation of creation."<sup>18</sup> This hope in the resurrection, as noted, was a consistent part of the eschatological expectation of the faithful of Israel, though it was also consistently viewed as something coming at the very end of the age. "Nobody had been expecting 'the resurrection' to happen to one person in the middle of ongoing history. Those who expected 'resurrection' expected it to happen to everybody, or at least to all the faithful, at the end of history when the new age dawned and the divine justice and mercy flooded Israel and the world."<sup>19</sup>



James Orr (1844-1913)

By the Second Temple era, this hope of the resurrection was clouded by many other, and more politically-oriented, expectations. The coming of the Davidic king, the conquering of Israel's oppressors, the reestablishment of Israel as not only a sovereign but an all-powerful nation were all features of the eschatological expectation of Second Temple Judaism. Added to this, especially among the Pharisees, there was the expectation that Torah observance would be both universal and uniform – conforming to *their* understanding of what Torah observance was supposed to be. Many other things would be 'done' by Israel's God, it was believed, before the resurrection. Thus when Saul of Tarsus encountered the resurrected Jesus on the road to Damascus, his entire

---

<sup>17</sup> Orr, James, ed. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1956); 976.

<sup>18</sup> Wright, *NTPG*; 332.

<sup>19</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 1061.

system of eschatology was upended. By doing the last thing first, as it were, God announced to Saul that *'the end of the ages'* have come.

## Lesson 2 – The Contours of Israel’s Hope

**Text: Ezekiel 10:1-22; Malachi 3:1-2**

*“According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus was an apocalyptic event that signaled the end of the old age and the beginning of the new.”*  
(Richard B. Hays)

The primary thesis of this study, at least at the beginning of it, is that the Apostle Paul did not consider eschatology something to be looked for solely in the future. Rather,

he believed that the hope of Israel – we might say ‘Old Testament Eschatology’ – was answered in the Christ-event, especially in the Resurrection. Richard Hays comments, “According to Paul, the death and resurrection of Jesus was an apocalyptic event that signaled the end of the old age and the beginning of the new. Paul’s moral vision is intelligible only when his apocalyptic perspective is kept clearly in mind: the church is to find its identity and vocation by



Richard B. Hays (b. 1948)

recognizing its role within the cosmic drama of God’s reconciliation of the world to himself.”<sup>20</sup> The concept of the ‘apocalyptic’ has often been considered a key, if not *the* key, to understanding Paul, and it has probably been over-applied to the apostle’s thought. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that the Pauline corpus is permeated with the dynamic of fulfilled prophecy and ‘end times’ language. Old Testament prophetic themes from the Pentateuch, the Psalms, and the Prophets are all frequently employed by Paul, themes that represented the eschatological hope of Israel and themes that the apostle considered fully answered in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Paul was a man of his times, and Second Temple Israel was a place of earnest eschatological expectation. The literary genre of such expectation is the Apocalypse.

---

<sup>20</sup> Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: HarperOne; 1996); 19.

The word 'apocalypse' is Greek for 'revelation.' It literally means 'the unveiling,' and its use as the primary descriptive for a whole body of literature dating from several centuries before Christ to into the second century after Christ signifies a style of writing in which the eschatological hope of Israel is depicted in vivid, graphic word pictures. Apocalyptic literature is a recognizable genre, though there are certainly many variations within it. A common theme, however, is the focus on the cosmic struggle between Good and Evil, between God and His angels and Satan with his demons. Ultimate victory belongs always to Yahweh, though the battle is often tenuous. God's people are integrally tied to His actions, and the demonic forces are represented by the enemies of Israel. There is a sense in all apocalyptic that the denouement in the war is imminent, that the final and cataclysmic divine judgment is about to happen. To Paul, however, it often appears that the end has already come, though not completely and not in the manner expected. "He is proclaiming the apocalyptic message that through the cross God has nullified the *kosmos* of sin and death and brought a new *kosmos* into being...The old age is passing away, the new age has appeared in Christ, and the church stands at the juncture between them."<sup>21</sup>

Many Second Temple Israelites read the Old Testament Scriptures, especially Daniel, and discerned that the days of the fourth prophetic empire had arrived with Rome, and so the time of YHWH's intervention into history was near. Yet this was not sufficient for Saul of Tarsus to conclude that *Jesus the Nazarene* was the answer to Israel's hopes and aspirations; indeed, Jesus was remarkably *not like* what everyone was expecting. For a Second Temple Pharisee to believe in Jesus as Israel's Messiah required the confluence of the various threads and themes of Jewish eschatology, culminating in an unmistakable event that definitively and undeniably placed the mantle of Messiahship on Jesus' shoulders. When confronted with this event - the resurrection of Jesus - the Pharisee Saul was forced by inexorable biblical logic (and the regenerative power of the Holy Spirit) to realize that the end of the age had dawned. From there it was but a short step to see how Jesus Christ did, in fact, pull together in Himself all the threads of Isra-

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*; 20.

el's eschatological hope. Describing how God had done all of this in Jesus Christ forms the basic theological structure of Paul's letters.

It is well worth the effort to trace these various contours of Israel's hope - enumerated in the last lesson - from their Old Testament origin to their consummation in Jesus Christ as discerned and written in Paul's epistles. This endeavor is very unlike modern eschatology, which tends to read Old Testament prophecy as referring only to a future fulfillment in a reconstituted Israel. But the language Paul uses in his epistles is strongly imbued with those contours of Jewish eschatology noted in the previous chapter, and the apostle consistently finds their confluence in the person and work of Jesus Christ. It may very well be that much of modern eschatological teaching and 'end time prophecy' sermonizing is looking to the future for things already fulfilled in the past. If this be the case, then the future expectation of much of the modern Church is horribly misplaced, a situation that cannot help but have a detrimental impact on the Church's understanding of her role in the present. It stands to reason that the Church's eschatology should be in line with Paul's no less than with John's. It may also be the case that understanding Pauline Eschatology will shed light on Johannine Eschatology.

### **The Rebuilt & Reconstituted Temple:**

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the tabernacle/Temple complex in Jewish religious thought. It was far more than 'where the Jews went to Church.' The tabernacle in the Wilderness, and Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, were where 'YHWH caused His Name to dwell.' This meant 'in the midst of His people,' and the standing, functioning tabernacle/Temple meant Israel's God was with His people and the nation. But even this understanding of the purpose of the tabernacle/Temple needs a foundation, and that takes us back to Eden itself. This is because the language of the Old Testament that speaks of the tabernacle and later of the Temple, is in several important points identical to the language used with respect to Adam in the Garden. Furthermore, the imagery of the tabernacle/Temple furnishings are intentionally reminiscent of the Garden of Eden. In a manner that ties the Covenant back to Creation, we see in

the tabernacle/Temple complex – both in its construction and in its meaning – the purpose of God expressed symbolically for the entire world and not just Israel. Thus N. T. Wright concludes, “the Temple was always supposed to represent creation, and that at last, according to Revelation, the purpose is accomplished: that which was represented by the Temple, namely the presence of the creator in his world, is completely achieved. There is thus no Temple in the New Jerusalem, because the whole new creation is itself the ultimate (and originally intended) Temple.”<sup>22</sup>

G. K. Beale, in his *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, details the rich symbolism of the tabernacle and Temple in both the Old Testament and the intertestamental apocryphal writings, showing that the tabernacle/Temple complex was far more integral and essential to Mosaic Judaism than modern Christians think. In addition, the symbolism that surrounded the tabernacle and Temple was deeply eschatological, pointing to the antitype of which these structures were merely types and



G. K. Beale (b. 1949)

shadows. One of Beale’s first points – and one that undergirds the rest of his analysis – is that the tabernacle/Temple complex was intended to be a visible representation of Creation. Working backward from the temple vision in Revelation 21 (the basic perspective of his book), Beale writes “The rationale for the worldwide encompassing nature of the paradisaal temple in Revelation 21 lies in the ancient notion that the Old Testament temple was a microcosm of the entire heaven and earth.”<sup>23</sup> Beale then quotes Psalm 78 in support of this ancient view,

*Moreover He rejected the tent of Joseph, and did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,  
But chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion which He loved.*

*And He built His sanctuary like the heights,  
Like the earth which He has established forever.*

(Psalm 78:67-69)

<sup>22</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2013); 102.

<sup>23</sup> Beale, G. K. *The Temple and the Church's Mission* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2004); 31.

Beale comments, "The psalmist is saying that, in some way, God designed Israel's earthly temple to be comparable to the heavens and to the earth."<sup>24</sup> All of this, of course, was patterned after the heavenly temple,

*And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I show you, that is, the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furnishings, just so you shall make it.* (Exodus 25:8-9)

*Now this workmanship of the lampstand was hammered gold; from its shaft to its flowers it was hammered work. According to the pattern which the LORD had shown Moses, so he made the lampstand.* (Numbers 8:4)

*For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, "See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain." But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises.* (Hebrews 8:3-6)

Understanding, then, that the tabernacle/Temple complex was patterned after a divine revelation given to Moses, the question remains as to what that pattern was. An exact answer is not possible from the biblical data, nor was it intended that an exact answer be attained. Nonetheless, the imagery of the original tabernacle, and later Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, is sufficient to show that the pattern of the tabernacle/Temple was Creation itself. Beale writes, "Our thesis is that Israel's temple was composed of three main parts, each of which symbolized a major part of the cosmos: (1) the outer court represented the habitable world where humanity dwelt; (2) the holy place was emblematic of the visible heavens and its light sources; (3) the holy of holies symbolized the invisible dimension of the cosmos, where God and his heavenly host dwelt."<sup>25</sup> The furnishings of both the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies confirm this hypothesis, as is the veil separating the two rooms which represented the angel with the

---

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*; 32.

<sup>25</sup> *Idem.*

flaming sword (embroidered by God's command into the veil of the tabernacle) that separated fallen Man from Eden...and from God. Within the Holy of Holies itself is all mystery, darkness, and unapproachable majesty. Only the ark of the covenant is to be found there, surrounded like the throne of heaven by cherubim.

Hence, the ark is part of God's heavenly throne-room, and, appropriately, the space directly above the ark is empty. God cannot be seen, and no images of him are to be placed there, because he has no human form and his special glorious dwelling is primarily in heaven and not on earth. Thus the holy of holies was a representation of God's unseen heavenly dwelling in his temple amidst ministering angels and spirits.<sup>26</sup>

Vern Poythress goes into great detail as to the correspondence of the tabernacle



Vern Poythress (b. 1946)

and its furnishing and their symbolism in his *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*. Early on in his treatise he summarizes, "All these aspects of the tabernacle may be expected to say something to Israel about the meaning of communion with God and dwelling with God. They picture the nature of God's dwelling and the manner in which He is approached."<sup>27</sup> It is integral to this study to recognize that the symbolism of the tabernacle was, among other things, very strongly reminiscent of Eden,

and, hence, of God's Creation. Israel was taught from the very beginning, in both symbols and in words, that the grace of which they were singular beneficiaries was intended to the entire Creation.

As Israel's lesson progressed, God's redemptive plan moved from the mobile tabernacle to the fixed Temple, a move that was probably intended at the time to correspond with God's having set David as king over His people. It was not, of course, David who built the Temple but rather it was his son, Solomon - whose name means 'Peace.' Thus, in a real sense, the 'prince of peace' was the one who built the Temple and not the 'king of war.' This, too, was symbolism. Yet as glorious as Solomon's Tem-

---

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*; 36.

<sup>27</sup> Poythress, Vern *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, Publishers; 1991); 16.

ple was from a materialistic point of view, even the builder knew that it was woefully insufficient as a dwelling for Israel's God.

*But will God indeed dwell with men on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You: that Your eyes may be open toward this temple day and night, toward the place where You said You would put Your name, that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place.* (II Chronicles 6:18-20)

The insufficiency of a building made with human hands to be the dwelling place for the Creator God, the Almighty God of the Universe and not merely Israel's titular god, becomes a recurring theme among the prophets. This is especially true of Isaiah, in which we find constant reminders that Israel's God is also God of the nations and that His planned salvation will flow to both all humanity and to all creation. God in Isaiah echoes Solomon's statement (perhaps the wisest the wise king ever made), in Isaiah 66,

*Thus says the LORD:*

*"Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool.*

*Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?*

*For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," Says the LORD.*

*"But on this one will I look:*

*On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word."*

(Isaiah 66:1-3)

Here is an early indication that God will make His home not in a building but in man, and perhaps in a particular man: *"But on this one I will look..."* In an earlier chapter in Isaiah we read of God's intention, consistent throughout, that His true temple would not be for Israel only but would be for all nations. The passage is so remarkable for the latitude in which God's salvation is portrayed, that it is essential to consider a longer portion than that which deals with the Temple.

*Do not let the son of the foreigner who has joined himself to the LORD  
Speak, saying, "The LORD has utterly separated me from His people";*

*Nor let the eunuch say, "Here I am, a dry tree."*

*For thus says the LORD:*

*"To the eunuchs who keep My Sabbaths, and choose what pleases Me,  
And hold fast My covenant,  
Even to them I will give in My house and within My walls a place and a name  
Better than that of sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that shall  
not be cut off.*

*Also the sons of the foreigner who join themselves to the LORD, to serve Him,  
And to love the name of the LORD, to be His servants –  
Everyone who keeps from defiling the Sabbath, and holds fast My covenant –  
Even them I will bring to My holy mountain, and make them joyful in My house of pray-  
er.*

*Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on My altar;*

***For My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations."***

*The Lord GOD, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, says,*

*"Yet I will gather to him others besides those who are gathered to him."*

(Isaiah 56:3-8)

Combining these thoughts, we can discern the purpose of the Temple as a symbol of God's dwelling with His people, and that His people would be from *'every tongue, tribe, and nation.'* Since there were faithful believers under the Old Covenant, and before the Deluge, and since God has never been without His witness in all nations, the promise of a geographically-unlimited Temple – that is not a building located in a particular city or country – there must be a resurrection. And since the old Creation has been *'subjected to futility'* due to Man's sin, there must also be a new creation. Speaking of the inability of any humanmade building to contain God, Beale writes, "That is, not only is everything in the old created order an inadequate container for God's residence, but those from the old world who will be able to dwell with him must be created anew and be made a part of the new creation."<sup>28</sup> Thus we begin to see how intensely eschatological the tabernacle/Temple complex was, and was intended to be.

This eschatological perspective comes out vividly in Jeremiah 3, where the prophet speaks of the former Temple as being eminently forgettable in light of the Temple promised.

---

<sup>28</sup> Beale; 137.

*Then it shall come to pass, when you are multiplied and increased in the land in those days," says the LORD, "that they will say no more, 'The ark of the covenant of the LORD.' It shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor shall they visit it, nor shall it be made anymore. At that time Jerusalem shall be called The Throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts.*

(Jeremiah 3:16-17)

This is a remarkable statement. The ark of the covenant – carried before the armies of Israel because the Israelites believed that their God was in it – will not even be spoken of in that coming day when YHWH intervenes fully and finally on behalf of His people, when He finally builds the true Temple. “In this light, Jeremiah 3 is affirming that once the greater glory of the eschatological temple comes, one will not focus on the lesser glory of the earlier temple, much less should one ever desire to rebuild it.”<sup>29</sup> This, of course, echoes the word of the LORD through Haggai,

*Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing? Yet now be strong, Zerubbabel,' says the LORD; 'and be strong, Joshua, son of Jehozadak, the high priest; and be strong, all you people of the land,' says the LORD, 'and work; for I am with you,' says the LORD of hosts. 'According to the word that I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt, so My Spirit remains among you; do not fear!' For thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Once more (it is a little while) I will shake heaven and earth, the sea and dry land; and I will shake all nations, and they shall come to the Desire of All Nations, and I will fill this temple with glory,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The silver is Mine, and the gold is Mine,' says the LORD of hosts. 'The glory of this latter temple shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts.*

(Haggai 2:3-9)

Zechariah also contributes to the centrality of the new and true Temple to the eschatological expectation, the *hope*, of Israel. In Zechariah 1 YHWH promises to return to Jerusalem and to build His house once more (we remember that Zechariah is a post-exilic prophet and that the temple that he witnessed was the meager shadow of Solomon's Temple referred to by Haggai).

---

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*; 140-141.

*Therefore thus says the LORD:*

*“I am returning to Jerusalem with mercy;*

***My house shall be built in it,**” says the LORD of hosts,*

*“And a surveyor’s line shall be stretched out over Jerusalem.”* (Zechariah 1:16)

Contrary to those who take this prophecy as a literal, physical temple in Jerusalem, the prophecy actually speaks of Jerusalem itself as the rebuilt Temple, both without bounds and a place of worship for all nations.

*Then I raised my eyes and looked, and behold, a man with a measuring line in his hand. So I said, “Where are you going?” And he said to me, “To measure Jerusalem, to see what is its width and what is its length.” And there was the angel who talked with me, going out; and another angel was coming out to meet him, who said to him, “Run, speak to this young man, saying: ‘Jerusalem shall be inhabited as towns without walls, because of the multitude of men and livestock in it. For I,’ says the LORD, ‘will be a wall of fire all around her, and I will be the glory in her midst.’*

(Zechariah 2:1-5)

*“Sing and rejoice, O daughter of Zion! For behold, **I am coming and I will dwell in your midst,**” says the LORD. **“Many nations shall be joined to the LORD in that day, and they shall become My people.** And I will dwell in your midst. Then you will know that the LORD of hosts has sent Me to you. And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the Holy Land, and will again choose Jerusalem. Be silent, all flesh, before the LORD, for **He is aroused from His holy habitation!**”* (Zechariah 2:11-13)

“The point is that Zechariah 2:11 has come full circle back to the introductory note about the temple in 1:16. God will construct his future temple on a huge scale, and his tabernacling presence will reside with both Jews and Gentiles who trust in him.”<sup>30</sup> The cumulative impact of these prophetic perspectives is an expectation that one of the major evidences of the return of YHWH to Israel would be a rebuilt Temple, but rebuilt in a manner totally different from what was before, and what was expected. One thing seems certain: the building reconstructed in the days of Zerubbabel was not it.

Perhaps no prophet of the Old Testament was more concerned about the present and future state of the Temple than Ezekiel. Again, we remember that Ezekiel prophe-

---

<sup>30</sup> Beale; 143.

sied from within the nation-in-exile in Babylon. It is in Ezekiel that we read the vivid account of the glory of the LORD – represented, as usual, by a cloud – departing from the Temple in Jerusalem. By the time this prophecy was given to Ezekiel, the temple buildings in Jerusalem had already been destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar’s forces, so we understand clearly that the vision given to Ezekiel was intended by way of *explanation* as to what had transpired. The Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed because God has ceased to dwell there, and this was because of the continual disobedience and apostasy of Israel.

*Then the glory of the LORD departed from the threshold of the temple and stood over the cherubim. And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight. When they went out, the wheels were beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the LORD’s house, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them.* (Ezekiel 10:18-19)

The message of YHWH through Ezekiel was not one of complete abandonment of the people, but of severe chastisement. In the midst of the same vision of the glory of the LORD departing from the temple there is the promise of restoration, a promise that forms a thread through the rest of Ezekiel’s prophetic writings.

*Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Although I have cast them far off among the Gentiles, and although I have scattered them among the countries, yet I shall be a little sanctuary for them in the countries where they have gone.” Therefore say, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “I will gather you from the peoples, assemble you from the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel.” And they will go there, and they will take away all its detestable things and all its abominations from there. Then I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within them, and take the stony heart out of their flesh, and give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in My statutes and keep My judgments and do them; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God. But as for those whose hearts follow the desire for their detestable things and their abominations, I will recompense their deeds on their own heads,” says the Lord GOD. So the cherubim lifted up their wings, with the wheels beside them, and the glory of the God of Israel was high above them. And the glory of the LORD went up from the midst of the city and stood on the mountain, which is on the east side of the city.* (Ezekiel 11:16-23)

Thus the return of Israel’s God to the temple – rebuilt and reconsecrated – was an integral part of Israel’s exilic and post-exilic hope. This particular hope was still in

powerful operation within Second Temple Israel, since it was widely believed that the return of YHWH had not yet happened even though the temple building had and were being rebuilt. Wright speaks of “the widespread belief that YHWH had abandoned the Temple to its fate at the hand of the Babylonians and, despite its rebuilding, had never returned.”<sup>31</sup> As we shall see in a subsequent lesson, the absence of Israel’s God from His Temple also constituted a palpable continuation of the Exile: Israel had not yet fully and finally returned to her covenant home, for her covenant God had not returned.

This is a serious point of departure on many levels between the eschatological perspective represented in this study – and hopefully itself reflective of Paul’s eschatological viewpoint – and that of Dispensationalism. Both acknowledge that the temple rebuilt after the Exile was not the final Temple, though Dispensationalism only acknowledges this implicitly in the contention that the Temple will yet be rebuilt according to Ezekiel’s prophecy. There *was* a temple rebuilt when the Jews returned from Babylon, a temple then embellished and made grand by Herod and his descendants. That this was not the temple of the greater glory is acknowledged both by Paul and by modern Dispensationalists. Paul, however, will maintain that the new and true Temple *has now been* and *is being* built in the Church, the body of Jesus Christ. Dispensationalism maintains that the literal fulfillment of Ezekiel must be realized through *a fourth* temple, to be built in the Millennium. The impact of these divergent views on the meaning and purpose of the Church, and therefore on Christian Ethics, is truly staggering.

But we do indeed find the promise of a rebuilt Temple in the latter part of Ezekiel, so the question is put to all as to whether that Temple has arrived or whether it must wait until a future, thousand-year reign of Christ on earth. Considering the earlier references to Old Testament passages indicating that no mere building could ever contain Almighty God, and the frequent passages that indicate that God’s dwelling will, in the future, be without geographical boundary and will encompass the Gentiles, the burden of proof is upon those who wish to see a physical, geographically-, ethnically-, and na-

---

<sup>31</sup> Wright, N. T. *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2013); 1051.

tionally-limited Temple reconstructed in literal conformity to the prophecy of Ezekiel. The alternative is the Temple of Jesus' Body, of which Paul says all believers are members, and Peter says all believers are living stones.

Beginning in Chapter 40, Ezekiel records the measurements of the promised rebuilt Temple of Israel's God. In the vision recorded there we find an angel, a "man whose appearance was like the appearance of bronze, with a line of flax and a measuring rod in his hand."<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel is bid to follow this 'man' around the visionary Temple as the man takes various measurements of different parts of the building. It should be noted that the resulting description recorded by the prophet is not sufficient for anyone to actually build the building, as many of the measurements are not given. Be that as it may, the key feature of this rebuilt Temple is found in Chapter 43: the return of the LORD in the same manner as He came unto the tabernacle in the wilderness and to Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem – the *Shekinah*.

*Afterward he brought me to the gate, the gate that faces toward the east. And behold, the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east. His voice was like the sound of many waters; and the earth shone with His glory. It was like the appearance of the vision which I saw – like the vision which I saw when I came to destroy the city. The visions were like the vision which I saw by the River Chebar; and I fell on my face. And the glory of the LORD came into the temple by way of the gate which faces toward the east. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me into the inner court; and behold, the glory of the LORD filled the temple.* (Ezekiel 43:1-5)

Consider this phrase as compared with the presence of the LORD in the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple.

*Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. And Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.* (Exodus 40:34-35)

*And it came about when the priests came from the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.* (I Kings 8:10-11)

---

<sup>32</sup> Ezekiel 40:3

There is no indication in either the post-exilic prophetic writings or the intertestamental writings that this event ever happened to the building erected by the returned Jews. "Although she had come back from Babylon, the glorious message of the prophets remained unfulfilled. Israel still remained in thrall to foreigners; worse, Israel's god had not returned to Zion. Nowhere in the so-called post-exilic literature is there any passage corresponding to 1 Kings 8:10ff...Instead, Israel clung to the promises that one day the Shekinah, the glorious presence of her god, would return at last."<sup>33</sup> This was the hope of post-exilic and Second Temple Israel; this was the hope of Saul of Tarsus. "The Temple thus formed in principle the heart of Judaism, in the full metaphorical sense: it was the organ from which there went out to the body of Judaism, in Palestine and in the Diaspora, the living and healing presence of the covenant god."<sup>34</sup> Paul, as well as many but not all of his countrymen, came to understand that this hope was fully accomplished in the advent, the death, and especially the resurrection of Jesus, Israel's Messiah.

#### **The Temple in Pauline Literature:**

To sum up: the prophetic word that formed the eschatological expectation of the Jews from the return of the Exiles to the time of Jesus and Paul was, from at least one perspective, oriented around the rebuilding and reconsecration of the true Temple of YHWH, an event that would mark the return of Israel's God to His people. That this event was imminent during the Second Temple era is also indicated by Old Testament prophecy, particularly the visions of the four empires found in Daniel. We shall see in a later session that this return of YHWH to His people, to once again take up His abode in the midst of His people, would constitute at major part of the 'Day of the LORD' motif so prevalent in exilic and post-exilic literature. Suffice for this discussion to hear Malachi promising the return of YHWH to His Temple,

---

<sup>33</sup> Wright, N. T. *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 269.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*; 226.

*Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me.  
And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple,  
Even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight.  
Behold, He is coming," Says the LORD of hosts.*

(Malachi 3:1)

Putting together all the pieces, the expectation of Second Temple Judaism was high for the restoration of YHWH's presence in Israel, although just what this would look like was subject to an almost infinite variety of opinion. What we do see, however, is that Paul the Apostle considered this event as having been accomplished fully in the Person of Jesus Christ. Paul does not quote Jesus from John's Gospel, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up," but he frequently speaks of the Church, as well as individual believers, as the temple of the Holy Spirit.

*Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.*

(I Corinthians 3:16)

*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*

(I Corinthians 6:18-20)

*And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God.*

(II Corinthians 6:15-16)

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.*

(Ephesians 2:19-22)

In the first of these passages Paul is dealing with faction and division within the Corinthian church with regard to cliques forming around certain of the preachers – Paul himself, Cephas/Peter, and Apollos. Paul's emphasis, of course, is to rebuke the Corinthians for this behavior, but he does so by showing how it is that Jesus is building *His*

Church, using these men and others to build on the one foundation, “For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”<sup>35</sup> Reminiscent perhaps of the connection between the Temple and the Garden of Eden present in the Old Testament, Paul shifts between an agricultural metaphor (3:6-8) and a construction metaphor (3:9-11). He contrasts the possible building material on this ‘one foundation’ in a manner that evokes the description of Solomon’s Temple.

### I Kings

*And the king commanded them to quarry large stones, costly stones, and hewn stones, to lay the foundation of the temple. So Solomon’s builders, Hiram’s builders, and the Gebalites quarried them; and they prepared timber and stones to build the temple. (5:17-18)*

-----

*So Solomon overlaid the inside of the temple with pure gold. He stretched gold chains across the front of the inner sanctuary, and overlaid it with gold. The whole temple he overlaid with gold, until he had finished all the temple; also he overlaid with gold the entire altar that was by the inner sanctuary. (6:21-22)*

### I Corinthians

*Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. (3:12-14)*

That Paul was alluding to the building materials of the Temple in Jerusalem is then made explicit by his connection of the building that he and his fellow laborers are constructing, and the true Temple built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. Paul speaks of himself as a “wise master builder” (I Cor. 3:10), again a phrase that is redolent of Old Testament tabernacle/temple connotations. Consider from Exodus 35, where the same Greek term – *architectōn* – is used as in I Corinthians 3:10.

*And Moses said to the children of Israel, “See, the LORD has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and He has filled him with the Spirit of God, **in wisdom** and understanding, in knowledge and all manner of workmanship, to design (*architectōnein*) artistic works, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of artistic workmanship. (Exodus 35:30-33)*

---

<sup>35</sup> I Corinthians 3:11

Beale comments, "Paul also calls himself a 'wise master builder' (*Sophos architektōn*) in laying the foundation, which echoes the use of the same word applied to those who helped build Israel's tabernacle."<sup>36</sup> When we add to the passage in I Corinthians 3 what Paul has to say about the joining together of Jews and Gentiles into one building in Ephesians 2 (quoted above), we comprehend the apostle's mind to the effect that the Church of Jesus Christ *is the rebuilt and reconsecrated Temple* of the eschatological new age. Gordon Fee notes that the word Paul uses in these passages is the Greek *nous*, which refers to the inner sanctuary, "the place of a deity's dwelling," in contrast to *hieron*, which designates the temple precincts as well as the sanctuary.<sup>37</sup> In this the Apostle Peter agrees (as he does in all other things Paul taught),

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

And Peter knows no other foundation for this building than does Paul:

*Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,  
"Behold, I lay in Zion  
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,  
And he who believes on Him will by no means be put to shame."  
Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient,  
"The stone which the builders rejected  
Has become the chief cornerstone,"* (I Peter 2:6-7)

"Consequently, Paul, like Peter, is saying that faithful ministers who build up their flock in the wisdom of God's word will cause them to become part of God's temple, firmly secured to the foundation of Christ."<sup>38</sup> But we find in Paul even more references, implicit to be sure, to the Church and to believers as the temple of God, for he frequently refers to the presence of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church and in be-

---

<sup>36</sup> Beale; 247.

<sup>37</sup> Fee, Gordon *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1999); 114.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*; 249.

lievers. Remembering that the central meaning of the tabernacle/Temple complex was the *dwelling of Israel's God with His people*, we can correctly interpret the apostle as saying that this is now happening through faith in Jesus Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. "The point is this: there is one building, one Temple, one place where the living God has chosen to live. It consists now, of all those who belong to the Messiah, all those who are indwelt by his spirit."<sup>39</sup> This, again, is apparent in the previously quoted passage from II Corinthians 6, where Paul quotes what may be considered the essential 'motto' of God's people:

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:*

*"I will dwell in them and walk among them.*

*I will be their God, and they shall be My people."*

(II Corinthians 6:14-16)

Paul was not a participant in the Pentecost outpouring of the Holy Spirit and so makes no mention of or allusion to it in his writings. Thus he did not witness the *Shekinah* that Pentecost represented. But this fact does not in the least diminish his understanding that the Holy Spirit has indeed been given and now dwells both within believers and, assembled, within the Church. In the two passages regarding the 'temple' in I Corinthians, direct mention is made to the Holy Spirit having taken up His abode within them. With reference to the corporate church: "*Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and that **the Spirit of God dwells in you?***" And with reference to the individual believer: "*Or do you not know that your body is a temple of **the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God?***" He writes to the Ephesians that together, Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ Jesus, are "*being built together into a **dwelling of God in the Holy Spirit.***" These passages as well as many others make it clear that the apostle not only considered the Church to be the fulfillment of the temple promises and prophecies, but this was so because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, also promised by the prophets and now

---

<sup>39</sup> Wright, *PF*G; 392.

fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> This is just one part of how the theology of the Pharisee Saul of Tarsus was re-oriented around Jesus Christ after the encounter on the road to Damascus. Though he was not a witness (at least not as far as we know) of the Pentecost event, Paul fully grasped its meaning. “Jesus himself has become the place where, and the means by which, heaven and earth are brought together, so that the Pentecost-scene in Acts 2 takes the long-awaited place of a second-Temple scene in which Israel’s God comes back at last to live with and among his people.”<sup>41</sup>

When it comes to the Temple itself, however – the epicentre of the Jewish world, even the Diaspora world, the one place where the living God had chosen to put his name and reveal his glory, the place to which the nations would flock to see that glory and learn that name – the magnitude of Paul’s transformed symbolic world becomes at once apparent. *You are the temple of the living God.*<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> *Cp. page 14 above.*

<sup>41</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 356.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*; 355.

### Lesson 3 – The Once and Future King

**Text: Isaiah 9:1-7; 16:5; Ezekiel 34:1-30; Romans 1:1-7**

*“Our entrance into Pauline Christology  
is that Jesus reigns as the Christ,  
the new and better David.”  
(Thomas Schreiner)*

One of the most elusive concepts within modern Physics is ‘string theory,’ the search for a single mathematical formula that explains the entire universe. This concept



Albert Einstein (1879-1955)

of a unifying mathematical model that pulls together into one formula the comprehensive scientific meaning of the universe is something that enamored such geniuses as Albert Einstein, who believed that such a principle existed, but was unable to discover it in spite of vigorous effort and thought. It has become to many the heart of theoretical physics, while to others it is viewed as a seriously detrimental distraction.

Einstein himself was motivated by a belief in the unity of the Universe (logical enough) and often said, “God does not throw dice.” Some have mistakenly interpreted this saying to mean that Einstein was religious; he was not. Whatever belief he had in God was not sufficient to qualify the physicist as a ‘good Jew.’ He simply meant that ‘the Old One’ – his other reference to the Creator – had done thing in an orderly manner, a manner that physics ought to be able to discover.

The search for a unifying principle is common to the human pursuit of knowledge. Though modern theoretical physicists would be unwilling to accept the analogy, there is little epistemological difference between their search for ‘string theory’ and the ancient alchemist’s search for the ‘philosopher’s stone.’ We know innately that there is a unity to the world around us; indeed, without such a unity there could be no Science. Those who study Nature desire the ‘key’ that will unlock the black box – be it the Theory of Relativity or the discovery of DNA. But the history of knowledge has not been linear, and modern Science in anything but unified. Theories have been proven, only to be disproven by others. Those that remain ‘unproven’ are found to have limita-

tions in scope; none have been found to capture the whole within its grasp. It is a vain search.

Theology has not escaped the search for a 'unifying principle.' For much of American evangelicalism that principle is Dispensationalism, which is ironic when one considers that the essence of the system is to *divide* God's redemptive history into hermetically sealed epochs. But the key to 'string theory,' even as it applies to theology, is not that there are no divisions or distinctions, but rather that there is one uniting concept that governs them all (one theology to rule them all?). Reformed theology, on the other hand, has adopted the unifying principle of the 'covenants' in order to provide the overarching concept that unites our understanding of God's revelation and work. We know that these two systems are 'string theory' variants in theology because their adherents start from this basis in order to explain any other concept in Scripture. In both camps, as in theoretical physics, there are vigorous adherents to the cause who will not be dissuaded from their belief that their particular theory is 'unifying' and therefore the essence of theology. And, like theoretical physics, there are those in both camps who are coming to the realization that such a 'string theory' does not exist for the revelation of God (either in Nature or in Scripture) and the search for one - or worse, the slavish adherence to one - is a seriously dangerous distraction. Unmistakable gaps and errors have appeared in both Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology; it is past time to abandon these broken reeds and with them, the search for a biblical 'string theory.'

It was perhaps an inadvertent reaction against the over-emphasis on *systematic* theology - that theology that implicitly seeks a 'string theory' principle - that led to the development in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century of *biblical* theology. One of the pioneers in this field in the modern era was Geerhardus Vos, who taught the subject for forty years at Princeton Theological Seminary. Vos defines biblical theology as "that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals



Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

with the process of the self-revelation of God in the Bible.”<sup>43</sup> Essential to the pursuit of biblical theology is the concept of progressive revelation, that God did not reveal the entirety of His self-disclosure at the beginning of His ways, but rather unfolded both the self-disclosure of His Person and of His work through what is called ‘redemptive history.’ Vos writes, “Revelation is the interpretation of redemption; it must, therefore, unfold itself in instalments as redemption does.”<sup>44</sup>

In short, biblical theology follows the progression of biblical revelation through its historical phases. Though this might sound a bit like Dispensationalism, the difference is both stark and crucial. In Dispensationalism the various epochs of redemptive history are separate from each other – each comprises a unique era of divine redemptive activity, with no connection or association between them. This feature of Dispensationalism is perhaps its most damning, because the organic unity of biblical revelation is obvious to all but those most blinded by a contrary ‘system.’ The unfolding of divine revelation means that the revelation at each stage was both perfect and incomplete: perfect for that era yet incomplete as to the whole divine redemptive plan. “The organic progress is from seed-form to the attainment of full growth; yet we do not say that in the qualitative sense the seed is less perfect than the tree.”<sup>45</sup> At each stage along the way, until full growth is attained, there is both the sense of fullness at that stage and expectation of further growth. “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son.”<sup>46</sup> This is organic, progressive revelation.

And it is the progressive – as to both time and growth – nature of revelation that is so inherently *eschatological*. The planting of a seed is an eschatological act, an act that immediately looks to the future for fulfilment. This is likely why we find the pattern of biblical act followed by biblical prophecy – the act becomes the expectation, whether it is the forming of a covenant, or the Exodus, or the ascent of David as king. The pro-

---

<sup>43</sup> Vos, Geerhardus *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1991); 5.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*; 6.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*; 7.

<sup>46</sup> Hebrews 1:1-2a

phetic word then both explains the act and keeps the hope alive, the anticipation that the *meaning* of the act will see its day of revelation.

### **The Man After God's Heart**

The biblical narrative concerning David begins long before he was born, but once he did come on the scene, subsequent biblical writings –Historical Narrative, Psalms, and Prophecy – incorporate both David and his lineage into the overarching story line of Israel. At first glance it would seem that God intended Himself to be Israel's King, and when the nation demands of Samuel that he anoint a king over them, that they might be like the nations around them, God informs Samuel that the nation was rejecting Him. God gives Israel a king, but not at first the one that He had planned for them. This ought to have been obvious to Israel, had they been paying attention to the earlier prophecies. Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin; the true king was to be of the tribe of Judah.

*Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's children shall bow down before you.*

*Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up.*

*He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?*

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet,*

*Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.*

(Genesis 49:8-10)

This prophecy stands in a unique line of biblical prophecies which relate to the promised 'Seed,' the one through whom God would bring redemption and restoration both to Israel and to all of Creation. The tracing of this lineage moves from Eve to David; while the lineage itself continues, there is no further demarcation as to its path. It is as if the journey of the Seed proceeds along a road with several clear markers to keep the traveler on the right path, that is, until the route enters a long traverse through, as it were, a wilderness with nothing but the former marker to guide. The last marker any traveler can remember seeing is 'the Son of David.' Prior to that the way is clear; after-

ward it becomes less defined, though the direction given by this last marker still governs.

The road begins in Genesis 3, just after the Fall of Man. God pronounced both judgment and grace upon His original couple, and promises ultimate redemption through the 'Seed of Woman.' God curses the serpent and pronounces his eventual destruction.

*So the LORD God said to the serpent:*

*"Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all cattle,*

*And more than every beast of the field;*

*On your belly you shall go, and you shall eat dust all the days of your life.*

*And I will put enmity between you and the woman,*

*And between your seed and **her Seed**;*

*He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel."*

(Genesis 3:14-15)

As is to be expected this early in the unfolding of redemptive history, the *timing* of the coming of the woman's Seed is left indeterminate. What is instructive to all future generations of believers, including ours, is the *expectation* that was immediately present both within Eve and within the righteous lineage that flowed from her through Seth. When Eve conceived Seth, after her son Abel had been cruelly murdered by his brother, Cain, she seems to have thought this pregnancy to be the fulfilment of the original promise. The language is not definite, but the sense of the original promise is clear.

*And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, "For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed."*

(Genesis 4:25)

The subsequent narrative confirms both that Seth was not the promised Seed and that Eve was not mistaken in her hopefulness, for the lineage of Seth become the lineage of faith, "*Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.*"<sup>47</sup> We follow this line down to the time of Noah, born of Lamech (the Good, as compared to Lamech, the Bad). Upon

---

<sup>47</sup> Genesis 4:26

Noah's birth, his father reaches back to the original prophecy, and in doing so prophesies himself concerning his son.

*Lamech lived one hundred and eighty-two years, and had a son. And he called his name Noah, saying, "This one will comfort us concerning our work and the toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD has cursed."* (Genesis 5:28-29)

Lamech's reference to the curse that Adam incurred because of his sin – the curse upon man's labor and his toil on the earth – speaks of the reversal of that curse, a reversal that would only come through the promised Seed of Woman. Like Eve, Lamech was both wrong and right. Noah was not the promised Seed, but through Noah would come a form of redemption and deliverance from judgment that later becomes typical of that final redemption that comes only through Jesus Christ.

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.* (I Peter 3:18-20)

The route taken thus far:

**The Seed of Woman** → **Eve's Seed (Seth)** → **Lamech's Seed (Noah)**

This part of the journey is little spoken of in most texts, both Christological and Theological due to the opacity of the 'Seed' prophecy until it hits the major milestone: Abraham. Dispensationalism tends to isolate the earlier portions of the trail into the first and second 'dispensations,' separated from the rest and, frankly, insignificant to Dispensational theology. Covenantalism, on the other hand, basically *starts* with Abraham and his call out of Ur, and speaks of the earlier episodes as a relatively insignificant prologue. But the antediluvian era is critical to our understanding concerning the universal application - not to each and every human being, but to the entire Creation as well as to the descendants of Adam. The sense of expectation that we find in Eve and in

Lamech is representative of the same emotion and thought found in the faithful of God throughout history. Governing that abiding, generational hope is the promise of the Seed who would reverse the curse and restore Creation. But it is nonetheless true that the road only really begins to make its way on the map with the call of Abram out of the land 'east of the River.'

With the establishment of the Abrahamic Covenant the road signs come closer together: the Seed of Abraham in whom all the nations will be blessed is then delineated through Abraham's son, Isaac (and not Ishmael). The road is further channeled through Isaac's son, Jacob/Israel (and not Esau). Finally, for this portion of the route, the marker is isolated within Jacob's son Judah, bypassing the other eleven sons. The promised Seed would be Israel's - and more importantly God's - king, and that king would be from the tribe of Judah and no other. After this well-marked stretch of road, however, we enter the era of the Judges, when nothing is clearly marked and *"every man did what was right in his own eyes."* Judah is just one tribe among twelve, and the only clear demarcation of tribal identity is the priesthood within the tribe of Levi. So weed-choked became the route that when Israel sought its own king like the nations around her, God gave her a man from Benjamin and Israel did not protest, evidently having completely forgotten Jacob's dying prophecies.

But God had not forgotten, and the time was fast approaching for the next marker to show the true path, which had never deviated from the original promise or the divine purpose. God was looking for *"a man after His own heart,"* and He was looking only within the tribe of Judah.

*Now the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons."* (I Samuel 16:1)

The anointing of David ends the markers along the road, but does so in such an unmistakable manner that the guidance given by that marker will enlighten the next ten centuries of Jewish hope and expectation. Never again will the nation consider anyone

other than the 'seed' of David to be a rightful king over Israel. It is true that ten of the tribes will rebel and will set kings over 'Israel' from various tribes other than Judah, but this is a sign of the gross apostasy that was permeating the nation like a cancer. The faithful in Israel knew no other human king but David's son, and the eschatological expectation for the future begins to point to David's *Son*.

### **The Son Upon the Throne...Forever**

From a covenantal perspective, the 'Davidic Covenant' is the last of the salvific or redemptive covenants. It is, of course, prior to the Mosaic Covenant, but this was not, in fact, a covenant *with* Moses but a legal establishment of both religion and polity *with Israel*. The 'Mosaic Covenant' – also, and perhaps more properly known as the 'Sinaitic Covenant' – did not have regard to the lineage of the Seed of Woman, which the Noaic, the Abrahamic, and the Davidic covenants did. Each of these three covenants refer to some aspect of God's plan for the redemption and restoration of both the human race and of Creation itself. The Abrahamic, of course, is the primary covenant in terms of human redemption, promising the blessing of God to all nations through the seed of the patriarch. Prior to that, the Noaic Covenant secured the promise of a restored (or at least never more destroyed by fire) Creation. It can be argued that these two covenants secure within the divine promise the 'kingdom of God,' and the Davidic Covenant secures the King.

*Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: 'I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies.' Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and **I will establish his kingdom**. He shall **build a house for My name**, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of*

*men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever.”* (II Samuel 7:8-16)

Continuing, then, on the path started in Genesis 3, we progress through the further definition of the divine kingdom and of God’s plan for the redemption and restoration of His Creation.

