

THE THEOLOGY OF ST. PAUL¹

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According to the New Testament book known as "The Acts of the Apostles," the ascension of Christ into heaven was followed by the infusion of the Holy Spirit into the Christian Community (the Church) on the day of Pentecost. From that point on, the apostolic community began to grow significantly — both in numbers and in spiritual vitality (Ac 1-2). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the apostles finally came to comprehend the full meaning of Christ's ministry to the world, and they began to proclaim the gospel "with all boldness" to all who would listen. The center of the Church's life and activity was Jerusalem, and it was not long before the established religious authorities became alarmed at the continued existence of the "Jesus movement" (Ac 3-4). Having failed to disperse the troublesome "heretics" by harassment and threats, the Sanhedrin decided upon a policy of outright persecution (Ac 4-5). During this persecution, Stephen, one of the first deacons of the Church, was arrested and brought before the Sanhedrin; after making a strong and provocative defense of the Christian faith, he was stoned to death by an angry mob that the leaders of the Sanhedrin made no real effort to control (Ac 6-7). Following Stephen's martyrdom, the Christian community was "scattered throughout the region of Judea and Samaria," although the apostles remained in Jerusalem (Ac 8:1). However, this scattering through persecution only served to spread the gospel beyond the boundaries of the holy city.

One of the leading figures in the persecution of the Church was Saul of Tarsus (Ac 8:1, 3). Although he was born and raised outside of Palestine (Tarsus was a Greek city in Asia Minor), Saul was an Israelite "of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews . . . , a Pharisee . . . , [and] a persecutor of the church" (Ph 3: 5-6). It is ironic, therefore, that this great enemy of Christianity was to become one of the greatest saints of the Church. While on his way to Damascus in Syria to arrest any Christians he might find there, Saul had a direct and dramatic experience of the risen Christ (see Ac 9:119, 22:1-21, and 26:9-23). This experience revolutionized Saul's life. He was converted to the Christian faith, baptized, and received into the church of Damascus — the very community he had set out to suppress (Ac 9:10-31). It was also revealed to him that he was Christ's "chosen instrument" to carry the gospel, not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentile world (Ac 9:15). Having grown up in a Greek city as a Roman citizen (see Ac 22:23-29), Saul was no doubt well-prepared to communicate effectively in cosmopolitan terms. Thus, the persecutor of the Church became one of Christ's apostles — the "apostle to the Gentiles." As a sign of his special mission to "the nations," the converted Pharisee ceased using his Hebrew name and used instead its Greek equivalent: Paul (Ac 13:9).

It was through the mission of Paul that Christianity, originally a small Jewish sect, became a world religion. After his conversion (c. 32 AD), Paul lived and preached in the region of Damascus for about three years (c. 32-35 AD — Ga 1:15-19 and Ac 9:20-25). He made a brief visit to Jerusalem in 35 AD, and, following the counsel of the other apostles, he then returned to his native city of Tarsus (Ac 9:26-31). Paul remained in Tarsus for approximately nine years (c. 35-44 AD), no doubt preaching the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles. In the meantime, a Christian community including a "great number" of converted Greeks emerged in Syrian Antioch; and the church of Jerusalem sent the disciple Barnabas to minister to the new Antiochian fellowship. Barnabas, in turn, asked Paul to join him in the shepherding of the "large company" of Jewish and Gentile believers in Antioch. The ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Antioch lasted for a year or two (c. 45-46 AD — Ac 11:19-30). At the end of that time, they left Antioch and began to travel far and wide, preaching the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world (Ac 13:1-3). Paul's days as a pastor to local churches were over. Thenceforward, as apostle to the Gentiles, Paul was to serve as an itinerant missionary to the world at large.

Paul made three major missionary tours. On the first of these tours (c. 47-49 AD) he carried the Christian message to Cyprus and to a number of cities in Asia Minor (Ac 13-14). On his second and third missionary journeys (c. 49-52 and c. 52-56 AD),

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he traveled extensively throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece (Ac 15:38-18:21 and 18:22-21:16). As a result of Paul's efforts, many Gentiles were converted to the faith, and many local churches were established.

Paul's commitment to Christ and his success in reaching out to the Gentile world were, of course, highly offensive to the Jews of his day. After his third missionary tour, and while he was visiting with the church in Jerusalem, Paul was attacked and almost killed by group of Jews who had been angered by his work on behalf of the Christian sect. The apostle was rescued by a contingent of Roman soldiers and placed under arrest as a result of the public disturbance he had apparently caused (Ac 21-22). Through the legal and political maneuvers of the Sanhedrin and the Roman authorities, Paul was kept in prison — first in Jerusalem and then in Caesarea — for more than two years (c. 56-58 AD — Ac 23-24). Finally, having lost all hope of receiving a fair hearing from either the Jewish leadership or the Roman governor, Paul exercised his rights as a Roman citizen and appealed his case to the emperor in Rome (Ac 25:1-12). The Roman authorities in Judea then sent Paul to Rome (Ac 27-28). After arriving in Rome, Paul was kept under a mild house arrest for another two years (c. 59-61 AD — Ac 28:17-30), until, at last, the charges against him were dropped and he was released. He continued his ministry, preaching the gospel in Rome and, according to tradition, carrying the Christian message as far as Spain. Paul's freedom was, once again, taken from him in 64 AD — for in that year, the Emperor Nero (r. 54-68 AD) instituted the first great Roman persecution of the Church. Paul's second imprisonment in Rome lasted until 67 or 68 AD, when he was (along with the apostle Peter and other leaders of the Church) executed by order of the emperor.

Paul's Writings

Paul was primarily a preacher and teacher, not a writer. He wrote no systematic treatise expressing his theological perspective, nor did he live to set down in writing the gospel he preached, although he was probably the major apostolic source of the Gospel of Luke. Paul did, however, write a number of letters (or "epistles") during his thirty-five-year ministry; and thirteen of those letters have survived and are included in the canon of the New Testament. A fourteenth letter, Hebrews, has also been attributed to Paul because it seems to be a development of his teaching about Christ; but since Hebrews was apparently composed after 70 AD, it is almost certain that Paul (who died in 67 or 68 AD) was not its author. Scholars believe that the letter was composed by one of Paul's close associates, most often suggesting Barnabas, Luke, or Apollos.

Some of Paul's letters were written to specific Christian communities (Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians); others were addressed to individuals (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon); and one was intended for the Church at large (Ephesians, which scholars believe to have been originally a circular letter). Hebrews, which is more in the form of a sermon or treatise than a letter, was apparently intended for a community of Jewish Christians located either in Rome, Jerusalem, or Ephesus.

Although these writings are not systematic theological treatises, they do contain lucid and profound expositions of the metaphysical and ethical doctrines of the Christian Church. Paul's major purpose in writing his letters was to encourage the newly emerging churches of the Greco-Roman world to remain both theologically and morally steadfast in their discipleship to Christ. Paul was especially concerned with the problem of heresy in the early Church, for many enthusiastic but untutored Christians were following doctrines that were inconsistent with the teachings of the apostolic community. The two major heresies that had affected the first-century Church were those of the Judaizers and the Gnostics. The Judaizers insisted that Christianity was a form of Judaism and that all Gentile converts to the faith must follow all of the stipulations of the Mosaic law (circumcision, dietary laws, Sabbath observances, and so on). The Gnostics taught a kind of spiritualism in which the goodness of the material world was denied; they rejected the biblical view that God had created the physical universe; they denied the bodily incarnation and resurrection of Jesus; they considered Christ to be only one of a multitude of semi-divine, angelic saviors; and they held that God's truth was available only to a small number of "illuminati." Much of Paul's letter-writing was intended to counteract the influence of the Judaizers and the Gnostics. Throughout his writings, the apostle insists that the Christian, whether Jew or Gentile, is free of the Jewish ritual law. He also insists that God is the Creator of the world, that our salvation has been embodied in Christ and his Church, and that the apostolic message of salvation through Jesus Christ is available to all mankind.

