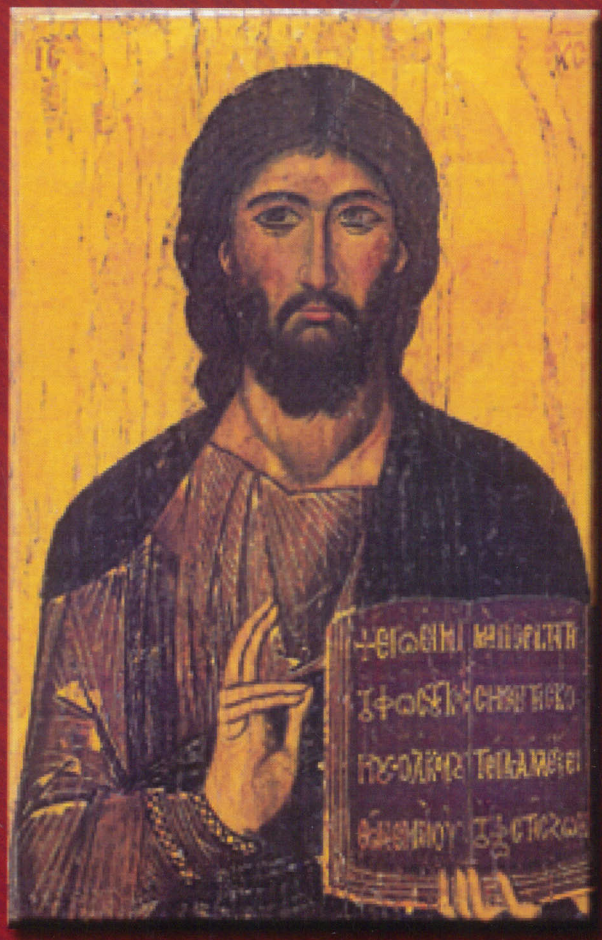


# INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP



*Christ--Origin of Light, 13th C.  
Monastery of St. Catherine, Sinai, Egypt  
John 8:12*

*Commentary on*

**ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS**

*and*

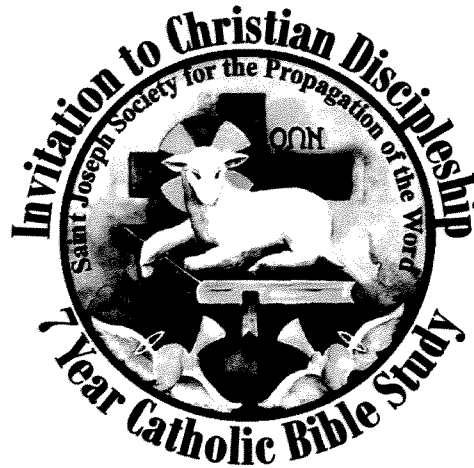
**FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS**

**Teachers Manual**



# INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP

A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study



COMMENTARY ON

**ST. PAUL'S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS**

and

**FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS**

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James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

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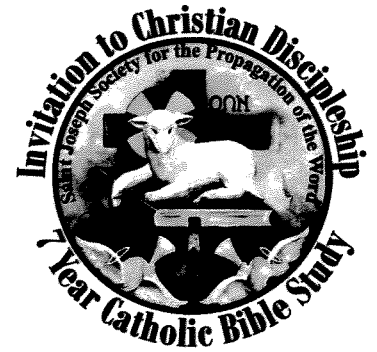
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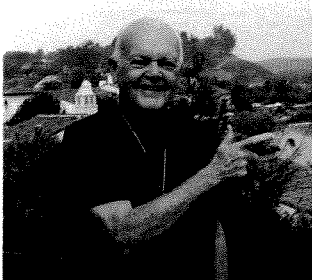
# An Invitation to Christian Discipleship

James P. O'Bryan, S.T., Author and Presenter

It was the early 1970's when a group of laywomen in Orange, CA approached Fr. O'Bryan about the lack of Catholic Bible studies in Orange County. There was, of course, the Protestant group nearby that had signed up over 200 Catholics to their study. Father knew he couldn't do the work without a great deal of assistance. Volunteers stepped up to do the logistical tasks and Father worked with the Holy Spirit to provide the inspiration. This was the beginning of his "seven year sentence". Working 60 – 65 hours per week, he was never more than two weeks ahead, and most of the time he was working with less than a day to presentation time. His work was all hand written and needed to be typed and copied for distribution. These two hour sessions (1 hour sharing + 1 hour lecture) were attended by approximately 400 people weekly, split between a morning and an evening class. Father claims he never rewrote a word; "I didn't have the time," he said. He continues his writing today in Riverside, California.



Father's efforts resulted in a seven year study plus several spin-off works used for educating Catholics around the world. The seven year scripture study includes:



Fr. Jim

- Invitation to Christian Discipleship (Intro)
- The Gospel of St. Mark
- The Gospel of St. Luke
- Acts of the Apostles
- The Gospel of St. Matthew
- The Gospel of St. John
- Romans
- Hebrews
- 1 Thessalonians
- 1 Corinthians
- 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Revelation

Other excellent teaching materials, often used in RCIA and formation classes, are the result of Father's dedication to the laity. These materials include "Christian with a Capital C," "Rock Foundation Revisited" and "On Eagle's Wings." In 2005, a group was formed to help publish and distribute Father's work. The **St. Joseph Society for the Propagation of The Word, Inc.** has been instrumental in setting up a web site to take on the ministry of spreading the Gospel by promoting the instructional works of Fr. O'Bryan. **Materials available include teacher's manuals, student workbooks, CD's of lectures, and several inspirational works for RCIA and adult education.**

This study is designed to be presented by either the laity or religious. Each scripture study offers Teacher's Manuals, Student Workbooks and CD's. Instructions for starting a study group are included. These studies are accredited by the Catechetical Institute of Orange County and have the Imprimatur through the Bishop of Orange, California. Check our website for a study near you or start a study in your parish. We'll be happy to help you.

This is an "in depth" study of the scriptures so that the Word of Christ, rich as it is, might dwell in us.

*Thus you will be able to grasp fully, with all the holy ones, the breadth and length and heights and depth of Christ's love, and experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness of God Himself (Eph. 3:18-19).*

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# **ST. PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS PART - I**

**Through the documents of the Second Vatican Council, the Church teaches the fullness and the perfection of the divine revelation received from Jesus Christ through His appointed witnesses, the Twelve Apostles. In the document on Revelation we read:**

**The Christian dispensation, therefore, as the new and definitive covenant, will never pass away, and we now await no further new public revelation before the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ch.1, sec.4).**

**Within the same document we read that the Church's understanding of revelation is not static, but in a state of continuous growth in both breadth and depth. The Church teaches:**

**For there is a growth in the understanding of the realities and the words which have been handed down. This happens through the contemplation and study made by believers who treasure these things in their hearts... For, as the centuries succeed one another, the Church constantly moves forward toward the fullness of divine truth until the words of God reach their complete fulfillment in her (Ch.II, sec.8).**

**We have an early example of this truth in the writing of St. Irenaeus of Lyons. Writing around 180 A.D., Irenaeus reflects the wisdom of nearly a hundred and fifty years when he teaches us:**

**In Deuteronomy, Moses says to the people: "The Lord God granted you a covenant on Horeb; it was not to your fathers but to you that he gave it." Why, then, not to the fathers? Because "the law is not intended for the upright" and the fathers were**



upright men who had the virtues prescribed by the Decalogue already written in their minds and hearts. They loved the God who created them and did no injury to their neighbor. Thus they needed no written law.

But such justice and love of God had been forgotten and lost in Egypt. Therefore, God was forced, in his concern for men, to speak to them anew in outward words. He brought the people out of Egypt by his power so that men might once more become disciples and followers of God.

In this showing the way of life, God spoke the words of the Decalogue to all alike. These words apply to us today for they were not abrogated but extended and deepened by God coming in the flesh. God indeed gave other precepts as well through Moses, but these were precepts proper to a time of servitude. These precepts were done away with in the new covenant of freedom, which taught men to know God as their Father, to love him wholeheartedly, and to follow his Word as faithful disciples (Against Heresies - Bk.4).

A clear understanding of the relationship of Christianity to the Jewish Torah resulted only after a long, painful struggle within the minds and hearts of the earliest Christians. This struggle surfaced as the first major, internal crisis faced by the infant Christian Church. Upon this crisis depended the catholicity of the Church. Peter, James, Paul, and the Party of the Circumcision were the leading protagonists in this vital ecclesiastical drama. The understanding and moral force of Paul of Tarsus, more than any other, can be credited with preserving and advancing the gospel truths at stake in this crisis. Certainly no Christian suffered more for the sake of these truths than Paul, from both those within and outside the Church.

The contents of Paul's letter to the Galatians concerned itself with this Church crisis. To better understand the contents of Paul's letter let us briefly review the background situation that stimulated Paul to write such an emotionally charged apologia and defense of Christian Revelation.

## THE COVENANT OF LAW

As Irenaeus mentioned, God established a Covenant with Israel at Mt. Horeb (also identified as Mt. Sinai). Yahweh established this covenant upon

obedience to particular laws. We find the essential precepts of the Mt. Sinai Covenant expressed in the Decalogue (The Ten Commandments) found in Exodus 20:2-17, and again in Deuteronomy 5:6-21. A Decalogue of ritual laws can also be found in Exodus 34:17-27, and a code of holiness detailed in chapters 12 through 26 in Leviticus. When all was said and done there existed over six hundred covenant laws. Through the years famous rabbis added their “hedge” around these laws--numerous precepts, customs, and traditions designed to protect the law. This “hedge around the law” acted as added insurance that a divine commandment would not be transgressed. The law was called the Torah.

Strictly speaking, the Torah was the first five books of the Old Testament. Later the word was applied loosely to the entire Old Testament. The Covenant made at Horeb had indeed, in the words of Simon Peter, become “*a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear*” (Acts 15:10).

The Covenant made with Moses and Israel at Horeb built upon the more ancient covenant established with Abraham, the forefather of Israel. We read in Genesis that God established a covenant of blessing with Abraham. God said to him:

*I will maintain my covenant with you and your descendants after you throughout the ages as an everlasting pact, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you... This is my covenant with you and your descendants after you that you must keep: every male among you shall be circumcised... that shall be the mark of the covenant between you and me... If a male is uncircumcised such a one shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant (Gen. 17:7,10,14).*

We see in Leviticus 12:3 that all male Israelite children must be circumcised on the eighth day after their birth. This was required in order to share in the covenant promises made to Abraham.