**Noah (Creation) —→ Abraham - Isaac - Jacob (Mankind) —→ David (Kingdom)**

The covenant with David, as noted earlier, marks the last descriptive passage concerning the identity, or the lineage, of the promised Seed. What follows in Israel’s history is roughly a thousand years in which every aspect of the redemptive covenants is put to the test, all but destroyed, and left seemingly hollow and abandoned. The Davidic dynasty lasts only one further generation before the nation is torn by a civil war and ten tribes abandon Judah and set out on their own in both religion and politics – a non-Aaronic priesthood and a non-Davidic monarchy. Israel is oppressed by the world powers of that time, ultimately losing her hold on the Promised Land and being carried off into Exile. Even for Judah, the Davidic kingdom eventually collapses, and the once glorious tree of Jesse becomes a ‘stump.’<sup>48</sup> Yet through all this there is no further development as to the identity and lineage of the promised Seed, and no retraction of that promise, either. David becomes, like the Exodus and the Return from Exile, a prophetic motif. God continues, through His prophets, to reiterate the promise of redemption and restoration, and that promise continues to run through David. We begin with the most challenging aspect of this history – the promise that David would not lack a man to sit on his throne *forever*.

*And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.* (II Samuel 7:16)

---

<sup>48</sup> Cp. Isaiah 11:1

Isaiah is the first to take up the theme, and links the return of the Davidic king with the advent of the New Earth. Note also the inclusion of the Gentiles (*goyim/ethnoi*) in the Davidic promise of restoration.

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.  
His delight is in the fear of the LORD, and He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes,  
nor decide by the hearing of His ears;  
But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth,  
And with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked.  
Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.  
The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole,  
and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD As the waters cover the sea.  
And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, Who shall stand as a banner to the people;  
For the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.*

(Isaiah 11:1-10)

There can be no doubt that this 'Rod of Jesse' is the same Deliverer spoken of a couple of chapters earlier, again with reference to an never-ending kingdom and the inclusion of the Gentiles.

*For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;  
And the government will be upon His shoulder.  
And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end,  
Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgment and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*

(Isaiah 9:6-7)<sup>49</sup>

---

<sup>49</sup> Cp. entire passage, Isaiah 9:1-7

*In mercy the throne will be established;  
And One will sit on it in truth, in the tabernacle of David,  
Judging and seeking justice and hastening righteousness.* (Isaiah 16:5)

Included in one of the most poignant evangelistic passages in the entire Bible is another reference to David, further emphasizing that God's plan of redemption would flow through the Davidic line and culminate in the Davidic king.

*Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters;  
And you who have no money, come, buy and eat.  
Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.  
Why do you spend money for what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy?  
Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.  
Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live;  
And I will make an everlasting covenant with you – **The sure mercies of David.**  
Indeed I have given him as a witness to the people,  
A leader and commander for the people.  
Surely you shall call a nation you do not know,  
And nations who do not know you shall run to you,  
Because of the LORD your God, and the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified you.”* (Isaiah 55:1-5)

The exilic prophets – Jeremiah before the Exile and Ezekiel during – chastise the leadership, especially the priesthood, of Israel for their malpractice in shepherding. It is, of course, no coincidence that David was a shepherd before he became king. It is evident in the following prophecy from Jeremiah that the coming David was going to be more than just a shepherd, more than just a Davidic king.

*“Woe to the shepherds who destroy and scatter the sheep of My pasture!” says the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel against the shepherds who feed My people: “You have scattered My flock, driven them away, and not attended to them. Behold, I will attend to you for the evil of your doings,” says the LORD. “But I will gather the remnant of My flock out of all countries where I have driven them, and bring them back to their folds; and they shall be fruitful and increase. I will set up shepherds over them who will feed them; and they shall fear no more, nor be dismayed, nor shall they be lacking,” says the LORD.  
“Behold, the days are coming,” says the LORD,  
“That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; a King shall reign and prosper,  
And execute judgment and righteousness in the earth.*

*In His days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell safely;  
Now this is His name by which He will be called:*

*THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

(Jeremiah 23:1-6)

*"For it shall come to pass in that day,' Says the LORD of hosts,  
'That I will break his yoke from your neck, and will burst your bonds;  
Foreigners shall no more enslave them. But they shall serve the LORD their God,  
And David their king, whom I will raise up for them."* (Jeremiah 30:8-9)

The Lord refers to the covenant He made with David, and the perpetuity of the Davidic reign, even at a time when there was no longer a descendant of David on the throne. The ears of faith would hear this prophecy as a direct continuation of the divine promise to David back in II Samuel 7, and the eyes of faith would be able to see through the current calamity within the Davidic house and look forward with hope and expectation to the time when God would fulfill His promise fully.

*For thus says the LORD: "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel; nor shall the priests, the Levites, lack a man to offer burnt offerings before Me, to kindle grain offerings, and to sacrifice continually." And the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah, saying, "Thus says the LORD: 'If you can break My covenant with the day and My covenant with the night, so that there will not be day and night in their season, then My covenant may also be broken with David My servant, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and with the Levites, the priests, My ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, nor the sand of the sea measured, so will I multiply the descendants of David My servant and the Levites who minister to Me.'* (Jeremiah 33:17-22)

*Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. **I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them—My servant David.** He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.* (Ezekiel 34:20-24)

And in the most powerful restoration prophecy of them all – the Vision of the Valley of Dry Bones in Ezekiel 37 – we again have David as the central redemptive character.

*Then say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Surely I will take the children of Israel from among the nations, wherever they have gone, and will gather them from every side and bring them into their own land; and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all; they shall no longer be two nations, nor shall they ever be divided into two kingdoms again. They shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will deliver them from all their dwelling places in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them. Then they shall be My people, and I will be their God. **David My servant shall be king over them**, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever. Moreover I will make a covenant of peace with them, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore. My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people. The nations also will know that I, the LORD, sanctify Israel, when My sanctuary is in their midst forevermore.'* (Ezekiel 37:21-28)

This last passage also illustrates the way that these eschatological contours from the Old Testament are interwoven. The advent of the Davidic King coincides with the people of YHWH *"walking in My judgments and observing My statutes, and doing them."* One chapter earlier this phenomenon was the result of God giving His people a new heart, and putting His Spirit within them (*cp.* Ezek. 36:25-27). Mention is also made here to YHWH's *sanctuary* and to His *tabernacle*, showing again how central to the eschatological hope the Temple complex was in the Jewish understanding. There is, furthermore, the same note of completeness and finality that accompanies the abiding Davidic kingdom: *"when My sanctuary is in their midst forever."*

Thus during the centuries of distress and catastrophe, ending in the fall of the House of David and the Exile of Israel to Babylon, the hope not only did not fail, but continued to grow, that Israel's God would one day set all things right again. "The king of Babylon will take Jerusalem; a new king of Persia will order its restoration. At the same time, however, the hope also grew that the positive side of YHWH's future action, the final restoration of Israel and the overthrow of all enslaving powers, would be accomplished through the true Israelite monarch, the anointed son of David."<sup>50</sup> This ex-

---

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 1050.

pectation of a divinely-ordained and empowered king was what made Second Temple Israel so militant in its zealotry, and so difficult for the Romans to govern. That the expectation of an all-conquering warrior king was misplaced, the expectation itself of a king was not.

### **The Once and Future King**

This survey of Old Testament prophecy shows that the expectation of the Seed of Woman culminates in the promise of a descendant (literally, 'seed') of David coming to reestablish God's reign over His people and the world. Dispensationalists look for the literal fulfilment of these prophecies in a Davidic king sitting on a literal throne in Jerusalem, ruling from there over all the nations of the world ('with a rod of iron'). However, the prophecies quoted above, along with others of similar tone, seem to indicate that the coming Davidic king is also the LORD Himself and not merely a physical descendant of David – *cp.* again Isaiah 9 and Jeremiah 23. Furthermore, a literal interpretation of the Davidic Covenant, and the promise of a perpetual occupant on the Davidic throne, has the insurmountable hurdle in the fact that the Davidic line *ceased to rule* at the Exile. To say that this rule will be reestablished during a future Millennium is special pleading: there is no indication in the prophecies themselves that the line of kings would be broken, and would remain broken for thousands of years.

What is decisive for the argument that the Davidic promise has been fulfilled in Jesus Christ is the testimony of the New Testament itself. For instance, James announces in the 'Jerusalem Council' that God has acted in Jesus Christ to fulfill the promises represented by the fallen Davidic house.

*And after they had become silent, James answered, saying, "Men and brethren, listen to me: Simon has declared how God at the first visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for His name. And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written:*

*'After this I will return and will rebuild the **tabernacle of David**, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up;  
So that the rest of mankind may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by My name,' Says the LORD who does all these things.*

(Acts 15:13-17)

Paul himself does not speak often about Jesus as the fulfilment of the Davidic covenantal promises, but what he does say is quite significant. It is found in the opening verses of the apostle's letter to the Romans, a church that he had not founded and one to whom he wishes to establish the *bona fides* of his gospel.

*Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead. Through Him we have received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations for His name, among whom you also are the called of Jesus Christ.*

(Romans 1:1-6)

The language here of Paul's description of Jesus' pedigree is strongly reminiscent of the original statement of the Davidic Covenant in II Samuel 7. There we read in verse 12, "I will raise up your seed after you," with the Greek verb *anastasō* – resurrect – used for 'raise up.' The promise of II Samuel 7 goes on to claim that YHWH would be this Seed's Father, and He would be YHWH's Son (7:14). This promise is echoed in the Psalms in several places, most notably in Psalm 2, a psalm that declares that the LORD "has set His king on Zion." YHWH continues,

*I will declare the decree: The LORD has said to Me,  
'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.'*

(Psalm 2:7)

Thomas Schreiner, in his book *The King in His Beauty*, highlights the significance of Paul referring to Jesus as the ‘seed of David’ as well as the ‘Son of God’ within the context of establishing his apostolic gospel. “The presence of this theme in the introduction is significant, for Paul introduces his gospel here, and thus Jesus’ Davidic heritage constitutes a central theme in the Pauline gospel.”<sup>51</sup> Schreiner goes on to show that Jesus’ role as the promised Davidic king is reinforced in passages that speak of Jesus’ perpetual reign, not least of which is I Corinthians 15,



Thomas Schreiner (b. 1954)

*For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For “He has put all things under His feet.” But when He says “all things are put under Him,” it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:25-28)

Paul in this passage leaves no room for anyone to rule *after* Jesus Christ – no ‘Millennial King David.’ Jesus’ perpetual reign takes all things to the ultimate consummation when everything is summed up in Jesus Christ and then submitted to the Father. This reign can be nothing other than the perpetual government laid upon the shoulders of the promised Child of Isaiah 9. And this government would mean nothing else to a Second Temple Jew than the ‘raising up’ of the seed of David to reestablish the Davidic kingdom. No other conclusion can be arrived at but “Jesus is the messianic king, the sovereign one sitting at God’s right hand, ruling even now from heaven.”<sup>52</sup>

Once again we find that the key that unlocks these prophecies and passages is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead: “...declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.” Not only did this comport with the Greek reading of II Samuel 7:12, it made inevitable (to those who believed) the

---

<sup>51</sup> Schreiner, Thomas R. *The King in His Beauty* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2013); 544.

<sup>52</sup> *Idem.*

conclusion that this resurrected Jesus was the promised David. The resurrection vindicated all that Jesus said of Himself during His earthly ministry, and vindicated all that God had promised to do for the redemption and restoration of both Israel and the world, through His servant David. *“Remember that Jesus Christ, of the seed of David, was raised from the dead according to my gospel.”*<sup>53</sup>

The resurrection of the person who had done and said these things, and who had been put to death as a messianic pretender, said it all. Israel’s God, the creator, had reversed the verdict of the court, in reversing the death sentence it carried out. Jesus really was the king of the Jews; and, if he was the Messiah, he really was the lord of the world...The event precipitated this exegesis: once early Christians had glimpsed the idea that a would-be Messiah, a descendant of David, had been put to death as a messianic pretender but had been raised from the dead, it was not long before the Septuagintal language about Israel’s God ‘raising up’ David’s seed after him, to sit on his throne, would come into its own.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>53</sup> II Timothy 2:8

<sup>54</sup> Wright; *The Resurrection of the Son of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 2003); 244.

#### Lesson 4 –Come Out and Be Separate

**Text: Leviticus 20:22-26; Romans 6:15-22; II Corinthians 6:14-18**

*“The church discovers its true identity only in relation to the sacred story of Israel...”*  
(Richard B. Hays)

“The Bible says what it means and means what it says.” This has become a frequent defense for those who deny any other interpretation of biblical passages than the literal or ‘natural’ one. Any other interpretation is dismissed as ‘allegorizing’ or ‘spiritualizing,’ especially as biblical texts and prophecies relate to Israel and eschatology. One of the most significant places where a ‘literal’ versus a ‘spiritual’ interpretation of a prophecy comes into play is with the interpretation of the New Covenant by the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews. Quoting Jeremiah 31, Hebrews announces the fulfillment of the prophecy in the Person and work of Jesus Christ.

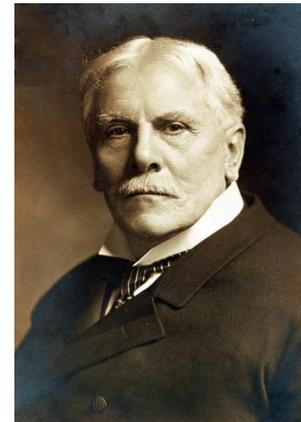
##### **Hebrews 8:7-12**

*For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second. Because finding fault with them, He says: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they did not continue in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more.”*

##### **Jeremiah 31:31-34**

*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

The argument of the modern literalist in regard to this passage is that the New Covenant prophecy in Jeremiah 31 specifically references “*the house of Israel and the house of Judah,*” meaning the New Covenant can only be made with ethnic Israel; in other words, the Jews. The problem literalists face with agonizing frequency is the fact that the New Testament consistently applies Old Testament prophecies initially referencing Israel, *to the Church*. Thus throughout its life, Dispensationalism has been unable to maintain a consistent adherence to a literal hermeneutic without denying the inerrancy of the New Testament Scriptures. C. I. Scofield, the father of modern Dispensationalism, admits to the need for ‘reverent spiritualizing’ of the Old Testament text if one is to be faithful to the inerrancy of the New. In discussing Paul’s allegorical interpretation of Abraham’s family in Galatians 4, Scofield writes, “These [historical Scriptures] are (1) literally true. The events recorded occurred. And yet (2) they have (perhaps more often than we suspect) an *allegorical* or *spiritual* significance.”<sup>55</sup>



C. I. Scofield (1843-1921)

The modern emphasis on literal or natural interpretation of the text was in large measure a reaction against a misguided *allegorical* hermeneutic that has persisted chronically throughout the history of biblical exegesis. Taking Paul’s lead in Galatians 4, early Christian exegetes sought to find ‘hidden’ or ‘spiritual’ meanings beneath the literal text. Bernard Ramm defines this process of allegorical interpretation as “the interpretation of a document whereby something *foreign, peculiar, or hidden* is introduced into the meaning of the text, giving it a proposed deeper or real meaning.”<sup>56</sup> Early Christian exegetes such as Origen followed the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Jewish scholar Philo in this allegorizing hermeneutic. Ramm quotes Philo as saying, “The literal sense was the body of Scripture, and the allegorical sense its soul.”<sup>57</sup> Of course, such a hermeneutical practice led to a tremendously subjective interpretation of the Bible in which the allegorical imagi-

---

<sup>55</sup> Quoted, “*Inconsistent Literalism among Dispensational Pretribulationists.*” [Classic Arminian Theology: 20 – Inconsistent Literalism among Dispensational Pretribulationists \(arminiusfan.blogspot.com\)](http://ClassicArminianTheology.com) Accessed 19September2021.

<sup>56</sup> Ramm, Bernard *Protestant Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1970); 223.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*; 27.

nation of the exegete was the governing factor. Recognized as dangerous, allegorizing nevertheless has been a consistent phenomenon in Christian exegesis, especially in Christian preaching.

If viewed as a corrective against this subjective form of biblical interpretation, then literalism is a valid principle that ought to be fervently maintained by all Christian



Bernard Ramm (1916-92)

exegetes. However, it must also be recognized that the *literal* text of the Bible employs *symbolism* and *typology*. Between the crass and imaginative allegorical hermeneutic and the wooden literal hermeneutic there lies the *typological* hermeneutic which recognizes that the biblical text, while speaking of literal events and persons, also often is speaking of those events and persons as *types*. There is yet a degree of subjectivity to the typological hermeneutic, and therefore a degree of debate among biblical scholars, with charges of 'spiritualizing' still leveled against those who see, for instance, Israel as a type where others see only ethnic Israel. Ramm defines the typological hermeneutic as "the interpretation of the Old Testament based on the fundamental theological unit of the two Testaments whereby something in the Old shadows, prefigures, adumbrates something in the New. Hence what is interpreted in the Old is not foreign or peculiar or hidden, but rises naturally out of the text due to the relationship of the two Testaments."<sup>58</sup> Ramm quotes Augustine with reference to types as, "a thing which apart from the impression that it presents to our senses, causes of itself some other thing to enter our thoughts."<sup>59</sup>

There can be little doubt that the Apostle Paul employed typological hermeneutics (as well as allegorical, at times) in his reorientation of the biblical revelation of God in the light of the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was, of course, inspired by the Holy Spirit in writing that corpus of literature that constitutes the theological center of both the New Testament and the Christian religion. It is the premise of this study that a

---

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*; 223.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*; 35.

correct and fair understanding of the apostle's writings *requires* an equal understanding of how he employed that typological hermeneutic so pervasive in his letters. Paul's typological interpretation of the Old Testament had everything to do with his understanding of the eschatological import of Jesus' death and resurrection. The apostle came to realize, upon encountering the risen Christ, that the 'end of the age' had occurred, and that he now lived in the 'final chapter,' as Richard Hays writes,

[Paul] does believe himself to be living in the final age toward which the eternal purpose of God has been aiming from the beginning of time. To return to the story/book metaphor, we might say that Paul sees himself and his churches enacting the events of the final chapter, whose conclusion, the Parousia, can be no more than a few pages away. His perspective from within this final chapter allows him to read the story whole from the standpoint of its ending, thus perceiving correspondences and narrative unities that would have been hidden from characters in the earlier chapters of the story.<sup>60</sup>

The reality of the resurrection meant to Saul of Tarsus the finality of Israel's God acting, fully and finally, in history on behalf of His people and His purpose. But there was another reality that had to be dealt with: the intervention of YHWH into Israel's history once more did not look like everyone thought it would. There was still the corrupt priesthood and the 'false' temple; there was still the lack of a Davidic king and the presence of Roman legions; indeed, there was precious little to indicate that Israel's God had acted on behalf of His covenant except for the most powerful of all events, the *resurrection of Jesus*. To Paul, and to the Church since Paul, this meant that the events of sacred history were not only historical events, they were types of what was to come. "The earlier events were in themselves authentic disclosures of grace, not mere shadows or pointers to future realities. But the full theological significance of the whole story arises from the metaphorical act of grasping together past (Israel) and present (church)."<sup>61</sup>

This is by no means to say that the events of the Old Testament were never viewed as typological before Paul and his Damascus Road experience. We have already

---

<sup>60</sup> Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press; 1989); 100.

<sup>61</sup> *Idem*.

seen how both the tabernacle/Temple complex and the Davidic king were redemptive motifs that extended long past the historical realities. God's gracious interventions in the life of His people produced not only the memory of such events but also the language of future expectation. So the Exodus was both a cherished memory and foundation of Israel's covenant hope and the literary motif for Israel's eschatological hope. This is also true of the Babylonian Exile (though it was not a cherished memory of deliverance, rather a sober memory of divine discipline). Just as we find in Paul's writings the language of the tabernacle/Temple complex and of the Davidic king, we also find the language of the Exodus and the Return from Exile. As in the former, so also in the latter the apostle sees the prophetic elements in these historic events complete fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

The typological interpretation of the Old Testament in light of the finished work of Jesus, Israel's Messiah (and of YHWH, Israel's God), unites for Paul the two 'testaments' of God's revelation. He therefore could write his New Testament letters in the language of Old Testament prophecy without force-fitting Old Testament prophecy into New Testament events, and certainly without recourse to 'spiritualizing' the Old Testament texts. The key to Paul's understanding of the all that he had been taught – and he had been taught more than most – was that everything promised under the Old Covenant remained unfulfilled, until Jesus' victory over the grave. This was not to Paul the beginning of a new book, or really even a new chapter; it was the conclusion of the one book he had been reading his whole life. "The church discovers its true identity only in relation to the sacred story of Israel, and the sacred story of Israel discovers its full significance – so Paul passionately believed – only in relation to God's unfolding design for salvation of the Gentiles in the church."<sup>62</sup>

In light of the constant connections Paul makes between what the Old Testament promised and what God had just done in and through His Son, Jesus Christ, Richard Hays refers to Paul's hermeneutic as 'ecclesiocentric.' Hays writes, "That is why Paul's hermeneutic must be called ecclesiocentric: he makes the biblical text pass through the

---

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*; 100-101.

filter of his experience of God's action of forming the church. The full meaning of God's eschatological redemptive purpose is not definitively enacted in the Christian community...the experience of the Christian community stands in continuity with the story of Israel, not in contradiction to it."<sup>63</sup> The apostle to the Gentile does not invent a new hermeneutic suitable to a Gentile Church and different from Jewish Israel; rather he uses the realized experience of the finished work of Jesus Christ – emphasized magnificently via the resurrection from the dead – as the hermeneutical principle by which the Old Testament Scripture is now fully and finally interpreted. Thus the fulfillment of the eschatological hope of Israel informs Paul's Ecclesiology and undergirds his Ethics.

What [Paul] does do is to use Christian experience in the church as a hermeneutical paradigm for reading Scripture, from which he is then able to draw material for the guidance of his community. This necessarily circular procedure is authorized by his conviction that his churches, in which Jews and Gentiles together offer up praise to the God of Israel, are an eschatological sign and fulfillment of the promises woven into the fabric of Israel's history and enunciated in the word of Scripture.<sup>64</sup>

James Dunn agrees that the relationship of the church to the ancient redemptive story of Israel is crucial to understanding Paul, and to understanding the Scriptures as a whole. "A Christianity which does not understand itself in some sense as 'Israel' forfeits its claim to the scriptures of Israel."<sup>65</sup> Contrary to the popular modern conceit that the Church is a separate entity from Israel within the overarching purpose of God, it is rather the case that Paul recognizes an organic unity – so organic, in fact, that he likens it to an olive tree; a *single* olive tree. "For if church is not defined by differentiation *from* Israel, but rather by inclusion *in* Israel and identification with Israel's blessings, then Christianity's self-understanding itself is at issue. For those accustomed to centuries of confrontation of 'Christianity' over against 'Judaism' this can be an unnerving realization."<sup>66</sup>

---

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*; 102.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*; 104.

<sup>65</sup> Dunn; 508.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*; 507. In this section of his book, Dunn makes a very useful distinction from Paul with regard to the terms 'Jew' and 'Israel.' He writes, "Strictly speaking, it is not possible to include 'Greeks' within 'Jews'; that is simply a

## The People of God

Perhaps the most fundamental error to be found in the multitude of errors that is Dispensationalism, is the notion that God chose Israel to be His people in and for themselves, without reference to the rest of the world. This, we have seen, is in stark contradiction to the Abrahamic Covenant itself, in which the blessing of the nations is encompassed. However, as redemptive history progresses from Abraham to the nation of his descendants, the institution of Israel took on a life of its own in isolation from the promise to the nations. On an even larger scale, this narrowing down of the eschatological focus on Israel forgets that the call of Abram was itself part of God's purpose to redeem all of Creation, through a people of His own choosing. Here we have classic biblical typology: Israel was historically 'elected' by Jehovah to be His people out of all the nations (and, by the way, in the presence of those nations). There can be no diminishing of that historical fact, nor of its significance to God's ultimate purpose. But what must also be recognized is that Israel was both a historical nation and an eschatological type. This is the central argument of the apostle's mini-treatise beginning in Romans Chapter 9. He asks (without explicitly asking), 'What is Israel?' And in answer to this unspoken question Paul states that Israel was *both* the historical, chosen people of God *and* the type of God's universal people in and through Jesus Christ.

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen. But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel.* (Romans 9:1-6)

We cannot imagine how profound and controversial Paul's comment was to his early audience: "They are not all Israel who are of Israel." Paul's solution to this conundrum is, of course, the essence of his doctrine of the Church, the fulfilled Israel in Isra-

---

confusion of identifiers. But it might be possible to include 'Gentiles' within 'Israel.'" And this latter thing is exactly what Paul does in Romans 9-11 and elsewhere.

el's Messiah. But that is material for a later lesson. In establishing, as best we can, Paul's thought patterns as a Jew who has come to know the fulfillment of the divine covenant in Jesus Christ, it is important to try to establish just what it meant to be Israel under the Old Covenant. Not merely the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but what was the *purpose* of God in calling Israel? What was God doing and to what end? We can read the 'end' in Paul's letter to the Romans, but we cannot fully understand Paul's logic if we do not trace the path by which he arrived at his conclusions.

The first concept, therefore, that we have to deal with is that of **Election**. Throughout the history of the formation of Israel as a nation we find God 'choosing' one man over another, and for no other reason than His choice. He called Abram from Ur of the Chaldees when at the time Abram and his family were pagans (*cp.* Joshua 24:2). God chose between Ishmael and Isaac long before the latter was even born, and then between Esau and Jacob while the two were still in their mother's womb. God set His love upon Abraham and his seed, the nation of Israel, for the sole revealed reason that He did so, and this divine love forms the consistent backdrop to the seminal event in Israel's national history: the Exodus.

*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

(Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

We know that the purpose of the Babylonian Exile was to punish Israel for its apostasy; but what was the purpose of the Egyptian Captivity? All we are told in the biblical text is that "*the sins of the Amorites were not yet full*" and it seems for this reason that the Promised Land was not yet ready for God's people. But does this mean that God's call of Abraham was premature? Should He have waited another four hundred years so that the land would be ready for habitation by His people? Of course not.

Therefore we are challenged to find a fuller meaning behind the 'exile' of God's people to Egypt through those centuries, especially in light of what happened to them in Egypt - *bondage*.

The account of Israel's journey down to Egypt - the initial favor shown by the then-ruling Pharaonic dynasty, the granting of land both fertile and isolated - can be interpreted as divine protection of the embryonic nation both from the wickedness of the Amorites as it filled its measure and the paganism of Egypt where Israel was to live for four hundred years. This, of course, eventually led to the Israelites being put under harsh bondage to the Egyptians, which might seem like a miscalculation on God's part, if there could be such a thing. However, it is from the perspective of God's purpose that we seek to understand *why* Israel was sent to Egypt and to bondage. The answer, or at least part of the answer, is found in the divine deliverance of Israel from Egypt: the Exodus. In short, God sent His people *to* Egypt so that He could deliver them *from* Egypt. This great deliverance itself forms a paradigm that actually began with Abraham, occurs again with the return of Israel from the Babylonian Exile, and forms a prophetic motif with regard to the ultimate gathering in which, as Paul puts it, "*all Israel shall be saved.*"

This paradigm is encapsulated in the phrase 'holy people,' or 'holy nation.' The word 'holy' is typically interpreted in terms of personal behavior, and it does have that connotation. But foremost the word means 'separated unto YHWH,' devoted to the LORD. In this broader meaning the phrase carries the import of contrast between the people of God and the people of the world - not unlike the antediluvian contrast between the 'sons of God' (the lineage of Seth) and the 'sons of men' (the lineage of Cain). Thus God's redemptive history unfolds along successive 'callings out' of His people: first Abraham, then Israel from Egypt, then Israel from Babylon, and eventually Israel from the Diaspora with the Gentiles included. The stage for two of these deliverances - the Exodus and the Return from Exile - was the grand empire of man of that day: the Egyptian in the days of the Exodus and the Babylonian in the days of the Exile. The redemptive purpose of God, therefore, is historically set against the pompous, arrogant,

godless empires of Man, with the ultimate deliverance coming during the era of the most inhuman of all human empires, the Roman (*cp.* Daniel 7:7). Thus we can understand why it was that God's people have never themselves constituted a powerful world empire; that result would be diametrically opposed to who they are *in this world* – aliens and sojourners – and such a political empire would reek too much of fallen humanity to represent a work of a holy God. Therefore God's people have always been set against, and often under, the powers of political man, seemingly insignificant and powerless but divinely powerful through faith. Hence Paul,

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*  
(II Corinthians 10:3-6)

But the term 'holy' means more than just separated, it means 'holy' in the common understanding of that term: sinless, perfect, as is "*be holy as the LORD your God is holy.*"<sup>67</sup> What is significant with regard to this criterion of the people of God is that the people of God never even came close to the standard. In fact, at the very beginning of Israel's life as a nation – a 'holy nation' – Moses prophesied of her eventual and inevitable apostasy. In his 'song' of Deuteronomy 32, Moses speaks of what God had done to rescue Israel from the nations and to make her His own people. But no sooner was Israel established and prosperous then she fell away,

*But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked; You grew fat, you grew thick, you are obese!  
Then he forsook God who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation.  
They provoked Him to jealousy with foreign gods; with abominations they provoked Him to anger. They sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know,  
To new gods, new arrivals that your fathers did not fear.  
Of the Rock who begot you, you are unmindful, and have forgotten the God who fathered you.*  
(Deuteronomy 32:15-18)

---

<sup>67</sup> Leviticus 11:44 and many other places.

This prophecy is in keeping with the spiritual condition of Israel, God's chosen people, yet unable to fully obey God or give Him the honor that is His due. In the midst of reminding the people what the LORD had already done for the nation in delivering them from their Egyptian bondage, Moses reminds them that they just do not have what it takes to fully walk with their God.

*Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land – the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.*

(Deuteronomy 29:2-4)

Israel was called to be a holy people, not merely separated unto the true God, but also obedient to His commandments and observant of His statutes. This, however, they could not do because they did not have the heart to do it; that could only come from God himself. Having prophesied that the nation would fall away from God and would suffer divine discipline and exile, Moses offers the hope of the promise of restoration by God. Note that the Exile was already bound up in the Exodus.

*Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. **And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.***

(Deuteronomy 30:1-6)

All indications are there to show that the call of Israel was not the end-all of God's redemptive plan. The Abrahamic Covenant contained the seed (both literally and figuratively) of worldwide redemption, both for mankind and for Creation. Israel

was to be the vehicle for that redemption, but to view Israel as that redemption is to grossly misread even the history of that people. *God had to do something with their hearts,* which is, of course, no different than what God must do for every man's heart, whether Jew or Gentile.

All this is to say that while Israel was undoubtedly the uniquely called people of God, it was also a type of the universal people of God yet to come. Israel was a microcosm of the 'new humanity' that would be formed in Christ. Israel was the embedded culture in the ancient world that pointed to the embedded church in the world today. But this could only be true of the Israel of faith and not of the Israel of physical descent. This is, as Paul puts it in Galatians 4, the Israel 'of promise.' Through the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, Paul comes to the realization that national or ethnic Israel could not comprise 'true' Israel, and his redefinition of Israel is both radical and eminently biblical. "Paul has secured a point of critical leverage by means of which he can reinforce his earlier arguments by calling for a redefinition of Israel itself. In that redefinition, historic Israel may find itself no longer in the role of Isaac and Jacob, but in the role of Ishmael and Esau, that is, in the role of those who represent the foil to God's election of Israel!"<sup>68</sup>

Paul's remarkable (but nonetheless inspired) allegory of Abraham's family goes a long way toward showing that the call of Israel – hence the Exodus itself – was at all times an incomplete act of divine redemption, an act that pointed forward to its own true fulfillment.

*For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondwoman and one by the free woman. But the son by the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and the son by the free woman through the promise. This is allegorically speaking: for these women are two covenants, one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves; she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. But the Jerusalem above is free; she is our mother.* (Galatians 4:22-26)

---

<sup>68</sup> Dunn; 511.

It is truly impossible to overstate the significance of this interpretation by Paul, for it states unequivocally that Israel is not what it seems to be. Here in Galatians the apostle gives vivid explanation to the more enigmatic statement he makes in Romans 9, that “*all Israel is not Israel.*” Dunn writes, “Paul makes this apparently self-contradictory statement in a matter-of-fact way as though it was an unexceptional statement. For him it was evidently an obvious conclusion to draw from the scriptural history of God’s covenant relation with his people.”<sup>69</sup> Paul was not alone among Second Temple Jews in making the claim that mere physical descent from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did not constitute a true Israelite, the Essenes and Qumran community did the same. Furthermore, it was an established tenet of the Pharisees, of which Saul the Tarsian was a devoted member, that adherence to Torah was the mark of a true Israelite, not mere lineage of birth. But this bold challenge to Israel’s identity in Romans 9 has profound ramifications on Israel’s history, and calls into question the meaning of the milestone events of that history, not least of which are the Exodus and the Exile. When we tie the loose ends together as Paul has done, we reasonably conclude that just as God had promised to circumcise the hearts of His people, so also He has promised a *New Exodus* and a *True Return* from Exile. “Many of Paul’s contemporaries were looking for that new day to dawn in which, at last, God’s covenant faithfulness would be unveiled in a great act of redemption, of new exodus, of return from exile.”<sup>70</sup>

This we find is the language of the Old Testament prophets, that Israel’s God would one day again call His people from distant lands – a second Exodus and a true return from Exile. But the language of this promised intervention is often coupled with the language of the New Earth, of full deliverance not only from oppressing world powers, but from sin and death. For instance, the famous messianic prophecy of Isaiah 11 in which the promised advent of the Son of David is coupled with the peaceful cohabitation of currently hostile nature *and* the calling of God’s people from all the na-

---

<sup>69</sup> Dunn, James D. G. *Word Biblical Commentary: Romans 9-16* (Dallas: Word Books; 1988); 547.

<sup>70</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 815.

tions, and this is by no means limited to the Jews of the Diaspora but is extended also to the Gentiles. First, the promised advent of the true king in the lineage of David.

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him,  
The Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might,  
The Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD. His delight is in the fear of the LORD,  
And He shall not judge by the sight of His eyes, nor decide by the hearing of His ears;  
But with righteousness He shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay  
the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist.*  
(Isaiah 11:1-5)

Next comes the promise of the New Earth in which, as Peter says, righteousness dwells.

*The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
The calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.  
The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together;  
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the  
weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den.  
They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,  
For the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*  
(Isaiah 11:6-9)

Finally there is the universal call of God's people from every nation on earth, including the Gentiles as well as the scattered Jews, the true Israel.

*And in that day there shall be a Root of Jesse, who shall stand as a banner to the people;  
For the Gentiles shall seek Him, and His resting place shall be glorious.  
It shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time  
To recover the remnant of His people who are left,  
From Assyria and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush, from Elam and Shinar,  
From Hamath and the islands of the sea.  
He will set up a banner for the nations, and will assemble the outcasts of Israel,  
And gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth.*  
(Isaiah 11:10-12)

This passage is remarkable in its combination of several aspects of Israel's (and Creation's) eschatological hope coming together in one place. Thomas Schreiner notes "Significantly, the first promise of a new exodus occurs in a text that promises a future Davidic king, and in which the promise of a new creation...is found. Just as Yahweh liberated Israel from Egypt in the first exodus, so he will bring his people back from Assyria, Egypt, and as far as the coastlands in the second exodus...It seems reasonable to conclude from chapter 11 that the new David, the new exodus, and the new creation will commence at the same time."<sup>71</sup> There seems to be little doubt that this is exactly how Paul interpreted Isaiah 11 and the finished work of the risen Jesus Christ, the promised Son of David.

What was the essential ingredient that was missing from the first Exodus? What was the reason that the return from Babylon did not and could not constitute the true and final return of God's people to His favor? The answer to these questions is the same: there had not yet been a full and final atonement for sins. God's people had not yet been washed clean and God's creation had not yet been redeemed. No matter to what extent Israel as a nation resecured a degree of autonomy, no matter how grand the Second Temple might be built and embellished, no matter how elaborate the priestly services and how arduous the Torah schools might be, sin remained, and Israel knew it. The true return from Exile, coincident with the second and final Exodus, was to be a time when Israel's God removed the iniquity of the land entirely. The post-exilic prophet Zechariah makes clear the fact that this return from Babylon was not the full return that faithful Israel was anticipating. That full accomplishment of God's purpose still awaited the advent of 'the Branch.' Using the same language of the Exodus and of the Promised Land, Zechariah writes,

*'Hear, O Joshua, the high priest, you and your companions who sit before you,  
For they are a wondrous sign;  
For behold, I am bringing forth My Servant the BRANCH.  
For behold, the stone that I have laid before Joshua:*

---

<sup>71</sup> Schreiner; 337

*Upon the stone are seven eyes. Behold, I will engrave its inscription,  
Says the LORD of hosts, 'And I will remove the iniquity of that land in one day.'  
'In that day,' says the LORD of hosts,  
'Everyone will invite his neighbor under his vine and under his fig tree.'*

(Zechariah 3:8-10)

Later in the same prophet we read,

*In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem,  
for sin and for uncleanness.*

(Zechariah 13:1)

Can there be any doubt that these were the same 'day' in which the God of Israel would fully and finally intervene on behalf of His people, the true Israel? And can there be any doubt that He has done all these things in and through His Son, Jesus Christ? Once again, the language Paul uses in his epistles would strongly indicate that he certainly thought not. For instance, his letter to the Ephesians he speaks of God tearing down the wall of separation that existed between the Jewish people and the nations, a wall that can only refer to Israel's unique status as God's people constituted as such at Mt. Sinai.

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.*

(Ephesians 2:11-17)<sup>72</sup>

But perhaps the most remarkable passage in light of the new Exodus is found, not surprisingly, in Romans, where Paul speaks of a deliverance from bondage far greater than that of Israel from Egypt or from Babylon, the deliverance of all believers

---

<sup>72</sup> It is noteworthy that Paul continues in this same vein by speaking of the new community of Jews and Gentiles united in Christ Jesus as the new temple of the Lord (*cp.* 2:19-22).

from the bondage of sin. This deliverance alone answers to the full purpose of God's call, a *holy* people.

*But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life.*  
(Romans 6:17-22)

Sin was the real problem, not the oppression of a pagan imperial overlord or even the idolatry seeping into the social and religious life of Israel as a nation. Sin was the true slave-master, and all men, including the Jews, were held in its bondage. Sin is the true Egypt, the true Babylon, and Exodus/Return from physical bondage in either place could not eradicate the inner bondage holding every human heart in chains. In the victory of Jesus Christ over the grave, proof positive to the apostle that Jesus was the Passover Lamb offered for God's people, there is the only full and final Exodus, deliverance from the bondage to sin, and Return from Exile, joining together all of God's people "*from every tongue, tribe, and nation.*"

## Lesson 5 – The Eschatological Spirit

**Text: Isaiah 11:1-5; 59:16-21; Jeremiah 31:31-33; Ezekiel 37:1-14**

*“Probably the one feature that distances the New Testament church the most from its contemporary counterpart is its thoroughly eschatological perspective of all of life.”*  
(Gordon Fee)

The apocryphal writings of the intertestamental period ought not be viewed as canon; the Jews never viewed them as such. However, they are valuable reading material for insight into the life of Israel from the close of the Old Testament canon to the advent of John the Baptist, roughly four hundred years *when there was no prophet in the land*. The prophetic voice had gone silent with the prophet Malachi, and now Israel awaited *“the messenger of the covenant”* who would come suddenly to His temple.<sup>73</sup> The loss of the prophetic voice was more serious for the people of Israel than it might appear at first glance, for it meant ultimately the absence of the Spirit of God, the Spirit who spoke the word of God through the prophets. Without the Spirit, Israel might be in the land again and might rebuild the temple, but she was not yet freed from exile, she had not yet truly experienced the Exodus. The impact of this lack of divine presence is seen in an event otherwise glorious in the history of post-exilic Israel: the wresting of Jerusalem from the Greek overlords, and the cleansing of the Temple precincts that had been defiled by them. Encountering the altar, the priests selected to cleanse the Temple did not know what to do with it, since it had been used by the Greeks for pagan offerings. We read of their conundrum in I Maccabees 4,

Then Judas and his brothers said, “Now that our enemies have been crushed, let us go up to purify the sanctuary<sup>73</sup> and rededicate it.” So the whole army assembled, and went up to Mount Zion. They found the sanctuary desolate, the altar desecrated, the gates burnt, weeds growing in the courts as in a thicket or on some mountain, and the priests’ chambers demolished. Then they tore their garments and made great lamentation; they sprinkled their heads with ashes and prostrated themselves. And when the signal was given with trumpets, they cried out to Heaven. Judas appointed men to attack those in

---

<sup>73</sup> Malachi 3:1

the citadel, while he purified the sanctuary. He chose blameless priests, devoted to the law; these purified the sanctuary and carried away the stones of the defilement to an unclean place. They deliberated what ought to be done with the altar for burnt offerings that had been desecrated. They decided it best to tear it down, lest it be a lasting shame to them that the Gentiles had defiled it; so they tore down the altar. **They stored the stones in a suitable place on the temple mount, until the coming of a prophet who could determine what to do with them.**<sup>74</sup>

The phenomenon of the Spirit in the Old Testament has been the cause of perennial debate among Christians for two thousand years. Was the Spirit known among the Old Testament faithful as a distinct *person* of the Trinity? There is little or no data to indicate that this was the case. Rather it appears that the Spirit of the LORD was the active presence of Israel's God in the midst of His people, accomplishing His purpose for them. There is a close connection, for instance, with the *Shekinah* and the Spirit as well as both with the *glory* of Jehovah. It is evident that the pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night was no mere natural phenomenon, for when the pillar descended on the tabernacle, Moses would enter in to converse with God. Moses and Israel knew that God was in the pillar, as in the *Shekinah*, though the concept of a separate 'person' of the one God would have been quite foreign to them.

*Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.* (Exodus 24:16-18)

Moses' understanding may not have extended to the theological intricacies of *hypostasis* from the writings of Athanasius or the Council of Nicæa, but he understood completely that the *presence* of the LORD was of the very essence of the identity of the people he was leading, the nation he was instrumental in creating. Though the word 'Spirit' is not used often in these early texts, the general flow of comprehension from the 'presence' to the 'glory' to the 'Spirit' is unmistakable as the Old Testament revelation

---

<sup>74</sup> I Maccabees 4:36-46. [1 Maccabees, CHAPTER 4 | USCCB](#) Accessed 26September2021.

unfolds. This is evident in one of the most famous encounters between Moses and YHWH recorded in Scripture.

*Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people.' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people." And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." So the LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name." And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." And the LORD said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:12-23)*

As the progressive revelation of the Old Testament progresses, we encounter the Spirit of the LORD as the inspiration of the prophets. The classic passage in this regard is the narrative of the prophet Elijah's impending departure, and the tenacious loyalty of his disciple, Elisha. The younger prophet seeks a 'double portion' of the spirit that is on Elijah, and the older prophet promises this under one condition.

*And so it was, when they had crossed over, that Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?" Elisha said, "Please let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." So he said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. And Elisha saw it, and he cried out, "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen!" So he saw him no more. And he took hold of his own clothes and tore them into two pieces. He also took up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and went back and stood by the bank of the Jordan. Then he took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and struck the water, and said, "Where is the LORD God of Elijah?" And when he also had struck the water, it was divided this way and that; and Elisha crossed over. Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, "The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha." And they came to meet him, and bowed to the ground before him. (II Kings 2:9-15)*

It is clearest in the Old Testament that the anointing of the Spirit of the LORD constituted an enabling, an empowerment, for individuals to do the will of Israel's God in some specified function. This would encompass the craftsman whose skill would embroider the tabernacle, the High Priest who would minister within that tabernacle, the eventual king who would rule over God's people, and the prophet who would speak the 'word of the LORD' to those same people. The distinct personality of the Holy Spirit within the Triune Godhead is not explicitly taught in the Old Testament, but nowhere in that testament is the personality ruled out as impossible. The 'Spirit of the LORD' in the Old Testament is first and foremost the presence of YHWH with His people, both as individuals and as a nation. But nothing that we read there contradict the fuller revelation of the New Testament that this same Spirit is a distinct personality within the one Godhead. What He is, however, in both Israel and the Church is the indispensable presence of the covenant/redeeming God; within Him present there is no presence of God.