Paul's New Testament epistles are commonly grouped into four categories, reflecting the chronological order in which the documents were written. Paul's "early letters," 1 and 2 Thessalonians, were written from Corinth (in Greece) c. 50 AD, during his second missionary tour. Paul was one of the founders of the church in Thessalonica (in Macedonia), and in his letters to the Thessalonian Christians the apostle encourages them to remain both theologically and morally pure. In both letters, Paul

speaks of the second coming of Christ and the last judgment, and he cautions the Thessalonians to await "the day of the Lord" with vigilance and with patience (1 Th 4-5 and 2 Th 2). Like many enthusiastic Christians, the Thessalonians were so excited about the return of their Lord that they were neglecting the day-to-day and down-to-earth requirements of the Christian life. Paul therefore exhorts them not to allow their "eschatological expectations" to distract them from the daily moral and spiritual practice of their faith.

The "great letters" were composed during Paul's third missionary journey (c. 52-56 AD). Paul wrote his letter to the Galatians (probably from Ephesus) in 52 or 53 AD. Galatia was a large Roman province in Asia Minor, and Galatians was most likely intended for all of the churches in that region. The letter contains a defense of Paul's apostolic authority and a strong critique of the Judaizers, who had apparently made inroads into the Christian communities in Galatia. 1 and 2 Corinthians were written from Ephesus (on the west coast of Asia Minor) in 55 AD. Corinth was a cosmopolitan city in Greece, notorious for its corruption and immorality. Paul was apparently the founder of the church in Corinth, and he was disturbed by the news he received of the moral and spiritual disorder that had grown up there. 1 Corinthians (as well as two other letters that have been lost) was intended to correct the irregularities that were undermining the Christian life in Corinth. After a difficult struggle (which went on for several months), Paul finally convinced the Corinthians of the errors of their ways, and in 2 Corinthians he expresses his thanks to God for the cleansing of the church in Corinth. After writing 2 Corinthians, Paul traveled to Corinth and stayed with his repentant flock for about three months. During that time, in 56 AD, he wrote his letter to the Romans (that is, to the Christian community in Rome). Paul hoped to visit the church in Rome, and in his letter to them he discusses the nature of salvation through Christ (chapters 1-8), the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in God's plan of salvation (9-11), and the life of practical holiness all Christians should strive to live (12-15). Romans is one of Paul's most extended and systematic statements of his overall theological understanding of the gospel of Christ.

During his first imprisonment in Rome (c. 59-61 AD), Paul wrote the "prison letters." Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians were all written in 59 AD, and Philippians was produced in 60 AD. Philemon was a well-to-do Christian of Colossae in Asia Minor whose slave, Onesimus, had run away to Rome. Onesimus visited Paul, who was a friend of Philemon, and was converted to Christianity. In his letter to Philemon, Paul appeals to his friend to receive Onesimus back as a Christian brother; the apostle also promises to pay back whatever money or property the runaway slave had stolen from his master. The letter to the Colossians was written in opposition to the gnosticism that had sprung up in the church at Colossae. Accordingly, Paul stresses that Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, that through Christ God created the world, and that in Christ "the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9). The document known as the "Letter to the Ephesians" was probably a circular letter sent by Paul to all of the churches of the Ephesian region (eastern Asia Minor). The central theme of Ephesians is the relationship between Christ and his Church; the Church is depicted as the mystical body of Christ, which, in the power of the Holy Spirit, is God's sacrament of salvation offered to the world. The church in Philippi (a Roman colony in Macedonia) was another of the Christian communities founded by Paul. Knowing of Paul's imprisonment in Rome, the Philippians sent him a gift in order to comfort him; and the letter to the Philippians is a highly personal and spontaneous response by Paul to the generosity and concern of his flock. He expresses joy at their continuing faith in Christ, warns them against the heretical teachings of the Judaizers, exhorts them to persist in their efforts to live the full Christian life, and thanks them for the gift that they had sent him.

The "pastoral letters" were written after Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Titus and 1 Timothy were composed between 61 and 64 AD, while 2 Timothy is a product of the period of Paul's second imprisonment in Rome (c. 64-67/8 AD). In these letters, Paul speaks of the nature and functions of the Christian ministry; and he appeals to Titus and Timothy, ministers of the gospel who were ordained by Paul himself, to work diligently for the maintenance of sound doctrine and good order in the churches.

The document known as the "Letter to the Hebrews" is in fact an anonymous treatise or sermon presenting a lengthy and sustained argument concerning the superiority of Christianity over Judaism. The intended readers of the letter seem to have been Jewish Christians, who, as a result of persecution, were at the point of renouncing their faith and lapsing back into Judaism. In an effort to save his readers from apostasy (Heb 6:1-12) and to win them back to a firm commitment to Christianity, the author of Hebrews develops three major themes: (1) the superiority of Christ over the prophets of Judaism (1:1-3), over the angels (1:4-2:18), and over Moses and Joshua (3:1-4:13); (2) the superiority of Christ's high priesthood over the Levitical priesthood (4:14-7:28); and (3) the superiority of the new covenant in Christ over the old covenant of ancient Israel (8:1-10:18). Hebrews also contains a profound meditation on the life of faith (10:19-12:29) and a concluding exhortation in which Christians are warned not to be "led away by diverse and strange teachings" (13:1-15). The overall message of Hebrews is that the old

covenant of ancient Israel has been fulfilled and transcended in the new covenant of Jesus Christ and that, in Christ, God's work of salvation has been made both perfect and final.

The Divine Plan of Salvation

The gospel of Christ, according to Paul, is, in the first place, a revelation of the human condition and of the human need for salvation (see Rm 1:18-20); and, in the second place, it is a revelation of God the Father's plan for the salvation of humanity and the world (see Eph 1:3-4, 3:4-12; and Col 1:24-29). Paul's analysis of the human condition will be presented in the next section. Here, we must summarize briefly the apostle's overall conception of God's economy of redemption.

In Paul's view, sin has separated the human race from the full presence and life of God; but God's love for humanity is an enduring love, and God has graciously decided to redeem the human race from the clutches of sin and death, from bondage to the devil. God's will and purpose is to reconcile not only humanity but "all things" to himself through his Son, Jesus Christ, and through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul defines the general pattern of "salvation history" in terms of the following stages: (1) the creation of the world and of the human race; (2) the fall of humankind from the grace of God; and (3) God's redemption of humanity and of the cosmos through the old covenant with ancient Israel and through the new covenant of Christ and the Holy Spirit. God's new covenant with the human race is realized in Christ's earthly ministry; in the life of the Church, which is inspired by the Holy Spirit, and in the second coming of Christ, which will usher in the kingdom of God (see Rm 8; 1 Co 1, 2, 15; 2 Co 3-5; Eph 1-6; 1 Th 4-5; 2 Th 1-2).