### THE COVENANT OF CIRCUMCISION

The covenant made with Abraham was primarily based upon an act of faith, as we read in Genesis: “*Abram put his faith in the Lord who credited it to him as an act of righteousness*” (Gen. 15:6). However the promise that all nations would be blessed through Abraham resulted from Abraham's heroic act of

obedience--in truth, an act of supreme love of God. Again we read in Genesis: *"In your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing. All this because you obeyed my command"* [to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac] (Gen.22:18). The covenant and the promises made to Abraham were neither conditional nor temporary. It was an everlasting reward for Abraham's faith and love.

This was not true of the Sinai Covenant, which was conditioned upon the continual obedience of Israel to the Torah. Through Moses, God foretold that these laws would remain in force until the coming of a new Moses. Moses told Israel in Deuteronomy 18:15, *"A Prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen."* The Lord confirmed these words of Moses telling him:

*This was well said. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their kinsmen, and will put my words into his mouth; he shall tell them all I shall command him. If any man will not listen to my words which he speaks in my name, I myself will make him answer for it (Deut.18:17-19).*

## A NEW COVENANT

The prophets of Israel foretold that a new covenant would be established. Jeremiah prophesied:

*The days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their fathers the day I took them by the hand to lead them forth from the land of Egypt; for they broke my covenant and I had to show myself their master, says the Lord. But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord, for I will forgive their evildoing and remember their sin no more (Jer.31:31-34).*



Speaking of the new covenant the prophet Ezekiel wrote:

*I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the stony heart from their bodies, and replace it with a natural heart, so that they will live according to my statutes, and observe and carry out my ordinances; thus they shall be my people and I will be their God... with my servant David their prince forever. I will make with them a covenant of peace; it shall be an everlasting covenant with them, and I will multiply them, and put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling shall be with them; I will be their God, and they shall be my people (Ez.11:19-20; 37:25-27).*

The Twelve Apostles, along with other disciples, experienced the entire public ministry of Jesus Christ. They heard His teachings and witnessed His deeds. They became the repositories of Christian Revelation. The Scriptures, especially the Gospel of Mark, are at pains to teach that during the earthly ministry of Jesus the Disciples failed to grasp the significance of His teachings and actions. Mark records that on one occasion Jesus asked the Twelve: “*You do not understand this parable?*” and then asked them, “*How then are you going to understand other figures like it?*” (Mk.4:13).

Concerning the significance of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus asked the Twelve, “*Do you still not understand?*” (Mk.8:21). Mark teaches that this ignorance persisted during the entire public ministry of Jesus. He writes:

*He was teaching his disciples in this vein: “The Son of man is going to be delivered into the hands of men who will put him to death; three days after his death he will rise.” Though they failed to understand his words, they were afraid to question him (Mk.9:31-32).*

St. John adds, “*Remember, as yet they did not understand the Scriptures that Jesus had to rise from the dead*” (Jn.20:9). However, after the death and resurrection of Jesus and the reception of the Holy Spirit, their former experience with Jesus became a well of infinite depth from which the Apostles constantly drew divine wisdom and gained spiritual insight into the mysteries enacted within the life of Jesus. Through the power of the Holy Spirit they began to penetrate the significance of His symbolic actions. They came to realize that a New Covenant had been inaugurated at the Last Supper.

Matthew writes:

*Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them. "All of you must drink from it," he said, "for this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, to be poured out in behalf of many for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt.26:27-28).*

St. Luke adds: *"This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you" (Lk.22:20).*

We see from Luke's presentation in the Acts that the early Christian Community recognized the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon believers as the fruit of the New Covenant that was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus Christ through His death and resurrection from the dead. *"The stone rejected by the builders has become the cornerstone"* of a new, eternal relationship with God. Peter preached:

*This is the Jesus God has raised up and we are his witnesses. Exalted at God's right hand, he first received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, then poured this Spirit out on us (Act 2:32-33).*

The Church interpreted the coming of the Holy Spirit and its effects as the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy:

*Then afterward I will pour out my spirit upon all mankind. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions; Even upon the servants and the handmaids, in those days, I will pour out my spirit (Joel 3:1-2).*

Joel went on to prophesy, *"Then everyone shall be rescued who calls on the name of the Lord" (3:5).*

Peter makes clear "the name" through which salvation comes. He preached:

*Let the whole house of Israel know beyond any doubt that God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified. You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift*

*of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:36,38).*

Peter clearly teaches here that there are certain essential conditions for entrance into the New Covenant and receiving the Holy Spirit: repentance, faith in Jesus Christ, baptism into Jesus Christ, remission of sins. Peter goes on to declare to the leaders of the people:

*This Jesus is “the stone rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone.” There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved (Acts 4:11-12).*

The healing of the crippled man at the Gate Beautiful became a symbolic gesture symbolizing this truth. Peter explained:

*If we must answer today for a good deed done to a cripple and explain how he was restored to health, then you and all the people of Israel must realize that it was done in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified and whom God raised from the dead. In the power of that name this man stands before you perfectly sound (Acts 4:9-10).*

The Prophet Joel had said, “*Then everyone shall be rescued who calls upon the name of the Lord.*” Peter has sufficiently interpreted what it meant to call upon the name of the Lord, but how did the early Church interpret “everyone”? Peter evidently taught Jesus Christ to be the Savior of the world when he said, “*there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved*” (Acts 4:12).

## THE MOSAIC LAW AND THE NEW COVENANT

It was clear from the Old Testament that there would come a day when salvation would be offered to all mankind. Isaiah had foretold:

*Let not the foreigner say, when he would join himself to the Lord, “The Lord will surely exclude me from his people” ... And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, ministering to him, Loving the name of the Lord, and becoming his servants--All who keep the sabbath free from profanation and hold to my covenant,*



*Them I will bring to my holy mountain and make joyful in my house of prayer; Their holocausts and sacrifices will be acceptable on my altar, For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Is.56:3,6-7).*

This prophecy apparently leaves the Old Testament intact.

How universal salvation would be applied to the non-Jew was not clear to the early Church. It had begun as a Jewish congregation, accepting Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. In its membership, in its customs and in its religious practices it was Jewish. As we read in Acts, “*They went to the temple area together every day*” (2:46), and “*Peter and John were going up to the temple for prayer at the three o'clock hour*” (3:1). It has been observed that Judaism was the “*swathing bands*” useful for the support of the infant Church, but binding and crippling the mature growth of the Church. They received a universal commission from the Lord, “*You are to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria. Yes, even to the end of the earth*” (Acts1:8.) “*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations*” (Mt.28:19).

Other than to baptize and to teach, the Lord left no instructions, gave no blueprints as to how the Church was to move from being a provincial body to becoming a Church for all nations embracing all mankind.

What was the relationship of the Mosaic law to the New Covenant? The Scriptures reveal some steps taken by the Church to clarify the position of the Mosaic law in the Christian Community. The Church realized that in some way the New Covenant fulfilled the Old Covenant. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is recorded as teaching:

*Do not think that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets. I have come, not to abolish them, but to fulfill them. Of this much I assure you: until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter of the law, not the smallest part of a letter, shall be done away with until it all comes true. That is why whoever breaks the least significant of these commands and teaches others to do so shall be called least in the kingdom of God. Whoever fulfills and teaches these commands shall be great in the kingdom of God. I tell you, unless your holiness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees you shall not enter the kingdom of God (Mt.5:17-20).*

The fulfillment of the Mosaic law is not seen in its discontinuation, but in its perfection within the New Covenant. We see an example of this when our Lord reduces all the commandments of the Old Testament to love of God and love of neighbor: *“On these two commandments,”* Jesus teaches, *“the whole law is based, and the prophets as well”* (Mt.22:40). Commenting on this, St. Irenaeus wrote:

Inasmuch as in the Law and in the Gospel the first and greatest commandment is to love the Lord God whole-heartedly, and then there is another like it, to love one’s neighbor as oneself, it is shown that the Law and the Gospel have one and the same author. The precepts of the perfect life, since they are the same in both Testaments, point out the same God, who certainly has prescribed particular precepts adapted to each, while for the more prominent and greatest commandment without which it is not possible to be saved, He recommends the same in both (St. Irenaeus).

Nevertheless the Christian Community begins to understand that as the spirit of the New Covenant differs from the spirit of the Old Covenant, the form through which the spirit expresses itself must also be different. Matthew records Jesus as teaching:

*Nobody sews a piece of un-shrunk cloth on an old cloak; the very thing he has used to cover the hole will pull, and the rip only gets worse. People do not pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins burst, the wine spills out, and the skins are ruined. No they pour new wine into new wineskins, and in that way both are preserved* (Mt.9:16-17).

The Christian Community begins to question the enforcement of certain Jewish laws and customs. They begin, at least, to realize that the Lord had abrogated certain external laws and customs. We read that Jesus *“...summoned the crowd and said to them: ‘Give ear and try to understand. It is not what goes into a man’s mouth that makes him impure; it is what comes out of his mouth’”* (Mt.15:10).

Matthew (15:20), writing for Palestinian Christians, gives this interpretation of our Lord’s words: *“As for eating with unwashed hands--that makes no man*

*impure.*” However Mark (7:19), writing for Roman Christians, gives a much broader interpretation to this same teaching: *“Thus did he render all foods clean.”* As the Church abandoned more and more Jewish customs and practices, it incurred increasing hostility of the Pharisaic Jews. We see a hint of this problem in the following episode:

*His disciples approached him and said, “Do you realize the Pharisees were scandalized when they heard your pronouncement?” “Every planting not put down by my heavenly Father will be uprooted,” he replied. “Let them go their way; they are blind leaders of the blind. If one blind man leads another, both will end in a pit” (Mt.15:1-14).*

Jesus certainly taught *“salvation is from the Jews”* (see *Jn.4:22*). Did this imply Gentiles must become Jews in order to share in the salvation offered through the New Covenant? Many early Christians believed this, insisted upon it. They maintained that Gentiles must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law in order to be saved. As to the apostolic mind on this subject we cannot be sure, but we do see the mind was open to direction from the Lord.

The history of the Church confirms that it is often only a crisis of contention and conflict that forces the truths of Christian Revelation into the Church’s conscious awareness. This is certainly true regarding the necessity of circumcision in the New Covenant. The truth in this matter triumphed only after a painful conscientious struggle. This truth only became a practical reality in the Jerusalem Christian Community after political circumstances altered the destiny of the Jewish religion and nation.