This fact explains the horror of Ezekiel's vision of the departing glory of YHWH in Ezekiel 10, and the earnest hope and faithful expectation among the exiles and the subsequent returnees, that the Spirit of the LORD would one day return to take up residence with God's people. Indeed, this particular contour of Israel's hope is the one that ties all the others together, for the gift of the Holy Spirit promised in the Old Testament is nothing less than the return of the *Shekinah* to God's temple; the gift of the Holy Spirit is the anointing and empowerment of the promised Son of David, the Messiah; the gift of the Holy Spirit is the one and only manifestation that Israel has finally experienced the Exodus and the return from Exile, because it is the evidence of the new creation promised by Israel's God. Thomas Schreiner writes, "The Spirit is the eschatological Spirit who brings eschatological salvation, and the servant of the Lord is endowed with that Spirit, showing that the new creation cannot arrive apart from the Spirit or apart from the servant of the Lord...The Spirit is poured out when Jesus is glorified, and the coming of the Spirit signals the arrival of the last days, the fulfillment of all of God's saving promises." This is exactly how the apostle Paul saw things.

Tracing the contours of the promise of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament will help us see both the expectation of a Pharisee like Saul the Tarsian and the realization by the same man that these promises were fulfilled in and through Jesus Christ. Once again, however, we need to remember that the themes discussed in these lessons are not mutually exclusive; they cannot be extracted from one another and placed under a theological microscope. Rather they are all bound together so that the overall expectation of YHWH's future intervention is a comprehensive result of each theme, working together with each of the others. Thus the Davidic king is anointed with the Spirit of the LORD and the Spirit-led return from Exile/Exodus is the advent of the New Earth. Perhaps most significant of all these associations is that between the Holy Spirit and the Resurrection, clearly an integral thought in the conversion of Paul.

Vos, in an excellent article titled "Paul's Eschatological Concept of the Spirit," provides a useful summary of how the Old Testament prophetic word dealt with the promise of the return of the Spirit. These strands of Old Testament prophetic thought constituted the expectation of the Pharisee Saul, and would form the firm convictions of the Apostle Paul. "For Paul, the Spirit was regularly associated with the world to come, and from the Spirit thus conceived in all His supernatural and redemptive potency the Christian life receives throughout its specific character."<sup>75</sup>

Vos speaks first in this essay about the Old Testament paradigm of the promised new world, and the centrality of the presence of Israel's God through His Spirit to this reality of a new world. "First, we have the idea that the Spirit by special manifestations of the supernatural, by certain prophetic signs, heralds the near approach of the future world."<sup>76</sup> That the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has the entire world for its purview is apparent in the famous 'Pentecostal' prophecy of Joel 2. Set in the context of complete restoration of Israel to God's favor and to the promised land, the prophecy extends the reach of this future grace to 'all flesh,' an extension recognized by Peter as fulfilled on the day of Pentecost after Jesus' ascension.

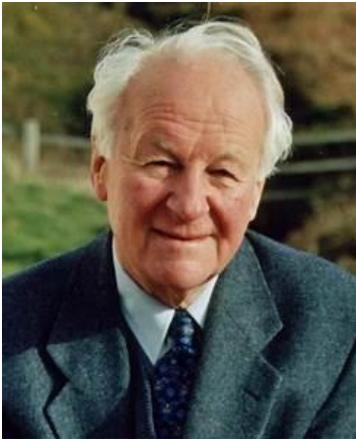
---

<sup>75</sup> Vos, Cornelius *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 1980); 125.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*; 95-96.

*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams,  
Your young men shall see visions. And also on My menservants and on My maidservants  
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.  
And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into  
blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.  
And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.  
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance,  
As the LORD has said, among the remnant whom the LORD calls.* (Joel 2:28-32)

The linkage between the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the 'great and awesome day of the LORD will be addressed later in this study, but it deserves noting here that the two events are tied together as one in this prophecy. That the early church considered this prophecy fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, validated by the



John R. W. Stott (1921-2011)

outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon His disciples on Pentecost, is evident from Peter's first sermon, in which the apostle quotes verbatim the same passage. The only modification, though very important, is Peter's insertion of "*it will come about in the last days*" for Joel's "*it will come about after this.*" Thus Peter's "*this is that which was prophesied by Joel*" does not leave room for analogy between God's promise through the prophet and the events of that first Christian Pentecost; the words can only reasonably (and *literally*) be interpreted as a one-to-one correspondence, prophecy to fulfillment. John Stott writes in his commentary on the Acts passage,

It is the unanimous conviction of the New Testament authors that Jesus inaugurated the last days or Messianic age, and that the final proof of this was the outpouring of the Spirit, since this was the Old Testament promise of promises for the end-time. This being so, we must be careful not to re-quote Joel's prophecy as if we are still awaiting its fulfillment, or even as if its fulfillment has been only partial, and we await some future and complete fulfillment. For this is not how Peter understood and applied the text. The whole Messianic era, which stretches between the two comings of Christ, is the age of the Spirit in which his ministry is one of abundance.<sup>77</sup>

---

<sup>77</sup> Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Acts* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press; 1990); 73.

Peter was by no means alone in his view that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the key marker of the 'last days'; although he does not quote from the same prophetic passage, the same language will be very evident as we investigate Paul's writings below.

The second aspect of the Old Testament promise concerning the Spirit note in Vos' essay is that "the Spirit is brought into the eschatological era as forming the official equipment of the Messiah."<sup>78</sup> 'Official equipment' is a somewhat odd, perhaps, way of saying that the promised Messiah would be filled with the Spirit for the accomplishment of His ministry and for the benefit of God's people. Certainly the *locus classicus* for this concept is Isaiah 11, which we have already had occasion to review in terms of other contours of the Jewish hope.

*There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.  
The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
The Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*

(Isaiah 11:1-2)

Vos writes, "It is to be noticed that the Messiah receives the Spirit as a permanent possession, and not temporarily as the prophets."<sup>79</sup> This is, of course, what is meant when John writes in his gospel, "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure."<sup>80</sup> Of this unique giftedness in the Messiah the prophet Isaiah is especially emphatic. In addition to the passage quoted above, consider the following, especially in terms of the comprehensive nature of the individual quotes – bringing in various aspects of God's divine redemptive plan in the Messiah.

*Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!  
I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.* (Isaiah 42:1)

*He saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor;  
Therefore His own arm brought salvation for Him; and His own righteousness, it sustained Him.*

---

<sup>78</sup> Vos; *Redemptive History*; 96.

<sup>79</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>80</sup> John 3:34

*For He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation on His head;  
He put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak.  
According to their deeds, accordingly He will repay, fury to His adversaries,  
Recompense to His enemies; The coastlands He will fully repay.*

*“So shall they fear the name of the LORD from the west,  
And His glory from the rising of the sun; when the enemy comes in like a flood,  
The Spirit of the LORD will lift up a standard against him.*

*The Redeemer will come to Zion,*

*And to those who turn from transgression in Jacob,” says the LORD.*

*“As for Me,” says the LORD, “this is My covenant with them: My Spirit who is upon you, and My words which I have put in your mouth, shall not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your descendants, nor from the mouth of your descendants’ descendants,” says the LORD, “from this time and forevermore.”* (Isaiah 59:16-21)

And one of the most beautiful of the Messianic prophecies, quoted by the Lord Jesus Himself in His hometown of Nazareth:

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me  
To preach good tidings to the poor;  
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;  
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God;  
To comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion,  
To give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning,  
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;  
That they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.* (Isaiah 61:1-3)

Schreiner notes, “The Spirit is the eschatological Spirit who brings eschatological salvation, and the servant of the Lord is endowed with that Spirit, showing that the new creation cannot arrive apart from the Spirit or apart from the servant of the Lord. In the NT Jesus, as the exalted and resurrected Lord, is the one who pours out the Spirit on his people. The Spirit is poured out when Jesus is glorified, and the coming of the Spirit signals the arrival of the last days, the fulfillment of all of God’s saving promises.”<sup>81</sup>

Vos continues, “In the third place the Spirit appears as the source of the future new life of Israel...also as the pledge of divine favor for the new Israel, and as the au-

---

<sup>81</sup> Schreiner; 345.

thor of a radical transformation of physical conditions in the eschatological era, and thus becomes the characteristic of the eschatological state itself.”<sup>82</sup> It is evident from the beginning of revelation, in Genesis 1 & 2, that the Spirit of Jehovah is the agent of life, all life. It is equally evident from Genesis 3 that the sin of Man has brought death into God’s Creation, negating, it would seem, the Life that was integrated into God’s creative work. This reality (and tragedy) forms the backdrop to Paul’s mini-treatise on the fall of Man in Romans 5 (*cp.* 5:12-15). But the promise of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament is the *promise of Life*, both to mankind and to Creation. The unlimited outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the Messiah was intended to be the *new creation* of all things, now begun through the outpouring and the indwelling of the Spirit in the Church. Again, this aspect of the promised Spirit forms a major part of Isaiah’s work, but also of Ezekiel’s.

*People shall mourn upon their breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine.  
On the land of my people will come up thorns and briers,  
Yes, on all the happy homes in the joyous city;  
Because the palaces will be forsaken, the bustling city will be deserted.  
The forts and towers will become lairs forever, a joy of wild donkeys, a pasture of flocks –  
**Until the Spirit is poured upon us from on high,**  
And the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is counted as a forest.  
Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field.  
The work of righteousness will be peace,  
And the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.* (Isaiah 32:12-17)

*Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen.  
Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you:  
‘Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.  
For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground;  
**I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;**  
They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses.’  
One will say, ‘I am the LORD’s’;  
Another will call himself by the name of Jacob;  
Another will write with his hand, ‘The LORD’s,’  
And name himself by the name of Israel.* (Isaiah 44:1-5)

---

<sup>82</sup> Vos; 96.

*Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. **I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live,** and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.'*  
(Ezekiel 37:11-14)

Notice in reading these prophecies, the mention of the Gentiles, the restoration of the earth, and the resurrection of the dead. Peter and Paul and the other New Testament writers did not take these allusions as metaphors, still looking for the 'literal' fulfillment in some far-off millennium. Rather they considered all of these various contours of the Messianic and Spirit promise (for they truly are so united as to be a *singular* promise) as completely fulfilled by the events surrounding Christ's atoning work and the Spirit's consequent outpouring. The application of this principle of *life* is evident, for instance, in Paul's second letter to the Corinthian church.

*Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but **the Spirit gives life.***  
(II Corinthians 3:1-6)

The fourth aspect of the promise of the eschatological Spirit that Vos highlights, is the fact that everything "supernatural and transcendent" in the Old Testament is associated with the Spirit of the LORD. This is to say that the only true remedy for Creation's very physical and mundane problems, caused by Man's sin, must be a sovereign, omnipotent, supernatural, and transcendent work of God, and therefore, by the Spirit of God. The true tabernacle/Temple experience is that in which the Spirit dwells; the true prophet of Jehovah is the one on whom the Spirit of Jehovah has rested; etc. It is as Paul

says in I Corinthians 15, “*the physical/natural comes first, and then the spiritual.*”<sup>83</sup> Vos writes, “It is a recognized principle in New Testament teaching that in one aspect the eschatological order of things is identical with the heavenly order of things brought to light.”<sup>84</sup> It is the Spirit who will bring, and has brought, the heavenly to light.

Thus it is a reasonable conclusion that of all the ‘contours of hope’ that characterized faithful Israel in the desert years/centuries after the departure of the glory of the LORD from the Temple, the most important – or the summation of all – was the gift of the Holy Spirit. There could be no true Temple worship in a place where the *Shekinah* had not descended. There could be no true Exodus, no true return from Exile, for a people who still disobeyed their God and failed to live according to His statutes. But even more significantly, there could be no *new creation* until God sent His Spirit upon all flesh. From a personal or individual perspective, of course, the most powerful and succinct statement of the gospel, found in Ezekiel 36, is based entirely on the gift of the indwelling Spirit of Israel’s God.

*For I will take you from among the nations, gather you out of all countries, and bring you into your own land. Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.* (Ezekiel 36:25-28)

But, as we have seen from the prophecies quoted earlier, the promise of the Spirit was for the restoration not merely of Israel, but of the whole of Creation. The salvation thus wrought by the gift of the Spirit through the ministry of the Messiah, would flow out from Jerusalem/Zion to the whole world, bringing redemption to the Gentiles and, eventually, restoration to Creation. This accomplished reality is unmistakably interwoven into Paul’s own theology. It is the reality of the gift of the Holy Spirit – *already given* – that allows Paul to speak of the Church, and of believers, as the true temple of God *now*. “The church, as it stands now, is thus already the new Temple, and the Spirit that

---

<sup>83</sup> I Corinthians 15:46

<sup>84</sup> Vos; 97.

dwells within is the new Shekinah.”<sup>85</sup> The coming of the Holy Spirit, and His indwelling of believers and the church, is both the inauguration of the new age and the invasion of this present age by the power of the age to come. Richard Hays, in his *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, highlights how critical this reality is to understanding biblical ethics in the light of the finished work of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Showing how biblical eschatology undergirds biblical ecclesiology (and, later, biblical ethics), Hays writes, “The church community is God’s eschatological beachhead, the place where the power of God has invaded the world.”<sup>86</sup> Elsewhere Hays writes, in what is perhaps a summary statement for this entire series,

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the church is an eschatological sign, a foretaste and assurance of God’s promised redemption. Thus, the Spirit-endowed church stands within the present age as a sign of what is to come, already prefiguring the redemption for which it waits.<sup>87</sup>

### **The Eschatological Spirit in Paul’s Letters**

When Vos took up his pen to write an essay on the Apostle Paul, the Holy Spirit, and Eschatology he certainly did not lack for material from Paul’s letters. Several authors of Pauline theologies/summaries have called him the ‘Apostle of the Spirit,’ and there is abundant evidence that the Holy Spirit was a central and critical element in Paul’s converted worldview. “Paul is a minister of the new covenant of the Spirit because he proclaims the message that brings this eschatological community into being.”<sup>88</sup> But we have also seen that Paul’s conversion experience – his encounter with the resurrected Jesus – was the seminal event in his new (literally) life and in his reorientation of theology. The reality of Jesus’ resurrection was to Paul the reality of the general resurrection promised in the Old Testament, not least in Daniel 12. It is clear from this

---

<sup>85</sup> Wright; *PFG*; 712.

<sup>86</sup> Hays, Richard B. *The Moral Vision*; 27.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*; 21.

<sup>88</sup> Hays, *Echoes*; 131.

prophecy that the vision is for the end of the age, the culmination of Israel's hope and expectation.

*At that time Michael shall stand up,  
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;  
And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,  
Even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered,  
Every one who is found written in the book.  
And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake,  
Some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.  
Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament,  
And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.* (Daniel 12:1-3)

Thus we expect to find in Paul's reconfigured theology a beginning emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, coupled with the advent of the Holy Spirit as the redemptive and eschatological content of that resurrection. Vos writes, "As for Paul, his attitude in regard to this matter [*i.e.*, eschatology] was from the outset determined by the fact that he views the resurrection of Christ as the beginning of the general resurrection of the saints."<sup>89</sup> This, in Paul's understanding of Old Testament prophecy, coincides exactly with the end of the age and the beginning of the age to come. Although Paul himself did not participate in the first 'Christian' Pentecost, he was no less filled with the Holy Spirit when he believed (*cp.* Acts 9:17-18), and so the reality of the gift of the Spirit was as experiential to Paul as it was to the Twelve. It was, however, left primarily to Paul to establish the theological, redemptive, and eschatological connection between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit. This he did with consummate (and accustomed) skill.

There are numerous places within Paul's letters where the resurrection and the Spirit are combined in the apostle's thought. One passage within Paul's letters that is perhaps clearest in regard to the connection between the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is Romans 8. It may not appear at first glance that Romans 8, where Paul talks extensively about the Spirit, is in the con-

---

<sup>89</sup> Vos; *RHBI*; 92.

text of the resurrection until one realizes that the argument in this chapter is a continuation of Paul's ongoing treatise since Chapter 4, including what he says about baptism in Chapter 6 where we are told that our baptism in Christ brings us *"into the likeness of His resurrection."* The emphasis in Chapters 6 & 7 is on the freedom that every believer has in Christ Jesus – freedom from the Law and freedom from sin, again with a focus on the resurrection in Romans 7:4, *"Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead..."*

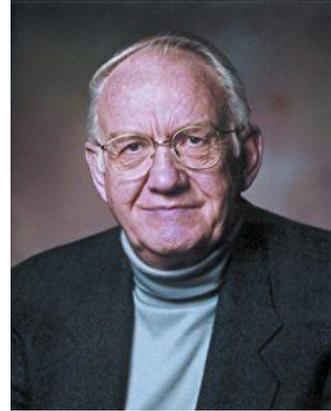
The focus thus far in Paul's argument has been the power of the resurrection in the baptized believer. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the believer's union with Christ through baptism, is the foundation of the new life and the promise of eternal life. But the power, the motive force, of that new life is yet to be explained. This Paul does in Romans 8.

*There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. **But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.** (Romans 8:1-11)*

Thus the presence of the Holy Spirit, both within the believer and within the church, is a guarantee of the future redemption of our bodies, the completed resurrection that has begun with Jesus Christ. This is eschatological language through and through, basing assurance of the future squarely upon the reality of the past resurrec-

tion of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit. “Paul’s gospel was eschatological not because of what he still hoped would happen, but because of what he believed had already happened.”<sup>90</sup> Fee adds succinctly, “The presence of the indwelling Spirit guarantees our future resurrection.”<sup>91</sup> Vos adds, “We have found that the Spirit is both the instrumental cause of the resurrection-act and the permanent substratum of the resurrection-life.”<sup>92</sup>

Significant to Paul’s argument both here in Romans and elsewhere is the impact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit on the continued regime of Torah. The apostle utilizes the analogy of a marriage, in which the marital bond is broken by the death of one spouse, without sin on either part, the surviving spouse is *free*. This is, according to Paul’s logic, the condition of the one who is in Christ by the power of the Spirit: *free from the Law* of sin and death (8:2). Freedom from the Law means the end of the covenant of which Torah was the operative principle – the end of the Old Covenant and the advent of the New. Gordon Fee writes, “For Paul, the gift of the Spirit, along with the death and resurrection of Christ, meant the *end* of the time of Torah.”<sup>93</sup> The Law has been set aside, powerless as it was due to indwelling sin, and in its place has arrived the *power that raised Christ Jesus from the dead*, the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit which now enables *the righteous requirement of the Law* to be fulfilled in every believer. Again Fee,



Gordon Fee (b. 1934)

In rendering Torah obsolete and in effectively dealing with sin, Christ has opened the way for the Spirit to ‘fulfill’ the very purpose for which Torah existed but which it was unable to provide: righteousness...Even though one may recognize Torah for what it is, God’s good and holy thing, its ineffectiveness with regard to sin has finally rendered it basically finished; it is now ‘the *oldness* of the letter,’ replaced through the effective work of Christ by ‘the *newness* of the Spirit.’<sup>94</sup>

---

<sup>90</sup> Dunn; 465.

<sup>91</sup> Fee; 552.

<sup>92</sup> Vos, *RHBI*; 108.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*; 369.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*; 530.

Thus the tyranny of sin, which Torah was helpless to do anything about, has been overcome through Christ's death; but the 'righteous requirement' – the *real aim* of Torah, if you will – is now fulfilled in us by God through his Spirit and is evidenced by the fact of our walking in the Spirit and not in the flesh...The Spirit himself fulfills Torah by replacing it, and he does so by enabling God's people to 'fulfill' the 'whole of Torah' – which in other contexts is expressed in the love command, the initial fruit of the Spirit. In bringing the time of Torah to an end, God did not thereby eliminate its purpose, but though the Spirit has brought that purpose to fruition.<sup>95</sup>

It is significant to the logical flow of this study to notice that Paul does not limit his treatise in Romans 8 merely to *individual* salvation. Rather he incorporates, in good, Old Testament prophetic fashion, the restoration of Creation into the very same work of the Holy Spirit.

*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.* (Romans 8:19-25)

The combination of personal and creational within this monumental treatise on salvation through the resurrection of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, confirms our previous contention that God's redemptive plan *always* encompassed both Man and Creation, and *both* were fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Thus "the twin realities of the death and resurrection of Christ and the gift of the eschatological Spirit"<sup>96</sup> guide the continuing eschatological thinking of the Apostle Paul. "Again, this verifies that for Paul the Spirit was an essentially eschatological reality. For him and the Judaism he represented, the outpouring of the Spirit and the resurrection of the dead were the key elements to their eschatological hopes. For the early church, including Paul, the resur-

---

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*; 536.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*; 363,

rection of Jesus and the subsequent gift of the eschatological Spirit meant that the future had therefore already arrived in some measure."<sup>97</sup>

With the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church of Jesus Christ, we arrive at the culmination of the contours of Jewish hope. There is a return of the *Shekinah*, the real presence of Israel's God, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as there is the fulfillment of the covenant and Torah in the indwelling of the same Spirit. There is the beginning and guarantor of the general resurrection of God's saint through the resurrection of the Messiah, Jesus. These events are eschatological in that they are the fulfillment of Israel's eschatological hope, the fulfillment of all that God had promised to do on behalf of His people and His glory. A new Temple has begun to be erected, the Temple of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the Church. And this Temple is the centerpiece no longer of a single city, but of a new creation - a *New Jerusalem*. G. K. Beale writes, "The Spirit himself is the beginning evidence of the new creation, wherein is resurrection existence and the abode of the cosmic temple."<sup>98</sup> This understanding for Paul tied together the eschatological hope that he as a faithful Jew had clung to, with the ecclesiology of the new Church as the community of the Spirit of the resurrected Messiah. This in turn would inform Paul's ethical stipulations and guidelines for his churches: *Eschatology - Ecclesiology - Ethics*. Fee writes, "The church is an eschatological community, whose members live in the present as those stamped with eternity...Ethical life, therefore, does not consist of rules to live by. Rather, empowered by the Spirit, we now live the life of the future in the present age, the life that characterizes God himself."<sup>99</sup>

The claim of the first Christians, then, was that the Spirit had been dispensed as promised. The drought of the Spirit had ended. The longed for and expected new age had begun. In eschatological terms, this experience of the Spirit was as decisive for the Christians' self-understanding as was Jesus' resurrection. As the latter brought conviction that the last days were upon them (the resurrection of the dead had begun), so the gift of the Spirit brought them existential confirmation within (the new heart).<sup>100</sup>

---

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*; 573.

<sup>98</sup> Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2011); 272.

<sup>99</sup> Fee; 804.

<sup>100</sup> Dunn; 418.

## Lesson 6 – A New Day Has Dawned

**Text: Isaiah 43:14-21; II Corinthians 5:14-17**

*“Thus, believers’ present identification with Christ’s resurrection is identification with the new creation, since his resurrection was the very inception of the eschatological new creation.”*  
(G. K. Beale)



John Newton (1725-1807)

There is often a certain irony in divine providence. John Newton, famous for his many hymns but especially for *Amazing Grace*, wrote in that hymn the line, “I was once blind but now I see.” The blindness of which he speaks in the hymn is spiritual; he was blind to the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ, but gained his sight upon conversion. The irony in Newton’s life is that, toward the end of it, he became physically blind. This did not stop him from preaching, as he was now able to see more clearly with his spiritual eyes than he once did with his physical. In referring to himself as blind before his conversion, Newton employed a common biblical metaphor for one who is lost and without God. Paul used this figure of speech often, but with him it had a deeper, more physical meaning. When he encountered the risen Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus – the event that we have maintained was seminal to his later theology – the immediate impact of the encounter was to render Paul blind. *“And Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing.”*<sup>101</sup> Paul received both his physical sight and his spiritual sight at the same time, when he received regeneration by the Holy Spirit, *“Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on the road by which you were coming, has sent me so that you may regain your sight, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”*<sup>102</sup>

The manner of Paul’s conversion was not intended to be normative for all believers – John Newton could see perfectly well with his physical eyes at the time of his con-

---

<sup>101</sup> Acts 9:8

<sup>102</sup> Acts 9:17

version, which is the experience of the vast majority of sinners converted to faith in Jesus Christ. No, Paul's experience was intended, it would seem, as a powerful metaphor describing the blindness in which he lived (thinking he could see) and the sight he so desperately needed. Consider the apostle's later challenge to his unbelieving Jewish brethren in Rome; is not his own pre-conversion life encapsulated in the diatribe?

*Indeed you are called a Jew, and rest on the law, and make your boast in God, and know His will, and approve the things that are excellent, being instructed out of the law, **and are confident that you yourself are a guide to the blind, a light to those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, having the form of knowledge and truth in the law. You, therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself? You who preach that a man should not steal, do you steal? You who say, "Do not commit adultery," do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who make your boast in the law, do you dishonor God through breaking the law?*** (Romans 2:17-23)

Paul's experience of physical blindness, removed at the same time he received his spiritual sight, seemed to establish to him in a very physical way, that a new day had dawned with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. For a Second Temple Jew, a Pharisee at that, the only 'new day' that was expected was the Day of YHWH – the Day of the LORD – so often promised by Israel's God through the Old Testament prophets. This concept of the Day of YHWH pulled together the various strands of Israel's hope that their covenant God would one day again intervene – fully and finally – on behalf of His covenant and His people. N. T. Wright notes that "many of Paul's contemporaries were looking for that new day to dawn in which, at last, God's covenant faithfulness would be unveiled in a great act of redemption, of new exodus, of return from exile."<sup>103</sup>

As with so many other aspects of Old Testament eschatology, the Day of the LORD has largely been consigned in modern evangelical Christian eschatology to a time yet future, and perhaps far future. There is little agreement as to what that Day will entail, when it will occur, and what it will mean. This confusion of interpretation is largely due to the fact that most modern exegetes fail to consider the concept in its Old Testament context and as subsequently understood by the Apostle Paul in light of the

---

<sup>103</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 815.

death and resurrection of Jesus. Really, however, one does not need to dig deep into Pauline theology to realize that the early Church believed that the promised Day had come in Christ Jesus. One need only accept the testimony of Peter in his first sermon.

*But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, "Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But **this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:***

*'And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,  
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions,  
Your old men shall dream dreams.  
And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy.  
I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath:  
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.  
The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,  
**Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.***

*And it shall come to pass*

*That whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.'* (Acts 2:14-21)

It was left to Paul to develop the 'theology' behind the realization that Israel's God had indeed acted, fully and finally, in His Son Jesus Christ, and to recalibrate the entire Old Testament eschatology around the *fact* of the resurrection of Jesus – Israel's Messiah – from the dead. This recalibration was centered on the fact that, now that God had raised Jesus from the dead, the 'Day' that had been so earnestly expected had most certainly dawned. Thus, "there is a sense in which Paul's theology is 'eschatological' through and through – not that he spent all his time talking about the future, but that all his thinking, on all key topics, was shaped by his belief that in Jesus, and especially in his death and resurrection, the expected 'end' had come forward into the middle of history, and that by the work of the spirit, implementing the achievement of Jesus, the long-awaited renewal was already starting to take place."<sup>104</sup> And this renewal, for Paul, meant not merely his own salvation; it meant the restoration of the entire Creation of

---

<sup>104</sup> Wright, *PGF*; 1046-47.

God. Again, his comment in II Corinthians 4 seems to refer autobiographically to his own conversion experience as much as to that of all believers. Notice the ‘creation’ language the apostle uses to speak of a sinner’s conversion through the ‘enlightenment’ that comes only from God (as well, significantly, to his usage of the ‘blindness’ metaphor in referring to the unbeliever),

*But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them. For we do not preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord, and ourselves your bondservants for Jesus’ sake. **For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*** (II Corinthians 4:3-6)

Paul’s thinking regarding the world after the resurrection of Jesus Christ is now couched in terms of ‘creation,’ in particular, ‘new creation.’ How this ties into the concept of the Day of YHWH requires a brief – really, it requires a thorough, but we only have space for a brief – review of what the Old Testament has to say about that ‘Day.’

The frequent reference to the Day of YHWH in the Old Testament does not, unfortunately, provide instant clarity as to either *when* that Day will happen or *what* will occur on that Day. Primarily, though there are many facets to the opacity, the problem lies in whether the Day of YHWH constitutes a day of *judgment* or a day of *salvation*. Thomas Schreiner notes that “in many instances the day of the Lord represents Yahweh’s covenant judgment or covenant salvation.”<sup>105</sup> Additionally, it is apparent that the Day of YHWH also constitutes a physical manifestation of the return of Israel to sovereign possession of the land promised to Abraham and secured under Joshua and, later, David. Yet that same Day speaks of the deliverance of Israel from sin. An example of this nuanced meaning is evident in Zechariah, where both of these features are present only a few verses apart. The terminology is not uniform – ‘*in that day*’ is combined with ‘*a day is coming*’ – but the sense is that the prophet is speaking of the same act of Israel’s God throughout,

---

<sup>105</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*; 403.

*In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness. It shall be in that day," says the LORD of hosts, "that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land. (Zechariah 13:1-2)*

*Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, and your spoil will be divided in your midst.  
For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem;  
The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished.  
Half of the city shall go into captivity,  
But the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city.  
Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as He fights in the day of battle.  
And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east.  
And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley;  
Half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south.  
Then you shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal.  
Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.  
Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You.  
It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; The lights will diminish.  
It shall be one day which is known to the LORD – neither day nor night.  
But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light.  
And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,  
Half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea;  
In both summer and winter it shall occur.  
And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. in that day it shall be –  
"The LORD is one," and His name one. (Zechariah 14:1-9)*

Interpretation of such passages as these has been unnecessarily complicated by modern – especially Dispensational – exegetes reading them as separate ‘days’ of the Lord due to the seemingly separate content of each passage. Interpreted through the understanding given to Paul – *through the filter of the Christ-event* – will help to clarify much of the prophetic/poetic language that is used. The first passage refers to salvation; the second to judgment – does that mean that there are two ‘Days’ of the Lord? Or does it mean that the same ‘Day’ is being viewed along two perspectives of its impact? Understood through the revelation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, it becomes apparent that the same day will be judgment to some and salvation to others.<sup>106</sup> Reviewing the

---

<sup>106</sup> This should not be a surprise when one realizes that the Gospel itself is the fragrance of life unto life to those who believe, and the stench of death unto death to those who are perishing in their unbelief (*cp.* II Cor. 2:15-16).

event as it appears in Isaiah, Schreiner notes, “The judgment of Israel for its sin is feature in the day of the lord. The day of the Lord is a day of both judgment and salvation. The shocking element for Israel is that the day of the Lord did not guarantee their salvation.”<sup>107</sup> Elsewhere he adds, “What is remarkable, is that the day of the Lord is one of judgment. Israel cannot count on salvation if it is not obeying the Lord...Unless they repent and obey Yahweh, those who comfort themselves with the thought of being delivered on the day of the Lord are deluded.”<sup>108</sup> These comments are in reference to the Day of YHWH as found in the prophet Joel, the same one quoted by Peter at that first Christian Pentecost.

*The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great;  
For strong is the One who executes His word.  
**For the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; Who can endure it?**  
“Now, therefore,” says the LORD, “Turn to Me with all your heart,  
With fasting, with weeping, and with mourning.”  
So rend your heart, and not your garments; return to the LORD your God,  
For He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness;  
And He relents from doing harm.  
Who knows if He will turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind Him –  
A grain offering and a drink offering for the LORD your God? (Joel 2:11-14)*

It is in the same chapter and the same context that Joel furnishes the prophecy used by the apostle in his first Pentecost sermon,

*And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;  
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams,  
Your young men shall see visions.  
And also on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days.  
And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:  
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into  
blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.  
And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved.  
For in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be deliverance, as the LORD has said,  
Among the remnant whom the LORD calls. (Joel 2:28-32)*

---

<sup>107</sup> Schreiner, *The King*; 329.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*; 404.

The prophet Amos focuses on the negative aspect of the Day of the LORD, yet without indicating that there would be any 'other' Day but the one prophesied.

*Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! For what good is the day of the LORD to you?*

*It will be darkness, and not light.*

*It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him!*

*Or as though he went into the house, leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him! Is not the day of the LORD darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?*

(Amos 5:18-20)

Zephaniah, an obscure prophet from the days of the righteous king Josiah, provides a very thorough analysis of the Day of the LORD as one of both divine judgment and divine mercy. He interchanges phrases between 'the day of the LORD' in Chapter 1 and 'in that day' in later chapters, but it is reasonable to interpret the different terminology as referring to the same 'day' that Israel is to 'wait for.' Consider, for instance, the following parallel verses:

Zephaniah 1:7

*Be silent before the Lord God!  
For the day of the LORD is  
near...*

Zephaniah 1:14

*Near is the great day of the  
LORD, Near and coming very  
quickly; Listen, the day of the  
LORD...*

Zephaniah 3:8

*'Therefore, wait for Me,' declares  
the LORD, 'For the day when I  
rise up to the prey.'*

It is reasonable to interpret the day that is near and coming very quickly to be the same day that the Israelites are admonished to wait for; the overall context of the prophecy fairly demands this consistency in exegesis even if the exact phraseology is not used in each place. Reading the prophecy through, therefore, we realize the dual nature of the 'Day of the LORD,' first as universal judgment but also as salvation. For the former we have this passage from Chapter 1,

*Be silent in the presence of the Lord GOD; For the day of the LORD is at hand,*

*For the LORD has prepared a sacrifice; He has invited His guests.*

*And it shall be, In the day of the LORD's sacrifice, that I will punish the princes and the king's children,*

*And all such as are clothed with foreign apparel,  
In the same day I will punish all those who leap over the threshold,  
Who fill their masters' houses with violence and deceit.  
"And there shall be on that day," says the LORD, "The sound of a mournful cry from the Fish  
Gate, a wailing from the Second Quarter, and a loud crashing from the hills.*  
(Zephaniah 1:7-10)

*The great day of the LORD is near; It is near and hastens quickly.  
The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out.  
That day is a day of wrath,  
A day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation,  
A day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness,  
A day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers.*  
(Zephaniah 1:14-16)

But in the midst of this doleful prophecy of judgment and destruction, that 'Day' also brings the hope of divine salvation for the remnant of God's heritage,

*"Therefore wait for Me," says the LORD, "Until the day I rise up for plunder;  
My determination is to gather the nations to My assembly of kingdoms,  
To pour on them My indignation, all My fierce anger;  
All the earth shall be devoured with the fire of My jealousy.  
For then I will restore to the peoples a pure language,  
That they all may call on the name of the LORD, to serve Him with one accord.  
From beyond the rivers of Ethiopia My worshipers, the daughter of My dispersed ones,  
Shall bring My offering.  
In that day you shall not be shamed for any of your deeds in which you transgress against Me;  
For then I will take away from your midst those who rejoice in your pride,  
And you shall no longer be haughty in My holy mountain.  
I will leave in your midst **a meek and humble people,**  
And they shall trust in the name of the LORD.  
**The remnant of Israel** shall do no unrighteousness and speak no lies,  
Nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;  
For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid."*  
(Zephaniah 3:8-13)

It should be clear that the Day of YHWH is a time of divine intervention, *covenant* intervention into the life of God's people Israel. But it should also be clear that this intervention will not result in the expected deliverance for that portion (that large portion) of Israel that was unfaithful to the covenant and to Israel's covenant God. For them – in spite of what their false prophets were telling them – the Day of the LORD will

be as *“refiner’s fire and like fuller’s soap, Who can endure its coming?”*<sup>109</sup> Schreiner writes, *“Unless they repent and obey Yahweh, those who comfort themselves with the thought of being delivered on the day of the Lord are deluded.”*<sup>110</sup>

*For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven,  
And all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.  
“And the day which is coming shall burn them up,” Says the LORD of hosts,  
“That will leave them neither root nor branch.”  
“But to you who fear My name  
The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings;  
And you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.  
You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet  
On the day that I do this,” Says the LORD of hosts.* (Malachi 4:1-3)

Note how this last passage ends: *“On the day that I do this,’ Says the Lord”* The prophets knew nothing of multiple ‘days’ of YHWH, but rather of one ‘Day’ in which both judgment and deliverance were to be meted out by Israel’s God, as Paul later say, *“to the Jew first, and then to the Gentile.”* The key, it seems, to unlocking the mystery of the Day of YHWH is back in the verse from Zechariah 13,

*In that day a fountain will be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem,  
for sin and impurity.* (Zechariah 13:1)

That this chapter from Zechariah has reference to the atoning work of Jesus Christ is confirmed by its use in the Gospels to explain the falling away of the disciples at the time of Jesus’ arrest, trial, and execution.

*Then Jesus said to them, “All of you will be made to stumble because of Me this night, for it is written:*

*‘I will strike the Shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.’”*

(Matthew 26:31)<sup>111</sup>

---

<sup>109</sup> Malachi 3:2

<sup>110</sup> Schreiner; 404.

<sup>111</sup> Cp. Mark 14:27

How did Paul read these passages from the Old Testament after his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus? It would appear that the apostle considered the Day of YHWH to have come, though it was not yet consummated. He will speak of 'the day of the Lord' and 'the day of Jesus' in terms both present and future, consistent with the 'now and not yet' perspective that he has through the resurrection of Jesus and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "But (to lapse into the normal technical language) though this eschatological hope had been well and truly *inaugurated*, it was not yet *consummated*."<sup>112</sup> Paul did not (and could not) claim that the full content of the promises had been fulfilled – there was still sin and death in the world, and the glory of the LORD did not cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. "Sin and death were still present realities in Paul's world, as his own suffering reminded him day by day. Wolves and lambs, literal and metaphorical, had yet to make up their ancient quarrel."<sup>113</sup> But this understanding did not diminish in the least Paul's belief that the promised Day had dawned through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of God's Holy Spirit. "That is why... 'the day of YHWH' in the Hebrew scriptures has become 'the day of the Lord Jesus' in Paul."<sup>114</sup> It is crucial for believers to understand as best they can, what God *has done* in the Now, so that we may properly anticipate the Not Yet.

The dawning of the new day for Paul was nothing less than the first dawn of the first day; it was a New Creation, and that phrase fully encompassed the apostle's understanding of the Now 'in Christ.' So sure was Paul that God had introduced His New Creation into this present world/age, and given assurance of this fact through the outpouring of His Spirit, that the apostle could not doubt for a moment that the consummation of the age was fully guaranteed, held fast through the faithfulness of Israel's faithful covenant God. Thus he can write to the Philippians (and to all believers),

*I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, being confident*

---

<sup>112</sup> Wright; PFG; 1047.

<sup>113</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>114</sup> *Idem*.

*of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.*  
(Philippians 1:3-6)

This passage, to be sure, speaks of the 'day of Jesus' as yet future, which it is. But the assurance which Paul possesses of the finished work in each and every believer, is based on that which *God has begun*. That day in the future cannot be in doubt, because of that day in the past when God fulfilled His promises. For Paul the day of the Lord, or the day of Jesus, remains in the future as the final consummation of what God has accomplished in His Son. This perspective should ground Christian eschatology between the extremes of thinking that everything (including, for instance, the resurrection) has already occurred on the one hand, and on the other hand thinking that little has been accomplished and all must wait till a future 'day.' To Paul the war has been won, and only the battles have yet to be fought. He can be in no doubt as to the outcome now that Christ is risen and Paul (and all believers) are sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise. This assurance did not depart from the apostle even on the eve of his own departure.

*For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day.*  
(II Timothy 2:12)

Paul splits the Day of YHWH in his eschatology in the same manner as he understands the Resurrection to have been split. The resurrection of Jesus is the *firstfruits* of the general resurrection promised in such places as Daniel 12, and the former event *guarantees* the latter. So also Paul sees the Day as split between the *opening up of a fountain for sin and for impurity* – the day of Jesus' death and resurrection – "*the day in which God will judge the hearts of all men in Christ Jesus according to my gospel.*"<sup>115</sup> He also understands now that in the gospel of Jesus Christ there is both divine judgment and divine salvation, bringing together in Jesus Christ the two seemingly opposite aspects of the Day of YHWH in the Old Testament. The event that 'splits' the hope of Israel into two

---

<sup>115</sup> Romans 2:16

sections is the resurrection of Jesus from the dead – an event that was expected to take place for all at the ‘end of the age’ has now taken place for One, therefore the ‘end of the age’ must have come, and have come upon us. We await, according to Paul, not the content of the promised deliverance, but the consummation of it (*cp.* I Cor. 15:23-28). “The source from which all these streams flow is Paul’s belief that with the resurrection of Jesus the hope of Israel had been split into two. Jesus had been raised first, demonstrating him to be Israel’s Messiah; all his people would be raised later, at the moment Paul calls ‘the end.’”<sup>116</sup>

What ties all of this together in Paul’s writings is the inauguration of the New Creation which attends the dawning of the new day. G. K. Beale writes,

Christ’s resurrected body was the first newly created body to pass to the other side of the new creation. The coming new creation penetrated back into the old world through the resurrected body of Jesus. This occurs with the followers of Jesus through the work of the Holy Spirit, who is the agent causing the new creation to begin to penetrate their hearts and giving hope for its consummation, which has begun in them.<sup>117</sup>

Wright adds, “The future had burst into the present, close up and personal; at the same time, the future remained future, glimpsed as in a darkened mirror.”<sup>118</sup> This seems to be the proper way to understand Paul’s comments about his own status as well as that of all who are in Christ, with the Now and Not Yet so powerfully evident in him as he is in Christ. Note the ethical import of the following: how the believer ought to live is predicated on what has happened to him or her through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Vos does not overstate the matter when he writes, “The resurrection...signifies in fact the most radical and all-inclusive transforming event within the entire range of the believer’s experience of salvation.”<sup>119</sup>

---

<sup>116</sup> Wright; *PFG*; 1048.

<sup>117</sup> Beale; 298.

<sup>118</sup> Wright; *PFG*; 1048.

<sup>119</sup> Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*; 150.

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*  
(Galatians 2:20)

*If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*  
(Colossians 3:1-4)

*Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.*  
(Romans 6:3-4)

The *locus classicus* of this concept in Paul is II Corinthians 4 - 6, which deserve a fairly thorough treatment here. For in this passage the apostle links the resurrection of Jesus Christ to the believer's confidence in his or her own resurrection, referring to the entire paradigm as the 'new creation' in Christ. Beginning, somewhat arbitrarily, in II Corinthians 4:6, we read of our conversion in words intentionally reminiscent of the Creation account, for Paul sees the regeneration of the believer as nothing less than the new creation. Within the immediate context of the dual nature – judgment/salvation – of the Gospel, Paul writes,

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*  
(II Corinthians 4:6)

The apostle then speaks poignantly of the Not Yet for which the new creation of the believer's regenerated life is the Now. Things are not yet as they will be, but that they will be what they are meant to be has now been guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

*And since we have the same spirit of faith, according to what is written, "I believed and therefore I spoke," we also believe and therefore speak, **knowing that He who raised up the Lord Jesus will also raise us up with Jesus, and will present us with you.** For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glo-*

*ry of God. Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

(II Corinthians 4:13-18)

That Paul is not using metaphorical language then becomes clear as he speaks of every believer still in this earthly tent awaiting his or her heavenly dwelling, the resurrected body. This language precludes the all-too-common spiritual interpretation of Paul's 'resurrection'; he speaks too plainly of the sufferings, frustrations, and setbacks of life in the current state to interpret the 'resurrected life' as some 'victorious Christian life' of conquered sin or sinless perfection. No, we must face along with Paul the dichotomy of the Now – the appropriated resurrection of Jesus Christ in every believer – with the Not Yet – the groaning that we still do while in this body. Paul also brings in the reality of the possession of the Holy Spirit *now* as the firm guarantee for *then*.