Paul speaks of the divine economy of salvation as a "mystery hidden for ages and generations but now made manifest to . . . [God's] saints" (Col 1:26). God the Father "has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places" and has chosen his saints in Christ "before the foundation of the world." Believers are "destined . . . in love" to be the children of God "through Jesus Christ," through the saving grace the Father has freely bestowed upon them in his beloved Son (Eph 1:3-6). From the beginning, it has been "the purpose of . . . [God's] will" to effect the redemption of the world from evil through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Those who have acknowledged Christ as Savior and Lord have been destined for glorification as children of God (Rm 8:14-17). The gospel is a revelation of "a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification" (1 Co 2:7). "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son . . . And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified" (Rm 8:29-30).

For Paul, God's predestinating will for Christians does not cancel out their spiritual freedom. From Paul's point of view, people are led to Christ by the Holy Spirit; but they remain free to accept or to reject the salvation offered to them by God in Christ. God has known from all eternity who would accept and who would reject the gospel, and he has ordained that the former shall enter into the divine sonship of Christ and that the latter shall be forever separated from the divine presence. As Paul sees it, God does not foreordain people's spiritual choices, but rather the spiritual destiny that is contingent upon those choices. Throughout their lives in this world, people remain free to cooperate with or to resist the leading of the Holy Spirit.

Salvation, then, is the work of the Holy Trinity. However, in Paul's "Christocentric" doctrine of redemption (soteriology), the pivotal figure in the divine drama of salvation is Jesus Christ. Believers have redemption through the blood of Christ, and in Christ the meaning and goal of all creation are revealed. Christ is the consummation of "all things;" in him both heaven and earth have been united and reconciled with God (Eph 1:7-10). Christ, who is both true God and true man, is the one and only mediator between God and man (1 Tm 2:5-6), and through faith in him believers are liberated from "the law of sin and death" (Rm 8:2). This is the "mystery" of which Paul speaks, "the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the [Holy] Spirit" (Eph 3:4-5). In one of his letters to Timothy, Paul writes, "It is a great mystery we worship: Revelation made in human nature, justification won in the realm of the Spirit; a vision seen by angels, a mystery preached to the Gentiles; Christ in this world, accepted by faith; Christ, on high, taken up to Glory" (1 Tm 3:16). Through the person and work of Christ, the eternal redemptive purpose of the Father has been realized, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church has been made possible.

The Human Condition

The Bible teaches that the human race was originally intended to live in communion with God (Gn 1-2). It was God's eternal and original purpose to associate humankind and the cosmos to himself in perfect harmony; and in that harmony, humanity was to receive and enjoy the fullness of the divine life. However, instead of responding in love and obedience to his Creator,

human beings turned from God to themselves; they yielded to the temptations of the devil and were thus enslaved to the forces of evil." The Bible proclaims the fact of humanity's alienation from God as a result of sin, but gives no systematic explanation of the fall of the humankind. We are told of the angelic rebellion against God that occurred prior to the creation of the human race (Rv 12:1-17; Is 14:5-15; Ezk 28:11-19) and of the satanic temptation of Adam and Eve (Gn 3); but the Bible does not tell us precisely why angels and humans, whose relationship with God was direct and uncorrupted by sin, should have chosen to set themselves in opposition to their Creator.

Like other biblical writers, Paul makes no attempt to explain the mystery of humanity's original rebellion against God. Instead, he presupposes the fall of the human race and concentrates his attention upon the postlapsarian condition of alienation into which the humanity has fallen. Between the fall and the advent of Christ, humanity lived without access to the presence and life of God and was subjected to the powers of sin and death. According to Paul, "sin came into the world through . . . [Adam] and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned" (Rm 5:12), for "the wages of sin are death" (Rm 6:23)

Paul sometimes describes man's subjection to sin and death as a subjection to the "flesh" (Greek, *sarx* — Rm 8:3-11; Ga 5:16-24). The "flesh" is not simply identical with the body (Greek, *soma*). The human body, like the rest of the material creation, is essentially good (Gn 1:31). The "flesh," for Paul, represents those human inclinations that seek fulfillment in that which is contrary to the will and being of God. The "desires of the flesh" run counter to the "desires of the Spirit" (Ga 5:17). To "walk by the Spirit" is to lead a life of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Ga 5:22-23). To follow the way of the flesh is to immerse oneself in "fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like" (Ga 5:19-21). As a result of the fall, humanity was enslaved to its passions, appetites, and lusts; the human mind and will were set upon "the things of the flesh" rather than upon "the things of the Spirit" (Rm 8:5-6). "For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God" (Rm 8:7-8). To live "according to the flesh" rather than "according to the Spirit" is to be estranged from the "life and peace" of God (Rm 8:6).

Another effect of the fall, Paul argues, is spiritual blindness, a corruption of the mind that deprives human beings of the knowledge of God. In its sinful failure to honor God as God, the human race "became futile" in its thinking, and its "senseless mind . . . [was] darkened" (Rm 1:21). Seeking wisdom outside of God (see Gn 3) and "claiming to be wise," humanity became a fool (Rm 1:22; see also 1 Co 1:18-2:16). "Let no one deceive himself. If any one among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God" (1 Co 3:18-19).

Spiritual ignorance . . . , [in Paul's view,] is both a consequence and a cause of human sin. Without knowledge of God and his will, the human understanding is "darkened," and humanity is given over to "licentiousness" and to the practice of "every kind of uncleanness" (Eph 4:17-19). Having lost contact with "the glory of the immortal God" (Rm 1:23), the human mind is turned from light to darkness (Eph 5:8-14; Col 1:9-14). In Paul's view, much of the spiritual and moral impurity that pervades the world follows from the darkness and ignorance of the fallen human mind (Rm 1:24-32; Eph 4:17-19; Col 3:5-10; 1 Th 4:3-6; Tt 3:3). It is not that everyone commits every sin, but that everyone fails in countless ways to live for God and to walk perfectly in the "paths of righteousness" (Ps 23:3). Insofar as the human heart is primarily oriented not toward God but toward that which is not God, human beings are guilty of the grave offense of idolatry, and they become infected with the general sinfulness of the world.

The ancient Jews, and especially the Pharisees, were proud of the fact that God had chosen them to be the custodians of his divine law. They believed that they were saved through the law, for the law was a revelation of the will of God, a deliverance from the curse of spiritual blindness. Knowledge of God and his will, which had been lost as a result of the fall, was made once more available to humankind. In giving his law to Israel through Moses, God made manifest his own holiness and the moral and religious standards by which humanity must live. However, to be saved under the old covenant, humanity had to obey the divine law; and many Jews apparently believed that they were capable of living according to the requirements of the Mosaic code (Rm 2:17-20). In the writings of Paul, however, the idea that human beings can be saved through "works of the law" is repeatedly rejected (see Rm 2:17-8:2; Ga 3-5; Ph 3).