If religious complacency ever existed in the Jerusalem Christian Community, it ended with the ministry and martyrdom of St. Stephen. Stephen was one of the Seven Hellenistic Jewish Christians--those Jews born and reared in Gentile cities beyond Palestine. Because of their social environment they were much more open to communication with the Gentiles than were the Palestinian Jews. In fact, they were treated with suspicion by the Palestinian Jews, to whom their orthodoxy was suspect. Many of the young Hellenistic Jews, such as Saul of Tarsus, had come to Jerusalem to study at the feet of great rabbis, such as Gamaliel. Before his conversion to Christ, Stephen may have belonged (in Jerusalem) to the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen, which was composed of Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia. Since Saul was from Tarsus in Cilicia he most probably attended this synagogue.



As a Christian, Stephen dared to look down the road of Judaism, and he beheld a dead end. He realized that Christians had another road, a further road to travel far beyond Judaism. He became a harbinger sounding “the death knell of the Mosaic ordinances.” Stephen echoed anew Jesus’ prediction of the demise of temple worship. It is said he often debated these matters with Jews from the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen, and they proved no match for his spirit and wisdom. He made enemies, not the least of which was Saul of Tarsus.

Accused of heresy before the Jewish Sanhedrin, the accusers of Stephen charged that he “*never stops making statements against the holy place and the law. We have heard him claim that Jesus the Nazorean will destroy this place and change the customs*” (Acts 6:13b-14a).

### PHILIP THE EVANGELIST

After the martyrdom of Stephen, a persecution arose aimed especially at the Hellenistic Jews. Many fled Palestine. The persecution created circumstances out of which a Christian Community, largely Gentiles, would arise in the city of Antioch. Some have seen the Gentile Church rising out of the martyred blood of Stephen. That blood certainly played no small part in the conversion of Saul, the Apostle to the Gentiles.

Philip, a companion of Stephen and one of the Seven ordained by the Apostles, took the first positive step toward receiving non-Jews into the Church. Philip fled to Samaria and preached the Gospel to the Samaritans, and received many of them into the Church. Peter and John came from Jerusalem and approved Philip's ministry by imparting the Sacrament of Confirmation to the converted Samaritans. In the case of the Samaritans, even though the Jews considered them heretics and half-breeds they were already circumcised. With the Samaritans it was not a matter of bringing uncircumcised people into the Christian Community. However, Philip went on from Samaria to encounter the Ethiopian eunuch on the Gaza road. Although the eunuch believed in Judaism he was impeded by his physical infirmity from officially becoming a Jew. When Philip baptized the eunuch, he received the first non-circumcised person into the Church. The reception of the eunuch into the Church could have been viewed as a rare exception fulfilling the prophesy of Isaiah:

*To the eunuchs who observe my sabbaths and choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant, I will give, in my house and within my walls, a monument and a name... an eternal, imperishable name will I give them (Is.56:4-5).*

## PETER BAPTIZES CORNELIUS

Simon Peter clearly stated the Jewish attitude and, seemingly, the then present Christian attitude concerning relations with Gentiles. Addressing the centurion Cornelius and his household Peter said, *“You must know that it is not proper for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to have dealings with him” (Acts10:28)*. We see later that certain Christian Jews in Jerusalem were scandalized by Peter's behavior and said to him, *“You entered the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them.”*

Although the Levitical law did not forbid Jews from eating with non-Jews, it became a corollary of their law that to do so would result in ritual impurity because pagans would not observe their dietary and ritual laws. It will help to understand the problem at hand to realize the Jews made no distinction between impurity resulting from either moral or ritual prohibitions. Impurity before the law must be avoided because such impurity rendered a person unfit to participate in the worship of Yahweh. Impurity, regardless of its nature, severed one's relationship with God.

The Jews made no distinction between a bodily impurity and a spiritual impurity when it came to union with God. To perform a forbidden act, regardless of its nature, *ipso facto* (automatically) affected the person in his or her entirety. Jesus, we know, insisted upon a distinction between moral impurity, which he insisted proceeded from the soul of the person, corrupting the spirit of the person, and physical impurity, which dealt more with matters of physical sanitation. As we have seen, he insisted that a person is not rendered impure before God because of what he touches or eats, but rather by the evil that proceeds from his heart, corrupting his spirit.

Nevertheless, this was not an accepted practice or belief among the earlier members of the Church. They adhered strictly to Jewish laws. Jewish customs and traditions formed the social environment in which they lived. Social acceptance depended upon their strict observance. To declare that a Gentile

could be accepted into the Church without circumcision was revolutionary, with repercussions on every level of Jewish life. Such a belief was not readily acceptable in the Jerusalem Christian Community. Its practice became a major source of contention and divisiveness within the Community. It produced the first major theological crisis within the Church. Even when the point could be theologically admitted, it still remained psychologically and socially difficult for some to accept the principle in practice. Some could never accept it. We see later, at the Council of Jerusalem, James' attempts to deal with the social aspects of a theological decision made by the Church.

While in Joppa, a city by the Mediterranean Sea, Simon Peter, the recognized leader of the Church, had a vision that altered the policy of the Christian Community. It broadened the conscious awareness of the Church concerning the effects of the redemptive act of Jesus Christ.

Peter beheld in the vision a large net coming down from heaven, filled with creatures forbidden by Leviticus for Jews to eat. A heavenly voice commanded Peter to kill and eat these creatures. The command shocked Peter. Not being a person given to blind, unquestioned obedience, Peter refused, giving his moral reasons for his refusal, "*Sir, it is unthinkable! I have never eaten anything unclean or impure in my life*" (Acts 10:14). The heavenly voice replied to Peter, "*What God has purified you are not to call unclean*" (Acts 10:15). Within the same vision the scene was repeated three times.

Later, Peter pondered over the contents of the vision and wondered what it signified. In later years St. Ignatius Loyola warned visionaries to be careful of the "after-glow"--the moments following visions and divine inspirations. He taught that the moment of the vision or inspiration is God's moment, one of grace, but the moment afterwards is the visionaries' moment, and it is not necessarily a moment of grace. Human nature is quite capable of taking over and, in a sense, grabbing the ball and running with it in the wrong direction. When the vision comes from God, the interpretation of it should be left to God. This often demands a patient waiting and a prayerful expectation. God, in his own time and way, will make the meaning clear. Recall the example of St. Francis: Francis heard the command, "Rebuild my Church!" He interpreted it to mean the reconstruction of a fallen down building in the area. In truth, the words of the Lord applied to the Christian Community itself.

In this case Peter's consternation was short lived. Concomitant with Peter's vision, in Caesarea, a port city north of Joppa, a certain Roman centurion named Cornelius had likewise received a vision while in prayer. This Cornelius was a "God fearing Gentile," which implied he accepted the Jewish religion and its practices in so far as a pagan could. Cornelius was a "proselyte of the gate." The Jews made a distinction between proselytes of the covenant (or of righteousness) who were circumcised and observed the whole law, and the proselytes of the gate who acknowledged Yahweh and conformed in a degree to Jewish worship. They stood outside the covenant, not having received the initiatory rite of circumcision.

The writer recalls a similar distinction once being made about membership in the Catholic Church. While working at Camp Graveline, a summer camp for children down along the Mississippi bayous, he became a friend of Bessie Mae, a black lady who cooked for the camp. Bessie Mae showed a great interest in the Catholic Church, but remained a Protestant. Asked one day why she did not become a Catholic, she explained that presently she could only be a "front door Catholic" and that wasn't enough. She went on to explain, "Brother, you see I got a husband over here in Biloxi and another live husband over in Gulfport and if I joined the Catholic Church I couldn't

receive Holy Communion. Now when Bessie Mae joins the Church she wants to go down the whole aisle. She wants to be a rail Catholic."

In his vision, the centurion Cornelius was commanded to send some men to Joppa to summon Simon Peter to Caesarea. As a Roman soldier trained in blind obedience, Cornelius did exactly as the vision commanded. However the prudence of his obedience becomes evident when we read, "*He called two servants and a devout soldier from among those he could trust. He explained everything to them and dispatched them to Joppa*" (Acts 10:7). St. Therese of Lisieux used to teach that one should carefully guard "the secrets of the King." In other words, speak only prudently of divine communications lest the communication lose its divine fragrance.

Peter set off with the messengers for Caesarea, taking some Christians from Joppa with him. On arriving at the home of Cornelius, Peter found him gathered with members of his family and a group of close friends, waiting to

hear what Simon Peter had to say to them. Peter explained first that, although *“it is not proper for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or to have any dealing with him,”* he had come to understand that *“God has made it clear to me that no one should call any man unclean or impure”* through his vision and what subsequently followed (*Acts10:28*). Seemingly, this redemptive act of Jesus had altered the situation--a sanctification of humanity itself had resulted. Peter went on:

*I begin to see how true it is that God shows no partiality. Rather, the man of any nation who fears God and acts uprightly is acceptable to him. This is the message he sent to the sons of Israel, the good news of peace proclaimed through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all (Acts10:34-36).*

Peter proclaimed the universality of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Cornelius humbly replies to Peter, *“All of us stand before God at this moment to hear whatever directives the Lord has given you”* (*Acts10:33*). Peter then preached the good news: Jesus of Nazareth is both Lord and Messiah, and through his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, *“everyone who believes in him has forgiveness of sins through his name”* (*Acts10:43*).

An extraordinary event occurred while Peter spoke to this assembly of non-Jews. *“The Holy Spirit descended upon all who were listening to Peter’s message”* (*Acts10:44*). This was indeed an extraordinary event because normally the reception of the Holy Spirit followed upon Christian Baptism. Peter had preached on Pentecost: *“You must reform and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit”* (*Acts 2:38*).