*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. So we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight. We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*

(II Corinthians 5:1-8)

The ethical element of Paul's eschatology is never far from the surface, and here he shows how important the life lived *now* is for the one that will come,

*Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

(II Corinthians 5:9-10)

This brings us to the climax of the section, and really of the entirety of Paul's soteriology, his eschatology, his ecclesiology, and his ethics. In a few verses Paul writes

what could fill a volume on the magnificent work of redemption God has brought about through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.* (II Corinthians 5:14-17)

Paul's line of reasoning in this passage is the flip side of what he writes in Romans 5. There the apostle considers the impact of Adam's sin and consequent death upon the entire human race. Here he speaks of another death, that of the last Adam, and the impact of that death on all who are 'in Him.' Consider:

II Corinthians 5:14

*For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died...*

Romans 5:12

*Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned...*

The difference between these two 'death' events – *representative* deaths – is that the second one was overcome through the resurrection. This makes all the difference in the world (literally, the *kosmos*) to Paul, for he sees in Christ's resurrection the reversal of the Fall and the bringing in of the new creation. Thus for now we will pass over the somewhat difficult verse 16 – intending to deal with it later in terms of the ethical life of the church – and move to the key verse in the treatise, verse 17. *“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things have passed away; behold, new things have come.”*

The first comment to make is upon the first clause, and the phrase 'he is' in terms of the 'new creature.' These words are added to our English Bibles, and we should find them in italics: *he is* a new creature. Paul's writing style is challenging at the best of times, and here is a prime example of that fact. The phrase is choppy and the addition of 'he is' in the English is an attempt to smooth out what the apostle actually writes. Hays considers the absence of the 'he is' in Paul's statement as significant due to the

apostle's use of the word *ktisis* – creation – which he typically uses in terms of the overall framework of God's created order, not as referring to individual salvation. Hays writes somewhat technically,

In view of the fact that Paul characteristically uses *ktisis* and its cognates in a cosmological frame of reference and in view of the scriptural subtexts from which Paul derives this language, it would be far better to complete the ellipsis in a way that would demonstrate that Paul is speaking here not of individual spiritual renewal but of the reconciliation of the *world* to God (cf. 2 Cor. 5:19): 'Therefore, if anyone is in Christ – there is a new creation!'<sup>120</sup>

The 'scriptural subtexts' to which Hays refers are from Isaiah, where we find language to similar to Paul's to not have been in the apostle's mind and intention when he wrote this passage in II Corinthians 5. The first of these, from Isaiah 43, also sheds light on Paul's meaning in the enigmatic verse 16, but more on that later.

*Do not remember the former things, nor consider the things of old.*

*Behold, I will do a new thing, now it shall spring forth;*

*Shall you not know it?*

*I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert.*

*The beast of the field will honor Me, the jackals and the ostriches,*

*Because I give waters in the wilderness and rivers in the desert,*

*To give drink to My people, My chosen.*

*This people I have formed for Myself; They shall declare My praise.*

(Isaiah 43:18-21)

The second passage is from Isaiah 65, the 'New Creation' passage *par excellence* of the Old Testament.

*For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;*

*And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind.*

*But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;*

*For behold, I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing, and her people a joy.*

*I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in My people;*

*The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying.*

(Isaiah 65:17-19)

---

<sup>120</sup> Hays, *Echoes*; 223n15.

From the reality of the new creation in Jesus Christ, Paul will move in II Corinthians 6 to the reality of the church as the people of God (*cp.* II Cor. 6:16-18). Here again we see Paul's ecclesiology rooted in his eschatology, and from that ground grows his ethics. At the very root of it all, of course, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. The first secures what the second inspires: the New Covenant people of God. Christ's resurrection firmly grounds the new creation in *this world* reality: He is risen, bodily, and that cannot be negotiated if the foundation of Christianity is to stand firm. This fact secures the reality of believers' future resurrection; the age to come has invaded and overlapped the present age within the Church and by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. But for Paul the resurrection of Christ means even more; it means the new creation has dawned in reality, the reality of Christ's resurrection from the dead. "The new creation has even begun physically in the form of Christ's resurrection body, which is the first re-created body of the new creation....Thus, believers' present identification with Christ's resurrection is identification with new creation, since his resurrection was the very inception of the eschatological new creation."<sup>121</sup> This reality, we will see, undergirds Paul's new attitude toward the symbols of identity that prevailed under the Old Covenant – the 'works of the Law' as he calls them – which can no longer govern in the new creation, nor can they have any place. "*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation.*"<sup>122</sup> This fact becomes programmatic for the apostle in terms of the Church's existence and ethics as the people of God in this world.

The single newly created human being functions as a small window on the new, large, eschatological reality. God is renewing the world, and is calling human beings both to be renewed in themselves...and then, if seems, to be agents of that renewal. And in that new creation the divisions of the human race that marked, and marred, the 'present age' are to be done away.<sup>123</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup> Beale; 302.

<sup>122</sup> Galatians 6:15

<sup>123</sup> Wright; *PFG*; 1072.

**Lesson 7 – A New People for a New World**  
**Text: Ephesians 2:11-22; Colossians 3:9-11**

*“The conception of salvation as an individual matter  
between man and God  
is utterly foreign to Paul’s preaching.”  
(Victor Paul Furnish)*

Thus far we have seen that the Apostle Paul was holistic in his understanding of the redemptive work of God in and through the resurrected Jesus Christ. This redemption not only encompassed the nations in addition to Israel, it also established the foundation for the complete restoration of God’s perfect Creation. For instance, this panegyric of Jesus the Son of God in Paul’s letter to the Colossians leaves no doubt as to the grand extent of the redemption accomplished by Jesus, Israel’s Messiah. Paul never saw salvation in individual terms only, but fully in reference to the Creation, with Man remaining the centerpiece as he was in the beginning.

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*

(Colossians 1:13-18)

Joined in this passage with the redemption of individual sinners (vs. 13) and the restoration of all Creation (vs. 15) Paul has included the concept that joins these things together in this current age: the Church (vs. 18). Having established Paul’s firm viewpoint that with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the New Age has dawned, it remains for our study to determine *exactly what that means* in terms of God’s continuing activity ‘between the ages’. Believers are fairly consistent in their view that Christians ought to go to church (though not necessarily themselves obedient to that conviction), but there is little agreement on what, exactly, the Church *is* in this world. Some would say it is where sinners hear the gospel

and become saved; others, that it is the 'household of God' where true worship of the true God takes place. The Church has been institutionalized, and it has been marginalized; it has stood for justice and the relief of oppression, and it has mishandled justice and has oppressed. The Church has been called the 'New' Israel and the 'True' Israel, and has been denied any connection with Israel whatsoever. That the 'Church' is a necessary and biblical concept is irrefutably established by Jesus' own words, "*And upon this rock I will build My Church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against her.*"<sup>124</sup> Paul's own ecclesiology could hardly be higher, as he considers the Church to be "*the fulness of Him who fills all in all.*"<sup>125</sup>

But what exactly is the Church? And what is her purpose 'between the ages'? Is the Church simply a holding pen for believers until they die or until the Rapture? Is it God's vehicle for social change in the world of any generation? Is it primarily an evangelistic organization or a place of Christian discipleship? Or is it all of the above (or none of the above)? That it *is* something important cannot be denied by anyone who reads Paul's letters *to the churches* throughout the Mediterranean world of his day. To use just one of the apostle's several metaphors, the Church is the body of the risen Lord. This is undoubtedly a mystery, for the Scripture records (and Paul attests) that Jesus Christ rose from the grave with a complete body and retains full humanity as He is at His Father's right hand in heaven. So the imagery of the Body of Christ is clearly metaphorical, though made no clearer by that admission. Suffice it to say at this point that Paul did not mean that 'we are His hands; we are His feet; etc.' as is so tritely preached in too many churches. Jesus is not dependent on the Church; the Church is dependent on Jesus. Yet the Church has a purpose and a mission, and a Holy Spirit to empower and guide her.

It goes without saying that the Church is more than the building in which believers meet to worship, but it should also be noted and remembered that the Church *is* a

---

<sup>124</sup> Matthew 16:18

<sup>125</sup> Ephesians 1:23

building – a holy temple of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 3:16). The Apostle Peter had the same high conception of the Church as did Paul.

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

For Paul the Church is the nexus, or link, between what God has done in and through Jesus Christ – His death & resurrection, of course, but also His sending of the gift of the Holy Spirit – and what God is continuing to do in the world ‘between the ages’. If, as we have hopefully established in our study thus far, God’s completed work of redemption in Jesus Christ includes that of Creation, then it stands to reason that the proper definition and purpose of the Church will also have reference to a restored Creation. This seems to be what the Creation itself is ‘thinking,’ if we can put it that way. In a statement that seems to put believers (the Church) and Creation in the same boat, Paul writes,

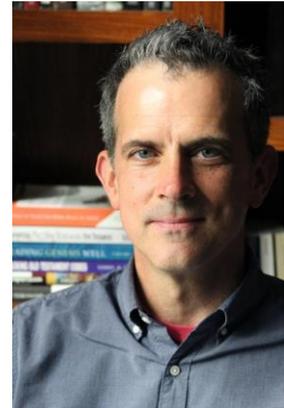
*For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.* (Romans 8:20-23)

This enigmatic passage actually offers a place to begin in our analysis of Paul’s definition of the Church – what it is, of whom it is comprised, and what its purpose is in the time ‘between the ages’. It is evident that the groaning of creation of which Paul speaks here is due entirely to the sin introduced into the world by the first man, Adam. Paul in several important places recognizes the risen Jesus as the ‘last Adam,’ and the connection between the two Adams is quite important for our understanding of Paul’s theology, including his ecclesiology. By investigating this linkage we will hopefully come to better understand what God is doing in the Church and how she fits into the inaugurated eschatology of the risen Lord Jesus Christ through the outpoured Holy

Spirit. Furthermore, as we move from Ecclesiology to Ethics, this creational perspective on Paul's understanding of the Church will inform our understanding of how the Church – meaning believers within the Church – is to act in the world.

### What did We Lose when Adam Fell?

In an interesting essay titled “Participation in the New-Creation People of God in Christ by the Spirit” (pithy it is not), Timothy Gombis writes, “It is important to note what was lost in ‘the fall’ so that we can see what God has set out to recover in his redemptive mission.”<sup>126</sup> Typically, treatments of the Fall of Man and what was lost therein focus on the anthropological advent of ‘death’ and the consequent loss of fellowship with God. This is entirely true and biblical, as we will see from what Paul has to say in Romans 5, to name only one biblical reference. But the impact of the Fall on mankind bears further study, further than the scope of this particular lesson can take us. The Fall forms a consistent backdrop for the entire revelation of God through both the Old Testament and the New, and we have already seen sufficient biblical evidence to show that restoration of ‘what was lost’ forms a major component of Old Testament Eschatology. Studying the effects of the Fall on both the human race and on all Creation will enable us to comprehend ‘salvation’ as so much more than ‘going to heaven when you die.’ And it will help make sense of much of what Paul writes to the churches of his day, letters that have been considered normative for the churches of all ages since his time.



Timothy G. Gombis

We will begin, since a beginning point must be taken, with the impact of the Fall on ‘interpersonal relationships.’ This is not intended in pursuit of some psychological reinterpretation of the Gospel, but rather as the foundation on which Paul will build the *content* of his Ecclesiology, meaning the *who* that makes up the Church. For whatever

---

<sup>126</sup> Gombis, Timothy G. “Participation in the New-Creation People of God in Christ by the Spirit” in *The Apostle Paul and the Christian Life*, Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 2016); 106.

we find lost in the Fall, we must find restored (or at least beginning to be restored) in the New Creation and, consequently, in the Church.

What we are headed to in this subsection is the explanation of Paul's admittance of Gentiles into his churches without their first converting to Judaism. What lies behind the Apostle's famous statements of universal equality among the nations? "*There is neither Jew nor Greek, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all, and in all.*"<sup>127</sup> Liberal theologians of the past two centuries have seen in this statement, and similar ones in Paul's letters, a complete reworking of the religion of Saul of Tarsus; really, an abandonment of it in favor of a religion that will 'sell' among the Gentiles. Certainly Paul's countrymen considered that the former Pharisee had 'sold out' Judaism by the free inclusion of Gentiles into the 'Church,' but it does not do to make the opinions of Paul's first century *enemies* into our 21<sup>st</sup> Century Pauline hermeneutic. There has to be more in Paul's recalibrated understanding of the people of God than marketing or convenience. When we see how he grounded his Ecclesiology in the restoration of that which was lost in the Fall, coupled with his understanding of the inauguration of the New Creation – really, the New World – in the risen Jesus, we will come to understand the deeper foundation of his ethnic ecumenicism.

From a relational point of view, the first thing that happened upon Adam's sin was the advent of *separation* and *division* in the world. This is manifested in the Genesis 3 account in two aspects: first, the separation between Man and God, for "*the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God*" because they had become afraid of God.<sup>128</sup> Second, there was an immediate division between Adam and his wife, Eve, evidenced by Adam blaming the Fall on his wife rather than taking responsibility for his own disobedience and rebellion, "*The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.*"<sup>129</sup> Division will turn to discord in the next generation, with the sordid tale of Cain's murder of his brother. Thereafter the entire human race is divided into the 'sons of God' (corresponding to the lineage of Seth) and the 'sons of men' (the

---

<sup>127</sup> Colossians 3:11

<sup>128</sup> Genesis 3:8

<sup>129</sup> Genesis 3:12

lineage of Cain), with the former slowly being corrupted by the latter. Even after the Deluge mankind only comes together with insidious purpose, to make themselves gods on the earth. Gombis writes,

After their corruption, Adam and Eve no longer pursue each other's flourishing. They now too often seek to undermine each other. Rather than enjoying God's blessing alongside Abel, Cain murders his younger brother (Gen. 4:1-16). Rather than behaving honorably, humanity behaves dishonorably, shamefully relating to one another (Gen. 9:18-27). Rather than scattering to oversee the universal spread of *shalom*, humanity seeks to gather and rally around idolatrous purposes (Gen. 11:1-9).<sup>130</sup>

God will, in a sense, institutionalize this 'separation' at the Tower of Babel because of the inevitable consequences of unfettered human sin. He will then utilize this separation Himself within His redemptive plan, calling Abram out of his native, pagan land and 'separating' the patriarch unto Himself. Now, however, the separation is to be of one people *toward holiness* and away from an idolatrous and rebellious world. The frequent mantra of the Abrahamic Covenant is "*Come out from among them and be separate, and I will be your God and you shall be My people.*" Israel failed, of course, because – as we will learn from Paul – Israel was itself an example of trying to do what only God could do: reconciliation between God and Man. Separation of the wrong sort – from God and from one's fellow man – will prevail in the world and in Israel, for Israel was still part of the first Adam, still – though she would not admit it – part of the world. Again Gombis,

First, humanity, created in God's image and called to rule creation on God's behalf, failed to do this. Humans have turned against God and against one another, becoming idolatrous, so that God does not inhabit creation as his temple according to his original intentions. Second, God has called one man, Abraham, to become the agent of God's reclamation of all humanity. Third, Abraham's 'seed,' the nation of Israel, called by God to lead the nations back to Israel's God, who is also the Creator, has also failed, and has become idolatrous.<sup>131</sup>

---

<sup>130</sup> Gombis, in M<sup>c</sup>Knight; 106.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*; 108.

This statement sounds somewhat Dispensational, as if these repeated failures motivated God to a 'new' plan. But the balance of Gombis' essay will show that he does not view things in this light, but rather understands that these 'failures' were made inevitable by the advent of sin – a theme to which Paul devotes quite a bit of time in Romans 3-5 and again in Romans 8. The point is that one of the major impacts of sin in the world, and particularly in the human race, was *division* of the image of God, something that is really inconceivable if one considers it, yet it most certainly has come to pass. Paul understands, as should we, that the restoration of all things is centered upon Man because in this is the *restoration of God's image*, inconceivably corrupted when Man – the first Adam and all his progeny – rebelled. This restoration of the divine image underlies much of what Paul writes as well as the very words in which he writes it.

Paul speaks of Christian existence as believers being 'conformed to the image of his Son' (Rom. 8:29) and participating in the renewed humanity created 'according to the likeness of God' (Eph. 4:24). This language alludes specifically to God's creation intentions for humanity and indicates that the Christian life has everything to do with the recovery of God's original purpose for 'the image of God.'<sup>132</sup>

It goes without saying that the pattern of separation and division has ruled the entirety of human history, from the scattering of the Nations in Genesis 11 through the 'Age of Empires' and into the present, divided and divisive world in which we live. Philosophers and statesmen have lamented the inability of the human race to 'just get along,' but no one has a solution to the problem; at least no *man* does. But God in Christ has created a 'new people' who are called, as Israel was, to be separate. Only this time He has laid the foundation *and* the topstone of His new Temple, the Church, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Writing to the Corinthian church, Paul established the true doctrine and practice of 'separation' on the reality of the New Creation.

---

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*; 110.

*Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said:*

*“I will dwell in them and walk among them.*

*I will be their God, and they shall be My people.”*

*Therefore,*

*“Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.*

*Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.”*

*“I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,”*

*Says the LORD Almighty.*

*(II Corinthians 6:14-18)*

### **The Wall of Division...Torn Down**

One of the major themes in the Pauline literature, because a major plank in Pauline theology, is the “tearing down of the dividing wall” between Jews and Gentiles. To understand the import, and the impact, of this demolition project, one must first consider why the wall was built in the first place. And considering what that wall was, in Paul’s understanding – *Torah* – this will also help us understand the apostle’s stance vis-à-vis the Law and the believer. It is all very linked together, as we should expect from a mind as rich and variegated as Paul’s. That the wall is *Torah* is evident from Ephesians 2,

*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near.*

*(Ephesians 2:14-17)*

The dividing wall was, in fact, an intensification of separation between God’s people, Israel, and the rest of the world. That this wall no longer existed was both a central tenet of Pauline theology and the grounds on which the Apostle to the Gentiles was vehemently persecuted by the Jews. But Paul understood that the separation of the nations was temporary, waiting until the ‘fulness of time’ when “*God sent forth His Son,*

*born of a woman, born under the Law.*"<sup>133</sup> This expression, "*born of a woman, born under the Law,*" cuts to the heart of the matter since the first clause refers to Jesus' humanity – his descent from Adam according to the flesh and hence his identity as 'the Seed of Woman.' The second clause refers to His being a citizen of the commonwealth of Israel, a member of God's elect people, and therefore by extension His identity as Israel's Messiah. To Paul it was Torah that defined Israel as against the world, the nations. So only Israel's Messiah could remove that wall. What was revelatory to Paul through his encounter with the risen Jesus was that *the wall was to be removed at all*. That revelation informs the rest of Paul's Ecclesiology – if the *main* division is gone, can there be any other? This was, to the apostle, the momentous event of the New Creation as it unfolds through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the ingathering of the elect from all the nations. This was "the coming together of Jews and gentiles in the single family of God, as both a tell-tale sign of God's plan to unite all things in the Messiah and a warning sign to the principalities and powers."<sup>134</sup>

The 'new-creational' aspect of Paul's inaugurated eschatology, and hence his Ecclesiology, is seen in Ephesians 2 in the phrase "*created in Him.*" It is so well-noted as almost to become trite, that the apostle's use of the 'in Him' and related phrases is fundamental to his understanding of the believer's status before God. Less well developed is the *corporate* aspect of this phenomenon which is, in fact, more common in Paul than the individual. G. K. Beale correctly understands that this whole concept ties in with Paul's realization that, by virtue of the resurrection, Jesus Christ has been revealed as the 'last Adam,' the 'new man.' Beale writes,

Accordingly, the 'one new man' in Eph. 2:15 is composed of Christian Jews and gentiles, but they are 'one new man' because Christ created the two 'in himself.' Jew and gentile were two groups, separate from each other, but after their creation in Christ they are 'one new man' because Christ himself is 'the one new man.'<sup>135</sup>

---

<sup>133</sup> Galatians 4:4

<sup>134</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 1234.

<sup>135</sup> Beale; 840.

As significant at the 'in Him' and 'in Christ' statements found in Paul's letters, are the 'now' comments that are almost as ubiquitous. These statements confirm the thesis that, for the apostle, God has fully and finally acted in accordance with His covenant faithfulness and His faithfulness to His Creation. Coupled with "the fullness of time" in Galatians 4:4, these 'now' statements firmly place the Church within "the ends of the ages," the 'in-between time' of the inaugurated New Creation. Consider,

*Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh – who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands – that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **But now** in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.* (Ephesians 2:11-13)

*For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles – if indeed you have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ), which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has **now** been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets: that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel.* (Ephesians 3:1-6)

*To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; to the intent that **now** the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.* (Ephesians 3:8-11)

In light of the many other passages we have reviewed where Paul indicates his firm belief that the New Age has dawned and the New Creation has begun with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it is reasonable to link these passages from Ephesians in a causal manner to the 'now' statement regarding the gospel that Paul preached, found in Romans,

*But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.* (Romans 3:21-26)

Note again how Paul views the membership in this new community of faith: “*For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*” This once again takes us back to Genesis 3, back beyond the establishment of Israel and the Law, back beyond the call of Abram out of Ur, back even beyond the Flood, to the beginning of sin. That is what God is dealing with in Jesus Christ and is exactly what He has been dealing with proleptically throughout history. To be blunt, Israel was a cul-de-sac that many Christian theologians have not been able to escape. And is because of their misunderstanding of the purpose and role of Israel in God’s redemptive plan that their views run the extremes from the Church *replacing* Israel to Israel and the Church being eternally separate. Israel was part of God’s redemptive purpose in human history, but it was never intended to be the goal in itself, for Israel itself was still ‘in Adam’ and therefore still in sin. Paul sees the work of Christ fully answering to the purpose of Israel, but he also sees the work of Christ also fully answering to the need of all Creation, a need that Israel was intended to witness to, but could never solve. What Christ did for Israel (and in Israel’s place) was intended for all the nations, as the Abrahamic Covenant was inclusive of all the nations. This is what Paul means when he speaks of all things being ‘summed up’ in Christ Jesus.

*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might **gather together in one** all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him.* (Ephesians 1:7-10)

### The New Humanity

If we recognize what God has done in Christ Jesus, then with Paul we realize that a new dawn has come, the New Creation has been inaugurated. Further understanding how this pertains as much to Creation as it does to Covenant allows us to further realize that when Paul says "*Behold! Old things have passed away; all has become new!*"<sup>136</sup> he is speaking in terms parallel to those of the original Creation. This means that, as the first Adam was the progenitor of a new humanity, so also the last Adam is the beginning of a new humanity. This then becomes the most basic identity of the Church – transcending (but not abolishing) both theological doctrine and biblical practice in the Church and establishing for all time just what the Church is in this world: it is the New Humanity in the New Man, Jesus Christ.

All we had to do to be part of Adam's fallen humanity was to be born; it is the natural state of all human beings and cannot be avoided nor altered. This is Paul's meaning, at least at it pertains to the development of the human race, when he says that in Adam, all sinned. And this is confirmed in every human being (with two notable exceptions, of course) by the fact of his inevitable death.<sup>137</sup> But as Paul goes on to say in this same passage, the free gift of life in Christ Jesus, the last Adam, is not like the sentence of death in Adam. It cannot be, for it is precluded by the "*law of sin and death*" that remains in every man born of natural generation from Adam. "Adam's death-bringing sin ultimately necessitated its reversal in another Adam, who would perform a life-giving act."<sup>138</sup> In reversing this curse, the last Adam does, in fact, *begin* a new human race.

The given of humankind's condition is membership of Adam, sharing in Adam's humanity, under the power of sin, on the way to death. But membership of the last Adam, sharing in Christ's resurrected humanity, beyond the power of sin and death, was not a given in the same way. It had to come about. A transition was involved, an ending and a beginning, a step across a chasm, a jump to a new plane, the experience of a new

---

<sup>136</sup> II Corinthians 5:17

<sup>137</sup> Romans 5:12

<sup>138</sup> Beale; 440.

life...The Spirit had to be bestowed afresh by God, in a new beginning as decisive as the first bestowal by which the dust of the earth became humankind.<sup>139</sup>

Beale adds, "By a similar application, Christ is the last Adam, who is the firstborn, not only of all humanity in the new creation, but also of 'all [things in the old] creation.'<sup>140</sup> Beale and other contemporary scholars, in keeping with the contemporary academic craze for hyphenated words, speaks of Paul's theology as being 'new-creational.' What is both clear and of crucial importance in Paul is that what God has done in and through the resurrected Lord, and the outpouring/indwelling of the Holy Spirit, cannot be construed as either a mere continuation of the status quo, Israel, or an abandonment of the former revelation in favor of a new accommodation to the pagans. No, what God has finally done is to intervene in history to complete the purpose of Covenant and to restore the loss of Creation and to do so through the inauguration of the New Creation. "This discussion of Christ and his people coming to be in the end-time mage of God through resurrection is another way to speak of new creation, since the new creation will be an incorruptible and imperishable state. The fallen image of the first Adam is rectified through the resurrection of Christ, which, as we have seen repeatedly, is a synonymous notion with new creation."<sup>141</sup>

This is why Paul would not allow Torah and 'the works of the Law' to continue as defining markers of the Church. Nor would he allow the licentiousness and idolatry of the pagan cultures to even have place in the Church. For the Church neither a reconstituted Judaism nor is it a cleaned-up and sanctified paganism; it is a New Humanity in the midst of the world 'between the ages.'

With Paul, we now see more clearly *what a specifically Christian theology is and why it matters*. It matters because the worldview which Paul held, and which he did his best to make second nature for his *ekklēsiai*, had none of the normal worldview-anchors that second-Temple Judaism had had, and did not take on board, to replace them, the major worldview-anchors of ancient paganism. In fact...the *ekklēsia*, in its unity and holiness,

---

<sup>139</sup> Dunn; 323-24.

<sup>140</sup> Beale; 447.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*; 441.

*was itself the central worldview-marker, the loadbearing symbol, generating its own necessary and organically appropriate praxis in worship, prayer, scripture reading and...the sacraments.*<sup>142</sup>

This statement, an accurate summary of Pauline ecclesiology, will become a crucial thought as we investigate the Church's role in the world and visit such concepts as 'cultural relevancy' and 'orthodoxy.' That the Church sets its own worldview – or rather, the Church's worldview is and has been set by the resurrected and ever-living Lord Jesus Christ – is of paramount importance to any biblical view of the Church's place and purpose in whatever age of the time 'in between.' If we fail to comprehend this truth, "the *ekklēsia* will cease to be its true self, and be forced to lean on symbols from other worldviews, whether Jewish or pagan or some odd combination of the two."<sup>143</sup> Do we not see this happening in our own day?

Recognition of the Church as the New Humanity of the New Creation in Christ will raise our Ecclesiology much higher than it has been in generations. This not to advocate a 'high church' liturgy but rather to think about the Church as Paul did, recognizing as he did that, as the "*fullness of Him who fills all in all,*" we can hardly think to highly of Christ's Body. This is indeed the apostle's ardent prayer for all believers,

*Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, **which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.*** (Ephesians 1:15-23)

---

<sup>142</sup> Wright; PFG; 565.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*; 568.

In an age in which individualism is almost a religious tenet, it is a necessary corrective to reconsider the corporate aspect of every believer's life, and to realize that Paul had little to say about an atomic believer – one who lives separately from the Church as a being unto himself. "In fact, while much of Protestant theology has focused on the individual in abstraction from the church, we can say quite confidently that Paul would have almost nothing to say about the Christian life if he had to speak of it apart from the church...Paul doesn't lose the individual in the community, but when he writes his letters to give counsel on Christian discipleship, he writes to communities. And when he envisions Christian existence, his conception is communally oriented."<sup>144</sup> The Church is the center of what God is doing in the world because it is the result of what He has done in and through Jesus Christ. The Church is the epicenter of the New Creation, which is itself centered in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Rather than continuing to emphasize Torah – that which constituted the dividing wall that forbade entrance to the lost world into the presence of God – Paul will now emphasize the Church of Jesus Christ as the "*Jerusalem from above*." Wright comments, "Indeed, we have come to the striking conclusion that Paul's worldview had as its central symbol the unity and holiness of the *ekklēsia* itself, grounded in what he believed to be true about the Messiah and the spirit, and grounded beneath that again in the one God, the creator, who had now acted surprisingly and decisively to fulfil the ancient promises."<sup>145</sup>

Richard Hays summarizes Paul's view of the inaugurated eschatology inherent in the reality of Jesus' resurrection, "Paul sees the community of faith being caught up into the story of God's remaking of the world through Jesus Christ...Within the story, everything points to the death and resurrection of Jesus as the pivot-point of the ages; the old cosmos has met its end, and God's eschatological righteousness/justice has broken in upon the present, making everything new."<sup>146</sup> This will be our working thesis in the continuing study of Pauline Ecclesiology and, consequent to that, Ethics.

---

<sup>144</sup> Gombis, in McKnight; 112-113.

<sup>145</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 563.

<sup>146</sup> Hays, *Moral Vision*; 45-46.

## Lesson 8 – The Church ‘in Christ’

**Text: Romans 12:1-5; I Corinthians 10:16-17; 12:4-27**

*“The ekklēsia, the Messiah’s body is nothing short of a new version of the human race.”*  
(N. T. Wright)



Scot McKnight (b. 1953)

Scot McKnight begins his essay on “The New Perspective and the Christian Life” by advocating a reacquaintance and return to the Apostle Paul’s view of the Church. He immediately offers a caveat of sorts, understanding that the apostle to the Gentiles has fallen on hard time in modern ecclesiology, and certainly in modern sociology. McKnight quotes Daniel Kirk from his *Jesus Have I Loved, but Paul?* putting into words what many in Western evangelicalism think, “Some people find Paul lacking in comparison with the Master; others simply find Paul distasteful, offensive, oppressive, exclusive, confusing, arrogant, or just plain wrong.”<sup>147</sup> Such attitudes and opinions should not be surprising, considering what Paul’s fellow apostle, Peter, had famously to say about Paul’s writings, “in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.”<sup>148</sup> But no one speaks of the Church in the New Testament as much as Paul does; no one even comes close. Thus we cannot ignore Paul if we hope to develop a biblical doctrine of the Church, both as to its ecclesiology and its practice. And to develop an ecclesiology apart from the Pauline corpus is to establish the church on opinion and tradition, not on the Word of God.

The point is often made that Paul did not write mini theological treatises but rather epistles directed to individual churches, and often to address problems within those churches. It is remarkable how often these problems revolved around the church itself and its own understanding of what the church is supposed to be; there are only a

---

<sup>147</sup> McKnight; 125.

<sup>148</sup> II Peter 3:16

few times in Paul's letters when specific 'sin issues' are on the table (though the apostle definitely viewed *anything* that detracted from the unity or the holiness of the Church to be sin). But what Paul had to say about the Church has not been easy to consistently interpret, and has been even harder to apply, throughout the ages since his day. Many have given up trying and have simply adopted whatever traditional evolution of ecclesiology happens to suit their denominational fancy. Paul's model of the Church has been deemed by many across the millennia as unattainable and idealistic. His metaphors of the Church as Christ's 'Body' and 'Bride' are treated as ultimately true, but not realistic in the current age. The polity that he established in every church of his missionary activity is now considered just one among many options; his statements as to the interrelationships within the Church - especially the role of men and women - considered outdated and 'culturally conditioned' to his own era. It is a manifestation of the different way in which the writings of Paul are viewed relative to the 'red letters' of Jesus, that the teachings of Jesus are considered sacrosanct, whereas those of Paul are negotiable. Even a scholar as devoted to Church structure and polity, and to Pauline Theology, as James D. G. Dunn exhibits a remarkable ambivalence in recommending Paul's ecclesiology to his readers.

Nevertheless, Paul thought it important to spell out the principles of Christian community as he saw them...And these principles, if they had validity in reference to the troubled churches of Paul's mission, may still have validity for churches of later times. As he call his own churches to measure themselves against his vision, so later church could do far worse than check their own structures and operating practices against the principles he outlines.<sup>149</sup>

This is too anemic by far. The epistles of Paul are, as Peter acknowledged, *Scripture*. They are God-breathed and therefore "*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"<sup>150</sup> As these words were written - *by Paul* - in a 'pastoral' epistle and thus deals with the Church, it stands to reason that the establishment, government, and

---

<sup>149</sup> Dunn; 563.

<sup>150</sup> *1* Timothy 3:16

practice of the Church will profit immensely from adherence to the principles that Paul lays down in his letters. The half-way measures and systems of human devising that have been tried across twenty centuries have consistently failed. It has never been the case, as Dunn proposes, that the Church 'measures itself' against the Pauline ecclesiology. Rather it has ever been the case that what the Lord Jesus Christ has accomplished (and is accomplishing) in and through His Church is most fully defined and elucidated in the letters of Paul 'to the churches.'

One of the problems in the interpretation of Pauline ecclesiology is the lack of connection between the apostle's doctrine of the Church and his Christology, his doctrine of Christ. This problem has been massively compounded with the advent of Dispensationalism over the past century and a half, but the blame can by no means be laid entirely at the feet of that hermeneutical perspective. Difficulties and disagreements regarding Paul's view of the Church started during the apostle's own lifetime (hence so many epistles) and continued unabated after his departure. It has been the contention of this study that the Church has often missed Paul's eschatological view of the work of Jesus Christ, and it will be the progressing view of this study that this oversight has negatively influenced the Church's view of itself. At the root of the problem is the failure of the Church to see the *creational* aspects of Christ's work alongside the *covenantal*, and to recognize just how crucial these two foci are to Pauline theology, not least Pauline ecclesiology. Paul, we have seen, viewed the finished work of Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Israel's eschatological hope, and this conviction fully informed all that he conceived the Church to be and to do. "The eschatological character of Paul's thought manifests itself in his theology of the church. Paul conceives of the church as God's new temple and as the body of Christ and as the new Israel."<sup>151</sup>

Part of the problem in the Church's understanding of Pauline Ecclesiology, and perhaps the largest part, stems from the way Paul seems to distance the Church from Israel. The apostle reserves some of his harshest language for those - later termed 'Judaizers' - who wanted to essentially absorb the Church back into Judaism, and to de-

---

<sup>151</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*; 571.

mand a continuation of observance to all of the 'markers' that singled Israel out as a unique people. Chief among these markers were circumcision, observance of the Mosaic dietary laws, and strict adherence to the Sabbath. Combined with an innate (and very un-Pauline) anti-semitism, the historic Church has emphasized the apostle's opposition to 'the works of the Law' as indicating Paul's view of the Church as an entirely new thing. This perspective was intensified by modern Dispensationalism, but it was by no means invented by Dispensationalists. It has remained for every generation of the Church to interpret what Paul has to say concerning the relationship of the Church to Israel, and from that to establish a Pauline ecclesiology for its age. Few generations have done well at this.

At the heart of the problem is the fact that Paul does advocate new 'worldview markers' for the Church while at the same time rejecting the worldview markers of ancient and contemporary (to Paul) Judaism. A 'worldview marker,' to be clear, is something that not only sets a people off from other peoples, but serves to define the people in terms of their most fundamental beliefs and practices. For the Jews in Paul's day, the most evident markers were the practice of circumcision, the strict observance of dietary restrictions that forbade Jews from joining with Gentiles in the all-important cultural phenomenon of the meal, and the Jewish observance of the Sabbath as a day of complete inactivity. These three markers, Dunn maintains with excellent reason and biblical support, constitute the 'works of the Law' that Paul writes about in his epistles. What is significant to our current study, however, is how these markers are consistently – and at times vehemently – rejected by the apostles as applying in any way to the Church. He declares any gentile who receives circumcision to have negated Christ's benefit for themselves (Gal. 5:2); he speaks of all foods being sanctified and permissible to believers (I Cor. 10:23) and approvingly of those who view "*every day alike*" (Rom. 14:5). Several passages in the apostle's writings – notably Romans 14 and I Corinthians 10 – infuriated his unbelieving countrymen because of their ambivalence toward the ancient Jewish 'markers.'

*One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks. For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself. For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.*

(Romans 14:5-8)

*All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."*

(I Corinthians 10:23-26)

The worldview markers of Judaism were non-negotiables; Jews went to their deaths as martyrs rather than to eat forbidden meat or perform a forbidden activity on the Sabbath. Government prohibitions against circumcision went unheeded as well; this was not *adiaphora* – a matter indifferent – to the Jew. So Paul's new ambivalence is striking. Indeed, "Disputations over food, which particularly divided Jews and Gentiles, became occasions in which Paul exhorts the church to love one another, to desist from judging or condemning one another, and to understand the perspective of those with whom they disagree."<sup>152</sup> This perspective was radical and incendiary in Paul's own time, and has sadly caused confusion in the interpretation of his doctrine of the Church in years since.

The markers of Paul's ancestral Judaism fall away, as far as the *ekklēsia* is concerned, because God has done at last the great thing which he had promised to the patriarchs, the thing for which Moses, the Psalms, and the prophets had longed and prayed. The scaffolding which has protected both building and builders during its construction must now be taken down lest it spoil the view.<sup>153</sup>

Theologians speak often of the new markers of the Church being baptism and the Lord's Supper, and it is true that these sacraments/ordinances are very important to the life of the Church and factor into Paul's ecclesiology at various important points. But it

---

<sup>152</sup> Schreiner, 573.

<sup>153</sup> Wright, *PGF*; 400.

may be going too far to call them ‘markers’ in the same sense as circumcision, dietary laws, and the Sabbath were to Old Covenant Judaism. For instance, such freight of meaning when applied to baptism would seem to be contradicted by Paul’s seeming ambivalence toward the sacrament as part of his own, personal ministry.

*I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name. Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas. Besides, I do not know whether I baptized any other. For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect.*

(I Corinthians 1:14-17)

Now this passage should not be taken as in any way diminishing the importance of baptism in the Church, and Paul elsewhere speaks of the sacrament as an importance symbol in and of itself. But its importance in the Church does not appear to be of the same order as circumcision and the other worldview markers of ancient Judaism, though this is better considered as a difference in degree rather than kind. We will see shortly, and hopefully in more detail in a future lesson, just what Paul did think of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But before entering into a detailed study of the Church’s two sacraments, it is necessary to understand what Paul believed these sacraments did to a regenerated sinner, and in this we find a consistent perspective from the apostle.

It will become apparent in any study of Paul’s doctrine of the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper that both are oriented to the twin foci of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. As we investigate the apostle’s view of the Church, however, it is important to note the role of these two sacraments with reference to the body of Christ, which is the primary Pauline metaphor for the Church itself. In I Corinthians 12, where Paul gives one of his more detailed treatises on the *charismata*, the ‘gifts of the Spirit,’ as they are commonly known, he writes of the body in similar terms as we have seen in Ephesians and Colossians. But in this instance he incorporates the rite of baptism.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether*

*Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many.* (I Corinthians 12:12-14)

Modern teaching regarding baptism is commonly along the lines of ‘a public testimony of faith,’ very individualistic in orientation (as is much of our soteriology and ecclesiology in the modern church). Paul, however, sees baptism as “a *community-marking symbol*, which the individual then receives, not first and foremost as a statement about him- or herself, but as a statement which says, ‘This is who *we are*.’”<sup>154</sup> This focus on the community seems to be confirmed in Ephesians 4, though the passage definitely requires more unpacking to even begin to appreciate the fulness of meaning contained therein.

*I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, **one baptism**; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

(Ephesians 4:1-6)

Paul’s reference in I Corinthians to the Lord’s Supper is in a similar vein, with both the identity and the unity of the body taking primary place in his analysis of the sacrament.

*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.* (I Corinthians 10:16-17)

The common denominator in these two passages from I Corinthians is *the body*, the Body of Christ, the Church. Into this body are believers baptized, and within this body do believer commune both with the Lord and with one another through the Lord’s Supper. “The Lord’s Supper is the other great element of Pauline symbolic praxis, standing alongside baptism...together constituting the symbolic actions which des-

---

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*; 422

ignite this community as the Passover people, the single family rooted in Messiah-shaped monotheism.”<sup>155</sup>

It is important at this point to note that the apostle to the Gentiles did not replace the Jewish markers of his heritage with pagan markers of the world into which he went preaching the gospel. Paul did not mint coins with the cross or an image of Jesus on them; he did not build temples or altars to the name and honor of *kurios* Jesus – Lord Jesus; he did not commission statues in Lystra, Derbe, or Psidian Antioch in honor of the man Jesus. Paul did not abandon the monotheism of his ancestors and did not accommodate the symbols of his ‘good news’ to the sensibilities (or lack thereof) of his gentile, pagan audience. At no point did the apostle to the Gentiles modify the biblical nature of his message in order to attract or to facilitate belief among his Gentile hearers; he had no part in making the gospel ‘culturally relevant’ in that way.

So if Paul rejected the worldview markers of his earlier Judaism without taking up the worldview markers of the Gentile world, does this mean he attempted to build a community total devoid of markers? If he did he would have been woefully unsuccessful, for even a brief sociological or anthropological study of human civilizations will show that ‘markers’ are part and parcel of any human society; they are what helps define one society apart from another. Even when all human society was one, and attempted to remain as one, they did so by attempting to build a marker – the Tower of Babel – that would, in a very real sense, define them. But Paul rejected any and all distinctives within the Church that set one group off from another; he rejected this with great vehemence and even, at times, anger.

The answer to the question of what constituted the marker(s) of the new community in Christ point at all times to Jesus himself as that marker, and the Holy Spirit as literally the ‘seal’ – itself a visible mark on a legal document – as confirmation of the one worldview marker which is Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*; 429.

The other icons – statues, temples, coins, mosaics – fall away, and for Paul one solitary icon stands in place of them all. Jesus *reflects the one God*: that is what *eikon tou theou* indicates. The fact of Jesus himself, who he was and is, and not least his Messiahship, is for Paul the place where, and the means by which, the community of his followers gazes at the one God and, through worship and thanksgiving, is itself transformed into the same likeness.<sup>156</sup>

But if this were Paul's only worldview marker – the person of Jesus Christ – he would not have bothered so much about establishing churches in each town and city in which he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ. To be sure, Jesus is the *only* image of God and therefore the *only* icon or marker for believers. But this statement cannot be interpreted as justifying visible images of Jesus in portrait or statue, of which *nothing* can be found in the New Testament and which is a clear violation of the prohibition against representative images of God. The one image of God in Jesus Christ remains, for now, invisible. But that does not mean for Paul that the Church has no worldview marker. Rather, and this is the key point, the Church *is the marker* of the new age. To Paul, the Church is, under Jesus himself, *everything*. McKnight only slightly exaggerates when he writes, "What I want to contend is that the *church* was Paul's obsession."<sup>157</sup> With only slightly less hyperbole, Wright comments,

And again we remind ourselves: at the moment we are concerned, not with something called 'the theology of the church,' but with the construction and maintenance of a worldview-symbol, indeed *the* central symbol of Paul's newly formed world. The *ekklēsia*, the Messiah's body, is nothing short of a new version of the human race...The unity of God's people in the Messiah is the most obvious worldview-symbol Paul has. That is why, in the absence of others, it matters so enormously to him. It is loadbearing. If this gives way, everything comes crashing down.

### Interim Summary

To review where we have been thus far: Paul sees in the resurrection of Jesus the complete fulfillment of the promises made by God, not only to Abraham but also to Adam. Both covenantal *and* creational lines of divine redemptive history culminate in

---

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*; 406.

<sup>157</sup> McKnight; 143.

Jesus and are triumphant in the resurrection. This fact of history constituted Jesus Christ as the last Adam, and all 'in Him' constitutes the new Creation. Thus the people who are 'in Christ' can be nothing less than a new humanity. This should fully explain why Paul was so determined to eradicate all thought of division or distinction within the Body of Christ, for such division entered the world through the Fall and as a result of the rebellion of the first Adam. The obedience of the last Adam, and His complete victory over sin and death, precludes in the Church any and all of the distinctions that continue to prevail in the world around the Church. The foremost of these, for the former Pharisee, was the distinction between Jew and Gentile. By abandoning the worldview-markers of ancient Judaism, Paul establishes the principle that this distinction can no longer obtain in the Church: "*there is neither Jew nor Gentile...*" And without adopting any of the pagan worldview-markers so disgustingly pervasive in all of the towns Paul visited, the apostle nonetheless recognizes the Gentile believers as equally part of the new Creation in Christ Jesus.