For Paul, the revelation of the divine law was an illumination of the human condition, of the human need for salvation. The law did not, in itself, bring salvation to the human race; on the contrary, it was a revelation of the vast distance that separates sinful humanity from the absolute moral and spiritual perfection of God. Anyone who contemplates seriously the rigorous

standards of God's law will realize that s/he is incapable of living up to those standards (see Rm 2:21-23, 7:7-25). Human beings may even be provoked to sin by the law, for the sinful human soul naturally rebels against the commandments and prohibitions issued by God (Rm 7:5, 8, 11). The law is therefore "a curse" for those who believe that the way of salvation is conformity to its requirements. For as Paul points out, the Mosaic code itself stipulates (in Dt 27:26) that everyone who does not abide by the law *in its entirety* is "cursed" (Ga 3:10). On this basis, the apostle concludes "that no man is justified before God by the law" (Ga 3:11). The law demonstrated the extremely desperate situation into which humanity had fallen, yet it did not supply the human race with the moral and spiritual power needed to extricate itself from its plight. However, according to Paul, the law was also a great blessing. It was, as the Jews believed, a revelation of the divine nature, a remedy for the spiritual ignorance of post-Adamic humanity. In showing the full reality of humanity's moral and spiritual desolation — in revealing the human need for salvation — the Mosaic law served to prepare the world for the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Ga 3:21-22).

To the Jews of his day, then, Paul proclaimed that although the law was a source of enlightenment, it was not the key to salvation (Rm 3:20). What the law reveals is that humanity, in its fallen state, cannot live according to the will of God. All humans — Jews as well as Gentiles — are "under the power of sin" (Rm 3:10). Quoting Psalm 14:1-3, Paul declares, "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands, no one seeks for God. All have turned aside, together they have gone wrong; no one does good, not even one" (Rm 3:10-12). Both Jews and Gentiles are in desperate need of the salvation offered in Christ, for "all have sinned and [thus] fall short of the glory of God" (Rm 3:23). Only through faith in Jesus Christ, and not through "works of the law," can one be justified in the sight of God (Rm 3:21-30). Through the perfect obedience of Christ — the Son of God incarnate — the requirements of the law have been met. Christians, therefore, are not bound by the ritual and ceremonial laws of Judaism, for purification now comes through Christ and through the sacraments of his Church; and while the moral law revealed in the Old Testament remains valid, it is only through faith in Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit that the struggle to live righteously can contribute to humanity's final deliverance from evil.

Yet another dimension of human fallenness is subjection to the tyranny of the devil and other demonic forces. Presupposing the ancient Jewish tradition concerning Satan's original role as the angelic guardian of the earth, Paul speaks of the devil as "the god of this world" (2 Co 4:4). After the primeval angelic rebellion against the divine order, and as part of the mystery and drama of God's plan of redemption, Satan was permitted to continue his association with our world. Adam and Eve, making bad use of the gift of freedom, responded to the enticements of the devil and sought fulfillment in that which had been forbidden by God (Gn 3:1-6). They thus brought the human race under "the dominion of darkness" (Col 1:13), the jurisdiction of Satan. Alienated from God, fallen humanity must follow "the course [aeon, or angel] of this world . . . , the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience [fallen angels as well as men]" (Eph 2:1-2). Because of "the wiles of the devil," the human race has been subjected to "the principalities and powers" and "the elemental spirits of the universe" that do the bidding of the Prince of Darkness (see Eph 6:11-12; Col 2:15, 20; Ga 4:1-3, 8-9). Having lost its relationship with God, the human race was brought into bondage "to beings that by nature are no gods" (Ga 4:8), to "all the forces in the universe opposed to God and man."¹ Indeed, the other powers that govern the existence of postlapsarian humanity — sin, death, the "flesh," spiritual blindness — are the instruments through which the satanic tyranny over humankind is exercised (see Eph 2:1-3, 5:3-14).

In consequence of the fall, then, humanity lost its full spiritual freedom under God, was alienated from the presence and life of God, and was enslaved by the devil. Under the tyranny of Satan, humanity is condemned to death, dominated by sin, driven by "the desires of the flesh," and bereft of moral and spiritual wisdom. So desperate is the human condition after the fall that the divine law itself, revealed by God to Israel, is experienced as a curse of conviction and condemnation — since no one can fulfill the requirements of the law. Estranged from the divine presence and from its own spiritual liberty, humanity lives in a condition of desolation, unable to actualize its original potentiality for participation in the life of God. Thus, the deepest human need is for liberation from this fallen state, for deliverance from demonic captivity, for redemption.

¹F.F. Bruce, *The Message of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1973), 39

The Person and Work of Jesus Christ

As indicated earlier, Paul's theory of redemption, or soteriology, is "Christocentric" — centered upon the person and work of Jesus Christ. Speaking out of the apostolic tradition of the early Church and in accord with the other authors of the New Testament, Paul proclaimed Jesus of Nazareth to be both the Messiah of Israel and the divine Son of God. Jesus was "the Christ," the anointed descendant and successor of King David, promised by God to Israel through the prophets of the Old Testament (Rm 1:1-3). He was also the incarnation of God the Son, the manifestation of the power, wisdom, and glory of God in human form (see Ph 2:6-11; Col 1:15-20, 2:9; 1 Co 1:24, 2:8). Thus, Paul speaks repeatedly of Jesus as "Lord" (Greek, *kyrios* — see Ph 2:11; Rm 5:1, 10:9; 1 Co 12:3, 15:57; 2 Co 8:9), a title the Jews reserved exclusively for God. According to Paul, the eternally preexistent Son of God became human in Jesus of Nazareth; he "emptied himself" (or "divested himself") of his divine prerogatives and took "the form of a servant" (Ph 2:6-7). Paul also speaks of God the Son as the source and sustenance of the created order: ". . . In him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible . . . All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17). This same divine Son was "born of woman" (Ga 4:4), and his divine nature was made one with human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ is true God — "for in him all the fullness of deity dwells bodily" (Col 2:9, 1:19); and he is also truly human, the perfect image and likeness of the invisible God (Col 1:15; 2 Co 4:4). In and through the saving work of Christ — and especially through his death and resurrection — humankind and the cosmos have been saved from the forces of evil.

Paul recognized that the apostolic proclamation of Jesus as the divine-human Christ who has suffered and died for the sins of the world was difficult for many to accept: "We preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles" (1 Co 1:23). From at least as early as the second century BC, Judaism depicted the Messiah as a great man — a king anointed by God—who would lead the nation of Israel to victory over her enemies and prepare the world for the advent of the kingdom of God. Thus, most Jews regarded the idea of a divine and yet crucified Messiah as a scandal — indeed, blasphemy; and the Gentiles of Paul's time — especially the "sophisticated" Greeks and Romans — regarded Christianity as nothing more than a particularly superstitious and fanatical sect of Judaism, just another religious cult propagating its own peculiar brand of "foolishness." Believing that the "scandal" and "foolishness" of the Christian faith was, in fact, the very wisdom of God (1 Co 1:18-2: 5), Paul saw it as his divinely ordained duty to bring the apostolic message of salvation through Christ to both Jews and Gentiles (see Ac 9:15, 26:12-23; Rm 1:1-3:20, 9:1-11:36; Ga 2:7-8; Eph 3:7-8).

The New Testament teaches that the divine plan of salvation has been carried into effect by the Holy Trinity. The Father has purposed the redemption of the world from all eternity, and, in the fullness of time, he has sent the Son and the Holy Spirit into the world to make possible and to proclaim the good news of salvation from evil. While not ignoring the "economy of the Father" or the "economy of the Spirit," the New Testament concentrates its attention upon the "economy of the Son." The mission of Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, is presented as the key element in the redemptive plan of God. Even the ministry of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church is a product of the "economy of the Son," for the Church was able to receive the indwelling power and life of the Spirit only after Christ had ascended to the Father (see Jn 15:26-27, 16:5-11).