As Paul explained to the disciples of John the Baptist who, as yet, had no knowledge or experience of the Holy Spirit:

*John’s baptism was a baptism of repentance. He used to tell the people about the one who would come after him in whom they were to believe--that is, Jesus. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. As Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down on them and they began to speak in tongues and to utter prophecies (Acts19:4-7).*

**It was extraordinary that the Holy Spirit should be given before Christian Baptism. What was even more surprising was the fact that these recipients of the Holy Spirit were all uncircumcised people. It implied a by-pass of Judaism, a thing never envisioned up to now by the Christian Community. We are told:**

*The circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter were surprised that the gift of the Holy Spirit should have been poured out on the Gentiles also, whom they could hear speaking in tongues and glorifying God (Acts10:45-46a).*

**From that extraordinary event, Peter interpreted that Jewish circumcision was not a prerequisite for Christian Baptism. Peter put the question at that point, “What can stop these people who have received the Holy Spirit, even as we have, from being baptized with water?” So he gave orders that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts10:46a-48). Since they had received the Holy Spirit--the Fruit of the New Covenant--they certainly should be formally received into the New Covenant.**

**After the baptism we are told, “They asked him to stay with them for a few days” (Acts10:48). Peter’s staying in the home of a Gentile and eating with them signified that the Church had taken a step toward catholicity--toward a realization that it was a new wine to be contained in new wine skins. Peter’s action had sown a revolutionary seed within the Christian Community that would reap a harvest of conflict but which, when subsided, would leave a Catholic Church--a house of prayer for all the nations.**



## CHAPTER 2

### INTRODUCTION TO GALATIANS PART – II

#### THE CHURCH OF ANTIOCH

The reception of the Gentiles by Simon Peter into the Christian Community prepared the Church for the progress that would take place in Antioch. Peter set a precedent for the Church when he baptized uncircumcised people. We are given this account of the establishment of the Church in Antioch by Luke:

*Those in the community who had been dispersed by the persecution that arose because of Stephen went as far as Phoenicia, Cyprus and Antioch, making the message known to none but Jews. However, some men of Cyprus and Cyrene among them who had come to Antioch began to talk even to the Greeks, announcing the good news of the Lord Jesus to them. The hand of the Lord was with them and a great number of them believed and were converted to the Lord (Acts 11:19-21).*

Antioch became the first center for a mixed congregation. This ecumenical congregation of Jews and Gentiles became the testing ground for the catholicity of the Church. In Antioch, the Gentile converts probably even predominated. When Church leaders in Jerusalem heard the report from Antioch, they immediately sent Barnabas, a Hellenistic Jew from Cyprus, as their official representative. Barnabas confirmed that the work in Antioch evidently enjoyed the favor of God (Acts 11:23). Under Barnabas' encouragement larger numbers, no doubt Gentiles, were soon added to the Church. To work in this delicate missionary field, Barnabas went to Tarsus and solicited the assistance of Paul, who had been converted to Christ some ten years earlier. Paul joined with Barnabas in ministering to the Church at Antioch. By this gesture, Barnabas brought Paul back into the mainstream of apostolic activity. The field was being firmly established that would stimulate and bring to a head the first major, internal crisis within the Church.

## THE CRISIS OF CONSCIENCE

Peter's action in Caesarea did not go unquestioned or unchallenged in Jerusalem. The knowledge of his action had a divisive effect. The church membership taking exception to Peter's action is identified as "some among the circumcised." These men were converted Pharisees, having belonged to a Jewish party dedicated to the strictest observance of the Mosaic law.

As Christian beliefs and attitudes solidified within the Church, it was this group of Christians who would form the divisive group called "the party of the circumcision." The goal of this party would be to conserve Judaism within the Church. Their hatred for their opposition would incarnate itself and center itself in a personal animosity toward Paul of Tarsus, a hatred that would endure centuries after Paul's death.

Peter carefully explained to the Jerusalem brethren all that transpired in Joppa and Caesarea. He explained the rationale for his action, an action he had felt obliged to take. As a result of his explanation "...*they stopped objecting, and instead began to glorify God in these words: 'If this be so, then God has granted life-giving repentance even to the Gentile'* (Acts 11:18). Nevertheless, doubts still lingered in the minds of some.

Many members of the early Church faced a particular crisis of conscience: should they be directed by their own private interpretation of the Scriptures, or should they acknowledge the teaching authority of the Church to correctly discern matters of salvation and to properly interpret the Scriptures? A Gospel record according to Matthew, written some years later, confirmed that Peter as an individual, and the Twelve as a college, possessed the power to bind and loose within the Church. Jesus is recorded as telling them: "*I assure you, whatever you declare bound on earth shall be held bound in heaven, and whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be held loosed in heaven*" (Mt.18:18).

Jesus commissioned the Twelve also to teach: "*Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations... Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world!*" (Mt.28:20).

A reasonable assumption is that they possessed the grace necessary to properly fulfill their duties within the Church.

## THE ROLE OF JAMES

Very early in the Christian Community, two classes of Christian Jews existed in Jerusalem. One class remained strictly Jews and, in the light of Genesis 17:7-14 and Leviticus 12:3, insisted all Gentiles be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law. They refused to associate--to hold communion with--uncircumcised Christians, considering them unsaved people. The second class equally confirmed their commitment to the Mosaic law, but did not insist upon Gentile converts being circumcised, admitting that they were not obliged, as were Jewish Christians, to observe the Mosaic law. They were open, to some degree, to communion with Gentiles. This latter class found their authority and leadership in James. James became the recognized leader of the Jerusalem Christian Community sometime between 41 and 44 A.D. Although not generally believed to be an apostle, James was "the brother of the Lord" who came to accept Jesus as the Messiah only after the Resurrection.

Paul mentioned an appearance of the Risen Lord to James (1Cor.15:7). The degree and manner of James' relationship with Jesus has been highly debated. Catholics are free to hold any opinion that does not violate the perpetual virginity of Mary. James' kinship with Jesus may have come through Joseph by children of a former marriage, or by an adoption of Joseph's late brother's children, or indirectly through Mary by being a child of her sister or another relative. King Herod Agrippa executed the Apostle James and arrested Peter. He inaugurated a persecution against the Church leaders. Peter escaped prison and fled Jerusalem. Until this time, as the first ten chapters of Acts demonstrate, Church leadership in Jerusalem was in the hands of Peter and the Apostles.

From this time on, James and the presbyters appear in the role of leadership in Jerusalem. Among people who esteemed family relationships and measured holiness by a scrupulous observance of the externals of Jewish law, James would have been a logical choice to rule this local church, which would never demand James to be less a Jew in order to be a Christian. They called him the "Just," signifying his strict observance of the Mosaic law, and probably implying a life of rigid asceticism.

James' position and prestige in the Jerusalem Community in no way militated against Peter's position. As we can see at the Council of Jerusalem, the concern of Peter was with the whole Church and with preserving the integrity

of the Gospel, while the concern of James was provincial--the problem of Jewish Christians associating with Gentile Christians. In the Essene concept of leadership, Peter appears as the "overseer of the whole" and James as the "supervisor" of the local community. James the Just was an appropriate leader in Jerusalem, the center of Christian Judaism. Rome, the center of the known civilized world, was more appropriate for the leadership of Peter and Paul. Recorded in Acts, we have an example of James' provincial mentality. Presumably, James tells Paul:

*You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have come to believe, all of them staunch defenders of the law. Yet they have been informed that you teach the Jews who live among the Gentiles to abandon Moses, to give up the circumcision of their children, and to renounce their customs. What are we to do about your coming, of which they are sure to hear? (Acts 21:20-22).*

We hear no rebuttal by Paul. This conversation occurred on his last visit to Jerusalem, only a few years prior to his death in Rome. We can well imagine how the following statement by Paul, written a few years earlier to the Corinthians, would have been received by the Jewish Christian in Jerusalem: *"Circumcision counts for nothing, and its lack makes no difference either. What matters is keeping God's commandments"* (1Cor.7:19). A revolutionary statement. One reflecting the spiritual maturity of its teacher. Precisely because of such teachings many, both within and without the Church, bitterly opposed and hated Paul.

Without a doubt, Paul of Tarsus was a leading force in the early Church for effecting the catholicity of the Christian Religion. He fought valiantly to free the Church from the legalism of Judaism, and to force the Christian Community to recognize and proclaim the full effect of the Redemption coming through Jesus Christ. Paul was so successful in his struggle that some of his enemies have called him the founder of the Christian Religion.

## PRELUDE TO THE COUNCIL

Acts records an episode in Antioch that initiated the Church Council at Jerusalem, where the issue of Gentile Christians and the Mosaic law was officially settled. However, it was not settled to the satisfaction of the entire Christian Community. With the passing of the centuries it has been noticed that schisms come in the after-glow of Church Councils.

In the first century, the city of Antioch became the second center of Christianity. As mentioned earlier, many Gentiles converted to Christ through the ministry of Barnabas and other Hellenistic Jewish Christians. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Antiochean Community commissioned Barnabas and Paul to undertake the missionary journey among pagan nations. The two apostles appealed first to the Jews in the pagan cities, but when opposed by them, Paul and Barnabas spoke out fearlessly:

*The word of God has to be declared to you first of all: but since you reject it and thus convict yourselves as unworthy of everlasting life, we now turn to the Gentiles. For thus were we instructed by the Lord: 'I have made you a light to the nations, a means of salvation to the ends of the earth' (Acts 13:46-47).*

Barnabas and Paul traveled to the Island of Cyprus, crossed over to the mainland at Perga and headed north into the Roman Province of Galatia. There they preached in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra and Derbe. Returning to their home base in Antioch they related to the congregation of believers *"all that God had helped them accomplish, and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles"* (Acts 14:27).

Meanwhile, certain Jerusalem Christians had second thoughts about Peter's action in Caesarea. Correct, in so far as it went, but it did not go far enough. It was their conscientious decision that Christian Baptism did not exempt one from the obligation of being circumcised and observing the Mosaic law. They may well have reasoned that such Christians had a serious obligation, in the light of the great grace received, to embrace Judaism. It was their conclusion that it was necessary for salvation. They not only personally held these beliefs but zealously propagated them throughout the Christian communities. These men became known in Christian circles as Judaizers. They were probably the first Christian sect born within the Church.

With apostolic zeal some of these Jerusalem Christians arrived in Antioch, disturbed, no doubt, by the news that many uncircumcised people enjoyed membership in the Christian Community, and Jewish and Gentile Christians were actually in communion with each other. They immediately sought to correct this situation by preaching to the Gentile Christians: *"Unless you are circumcised according to Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved"* (Acts 15:1b). Such a proclamation shocked Paul and Barnabas.

Too often good people remain quiet in the face of error. Subsequently, they will maintain the same silence in the face of evil. Silence becomes the fuel feeding the fires of error. Silence in the face of error or a lie becomes an interpreted consent to its truth. The mind is made for truth and corrupted by the lie. If truth is to triumph in the mind, it must be presented to the mind. It must gain at least equal time with error. Thought motivates human action. An erroneous thought acted upon can only produce a degree of evil. Think of the evil that flowed from such doctrines as white and Aryan supremacy! Paul taught that the acceptance of truth only comes by hearing the truth, and truth cannot be heard unless there are lips which clearly proclaim that truth (see Rom.10:14-17).