The apostle does not need to adopt worldview-markers from the world that is passing away. Instead, he establishes the unity of the Church as the worldview-marker of the new age, the 'ends of the ages,' calling it the Body of Christ and "*the fulness of Him who fills all in all.*" The Church is so far from being 'Plan B,' that Paul views her as the primary work of God in consequence of the finished work of Jesus Christ. "In the Messiah Jesus, God has launched his project of bringing the human race together into a new unity, and those who believe in him are summoned into that *koinōnia tēs pisteōs*, that fellowship of faith, in which their previous differences are transcended."<sup>158</sup>

Thus the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the motive force behind Paul's recalibration of the entire theology of the Old Testament – from Eden as well as from Sinai – around this momentous event and Person. But the motive force behind what then transpires – the establishment of Christ's *Body* – is due to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the gift of the divine Spirit that formed the culminative element in ancient Israel's eschatological hope. But the language that Paul uses with regard to the

---

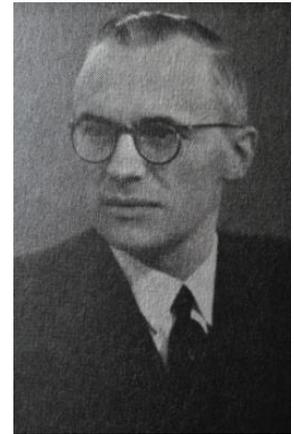
<sup>158</sup> Wright, *PGF*; 833.

Spirit indwelling, sealing, marking, and most importantly, imparting life to the regenerate believer is reminiscent of the creation of the first man. Just as God breathed into the lifeless form of Adam, so now He breathes the Holy Spirit into the spiritually lifeless form of every sinner saved by grace. Only God can make alive, and it is through His Spirit that He does so. Hence we should hear the strains of the original Creation even when we read of our own re-creation.

*And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* (Ephesians 2:1-7)

### Metaphors of Unity

Th two most common metaphors that Paul uses to describe the Church are the 'Body of Christ' and the 'Bride of Christ,' and of these two, the image of the body is by far in the majority. Each is worth thorough study to see what the metaphor conveys about the Church in relationship to Jesus Christ, but it can be said in preliminary summary that both signify, above all else, *union*. The union of the head to the body goes without saying, and that of the husband to his wife is found in the very establishment of marriage, "*and they shall become one flesh.*"<sup>159</sup> This unity is, in both images, organic and living and, in the latter image, procreative. Thus these pervasive images of the Church found in the Pauline corpus reaffirm his view of the unity of the Church with her Lord, Jesus Christ, and within herself. The problem we find in the history of ecclesiology – both in theory and in practice – is that this unity is so rarely visible

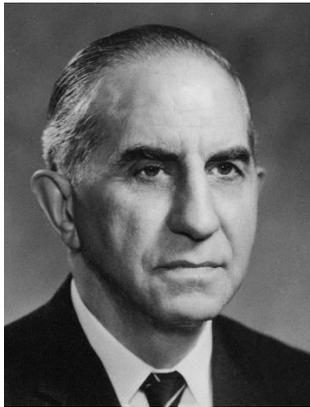


G. C. Berkouwer (1903-96)

---

<sup>159</sup> Genesis 2:24

in the life of the Church that the whole imagery is abandoned for a more 'realistic' perspective. G. C. Berkouwer comments, for instance, that "we can say that the problem of unity and division concerns everyone and the solutions are never totally satisfying."<sup>160</sup> This struggle between the 'reality' of the Church – sin, faction, division, strife – and the 'ideal' of Paul's perspective has led many to downplay the significance of the Pauline metaphors in relation to the life of the Church in the current age. Practically the concept of the Church as the united and unified Body and Bride of Christ has all but been abandoned for a more institutionalized and sacramentalized 'church,' and this began happening even within Paul's lifetime. Paul's metaphors are said to apply to the 'invisible' Church; what we have to deal with is the visible Church. But the problem with this 'sol



John Murray (1898-1975)

ution' is that Paul's letters make no mention of an invisible church in Corinth or Ephesus or Galatia, and firmly ground how the churches in these locales – the Church – was supposed to live *in the present age* as the united and unified Body of Christ. John Murray is certainly correct when he rejects the 'invisible Church' ploy as a solution to the conundrum of sin and disunity in the Church. Murray writes, "It would be, therefore, far too abstract to find in these two Epistles [Ephesians & Colossians]

reference to the church viewed transcendently and invisibly. It is the church, exemplified in the saints and faithful brethren in Ephesus and Colosse, which Christ loved and of which he is the head."<sup>161</sup> The challenge every generation of the Church faces is to find and incorporate the reality of which these metaphors – the Body and the Bride – are the vivid Pauline word images. To say that they are merely figures of speech, essentially without practical meaning or application, is both facile and degrading to the integrity of Paul's thought. Murray writes, "This is an all-important distinction, namely, that between what a situation may existentially be by reason of the sin, hypocrisy, and infirmity of man, on the one hand, and the terms in which the

<sup>160</sup> Berkouwer, G. C. *Studies in Dogmatics: The Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1976); 70.

<sup>161</sup> Murray, John *Collected Writings of John Murray: Volume 2* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth; 1977); 326.

church is to be defined, on the other.”<sup>162</sup> How Paul defines the Church is *what the Church is*, regardless of how far the Church herself falls short of the mark. What we can never do (though it is often done) is define the Church in terms of her failure rather in terms of her commission.

The passages in which we find Paul elucidating his understanding of the Church as the “Body” of Christ are significantly also those in which the apostle introduces the ‘charismata’ or ‘grace gifts,’ what have come to be known as ‘spiritual gifts.’ These passages are also found in widely diverse locations as to the purpose and content of the letters: Romans, I Corinthians, and Ephesians. This signifies that Paul’s view of the Church as the Body of Christ was by no means limited to one of the churches; nor was it in response to a particular problem or doctrinal issue. To Paul, the Church is the Body of Christ because God has made it so, and not just for a season or a purpose. Murray writes,

It is because we are partakers of Christ’s body that we are one body in him. It is because we are the beneficiaries of the offering of the body of Christ once for all, because he bore our sins in his own body upon the tree, that we are constituted the body of Christ. It is because representatively, and by mysterious identification with Christ in his death and resurrection, yea, even in his ascension to the heavenlies (Eph. 2:4-7), and thus identification with him in that which he accomplished in his own body, that we are one body in him.<sup>163</sup>

It is worthwhile spending a few minutes reading the key passages in which this important metaphor stands out in Paul’s ecclesiology.

*For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith. For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use*

---

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*; 327.

<sup>163</sup> Murray; 328.

*it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching; he who exhorts, in exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.*

(Romans 12:3-8)

*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills. For as the body is one and has many members, **but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body**, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

(I Corinthians 12:4-13)

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom **the whole body**, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

(Ephesians 4:11-16)

Clearly Paul is not speaking literally here – the Church is not literally the body of Jesus Christ; He has a body of His own. But does that mean that the intent of Paul’s metaphor is strictly figurative? In other words, is he speaking of something that is merely analogous to the truth, or of a reality in and of itself? Theologians are divided as to the answer, with modern, liberal scholars emphasizing the figurative, allusive characteristic of the language. The problem with their analysis, however, is that the apostle consistently bases very concrete and practical actions by and within the Church on the fact that she is the Body (or the Bride) of Christ. Berkouwer comments, “Paul is concerned with much more than simply figurative language: he has a specific bodily reality in view...figurative language undoubtedly intends to refer to reality. A metaphor is not

a vague, unreal expression, but intends, in the service of revelation, to open one's eyes to a deep, fascinating reality."<sup>164</sup>

The classic orthodox response to the conundrum of the ideal versus the apparent in the Church's life is to speak of the 'invisible' Church as being the Body of Christ while the visible Church is a 'mixed multitude' that contains those who are not in Christ at all. This assessment of the Church as it lives in the 'in between' age is, sadly, accurate for all generations: the Church has never lived up to its definition in Paul's writings. But, once again, to adopt a purely figurative or spiritual interpretation for the metaphors renders the admonitions that are consistently attached to them null and void. Paul was not speaking abstractly about 'the Church' as the Body of Christ; no, he was exhorting the churches to a certain type of behavior – and away from other types of behavior – *on the basis of* her identity as the Body of Christ. This is a characteristic of the Pauline letters that is unavoidable. If one spiritualizes the metaphor, one cuts the foundation out from under the ethics. "We should bear in mind what we have already found to be the concept of the church, and we may not attempt to escape from the implications of this oneness, and the obligation incident to it, by taking refuge in the notion of the invisible church."<sup>165</sup>

In the same essay, Murray offers four points of interpretation with regard to the reality of the metaphor of the Church as Christ's Body. These points flow from the metaphor itself and, as Paul does in Ephesians 4 (above), Murray highlights the inseparable unity of a body with its head, and within itself.

1. "Christ and the church are complementary."<sup>166</sup> There is hardly a metaphor that captures the essence of coordination and complementarity than that of a head and its body. This is emphasized in Paul's letters in such passages as Colossians 1:18, "*And He is the head of the body,*" uniting the two – Christ and His Church – in the midst of the restoration of all Creation. What is amazing about this concept is that it is not *necessary*, but *gracious*. Christ, the eternal God and now the immortal Man, does not *need* the Church to complement His being. Rather, He gra-

---

<sup>164</sup> Berkouwer; 81.

<sup>165</sup> Murray; 332.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*; 330.

ciously *chooses* to constitute His Church as His body. Murray quotes the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Anglican theologian L. S. Thornton, "The Church apart from Christ would be like an empty wine-cup. Christ without the Church would be like wine which, for lack of a wine-cup, no one could drink."<sup>167</sup> Yet we must always remember that this association is by the will of God alone and not due to any merit of the Church.

2. "The figure of the body implies an organic relationship that exists on an infinitely higher plane than anything with which we are acquainted."<sup>168</sup> The idea of the Church being the Body of Christ transcends, and must be allowed to transcend, any and all human associations that the members of the Church have experienced. This is a critical consideration especially when one contemplates the struggles the Church has had, and has always had, in the world. It may be reasonably asserted that those struggles have been due to the Church associating herself with the world rather than contemplating her intimate association with the Head, Jesus Christ. As mentioned above, we must not gauge the purpose and meaning of the Church by her failures, but rather by her divinely-revealed identity and commission.
3. "The church as the body derives all its life from Christ the head."<sup>169</sup> This seems an obvious take-away from the metaphor, but that fact should not diminish the magnitude of the thought. The Church has generation to generation attempted to derive life within herself, and even at times to consider herself as life-giving. The metaphor of the Church as Christ's Body, deriving as it does from the creation account in Genesis 2:7, coordinates well with what Paul says elsewhere concerning the last Adam, who "*became a life-giving spirit.*"<sup>170</sup>
4. "The body of Christ is unit, and all the members are united to the head and to one another."<sup>171</sup> This is where Paul ties his ecclesiology with his ethics, and the exhortations to unity that abound in his epistles are grounded in his understanding of the Church as Christ's body. Paul does not admonish his churches to be unified and to resist division and schism *in order to be* the body of Christ, but rather *because they already are* the body of Christ. In this way the apostle expands upon his understanding of the new-creation Man that is the risen Jesus Christ, by incorporating all who are 'in Him' into the body of that Man. And just as there was no division within humanity until sin entered the world, so – and in spite of the fact that there is still sin in the Church and in believers – there ought not be any division, favoritism, factions, or schisms.

---

<sup>167</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>168</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>169</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>170</sup> I Corinthians 15:45

<sup>171</sup> Murray; 331.

As mentioned in a previous lesson, the high point of Paul's ecclesiology, and the standard by which any doctrine of the Church that purports to be biblical must certainly be measured, is Ephesians 1:22-23, "...and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all." Attempting to understand this remarkable statement, we must first limit our thoughts by the fact that Jesus Christ, the risen Lord, does not lack anything of the fulness; rather it is the case that "...it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fulness to dwell in Him," and "in Him all the fulness of Deity dwells in bodily form."<sup>172</sup> Keeping this foremost in mind, we will steer clear of adopting an 'incarnational' ecclesiology in which the Church essentially takes the place of Christ on earth, the ecclesiology of the Roman Catholic Church. A more satisfying explanation, more in keeping with the overall thrust of Paul's writings concerning the relationship of the Church to her Head, Jesus Christ, is given by Murray, who holds that "the meaning is that the church is the receptacle of the fulness, and in this sense is being filled with him who himself fills all things."<sup>173</sup> Murray quotes Thornton, "In the primary sense the Church is the fulness, because the mystical body is like a vessel into which the fulness of Christ is poured. He fills it with himself."<sup>174</sup> Teasing out what this means in both the life of the Church within herself and her life within the world then becomes the task of both Ecclesiology and Ethics.



L. S. Thornton (1884-1960)

---

<sup>172</sup> Colossians 1:19; 2:9

<sup>173</sup> Murray; 331.

<sup>174</sup> *Idem.*

## Lesson 9 – The Church and Israel

### Text: Romans Chapters 9 - 11

*“Christ, who is the seed of Abraham,  
as well as the second Adam:  
the one in whom the whole church, Jews and gentiles together,  
has become one body and one new man.”*  
(Herman Ridderbos)

Perhaps the greatest theological challenge that confronted the Apostle Paul was the status of his own people, Israel, in light of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It would have been nothing for Saul of Tarsus to go to the Gentiles preaching the need for repentance and abandonment of idols, so long as the Gentile then converted to Judaism, submitted to circumcision, and lived a life according to Torah. But Paul knew pretty much as soon as he encountered the risen Jesus that this age-old message was no longer the Good News (if it ever really was), and he concluded soon after this event that his call was not to go into the world and make *proselytes*, but *disciples*. Thus he moves through the world of the Roman Empire, in cities and towns that have at least a minority Jewish population, preaching reconciliation with the God of Israel apart from conversion to the religion of the Jews. This was, no doubt, good news to the God-fearing Gentiles who had already attached themselves in an ancillary way to the Jewish religion, but had as yet balked at the rite of circumcision. Even Gentiles who had rationally concluded the vacuousness of paganism – and there were many such – would have been attracted to this new way of salvation. Even Paul acknowledges that his life would have been easier had he travelled this road, *“But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.”*<sup>175</sup>

But Paul would not abolish that stumbling block, and hence was both consigned and compelled to preach a message that placed him on a collision course with his unbelieving countrymen, the Jews. And we have to admit that the Jews did have a plausible argument, on the face of it, for opposing Paul’s audacious admittance of Gentiles into the covenant of Abraham *without* the accompanying markers that demarcated the chil-

---

<sup>175</sup> Galatians 5:11

dren of Abraham from the rest of the world for so many generations. Paul does take up the challenge, and as a result (and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) he gives the Church the deepest theological treatment of the redemptive work of God in Christ Jesus, that can be found in the whole of Scripture. But with regard to the status of Israel and her relationship with the Church, now that Christ Jesus has died and been raised, all begins on the foundation of Romans 9:6, "*But it is not as though the word of God has failed.*" It is amazing how many wrong theories of Israel and the Church would be nipped in the bud if full weight had been given at the outset to this statement by the apostle: "*The word of God has not failed!*"

One erroneous view that has perennially influenced Pauline studies in the Church, from the second century on, is that the 'Apostle to the Gentiles' developed a new religion that, while it drew copiously from Paul's Jewish heritage, also completely reconfigured the religion of his fathers into something completely new and suitable for his pagan audiences and congregations. Geerhardus Vos recognizes the strength of this theory as a practical explanation of Paul's 'new' doctrine, but also the inadequateness of such a theory for anyone who holds to the inspiration of the Pauline literature.

Paul exercised his apostolic activity on a virgin field, where the necessity of radical reconstruction of the entire fabric of life compelled reflection upon the fundamental principles of religion and ethics. But, while recognizing the validity of all such considerations, we cannot as believers in the inspired character of apostolic teaching consider them ultimate. The deepest reason for the theological form of the Pauline teaching is an objective one, inherent in the purpose itself for which truth exists. Because so much depends for the vigor and purity of the Christian religion on its practical side upon the definite apprehension of its truths in their various relations and their organic unity, there was need that the main lines of this apprehension should be firmly drawn beforehand in Scripture for the infallible guidance of believers in later ages.<sup>176</sup>

This lengthy and somewhat indigestible statement (and it is longer in the original essay), is summarized by Paul: "*It is not as though the word of God has failed.*" The objectivity of Paul's theology is dependent on this fact, for if the word of God had failed,

---

<sup>176</sup> Vos, *Redemptive History*; 355.

Paul knew he had nothing to say and nothing on which to build a new religion. It has been a chronic error of Pauline studies to conclude that the apostle had to *abandon* the Old Testament in order to provide the theological bulk of the New Testament. Such a conclusion makes things easier, though every theory based on this conclusion ends up tying itself in knots and collapsing in logical absurdity. No, the student of Paul's theology must accept at the outset that the apostle *never* considered that the promises of God to Israel had failed. Nor, it must be added, did he consider that these promises had been delayed until a future age. Somehow he considered them to be fulfilled in their entirety in the person and work of his risen Lord, Jesus Christ. This belief then forms the starting point of Christian theology, as Vos, notes, "While beginning to the history of revelation, his teaching at the same time marks the beginning of the history of theology."<sup>177</sup>

So how then does Paul unite Israel and the Church without abandoning the Old Testament prophecies? We know that his encounter with the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus forced him to recalibrate his understanding of God's covenant promises regarding Israel in the light of this phenomenal occurrence, but *how* he did this recalibration has caused constant debate and disagreement within the Church for two millennia. Wright acknowledges that Paul had his work cut out for him as he truly blazed a new trail from the old one, "The revelation of a crucified Messiah has caused Paul to reflect, from all that he knew of Israel's traditions, on how Israel's God had done all things in such a way as to lead up to this point, but in a way which nobody before had imagined."<sup>178</sup>

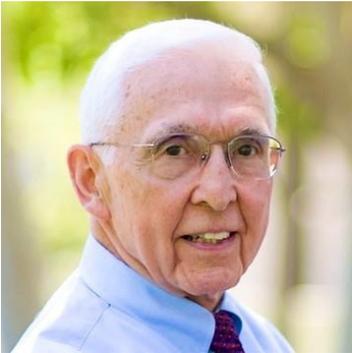
Different denominations within Christianity have come up with different solutions to the question of the relationship between the Church and Israel, but the two main opposing rubrics under which these theories are contained are, *Supersessionism* (or *Replacement Theology*) on the one hand, and *Dispensationalism* on the other. The latter of these two is not a Reformed view and thus will not be treated in detail here. Suffice it to

---

<sup>177</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>178</sup> Wright, *PGF*; 899.

say that Dispensationalism holds so literally that the promises of God to Israel must be met in physical, national Israel, that all thought of a relationship between Israel and the



Robert Saucy (1930-2015)

Church is denied outright. This is not a conclusion that can be maintained by any fair reading of Paul's theology. Robert Saucy, a Progressive Dispensationalist, makes some remarkable statements concerning Paul's view of the Church and Israel, statements that are made necessary by his Dispensational foundation. For instance, Saucy writes, "This present work of God in the church is, therefore, dis-

tinct from the previous economy of salvation history in which Israel enjoyed a special relation to God as a nation among the nations. It is also different than that OT prophetic picture of the messianic kingdom in which Israel has a preeminent position among the nations."<sup>179</sup> Perhaps even more remarkable is Saucy's comment, "The apostle, however, does not speak of the Gentiles being incorporated into Israel, or of them together forming a 'new Israel.'"<sup>180</sup> Granted, Paul does not use these exact words or phrases in Romans 9-11 or Ephesians 2, but it is hard to mistake the meaning of incorporation in those important passages.

The Reformed position has always held to some form of continuity between Old Testament Israel and the New Testament Church, on the basis of the unity of God's word and redemptive purpose. However, within this overall rubric of continuity there has been a pervasive tint of *Supersessionism* or *Replacement Theology*, in which the Church has in some measure taken the place of Israel. There is a broad range of views within this paradigm, and a detailed summary of the field is beyond the scope of this study. However, the concept itself is so frequently inherent in much modern Christian thought, though usually without knowing the underlying 'theology,' that it bears some further discussion. We begin with a definition offered by Michael J. Vlach of The Mas-

---

<sup>179</sup> Saucy, Robert, "Israel and the Church: A Case for Discontinuity" in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, John S. Feinberg, ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books; 1988); 251.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*; 253.

ter's Seminary, "Supersessionism is the view that the NT church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God."<sup>181</sup> Vlach differentiates between 'strong' and 'moderate' supersessionists, "Strong supersessionists hold that Israel has no future in the plan of God, but moderate supersessionists see a divine plan for the future salvation of the Jews as a group, but not their national restoration to the promised land."<sup>182</sup> He summarizes the debate, "At issue is whether the New Testament church replaces, fulfills, and/or displaces national Israel as the people of God. And if so, to what extent does this affect national Israel."<sup>183</sup>

Before digging into the theology of 'replacement' or 'supersession,' it is worth noting that both sides of the debate tend to treat the identity of Israel as a nation as being essential to Israel itself. There are several things to note on this score. First, Israel was a people long before it was a nation and, when it lost its national status during the Exile (and its national sovereignty from there on), it did not thereby cease to be Israel. The constant refrain within the literature of 'national Israel' is therefore a categorical error: being a nation is not of the essence of being Israel. This does not, of course, answer the question as to what happened to Israel with the resurrection of Jesus Christ, but it is important to get the conceptual framework right.

The second thing to note is more biblical, and that is the fact that Paul does seem to make a linguistic distinction between the word 'Israel' and the word 'Jew.' The latter is ethnic, the former covenantal. "When Paul uses the term [Israel] he is not using it simply as a general designation of those claiming physical descent from Abraham. Rather he uses it to designate them as the people of the covenant made with Abraham...One gets the impression that when Paul wants to stress ethnic affiliation, he uses the term Jew, but when he comes to reflect upon their spiritual heritage, Israel/Israelite alone can clearly designate this people as a religious entity."<sup>184</sup> Dunn concurs, "In

---

<sup>181</sup> Vlach, Michael J., "Various Forms of Replacement Theology"; *The Master's Seminary Journal* 20/1 (Spring 2009); 57.

<sup>182</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>183</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>184</sup> Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid, *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1993); 441.

short, 'Jew' defines primarily by relation to land and by differentiation from peoples of other lands, whereas 'Israel' defines primarily by relation to God."<sup>185</sup>

In his essay on Replacement Theology, Vlach cites numerous well-known Reformed or Reformed-leaning theologians as advocating 'replacement' views with respect to the Church and Israel. He quotes Bruce Waltke as stating, "the hard fact that national Israel and its law have been permanently replaced by the church and the New Covenant," and Hans K. LaRondelle as affirming, "that Israel would no longer be the people of God and would be *replaced* by a people that would accept Messiah and His message of the kingdom of God."<sup>186</sup> Vlach also quotes Loraine Boettner, a theologian of impeccable Reformed credentials, as saying "It may seem too harsh to that that 'God is done with the Jews.' But the fact of the matter is that He is through with them as a unified national group having any-  
Thing more to do with the evangelization of the world. That mission has been taken from them and given to the Christian Church."<sup>187</sup>



Loraine Boettner (1901-90)

All of these quotes, and the overall thrust of Vlach's essay, focus on Israel *as a nation*, which does tend to be the emphasis within the age-old debate. But as we have already noted, national status is not of the essence of being Israel. The apostle might not have even considered Israel to be a 'nation' when he wrote about Israel in Romans 9-11, for the political manifestation of the Jews in that day was hardly 'national'; they were a province of the Roman Empire and what political autonomy they possessed was held at the pleasure of Rome. Again, this seems to be an error of category in the discussion: to emphasize Israel as a *nation* as being of the same nature as Israel as a *people*. Indeed, even replacement theologians tend to confuse their terms, for they rarely mean that the Church has replaced the *nation* of Israel but rather that the Church has replaced Israel as *the people* of God. This may seem to be just so much semantics, but in such a hotly de-

---

<sup>185</sup> Dunn; 506.

<sup>186</sup> Vlach; 59.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*; 60. Vlach is quoting from Boettner's *The Millennium*; 89-90.

bated and confused issue as the relationship of Israel to the Church – and in light of the advent of a *nation* called Israel in 1948 – terminology is important if one hopes to understand what Paul has to say on the matter.

Replacement or Supersessionist Theology can be summarized as the general belief that now that Christ has come and the Church has been inaugurated, God is done with Israel. There is a certain plausibility to the theory, since Paul does distance himself remarkably from his heritage in terms of the Old Covenant versus the New, and vehemently denies the validity of the ancient markers of Jewish faith as applying to the Church in any way. There is, therefore, a sense in which the Church does ‘replace’ Israel, but does this mean that Israel ceases to be God’s people? To have any part in God’s



Herman Ridderbos (1909-2007)

redemptive future? Would this not constitute a failure of God’s word? And Paul clearly states his firm belief, “*It is not as though the word of God has failed.*” These questions indicate that a true understanding of Paul’s view vis-à-vis Israel and the Church is probably more nuanced than the two ‘typical’ positions of Replacement and Dispensationalism allow. Herman Ridderbos recognizes the difficulty in determining

this perspective with regard to just how the Church has ‘replaced’ Israel in the current era. He writes, “The significance of the church...as the continuation of Israel, as the elect, called, holy people of God, ought now to be defined further according to its content and essence. We have already seen in the analysis of these various designations that this ‘continuation’ is no simple matter. On the one hand, in a positive sense it presupposes that the church springs from, is born out of Israel; on the other hand, the church takes the place of Israel as the historic people of God. This means a new definition of the people of God, and likewise a new concept of Israel.”<sup>188</sup>

This analysis of Israel in relation to the Church, to the finished work of God in Christ Jesus, is exactly what Paul does in Chapters 9 – 11 in Romans. Paul knew very

---

<sup>188</sup> Ridderbos, Herman *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1975); 333-34.

well that his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus necessitated a complete re-evaluation of the whole concept, not to mention the *nation*, of Israel, and this is what he did under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the Old Testament Scriptures. He does not accomplish his task of reconceptualizing Israel by abandoning the prophecies, or by concluding that the word of God had somehow failed. Indeed, he would not even allow that Israel's disobedience in any way justified God in abandoning His word, for Paul knew that God was unshakably faithful to His own word. "[Paul] never suggests the Gentiles have displace Israel or that Israel has no role to play in God's future. Rather he sees God's gift to Israel as irrevocable and Israel as occupying an inalienable place in the divine economy of salvation."<sup>189</sup> Thus Paul has the challenge – and meets it – of explaining just how God's word *has not failed* and yet Israel is no longer the vehicle of redemption in God's plan. The answer, of course, is found in Paul's understanding of who Jesus was and what He accomplished through His death and resurrection. "This has nothing to do (as is sometimes suggested) with the replacement of the old Israel with a new one, and everything to do (as is less frequently noted) with Paul's belief that Israel as a whole is summed up and redefined in and by *Christos*."<sup>190</sup>

There was something about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ that convinced Paul that all that God had promised on behalf of Israel – and that He promised to do through Israel – had been accomplished. So firm was this conviction that it was not in the least shaken by the prevailing unbelief of his fellow countrymen. Israel's unbelief certainly presented the apostle with a challenge, but he stood to that challenge in the firm conviction that God's word could never fail, and that "*the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable*."<sup>191</sup> And on the basis of the irrevocable gift and calling, and the immutability of God's word, Paul could only conclude that God had not rejected His people,

---

<sup>189</sup> *Dictionary*; 441.

<sup>190</sup> Wright, *PF*G; 831.

<sup>191</sup> Romans 11:29

*I say then, God has not rejected his people, has He? May it never be! For I too am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin. God has not rejected His people whom He foreknew.* (Romans 11:1-2)

Paul's initial conclusion, as we read in Romans 9, is quite remarkable in itself and cannot be merely accepted without consideration: "For they are not all Israel who are from Israel; neither are they all children because they are Abraham's descendants."<sup>192</sup> This was an incendiary statement to Paul's unbelieving brethren and therefore one that must have some root in God's word if it is not to be seen as destructive of God's word. "In order to give a satisfactory explanation of this state of affairs [*i.e.*, the faithfulness of God in light of the unbelief of Israel], Paul was forced to take a careful look at the history of Israel in the Scriptures. From this he came to a conclusion that some Jews would have considered radical, even blasphemous – that not all the descendants of Abraham are really Abraham's children in the sense that they share the same kind of faith as their father Abraham."<sup>193</sup> Paul thus deals with the problem of Israel in relationship to the Church by redefining Israel in terms not of physical descent but of promise.

*But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect. For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham; but, "In Isaac your seed shall be called." That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; **but the children of the promise** are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: "At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son."* (Romans 9:6-9)

'Promise' factors heavily in Paul's reconfigured theology, and in a manner that logically leads to his own conclusion with regard to the fulfillment of the promise in Jesus Christ. Here in Romans he redefines true Israel according to the promise and not according to physical descent, a modification that he proceeded to defend from the Old Testament itself. Promise become the defining trait of the true Israel, and the litmus test of whether a Jew is 'true' or 'false.' "This new definition at the same time represents the real nature of Israel's election and the content of God's purpose with respect to his peo-

---

<sup>192</sup> Romans 9:6-7

<sup>193</sup> *Dictionary*; 442.

ple.”<sup>194</sup> The concept of the promise delineates the true succession of Abraham and, as the apostle sets forth in Galatians, cuts through the fog created by the Law.

*And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect. For if the inheritance is of the law, it is no longer of promise; but God gave it to Abraham by promise.* (Galatians 3:17-18)

Thus adherence to the Law – or the attempt at such – cannot be the deciding factor as to whether one is a true Israelite or not. In fact, as we will see in more detail in a later lesson, the Law was given “*because of transgressions*” (Gal. 3:19) and does not nullify the promise at all. But the promise was *life*, not the Law, and so true Israel was seeking the promise even as it tried to abide by the Law. Therefore, when the promise came in the Person of Jesus Christ, the final separation between true and false Israel came at the same time. In this manner Paul redefines election without abandoning the Old Testament prophecies: *it is according to promise* and not according to flesh. The two seminal promises to which he alludes concern first Isaac, “*through Isaac your seed will be named,*” and then Jacob, “*the older will serve the younger.*” Thus through the patriarchal family Paul shows how the differentiation was made – *by divine choice (election)* – by means of promise. This is, as we have seen elsewhere and frequently, nothing less than the continuation of the promise given at the outset of human misery, “*the Seed of woman shall bruise your head.*” It fits, of course, with the overarching promise given to Abraham that “*in your seed shall all the nations be blessed.*” Paul simply pieces these promises together in order to make sense out of what he has experienced in the risen Lord, Jesus Christ. In this way the apostle will arrive at the conclusion that God has now extended His saving grace in Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, *without their having to become Jews first, and without abandoning or abrogating His word.*

The primary thrust of Romans 9 – 11 is to show what has happened to Israel, how Israel can be seen to no longer be in God’s grace without that fact diminishing in the least the faithfulness of God to His word or to His covenant. Thus Paul quotes from

---

<sup>194</sup> Ridderbos; 334.

Old Testament passages to show how the apostasy of Israel was prophesied long ago, and that only a remnant of Israel would be saved.

*Unless the LORD of hosts had left to us a very small remnant,  
We would have become like Sodom, we would have been made like Gomorrah.*  
(Isaiah 1:9 – quoted in Romans 9:29)

*For the LORD has poured out on you the spirit of deep sleep,  
And has closed your eyes, namely, the prophets;  
And He has covered your heads, namely, the seers.*  
(Isaiah 29:10 – quoted in Romans 11:8)

*Let their table become a snare before them, and their well-being a trap.  
Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see;  
And make their loins shake continually.*  
(Psalm 69:22-23 – quoted in Romans 11:9-10)

In addition to such passages indicating Israel's apostasy and the promise of a remnant, Paul also mixes in passages to show that God's redemptive purpose had always included the 'nations,' literally – the *goyim* or Gentiles.

*Then I will sow her for Myself in the earth,  
And I will have mercy on her who had not obtained mercy;  
Then I will say to those who were not My people, 'You are My people!'  
And they shall say, 'You are my God!'*  
(Hosea 2:23 – quoted in Romans 9:25-26)

*I was sought by those who did not ask for Me;  
I was found by those who did not seek Me.  
I said, 'Here I am, here I am,' To a nation that was not called by My name.  
I have stretched out My hands all day long to a rebellious people,  
Who walk in a way that is not good, according to their own thoughts.*  
(Isaiah 65:1-2 – quoted in Romans 10:19-20)

Thus Paul establishes the two phenomena of his gospel: its rejection by the majority of the Jews and its open offer and reception by the Gentiles. And in what is perhaps the crux of the entire passage, the apostle shows what it was that made the difference, that made this remarkable occurrence possible *according to the word of God* which

has not failed. In Romans 9 Paul quotes Isaiah again, in reference to the 'stone' who would be both a sanctuary and a snare, depending on how Israel responded.

*The LORD of hosts, Him you shall hallow; Let Him be your fear,  
And let Him be your dread. He will be as a sanctuary,  
But a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense  
To both the houses of Israel, as a trap and a snare to the inhabitants of Jerusalem.  
And many among them shall stumble; They shall fall and be broken, be snared and taken.*  
(Isaiah 8:13-15 – alluded to in Romans 9:33)

This reference highlights an aspect of Old Testament prophecy that sadly the majority of Israel failed to grasp: that it was all coming down to one individual within Israel, one who would himself *be* Israel. This 'stone' of stumbling is also the chief cornerstone of God's new Temple,

*Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation,  
A tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation;  
Whoever believes will not act hastily.*  
(Isaiah 28:16)

This theme continues especially in the prophecy Isaiah, with the Servant Songs of Isaiah beginning in Chapter 40. Some of the 'Servant' passages refer to Israel, while others refer to an individual, thus indicating – though obliquely – that God's purpose for (and through) Israel would distill eventually into one Israelite, a *representative* Israelite who would fulfill in himself the divine purpose for calling Israel and consequently open up the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant to the nations. G. K. Beale writes, "It was not as clear in the OT that when the Messiah came, the theocracy of Israel would be so completely reconstituted that it would continue only as the new organism of the Messiah (Jesus), the true Israel. In him Jews and gentiles would be fused together on a footing of complete equality through corporate identification."<sup>195</sup> Thus we read of God commissioning Israel as His Servant in Isaiah 41 with a commission that has no expiration date.

---

<sup>195</sup> Beale; 654.

## The Ends of the Ages: Pauline Eschatology, Ecclesiology, and Ethics

*But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen,  
The descendants of Abraham My friend.  
You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions,  
And said to you,  
‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away:  
Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’* (Isaiah 41:8-10)

But just a short while later in the same general section of Isaiah’s prophecy, the identity of the Servant becomes singular, hardly capable of being mistaken for anyone other than the promised Messiah.

*Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights!  
I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the Gentiles.  
He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street.  
A bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench;  
He will bring forth justice for truth. He will not fail nor be discouraged,  
Till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands shall wait for His law.* (Isaiah 42:1-4)

What Israel often failed to realize was that these words, and the following ones quoted below, were intended to be the mission and purpose of Israel as a nation chosen from among all nations and set in the midst of the nations.

*Thus says God the LORD, Who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
Who spread forth the earth and that which comes from it, Who gives breath to the people on it,  
And spirit to those who walk on it:  
“I, the LORD, have called You in righteousness, and will hold Your hand;  
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the Gentiles,  
To open blind eyes, to bring out prisoners from the prison,  
Those who sit in darkness from the prison house.  
I am the LORD, that is My name; and My glory I will not give to another,  
Nor My praise to carved images.  
Behold, the former things have come to pass,  
And new things I declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them.* (Isaiah 42:5-9)

The Servant's mission to the nations is again highlighted in Isaiah 49, in a passage that cannot refer to the Servant *as* Israel, for it will be the mission of the Servant to restore Israel.

*Indeed He says, 'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob, and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'* (Isaiah 49:6)

But immediately before this the LORD identifies His Servant *as* Israel, whom he cannot be in the corporate sense (since it will be his mission to restore Israel).

*And He said to me, 'You are My servant, O Israel, in whom I will be glorified.'  
Then I said, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;  
Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, and my work with my God.'  
And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,  
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him  
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength)* (Isaiah 49:4-5)

The reasonable interpretation of these passages is that the role of the Servant of Yahweh was the original charter of Israel's existence, her purpose to bear witness of the divine grace and holiness, and to declare the majesty of the one true God before the nations. She was to live in obedience to His commands; in a word, she was to be holy. This, however, she was incapable of doing, since Israel was also from among the sons of Adam and, therefore, corrupt from her mother's womb. Thus it was the divine intent that Israel's role would be taken up and fulfilled by one in Israel who would himself *be* Israel, the Servant of Yahweh. He would be filled with the Spirit of God (42:1) to "*open blind eyes*" and be a light to the Gentiles (42:6-7), and to restore the "*preserved ones of Israel*" (49:6), another way of saying 'the remnant.' And Paul realized through the resurrection that Jesus was and must be that Servant so promised. Speaking of Paul's Pharisaic hope for the resurrection, Wright comments,

When, therefore, it happened [i.e., the resurrection] to one person, as Paul believed it had – and when, in particular, it happened to someone who had been executed as a would-be Messiah – it meant that *Israel's God had done for Jesus what it had been supposed he would do for Israel*. Not only therefore did the resurrection demonstrate that Jesus was after all Israel's Messiah, despite the verdict of the court. The resurrection also declared, for Paul, that the divine purpose for Israel had been fulfilled, uniquely and decisively, in this Messiah, this Jesus. He was, in effect, Israel in person.<sup>196</sup>

Just how the Servant of Yahweh would accomplish all that God had purposed when He established Israel as His people, is powerfully described in the most poignant of Servant Songs – a veritable gospel in Isaiah 52 -53,

*Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.  
Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man,  
And His form more than the sons of men;  
So shall He sprinkle many nations. Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;  
For what had not been told them they shall see, and what they had not heard they shall consider.  
Who has believed our report? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?  
For He shall grow up before Him as a tender plant, and as a root out of dry ground.  
He has no form or comeliness; And when we see Him,  
There is no beauty that we should desire Him.  
He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.  
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.  
Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows;  
Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.  
But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities;  
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed.  
All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way;  
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.* (Isaiah 52:13-53:6)

That Jesus would Himself *be Israel* in the fulfillment of God's purpose for Israel should not be difficult to comprehend for anyone who understands the biblical principle of *representation*. However, we tend to consider representation from the perspective of *origination* – for instance, all mankind was represented in Adam when the first man was created and when he fell; and all believers are now represented in Christ as their Head and their righteousness, benefiting from His representative atoning death. Israel

---

<sup>196</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 828.

was represented in Abraham, and so on. What was perhaps more difficult to discern, though it is contained in the promise of the 'seed,' was representation in the *culmination*. Flowing *from* a representative, but flowing also *to* a representative. Beale discusses both of these representations – of *origination* and of *culmination* – as presuppositions to the understanding of Paul's theology of Christ and of the Church.

The first presupposition is the notion of corporate solidarity or representation or identification, sometimes known as the concept of 'the one and the many'...One of the best illustrations of this concept is the sin and punishment of the first Adam, which is seen by Paul to be representative of all humanity, so that all humanity is seen to have committed Adam's sin and thus to be deserving of the punishment of that sin...The second presupposition, following from the first, is that Christ is the true Israel, and as true Israel, he represents the church as the continuation of true Israel from the OT. Christ came to do what Israel should have done but failed to do.<sup>197</sup>

Wright adds, "In other words, the driving force of the whole chapter [in this case I Corinthians 15] is that *in Jesus* the creator God has done that for which he called *Israel*. It is now Israel's representative, rather than Israel as a whole, who constitutes the 'true humanity', under whose feet all things are placed in subjection."<sup>198</sup> In this manner the apostle recognizes that while Israel itself continues, it does so *in Christ* and therefore as a people fulfilled rather than one still awaiting fulfillment. "In passage after passage in Paul the point being made is that *Jesus, as Messiah, has drawn together the identity and vocation of Israel upon himself*."<sup>199</sup> Jesus thus becomes true Israel, and it is union with Him that now constitutes Israel, not descent from Abraham and certainly not observance of "*the works of the Law*." Thus Ridderbos,

For it is only in Christ, who by God has been made a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense, as well as a foundation by whom none shall be put to shame, that Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, have become the new unity, the one new man (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:15); in him the people of God, Israel, circumcision, promise, sonship, and

---

<sup>197</sup> Beale; 652.

<sup>198</sup> Wright, *PGF*; 821.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*; 825.

heirship receive their new definition and content; therefore in him, too, is the only and utterly decisive criterion of what may be called by the name of Israel.<sup>200</sup>

Therefore, Paul concludes, Gentiles are no longer brought to Israel's God by first being incorporated into Israel through circumcision and obedience to the Law. Rather, now that Israel herself has been fulfilled, both Jews and Gentiles are brought to God either by remaining in the one true olive tree (believing Jews) or being grafted into the one true olive tree (Gentiles). In either case there is but *one* tree, and that tree is Jesus Christ. Dunn comments, "A Christianity which does not understand itself in some proper sense as 'Israel' forfeits its claim to the scriptures of Israel."<sup>201</sup> This, to Paul, would have constituted Christianity as a false and heretical religion. "*It is not as though the word of God has failed.*" Thus those who were once alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants, without hope and without God in the world - in other words, the Gentiles - are not redeemed by being converted to Judaism. Rather they are redeemed by being 'brought near' in Christ Jesus, by being 'grafted in' to the tree that is Jesus Christ. Wright concludes,

The boundaries of Israel are not merely slackened to tightened, a few key adjustments here and there; they are radically redrawn. *The boundaries of God's people now consist of the Messiah and his death and resurrection, and as a result Israel itself...has been put to death and raised to new life. This, we should note in relation to wider debates, has nothing whatever to do with the replacement of Israel by something else...but everything to do with the fulfilment of the divine purpose for Israel in and through Israel's own representative Messiah.*<sup>202</sup>

---

<sup>200</sup> Ridderbos; 341.

<sup>201</sup> Dunn; 508.

<sup>202</sup> Wright; *PFG*; 858

## Lesson 10 – The Embedded Church

**Text: Romans 12:1-2; I Corinthians 1:26-30; Ephesians 5:1-13**

*“Genuine Christians constitute an identifiable part of any particular culture.”*

(D. A. Carson)

Theologians often distinguish between the church ‘militant’ and the church ‘triumphant.’ The latter refers to believers that have gone on to be with the Lord, to the Church of ages past, now at rest with Jesus Christ. The former, then, is the Church in any particular age, those believers still alive in any given generation and still bearing witness through their words and deeds. The adjective describing the living Church – *militant* – connotes battle, which is in keeping with several passages in the Pauline literature, though perhaps the ‘Church Militant’ has not always defined her battle as Paul did and would.

*Now I, Paul, myself am pleading with you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ – who in presence am lowly among you, but being absent am bold toward you. But I beg you that when I am present I may not be bold with that confidence by which I intend to be bold against some, who think of us as if we walked according to the flesh. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.*

(II Corinthians 10:1-6)

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

(Ephesians 6:10-13)

‘Militant,’ therefore, describes a Church in the midst of warfare, and that warfare is considered on-going through every living generation of the Church from the day of Christ’s Ascension to the day of His Parousia. In keeping with the military motif, Paul not only speaks of the ‘*weapons of our warfare*’ in the above passage, but also exhorts the

believers in Rome not to “*present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.*”<sup>203</sup> The word translated ‘instruments’ in most English Bibles is *hopla*, the same term used in II Corinthians 10:4, there translated ‘weapon.’ For Greek readers of Paul’s letters the word would always carry a strong military connotation, since *hopla* is the root of the term *hoplite*, the heavily-armed Greek soldier of antiquity. This is, of course, the image that the apostle establishes so famously in Ephesians 6, where he described ‘the armor of God’ in such vivid terms. It is often said that Paul’s terms of armor in this passage are indicative of a soldier in the Roman legions, but it may be more accurate to his intention to be describing the equally famous Greek soldier, the *hoplite*. In any event, the image is a military one beyond any doubt, though the individual pieces of the believer’s armor bear no resemblance to the weaponry of either the Roman legionary or the Greek hoplite.