In proclaiming the apostolic message of salvation through Christ, theologians of the ancient Church emphasized some aspects of Christ's ministry more than others. The elements of Christ's work most often selected for special consideration were his incarnation, his passion and death, and his resurrection. When speaking of the resurrection, most ancient Christian writers — including John the Apostle and Paul — were also thinking of Christ's ascension and exaltation: they were three phases of a single divine act. Through the incarnation of God the Son in Jesus Christ, human nature was united with the divine and thus transfigured and deified; through the passion and death of the perfectly righteous Christ, humankind can be absolved of sin and thus delivered from the dominion of death; and through the resurrection-ascension-exaltation of Christ, the liberation of the human race from the curse of mortality was made manifest to all the world.

Paul's account of the redemptive ministry of Christ is centered upon the saving effects of the passion, death, and resurrection of Christ. Paul presupposes the incarnation as the basis of Christ's saving work, for only he who is both true God and true human can save the world by dying and rising again. Through his passion, death, and resurrection, Christ has effected the expiation (or remission) of humanity's sins, the justification of humanity in the sight of God, the *redemption* of humanity from the forces of evil, and the *reconciliation* of God and the human race. To share in these effects of Christ's work, of course, the individual must acknowledge Jesus as Savior and Lord (Col 1:23). Fallen humanity needs reconciliation, or atonement, with God; and Paul's testimony is that Christ has made such reconciliation possible. Through faith in Christ, the believer's sins are

washed away, her/his life is rededicated to the service of God, s/he is constituted as righteous before God, s/he is liberated from the demonic powers of sin and death, and s/he is adopted as a child of God (Ga 4:5).

To be reconciled with God, fallen humanity must *repent*, it must give up its self-centeredness in favor of a God-centered life. However, in its bondage to the world, the flesh, and the devil, humanity is incapable of true repentance, for repentance is the death of self-centeredness, a complete surrender, submission, and devotion to God; and sinful humanity, having no direct experience of God's reality and life, is unwilling to undergo this self-abasement. To repent in the true and full sense, humanity needs God's help (just as he needs God's help in order to reason or to love). To help humanity repent, God had to become human. In Christ (the God-man), the human race surrenders, suffers, submits, and dies *perfectly*. Christ, according to Paul, pays the "debt" that humanity, by itself, could never pay — the debt of perfect love and obedience owed to God (Col 2:14). By identifying . . . in faith with Christ in his passion and death, it is possible for fallen human beings to repent and, on that basis, to enter into union with God through the resurrection, ascension, and exaltation of Christ. "Redeemed, justified, reconciled, man is elevated from the status of slave to that of son, and becomes 'an heir through God' [Ga 4:7] of the promised salvation."¹

The Ministry of the Holy Spirit and the Life of the Church

Paul's doctrine of the Holy Spirit (*pneumatology*) and his doctrine of the Church (*ecclesiology*) are developed in conjunction with one another. For there is a close relationship between "the economy of the Holy Spirit" and the ministry of the Church. Paul's analysis of that relationship contains the following thematic elements: the Church and the work of salvation; the unity of the Church; the mission of the Church; the Church and the process of sanctification; and the Church and the glorification of humanity.

The Church and the Work of Salvation. The salvation offered by God in Christ is made fully available to the human race through the ministry of the Church; and the ministry of the Church is possible only on the basis of the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit, who descended upon the apostolic community on the day of Pentecost. For Paul, the Church is the mystical body of Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, God's sacrament of salvation to the world. To be delivered from the bondage of evil and to be raised into the presence and life of the triune God, a human being must be "made one" with Christ, must be incorporated into Christ through the devotional, sacramental, and moral life of the Church. Salvation must be appropriated by the individual through faith in and obedience to Christ as Savior and Lord. However, Paul does not teach a "doctrine of solitary salvation." On the contrary, "to be 'in Christ' is, for Paul, to participate in the solidarity of all Christians with one another and with their Lord: it is to be a member of the Church which is the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12), Christ Himself being the Head."²

The individual is led to faith in Christ by the Holy Spirit and, on the basis of faith, receives the Holy Spirit as an indwelling presence in her/his life (regeneration). One who hears and believes "the word of truth, the gospel of . . . salvation," is "sealed with the promised Holy Spirit" and enters into the life of Christ in his Church (Eph 1:13-14). Through the power of the Holy Spirit, the individual is to become a "new creation" — built into Christ through the life of the Church (edification), made holy through the performance of "good works" (sanctification) and, finally, united with the eternal and divine life of the Holy Trinity (glorification). Through the redemptive and reconciling work of Christ, and through the regenerating, edifying, sanctifying, and glorifying ministry of the Holy Spirit, "all can share in the glory of God and become participants in God's own holiness."

The work of the Holy Spirit, then, is carried out within the body of Christ, the Church. The Church is God's holy temple, a dwelling-place for the Holy Spirit (Eph 2:19-22). Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Church, "we receive adoption as sons of God" and become co-heirs of Christ's inheritance as the Son of God. Thus, full participation, on the basis of faith, in the life of the Church is the path to salvation. Faith, in other words, must be an active response to God, an "existential" engagement of one's total self in the life of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit; and this existential faith must therefore involve a full incorporation of the individual into the life of the Church. In Christ and his Church, a believer receives her/his full

¹J.G. Davies, "Christianity: The Early Church," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Living Faiths*, ed. R.C. Zaehner (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 56.

²*Ibid.*

inheritance as a child of God; s/he is "raised up" with Christ and exalted into the very power and presence of God the Father (Eph 2:4-7).

The Unity of the Church. Paul proclaims the unity of all believers in the undivided body of Christ-in the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church; and he exhorts the Christians of his day "to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph 4:3). "There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:4-6). Before the creation of the Church on Pentecost, the entire Gentile world was "uncircumcised . . . alienated from the commonwealth of Israel . . . [estranged from] the covenants of God's promise" (Eph 2:11-12). However, through Christ and his Church, both Jews and Gentiles have been incorporated into the Israel of God. All those who have faith in Christ have been constituted as "one new man," having access "in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:13-18). Speaking to the Gentile Christians of the mid-first century, Paul declares, "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19). In Christ and in his Church, all believers are united as children of God through faith. "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Ga 3:26-29). To give practical expression to the unity of the Church, to experience "the unity given by the Spirit," Christians must live "in the bond of peace." They must practice humility, gentleness, patience, forbearance, and love. The unity of the Church cannot be experienced when Christians fail to "lead a life worthy of their calling." Such a life is possible only insofar as believers are guided and led — edified and sanctified — by the Holy Spirit (see Eph 4:1-3).

In discussing the practical expression of the unity of the Church, Paul elaborates upon the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the body of Christ. The Spirit, as Christ's "gift" to the Church, is also the source of the Church's "gifts" (charisms, special powers). Paul refers to a general dispensation of the Holy Spirit whereby all members of the Church are constituted as a holy priesthood ("the priesthood of all believers") as well as a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit that raises up an ordained spiritual leadership (Eph 4:7-12). Through the general dispensation of the Holy Spirit (at Pentecost; see Ac 2), the Church as a whole has received "Christ's gift." Each member of the Church has received his own measure (or share) of grace by which he is enabled (or empowered) to live the Christian life. It is through this general ministry of the Holy Spirit, filling all members of the Church with "sanctifying grace," that Christ "fills all things with his presence" (Eph 4:10). The spiritual leadership raised up through the special dispensation of the Holy Spirit (apostles, prophets, bishops, presbyters, deacons, teachers, evangelists) is "gifted," "called," and "ordained" by Christ and the Holy Spirit in order to equip the Church for the proper performance of her ministry to the world (Eph 4:11-12; see also Jn 20:21-23).