What is said of truth equally applies to error, to the lie. The acceptance of error or a lie comes through hearing it, and it is heard because its apostles loudly and fearlessly proclaim it. If truth does not receive equal time and treatment, error and its subsequent evil triumphs. Truth carries the potential to extinguish the lie, negating its evil consequences. Silence negates the power of truth!

In Antioch, error and evil met its match in Paul and Barnabas, zealous apostles of the truth, who were men that so highly did they esteem the benefit of Gospel truth for mankind that they were willing not only to preach the truth but subsequently willing to die for it.

The Christian Jews from Jerusalem no doubt made capital gains out of the failure of Paul and Barnabas to make inroads among the Jews on their missionary journey; arguing that the theology upon which the Antiochean experiment of Christian Jewish and Gentile communion had been based was rejected in Pisidian Antioch, and would generally be so among all Jewish communities because circumcision was not being insisted upon for all Gentile converts. They insisted that the future conversion of the Jews to Jesus Christ depended upon the requirement that Gentile converts be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law.

The implications of such a theology and practice did not escape Paul and Barnabas. It implicitly denied that a New Covenant had been established in the Blood of Jesus Christ. It negated the merits of the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross. The teachings implicitly denied that Jesus Christ was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. If salvation resulted from circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic law, then the death of Jesus



was meaningless and futile; the life and death of Jesus had changed or altered essentially nothing.

In the face of such error, with such drastic consequences, men of the caliber of Paul and Barnabas were unable to be silent. No peace at such a price! The debate that ensued between the Jerusalem Christians and those two defenders of Christian freedom, Paul and Barnabas, caused much dissension between the members of the Antiochean Community.

### THE COUNCIL OF JERUSALEM

The issue divided the Christian Community. The Church decided to appeal to the authorities in Jerusalem for a solution of peace, an authoritative decision, settling this vital matter of faith and conscience. Finally it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some others should go up to see the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem about this question (Acts 15:2).

Upon arrival, the delegation from Antioch met informally with the Apostles, the presbyters and other members of the Jerusalem Church. This gave Paul and Barnabas the opportunity to explain their work among the Gentiles of Galatia and *"all that God had helped them accomplish"* (Acts 15:4). After they had spoken, *"some of the converted Pharisees then got up and demanded that such Gentiles be circumcised and told to keep the Mosaic law"* (Acts 15:5). No doubt another debate quickly ensued. The meeting ended with a promise that a formal inquest into the matter would be made.

Subsequently, *"the apostles and the presbyters accordingly convened to look into the matter"* (Acts 15:6). Much discussion ensued until finally, Peter took the floor and appealed to the empirical evidence at hand--the visible work of God within the souls of these baptized Gentiles. He argued that God had chosen him first to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, and God had demonstrated approval of the Gentiles by the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit upon them. *"He made no distinction between them and us but purified their hearts by means of faith also"* (Acts 15:9).

Peter insisted that if God demanded no more from the Gentiles than faith in Jesus Christ, the Church had no right to demand more. That was tantamount to testing God. To insist upon circumcision and the observance of the-Mosaic law, he went on to explain, was to place a yoke on the converted Gentiles, a yoke that the Jews themselves had been unable to bear. Peter concluded his

presentation by formulating the true belief of the Christian Faith. He declared, *"Our belief is rather that we are saved by the favor of the Lord Jesus and so are they" (Acts 15:11).*

In truth, within the New Covenant established in the Blood of Jesus Christ, the keeping of God's commandments became an effect and fruit of salvation-- a sign of salvation but not a cause of salvation. The Church recognized Peter's decision as *"the decision of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:28a)*. Therefore it became the decision of the true Christian Community. *"At that the whole assembly fell silent" (Acts 15:12a)*. Public discussion on the matter ended.

Nevertheless James, the presiding presbyter in Jerusalem, had something to add. In the mind of James there still existed a social problem: the problem of those who still observed the Mosaic law communicating with those who did not. He went on to insist upon some stipulations. For the sake of Christian unity and communion, Gentile Christians should observe certain Levitical laws: *"We should merely write to them to abstain from anything contaminated by idols, from illicit sexual union, from the meat of strangled animals, and from eating blood" (Acts 15:20).*

These requirements were more to satisfy the Jerusalem Jews and apparently were never promulgated in the churches where the Gentiles predominated, as in Corinth.

Jerusalem sent an official delegation to Antioch with a letter. The letter plainly stated that the Jewish Christians, who had upset the peace of mind and conscience of the Antiochean Congregation by their erroneous teachings, had acted without any authority from the Apostles or presbyters in Jerusalem. The letter informed a delighted and much encouraged congregation: *"It is the decision of the Holy Spirit, and ours too, not to lay on you any burden beyond that which is strictly necessary" (Acts 15:28)*. This formal decision by the teaching authority of the Church saved the Christian Church from being a Jewish sect--from becoming no more than "the sect of the Nazoreans." This decision resulted, in no small part, from the zeal and wisdom of Paul of Tarsus. It was precisely this controversy that stimulated Paul's letter to the Galatians.

Before turning our attention specifically to the Galatian letter, let us carry the historical thread of the Jerusalem Church to some completion. Under the leadership of James, the Christian Community in Jerusalem remained

devoutly Jewish. The Jewish Christians remained good citizens, observing the Mosaic law as both their religious and civil law. Josephus, the Jewish historian, relates that Ananias II, whose infamous father participated in the trial of Jesus, put James to death. Taking advantage of an interim between Roman procurators (Festus having died and his successor Albinus not having arrived), Ananias called a meeting of the Sanhedrin and:

brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned (Ant. Bk.XX, Ch. IX sec.1).

Symeon, a cousin, succeeded James as Bishop of Jerusalem. Symeon was the son of Clopos, and was believed to be the nephew of Joseph. According to the Christian historian Eusebius, Symeon lived to an advanced age, dying a martyr in 106 A.D. under Trajan. The Jewish nation revolted against Roman rule in 66 A.D.

Warned by prophecy, the Christian Community, under the leadership of Symeon, fled Jerusalem before its destruction by the Romans in 70 A.D. The Christians fled north across the Jordan into the Decapolis area. The Jewish Christians reestablished their church in the Gentile city of Pella.

Following the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple, drastic changes occurred within the Jewish and Christian communities. With the passing of temple worship and sacrifice, the Jewish Christians had to reevaluate their relationship to the Mosaic law. Some scholars believe that the Epistle to the Hebrews appeared at this time to aid Jewish Christians in their readjustment. They came to recognize that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, the perfect and eternal sacrifice, replaced the old sacrifices of the temple. They now understood the symbolism behind the cleansing of the temple by Jesus. In Jesus, animal sacrifice and the need for such a temple had come to an end. The Body of Jesus had replaced the temple.

Some time after the fall of Jerusalem, Jewish leaders concentrated their efforts upon the preservation of the Jewish Religion. They sought the expulsion of all Christian Jews from the synagogues. The line between the Christian and Jewish communities became more sharply drawn. Until this time, the Christian Religion existed within the Roman Empire under the accepted and legitimate umbrella of Judaism. Judaism made it clear by its

anathemas and excommunications that Christians had no place in Judaism. Under Roman Law, which forbade the establishment of new religions or the promulgation of provincial religion beyond their native territories, Christians were placed in a precarious situation. As a new and proselytizing religion, Christianity fell under the censure and condemnation of Roman Law. No longer considered law-abiding citizens, Christians were martyred for the crime of irreligion and impiety.

In 132 A.D. a Palestinian leader calling himself Bar-Cochba (meaning "the Son of the Star") declared himself to be the promised Messiah, and led a Jewish revolt against Rome. The Christians of Palestine naturally refuted his claims, and became the special targets of persecution by Bar-Cochba and his followers. Hadrian crushed the revolt in 135 A.D. and razed the city of Jerusalem to the ground. Upon its ruins he built a new city, Aelia Capitolina. No Jew was permitted within sight of the wall of the city. Christians, however, because of their opposition to the rebel leader and his revolt, were welcomed within Aelia Capitolina. From this time on, the Bishop of Jerusalem and the congregation became largely Gentile.

This was not the end of the Jewish-Christian problem. In his Dialogue with Trypho, St. Justin Martyr, who was born in Nabalus in Samaria at the beginning of the second century, writes of the existence of two classes of Christian Jews. One sect retained the Mosaic law, but did not wish to impose it upon their Gentile brothers. The other sect insisted that all Christians conform to the Mosaic law as a necessary condition for salvation. Seemingly, certain groups of this sect also maintained that Jesus was a mere man. Later the two groups are referred to respectively as "Nazarenes" and "Ebionites."

Because the city of Pella was near Samaria, St. Justin may have been familiar with the Christian settlements that remained in the area after the Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem and Palestine following the Roman conquest in 70-73 A.D. Several centuries later, both Eusebius and St. Jerome mention a sect of Nazarenes dwelling in the Pella region. They were descendants, no doubt, of those earlier exiled Jewish Christians who had refused later to return to Palestine. As mentioned by St. Justin, the Nazarenes still accepted the Mosaic law but rejected the Pharisaic interpretation of the law. They still acknowledged communion with Gentile Christians and recognized the mission of Paul to the Gentiles. There was some question about their teaching concerning the nature of Christ; but to the mind of Jerome, their major point of separation from the Christian Church was their observance of the Mosaic

law. These Nazarenes lamented the rejection of Jesus by the Jews and prayed for their conversion to Jesus Christ.

Jerome and Eusebius also reported finding the sect of Ebionites in the Pella area. This sect was much larger and wider spread than that of the Nazarenes. Ebionites were found in Rome and in the other great cities where Jewish congregations could be found. The Ebionites still insisted upon circumcision and the observance of the Mosaic law. They rejected Gentile Christians as impure. They especially abhorred the Epistles of St. Paul, and personally condemned Paul and his ministry to the Gentiles.

The Ebionites were a heretical sect; they accepted Jesus as the Messiah but denied His Divinity. They professed Him to be a mere man, born of Mary and Joseph. They claimed that Jesus sanctified Himself through His strict observance of the Mosaic law. One group of Ebionites was strongly Pharisaic in origin, and another group strongly Essene in origin, which gave the group more of an ascetical and mystical nature. All Ebionites had one thing in common: their rejection and hatred of Paul. They were, in spirit at least, the children of those Judaizers who opposed Paul and his work whenever and wherever possible.

