

“For I want you to know, brothers, that the gospel preached by me is not of human origin. For I did not receive it from a human being nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” (Galatians 1:11-12)

## I. Introduction

- A. St. Paul did not write a gospel in the same way as did the authors of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.
  - 1. Most letters are to individual churches that he founded: I and II Corinthians, I Thessalonians and Philipppians.
  - 2. One is to a church he was planning on visiting: Rome.
  - 3. One is to an individual: Philemon.
  - 4. Some letters that are attributed to St. Paul may have instead been written by a disciple of his either when he was unavailable or after his death. These are called pseudonymous Pauline letters.
    - a. II Thessalonians (50:50)
    - b. Colossians (60:40)
    - c. Ephesians (80:20)
    - d. Pastorals (I and II Timothy and Titus) (90:10)
- B. The letters of St. Paul are not an exercise in either systematic theology or Church history. In spite of this, no man has exerted so profound an aspect on the development of systematic theology as has St. Paul.
- C. Any attempt to develop a systematic theology of St. Paul needs to take into account the facts that
  - 1. The letters were written at different times to individual churches and deal with specific issues being faced by those churches.
  - 2. St. Paul’s thinking does not stand complete in his letters. We do not know what he communicated to the churches when he was with them nor do we know the traditions to which he often refers.
  - 3. We can only guess that the chronology and, in some cases, the authorship of the letters. Thus, we can only guess as to how his theology developed during the course of his ministry.

## II. Background for St. Paul's Theology

### A. St. Paul was and remained a Jew.

1. His ideas about God, humanity, time and eternity are fundamentally those of the rabbinic Judaism of his time.

### B. St. Paul was a Hellenistic Jew

1. He quoted from the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Hebrew Scriptures.
2. He was familiar with Greek culture.
3. He wrote in koinē Greek.

### C. St. Paul was influenced by those who were "before him in Christ" (Rom. 16:7).

1. In spite of the title passage, he claimed that his gospel was the common apostolic gospel (I Cor. 15:3-11), and his letters were known and accepted by the early church (I Clement).

## III. Important Themes in St. Paul's Theology

### A. Being in Christ

1. Hebrews had a deep sense of the solidarity of the human community.
  - a. When King David sins, the entire community suffers (II Sam. 24).
  - b. When Achan, the head of a household, sins, his whole family including his cattle must be punished (Josh. 7).
  - c. In the Mishnah, the question "Why was only one human being created in the beginning of the world?" is answered "...to teach that if any has caused a single soul to perish, scripture imputes it to him as though he had caused a whole world to perish, and if any saves alive a single soul, scriptures imputes to him as though he had saved alive a whole world (*m. Sanh.*, 4.5)
2. St. Paul, when he discusses what is wrong with humanity, refers to the Genesis story and applies it to the problems of his own age (c.f. Rom. 5:12-22).
  - a. Humanity has solidarity in sin and death since the creation - "...in Adam all die..." (I Cor. 15:21-22).
  - b. Now this has changed in Christ - "...so in Christ, will all be made alive." (I Cor. 15:22). See also Rom. 5:12-21.

3. St. Paul tells us that we have been baptized into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3) so that "...we too might live in newness of life." (Rom. 6:4)
4. In the same way, in the sharing of the Eucharist we participate in Christ's life, death and resurrection "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because the loaf of bread is one, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake in the one loaf." (I Cor. 10:16-17)
  - a. On the basis of this thinking, St. Paul can speak of the Christian community as "the body" of Christ "As a body is one though it has many parts, and all of the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free persons, and we were all give to drink of one Spirit...Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it. " (1 Cor. 12:12-13, 27)
    1. See also Rom. 12:4-5; Col. 1:24; Eph. 4:4, 15-16.
  - b. Paul uses the term *koinonia*, which is translated as both communion and fellowship, to represent the fellowship of Christians that occurs in
    1. sharing Christ's sufferings (Phil. 3:10)
    2. participation in the Eucharist (1 Cor. 10:16)
    3. fellowship with (or brought about by) the Holy Spirit (II Cor. 13:13).
5. St. Paul sees Christ's death and resurrection as the most important event in history, and Christians, through their baptism, are part of that event.
  - a. Just as the kingdom of God is both present and future, so Christians, who have already died and risen with Christ in baptism, must yet die and rise with him. St. Paul expresses this paradox to the Philippians "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling. For God is the one who, for his good purpose, works in you both to desire and to work." (Phil. 2:12-13)
    1. "fear and trembling" is a common OT expression indicating awe and seriousness in the service of God.
  - b. St. Paul tells us to work out our salvation by following the example of Jesus "Who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God something to be grasped. Rather he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness: and found in human appearance he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross." (Phil. 2:6-8)