In his letters to Timothy and to Titus, Paul speaks at length of the role of ordained leaders in the life and mission of the Church. He states some of the personal and moral qualifications required of those who are called to be bishops, presbyters (or priests) and deacons (see 1 Tm 3:1-13; and Tt 1:5-9); and he emphasizes that those who are ordained through "the laying on of hands" receive "a spirit of power and love and self-control" that will enable them to carry out their ministries in the Church (2 Tm 1:6-14). The Christian minister will need both moral and doctrinal fortitude, grounded in God's promises, if he is to complete his mission on behalf of God in Christ (2 Tm 2:1-13).

The central task of the Christian leader is to practice and defend the faith of the Church. To practice the faith is to live according to godliness, placing one's hope in God alone (1 Tm 4:7-10). On the basis of a "sincere faith," the Christian leader must live righteously. S/he must have a "pure heart" and a "good conscience" (1 Tm 1: 5). Her/his conduct must be guided by the virtues of love, patience, gentleness, and steadfastness (see 1 Tm 6:11; and 2 Tm 4:10). The Christian leader must also defend and hold on to the deposit of faith — the "sound doctrine" — that has been passed on from the apostles (see 1 Tm 1:10, 4:6, 6:14). The defense of the faith requires the faithful preservation of the apostolic tradition and the steadfast adherence to the teachings of Holy Scripture (2 Tm 3:14-17). The apostolic faith — the word of truth — must be "rightly handled" and "faithfully interpreted and dispensed" (2 Tm 2:15). The Christian leader (especially the bishop and the priest) is to dispense the rule of faith through the liturgical reading of scripture (1 Tm 4:13), and the leader must also preach the gospel in a convincing manner, rebuking and exhorting those who are not fully in accord with the true faith. The leader must do this with patience and yet also with a sense of urgency, both "in season and out of season," whether this activity is considered "appropriate" or not (2 Tm 4: 2). In this way, the pastoral ministry will contribute to the sustenance of the spiritual and moral unity of the body of Christ.

The Mission of the Church. According to Paul, the task of the Church is to proclaim the mystery of God's plan of salvation through Christ to the world and to make participation in the body of Christ available to all who sincerely seek it (see Eph 3:1-21; Col 1:24-29). The Church is God's sacrament of salvation, the visible means by which the saving grace of the Holy Trinity is made available to the human race. Through her preaching and teaching, through her works of mercy and charity, and through her liturgical and sacramental ministry, the Church is to "make the word of God fully known" throughout the world (Col 1:25). God has commanded the Church to "warn every man and teach every man in wisdom" and to bring all believers to maturity in Christ (Col 1:28).

In addition to his definition of the general mission of the Church, Paul also speaks of the sacramental life of the body of Christ. Baptism, he argues, is an immersion in the death of Christ and a participation in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his" (Rm 6:3-11; see also Col 2:11-15). Through baptism, which is a "washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit" (Tit 3: 5), we may "put off" our "old nature," which was dominated by the forces of evil, and "be renewed in the spirit of . . . [our] minds," putting on "the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:22-24).

Paul's teachings on the [sacrament of the] holy eucharist are contained in 1 Corinthians 10:16 and 11:17-34. The apostle recounts the institution of the eucharist by Christ at the last supper (11:23-25). He also states that to partake of the bread and wine of holy communion is to participate in the body and blood of Christ (10:16). He warns the Corinthian church that to partake of the consecrated bread and wine in an unrepentant spirit is to eat and drink condemnation upon oneself (11:27-29).

Paul's writings contain references to two other sacraments of the Church: matrimony and holy orders. In Eph 5:21-33, the marriage relationship between husband and wife is depicted as an iconic representation of the relationship between Christ (the bridegroom) and his Church (the bride of Christ) (see also Rv 19:1-10, 21:2, 9; and 2 Co 11:2). In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, 2 Timothy 1:6-7 and Titus 1:5-9, Paul comments on the significance of the "gift of God" received through the rite of ordination. To be an ordained leader in the Church is to participate in the high priesthood of Christ himself (2 Tm 2:1; see also Heb 4:14-7:28).

The point of Paul's sacramental theology is that through responding to "the word of truth" propagated by the Church, and through participating in the sacramental acts of the Church, the individual can be incorporated into Christ himself and thus into the life of the Holy Trinity. The mission of the Church is accomplished through the preaching of the gospel to all nations and through the sacramental incorporation of all believers into the divine sonship of Christ.

The Church and the Process of Sanctification. To enter into the fullness of salvation made available in Christ, the individual [Paul argues] must have faith in Christ and struggle to live according to the will of God. By cooperating with the Holy Spirit, the Christian is enabled to do those "good works" that are "pleasing to God" (Eph 2:10, 5:10). The Christian, in other words, must *practice* his faith: s/he must participate in the devotional, liturgical, and sacramental life of the Church (Rm 12:3-8; 1 Co 11-14; Eph 1:3-4:16; 1 Tm 2:1-7) ; and s/he must strive to live a morally upright life, after the example of Christ himself (Rm 12:1-15:3; 1 Co 6:9-20; Ga 5:13-6:10; Eph 4:17-6:9; Col 3:5-4:6). It is through the practical expression of her/his faith through good works that the Christian is "sanctified" (or "made holy") through the grace of the Holy Spirit. Through the process of sanctification, the Christian is prepared for final "glorification," when s/he will enter into the divine sonship of Christ and become a participant in the eternal life of God (1 Th 4:3; 2 Th 2:13-14; Rm 15:16; 1 Co 6:11). Thus, Paul depicts sanctification as a progressive and life-long process of moral and spiritual growth "by which the believer dies more and more to self and sin and lives more and more to Christ and righteousness."¹

Paul's teaching on the relationship between "faith and works" in the process of sanctification is complex and has thus often been misinterpreted. On the one hand, Paul holds "that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ" (Ga 2:16; see also Rm 3:20-4:25); but on the other hand, Paul repeatedly exhorts his Christian readers to "work out

¹ *The Harper Study Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965), Footnote on 1705.

your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Ph 2:12), to struggle toward holiness and righteousness under the lordship of Christ and through the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit (see Rm 12:9-21; 1 Co 6:9-11; Ga 6:7-10; Eph 4:17-6:9; Col 3:5-17).