These sects had all but disappeared by the middle of the fifth century: probably absorbed either into the Christian Church or the Jewish synagogue. However, we see from this brief historical review that the fires of dissension enkindled by the Jewish-Gentile controversy in Antioch and in the Council of Jerusalem were not easily distinguished. The error and the spirit of divisiveness spawned by the Judaizers survived for centuries, nourished by heretical Christian sects. Their historical hatred of Paul of Tarsus gives silent testimony to the powerful effect of his work, written and otherwise, for the preservation of a pure Christian Faith.

### WHEN, WHERE, AND TO WHOM?

There is little agreement among scholars as to the recipients of this Epistle. Generally, all agree that the time of its writing depends upon to whom it was written. Two major schools of thought exist. We know from Acts that Paul and Barnabas traveled through the southern section of Galatia on their first missionary journey. They made converts in the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium, and Derbe. Some scholars believe the Epistle was written to the Christians living in these southern cities of Galatia. Those of this school of

thought place the composition of the Letter in Antioch (Syria), or maybe Corinth, and possibly written as early as 49 A.D. This would make Galatians the first New Testament Epistle written by Paul.

Acts records a second missionary journey by Paul, with Silas rather than Barnabas. These two traveled through both the southern and northern sections of Galatia. The northern section was, properly speaking, the traditional Galatian territory. Acts records, "*They next traveled through Phrygia and Galatian territory*" and finally came to Mysia (see Acts 16:6-7). Certain scholars insist that Paul addressed his Epistles to Christians living in Ancyra, Pessinus and Tavium--cities of northern Galatia. This theory would place the writing of the Epistle sometime around 51 to 54 A.D., from Corinth or Ephesus. It would place its writing after the Letters to the Thessalonians and even, maybe, after the Letters to the Corinthians.

Scholars favoring the theory of the northern cities argue that Paul makes reference to the people as "Galatians." They point out that in other ancient writings of the time the term "Galatians" was restricted to those living in Galatia proper. They observe that Luke, in his references to the cities in the south, uses the traditional names for the territories, such as, "Lycaonian." However, when Luke writes on Paul's third missionary journey, he certainly referred to the southern cities as part of Galatia when he wrote, "*After spending some time there [Antioch] he set out again, traveling systematically through the Galatian country and Phrygia to reassure all his disciples*" (Acts 18:23).

The scholars insist that Paul's reference to the fickleness of the Galatians fits well the traditional description of the people from the old Galatian territory. They stress the point that while Paul seemingly addresses a congregation primarily Gentile, the congregations within the southern cities were composed of both Jews and Gentiles.

Cogent arguments exist for both theories as we shall see. However, this writer feels that the theory supporting the Christians in the southern cities of Galatia as the recipients of the Epistle is stronger and more credible. First of all, Luke, the historian, mentions in some detail Paul's visits to these cities on both the first and second missionary journeys. Luke makes no mention whatsoever of any Christian communities established by Paul in Northern Galatia, which is a strange silence and omission for a historian recounting the movement of the Church westward. Scholars make much of the fact that Luke omits any



reference to a sickness of Paul on the first missionary journey. Luke, in fact, never mentions any sickness at all on the part of Paul. This illness of Paul's may explain why on his first missionary journey, the group did not linger on the coast, but pushed on into the higher altitudes of Pisidian Antioch. The climate may have been more conducive for an ill man than the malaria infested Perga. Luke mentions: *"From Paphos, Paul and his companions put out to sea and sailed to Perga in Pamphylia... They continued to travel on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia"* (Acts 13:13-14).

An important fact in the mind of this writer is that Paul mentions the name of Barnabas three times in this Epistle. The reference in Gal.2:13 at least implies the Galatians were personally familiar with not only the name of Barnabas, but also with his character. On the second missionary journey, when certain scholars believe Paul visited the northern cities of Galatia, Silas had replaced Barnabas as his traveling companion. Not only is Barnabas not with Paul, but his absence is the result of a bitter dispute. As Luke mentions, *"The disagreement which ensued was so sharp that the two separated"* (Acts 15:39). The aftermath of such disputes usually leaves hurtful feelings, even in the best, needing the cure of time and grace. There would have been little reason for Paul to have made mention of Barnabas in northern Galatia.

The fact that Luke mentioned the historical names of territories would certainly be in keeping with a historian's account. It would not be surprising that Paul would make a reference to a popular area in a personal letter. For over a hundred years the cities Pisidian Antioch, Lystra, Iconium and Derbe had been incorporated into the Province of Galatia. Paul, being a Roman citizen reared within a Roman province, would naturally be expected to refer to people under their provincial title. Paul definitely sent *"greetings to the churches in Galatia"* (Gal.1:2). If he addressed this to the churches in southern Galatia, what generic name other than "Galatians" could they be grouped under? Historically, they had other names, such as Pisidians and Lycaonians. As to the fickleness of the recipients of the Epistle: who could have been more fickle than the inhabitants of Lystra, who at one moment declared Paul and Barnabas to be the gods Zeus and Hermes and at another moment stoned Paul and left him for dead?

As mentioned earlier, determining to whom the letter was written helps to proximate when and where Paul wrote the Epistle. The evidence within the Epistle indicates Paul wrote it a short time after the conversion of the Galatians. At the time of the writing of the Epistle, the Council of Jerusalem

had apparently occurred. Paul appears to narrate his own account of the council in his letter. It would have been at this meeting in Jerusalem that the Judaizers in Jerusalem would have learned of the conversion of the Gentiles in southern Galatia. Assuming Paul wrote to the cities in southern Galatia, it is hypothesized that Paul wrote the Epistle to the Galatians from Antioch around 50 A.D. At the time of its composition, Paul was probably unable to go directly to Galatia, perhaps because of weather conditions or some prior commitment.

## THE MESSAGE

News that the Galatians had defected from the true faith reached Paul. This news stimulated his Letter to them. Seemingly the Christians in Galatia had been subjected to the same pressure as the Christians in Antioch. Members of the circumcision party, arriving in Galatia, effectively preached the doctrine that Gentile converts must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic law in order to be saved.

In order to have their brand of Christianity accepted, the members of the circumcision party had shrewdly resorted to the tactic of destroying the credibility of their opposition. They convinced the Galatians that Paul had failed to preach the true Christian Gospel to them. They attributed his erroneous teachings to his personal desire to be accepted and approved by human beings. According to his critics, he was obviously a man who sought to please men rather than God. In order to weaken Paul's teaching authority, they insinuated he was a bogus apostle speaking without divine authority. They presented themselves as the legitimate representatives of the Apostles in Jerusalem.

The Epistle begins by Paul bluntly expressing his opinions of the Galatians' present situation. They have been seduced into accepting a false gospel, having fallen under an evil spell, causing them confusion of mind and inconstancy of heart. They have been reduced to foolishness in their religious life. Paul, who blesses so well, wastes no time cursing those responsible for this lamentable spiritual condition: the pseudo-disciples of Christ who had wormed their way into the body of the Church in order to destroy its life-giving spirit. "*Let a curse be upon him!*" who teaches a false gospel, cries Paul (see Gal.1:8-9).

Wisely, Paul perceives that the credibility of his teachings depends upon the genuineness of his apostolic authority to proclaim the gospel. Forced by the

attacks of his enemies, Paul defends his apostolic authority and proceeds to defend the truth of the gospel. It became a battle cry with him: *"I will not treat God's gracious gift as pointless. If justice is available through the law, then Christ died to no purpose!"* (Gal.2:21).

The Epistle to the Galatians certainly has permanent value for the Christian Community. Here we are taught the meaning of an apostle, and what is the essential content of the true gospel. Within the content of this Epistle, Paul also deals with legalism, license, and liberty. These are three issues vital to Christian life in every age. In a defense against legalism, Paul declares that *"only faith which expresses itself through love"* accounts for anything in Christ (Gal.5:6). While Paul seeks to free the Christian from a spirit of legalism, which binds, narrows, and stifles the life of the spirit, he insists, on the other hand, that a Christian must be guided by law. This is in order to avoid a spirit of license and libertinism, which leads to mental impoverishment, moral decay, spiritual bankruptcy and boredom. He declares there is a spirit of liberty that paradoxically realizes itself in a spirit of *"bondage to Christ."* He reveals true liberty, which discovers its essential dimensions in its obedient submission to the *"Law of Christ."* Paul writes: *"Remember that you have been called to live in freedom--but not a freedom that gives free rein to the flesh..."*(5:13). *"Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires"* (5:24).

In the mind of Paul, the spirit of the Christian truly becomes the Phoenix that arises to new life out of its own ashes. Through its crucifixion of the flesh, the Christian frees itself from being an earth-bound soul, and permits the spirit, with eagle wings, to soar into the heavens. It is the spirit of self-sacrificing love that charts the spirit's course to the true freedom of the children of God. On this course, the spirit never grows weary of doing good (Gal. 6:9), and while it has the opportunity, does good to all men--*"but especially those of the household of the faith"* (Gal.6:10).

*"Peace and mercy on all who follow this rule of life, and on the Israel of God... Since we live by the spirit, let us follow the spirit's lead... All that matters is that one is created anew"* (Gal.6:10; 5:25; 6:15b).

## CHAPTER 3

### THE APOSTLE OF GOOD NEWS

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul strikes defensive chords with the opening notes of his epistle to the Galatians. In keeping with the literary custom of the time, his introduction identifies the writer and the recipients of the letter, and also conveys well wishes and blessings from the sender. Paul omits, out of a sense of sincerity, the customary praise and thanksgiving for the recipients of the letter. At the moment his heart held neither praise nor gratitude for the Galatians, which indicated only too well the depth and length of their deviation from gospel truth. The introduction betrays a writer not bothered with civil niceties, but one impatient to move on to the urgent matters at hand. The brief introduction, like a volatile capsule, fairly explodes with the high emotional content of the letter. It begins, "*Paulos Apostolos:*"

*Paul, an apostle, sent not by men or by any man, but by Jesus Christ and God his Father who raised him from the dead--I and my brothers who are with me send greetings to the churches in Galatia. We wish you the favor and peace of God our Father and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, to rescue us from the present evil age, as our God and Father willed--to him be glory for endless ages. Amen (Gal.1:1-5).*

With the first two words, "*Paulos Apostolos,*" he boldly places himself alongside the twelve Apostles, and states the authority by which he preaches the Gospel. The opening statement defends Paul's apostolic authority against any such accusations that he owes his position to the Church at Antioch or the laying on of hands by Ananias of Damascus. Paul attributes the source of his apostolic authority to God the Father, and he acknowledges the Risen Jesus Christ as the instrument through which he received his commission. He presents himself before the Galatians no less an apostle than the Twelve.