Hoplite

*Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

(Ephesians 6:14-17)

Perhaps as a result of the Crusades, or the experience of the Reformers (and anabaptists) at the hands of the offended Roman Catholic Church, or simply because the imagery does not fit with the modern, domesticated version of a God whose only true attribute is ‘love,’ the militant terminology describing the Church of the present age (*any* present age) has fallen by the wayside. It seems telling that the *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, published in 1993, does not contain an entry on ‘Weapons’ in its 993 pages. The professing Church has too often employed the carnal weapons of worldly man, even the killing weapons of worldly soldiers. For this reason most modern writ-

---

<sup>203</sup> Romans 6:13

ers shy away from speaking of the Church as ‘militant,’ and any mention of ‘weapons’ is in the context of asserting that they are not “used to carry on a ‘worldly war’.”<sup>204</sup> But there is a danger in this retrograde movement, that the Church will lose sight of the fact that she is in *conflict*, which is certainly at least a major part of what Paul is trying to say in these ‘militant’ passages. The living Church of any and every era is not a cloister, but a culture that by its very nature is in conflict with the culture of the world in which she lives.

Another way in which Paul’s militant language has been diverted in the modern church is through individualizing the struggle, making it entirely (or almost so) a personal battle against indwelling and ‘besetting’ sins. Even a cursory reading of Ephesians



Edmund Clowney (1917-2005)

6 will not allow this interpretation to stand, for the “*principalities, powers, rulers of this present darkness*” are not inside individual believer. “Paul does not conceive of spiritual warfare as a mystical and ineffable struggle that bypasses human beings.”<sup>205</sup> Edmund Clowney explains why the existence of the Church in any age presents the surrounding world with an entity with which it cannot live in peace. “The

church as the community of Christ’s kingdom on earth is a theo-political order. While all things are under the rule of Christ, it is his *saving* rule that constitutes his kingdom. The church is the heavenly *polis* on earth, the new humanity whose hearts are circumcised by his Spirit.”<sup>206</sup> If the Church is what she is supposed to be in the world, conflict is unavoidable. But it is not a conflict that is initiated by the Church – that is where she has gone wrong so often in the past, and still does in the present. One can assume that Paul did not see a different mission for the Church than for himself, and his mission was *reconciliation*.

---

<sup>204</sup> Berkouwer, *The Church*; 417.

<sup>205</sup> Schreiner, Thomas R. *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2001); 302.

<sup>206</sup> Clowney, Edmund P. *The Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1995); 189.

*Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.* (II Corinthians 5:18-20)

This is the perennial conundrum: How is the Church to interact with the world, knowing that all that she stands for is all that the world stands against? There is a clash, not merely a conflict, of worldviews between the Church – when she is the Church – and the world in which she lives. Each generation of the Church must, it seems, relearn the principle that *“friendship with the world is enmity toward God”*<sup>207</sup> while at the same time remembering that *“God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.”*<sup>208</sup> The result of sin’s corruption of all of humanity, and the consequent subjection of all Creation to futility, presents the Church with the dichotomy of a world that God made and loves, filled with people who hate Him and hate His people. Thus the Church is not allowed either to *embrace* a world that is in rebellion against its Creator, nor can it *abandon* a world that her God has made. D. A. Carson writes,



D. A. Carson (b. 1946)

“Christians cannot long think about Christ and culture without reflecting on the fact that this is *God’s* world, but that this side of the fall this world is simultaneously resplendent with *God’s* glory and awash in shame, and that every expression of human culture simultaneously discloses that we were made in *God’s* image and shows itself to be mis-shaped and corroded by human rebellion against *God.*”<sup>209</sup>

In her on-going struggle with the world, the Church has frequently fought with ‘carnal’ weapons, the Crusades being the most infamous but certainly not the only example. But in addition to utilizing the wrong weaponry, the Church has often failed to properly discern the location of the battlefield itself. The Crusades are past, and hopefully forever past, so that believers no longer even consider the literal field of warfare a

---

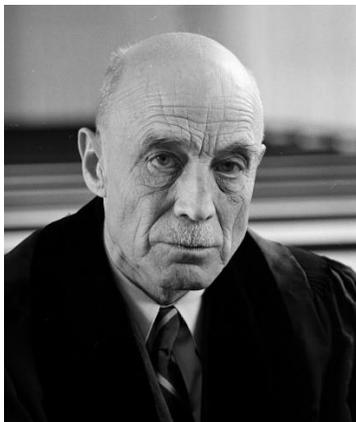
<sup>207</sup> James 4:4

<sup>208</sup> John 3:16

<sup>209</sup> Carson, D. A. *Christ & Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2008); 49.

proper sphere of Christian evangelism. But in much of the modern, conservative church the battlefield has shifted to the public forum, and the swords of the medieval knights have been exchanged for barbed and hateful words thrust out with no less intention and capacity of harm than a Crusader's blow. Such weapons would be viewed as 'carnal' by the apostle. Writing about the apostle's use of military terminology, Berkouwer notes, "The militant aspect in all images that are employed includes the equipment of the gospel of peace and the sword of the Holy Spirit. In this *militia* 'praying with all prayer' is not a pious pretense, but is itself the structure of the *militia*. The Church is tested in her dialogue not only as to the purity and understandableness of her proclamations, but also as to her faith and love, her confession of the Name, and her whole life in that imitation to which she summons others."<sup>210</sup> Schreiner adds, "The battle is for the mind of human beings. Satan and the flesh are conquered when human beings *think* and live the way God desires. When people come to know God and obey Christ, then Satan is defeated."<sup>211</sup>

Thus the Church in the world today is in conflict, *at war*. Her mission is not to retreat and 'circle the wagons,' but rather to engage with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, to "*take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.*" What this has meant to different epochs of the Church, and to different segments of the Church in any given epoch, has



H. Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962)

not been consistent and uniform. In his seminal treatise on the subject of the Church's relationship and interaction with the surrounding world, H. Richard Niebuhr took comfort in this heterogeneity of thought. "It is helpful also to recall that the repeated struggles of Christians with this problem have yielded no single Christian answer, but only a series of typical answers which together, for faith, represent phases of the strategy of the militant church in the world."<sup>212</sup>

---

<sup>210</sup> Berkouwer; 418.

<sup>211</sup> Schreiner; 302.

<sup>212</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard *Christ & Culture* (New York: Harper & Row; 1951); 2.

Niebuhr outlines five of the 'typical answers' in his book, and these five have generally guided the conversation regarding the Church and culture since the book was written. Carson writes, "It is hard to overestimate the influence of Niebuhr's fivefold template, especially in the English-speaking world."<sup>213</sup> Therefore we will review Niebuhr's analysis, if only to disagree with the basic premise and move forward, hopefully, with a more Pauline 'template.'

The first paradigm that Niebuhr develops is termed '**Christ Against Culture**' and he brings it forward at the beginning because, he maintains, this was the primary attitude of the early church to the world around it. "The first answer to the question of Christ and culture we shall consider is the one that uncompromisingly affirms the sole authority of Christ over the Christian and resolutely rejects culture's claims to loyalty. It seems to be both logically and chronologically entitled to the first position: logically, because it appears to follow directly from the common Christian principle of the Lordship of Jesus Christ; chronologically, because it is widely held to be the typical attitude of the first Christians."<sup>214</sup> This view might be summarized as one of **Antagonism** between the Church and the surrounding culture, and is summarized biblically in Paul's rhetorical questions in II Corinthians 6, "*for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what fellowship has light with darkness? Or what harmony has Christ with Belial, or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?*"<sup>215</sup>

This view was most earnestly propounded in the early church by the Latin theologian Tertullian, who famously rejected any synthesis of Christian doctrine with prevailing Greek philosophy in terms reminiscent of Paul's: "What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Academy with the Church?" In the modern church the view is represented primarily by the anabaptists and their successors, who advocated a complete separation from the surrounding culture, a refusal to find merit or good in anything that is 'of the world.' There is in this view, however, a proper recognition that the forc-

---

<sup>213</sup> Carson; 29.

<sup>214</sup> Niebuhr; 45.

<sup>215</sup> II Corinthians 6:14-15

es that are at work *“in this present darkness”* are fundamentally and essentially antagonistic both to God and to His people. Speaking of the ‘powers that be,’ James Davison Hunter writes, “The powers do give unity and direction to individual and social life, yet in this unity and direction, they also separate people from the true God. ‘They let us believe that we have found the meaning of existence, whereas they really estrange us from true meaning.’”<sup>216</sup> The ‘Christ Against Culture’ viewpoint therefore presents, on the one hand, a proper skepticism with regard to what the world really is, and its innate animosity toward the things of God. But on the other hand, it abandons the world that God made, and as a result has the tendency to be very non-evangelistic as it is non-engaging.



James D. Hunter (b. 1955)

The second template that Niebuhr discusses is the diametric opposite of the first: **The Christ of Culture**. This is the **Accommodation** perspective to the Antagonism of the first view. This view seeks to synthesize Christianity with Culture by attempting to conform the Christian message to the prevailing dialogue within culture at any given time. The current manifestation of this is called ‘wokeness.’ In history this view “was further developed after the Constantinian settlement, in the rise of ‘so-called Christian civilization.’ In the medieval period, Abelard is the best example.”<sup>217</sup> Niebuhr has little good to say of this view, as there is little good to be said of it. He notes that when the believer adopts this paradigm, “in stating the faith, its beliefs about God and Christ and its demands on conduct, he reduces it to what conforms with the best in culture. It becomes a philosophic knowledge about reality, and an ethics for the improvement of life.”<sup>218</sup> This is, however, not the gospel that Paul preached.

---

<sup>216</sup> Hunter, James Davison *To Change the World* (Oxford University Press; 2010); 157. Hunter is quoting Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*.

<sup>217</sup> Carson; 17.

<sup>218</sup> Niebuhr; 90.

The next three templates are really different nuances of the third, **Christ Above Culture**, in which the authority of Jesus Christ both as Head of the Church and as Lord of lords, is to be superimposed in some manner and measure over the cultures of the world, the Church being the instrument of this superimposition. Each of the last three paradigms of Niebuhr's analysis emphasizes the Church as being in the center of cultural modification in the world. The 'church in the center' approach is founded on the principle that this is God's world, and that Jesus Christ, by virtue of His death and resurrection, is the Lord of that world. Therefore the two - Christ's people/body and Christ's world - cannot be either hermetically sealed from one another (Christ Against Culture) or blended into one (The Christ of Culture). Niebuhr writes,

The great majority movement in Christianity, which we may call the church of the center, has refused to take either the position of the anticultural radicals or that of the accommodators of Christ to culture...One of the theologically stated convictions with which the church of the center approaches the culture problem is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, the Father Almighty who created heaven and earth. With that formulation it introduces into the discussion about Christ and culture the conception of nature on which all culture is founded, and which is good and rightly ordered by the One to whom Jesus Christ is obedient and with whom he is inseparably united. Where this conviction rules, Christ and the world cannot be simply opposed to each other.<sup>219</sup>

Niebuhr describes the 'church in the center,' then, in three templates: Christ Above Culture, Christ and Culture in Paradox, and Christ the Transformer of Culture. A brief description of each is all that is needed here, since all three templates emphasize the mission (and the ability) of the Church to modify the surrounding culture to some extent. Carson provides an excellent summary of these in his review of Niebuhr, "It may help some to think of the last three of his five types as: (3) Christ above culture: synthesist type; (4) Christ above culture: dualist type; (5) Christ above culture: conversionist/transformationalist type."<sup>220</sup> The first of these, the 'synthesist' type, is somewhat self-explanatory. Adherents of this view see the church's mission as synthesizing

---

<sup>219</sup> Niebuhr; 117.

<sup>220</sup> Carson; 20.

the surrounding cultural milieu into the culture of the church, and vice versa. Clement of Alexandria is perhaps the first 'synthesizer' in the Church, but the most famous and influential was the medieval Catholic doctor, Thomas Aquinas, who sought to blend the newly-rediscovered philosophy of Aristotle with the teachings of the Bible. In general, this perspective seeks to find common ground between the surrounding world culture and the teachings of the Church, and to then emphasize these points of contact in its dialogue with the world.

**Christ and Culture in Paradox** is a paradigm that is a bit more difficult to understand and to explain. It is similar to the first of Niebuhr's templates, *Christ Against Culture*, except that in the Paradox view both the world culture *and* the church culture are deficient and sinful. It is not only philosophy that is wrong, but also theology. By this analysis the paradox viewpoint unites the world and the church in sin, and tends to be as skeptical regarding dialogue within the church as it is toward dialogue between the church and the world. This is the underlying (and sometimes unconscious) perspective of those who say, 'I am just a sinner saved by grace.' Not that this statement is in error, but that it tends to obscure the magnitude of what God has done in the believer's life through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit. It is a pessimistic view, really, of both the Church and the world, and Martin Luther may be considered its most famous adherent. Niebuhr writes in summary of Luther's teaching (and the Lutheran denomination in general), "Living between time and eternity, between wrath and mercy, between culture and Christ, the true Lutheran finds life both tragic and joyful. There is no solution of the dilemma this side of death."<sup>221</sup>

The final paradigm, the third of this 'church of the center' set, is **Christ the Transformer of Culture**. This view emphasizes the church's mission and power to *convert* culture to the divine will through the teachings and activities of Christ's Church.<sup>222</sup> There is a very strong Activism involved in this perspective, as its adherents and

---

<sup>221</sup> Niebuhr; 178.

<sup>222</sup> "It is vital to understand that Niebuhr is not thinking so much of individual conversion...as of the conversion of *the culture itself*." – Carson; 25.

churches are “less concerned with conservation of what has been given in creation, less with preparation for what will be given in a final redemption, than with the divine possibility of a present renewal.”<sup>223</sup> Carson lists John Calvin as a proponent of this template, but perhaps a more current example (and more consistent) would be Abraham Kuyper, who famously stated “There is not a thumb’s breadth of all creation of which God does not say, ‘Mine.’” Kuyper advocated full engagement of both the believer and the church with the surrounding culture, with the goal of conquering that culture for Christ. Kuyper’s viewpoint is perhaps the most ‘militant’ example of the transformative template, as he himself was involved in education and politics, founding a newspaper and later becoming Prime Minister of his homeland, the Netherlands, from 1901-05. Kuyper was resounding rejected after serving only one term, his brand of Christian engagement not to the liking of his fellow citizens. Ultimately the jury is still out on the practical application of Kuyper’s brand of transformative engagement, but that can also be said of the other four templates that Niebuhr outlines.



Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920)

Perhaps the most that can be said regarding the fivefold approach of the Church to culture, is that these five paradigms represent the historical thinking of believers in the church to their generation’s interaction (or lack thereof) with the surrounding culture. Carson notes that the *Sitz im Leben*, the ‘situation in life,’ of the church in any particular age or demographic or political environment has a massive impact on the available options for engagement. “I have repeatedly hinted that which aspect should be emphasized of the many things that the Bible says about the relations between Christ and culture depends, at least in part, on the concrete historical circumstances in which Christians find themselves.”<sup>224</sup> This reality speaks to the inherent weakness of all five templates: they cannot be universally applied to the church in every age and in every

---

<sup>223</sup> Niebuhr; 195.

<sup>224</sup> Carson; 65.

location. Carson adds, "So if we are going to uncover a broad, theoretical understanding of the relationship between Christ and culture, it is going to have to be complex, subtle, and flexible enough to embrace the specificity of cultures."<sup>225</sup> It is for this reason that none of Niebuhr's five relational paradigms has ever been recorded as successfully impacting the surrounding culture in the manner intended or, if some impact has been made, that this influence had any significant duration in time.

The benefit of Niebuhr's analysis, then, is in the manner in which it highlights the various facets of difficulty in the conflict of the Church with its surrounding culture. To return to the militaristic figure of speech, these five paradigms are, so to speak, five different forms of reconnaissance of the front between the Church and her surrounding culture. None of them, however, can singly lead to a successful line of attack. They are informative of the situation as it stands, but are remarkably incapable of altering that situation in a meaningful and lasting way. Hunter comments on this score, "Christians have embraced strategies that are, by design, incapable of bringing about the end to which they aspire. Christians have failed to understand the nature of the world they want to change and failed even more to understand how it actually changes."<sup>226</sup> Yet the problem does not go away; the Church is left in the world by the divine providence and purpose, and each generation of the Church must discern what is to be the proper relationship and interaction between her and the surrounding culture in which she bears witness. Again Hunter, "a tension exists for the Christian community, a community caught in the unavoidable pull between history and revelation; between the conditions of social life in any particular epoch and the call of God on the church."<sup>227</sup>

Perhaps the problem with the Niebuhrian approaches is that each of them derives its structure more from the nature of the surrounding culture and less from the Scriptures themselves. They are, almost of necessity, both opportunistic and responsive: the battlefield is set in every instance by the world culture and not by the church. Hence each paradigm has a strong element of the 'carnal' in it, as the church responds

---

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*; 71.

<sup>226</sup> Hunter; 99.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.* 230.

to the movements of culture as she perceives and understands them (an understanding which is often in error).

### **The Church as an Embedded Culture**

In beginning to sort this out, it is perhaps best to consider in what ways the Church differs from her surrounding culture, and where there are points of commonality, if any. The latter investigation is fairly easy, at least on the surface. Christians share a great deal with their unbelieving neighbors in terms of both cultural heritage and participation in cultural change, which is occurring at all times. Hunter points out in his excellent book, *To Change the World*, that people are changed by their culture in a far more powerful way than they change the culture itself. And the believer is no less susceptible to the powerful modifying impact of culture than is the unbeliever. The believer participates alongside the unbeliever in such cultural-modifying activities as economics and politics, entertainment and athletics, art and food. The impact of cultural modification within the church can most easily be seen in the invariable generational differences of believers within the same cultural heritage and denomination structures. This reality has led to the 'Culture Wars' that take place with increasing frequency *within* the churches.

Political ideology and national pride – patriotism – are also epistemological phenomena that are shared roughly equally by believers and unbelievers in any given age and area. Thus the question is really not, 'Are there points of contact?' but rather, 'Do these points of contact represent a viable strategy for the Church to modify its surrounding culture?' It would seem that the biblical answer to this second question is 'No.' Echoing the Old Covenant mantra for God's people to live 'separated' lives vis-à-vis the surrounding nations, Paul writes to the Corinthian church,

*Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord.  
Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you.  
I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters,  
Says the LORD Almighty.*

(II Corinthians 6:17-18)

There is, therefore, a basic biblical foundation with regard to the relationship of the Church to the world: the world is *unclean*. This, of course, takes us back to the verse in James quoted above, that love of the world is enmity toward God. Not only does this perspective rule out any form of synthesis between the Church and the surrounding culture, it also argues the greatest caution with regard to *any* relational template the Church may adopt vis-à-vis culture. Indeed, if it were not for the admonition of Christ Himself, “*And you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth,*”<sup>228</sup> it would be reasonable to conclude that the Christ Against Culture paradigm was the correct one, and that the Church had no other recourse but to avoid all contact with the surrounding culture. This, however, was not an option for Israel – placed as she was in the middle of the major transportation highway between the powerful empires of the ancient Near East – and it is not an option for the Church – placed among every tongue, tribe, and nation to witness the grace of God in and through Jesus Christ.

Therefore, recognizing that engagement with the surrounding culture is both inevitable and necessary, it is crucial for the Church to figure out how to do this biblically and, consequently, effectively. The key, it seems, is not to be found in analyzing the culture either for points of contact or to ascertain cultural needs that the Church might address. No culture is so homogenous and stable even to allow this type of response; the Church ends up associating itself with one form or manifestation of culture against other forms or changes in that culture. When the Church becomes thus associated with a certain type of culture, it ceases to be a witness for Jesus Christ and becomes a witness for that cultural expression, and this cannot be what the Lord intended in Acts 1:8. What is needed is for the Church to recognize her own unique cultural characteristics as the people of God in Christ Jesus, which is exactly what the nation of Israel was supposed to do in her witness before the nations. The Church as the extension of Israel, therefore, has the same relationship with the surrounding world, rooted as Israel’s was

---

<sup>228</sup> Acts 1:8

on the identity of her God and on His covenant activities on behalf of His people. This paradigm has not changed. This is the concept of the **Embedded Church** which becomes itself a culture within the surrounding culture or cultures. Carson writes, "This means that the Christian communities honestly seeking to live under the Word of God will inevitably generate cultures that, to say the least, will in some sense counter or confront the values of the dominant culture...Christians thus shaped by Scripture envision a church that not only counters alternative cultures but also seeks sacrificially to serve the good of others – the city, the nation, common humanity, not least the poor. Salt does not confront, it enhances."<sup>229</sup> To approach this concept of an embedded church culture, Carson offers six points at which the believing culture of the Church differs irreconcilably and inalienably with the surrounding culture. The first five follow the trajectory of the life of Jesus from His birth to His ascension and session at the right hand of God; the sixth is perhaps the broadest statement given by the Lord with regard to the relationship between His people and the world around them: "*Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's.*"<sup>230</sup> These distinctives are listed here, to be developed in greater detail in the next lesson.

1. The Incarnation of Jesus Christ
2. The Concept & Reality of the Kingdom of God
3. The Passion of Christ
4. The Death of Christ
5. The Resurrection & Ascension of Christ
6. "Render unto Caesar"

The provisional summary of this investigation, therefore, is that the Church, the community of faith in Jesus Christ in the midst of an unbelieving world, does not need (and indeed should not) to aggressively engage culture either to dominate it or to change it. Rather, "genuine Christians constitute an identifiable part of any particular culture."<sup>231</sup> That inevitable distinction is the solution to the problem.

---

<sup>229</sup> Carson; 143.

<sup>230</sup> Matthew 22:21

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*; 63.

## Lesson 11 – The Embedded Church: Part 2

**Text: Isaiah 40:9-10; 21-26; 41:8-16; 43:1-13; 44:1-5; 45:15-17; 46:3-4; 49:3-7**

*“Although still in the world  
they are not oriented toward ‘earthly things’  
but toward the age which is to come.”*  
(Victor Paul Furnish)

If, as has been at least provisionally established, the Church is the extension of Israel through the grafting in of Gentile branches to the one olive tree, then it stands to reason that the role of the Church vis-à-vis the world, in any age, will be at least analogous to that of Israel during the Old Covenant era. It is equally reasonable to conclude that the fivefold template of ‘Christ and Culture’ developed by Niebuhr would have had no application – indeed, would have made no sense – to ancient Israel in her setting. Israel was not established to change the world but, in a manner of speaking, to *save* the world, as Jesus informed the Samaritan woman, “*Salvation is from the Jews.*”<sup>232</sup> If we consider Jesus’ admonition to His disciples in Acts 1:8 as paradigmatic of the nature and purpose of the Church, then there is a parallel between this mission statement and Israel’s mission statement in Deuteronomy 4, the mission of *Witness*.

*Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren.*  
(Deuteronomy 4:5-9)

“...that has God so near to it...” This, we have seen, is the present reality of the people of God in Jesus Christ, in whom God dwells through the Holy Spirit – what can be nearer? The Church is the Temple of the living God, the place where God has chosen

---

<sup>232</sup> John 4:22

to cause His Name to dwell – what can be nearer? Indeed, as we shall see in a later lesson, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit has taken the place of the Law written on tablets of stone; now it is written on the tablets of believers' hearts. Being ingrafted to the one olive tree means that this passage, this mission statement, in Deuteronomy 4 belongs to the Church, as do all the other passages and promises of the Old Testament, which are “*Yes, and Amen in Christ Jesus.*”<sup>233</sup>

We consider, therefore, Israel not merely as the ‘Old Testament people of God’ as distinct from the Church as the ‘New Testament people of God.’ Rather it is the case that the Church is the continuation of Israel: *Israel fulfilled* in her Messiah, Jesus Christ. This opens the entire Old Testament to the Church not merely as her history and heritage, but also the description of her purpose and her hope, which are essentially the same as Israel’s, though with the incredible difference that the Church stands on this side of the finished work of divine redemption. Perhaps the first characteristic, then, of comparison and continuity between Israel and the Church is that of being *chosen* by God and *beloved*. That this was true of ancient Israel is apparent throughout the Old Testament, being sustained consistently by the prophets even during times of severe divine chastisement. Moses establishes this twofold relationship between God and His people – *chosen* and *beloved* – in several passages which are just a small sampling of the unmistakable tenor of the Old Testament.

*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*

(Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

*For you are a holy people to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.*

(Deuteronomy 14:2)

---

<sup>233</sup> II Corinthians 1:20

*This day the LORD your God commands you to observe these statutes and judgments; therefore you shall be careful to observe them with all your heart and with all your soul. Today you have proclaimed the LORD to be your God, and that you will walk in His ways and keep His statutes, His commandments, and His judgments, and that you will obey His voice. Also today the LORD has proclaimed you to be His special people, just as He promised you, that you should keep all His commandments, and that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken.* (Deuteronomy 26:16-19)

God's chosen, God's beloved, God's special people; all these descriptions pertain to Israel under the Old Covenant *and* to the Church, the extension of Israel, under the New Covenant. When we recall that the New Testament term 'saints' really means no more or less than 'holy ones,' it becomes clear that the relationship of the Church to God is no different in Paul's estimation than was the relationship of Israel to God in the old days. Hence his greeting to the believers in Rome: "*To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints.*"<sup>234</sup> This is the common manner in which the apostle addresses his churches, even those whose behavior was less than 'saintly.'

*To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours.* (I Corinthians 1:2)

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life?*

(I Corinthians 6:1-2)

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.*

(Ephesians 1:3-6)

---

<sup>234</sup> Romans 1:7

This last passage, from Ephesians 1, combines much of what we have covered in this study, and more that is to be covered in this particular lesson. First, we have the Church as *chosen* in Him – the Greek word is *eklectos*, which is literally translated ‘elect.’ The purpose of this election is also given: *that we should be holy and without blame before Him*. While the word ‘holy’ definitely includes the concept of ‘without blame,’ its root meaning is ‘separate, set apart.’ Just as Israel was set apart from all the nations of the world, so also the Church – the extension of Israel – has been set apart from the world. But we also have the last phrase in the passage, *accepted in the Beloved*. This can only mean that Paul also viewed Jesus as not merely the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, but that He was Himself Israel – He *was* the Beloved of God, the title that God gave to His people, Israel. This is, of course, all of a piece with the apostle’s teaching that the Gentiles who were once wild branches, separate *from* God and without hope in the world, have been ‘brought near’ and ‘grafted in.’ The olive tree of Romans 11 is Israel. More specifically, it is Israel as represented in her perfect singular form: the Messiah Jesus.

‘Holy,’ ‘Chosen,’ ‘Called,’ and ‘Beloved’ are Israel-titles, given to Israel by the God who loved her and set her apart from the rest of the world. Paul’s usage of these terms – his *frequent* usage – can only mean that he sees the Church in the same light in relationship to God and, by extension, in relation to the world as well. Wright comments on Paul’s terminology, “He assumes that he can and should address his communities as *hagioi*, ‘saints,’ – even the muddled and misguided Corinthians. This...is a basically Jewish identity, marking a distinction between Messiah-people and the wider world.”<sup>235</sup> That each of these terms is linked, almost always in context, with Jesus Christ, is proof that Paul has redefined and reoriented the ancient Israel-titles, first around Jesus Christ and then around His people, the Church. By so firmly and consistently linking these terms now only to those who have believed in Jesus, Paul is making a powerful distinction between the Church – the continuation of Israel – and unbelieving Israel, which is no longer Israel due to that unbelief. Ridderbos comments,

---

<sup>235</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 443.

From all this the significance of this designation of the Christian church in Paul can also be clearly see: as the communion of the 'saints' it is the true people of God, the eschatological Israel, which may apply to itself the promises of God because of the salvation that has appeared in Christ. On the one hand the church is in this way identified with Israel as the people of God; on the other hand, however, it is thereby distinguished from empirical Israel.<sup>236</sup>

Thus we conclude that the Church, being incorporated into the true Israel, which is Messiah Jesus, now stands in the world in the place that Israel once occupied. It must be noted that Israel as an empirical people - an ethnic nation - will not occupy that place again *outside of her Messiah, Jesus*. As Paul himself puts the matter, the natural branches must be grafted back in; they will not form a new and different tree than the one olive tree, which is Christ. But more to the point of the Church: if she now stands in the place that Israel once occupied, then her position relative to the world and her ethical framework both within and without, must bear a strong resemblance to what was required of Israel under the Old Covenant. In other words, the *purpose* of the Church will not be found to be materially different from the *purpose* of Israel. And this purpose can be stated succinctly: *to declare the glory of her covenant God*. When David at last successfully brought the ark of the covenant into the tabernacle, he wrote and commissioned a psalm for Asaph and his brethren to sing, recorded in I Chronicles 16. It is, as are so many of the Psalms, a recounting of what God had done on Israel's behalf with the result that Israel was to lead the nations in giving God both thanks and praise.

*Sing to the LORD, all the earth;*

*Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.*

*Declare His glory among the nations, His wonders among all peoples.*

*For the LORD is great and greatly to be praised; He is also to be feared above all gods.*

*For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.*

*Honor and majesty are before Him; strength and gladness are in His place.*

(I Chronicles 16:23-27)

---

<sup>236</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*; 331-332.

Perhaps the key phrase in this stanza is found in verse 24, “*Declare His glory among the nations.*” This, ultimately, is what Israel was called to do from her position in the ‘center’ of the Ancient Near East. This, we may conclude, is the ultimate purpose of the Church from her position dispersed through ‘every tongue, tribe, and nation.’ The primary form that this responsibility (and privilege) took in Israel’s Scriptures was the recounting of all that God had done for Israel from the time of Abram’s call, through the Exodus and the giving of the Law, and on into the Exile and the promised deliverance from it, and finally to the New Heaven and New Earth promised in Isaiah. What God *had* done for Israel was recounted as firm assurance that God *would* do what He had promised. Any prophet of the Old Testament, or Moses himself, could have written Paul’s poem of praise to the covenant faithfulness of God – except, of course, for the first line.

*For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him;  
If we endure, we shall also reign with Him;  
If we deny Him, He also will deny us;  
If we are faithless, He remains faithful;  
For He cannot deny Himself*

(II Timothy 2:11-13)

More than any other Old Testament figure, the prophet Isaiah figures in the Pauline literature as most powerfully descriptive of what God had promised to do, and had done, in and through Israel’s Messiah, Jesus. Tom Holland, English Baptist minister and author of *Contours of Pauline Theology*, maintains that Isaiah forms the foundation of Pauline theology. The frequency with which the apostle quotes the prophet would indeed seem to bear this out. Holland writes in reference to one such citation, in Romans 10:14-15, “Thus Paul is not only quoting from but actually drawing his theology from the prophecy of Isaiah. As Jerusalem was under judgment for its sin, so is the world. As Yahweh reserved to himself a remnant, so he has done so now. As the task of the remnant, isolated by Isaiah from the nation in its faithlessness and given the



Tom Holland

title servant, was to announce the restoration, so it is the Church's task to prepare men for that Day."<sup>237</sup>

What is significant about Paul's usage of Isaiah becomes clearer when one considers that the most frequently quoted portion of this most-frequently quoted prophet in the Pauline letters, is that section known as the Servant Songs: Isaiah 40-66, the section that liberal scholars call 'Deutero-Isaiah.' In this section, Isaiah brings forth the purpose of Israel, both corporately and singularly, as the Servant of Yahweh. Holland writes, "Isaiah is the theologian par excellence of the Old Testament, but his importance for theology lies, not so much in any abstract formulations he may have reached about the oneness and creative power of God, as in the way in which he seems to have given living embodiment to his understanding of Israel's call to be God's servant in the world."<sup>238</sup>

What is significant here regarding Paul's usage of the Servant passages from Isaiah's prophecy, is how the apostle associates these passages *with his own ministry*, while at the same time maintaining the unique fulfillment of these prophecies in Messiah Jesus. Compare, for instance, Paul's response to the Jewish rejection of his gospel in Pisidian Antioch with the Servant Songs in Isaiah 42 and 49.

**Acts 13:47**

*For so the Lord has commanded us:  
'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles,  
That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'*

**Isaiah 42:6**

*I, the LORD, have called  
You in righteousness,  
And will hold Your hand;  
I will keep You and give  
You as a covenant to the people, as a light to the  
Gentiles*

**Isaiah 49:6**

*Indeed He says,  
'It is too small a thing that You should  
be My Servant  
To raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of  
Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the  
Gentiles, that You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'*

---

<sup>237</sup> Holland, Tom *Contours of Pauline Theology* (Christian Focus Publications; 2004); 80.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*; 69. Holland is quoting N. W. Porteous, 'The Theology of the Old Testament' in *Peake's Commentary on the Bible* (151-59).

Paul assigns to himself and to Barnabas the very same role that Isaiah gives to the Servant of Yahweh: *to be the light of the Gentiles*. Schreiner writes, "That Paul saw himself as the servant is confirmed by Acts 13:47, for when he and Barnabas bring the message of the gospel to the Gentiles, they vindicate this decision by appealing to Isaiah 49:6...In the Old Testament context this role belongs to the servant, but Paul now perceives his ministry in this light."<sup>239</sup> But it is impossible from Paul's own writings to conclude that he considered himself to be Israel's Messiah, the *One* who singularly performed the Servant's task. Thus we must conclude that Paul considered his work – and by extension, the work of the Church – to consist essentially in the same 'servant' role to which both Israel and Israel's Messiah were called. Beale comments, "Therefore, the church is the true Israel insofar as it is now receiving the prophetic promises intended for Israel in the OT. Furthermore, this rationale may have been enforced by Paul's understanding that Christ summed up Israel in himself and hence represented true Israel in a legal, corporate fashion. Whether Jew or gentile, those who identify with Christ by faith are considered part of genuine Israel, receiving the promises that he inherited as true Israel."<sup>240</sup> The logic of Paul's reorientation of Israel around her resurrected Messiah Jesus is straightforward: *Israel* was called to be the Servant of Yahweh, but failed in her mission both willfully and inevitably. *God's Son*, Israel's Messiah, embodied Israel in Himself and fulfilled all that the Servant of Yahweh was called to do, becoming both the redemption of Israel and the Light of the nations. Now *all who are in Christ* are not only a continuation of Israel but are also the continuation of the Servant of Yahweh, so that the fulfilled mission might one day be consummated, and Christ "*might be My salvation to the ends of the earth.*"

In addition to Acts 13:47, we also have Paul's testimony in Romans 15, where the apostle again quotes from a Servant Song – this time from Isaiah 52.

---

<sup>239</sup> Schreiner, *Paul*; 48.

<sup>240</sup> Beale; 715.

*And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man's foundation, but as it is written:*

*"To whom He was not announced, they shall see;  
And those who have not heard shall understand."*

(Romans 15:20-21)

Compare this with Isaiah's words in Isaiah 52, the beginning of the most powerful gospel presentation in the Old Testament.

*Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently; He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.  
Just as many were astonished at you, so His visage was marred more than any man,  
And His form more than the sons of men; so shall He sprinkle many nations.  
Kings shall shut their mouths at Him;*

*For what had not been told them they shall see,  
And what they had not heard they shall consider.*

(Isaiah 52:13-15)

A thorough study of the Servant passages in Isaiah would be justified here, but is well beyond the scope of this investigation. However, we can draw some general conclusions and direction for future consideration from the Servant passages, knowing their fulfillment in Jesus, Israel's Messiah, and knowing that Paul saw himself within the same paradigm as 'servant.' If we consider what was required of the Servant, and what it was foretold the Servant would accomplish, it becomes apparent that Jesus is continuing His Servant ministry through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Therefore a brief overview of some of the key Servant passages should be helpful in outlining the purpose of the Church in the world, and her relationship to the surrounding culture in every age and region of the world.

As noted earlier, one of the defining characteristics of God's people is that they are chosen by Him and beloved. Because of this fact they have confidence in the LORD's protection; it can be said of them on this account, "*No weapon formed against you shall prosper.*"<sup>241</sup> The Servant Songs begin with such assurance as is absolutely necessary and invaluable for God's people, stranded as it were in an evil age and in the midst of the godless nations. This is no less applicable to the Church than it was to Israel, for the

---

<sup>241</sup> Isaiah 54:17

Church is the continuation of the Servant and therefore lays claim to the Servant Song promises as “*Yes and Amen*” in Christ.

*But you, Israel, are My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen,  
The descendants of Abraham My friend.  
You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest regions,  
And said to you,  
‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and have not cast you away:  
Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God.  
I will strengthen you, Yes, I will help you,  
I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.’* (Isaiah 41:8-10)

The next Song, in Isaiah 43, contains the same comforting words of divine protection, but adds the fundamental purpose of the Servant – Israel, Israel’s Messiah, and now Messiah’s Body, the Church – “*Whom I created for My glory.*”

*But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob,  
And He who formed you, O Israel:  
“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; you are Mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you.  
When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.  
For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior;  
I gave Egypt for your ransom, Ethiopia and Seba in your place.  
Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored,  
And I have loved you; therefore I will give men for you,  
And people for your life.  
Fear not, for I am with you; I will bring your descendants from the east,  
And gather you from the west; I will say to the north, ‘Give them up!’  
And to the south, ‘Do not keep them back!’  
Bring My sons from afar, and My daughters from the ends of the earth –  
Everyone who is called by My name, **whom I have created for My glory;**  
I have formed him, yes, I have made him.* (Isaiah 43:1-7)

This particular Song contains the mission statement of the Servant of Yahweh – Israel, and now the true Israel – the message that this Servant brings to the world. This is the essence of the gospel presentation as the Apostle Paul saw it; this was why he was

able to appropriate Isaianic language to himself and Barnabas and why, we reason, he extended this language to the whole Church through the ages.

*'You are My witnesses,' says the LORD, 'And My servant whom I have chosen,  
That you may know and believe Me, and understand that I am He.  
Before Me there was no God formed, nor shall there be after Me.  
I, even I, am the LORD, and besides Me there is no savior.'* (Isaiah 43:10-11)

We come next to the power by which this witness to God's glory will be manifest by His Servant – through the work of the Holy Spirit promised to the Servant of Yahweh. This power, and this power alone, will bear the fruit of salvation to those who will lay claim to being part of Israel, who were not naturally part of Israel, thus intimating what will be more explicit later – the inclusion of the Gentiles.

*Yet hear now, O Jacob My servant, and Israel whom I have chosen.  
Thus says the LORD who made you and formed you from the womb, who will help you:  
'Fear not, O Jacob My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen.  
For I will pour water on him who is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground;  
**I will pour My Spirit on your descendants, and My blessing on your offspring;**  
They will spring up among the grass like willows by the watercourses.'  
One will say, 'I am the LORD's'; another will call himself by the name of Jacob;  
Another will write with his hand, 'The LORD's,' and name himself by the name of Israel.* (Isaiah 44:1-5)

It is also in this Song, as elsewhere, that we learn that a fundamental part of the Servant's witness is simply to declare that God is, and that there is no other. This has always been a non-negotiable in the Church's message, at least when the Church is being the Church, for when she wavers on this she can lay no claim to being the Church and certainly has no part in the Servant ministry of her Head, "For he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him."<sup>242</sup> In Isaiah's words,

*Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and his Redeemer, the LORD of hosts:  
'I am the First and I am the Last; besides Me there is no God.*

---

<sup>242</sup> Hebrews 11:6

*And who can proclaim as I do? Then let him declare it and set it in order for Me,  
Since I appointed the ancient people.  
And the things that are coming and shall come, let them show these to them.  
Do not fear, nor be afraid; have I not told you from that time, and declared it?  
You are My witnesses. Is there a God besides Me?  
Indeed there is no other Rock; I know not one.'* (Isaiah 44:6-8)

Perhaps the most powerful of the Servant Songs in terms of the overall mission not only to Israel, but to the world, is in Isaiah 49. This passage is correctly applied to Jesus Christ in its ultimate fulfillment, but Paul's appropriation of the same language to himself and Barnabas must mean that the ongoing work of the Servant continues in His Body, the Church. This Song most clearly tells of the geographic scope of the proclamation of God's salvation, corresponding to Jesus' charge, "even to the ends of the earth." It is not hard to imagine Paul seeing himself and his ministry in these very terms. There is also so much in this passage that speaks to the Church's role and mission in the world, as well as her frustration and her hope.

*Listen, O coastlands, to Me, and take heed, you peoples from afar!  
The LORD has called Me from the womb;  
From the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name.  
And He has made My mouth like a sharp sword;  
In the shadow of His hand He has hidden Me, and made Me a polished shaft;  
In His quiver He has hidden Me." And He said to me,  
'You are My servant, O Israel, **in whom I will be glorified.**'  
Then I said, 'I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and in vain;  
Yet surely my just reward is with the LORD, and my work with my God.'  
And now the LORD says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant,  
To bring Jacob back to Him, so that Israel is gathered to Him  
(For I shall be glorious in the eyes of the LORD, and My God shall be My strength),  
Indeed He says,  
'It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob,  
And to restore the preserved ones of Israel;  
I will also give You as a light to the Gentiles,  
That You should be My salvation to the ends of the earth.'* (Isaiah 49:1-6)

Although there is no direct quote, it is not difficult to hear this passage in Paul's own assessment of his ministry in term of both the Gentiles to whom he has been sent,

and the Jews whom he has not abandoned. In Romans he writes, *“But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if somehow I might move to jealousy my fellow countrymen and save some of them.”*<sup>243</sup>

There is more that can be drawn from the Servant Songs, including perhaps an explanation of Paul’s enigmatic statements in several of his epistles concerning ‘sufferings’ with a comparison to Isaiah 53. But at this point another summary conclusion may be drawn: that the ministry of the Servant of Yahweh, fully embodied (literally) in Israel’s Messiah Jesus, continues in the apostles and, by extension of their witness and word, through the Church down the ages. *“Thus, Paul and the apostles carry on the end-time witness begun by Jesus, so that they are ‘commissioned witnesses to bear authoritatively the word of the Messiah to the nations,’ which includes not only their oral testimony but also their written testimony that authoritatively preserves their word, which we now have in the collection of documents known as the NT canon.”*<sup>244</sup>

The working hypothesis, therefore, is that the paradigm governing the purpose and relationship of the Church in and to the world is the same pattern that we find laid out for Israel under the Old Covenant. This does not mean that the identity markers remain the same – we have seen, and will see, that to Paul the ancient markers of Jewish identity could no longer pertain in the Church due to the fulfillment of all that they stood for in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and in the outpouring and indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Yet the role of the Church vis-à-vis the world cannot be materially different than Israel’s position under the Old Covenant, for she, too, was called to be God’s Witness, to proclaim the glory of God’s nature and His salvation. The consummation of her mission awaited the sending of God’s Holy Spirit, as we read above in Isaiah 44. That promise has been fulfilled, and now the Church as the extension of Israel – the continuing olive tree – carries out the commission of the Servant of Yahweh.

Thus when we ask questions of the Church such as, “What is her purpose; what is she supposed to be doing?” we should seek the answers both in the New Testament

---

<sup>243</sup> Romans 13:13-14

<sup>244</sup> Beale; 826.

*and* in the Old Testament that undergirds it. Read Paul, but also read Isaiah who so powerfully motivated Paul and whose words so permeate the apostle's letters.

The pattern of Israel – what she was supposed to be, not what she often was – may be divided into three perspectives: first, Israel's interaction with her God; second, Israel's interaction within the community of God's people; and third, Israel's relationship to the world around her. If the conclusion is valid that the Church is the extension and continuation of Israel, based on her being the Body of Him who was Himself true Israel, then what the Old Testament has to say about this threefold rubric will overlay and deepen what we read in the New Testament concerning the Church. Considering the fact that most of what is written in the New Testament concerning the Church was written by Paul, and that Paul himself was so thoroughly immersed in the Old Testament Scriptures, it would be amazing if we did not find this overlay to be pretty near exact. By way of outline, then, as we move forward in discussing the Church, we can consider the threefold rubric as follows:

**First**, Israel's relationship and interaction with her God may be summarized under two headings: (1) To show forth and sing Yahweh's praises, and (2) To proclaim His salvation.