There is no contradiction between these two dimensions of the Pauline doctrine of sanctification. In arguing that . . . [justification is] by faith and not by "works of the law," the apostle was seeking to repudiate the Judaizers, who, as we have seen, maintained that the Christian must live according to the Mosaic law as interpreted by the Scribes and Pharisees. According to Paul, the law was fulfilled and transcended in Christ (Rm 10:10) and, through the perfect righteousness of their Lord, Christians have been freed from the bondage of Jewish legalism (Rm 7:1-6; Ga 2-5; Col 2:20-23). Nonetheless, in his controversies with the Judaizers, Paul never intended to deny that the Christian must struggle to live a life of "true righteousness and holiness" before God (Eph 4:24). The Christian is not "without law toward God" (1 Co 9:21). Although he has been liberated from the minute rules and regulations of the Jewish law, the Christian has come under a new law — "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rm 8:2; see also 1 Co 9:21) — revealed in the teachings of Christ and in the life of his Spirit-filled Church. The Christian is called not merely to *believe in* Christ but to *live in* Christ; the Christian faith, to be authentic, must be expressed in those good works that are willed by God (Eph 2:8-10). No one can achieve holiness and righteousness entirely through one's own efforts. It is only by the grace of God and through faith in Christ that one can receive the gift of the Holy Spirit and so begin the difficult process of sanctification, a process in which "faith and works" are indivisibly conjoined. The Christian life is a life of "faith working through love" (Ga 5:6)

According to Paul's perspective on the process of sanctification, a person may respond to the gospel as preached by the Church through the prompting and guidance of the Holy Spirit; but prior to full conversion, the operation of the Holy Spirit upon the individual is external and not yet "infused." Only on the basis of an explicit faith that leads to active membership in the Church of Christ does the believer receive the Holy Spirit as an indwelling presence in her/his life. It is in this sense that "the Word took flesh that we might receive the Holy Spirit." Through the economy of the Holy Spirit, the believer's desire to conform to God's will becomes an *inward* power — the divine will "is no longer external to ourselves" but is present "within our very person" through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. This indwelling (or "infused") presence of the Holy Spirit is the foundation of the process of sanctification.

Through the process of sanctification, the "corruptible and depraved nature" of humanity is transformed and adapted to eternal life. This transformation of the believer is not automatic, not coerced: one must cooperate willingly with the Spirit in order to be "made holy." There is no contradiction between God's grace and human liberty. In Christ, the incarnation of God the Son, the will of God and the human will are united and thus collaborative. Thus, grace and free will are, in the life of one who is in Christ, synergistically coordinated; the divine will and the human will cooperate, God's sovereignty and human liberty are united. This "synergy," this free cooperation with God, is the metaphysical foundation and presupposition of the performance of good works. Thus, the very distinction between faith and works, based upon the false dichotomy of grace and liberty, is meaningless.

Through the "infused grace" of the Holy Spirit, the Christian is empowered to live the life of faith, hope, and love (1 Co 13). In order to be sanctified, the Christian must cooperate with the Holy Spirit. Such cooperation (or synergy) is possible [Paul argues], only insofar as the believer is built *into* Christ by faith and by membership in the Church; for through incorporation into Christ, the believer is able to share in Christ's human nature, a human nature that cooperated freely and perfectly with the will of God the Father. By this means, the Christian is enabled to cooperate freely and perfectly with the will of God as present in the indwelling grace of the Holy Spirit. Insofar as s/he *does* cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Christian is sanctified, that is, s/he "grows in grace" through good works based upon faith in Christ. By this process of moral and spiritual growth, the Christian enters into an [ever-developing and] ever-deepening communion with God Thus, God became one with humanity in the incarnation of Christ; and humanity can become one with God through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. This process of sanctification enables the Christian to partake of Christ's transfiguration, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation.

When one systematically rejects the guidance of the Holy Spirit, one cannot meaningfully claim to be, or be characterized as, a believer in Christ. Insofar as one truly believes in Christ, one *cannot* fail in the process of sanctification, in the sense that one who believes in Christ *must* and will struggle toward holiness and righteousness. To engage in such a struggle against the devil, against the world, and even against oneself, *is* to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in the work of sanctification; and such cooperation, showing itself in good works, is an expression and "outworking" of one's faith in Christ. To accept and to cooperate with the grace of the Holy Spirit is, in fact, an integral and therefore necessary dimension of the Christian faith.

"Faith without works" is a meaningless notion; and thus, the Epistle of James tells us that "faith without works is dead" (Jm 2:26), not just figuratively but literally dead. Where there are no good works, there is simply no faith

The Church and the Glorification of Humanity. The ultimate goal of the Holy Spirit's edification and sanctification of the Church is the realization, by all members of the body of Christ, of "the unity inherent in our faith and our knowledge of the Son of God." Paul defines this unity of the faith as the unity of "mature manhood, measured by nothing less than the full stature of Christ" (Eph 4:13). In and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, believers in Christ are to realize their "common unity through faith in the Son of God." The challenge to believers, according to Paul, is to cease being unsteady, confused and impressionable children — immature in their faith, tossed about by the storms of life, misled by heretical "winds of doctrine" — and to "grow up," through the profession and maintenance of the truth and through the practice of love, into the "perfect manhood" of Christ himself (Eph 4:13-15). Believers are called to acquire "the full measure of perfection found in Christ," and they are empowered to do so by Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:7-10). They are to "grow up into Christ" in and through the Church — the body of Christ — which depends upon Christ as "the source which supplies it" and which grows toward Christ, who is its head (Eph 4:15-16). Thus, according to Paul, Christ is both the source and the goal of the Church's spiritual growth.

The end of the process of sanctification, then, is the glorification of humanity in Christ. Through faith, writes Paul, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ . . . [for in him] we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God" (Rm 5:1-2). Through the process of sanctification, "we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Co 3:17-18; see also 2 Co 4:6). In the power of the Holy Spirit, believers may be "raised with Christ" to the "right hand of God." For the true Christian is dead to the world, the flesh, and the devil; and his life is "hid with Christ in God." "When Christ who is our life appears [at his second coming], then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col 3:1-4).

Through the Church, believers are one in faith and one with Christ. Christ, through the Holy Spirit, has created special ministries within the Church in order to train all believers for the works of service that make for the edification (or building up) of the body of Christ. The aim of this process of training and edification is the achievement, by the Church as a whole (that is, as a *body*), of a unified faith based upon a unified "knowledge of the Son of God." When this unity of faith has been attained, then every member of the Church will have "grown up" to the "complete manhood" of Christ, each "attaining the full measure of perfection found in Christ." It follows, therefore, that [for Paul] attainment of full growth in Christ cannot take place outside of the Church. It also follows that the unity of believers in and through the Church is subordinate to and instrumental in the attainment of a still higher unity — the unity of the Church with Christ himself, with the "perfect manhood" found in Christ. Believers must be built into the Church in order to be built into Christ; and being built into Christ, believers enter into full union with the eternal and divine life of the Holy Trinity, into communion with God. Through the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the glorification of the believer, which began with the incarnation of the divine Word, is carried through to completion.

The Second Coming of Christ and the General Resurrection of the Dead

The apostolic message of salvation through Christ is fundamentally "eschatological," pointing toward the "last things" which will bring the redemptive plan of God to completion. The center of biblical eschatology is the coming of the kingdom of God. The prophets of the Old Testament foretold that, "in the last days," God would send his Messiah to prepare Israel and the world for the great day of judgment that would usher in the heavenly kingdom. The authors of the New Testament depict Jesus of Nazareth as the fulfillment of Israel's messianic hopes. Through the first advent of Christ — through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension — the kingdom of God has been inaugurated; and during the "last days" of world history — the Church age — the Spirit of God has been "poured out" upon the followers of Christ (see Jl 2:28-32; Ezk 36:24-28; and Ac 2) in order to make them ready for the consummation of the divine economy. With his second advent, Christ will bring "all things" to fruition. The second coming of Christ will be followed by the general resurrection of the dead, the last judgment, and the final establishment of the kingdom of God.