Seemingly, Paul implies that the letter represents not only his own feelings and thoughts, but those also of his fellow Christians--"*my brothers who are*

*with me.*" These may have been either the Christians in Antioch or Corinth, or his missionary companions. These are aware of the content of his letter as he shared and reflected it with them. They, too, share in the sentiments expressed by him to the Galatians.

Paul uses the introduction to succinctly express that grace and peace, the fruits of the Gospel, came through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. In other words, he implies that union with God, peace of conscience and fellowship with the Holy Spirit became available to mankind through the generosity of God the Father, who willed that the Lord Jesus Christ should die for our sins. His death being the only grounds of our acceptance by God and by which we are now entitled to grace and peace. Furthermore, Paul claims Christian that deliverance from this present evil age results from the atoning death of Jesus Christ, not from any good work of man.

Paul speaks of being rescued from the present evil *aeon*. Among the Greeks *aeon* denoted the appointed lifetime of man in which some fate or destiny ruled the course of life. To the mind of Paul, present human life was under an evil power opposing the Will of God--"*the god of the present age,*" which blinded the minds of men so as not to behold the glory of God shining upon the face of Christ (see 2Cor.4:4), an *aeon* ruled by men headed for destruction (1Cor.2:6). The death of Jesus delivered Christians from this evil, destructive power. Deliverance and freedom from bondage strikes the keynote of this Epistle.

In the mind of Paul, the Gospel has become a glorious revelation of that perfect union of divine wisdom, holiness, and love which, lasting forever, gives infinite glory to God. To the truth it proclaims Paul adds--in Hebrew-his yes, his "*Amen!*"

Evidently from Paul's opening statement and subsequent remarks, the idea of being an apostle of Jesus Christ was important to Paul. He is adamant that he is no less an apostle than the Twelve. Many in the early Church were unwilling to acknowledge this claim.

### A DISCIPLE OF JESUS

The Scriptures record that Jesus, went up the mountain and summoned the men he himself had decided on, who came and joined him. He named twelve as his companions whom he would send to preach the good news; in addition,

they were to have authority to expel demons (Mk.3:13-15). Here, Mark tells us that Jesus personally chose twelve men to closely associate with him, and on some future date he would send them out with power to preach the gospel. Luke writes that these twelve were selected to be "apostles": *Then he went out to the mountain to pray spending the night in communion with God. At daybreak he called his disciples and selected twelve of them to be his apostles (Lk.6:12-13).*

Matthew refers to the twelve as "*the twelve apostles*" (see Mt.10:1). These twelve men were essentially disciples of Jesus Christ, chosen by Him for a special mission. They subsequently appear within the Church as a unique group possessing authority and leadership. From the Book of Revelation we see that these twelve men in some way became the foundation stones of the Church. Speaking of the New Jerusalem, "*the holy city,*" John writes: "*The wall of the city had twelve courses of stones as its foundation, on which were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb*" (Rv.21:14).

Foundational to being an apostle was being a disciple of Jesus Christ. In what did this discipleship consist? The Greek word *mathetes* is translated "disciples." It denotes a person who directs time and energy to the acquisition of knowledge under the tutelage of a person superior in that knowledge. The disciple, as an apprentice, seeks to acquire specific knowledge and behavioral skills according to a deliberate and set process. There is a dependent relationship upon a master, which is not dissolved until the completion of discipleship. In such a discipleship, learning is essential, and the technical and the rational dominate. Likewise, the relationship between the disciple and the master is essential to discipleship. The permanency of the relationship is of the essence. A disciple is no dilettante. Discipleship can never be merely an external effort at acquiring information or aptitude from an expert in the field. The normal student-teacher relationship today could hardly be construed as discipleship.

The concept of discipleship is rare in the Old Testament; the prophets had their servants and associates, but not their disciples. In the New Testament the word appears 250 times. Normally it refers to the disciples of Jesus, but there is mention of disciples of John the Baptist and Moses. In general, Israel saw itself as a whole people, as the disciples of Yahweh. Israel was a people constantly in the state of learning the Will of Yahweh. Rabbi Hillel taught that "he who does not learn is worthy of death." He argued that Israel is the People of God only because it is the People of the Torah (the Law). Not to study the Torah therefore is to disdain the will of Yahweh and to impede His

work of election. This, in the mind of Rabbi Hillel, makes a person worthy of death. The veneration of religious leaders had no place in ancient Judaism. Its great prophets never proposed themselves as sources of esoteric knowledge, but only as the transmitters or mouthpieces of Yahweh. Their kings only fulfilled the task assigned them by Yahweh.

The Hebrew word equivalent to disciple would be *talmid*, which means a learner. A man studying under a noted rabbi was called a talmid. A young man hoping to become a rabbi would come to a rabbi such as Gamaliel, in order to acquire his knowledge and method. The rabbi would welcome the young man as a talmid as long as he readily accepted instruction with open acceptance and with faithful perseverance.

There are essential differences between being a talmid in the rabbinic concept and being a disciple of Jesus. With Jesus, discipleship becomes a unique relationship. It demands a personal attachment on the part of the disciple to the Person of Jesus, which shapes the entire life of the disciple. However, in the first place, Jesus calls his own disciples; they do not choose Him. The final say of who belongs to Him remains with Him. Historically, He appears to call those who do not enjoy the necessary qualifications for intimate relationship with Him. In the second place, the relationship between Jesus and His disciples is unique. The emphasis lies not upon learning but upon commitment to the Person of Jesus. Christian Discipleship is essentially concerned with the Person of Jesus. The Person of Jesus is offered as an object of divine faith: *"Have faith in God and faith in me.... Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?" (Jn.14:1,10).*

Faith in Jesus becomes the essential characteristic of Christian Discipleship. A disciple of Jesus is primarily committed to the Person of Jesus and not to the acquisition of knowledge. The Word, or the Will of God, only exerts power over the soul after the person is committed to the Person of Jesus. When the person is deeply impressed by the Person of Jesus, the spirit obediently follows its Lord. After the death of Jesus, there is no evidence that His followers found consolation in His teachings or strength from them to go on. It was His Person that mattered. Their fear and despondency was due to His absence, His death. It was the Presence of the Risen Jesus that restored them to discipleship.

The failure of much of our Christian education lies in the fact that we teach the teachings of Jesus Christ to students who have made no commitment to



the Person of Jesus. We put the cart before the horse. We believe commitment will follow knowledge, but apparently it follows experience. Perhaps because a person is a social Christian, we assume a commitment. The hard evidence indicates that many students go through twelve or sixteen years of Christian education and never become personally committed to Jesus Christ. Their education had no more effect than that of any other good philosophical or ethical course.

Christian Disciples are primarily listeners of the Word, and obedience to the Word is the hallmark of discipleship. This obedience is expressed inwardly in belief and outwardly in action. An intellectual appreciation of the Word is important, but it is not primary. Intellectual appreciation cannot produce faith or obedience. However it gives light to faith and encouragement to obedience.

Christian Discipleship in this life does not become a step toward a higher step. It becomes life's goal to the end to believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him as Lord. Jesus remains the One who gives. There is friendship with Jesus but no equal partnership. The Evangelist John insists that Jesus gives to those who believe in Him and are willing to be molded by Him.

It follows, as the sun follows the night, that the disciple must share in the life of Jesus. The world would receive the disciple as it received Jesus. Discipleship implies suffering in this world for the sake of Jesus, who suffered in the world for the sake of God--suffered because He perfectly fulfilled the Will of God in a world opposed to the Divine Will.

Discipleship equally implies work in this world. Jesus Christ became no contemplative Buddha or guru, turning inwardly to gaze upon the navel of inner being and origin. Jesus turned his mind, heart, and hands outwardly. He had compassion on the multitude. He said the Son of Man came to serve and not to be served. The task of Jesus in this world becomes the task of His disciples. *"As you sent me into the world so I send them into the world."* (Jn.17:18). Luke records that Jesus sent out seventy-two disciples, two-by-two, in keeping with the Torah's demand for two witnesses for authentic testimony. It has been said that the primary task of every disciple in the world is to witness Jesus in a personal way and that the earlier disciples knew nothing of this business of the "imitation of Christ."

## AN APOSTLE OF JESUS

From this standpoint of a deeper understanding of discipleship, let us now turn to the concept of apostle. How did the early Church understand the term apostle? The word itself comes from the Greek *apostolos*. In classical usage, the term denoted the sending of a fleet on a military expedition. It became a nautical term for a naval expedition. With time, it received a wider application, embracing any group of people sent out on a particular enterprise, not merely an army, but bands of colonists and their settlements. In this classical definition, the term carries the idea of passivity because the *apostolos* lacks initiative entirely. Apostles are people who obediently respond to their mission. Applying this classical definition the Twelve could be seen as obedient soldiers of Christ the King, sent forth to establish the Kingdom of God on earth.

In the Greek classical definition, *apostolos* denotes the quality of being sent, without conveying the idea of being a messenger. In a much later work within the first century, Josephus, the Jewish historian, uses the term to signify "emissaries" that were sent to Rome. In the Greek Septuagint Bible, *apostolos* appears only as "messenger" in 1Kings 14:6, when the Prophet Ahijah is commissioned to deliver a message to the wife of King Jeroboam. Generally scholars agree that the proper understanding of apostles in the New Testament must be found within a Hebrew-Aramaic background. An adequate explanation of the term can be found in the rabbinic institution of the *siluiah* or in Aramaic, the *saluah*. This was a legal rather than a religious institution, but one often used for religious purposes.

The *siluiah* were those legally authorized to act in the name of another person or party. It consisted in authorized representatives being sent, usually some distances from the sender, to act legally or representatively in the name of the sender. These authorized persons were equivalent to ambassadors empowered to act and speak in the name of another. Marriage engagements were often transacted through the *saluah*. The *saluah* represented the other person and his rights. The rabbis believed that "the one sent by a man is as the man himself." Whatever honor belonged to the sender must be paid to the *saluah*. Shameful treatment of the *saluah* was considered directed toward the sender, and could not be ignored by him.

Usually the *saluah* consisted of ordained rabbis, who were set apart for their task by the laying on of hands in the name of the person or the party they

represented. Usually two or more representatives were sent, rarely one alone. The Great Sanhedrin often sent forth rabbis as plenipotentiaries to the Diaspora (Jews living beyond Palestine) to carry out a particular task for the Sanhedrin. On the Feast of the Atonement, the Jewish high priest became for Israel its solitary representative before the Holy of Holies.