**Second**, Israel's relationship within the covenant community may be biblically summarized as a community of Justice and Equity, Righteousness and Love.

**Third**, Israel's relationship vis-à-vis the world was to be one of 'present separatedness,' being in the world as a nation unlike the other nations, whose trust was not in princes and chariots, but in the LORD their God.

It will be the goal of the remainder of this study to flesh out these three perspectives in terms of the Church's role as the Body of Christ and the continuation of the ministry of the Servant of Yahweh. There is, however, a common denominator among the three, a common reality that undergirded and motivated Israel's behavior in each relational paradigm. That common denominator is the sovereign work of God on Israel's behalf. We will see that the most consistent element in the first perspective – singing God's praises and proclaiming His salvation – consists in the Old Testament of frequently recounting all that Yahweh had done for Israel: all that He had accomplished

and all that He had promised. This is the heart and soul of the Psalms, to call Israel to remembrance of the deliverances she had already experienced through divine intervention, because she was the chosen and beloved of Yahweh, and thus to call Israel to continued faith and faithfulness. Is the situation any different for the Church? Not at all! Indeed, the Church's heritage of God's gracious works now goes back, through adoption, to the same starting point as Israel's: the calling of Abram. But the Church's heritage is now even richer, for she has the finished work of Jesus Christ to constantly remember, to sing, and to proclaim.

The summary of the works of Christ were listed at the end of the previous lesson (page 168) and can now take their place, not as some addendum or parenthesis to God's redemptive plan, but fully inline with all that God had accomplished redemptively from Adam through Abraham to Jesus Christ. The Church's heritage as the continuation of Israel in Israel's Messiah must form the core of her theology both in doctrine and practice. Therefore, let us consider in a little more detail the first five of the distinctives that characterize the Christian community as an embedded culture (*cf.* pg. 168).

1. **The Incarnation of Jesus Christ.** This is the historic event that ties together the divine promises contained in the Adamic line and the Abrahamic line. The promise of Immanuel, God-with-us, unites the two major 'seed' lines of redemptive history, bringing forth the Seed of Woman as the Seed of Abraham. There is, of course, great significance in the Incarnation in the fact that, as Man sinned, so Man must redeem. But in terms of the Church as extended Israel, and her purpose in the world, the Incarnation unites the redemptive covenant (Abraham) with the creation covenant (Adam/Noah). The Church, in a way that was not really available to Israel, now looks on her position in the world both with respect to mankind and with respect to Creation.
2. **The Concept & Reality of the Kingdom of God.** Paul does not mention the kingdom often, but what he has to say about it is entirely in line with both the Old Testament promise and the rest of the New Testament witness. His focus, as will become clearer when we investigate the relationship of the Church to the world, is that believers are now citizens of the Kingdom of God, having been "*delivered from the domain of darkness and transferred to the kingdom of His beloved Son.*"<sup>245</sup> This distinctive, then, pertains to the second and third perspectives

---

<sup>245</sup> Colossians 1:13

above – that of the interrelationship of believers within the community and the interaction of the community with the surrounding culture.

3. **The Passion of Christ.** This is the most enigmatic distinctive, and one easiest to avoid considering – no one likes the idea of suffering. But Paul speaks of “*the fellowship of His sufferings*” and “*filling up in my flesh what is lacking of Christ’s afflictions.*”<sup>246</sup> Paul frequently links consolation with suffering, even to the point of indicating that the measure of consolation is proportionate to that of suffering. But the apostle did not seek suffering for its own sake; rather, he encountered it through his faithful proclamation of the gospel in the world. This distinctive, then, pertains to the third rubric: the Church’s relationship to the world.
4. **The Death of Christ.** Of all the elements in Christ’s redemptive life, this is the one that Paul alludes to most often (coupled, of course, with the resurrection in most instances). But for Paul the death of Christ is the event which renders those who are now ‘in Him’ righteous before God. Thus it is the death of Christ that sets the whole system in bedrock and firmly establishes the believer’s position of ‘reconciled’ to God. But Paul also expands the meaning of Christ’s death, as appropriated by faith in the believer, as rendering the believer ‘dead to sin,’ thus enabling the believer now to “*put to death the deeds of the flesh.*”<sup>247</sup>
5. **The Resurrection & Ascension of Christ.** We have seen abundantly that the resurrection of Jesus Christ was the turning point in Paul’s life and belief, convincing him that God had fully and finally interceded on Israel’s behalf, to perform all that He had promised. The fact that Jesus has conquered death, and now reigns at the right hand of the Father, is the fulness of that promise of never-ending divine support and strength given to the Servant of Yahweh throughout the Servant Songs. Jesus’ “*I will never leave you nor forsake you*” is reminiscent of those Songs, and firmly establishes both the confidence and the hope that enlivens the Church to her mission. We are a resurrected people, which may be the most powerful distinctive of all.
6. **“Render unto Caesar.”** Clearly this distinctive pertains to the relationship of the Church to the world, and is founded on the previous five. We will develop this one more fully in the section on Pauline Ethics.

---

<sup>246</sup> Philippians 3:10; Colossians 1:24

<sup>247</sup> Romans 8:13; *cp.* Colossians 3:5

**Lesson 12 – The Spirit of Adoption**  
**Text: Romans 8:12-30; Galatians 4:4-6**

*“Thus the work of the ‘Spirit-of-sonship’ forms the indispensable and unbreakable link in the whole of God’s plan of redemption.”*  
(Herman Ridderbos)

There can be no reasonable doubt that Jesus’ death on the cross was an atonement. Why, then, did it occur at the annual *Pesach* – Passover – feast and not on *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement? It was on the latter date, in the seventh month of the Jewish religious calendar, that the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies to offer up the blood of atonement for the sins of all the people. And it was *only* on this date – at no other time during the year would that veil be drawn and a man enter into the inner sanctum of the tabernacle/Temple. That Jesus did, in fact, fulfil the meaning of *Yom Kippur* is evident by the language used in the Book of Hebrews,

*Now when these things had been thus prepared, the priests always went into the first part of the tabernacle, performing the services. But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people’s sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing. It was symbolic for the present time in which both gifts and sacrifices are offered which cannot make him who performed the service perfect in regard to the conscience – concerned only with foods and drinks, various washings, and fleshly ordinances imposed until the time of reformation. But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.* (Hebrews 9:6-12)

Yet as much as Jesus’ sacrificial death matches the intent and meaning of the Day of Atonement for the nation of Israel, that death did not occur in the seventh month of Tishrei (roughly September-October), but in the first month, Nisan, at the Feast of Passover. There are several possible explanations, or facets to the explanation, of this phenomenon, all of which preserve Jesus’ death as an atonement – *the* atonement – while also deepening our understanding of God’s redemptive work in the death of His Son. If we survey the Jewish ecclesiastical calendar, we see that the next feast after Passover is

that of 'First Fruits,' or Pentecost. This feast marked the beginning of the annual harvest and was a time of thanksgiving for God's people, Israel. It is easy to see how this corresponds to its fulfilment, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost immediately following Christ's resurrection. That this was the first fruits of the ongoing harvest of souls into Christ's kingdom – a harvest that has continued for two thousand years and is still going – certainly goes some distance in explaining why Christ's death occurred at the Passover. But this is only an indirect explanation – more of a 'convenience,' as it were, so that everything would be in place for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. There is a more direct and significant meaning to the feast that Jesus and His disciples celebrated – *Pesach* – right before His death, a meaning that impinges powerfully on the subsequent identity of God's people and their relationship to Him 'in Christ.'

The background to the first feast of Passover is well known even to unbelievers, certainly to anyone who has seen *The Ten Commandments* movie (which takes almost as long to watch as it did for Israel to traverse the wilderness). The Passover feast was established on the evening of the tenth plague that God meted out upon Pharaoh and Egypt as He effected His deliverance of His people Israel from their bondage in that land. The nine plagues preceding the last one were intended to show the power of Israel's God and to make life in Egypt tenuous, even horrific. These plagues also manifested a powerful distinction between Israel and Egypt, as they did not impact the land of Goshen, where Israel lived in Egypt. Yet it may be said, in a manner of speaking, that the first nine plagues were but a prelude to the tenth: the death of the firstborn of all of Egypt.

*Then Moses said, "Thus says the LORD: 'About midnight I will go out into the midst of Egypt; and all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the female servant who is behind the handmill, and all the firstborn of the animals. Then there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as was not like it before, nor shall be like it again. But against none of the children of Israel shall a dog move its tongue, against man or beast, that you may know that the LORD does make a difference between the Egyptians and Israel.'* (Exodus 11:4-7)

Thus the Passover is directly related to one of the first things that the LORD instructed Moses to say to Pharaoh when he first appeared at the royal court to bring about Israel's deliverance, the concept of the 'firstborn.'

*And the LORD said to Moses, "When you go back to Egypt, see that you do all those wonders before Pharaoh which I have put in your hand. But I will harden his heart, so that he will not let the people go. Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "**Israel is My son, My firstborn.** So I say to you, let My son go that he may serve Me. But if you refuse to let him go, indeed I will kill your son, your firstborn."* (Exodus 4:21-23)

God calls Israel His 'firstborn.' By declaring this, and by consequently redeeming Israel from Egypt through the death of all the firstborn of Egypt, God proclaimed a unique ownership over Israel and established a principle - 'firstborn' - that will develop through the history of Israel, to Jesus, and to the Church. This unique ownership is stated explicitly, with reference to the Passover event, in Numbers 3. But this is in the context of that development just mentioned, for in this passage God declares that *Levi* - the Levites - would be His firstborn within Israel; they will be the LORD's unique possession within His unique possession.

*Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Now behold, I Myself have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of every firstborn who opens the womb among the children of Israel. Therefore the Levites shall be Mine, **because all the firstborn are Mine.** On the day that I struck all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, I sanctified to Myself all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast. They shall be Mine: I am the LORD."* (Numbers 3:11-13)

The taking of Levi as the 'firstborn' in the midst of God's 'firstborn' Israel was, as it were, *in exchange* for the lives of the firstborn of every family in Israel. The narrative describes that each of the firstborn among the other eleven tribes were 'represented' in exchange for a Levite, and the balance was to be made up in the form of money to be given to the Levites for their work of service to the LORD. "On the 30<sup>th</sup> day after birth the firstborn was brought to the priest by the father, who paid five shekels for the child's redemption from service in the temple. For that service the Levites were accept

ed in place of the redeemed firstborn."<sup>248</sup> Thus the tribe of Levi became God's firstborn within Israel, as Israel was God's firstborn among the nations of the world. In regard to the nation, "Israel was Yahweh's firstborn. Israel, as compared with other nations, was entitled to special privileges. She occupied a unique position in virtue of the special relationship between Yahweh and the nation."<sup>249</sup>

The logic behind all of this is tied into the concept of a 'royal priesthood' – a nation of priests rather than a priestly class among the nation. The actual sacrifice of the Passover lamb in Egypt was done, not in a central tabernacle upon a single altar, but in each Israelite home, performed by the head of that household. Also, the blood of the sacrificial lamb was not sprinkled upon an altar but smeared on the lintels and doorposts of each Israelite home within the land of Egypt. In this act we see every household of Israel, and the father within the household, performing the function of a priest before Yahweh, a function later reserved for the Levites as God's 'firstborn' within Israel. "Now since the paschal lamb was a sacrifice...its blood was also expiatory, and the smearing of the door-posts with the blood is to be regarded as an act of atonement...By this...the whole nation proved itself to be the kingdom of priests, which God had called it to be."<sup>250</sup>

But a further delineation of the role of 'firstborn' was intended by God in His redemptive plan. Just as the tribe of Levi became the 'firstborn' within Israel as God's 'firstborn,' so also God's servant David – a messianic reference – is called the 'firstborn' of Yahweh in Psalm 89.

*But My faithfulness and My mercy shall be with him, and in My name his horn shall be exalted.  
Also I will set his hand over the sea, and his right hand over the rivers.  
He shall cry to Me, 'You are my Father, My God, and the rock of my salvation.'  
Also I will make him My firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.  
My mercy I will keep for him forever, and My covenant shall stand firm with him.  
His seed also I will make to endure forever, and his throne as the days of heaven. (89:24-29)*

---

<sup>248</sup> James Orr, ed. "Firstborn" in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, James Orr, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; 1956); 1113-1114.

<sup>249</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>250</sup> Kurtz, J. H. *Offerings, Sacrifices and Worship in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Hendrickson Publishers; 1998); 367.

We could, of course, move back in time from Passover to discover that Adam was also – and really – God’s ‘firstborn’ among the human race. This is what Luke does in his genealogy of Jesus (*cp.* Luke 3:38), calling Adam the ‘son of God.’ But it is the covenantal ‘firstborn’ that we are dealing with here, and particularly the unique reason why Jesus had to be sacrificed at Passover and not *Yom Kippur*. Still, from the beginning, we can see the narrowing of God’s redemptive focus on His ‘firstborn.’

Adam (Luke 3:38)  
→ Israel (Exodus 4:22)  
→ Levites (Numbers 3:13)  
→ David (Psalm 89:27)

This progression should have caused an Israelite student of Scriptures some consternation, as the designation of firstborn shifts dramatically from Levi to Judah with the announcement that God’s servant David would be made His ‘firstborn.’ But this is not the only place in the Old Testament where the confluence of the priestly and the royal tribe is forecast, again illustrating that this priesthood was to be a ‘royal’ one. Still, this shift does indicate in preliminary form what we learn in its fulfilment in the New Testament: that the Levitical priesthood was never intended to be permanent; it was transitory, for a season, awaiting its fulfilment in the One who would be God’s true ‘firstborn,’ Jesus Christ.

### **Paul and ‘Adoption’**

Paul, recognizing that Jesus is now the supreme example of God’s firstborn (and ‘firstborn from the dead’ as the apostle puts it in Colossians), ties together this concept with that of ‘adoption,’ the process by which a descendant of Adam is made a child of God. He lists this among the benefits that Israel had as a nation, unique among the nations as God’s firstborn. Paul knows that Israel as God’s firstborn was not the natural condition of the nation or people; rather, they were made to be God’s firstborn through a gracious act of adoption on the part of God.

*I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; of whom are the fathers and from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen.* (Romans 9:1-5)

We have already seen how God's servant David was to be 'made' God's firstborn (*cp.* Psalm 89:27); again an act of divine adoption. That this was to be the condition of God's Anointed – the Messiah – is also evident from elsewhere in the Psalms. The second Psalm, for instance, is one that is quoted in the Gospels with reference to Jesus' anointing by the Holy Spirit.

*I will declare the decree: the LORD has said to Me,  
'You are My Son, today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will give You the nations for Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth for Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.'*  
(Psalm 2:7-9)

Thus we begin to see why, in the wise providence of God, Jesus had to be killed at the Feast of Passover. God exchanged at that time, the firstborn of Egypt for His firstborn, Israel, which was then to become a kingdom of priests to Yahweh. Later, again according to His sublime wisdom, the one tribe of Levi was declared God's 'firstborn' from within His firstborn, Israel, with the express purpose of liturgical service to Yahweh in His tabernacle and Temple. This was the 'priestly' lineage of the firstborn, the 'royal' lineage is announced in Psalm 89, where God's servant David – the Messiah – is declared also to be His firstborn. Throughout this history, however, the 'rule' of redemption still applies: the firstborn belongs to the LORD and must be redeemed or consecrated as such. None of the 'firstborn' to this point are capable of doing what is required, as all are the descendants solely of God's first 'firstborn,' Adam. The deliverance of God's firstborn from bondage in Egypt was effected as Passover; the deliverance of God's true firstborn, Jesus Christ, from death was effected at that Passover

during which He both died and rose from the grave. This, we have seen, constituted Jesus as the 'Last Adam,' and as such God's *'firstborn from the dead.'*<sup>251</sup> For Paul and his ecclesiology, this is the vital content of the doctrine of adoption – *into* Jesus Christ as His body, *through* the outpoured 'Spirit of adoption.'

What this means with regard to the apostle's teaching regarding adoption is that it probably has less to do with the familiar legal practice among the Romans, and far more to do with the declaration by God in separating out a people for His name, calling them His 'firstborn.' Ridderbos concurs,

The term [*i.e.*, adoption] stems from the Hellenistic world of law; its content, however, must not be inferred from the various Roman or Greek legal systems, nor from the adoption ritual of the Hellenistic mystery cults, but must be considered against the Old Testament, redemptive-historical background of the adoption of Israel as the son of God.<sup>252</sup>

Thus Paul's usage of the term and concept of 'adoption' fits into the overall redemptive narrative of the 'firstborn,' as is indicated by the apostle's use of the two terms in several of his epistles. In Colossians Paul ties together the reality of Jesus as God's firstborn and the Church as Jesus' body,

*He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.*  
(Colossians 1:15-18)

Paul provides one of the most succinct overviews of redemptive history found anywhere in the Bible. Christ as "*the firstborn over all creation*" establishes His pre-existence, whereas Christ as "*the firstborn from the dead*" inaugurates His dominion in the New Creation. We see here again the significance of the resurrection of Jesus to Paul's theology and ecclesiology. It is on account of His victory over death that Jesus is now

---

<sup>251</sup> Colossians 1:18

<sup>252</sup> Ridderbos, *Paul*; 197-98.

*“the firstborn from the dead.”* But this use of the term cannot be made to stand on its own, without reference to the ‘firstborn’ concept developed throughout redemptive history according to the Old Testament. Rather it is the case that, once again, we see the entirety of redemptive history *culminated* in Jesus Christ through His death, as well as new creation history *inaugurated* in Him through the resurrection. That Paul then unites Jesus as firstborn with the Church as His body has powerful significance not only to the meaning of the Church, but also to her purpose in the world.

As we have seen repeatedly in this study, the resurrection of Jesus from the grave was only one *very important* side of the redemptive coin, one aspect of God’s finished redemptive work in Jesus Christ that convinced Saul of Tarsus that Israel’s God had finally intervened in the history of His people. The other side of the same coin was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and this aspect of God’s salvific work in Jesus is most intimately tied by the apostle to the concept of ‘adoption.’ Gordon Fee summarizes Paul’s perspective on the dual work of the Son and the Spirit in adoption when he writes, “Christ is the ‘cause’ and the Spirit the ‘effect’ as far as sonship is concerned.”<sup>253</sup> The two key passages in this regard are somewhat parallel: Galatians 4 and Romans 8.

**Galatians 4:4-7**

*But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the **Spirit of His Son** into your hearts, crying out, “Abba, Father!” Therefore you are no longer a slave but a son, and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.*

**Romans 8:14-17**

*For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the **Spirit of adoption** by whom we cry out, “Abba, Father.” The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.*

The allusion to *bondage again to fear* calls up images of Israel’s centuries of bondage in Egypt, from which God redeemed the nation by adopting Israel as *“My firstborn, Israel.”* The parallel with the Galatians passage also shows that Paul equated this

---

<sup>253</sup> Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*; 408.

'bondage again to fear' with being 'under the law,' with that condition's ever-present fear of condemnation. From all of this God has set the believer free, not only through the wonderful reality of justification in Christ, by further, and ultimately, through the adoption by the Holy Spirit into God's family. "Sonship is therefore a gift of the great time of redemption that has dawned with Christ."<sup>254</sup>

The basic equivalence of content between these two passages allows us to draw a direct parallel between the 'Spirit of Christ' and the 'Spirit of adoption,' who is in both instances, of course, the Holy Spirit. The word order in the Romans passage would seem to indicate that the Spirit is sent into the believer's heart *after* the believer becomes a 'son' of God. But the Galatians passage, in calling Him the 'Spirit of adoption,' acknowledges the Holy Spirit as the instrumental cause of the believer's adoption and not the result. The connection is irrefutable between the two references, as the Spirit in each case motivates the heartfelt cry, 'Abba, Father!' within the believer.

What is meant by all of this is further elucidated by the apostle in his famous introductory passage in Ephesians, where election and predestination and redemption are coupled with adoption as the multifaceted work of God in Christ Jesus.

*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us **to adoption as sons** by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will, that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.*

(Ephesians 1:3-12)

---

<sup>254</sup> Ridderbos; 198.

Thus adoption stands on the same level as redemption itself; the latter results immediately – and we may say, consists of – the former. “The new relationship between God and men, at the root of which lies justification, which can be considered as reconciliation and is effected by Christ’s substitutionary work as Mediator (atonement, ransom), finally finds expression in the important concept adoption of sons...The adoption of sons is here described, therefore, as the object of the great eschatological redemptive event and as the direct result of redemption.”<sup>255</sup> But there is a significant difference in the concept of adoption as compared with redemption, and that difference stems from the ‘firstborn’ narrative in the Old Testament. Redemption is typically viewed as an individual blessing from God (though again, if we consider what ‘redemption’ meant under the Old Covenant we would see the overwhelming *corporate* perspective). Still, when compared to adoption in its Old Testament meaning, and as Paul applied the term to Old Testament Israel, we see that it is *primarily* corporate rather than individual. This is not to say that individual believers are not adopted as the New Covenant children of God; they most definitely *are* adopted. It is rather to say that the *focus* of adoption is to be seen in the context of the ‘Israel, My Son’ of the Old Testament. This corporate perspective is found in Paul’s summary statement to his whole argument in Romans 8, the famous *Ordo Salutis*:

*For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.*

(Romans 8:229-30)

There are many important points to this statement, but the one that is most often overlooked is the *among many brethren*. It is this clause that ties Christ’s finished work – His death and more importantly His resurrection – with His being the ‘firstborn’ of God, the *firstborn from the dead* and the *firstborn among many brethren*. If we allow the fullness of the Old Testament story to inform this word ‘firstborn’ – as we can be assured the apostle did – we conclude not only that this means that the Church, the body of

---

<sup>255</sup> Ridderbos; 197.

Christ, *belongs to God* but also that this divine ownership is what defines her existence and her purpose. Just as Levi stood in for the other eleven tribes, so the Church, made up of Jews and Gentiles *from every tongue, tribe, and nation*, now stands in for the rest of Creation. This is how Paul saw it. Though he uses a similar term – *firstfruits* – instead of *firstborn*, the overall context fairly demands that we see the parallel between the priesthood of the Levites under the Old Covenant and the priesthood of the Church under the New,

*For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.* (Romans 8:19-23)

This all fits hand-in-glove with the New Creation humanity that has been inaugurated in the resurrected Christ, the ‘new man’ in whom all previous humanly distinctions must of necessity disappear. This also fits with what we have seen regarding the people of God in the New Covenant as the true and final Temple of God or, as Paul puts it in I Corinthians, the Temple of the Holy Spirit. This biblical teaching is thus expanded by the realization, through the ‘firstborn’ narrative, that the people who comprise the living Temple of God are also its priesthood. The purpose of the Church in the world, therefore, is to be found via a better understanding of the liturgical function of the true priesthood, starting first with Adam in the Garden, and then with the Levites in the tabernacle/Temple complex. It is at least the latter, and perhaps also the former, that was in Paul’s mind when he wrote in Romans 12,

*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.* (Romans 12:1-2)

It is no coincidence that this passage immediately precedes one of the apostle's discussions on the 'spiritual gifts.' The key phrase in relation to the purpose of the Church in the world is *reasonable service*. The Greek is *logikein latreian* (λογικην λατρειαν). The first word may sound familiar to the English ear, for it has the same root as the English word 'logic' or 'logical.' The translation 'reasonable' therefore has the import of 'it stands to reason,' or 'it is the logical conclusion' that this would be one's service. It means that if we follow the line of argument that Paul has been establishing throughout this epistle, and understand the connections he makes between the life of the Church under the New Covenant and the pattern of Israel under the Old, then *the logical service* of a transformed mind is what must result.<sup>256</sup> Paul is not saying that the service he is about to describe in Romans 12 is an option; he is saying that it must logically follow a correct understanding of what God had done through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of adoption.

So it is the second term that contains the kernel of reasonable/logical truth: *service*. What is significant about this word, and Paul's use of it, is the fact that it invariably translates the religious service of the people of Israel (as opposed to that of the Levites, which uses a similar word, *litourgeō*, from which we get the English word, 'liturgy'). "Hence in the LXX *latreuō* is very close to *leitourgeō* in meaning, but the latter is used exclusively for the service of the priests, while the former means the service of God by the whole people and by the individual."<sup>257</sup> In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint or LXX), we see the same term used in the description of the first Passover, a sacrifice that was, as we noted earlier, a 'people' service and not a 'priest' service.

*It will come to pass when you come to the land which the LORD will give you, just as He promised, that you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the LORD, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households.' So the people bowed their heads and worshiped.* (Exodus 12:25-27)

---

<sup>256</sup> Unfortunately the English word 'reasonable' has progressively lost its connection with Reason and Logic, and has come to mean 'fair' or 'equitable.' It is the stronger meaning that Paul gives to the word in Romans 12.

<sup>257</sup> Brown, Colin ed. *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology: Volume 3* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1979); 550.

This brings us full circle to the Passover, the feast at which Jesus died. The meaning of this feast, as we have seen, is the declaration by God that Israel was His Son, and so it was fitting that His Son should offer Himself up at the feast of Passover. It now remains to investigate the meaning of all of this to the Church, the ‘many brethren’ of Christ Jesus the ‘firstborn.’ In at least one place, Paul sees the behavior of the congregation in terms of the Passover:

*Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.*  
(I Corinthians 5:7-8)

The Passover motif is central to Paul’s understanding of what God has accomplished through His ‘firstborn,’ Jesus Christ. “The Messiah, then, is the Passover sacrifice, and his followers must think through what that means for their whole life.”<sup>258</sup> Tom Holland, in his *Contours of Pauline Theology*, sets forth a distinctively ‘paschal’ framework for Paul’s thought, and especially for Paul’s ecclesiology. Holland sees the connection between the terms Paul uses – *firstborn, Passover lamb, etc.* – and Israel’s history of deliverance from Egypt. “Once again we have found that the model that Paul has been following is that of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt. In that historical deliverance Israel was redeemed through the death of a representative, her firstborn. By their death, admittedly avoided by the substitution of a lamb, her covenant with Egypt and her gods was terminated and a new life under the headship of Moses began.”<sup>259</sup> Paul’s application of this historical type results in his development of the Church’s deliverance, not from Egypt (nor from Rome), but from Sin, contracted by every human being through his biological association with Adam (*cp.* Rom. 5). Holland continues,

The covenantal bondage in which man exists through his union with Adam demonstrates the need for the death of one who can act on his behalf, for it is only through

---

<sup>258</sup> Wright, *PFG*; 1343.

<sup>259</sup> Holland; 109.

death that such relationships can be severed. Thus, in Christ's death, there is not only a dealing with the guilt of sin and its consequences, but also the severing of the relationship with Sin, in which unregenerate mankind is involved...It is the deliverance of the community by the covenantal annulling effect of death, the death of the last Adam. Having been delivered from membership of 'the body of Sin,' the church has been brought into union with a new head and made to be the members of a new body, 'the body of Christ.'<sup>260</sup>

This application of the Passover sacrifice – the deliverance from bondage *and* the declaration of Israel as God's firstborn – undergirds Paul's understanding and teaching of the Church (1) in her relationship to God; (2) in her relationships within the community of faith; and (3) in her relationship to the outside world. It is the first of these that we will attend to in the balance of this lesson.

Much has been said with regard to the 'union' of the Church with her head, Jesus Christ. This unity is, of course, at the heart of Paul's ecclesiology, as we read again in I Corinthians 12 and Ephesians 2,

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

(I Corinthians 12:12-13)

*For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.*

(Ephesians 2:14-16)

What we are adding to this established baseline of the unity of the Church with Christ Jesus is the concept of the 'firstborn' as a unique role within redemptive history. That role is most explicitly described by the apostle Peter in his first letter, utilizing in reference to the Church many distinctive 'Israel-titles' to firmly establish God's possession of the New Covenant people in Christ. It is worth noting that at the end of this

---

<sup>260</sup> *Idem.*

concatenation of Old Testament quotes, Peter also references the same passage from Hosea that the apostle Paul quotes in his letter to the Romans.

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.* (I Peter 2:9-10)

Two of these Israel-titles are coupled in the Old Testament with the 'firstborn' paradigm: *priesthood* and *possession*. These being used with reference to the Church can only mean that the Church is, in Christ, the 'firstborn'. It is the thesis of this lesson that the Church, as the body of Jesus Christ who is the ultimate 'firstborn,' is therefore the fulfillment of the 'firstborn' statements of the Old Testament. This applies particularly to the adoption of Israel as God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22) and to the selection of the Levites as the firstborn within Israel (Numbers 3:13). In the first instance, the identity of the Church as the 'firstborn' in Christ Jesus (the 'many brethren' of whom He is the firstborn) means that the Church is the possession of God among the nations. Just as Israel was (and is), so also the Church – the extension of Israel in the New Covenant – is the unique and holy 'nation' that God has chosen from among the nations to be His own. This identity is crucial to the Church's self-conception, and is necessary for the modern evangelical church to begin to regain an appreciation and appropriation of the *corporate* aspect of the people of God in this age.

This concept was all but lost due to the erroneous hermeneutic of Dispensationalism, in which the Church and Israel were completely separated from one another in regard to God's redemptive purpose. In reality, and as Paul sets the matter before us, the Church as the body of Christ can be nothing less than the 'firstborn' of God – God's unique and holy possession in this world, just as Israel was among the nations under the Old Covenant. This is not to deny in the least the wonderful, *personal* comfort that every believer has in knowing that he or she is a living stone fitted into the true temple of the Holy Spirit, that the Holy Spirit Himself dwells in the heart of every believer as the down-payment, the seal and security of his or her future salvation. Ridderbos notes

the two-sided characteristic of being the uniquely-owned people of God, “It is the privilege of the church as the true people of God, but at the same time it affects the individual believer in the deepest motives of his existence.”<sup>261</sup> But there is no deficiency in the modern church with regard to the individualistic emphasis; indeed, it is too strong. For in it believers lose sight of the parallels drawn by the New Testament, and not least by Paul, between the identity of the Church and that of Israel. And while it has always been true that simply being an ethnic member of the people of Israel did not guarantee anyone salvation, yet it was no less true that being a part of Israel was a non-negotiable element of salvation under the Old Covenant. So, too, now being a member of the Church of Jesus Christ is not in itself salvific; but no one can be saved apart from the Church, the body of Christ. Just in relationship to the Pauline metaphor of the Church as the bride of Christ, Holland comments, “the individual is never spoken of as being the bride of Christ: it is always the church.”<sup>262</sup> If the Church is ever to approach what it is meant to be both within itself and within the world, it must regain the understanding of what it is ‘in Christ’ – the uniquely-owned people of God, the body of He who is God’s firstborn.

The second aspect of the ‘firstborn’ paradigm is that of the priesthood, for we have seen how God chose Levi to represent the firstborn of all the tribes; to redeem, as it were the firstborn of the other tribes. Thus by extension, the Church as the body of He who is the firstborn *par excellence* must also occupy that same role within the world as the Levites occupied within the nation of Israel. The thought needs to be developed further in terms of its application to the Church as a priesthood, but it is very suggestive that the tribe of Levi was set apart (1) to serve the High Priest and (2) to serve the congregation.

*And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “Bring the tribe of Levi near, and present them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. **And they shall attend to his needs and the needs of the whole congregation before the tabernacle of meeting, to do the work of the tabernacle. Also they shall attend to all the furnishings of the tabernacle of meeting, and to the needs of the***

---

<sup>261</sup> Ridderbos; 204.

<sup>262</sup> Holland; 98.

*children of Israel, to do the work of the tabernacle. And you shall give the Levites to Aaron and his sons; they are given entirely to him from among the children of Israel.*

(Numbers 3:5-9)

As a preliminary analysis of the role of the Church as the extension of the Levitical priesthood, we may say with confidence that the High Priest in place of Aaron is Jesus Christ Himself, whom the Church is to minister unto as the Levites did to the Aaronic High Priest. That service to the Lord Jesus Christ was at the center of Paul's ministry is apparent from several passages in his letters. For instance,

*And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for<sup>[a]</sup> you serve the Lord Christ.*

(Colossians 3:23-24)

*First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of His Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers, making request if, by some means, now at last I may find a way in the will of God to come to you.*

(Romans 1:8-10)

The second of these passages, along with other similar references, gives us some indication of the practical manner of this 'service' to the High Priest Jesus Christ: the preaching of the gospel. It was the function of the Levitical priesthood not only to facilitate the sacrificial system of the Old Covenant dispensation, but also to proclaim to the whole nation, on a continual, generation-to-generation basis, the salvific works of Israel's God on her behalf. Israel's hope for the future was founded on Israel's experience of God's intervention in the past. The situation is no different for the Church, and the message of the 'priesthood' – now comprising all believers – is also no different. It is by proclaiming the saving works of God in Jesus Christ that the Church fulfills her mission and duty as the firstborn 'Levites,' thus serving her High Priest faithfully by faithfully announcing His message, the gospel.

But the Levites were also separated from the rest of the tribes in order to serve the rest of the tribes, the 'congregation.' We find in the Old Testament that this in-

volved the teaching ministry of the Levitical priests as they lived among the other eleven tribes. It was the Levitical priests' duty to "*separate the precious from the vile*" and to teach the children of Israel the ways of the LORD their God. In a similar manner we find Paul referring to the Church as the "*pillar and foundation of the truth*" in the world.

The application of this aspect of the Church as the extended Levitical priesthood becomes a bit more complex at this point. For one thing, it would be unbiblical to refer to the world as 'the congregation.' The Church, however, does have a ministry - the ministry of truth - to the world. But it is perhaps closer to the point of the firstborn Levitical priesthood to serve the congregation, which, by extension, must be the Church itself. This dichotomy is probably behind Paul's exhortation to "*do good to all men, but especially the household of faith.*"<sup>263</sup> It is also what undergirds the many 'one another' statements in the Pauline corpus. Along with the corporate focus that is maintained by seeing the Church as the people of God's possession, this perspective reinforces that corporate focus by emphasizing every member/priest as a minister to every other member. The Church is thus a community of service - in the truly liturgical sense of the word (*cp.* Rom. 12:1) - first to God in Jesus Christ, and second to the congregation. For the Church to live in this manner is no different than what Israel was called to be and to do in the midst of the nations; it is the meaning of being the 'firstborn.'

---

<sup>263</sup> Galatians 6:10

### Lesson 13 – A People for God’s Own Possession

**Text: Ephesians 4:11-16; I Corinthians 12:1-27**

*“The church is, first and foremost,  
a worshipping community whose life centers on the word of God.  
As such, it is an altera civitas,  
yet one not so clearly distinct from the rest of the world as some would have it.”  
(James Davison Hunter)*

We have seen that Paul tolerated no distinctions within the church, disallowing all ethnic, gender, and socio-economic divisions that prevailed in the surrounding culture. Indeed, the only distinction that the apostle would permit, and that we must insist upon, is that *between* the church and the world. *“Come out from their midst and be separate’ says the Lord, ‘and do not touch what is unclean; and I will welcome you.’”*<sup>264</sup> Hunter refers to the Church as an *altera civitas* – an ‘other city’ – borrowing from the traditional view within the Church since Augustine wrote his *de Civitas Dei* – ‘Of the City of God’ – over fifteen hundred years ago. In the interim, however, the Church has rarely been able to live out this identity as a society and a culture entirely different from the world around it, and thus has often failed to bear proper witness to the world of her unique status as ‘God’s possession.’ It would be an interesting study, perhaps, to review the Church’s two-thousand-year history as to her self-awareness in each age and country, as well as her presentation to the world. Of course, much of that history would illustrate that, even within a given age or a given region, the self-awareness of the Church was far from homogenous. That this is true even with the allegedly monolithic edifice of the medieval Catholic Church, is manifest by the number of different monastic orders, each with their own perspective on what the Church is and what her role is to be in the world.

Sadly, such a study would not sell well today. The meaning and purpose of the Church in the world is not a topic of much discussion within professing Christianity, especially in the West. We have exchanged ‘Christendom’ for ‘Christian Narcissism,’ in which Christianity is almost entirely individualized, the Church is relegated to a volun-

---

<sup>264</sup> II Corinthians 6:17

tary society, and the focus of pastoral care, such as it is, become therapeutic for the individual. Courses on 'biblical counseling' and marketing have replaced those on Hebrew, Greek, and Hermeneutics in many seminaries, as Christian academia realizes that biblical scholarship and doctrinal integrity no longer play in Peoria, as the old saying goes. The church is now expected to 'meet people where they live' and to 'minister' to the 'broken' - which too often means simply affirming them where they live, and however they live. Even a cursory look at the display tables in a 'Christian Bookstore' or an online venue like Christianbook.com will illustrate the point: all of the titles are geared to 'personal growth,' 'personal recovery,' 'personal devotions,' or some such individualistic theme. It is highly unlikely that one will find a book on Ecclesiology without asking a sales associate (and being prepared to give the definition of the term when met with the resultant blank stare).

What interaction the Church is supposed to have with the surrounding culture has often been directed more by the culture itself than by Scripture, with public morality, economic equity, social justice, etc. being recurrent themes, especially over the past two hundred years in the West. In general it is true that the community of faith - regardless of denomination - senses a duty vis-à-vis the culture in which it finds itself, but there certainly has been no agreement among theologians or pastors as to how that duty is to be met. Hunter acknowledges that "a tension exists for the Christian community, a community caught in the unavoidable pull between history and revelation; between the conditions of social life in any particular epoch and the call of God on the church."<sup>265</sup> This statement applies more clearly to other eras of Christian history; no so much to our own. Now the 'call' has to do more with the individual believer: what is his social duty? What is her gift? How can I impact the culture for good? Well-intentioned, and completely divorced from the concept of 'community' that Paul so earnestly inculcated in his churches.

If the devil were to strategize how to marginalize a Christian witness in the modern world - which he most likely does in his evil machinations - he could hardly have

---

<sup>265</sup> Hunter, *To Change the World*; 230.

developed a more successful 'divide and conquer' plan than we have witnessed over the past two centuries. First, convince everyone that the Church is God's fallback plan - Plan B - and that she only exists as a place where people can get 'saved' and then go to heaven when they die. Second, follow up on this by making the mission of the Church entirely evangelistic; start counting numbers of 'decisions for Christ' and publishing them in the denomination's quarterly newsletter. Send out a slew of missionaries to preach the gospel of British imperialism or American democracy (or commercialism, depending on one's point of view) and, when society grows too immoral and atheistic to tolerate anymore, engage the Church in political activism and stir up the 'Moral Majority.' Along the way, be sure to lose any concept of a 'corporate' life of the Church, or a Church 'witness' that goes beyond individual believers sharing the 'Four Point' pamphlet with unbelieving and unsuspecting victims at the Student Union. Hunter maintains that the first essential task in recovering the Church from this anemia is to 'disentangle' the Church from its too-close orientation with contemporary culture. He writes,

The first task is to disentangle the life and identity of the church from the life and identity of American society...for the moral life and everyday social practices of the church also far too entwined with the prevailing normative assumptions of American culture. Courtship and marriage, the formation and education of children, the mutual relationships and obligations between the individual and community, vocation, leadership, consumption, leisure, 'retirement' and the use of time in the final chapters of life - on these and other matters, Christianity has uncritically assimilated to the dominant ways of life in a manner dubious at the least. Even more, these assimilations arguably compromise the fundamental integrity of its witness to the world.<sup>266</sup>

The problem we are dealing with, from a post-Reformational perspective at least, is that the average person cannot conceive of a religion that does not immediately impact social conditions, a religion that does not interact and confront contemporary culture. With the advent and progression of democracy, members of the professing Church have felt the need to employ their words and deeds for the modification of society

---

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*; 184-185.

through political avenues. This paradigm is present in all of the 'Christ and Culture' paradigms except the *Christ Against Culture* perspective that leads to cloisterism, which



Joseph Klausner (1874-1958)

is not a major factor in modern Christian thought. Joseph Klausner, a leading 20<sup>th</sup> Century Zionist, essentially dismissed the relevance of Jesus on the basis of his non-engagement with contemporary culture. Klausner's opinion was that "Jesus ignored everything connected with material civilization: in this sense he does not belong to civilization."<sup>267</sup> Zionism was, of course, the activist wing of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Judaism, so it stands to reason that such an ardent advocate of that viewpoint would dis-

parage Jesus' significance on account of his lack of social and political activism. But Klausner's political perspective does not make his observation incorrect; Jesus, and Paul after Him, did not engage with the political and social issues of His day. It is possible that this was because of the fact that, in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century, individual political activism was unheard of. But neither Jesus nor the Apostle Paul were zealots, and that was a ready-to-hand political expression of Judaism in the Second Temple era. Jesus *could* have been a zealot; Paul *could* have been a zealot; neither men *was* a zealot. Klausner's observation is correct; his conclusion is not.

Zionism was not orthodox Judaism, and Klausner was not an orthodox Jew. If he had been he might have realized from the Scriptures that it was the zealot who was wrong, not Jesus or Paul. In spite of being a renown Hebrew scholar and professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for many years, Klausner failed to understand the true nature of Israel's intended influence on the world around her: her *witness*. It was not to be through engagement, but through *visible isolation*. That is, Israel was to bear witness of the divine grace bestowed upon her by living out her unique status as God's own possession in the presence, but separate from, the nations surrounding her. Again,

---

<sup>267</sup> Klausner, Joseph *Jesus of Nazareth*; quoted in Niebuhr; 3.

Moses' admonition to the children of Israel on the advent of their finally entering the promised land is instructive of Israel's purpose.

*Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?*

(Deuteronomy 4:5-8)

With the eventual fulfilment of all that Israel was to do and be, through the 'Servant of Yahweh,' Jesus Christ, this commission, as it were, has 'gone on the road.' The Church, if she is indeed the extension of Israel as maintained in this study, has the same mission statement: to be *visibly isolated*, an 'embedded culture' testifying to (and against) the surrounding culture not by engaging or participating in that culture, but by living as the unique people of God in the presence of that culture. This is the inescapable conclusion of Paul's presentation of the Church as the new humanity, the body of Him who is the 'new man,' the New Creation inaugurated. The Church alone possesses the "*truth as it is in Jesus Christ*,"<sup>268</sup> which is the truth as it is. Consequently, the Church must in every age realize that "*the form of this world is passing away*"<sup>269</sup> and, therefore, to in any manner engage the surrounding culture on its own terms or using its own methods, is to build on sinking sand. "As to the present world order, it has no independent ontological status or homogenous character but 'is at the same time chaos and a kingdom,' 'a demonic blend of order and revolt.'"<sup>270</sup>

This perspective has come to be known as 'neo-anabaptist,' and represents a resurgent emphasis found in the anabaptists of the Reformation era, that the Church can-

---

<sup>268</sup> Ephesians 4:21

<sup>269</sup> I Corinthians 7:31

<sup>270</sup> Hunter; 161. Hunter is quoting the neo-anabaptist John Howard Yoder, *The Otherness of the Church*.

not succeed in its mission of witness unless it recognizes itself as an embedded culture, acknowledging that “the community of faith is its own *polis*.”<sup>271</sup> Hunter continues,

Citizenship in the church is true citizenship, one that trumps loyalties in the world. It creates an alternative space in the world and an alternative set of practices against which the world is judged and beckoned...‘The church doesn’t have a social strategy, the church *is* a social strategy.’ The church does not have a social ethic, it is a social ethic.<sup>272</sup>

The question, of course, is whether the Apostle Paul shared this perspective, whether his letters do, in fact, inculcate a viewpoint of the Church as a separate ‘polis’ within the existing cultural milieu. There are several passages that would indicate that he did indeed think this way. These passages are crucial to our understanding of the Church’s self-awareness, of her intramural relationships; that is, if we still consider Paul’s perspective to hold true of the Church today. It has been the thesis of this study that any other viewpoint than that which we find in the New Testament, not least in the Pauline literature, is nothing less than ‘will-worship’ and cannot pretend to any abiding authority in the Church. Consequently, what Paul said still goes. Consider the following as both a sampling and a summary of the apostolic view.