Like the other writings of the New Testament, the letters of Paul are pervaded with the eschatological spirit of the early apostolic community. Paul characterizes the era between the ascension and the second coming of Christ as a time of tension and conflict for the Church, a time during which the people of God are locked in spiritual combat with the devil and his servants (see Rm 12:12; 2 Co 4:4, 11:14, 12:7; Ga 1:4; Eph 2:2-3, 6:11-12). Although, in Paul's view, the Church has

been liberated from the domination of evil, her spiritual warfare with the powers of darkness (Eph 6:10-20) must continue until "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Co 1:8).

Paul predicts that, toward the end of the Church age, Satan will mount an all-out attack against the disciples of Christ. A "man of sin [or lawlessness]" will emerge and will be empowered by the devil to perform "signs and wonders" (2 Th 2:3, 9). This "antichrist" (see 1 Jn 2:18, 22) will become the ruler of the world and proclaim himself to be God (2 Th 2:4, 9). Through the "wicked deceptions" of this satanic world leader — this "son of perdition" — many (both within and without the Church) will be deluded, believing what is false and taking "pleasure in unrighteousness" (2 Th 2:10-11). Those who are so deceived, refusing "to love the truth and so be saved," will be separated from God and condemned (2 Th 2:10-11). Paul also implies that those who remain faithful to Christ during that time will suffer intense persecution and tribulation (see Rm 8:35; and Mt 24:15-28).

The second advent of Christ will bring the reign of evil on earth to an end. Paul uses numerous terms to describe "the day of the Lord": he speaks of it as a sudden "arrival" (Greek, *parousia*); as an "unveiling," "disclosure," or "revelation" (Greek, *apokalypsis*); as an "epiphany" or "appearance" (Greek, *epiphaneia* — see 1 Th 3:13; 2 Th 1:7; 1 Tm 6:14). "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night," suddenly and unexpectedly, and the antichrist and all who follow him will be utterly destroyed (1 Th 5:2; 2 Th 2:8; see also 2 Th 1:7-10). Because of the suddenness and unpredictability of "that day," Paul exhorts his Christian readers to keep the faith and to be vigilant at all times in order that they might be ready when their Lord returns (see 1 Th 5:1-11).

The second coming of Christ will also bring with it the general resurrection of the dead. "For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. The dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Th 4:16-17). Although he does not say so explicitly, Paul clearly assumes that all the dead, and not only "the dead in Christ," will rise at Christ's second advent; for he refers frequently to the last judgment (see Rm 2:1-16, 14:10-12; 1 Co 4:5; 2 Co 5:10; Ga 6:7-10; 2 Th 1:9; 2 Tm 4:8). At the last judgment, those who have been faithful to Christ will enter into glory (Col 3:1-3); and those who have been faithless (either through apostasy or outright rejection of the gospel) will suffer eternal separation from the presence and glory of God (Rm 2:8; 2 Th 1:8-9).

Paul's most extended discussion of the resurrection of the dead appears in 1 Corinthians 15. In this passage, the apostle does not speak of the resurrection of unbelievers, but instead concentrates his attention upon the resurrection of the redeemed. The foundation of the Christian belief in the general resurrection is the resurrection of Christ himself. The testimony of the apostolic Church is "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, [and] that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures" (1 Co 15:3-4). In quoting this early credal formula, Paul also refers to several post-resurrection appearances of Christ to his apostles and disciples, including Paul's own encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (1 Co 15:5-11).

Through the resurrection of Christ, humankind as a whole has been liberated from the grave. Paul argues that "if Christ has not been raised then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain" (1 Co 15:14). For without Christ's victory over the powers of sin and death, a victory certified by his resurrection, the human race would remain alienated from the love and life of God, it would remain under the bondage of sin and death (1 Co 15:17-19). If the believer's only hope in Christ is for peace and prosperity in their natural lives, then "we are of all men most to be pitied;" for the good things of this life are always subverted by evil, and the natural lives of human beings are continually haunted by the prospect of death and its accompanying symptoms (bodily weakness, disease, old age, etc. — see 1 Co 15:18-19). For Paul, the resurrection of Christ is the center of the Christian faith and the necessary foundation of the Christian hope for ultimate deliverance from evil. If that faith and hope are without substance, then believers ought to devote their lives to the pleasures of the moment, "for tomorrow we die" (1 Co 15:32).

Paul goes on to discuss the relationship between the resurrection of Christ, the general resurrection of the dead, and the coming of the kingdom of God. Through the sin of Adam, mortality became a permanent condition of human existence; but in Christ, the human race has been delivered from the curse of mortality. "For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Co 15:20-22; see also Rm 5:12-21). For those who have believed in Christ and who have been incorporated into his Church, the general resurrection will bring the glory of eternal life in the kingdom of God. At the second coming of Christ, "those who belong to Christ" will be raised with him into the power and presence of God the Father (1 Co 15:23-28).

Following the last judgment, according to Paul, the kingdom of God will be established as an eternal dwelling place for God's people. God and his creation will be finally and totally reunited (1 Co 15:24-28).

Paul also discusses the nature of the resurrected body. At the general resurrection, the bodies of the dead in Christ will be transformed. The natural body is to the resurrected body as the seed is to the plant: "There is continuity between the seed and the plant, but no resemblance."¹ "What is sown is perishable, what is raised is imperishable." The natural body is "sown in dishonor," as a sign of humanity's alienation from God, but it is "raised in glory;" "it is sown in weakness, [but] it is raised in power;" "it is sown a physical body, [but] it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Co 15:36-37, 42-44). In Christ, believers are delivered from the mortality they inherited from Adam; they are raised into the presence of God, to live on a plane of existence that is radically different from their present state. "Just as we have borne the image of . . . [Adam], we shall also bear the image of . . . [Christ]" (1 Co 15:45-49). In Christ, the humanity of believers has been transfigured and deified, and their bodies have been reconstituted and infused with the Spirit of God.

At the second coming of Christ, then, the dead will be raised, and believers in Christ will be translated to a new level of being.

Lo! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." "O death, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" (1 Co 15:51-55)

Paul contends that, through the victory of Christ, all believers have been liberated from the condemnation of sin and death (1 Co 15:56-58). In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes: "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rm 8:18). When the Church is raised into the divine sonship of Christ at the second coming, the entire creation, which "has been groaning in travail," will be liberated from its subjection to "futility" and from its "bondage to decay." The cosmos itself will be transfigured on "the day of Jesus Christ" (Rm 8:19-25). From that day forward, the faithful in Christ will live forever in God, and "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rm 8:38-39).

In these explorations, we have surveyed the major themes in the New Testament letters of Paul. Paul tells us of the divine plan for the salvation of humankind and the world, a plan put into effect by the three persons of the Holy Trinity. For Paul, the human race is in radical need of salvation, for in its fallen state, it is in bondage to the powers of sin and death, to the darkness of spiritual ignorance, and to the demonic tyranny of the devil. Through the incarnation of God the Son in Jesus Christ, and through the ministry of Christ, humanity is offered redemption from the forces of evil, forgiveness of sins, and reconciliation with God; and through the work of the Holy Spirit in and through the Church, humanity may receive the gifts of edification, sanctification, and glorification. By living a life in Christ, in the Church, and in the power of the Holy Spirit, believers may rise from the dead on the last day and be transformed into the perfect image and likeness of God.

¹William Neil, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 462.