- c. To St. Paul, being committed to the risen Christ, means being forgiven and obedient but also to forgive our brothers and sisters in Christ "Welcome one another, then, as Christ has welcomed you..." (Rom. 15:7)
- d. Solidarity with Christ is therefore the basis of Christian ethics as well as of Christian hope.
  - 1. "I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship." (Rom. 12:1)
  - 2. All of St. Paul's letters to churches include calls to acceptable ethical behavior: Rom. 12; the whole of I Cor.; II Cor. 7; Gal. 5:13-26; Phil. 2:12-18; I Thess. 4:3-12.
  - 3. This behavior is not prompted by fear of punishment but by God's love "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom. 8:38-39)

## B. Salvation History

- 1. St. Paul sees the gospel as part of a plan gratuitously conceived by God for human salvation to be revealed and realized in his Son.
- 2. This work involves three qualities of God
  - a. wrath – God's reaction to evil and sin, not emotional.
  - b. righteousness – God's legal or judicial activity.
  - c. love – God's overriding characteristic and the basis for salvation history.
- 3. Salvation history covers all phases of human existence.
  - a. lawless period – Adam to Abraham.
  - b. time of the law – Moses to the Messiah.
  - c. time of the Messiah and of Christ.
- 4. Corporate dimension is seen in the role played by Israel.
  - a. Israel's infidelity is foreseen by God and is only partial and only temporary.
  - b. Both Gentiles and Israel are incorporated into Christ and his Church.

5. Cosmic dimension is seen in the fact that all creation is affected by human salvation.
6. Eschatological dimension is important because Christians are seen as living in the last phase of salvation history.
  - a. The last things, *eschata*, have already begun and Christians are already, in a sense, being saved (II Cor. 6:2, Rom. 8:23-34), II Cor. 1:22, II Cor. 5:5).
  - b. Christians await the return of Christ, *parousia*, (I Thess. 4:15); resurrection of the dead (I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:13-19); judgement (II Cor. 5:10, Rom. 2:6-11; Rom. 14:10); glory of justified believers (Rom. 8:18, 21; 1 Thess. 2:12).
7. Christ's role in salvation history is the key to St. Paul's thoughts.
  - a. Rarely uses Jesus' name but generally uses a title.
    1. Son of God – indicates that Jesus was endowed with a life giving spirit for human salvation.
    2. Christ (*christos*) – anointed one/Messiah.
    3. Lord (*kyrios*) – indicates that the risen Jesus is worthy of being worshipped.
  - b. St. Paul links Christ's death and resurrection as the salvific effect (Rom. 4:25; I Thess. 4:14; Phil. 2:9-10; I Cor. 15:12, 17, 20-21; II Cor. 5:14-15; II Cor. 13:14; Rom. 8:34; 10:9-10).
    1. Generally attributes the efficiency of the resurrection to the Father (Gal. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:10; 6:14; I Cor. 15:15; II Cor. 4:14; Rom. 4:24; 8:11; 10:9; Col. 2:12; Eph. 1:20).
    2. The resurrection brought Christ into a new relationship with people who had faith.