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.* (Ephesians 4:17-24)

---

<sup>271</sup> *Idem*.

<sup>272</sup> *Idem*. Hunter is here quoting from *Resident Aliens* by Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon.

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

(Colossians 1:13-14)

*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life. And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

(Galatians 6:7-10)

*Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern. For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame – who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.*

(Philippians 3:17-21)

These passages share a common theme of the Church as something unique and distinct, something new *within* the world and definitely *not* of the world. Believers are referred to in their corporate identity as ‘citizens’ of Christ’s kingdom and ‘members’ of the household of God and of faith. This corporate motif is strengthened in Paul through the use of his various metaphors: the Church as the Body of Christ, as the Temple of God and of the Holy Spirit, as the Bride of Christ. Thus acknowledging the individual contribution of each believer, or ‘member,’ to the health and well-being of the body, the apostle nonetheless emphasizes the whole of the body as greater than the sum of the parts.

*For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many... Now you are the body of Christ, and members individually.*

(I Corinthians 12:12-14, 27)

*And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of*

*Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head – Christ – from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.* (Ephesians 4:11-16)

Switching metaphors to the ‘temple,’ we find Paul still maintaining the same corporate emphasis, though he also acknowledged the individual believer as the temple of the Holy Spirit. In the first case the context is schism in the church at Corinth; in the second case, in the same church, the issue is individual immorality – specifically, fornication.

*For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, you are God’s building. According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one’s work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is. If anyone’s work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward. If anyone’s work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire. Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are.* (I Corinthians 3:9-17)

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.* (I Corinthians 6:15-20)

In Ephesians, however, Paul returns to the corporate emphasis of the temple metaphor, in a passage reminiscent of Peter’s famous ‘living stones’ passage.

*Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.* (Ephesians 2:19-22)

*Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* (I Peter 2:4-5)

For Paul, as for Peter, the living stones – individual believers – are not intended to be alone, but rather to be fitted together into the new and true Temple of the Holy Spirit, the *spiritual house*, a *holy priesthood*: the Church. We saw in the previous lesson that the Church, the body of Christ, is the ‘firstborn’ of God and therefore stands as a priesthood before the Lord. The metaphor of the Temple, therefore, is the one most fitting to this role of every believer: the priest ministers in the Temple; the Church is the living Temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore the ministry of each and every believer is, at least *primarily*, focused in the Church, the Temple. It is in the Church that believers fulfill the Levitical calling of service, first the High Priest, Jesus Christ, and then to the congregation. It is hard to miss Paul’s emphasis on this reality or to fail to see his consistent refrain: that the ministry of every believer is toward the edification of the whole congregation. Paul knew no ‘Christian’ Lone Rangers.

Perhaps the most poignant of the apostle’s metaphors with regard to the Church is that of the Bride, an image familiar in the Old Testament but used only by Paul in the New. It has already been noted that this metaphor is never used of the individual believer, and in the key passage – Ephesians 5 – Paul is explicit as to its reference to the Church. In a passage that speaks both to the quality of marriages within the church and to the cosmic union between Jesus Christ and His Church, Paul writes,

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish. So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it,*

*just as the Lord does the church. For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. "For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.* (Ephesians 5:25-32)

This passage manifests a theme in the Pauline literature: that the behavior of believers within the Church is a microcosm of the relationship between the Church and her head, Jesus Christ. The unity of the body – and absence of division or of a divisive spirit – the believers' mutual care for one another, the exercise of the *charismata* for the common good, etc., all of these are in keeping with Paul's admonition in Philippians 2, where he inculcates the same spirit of sacrificial love within the Church as is found in Christ Jesus,

*Therefore if there is any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and mercy, fulfill my joy by being like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind. Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus...* (Philippians 2:1-5)

It is a generally accepted principle that the Church is supposed to be a mutually-supportive, loving community of common faith. This was to be the characteristic mark of Christ's disciples, their love for one another.<sup>273</sup> Little considered is the manner in which Paul presents the congregation as a self-contained community, sufficient in itself to meet every need. The congregation was to be self-governing, self-supporting, and self-adjudging. It is not too much to say that Paul's letters to the churches are a running commentary on Peter's statement, that God "*has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness.*"<sup>274</sup> A thorough investigation of the self-contained nature of the believing congregation is sufficient for its own study, and hopefully will constitute the third installment of the Pauline Theology series. It is sufficient for this study to review sever-

---

<sup>273</sup> John 13:35

<sup>274</sup> II Peter 1:3

al aspects of life in which the apostle to the Gentiles firmly believed and taught that the Church did indeed possess “*all things necessary for life and godliness.*”

One of the most important features of an independent society or *polis* is a centralized and independent government. This is not to say that such a government could, if it desired, overcome the government and power of a different self-contained political entity. It is merely to say that political or governing structure is an essential characteristic of any society of human beings that may call itself a *polis*, a ‘city’ in the philosophical sense of the word. It is evident that Paul viewed the congregation – the *local* congregation – as possessing this essential feature. It was his policy from the earliest of his missionary journeys to appoint elders in every church, to pass on the mantle of authority to men who were raised up by God to be overseers of the flock among which they lived. This pattern is evident in Luke’s account of Paul’s journeys, most particularly in the apostle’s farewell speech to the Ephesian elders. The image of the shepherd is maintained for the elders – to *guard* the flock and to *feed* the flock that God had entrusted to their oversight. But these were not men brought in from elsewhere; they were themselves members of the same flock over which they kept watch.

*Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.* (Acts 20:28-31)

The later ‘qualifications’ given by Paul for the elders of a church reiterate the governing aspect of the office, stipulating that if a man cannot manage his own household, “*how will he take care of the church of God?*”<sup>275</sup> The leadership of the congregation, therefore, had the authority (and should have the ability) to administer the church in terms of discipline and justice, benevolence and outreach, and education. As to the first of these, discipline and justice, Paul’s first letter to Corinth is quite instructive. In it the

---

<sup>275</sup> I Timothy 3:5

apostle deals with a terrible sin that existed unchecked within the congregation. What is notable regarding his reaction is not so much his abhorrence of the sin but his despair that the congregation had not already dealt with it. Consider how reluctantly Paul himself has to enter the fray, frustrated that the sinner had not already been disciplined.

*It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife! And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

(I Corinthians 5:1-5)

The principle that Paul is establishing here is the authority of judgment within the Church for matters pertaining to the Church. Thus he concludes his admonition to deal with this sinner before the apostle returns to Corinth, by saying, “*For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within the church?*”<sup>276</sup> From the specific case of gross immorality Paul moves to less socially-repulsive, civil lawsuits that were apparently also far too prevalent in Corinth. Note again the tone of self-sufficiency that the apostle assumes to be true of the local congregation.

*Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unrighteous, and not before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Do you not know that we shall judge angels? How much more, things that pertain to this life? If then you have judgments concerning things pertaining to this life, do you appoint those who are least esteemed by the church to judge? I say this to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you, not even one, who will be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!*

(I Corinthians 6:1-6)

Imagine what a powerful witness it would be in the world, if the Church – even in its local manifestation as individual congregations – refused to participate in the civil law courts in any and all matters pertaining between professing believers, but rather

---

<sup>276</sup> I Corinthians 5:12

subjected all such conflicts to the adjudication of wise men within the congregation. It is interesting that Paul does not stipulate that the elders alone are qualified to judge; indeed, he makes the claim that all of the saints will one day judge the world and the angelic host. Thus the congregation has a form of polity and a form of jurisprudence. We may say that it has no need of a legislative body, as God has already given it its entire legal code in the inspired Scriptures. But even though the Church does not *write* laws, it is still required to *interpret* what God has written, and once again Paul envisioned this aspect of the congregation's life to be self-contained.

It is an entrenched principle within modern professing Christianity, of almost any denomination, that a young man wishing to 'go into the ministry' will follow the para-church route of Bible College and seminary. Indeed, it is exceedingly rare that a graduate of seminary return to the church from which he came and, if he does, to return with the same doctrinal convictions with which he left. Is this what the apostles envisioned for the passing on of "*the faith once delivered unto the saints*"? It may be argued that the apostles did not envision seminaries simply because there were no such things in their day. But that is not true, since in both Judaism and the surrounding pagan/Greek world, higher education was conducted away from the family home and synagogue. Paul himself was a product of this phenomenon, having learned his rabbinic trade under the famous Gamaliel. The leadership of Jerusalem marveled at Peter and John and the erudition with which they spoke, seeing that they were 'unlettered' men, meaning they had no formal rabbinic training. It was the same in the philosophical world, with would-be philosophers and orators traveling many miles to attend the Lyseum or the Academy in Athens, or the famous school of rhetoric at Rhodes, where Cicero honed his oratorical skills. Indeed, studying away from home and synagogue was the pattern of higher education that the Church quickly imitated.

But what was Paul's intended pattern? We may assume that, one of the qualification of an elder being that he is "*apt to teach*," that it was the apostle's intention that the elders do just that: to teach. Indeed, he acknowledges some elders who "*work hard at preaching and teaching*" as being worthy of 'double honor,' probably meaning financial

compensation to enable them to continue their studies. The apostle summarizes his perspective in a statement to Timothy that implies a continued transfer of sound doctrine from generation to generation, *within the Church*.

*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.* (II Timothy 2:2)

The passage quoted earlier from Ephesians 4, in which Paul outlines the gifts of men that Christ has granted to the Church – apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers – also seems to give the time frame during which the internal teaching gift will be required: “*until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ.*”<sup>277</sup> It is hard to maintain that the Church has, in any era, attained to that high standard. But it is argued that Bible colleges and seminaries *are* part of the Church and therefore fulfill the teaching ministry outlined in these passages. While there is no specific passage that argues definitively against such a broad definition of the Church in this application, what we will see from Paul’s ‘member ministry’ treatise in I Corinthians 12 does seem to strongly argue for the self-contained and Spirit-led community within each congregation. At this point in Church history this whole discussion may be little more than tilting at windmills, but the consistent retrograde movement of Bible colleges and seminaries throughout the years does seem to indicate that something may be wrong with the system itself.

Be that as it may, the topic of this current discussion is the self-contained nature of the Pauline conception of the Church, both in its local manifestation, the congregation, and in its universal fellowship as against the unbelieving world around it. This nature is further illustrated by the ministry of benevolence and mercy that is to be found in the church, a perspective that incorporates the economic life of the congregation into the whole of the body. The key passage and event that illustrates this principle is the famine-relief effort orchestrated by Paul from within his gentile churches, for the

---

<sup>277</sup> Ephesians 4:13

aid of the brethren suffering from the famine in Judea. II Corinthians 8 & 9 form the text, one that remains crucial to any biblical understanding of personal economics and congregational benevolence. Several passages from these two chapters will be sufficient to establish the underlying principle, though it is certainly worthy of more in-depth analysis.

Of first importance is the fact that Paul did not employ his apostolic authority in order to raise the relief funds, nor did he promise any immediate return on their 'investment,' as is too often the case among televangelists today. Rather he simply presents the example of the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, to be the guide to each congregation.

*I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love by the diligence of others. For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich.*

(II Corinthians 8:8-9)

Paul next explains the reason why there is economic disparity even with the Church, just as there was in ancient Israel. He even quotes from the Old Testament in regard to the gathering of the manna in the wilderness, showing that though there was disparity there was no want nor excess. So now, in the Church, the economic prosperity of some is intended for the economic assistance of others, not in a socialistic sense of a uniform income, but rather in the sense that all legitimate needs in both the congregation and the universal Church are met.

*For I do not mean that others should be eased and you burdened; but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may supply their lack, that their abundance also may supply your lack – that there may be equality. As it is written, "He who gathered much had nothing left over, and he who gathered little had no lack."*

(II Corinthians 8:13-15)

Paul views individual economic prosperity or economic hardship entirely within the compass of divine providence and purpose. In this he merely echoes Moses from Deuteronomy 8, where Israel's lawgiver warns the people of turning their hearts away

from God on account of the prosperity He has promised to give them, and turning their hearts inward, as if this prosperity was a condition of their own making.

*Beware that you do not forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest – when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage; who led you through that great and terrible wilderness, in which were fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty land where there was no water; who brought water for you out of the flinty rock; who fed you in the wilderness with manna, which your fathers did not know, that He might humble you and that He might test you, to do you good in the end – then you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.’*

(Deuteronomy 8:11-17)

Moses then delivers one of the most important economic principles ever uttered by man, no less true in Capitalist, Evangelical America than it was in ancient Israel in the land of Canaan: “*And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth.*”<sup>278</sup> It is reasonable to think that this passage, and much else that the Old Testament has to say about economics, underlies Paul’s summary statement concerning prosperity and want in the Church,

*Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!*

(II Corinthians 9:10-15)

Thus, within the Church, the prosperity of some is intended for liberality so that the occasional need of others might result in abundant thanksgiving to God, who guides the hearts of both the rich and the poor within the household of faith. There does not seem to be any room for government welfare programs in Paul’s conception of

---

<sup>278</sup> Deuteronomy 8:18

the Church. But the apostle also did not envision a programmatic approach to this self-contained society within society. Benevolence and mercy were not organized in a top-down manner, with elders and boards and committees determining the who, why, and how of giving. Nor was education structured as a seminary within rather than a seminary without. Rather it is the working of the Holy Spirit, whose Temple the Church is, that brings about the self-contained and self-sufficient dynamic that is the Pauline conception of the Church. The *locus classicus* of this teaching is, of course, I Corinthians 12.

It is in I Corinthians 12 that the apostle expands on the reality that the Church is the temple of God in which He has caused His Name to dwell. And the dwelling of that Name is through the Person of the Holy Spirit; He is the motive force of all true ministry and worship in the Church. This is something the Corinthian church was having a hard time grasping; they somehow thought the 'gifts of the Spirit,' the *charismata*, were for personal use and acclaim. In this the Corinthians Christians have been sadly followed by many modern-day charismatics and Pentecostals. But Paul makes it crystal clear: the purpose of the 'gifts' is for the building up of the whole congregation, and that purpose is directed entirely by the Holy Spirit who gives the gifts in the first place.

*There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all: for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings by the same Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually as He wills.* (I Corinthians 12:4-11)

This passage is fundamental to the Church's self-awareness as well as her awareness of the work of the Holy Spirit in her midst (indeed, if the Holy Spirit is not working in the Church, then the lampstand has been removed and that assembly is no longer a church at all). Consider again the 'whole-assembly' perspective the apostle manifests here: "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one *for the profit of all.*" If we remember that the gift of the Holy Spirit was a crucial component of the eschatolog-

ical hope of Israel, then we may conclude that the Church, as the extension of Israel under the New Covenant, is to embody that communal life that was to be Israel's supreme witness of God's grace toward her. This dynamic is what an embedded Christian culture is all about, as we noted earlier from D. A. Carson's *Christ & Culture Revisited*.

Christian communities honestly seeking to live under the Word of God will inevitably generate cultures that, to say the least, will in some sense counter or confront the values of the dominant culture.<sup>279</sup>

Hunter seems to best understand the concept of the Church as a unique culture within the prevailing, surrounding culture, with a purpose all her own and yet with an impact beyond her walls. He calls this concept *faithful presence* and defines it as an ecclesiological view that runs counter to the prevailing social theory. This stands to reason on the basis of the Church as the New Humanity, the people of the New Creation in Christ Jesus. It also fits with the attitude so pervasive in Paul's letters, that the community of faith has no common ground with the unbelieving world around it, but rather stands as a testimony against it as it witnesses for Christ and His kingdom. Hunter writes,

One way to summarize the direction of my argument is to say that *theology moves in the opposite direction of social theory*, but neither oblivious nor without reference to its insights. A theology of faithful presence means a recognition that the vocation of the church is to bear witness to and be the embodiment of the coming Kingdom of God.<sup>280</sup>

The general thrust of this argument, also presented in this study, is that the Church only bears proper and powerful witness in the world when it is most biblically the Church. Her purpose is not first and foremost to change the culture around her, for if she makes this its purpose she must certainly fail. Indeed, every attempt to engage the prevailing culture on the latter's terms has resulted in some degree of assimilation and compromise. But when the Church recognizes herself as Paul presents her in his

---

<sup>279</sup> Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*; 143.

<sup>280</sup> Hunter; 95.

letters, and as the entire history of Israel prepares the Church to think, as the unique possession of God, a royal priesthood ministering in the true Temple, the indwelt people of God in Christ Jesus.

But this perspective must not be confused for cloisterism or monastic communism, for believers isolating themselves from the world and ‘circling the wagons’ in united avoidance of contact with the surrounding culture. As we will see in the next lesson, Paul always envisioned the Church in contact with the unbelieving world, just as Israel had been under the Old Covenant. It is *how* she is in contact that matters and makes the difference between some measure of assimilation or compromise, on the one hand, and witness and judgment, on the other. What the Church is equipped by the Holy Spirit to do within her own confines, the “*all things necessary for life and godliness,*” does not mean every single action in the believer’s life. Rather it pertains to the life of the community as it seeks to obey the divine pattern set forth in the Scriptures. This is done *in the world* and in the presence of an unbelieving culture (in any age), and this is how Paul understood it was to be.

*I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person.*  
(I Corinthians 4:9-11)

The Church is not allowed *to go out of the world*, but must not let herself be conformed to the world. Thus we turn in the next lesson, the last in this session on Pauline Studies, to the relationship of the Church with the world.

## Lesson 14 – A City Set Upon a Hill

**Text: Roman 12:17-13:13; Colossians 4:5-6; Philippians 2:12-15**

*“Alas, in leaning over to speak to the modern world,  
we had fallen in.”*

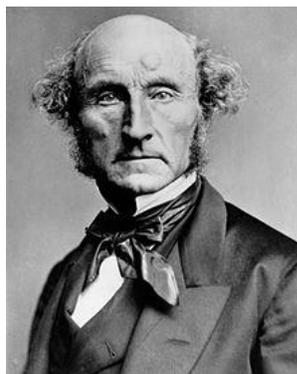
(Stanley Hauerwas & William Willimon)

The famous aphorism attributed to 18<sup>th</sup> Century Anglo-Irish statesman Edmund Burke is often brought to bear against any advocacy of ‘quietism’ among evangelicals: “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good men to do nothing.” There are several problems with this saying, not the least of which is the historical fact that Burke never said it. The saying is most similar to something the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British philosopher John Stuart Mill included in an 1867 inaugural address at the University of St. Andrews,



Edmund Burke (1729-97)

Let not any one pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, and forms no opinion. Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing. He is not a good man who, without a protest, allows wrong to be committed in his name, and with the means which he helps to supply, because he will not trouble himself to use his mind on the subject.<sup>281</sup>



John Stuart Mill (1806-73)

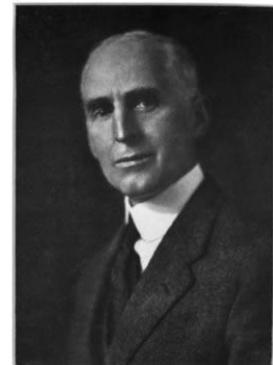
John Stuart Mill was not the sort of man that the Church should look to for guidance. An agnostic, if not an atheist, he was raised under the rigorous philosophical training of his father, the Scottish philosopher and historian John Mill, with the help of other Enlightenment notables such as Jeremy Bentham. Stuart Mill’s father purposefully shielded his son from any religious influence and from any association with children his own age, in order to propagate a ‘genius’ to carry on the utilitarianism so popular in early 19<sup>th</sup> Century Britain. Nevertheless, Stuart Mill became a guiding light

<sup>281</sup> [“The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing,” a Quote Falsely Attributed to Edmund Burke | Open Culture](#) Accessed 11December2021.

to the Social Gospel movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in both Great Britain and the United States, helping to inculcate a ‘we must be up and doing’ attitude as fundamental to the Church which he himself spurned.

But the problem with the aphorism, “The only thing necessary for evil to triumph...” is deeper than its authorship. It fully assumes that the battle of Good versus Evil is to be fought (and won?) entirely within the realm of human endeavor. This assumption denies any spiritual component of either Good or Evil, and thus ultimately contributes to the erasure of any distinction between the two. The terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ are, one might say by definition, *moral* classifications. But if the distinction between what is ‘good’ and what is ‘evil’ is removed from any association with an Absolute Good, then that determination can only be made via the fickle opinions of Man and Society – the realm of ‘relative morality.’ In spite of Stuart Mill’s lofty words and philosophy, this can only lead to a blurring of the line between Good and Evil, and consequently the increasingly common ‘calling good, evil and evil, good.’

That this is inevitable stems from the second serious problem with the saying, which assumes the presence of ‘good’ men in the world. This derived from the Enlightenment view that men of science and of philosophy, men of a ‘reforming spirit’ (though generally the whole idea of ‘spirit’ was vehemently denied) were the ‘good men’ of whom Stuart Mill spoke. No doubt he included himself in their number. These were the men who, through education and political legislation (Stuart Mill was a Member of Parliament), would reform the moral structure of society to their own pattern. This socio-political effort is known broadly as Progressivism and has had several incarnations over the past three hundred years, the most recent happening at the current time under the guidance of AOC and Bernie Sanders. Progressivism denies any absolute morality and seeks to replace it with a manmade (*their* made) morality. But if one compares the Progressive movements of the past two centuries, one will quickly see that the more cur-



Charles Beard (1874-1948)

rent morality would have been considered rank immorality by the era immediately preceding. In other words, it has been a downward spiral. The historian Charles Beard, himself an ardent promoter of Progressive doctrine, came later in life to see the self-destructive tendencies of the movement (though he did not apparently despair of the movement entirely). Beard wrote of the Progressives of his later years, “Don’t they realize that their method of arguing can justify anything? I wish we could find some way of getting rid of conservative morality without having these youngsters drop all morality.”<sup>282</sup> Beard did not realize how close he was to the heart of the problem (and, perhaps, also the kingdom): what he wished for is impossible, but man is blind to this fact until the scales are removed through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Yet activism remains a major part of American evangelicalism, simply because it is a major component of the American psyche. Our revolution was largely supported and actively incited and encouraged by the clergy of the American colonies, and that spirit of political activism has never left the distinctly American brand of Christianity. A fairly typical sermon from the revolutionary period is that from Abraham Keteltas, a Presbyterian minister in New York and an elected member of the Provincial Congress at the start of the revolution. His sermon of October 5, 1777 was entitled, “God Arising and Pleading His People’s Cause,” offers this summary conclusion of the revolution, “From the preceding [*sic*] discourse, I think we have reason to conclude, that the cause of this American continent, against the measures of a cruel, bloody, and vindictive ministry, is the cause of God.”<sup>283</sup> It was the American pulpit of the mid-18<sup>th</sup> Century that fomented and sustained rebellion against the British Crown, and that heritage underlies American Evangelicalism from that day forward. In other words, political activism is in the American DNA, and no less in the American Church than in the society at large. But what do we make, then, of Paul’s admonition in Romans 13?



Abraham Keteltas (1732-98)

---

<sup>282</sup> Goldberg, Jonah “Richard Ely’s Golden Calf” *National Review* (December 31, 2009).

<sup>283</sup> Sandoz, Ellis *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era* (Indianapolis: LibertyPress; 1991); 595.

*Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake.*

(Romans 13:1-5)

The relationship of Church and State has been a perennial conundrum for the Church in the United States for hundreds of years, and this study will not solve the issue nor end the debate. But it does bear noting that the *predominant* view among American evangelicals (and Catholics, for that matter) has been distinctly on the side of a vigorous political activism within the Church in this country, and any view otherwise is



John Winthrop (1588-1649)

frequently denigrated as 'unpatriotic.' There is a certain irony in this, as perhaps the original American sermon, preached by John Winthrop on board the Mayflower, set a different tone and purpose for the Plymouth colony - to be *a City upon a Hill*.

Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. The Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us, as His own people, and will command a blessing upon us in all our ways, so that we shall see much more of His wisdom, power, goodness and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with. We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when ten of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies; when He shall make us a praise and glory that men shall say of succeeding planta-

tions, “may the Lord make it like that of New England.” *For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.*<sup>284</sup>

In the 400 years since Winthrop, the Church he envisioned has in large measure failed to achieve his dream. In place of that dream, however, American Christianity has



Alexis de Toqueville (1805-59)

wrapped itself in political activism in a manner unprecedented in the history of the Church. This was evident to Alexis de Toqueville as he traveled through the country in the 1830s in prelude to his famous *Democracy in America*. De Toqueville observed, “The greatest part of British America was peopled by men who, after having shaken off the authority of the Pope, acknowledged no other religious supremacy; they brought with them into the New World a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion. This sect contributed powerfully to the establishment of a democracy and a republic, and from the earliest settlement of the emigrants politics and religion contracted an alliance which has never been dissolved.”<sup>285</sup> Hunter summarizes the result (at least as of 2010) of this union between religion in politics which, in its American manifestation, quite unique in human history. He writes,

The mythic connection between the Christian faith and America is variously understood by conservative Christians, but the link itself is not doubted. The fate of one has been, is, and will be intimately tied to the fate of the other. The bond is strong because each is, in indefinable ways, constitutive of the other. It is not surprising then, that they are often conflated, such that Christian faith and national identity are fused together in political imagination.<sup>286</sup>

The past forty years has illustrated the truth of this observation in four-year intervals – at each General Election. However, the apocalyptic language used by the

---

<sup>284</sup> Winthrop, John “A Model of Christian Charity” (1630); [John Winthrop Dreams of a City on a Hill, 1630 | The American Yawp Reader](#) Accessed 12December2021.

<sup>285</sup> De Toqueville, Alexis *Democracy in America*; [Democracy in America \(elte.hu\)](#); 330-331. Accessed 12December2021.

<sup>286</sup> Hunter; 128.

'Christian Right' with regard to the condition of our nation, our liberties, and our Christian religion if so-and-so is elected, or if so-and-so is not elected, is merely a continuation of what has become a uniquely American ritual. One has only to review the political broadsides between the Adams camp and the Jefferson camp in the months leading up to the Election of 1800 to learn that this fusing of religion and politics is a settled fact of Americanism. But Hunter argues cogently that this phenomenon has served only to diminish the influence of the Church in American society, and to remove her farther and farther from her biblical responsibility.

Thus, it is possible to argue that at the same time the Christian Right acquired and exercised its greatest power – culminating in the 2004 presidential election – this movement also generated greater hostility toward the Christian faith than ever before in the nation's history.<sup>287</sup>

We must note that the hostility of society toward Christianity by no means indicates that what the Church is doing is wrong. Indeed, we can maintain with biblical certainty, that when the Church is doing what the Church is supposed to be doing, she will face intense opposition from the surrounding culture. But it is always incumbent upon every church in every generation, to determine as best she can, whether the opposition she faces is for righteousness' sake, or whether it is because the Church herself is culpable. This self-examination is enjoined upon the Church by Peter in his first epistle,

*And who is he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good? But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled." But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. For it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.*  
(I Peter 3:13-17)

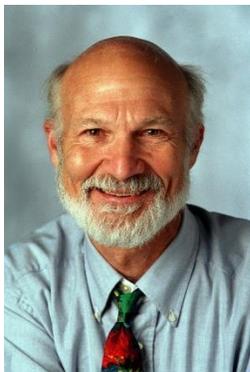
At the very least, Peter's admonition calls on evangelicals to reassess the union that has formed between religion and politics in the United States, to determine if the

---

<sup>287</sup> *Idem.*

opposition faced from society is on account of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or from an amalgam of faith and politics that is itself foreign to the Church's charter as 'A City Upon a Hill.' In the context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century America, this self-analysis takes the form of the Church's relationship with the surrounding world, and in particular the *political* world. It is the classic 'Church vs. State' paradigm, though the foregoing analysis makes it evident that the 'versus' has largely been removed from American Evangelicalism. Hunter's conclusion is that the marriage between religion and politics noted by de Toqueville is ungodly and has been counter-productive, even destructive, to the Church's true message and witness, "But the consequence of the whole-hearted and uncritical embrace of politics by Christians has been, *in effect*, to reduce Christian faith to a political ideology and various Christian denominations and para-church organizations to special interest groups."<sup>288</sup> In regard to the Church's relationship to the surrounding culture, Hunter believes that a major task before American Evangelicalism is "for the church and for Christian believers to decouple the 'public' from the 'political.'<sup>289</sup> Perhaps it is time for believers in the United States to make their faith more public, and their politics more private.

The primary thesis of this study has been that the Church is a new humanity, a unique people of God embedded within the cultures of the unbelieving world, with the



Stanley Hauerwas (b. 1940)

mission, not of transforming the world, but of *being the Church*. As such the Church will both 'condemn and beckon' as we saw in the previous lesson. In their jointly-authored book, *Resident Aliens*, Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon accurately depict



William Willimon (b. 1946)

the problem facing contemporary evangelicalism, though they sadly do not accurately offer a solution. Hauerwas and Willimon categorize American Christianity into three

---

<sup>288</sup> *Ibid.*; 172.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*; 185.

basic types of churches: *activist*, *conversionist*, and *confessing*.<sup>290</sup> In the briefest of summaries of the first two types, the *activist* church is the one we have been describing thus far in this lesson. The *conversionist* church is the one that despairs completely of any tangible change that the Church can bring to the surrounding culture, and consequently seeks only to 'save' as many as possible from that culture before the end of time arrives. It is the *confessing* church that presents to the authors the best illustration of what the Church is called to be in this world.

It seeks to influence the world by being the church, that is, by being something the world is not and can never be, lacking the gift of faith and vision...This church knows that its most credible form of witness (and the most 'effective' thing it can do for the world) is the actual creation of a living, breathing, visible community of faith.<sup>291</sup>

Later in the book the authors state succinctly, "The most creative social strategy we have to offer is the church."<sup>292</sup> What this means is that the Church has not been called upon to transform the world through political or even religious activism, but rather to be the Church in the midst of the world, to present to the world the Body of Jesus Christ in living community, standing as the witness for the Truth and as the Light to the darkness. Consider Paul's exhortation to the Ephesian church:

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.*  
(Ephesians 5:8-13)

One of the crucial questions in regard to the Church's relationship in the world is whether the Church is commanded to "Go" or whether the Church has become the place where all men "Come unto Me." The former option has characterized Western, and especially American, evangelicalism since the Second Great Awakening of the early

---

<sup>290</sup> "Confessing" not to be confused with "Confessional."

<sup>291</sup> Hauerwas, Stanley and William H. Willimon *Resident Aliens* (Nashville: Abingdon Press; 2014); 46-47.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*; 83.

19<sup>th</sup> Century. Mission conferences frequently employ Isaiah 6 in this regard, *"Who will go for Us? And then I said, 'Here I am, send me!'"*<sup>293</sup> It seems to escape their notice that this prophetic commission was not directed at the world, but at Israel; Isaiah was sent to prophecy to the people of God. It is a historical fact that Judaism was not an evangelistic religion; proselyte making was not the major occupation of the synagogue. Modern Christians look at this fact with disdain, but perhaps it was never the mission of the people of God to 'Go' in the first place. For the English-speaking Church, at least, this misunderstanding comes from an unfortunate rendering of the 'Great Commission' of Matthew 28, where the imperative falls on 'Go' *and make disciples of all nations*. The only imperative in the whole passage is not the word 'Go' but rather the 'make disciples.' Literally, the command of Jesus is *"Having gone, make disciples..."*

This is not to say that 'going' is not a component of the mission of the Church; the journeys of the Apostle Paul are significant in this regard. This is only to say that 'going' is not the primary mission of the Church, for we read of the first congregation in Jerusalem that *"The Lord was adding to the church daily those who were being saved."*<sup>294</sup> It may be argued that what drew so many people to the church – beyond the obvious drawing of the Holy Spirit – was the manner in which this community was living together and behaving themselves in the presence of the unbelieving world. They were that self-contained community that we investigated in the last lesson.

*Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.* (Acts 2:44-47)

The fundamental point here is that the 'rules' by which the Christian community is to govern its life, and the principles by which the Church is called to live, *are not possible outside the Church*. The moral reclamation that the Church has sought to bring

---

<sup>293</sup> Isaiah 6:8

<sup>294</sup> Acts 2:47

about within the surrounding culture – in every land and in every age – is not even possible without the presence of the Holy Spirit, who abides in the Church and not in the world. We must remember that the Holy Spirit is the One “whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.”<sup>295</sup> There is a sense in which the Church, whenever it attempts to engage the surrounding culture in reforming activism, diminishes the importance of that regeneration which is solely the work of the Holy Spirit. 20<sup>th</sup> Century neo-anabaptist John Howard Yoder writes, “Whether or not, or in what sense, non-Christians or the non-Christian society *should* love, forgive, and otherwise behave like Christians is a speculative question. The spiritual resources for making such redeemed behavior a real possibility are lacking.”<sup>296</sup>



John Howard Yoder (1927-97)

### Light and Truth

For Paul, there are two characteristics of the Church that are both completely absent from the surrounding, unbelieving world and essential to the Church’s witness in that world: Light and Truth. These are what the Church *is* and what the world *is not*. The Light can (and will) shine in the darkness, but it cannot make the darkness light. The Truth will expose the lie, but it cannot make the lie truth. No amount of activism can reform the darkness into light, or the lie into truth. Darkness and falsehood are the essential qualities (if that word can be used for such negatives) of the *form of this world which is passing away*; it is not incumbent upon the Church to ease its passing. Rather it is the fundamental ministry of the Church, as the Temple of the Holy Spirit, to be the vessel of His fundamental ministry: “to convict the world concerning sin, and righteousness, and judgment.”<sup>297</sup> And this the Church can only do within herself, as the community of faith, the new humanity of the New Creation.

---

<sup>295</sup> John 14:17

<sup>296</sup> Yoder, John Howard *The Christian Witness to the State* (Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press; 1964); 29.

<sup>297</sup> John 16:8

Light and Truth may be generalized in the Church as Practice and Doctrine, respectively. Neither is independent of the other, for there is no truth in darkness, and no light in the lie. It is also the case that the Church cannot practice rightly if settled on a false doctrine, nor can her doctrine be pure if her practice does not correspond. Together, sound doctrine coupled with the unity of the Church as a living witness to the grace of God in Jesus Christ, present the surrounding culture with the Light and Truth that both condemns its darkness and falsehood and draws to Christ those who are being saved. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy are the most powerful evangelistic methodology available to the Church; really, her only valid methodology. These are *“the weapons of our warfare”* which *“are not of the flesh, but are divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses.”*<sup>298</sup> Let us briefly consider, then, the Church as Light and the Church as *“the pillar and foundation of the truth”* as we conclude this study series.

It is abundantly clear in the Scriptures, not least in the Gospel of John, that Light is uniquely associated with the holy God, and is perhaps the most central characteristic of His Sent One, the Messiah Jesus Christ: *“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...there was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man.”*<sup>299</sup> Paul is especially keen to this metaphor, having been blinded by that Light on the road to Damascus. The apostle speaks often of believers as no longer in darkness but are now light in the Lord.

*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*

(Colossians 1:13-14)

*But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.*

(I Thessalonians 5:4-8)

---

<sup>298</sup> II Corinthians 10:4

<sup>299</sup> John 1:4,9

*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light.* (Ephesians 5:8-13)

*And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

(Romans 13:11-14)

For the apostle, this characteristic of Light that is unique to Christ and to His body, puts the Church in a completely different category from the world; it is a difference in *kind*, not merely in *degree*. “*What communion (koinonia) has light with darkness?*” Paul rhetorically asks the Corinthian church.<sup>300</sup> This concept of Light in relationship to the Church as the New Covenant people of God reminds us of the Sermon on the Mount, and the passage that probably deserves more to be known as the Great Commission than Matthew 28,

*You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men. You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.*

(Matthew 5:13-16)

This is, of course, the purpose of setting a city up on a hill, that the light from that city might be a beacon for wayfarers, guiding them to safety. The city was not meant to be down in the valley any more than the light was to be put under a bushel basket. But successive generations of the Church have sought to bring the city down into the valley of the world in an effort to ‘reach’ the world for Christ, when in fact it was

---

<sup>300</sup> II Corinthians 6:14

the position on top of the hill that enabled the elect to reach Christ in the Church. Hau-  
erwas and Willimon put it this way: "Alas, in leaning over to speak to the modern  
world, we had fallen in."<sup>301</sup>

Note the behavioral element of Light in Paul's treatment: *walk* as children of  
light, *put on the armor of light* and *cast off the deeds of darkness*, and *let us who are of the day  
be sober*. In the Ephesians 5 passage, Paul speaks in language reminiscent of both Gala-  
tians 5 – the fruit of the Spirit – and of Romans 12 – the call to transformation by the re-  
newing of the mind. Being Light is something that believers *are*, walking as children of  
light is something believers *do*. But it has been the contention of this study that believ-  
ers do this as the assembled and sanctified body of Christ, not merely as individuals.  
The Church, then, as the embodiment of the New Creation in Jesus Christ, becomes  
Light in the world in the same manner as the original light came into the world,

*For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts  
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

(II Corinthians 4:6)

But if the manifestation of the Church in the world is Light, the source of that  
light insofar as it is present in the Church, is the Truth. And, of course, that Truth is Je-  
sus Christ. There is a progression in the manifestation of the Truth in the world, found  
in John's Gospel, that undergirds Paul's subsequent treatment of the topic. Consider:

*"For the Law was given  
through Moses, grace and  
truth were realized through  
Jesus Christ."  
(John 1:17)*

*"But when He, the Spirit of  
truth comes, He will guide  
you into all truth."  
(John 16:13)*

*"I write so that you may know  
how one ought to conduct  
himself in the household of  
God, which is the church of the  
living God, the pillar and  
foundation of the truth."  
(I Timothy 3:15)*

*"For He will take of Mine and  
Shall disclose it to you." (John 16:14)*

*"Do you not know that you are the temple of  
God, and that the Holy Spirit dwells  
In you?" (I Cor. 3:16)*

---

<sup>301</sup> *Resident Aliens*; 27.

The realization of this progression from the advent of Jesus Christ to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to the indwelling of the Church, firmly establishes the timelessness of the Church's message: it is not subject to generational change any more than is Jesus Christ, who we are told is "*the same yesterday, today, and forever.*"<sup>302</sup> Hauerwas and Willimon write, "The church is the only community formed around the truth, which is Jesus Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life."<sup>303</sup> It is this orientation to the truth that most distinguishes the Church from the surrounding world – not that members of the Church know everything; that is certainly not the case. Rather that the Church consists of the redeemed of the Lord, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, who now are enlightened by Him who is the Light, so that they may now walk in the light of the Truth. This walk Paul contrasts with the walk of the unbelieving world around the Church, which is a stumbling in the darkness of gross ignorance. As the apostle describes some characteristics of this dark dance of the Gentiles, he is clearly implying that the Church must not walk in the same manner.

*This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, **as the truth is in Jesus:** that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.*  
(Ephesians 4:17-24)

It is evident from Paul's writings that neither individual believers nor the collective assembly is in possession of all truth and all knowledge in any given region or era. Rather there is a progressive deepening of the Church's understanding of the truth as well as periodic corrections against error. *Ecclesia reformata semper reformanda*. It is not the responsibility of each generation of the Church to rediscover the truth, but rather to

---

<sup>302</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>303</sup> *Resident Aliens*; 77.

reassert the *“faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.”*<sup>304</sup> In this endeavor, there are two paths that each generation of the Church must avoid, lest she lose her way and stumble back into falsehood.

The first of these is that of ‘confessionalism.’ That is, relying entirely on the study of previous generations of the Church and accepting uncritically their conclusions, rather than investigating the confessional statements as the musings of fellow travelers, always holding them up against the critical judgment of Scripture. In the former manner the Church merely becomes the echo of previous generations rather than a fresh voice crying in the wilderness. Her witness becomes that of dogmatism, holding fast to ecclesiastical and doctrinal pronouncements from an earlier era, rather than a true and living witness of a Church immersed in God’s Word, both the Living and the written. In this latter manner the prophetic spirit lives on in the Church from generation to generation, every the same yet ever fresh, with deeper and deeper insights into the majestic redemptive work of God throughout history. Paul’s admonition to Timothy to *“study to show yourself approved”* and *“to teach faithful men who will teach others after them”* are to be viewed as permanent injunctions to the Church in every generation.

The second path to avoid is the exact opposite, and that is for the Church to take its lead from the world and to adapt its message to the influences and ‘needs’ of the surrounding culture in any age or region. Culture is powerful in terms of moulding the format of public discourse, and it is very easy for the Church to conform to the world in this manner, to shape its own discourse and message in response to the pressures of the surrounding culture. Culture is pervasive and insidious, unavoidable and subliminal; it is very hard for believers and for the Church to resist its influence. Hunter points out that the sharing of a common language is the medium through which culture most powerfully impacts all of its members, even those who are also members of the sub-culture, the Church.

---

<sup>304</sup> Jude 3

Language, the most basic system of symbols, provides the primary medium through which people apprehend their conscious experience in the world. Through both its structure and its meaning – its syntax and semantics – it provides the categories through which people understand themselves, others, and the larger world. To acquire language is to see the world and oneself in it, meaningfully.<sup>305</sup>

One need only investigate the advertising industry – its history and its success – to understand the truth of this statement. But the power of language and its use by the surrounding culture, are dangerous adversaries of the Church in her mission to hold steadfastly to the truth as it is in Jesus Christ. Hunter concludes that “it is not so much individual hearts and minds that move cultures but cultures that ultimately shape the hearts and minds and, thus, direct the lives of individuals. The movement between the individual and culture, in other words, goes in both directions and perhaps moves even more strongly in the latter direction.”<sup>306</sup> Thus efforts by the Church to engage culture on culture’s own terms are fraught with hazards to the Church, and historically have posed little danger to the surrounding culture, at least none of any permanent nature. Hunter writes, “What this overview teaches is that cultures are profoundly resistant to intentional change – period.”<sup>307</sup>

Thus the approach taken by Neibuhr in his *Christ & Culture*, while illustrative of historic Christianity, is at fault at its very premise. On the one hand, Neibuhr is correct in saying that the Church was never intended to live in the world isolated from culture; that is an impossible scenario. But on the other hand, proximity to culture does not necessitate the responsibility of the Church to be anything other than herself, to attempt in any overt manner to modify the surrounding culture. Neibuhr’s influence on the past fifty years of Western Evangelicalism is lamented by Hauerwas and Willimon, “We have come to believe that few books have been a greater hindrance to an accurate assessment of our situation than *Christ and Culture*.”<sup>308</sup> Perhaps this assessment is a bit

---

<sup>305</sup> Hunter; 33.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*; 45.

<sup>307</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>308</sup> *Resident Aliens*; 40.

harsh, but the authors' later comment that "The people of God do not let the world determine how they respond to tomorrow" is right on the mark.<sup>309</sup>

In summary, the Church's relationship to the world must be defined solely by her relationship to her Lord and Head Jesus Christ, and never by the world itself. The Church must hold steadfastly to the truth in Christ, and be at all times alert to the subtle and insidious nature of culture which seeks to dilute and diminish her message and witness. "The validity of our witness to society, including the critical address to the state and the statesman, hangs on the firmness with which the church keeps her central message at the center: her call to every man to turn to God and her call to those who have turned to God to live in love."<sup>310</sup> Consider this statement again in the light of Paul's admonition in Romans 13, a chapter wholly devoted to the Church's relationship to the world as represented by the State.

*Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law. And do this, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now our salvation is nearer than when we first believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light. Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.*

(Romans 13:8-14)

Again from Yoder, "The church is herself a society. Her very existence, the fraternal relations of her members, their ways of dealing with their differences and their needs are, or rather should be, a demonstration of what love means in social relations."<sup>311</sup> Would Paul not say 'Amen' to this? Should we not, also?

---

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

<sup>310</sup> Yoder; 36.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.* 17.