### C. Effects of the Christ Event

1. <sup>23</sup>all have sinned and are deprived of the glory of God. <sup>24</sup>They are justified freely by his grace through the redemption in Christ Jesus, <sup>25</sup>whom God set forth as an expiation, through faith, by his blood, to prove his righteousness because of the forgiveness of sins previously committed," (Rom. 3:23-25)
1. Justification/Uprightness/Righteousness/Justice
  - a. The key idea in Romans and in St. Paul's thought is expressed in a number of Greek words: *dikaion*, verb; *dikaioσynē* noun; *dkaiōsis*, noun; *diakios*, adjective

1. can be translated as righteousness (but not self-righteousness) and as justification (but not punitiveness)
  - b. St. Paul speaks of *dikaioynē theou*, "the righteousness of God"
    1. Can be interpreted as a possessive genitive describing a static attribute of God's being, a divine virtue, but Paul seems to apply activity on God's part.
    2. Can be interpreted as a possessive genitive describing an active attribute of God, the justifying power of God (e.g. Rom. 3:25-26).
    3. Can be interpreted as a genitive of source or origin describing the state of uprightness communicated to humans from or by God (e.g. Phil. 3:9).
    4. This can be seen as "people being brought before God for judgment and God is acquitting them and manifesting divine graciousness."
      - a. "There is also a sense of God asserting authority and power, triumphing over forces that would mislead people, setting things right, and saving the world.
  - c. St. Paul also uses "justification" to describe what God does in people who believe in what He has done in Jesus Christ.
    1. People are now justified because God has acquitted them.
    2. This happened because "the truly innocent Jesus was himself made sin for the sake of other (II Cor. 5:21)" not because the people were innocent.
    3. Christ died for sinners by an act of love (Rom. 5:8; Rom. 4:25).
  - d. A major area of debate is whether God simply declares people upright (forensic or declarative justification) or whether He changes people and makes them upright (causative or factitive justification).
3. Redemption
- a. The Greek word for redemption is *apolytrōsis*. It is a rare word whose original meaning was the act of buying back slaves or ransoming prisoners. The individuals were made free through giving a payment.
  - b. Paul sees Christ's passion, death and resurrection as the ransom to set Christians free. Christians have been bought for a price (I Cor. 6:20; 7:23).

- c. Redemption has a future component in that Christians await the redemption of the body (Rom. 8:23) and a cosmic effect in that all creation is waiting to be redeemed (Rom. 8:19-22).
4. Expiation
- a. The Greek word for expiation is *hilastērion*.
    - 1. In the Septuagint, this word is used to translate *kappōret*, which is the mercy seat between the cherubim on the top of the Ark of the Covenant. This is where the blood of the sacrifice was sprinkled and signifies the meeting place between sinners and God.
  - b. Paul sees Jesus Christ as the new and more effective meeting place between sinners and God.
    - 1. Blood is still needed but this blood is Christ's.
    - 2. Emphasizes the cost of the love and forgiveness that the Christian experiences in the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
5. The "faith [*pistis*] of Christ" (Gal. 2:16)
- a. A major discussion has centered on what Paul meant when he wrote of being justified or of justification not from works of the Law but from/through/by the *faith* of (Jesus) Christ.
    - 1. The Greek is *ek/dia pisteos Christou*
      - a. Can be understood as an objective genitive – the Christian's faith in Christ
      - b. Can be understood as a subjective genitive – the faith possessed or manifested by Christ.
    - 2. The same possibility applies to the simpler and more common expression "from faith" (*ek pisteos*).
  - b. Faith in Christ is the more common interpretation and may be supported by Gal. 3:26.
    - 1. However, in this interpretation one must be careful not to assume that faith is a work by which a Christian earns his salvation. God also gives a Christian grace to believe.
  - c. Faith of Christ may be understood as his fidelity to God's plan for bringing salvation to humanity.
    - 1. Some see this as weak and instead see this faith as that exhibited by Jesus when he went to the cross without God's visible support