In the sense of the *saluah*, we can see that an apostle is one who is committed by obedience to a mission, a man under orders who, in order to fulfill his mission, must empty himself out, so to speak, so that he may adequately represent another. He acts not in his own name, nor through his own power, but in the name and in the power of the sender. From the gospel account, we note that Jesus gave His apostles the power to cast out demons. What a disastrous mistake would be made if they sought to encounter such evil forces with the power of their own souls!

Jesus probably used the Aramaic *saluah* when He referred to the Twelve as apostles. As already noted the Twelve were first and foremost disciples of Jesus. Being apostles was something other than being a disciple, but certainly being no less a disciple. When Mark speaks of the selection of the Twelve to accompany Jesus, he signifies that they will, in the future, become apostles. During Jesus' ministry the Twelve are temporarily commissioned to be apostles. When they completed their mission they returned to their task of accompanying Jesus, being intimately associated with Him and schooled by Him. As one studies their situation with the Lord, it becomes evident that the Twelve were disciples and apostles, but they also were something other than disciples and apostles. Only after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead do the Eleven (Judas having defected and died) receive a permanent commission as apostles of Jesus Christ. Matthew records:

*Jesus came forward and addressed them in these words: "Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth. Therefore go, make disciples of all the nations... And know that and I am with you always...until the end of the world" (Mt.28:18b-20).*

John the Evangelist gives this account:

*On the evening of that first day of the week, even though the disciples had locked the door of the place where they were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood before them. "Peace be with*

*you," he said. When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. At the sight of the Lord the disciples rejoiced. "Peace be with you," he said again. "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." Then he breathed on them and said: "Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn.20:19-22).*

From that moment on the lives of the Eleven must be apostolic, with all that their mission implies.

We learn from Acts how the Apostles interpreted their unique status as the Twelve. We see this in the business of determining who will replace the reprobate, Judas. Peter stands up amidst a congregation numbering about one-hundred-twenty and explained that while Judas was *"one of our number and he had been given a share in this ministry of ours" (1:17)*, he had become the traitor tragically ending his life.

Speaking of "our number" and "this ministry of ours," Peter distinguishes the Twelve from the rest of the disciples. He goes on quoting the Scriptures, *"May another take his office"* and adds:

*It is entirely fitting, therefore, that one of those who was of our company while the Lord Jesus moved among us, from the baptism of John until the day he was taken up from us, should be named as witness with us to his resurrection (Acts 1:19-22).*

We see that a requirement for being one of the Twelve was to have been associated with the entire public ministry of Jesus, and to have witnessed His resurrection and ascension. In other words, he had become so familiar with Jesus personally that he could verify, without a doubt, that the Person he encountered after the death of Jesus on the Cross was Jesus of Nazareth--glorified and raised from the dead. As Peter later preached:

*God raise(d) him up on the third day and grant(ed) that he be seen, not by all, but only by such witnesses as had been chosen beforehand by God--by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead (Acts 10:40-41).*

We must remember that the Risen Jesus had undergone such a physical transformation through the resurrection that He was not externally

recognized by one intimately associated with Him, such as Mary Magdalen. Paul explains this change when he writes the Corinthians:

*What is sown in the earth is subject to decay, what rises is incorruptible. What is sown is ignoble, what rises is glorious. Weakness is sown, strength rises up. A natural body is put down and a spiritual body comes up (1Cor.15:42-44).*

The Twelve were the official witnesses to the fact that this spiritualized Jesus Christ was the same Jesus of Nazareth crucified on Good Friday, died and was buried. Their intimate association with Him qualified them to teach everything He had commanded, and their reception of the Holy Spirit empowered them to fulfill their ministry.

This ministry of the Twelve--as living witnesses of the Resurrection--was obviously a ministry that could not be perpetuated within the Church. When the Apostle James was martyred by Herod Agrippa, he was not replaced. However, their mission to make disciples of the nations--to teach and sanctify--must continue through those ordained to do so. This was the universal mission of the Church of which the Twelve had become the foundation stones.

### THE APOSTLE PAUL

Now Paul insists that he stood equally with the Twelve as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. During our Lord's earthly life, Paul certainly had not been a disciple of Jesus. He came to faith in Jesus only after formal disbelief, and being a persecutor of Christians. However, Paul does insist that he is a witness to the Resurrection of Jesus. Writing to the Corinthians he says:

*Last of all he was seen by me, as one born out of the normal course. I am the least of the apostles; in fact, because I persecuted the Church of God, I do not even deserve the name. But by God's favor I am what I am. This favor of his to me has not proved fruitless. Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others, not on my own but through the favor of God (1Cor.15:8-11).*

We have learned from Acts that Paul, as part of the saluah of the Sanhedrin, had a conscious and sobering encounter with the Risen Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus. This was neither a vision nor mystical experience resulting

from prolonged prayer and fasting. Paul had a head-on collision with Jesus on the highway to Damascus. He found himself communicating with a celestial being more dazzling than the sun; an encounter that left him physically blinded. When Paul directly asked the Person to identify himself, the answer he received was the last thing in the world he expected to hear: *"I am Jesus the one you are persecuting!"* (Acts 9:5). Paul indeed became a witness not only to the Resurrection of Jesus, but to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Later, we see from Acts that Barnabas and Paul had been formally sent forth from Antioch on a missionary journey. We read:

*On one occasion, while they were engaged in the liturgy of the Lord and were fasting, the Holy Spirit spoke to them: "Set apart Barnabas and Saul for me to do the work for which I have called them." Then, after they had fasted and prayed, they imposed hands on them and sent them off* (Acts 13:2-3).

Some insisted that Paul was solely an apostle of the Church at Antioch. However, the words from Acts clearly manifest that both Barnabas and Paul were Apostles of the Holy Spirit. They were set apart for the Holy Spirit in order to do the work He called them to accomplish. The Scripture goes on to say, *"These two, sent forth by the Holy Spirit"* (13:4), went forth in the power of the Holy Spirit.

However, Paul predated his apostolic vocation prior to his ordination at Antioch. There are three accounts of his conversion in Acts. In the third account, the one before Agrippa, these words of Jesus are related:

*I am that Jesus who you are persecuting. Get up now and stand on your feet. I have appeared to you to designate you as my servant and as a witness to what you have seen of me and what you will see of me. I have delivered you from this people and the nations, to open the eyes of those to whom I am sending you, to turn them from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God; that through their faith in me they may obtain the forgiveness of their sins and a portion among God's people* (Acts 26:15-18).

After the encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus, Paul was told in Damascus by the Christian Prophet Ananias that he had been a chosen vessel: *"The God of our fathers long ago designated you to know his will, to look up the*

*Just One, and to hear the sound of his voice; before all men you are to be his witness to what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14). Ananias did not commission Paul, he only confirmed him.*

Paul visited Jerusalem after his conversion and had the following vision:

*I was praying in the court of the temple, where I fell into a trance and saw Jesus speaking to me. "You must make haste," he said. "Leave Jerusalem at once because they will not accept your testimony about me.... Be on your way. I mean to send you far from here, among the Gentiles" (Acts 22:17-18,21).*

Paul saw his vocation to the apostolate as comparable to the call of Jeremiah the Prophet--set apart and called by God before his birth. He told the Galatians: *"But the time came when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me by his favor chose to reveal his Son to me, that I might spread among the Gentiles the good tidings concerning him" (Gal.1:15).*

To no man, nor to any institution among men, did Paul attribute his role as an Apostle of Jesus Christ. God had integrated Paul into His plan for the salvation of mankind and within that plan he had become an integral part. God made Paul indispensable in His plan. Paul who had always sought submission to the Will of God recognized God's favor in his regard and so utterly cooperated with his mission that he was able to proclaim, *"the life I live now is not my own; Christ is living in me" (Gal.2:20).* Albeit Paul is not one of the Twelve but he is equally an Apostle with them, indeed an exception to the rule--as one born out of due time. As he said:

*All this has been done by God, who has reconciled us to himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation...he has entrusted the message of reconciliation to us. This makes us ambassadors for Christ, God as it were appealing through us (2Cor.5:18-20).*

In summary we may say that Paul experienced his role as an Apostle by the direct Will of God for him. He gave total, humble submission to this will. Come hell or the holy wrath of Jews or Christians, he would never be deterred from his vocation to be an Apostle of Jesus Christ. Nevertheless, Paul was no maverick apostle. He always worked within the structure of the early Church, accepting his ecclesiastical commission from the Church at Antioch. He

labored with the approval of the Jerusalem authorities. As he told the Galatians, these authorities recognized that:

*...I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised...and recognizing, too, the favor bestowed on me, those who were the acknowledged pillars, James, Cephas, and John, gave Barnabas and me the handclasp of fellowship, signifying that we should go to the Gentiles as they to the Jews (Gal.2:7-9).*

As Gordon Lightfoot remarked, "The Gentile Church, founded on the 'rock' must be handed over to the 'wise master-builder' to enlarge and complete."

### GRACE AND PEACE

Paul had a wish: a blessing of *charis* and *shalom* for the Galatians. It became his favorite wish for Christians that all would experience *charis* and *shalom*. These gifts were intrinsic to the Gospel. *Charis* is often translated as favor, grace, and gift.

To the mind of the writer these terms fail to convey the richness of meaning found in the Greek concept of *charis*. If we miss what Paul intended, how can we really say our "Amen" to it? In the classical Greek, *charis* meant "that which delights." In the mind of one ancient writer, a life without *charis* was a life without charm. It is a concept intimately related to joy. It was a state or condition causing joy to bubble up in the heart and overflow into the senses and emotions. *Charis* is being joyous, and it is charm, not in the sense of being beautiful, but in the sense of being delightful. When the *charis* of one results in the delight of another it becomes kindness. In classical Greek it came to signify "the favor or the blessings of the gods" and later, the favor of a ruler or the gracious disposition of a ruler toward a subject. *Charis* became the fruit of such a disposition--a gracious gift. *Charis* is an inner mood or disposition that outwardly manifests itself in a gracious act. It is a religious quality containing the supernatural power of love that streams down from above.

*Charis* embodies all this for Paul. For him, *charis* is like a diamond, catching, containing, and reflecting the light of the sun, for it contains and reflects the generosity of God to sinful mankind. *Charis* expresses the extravagance of God's love, which pours itself out freely with no consideration of the



worthiness of its recipients. It expresses that infinite liberality of God toward sinners, because His Son died for them on the Cross. The result of charis in the soul is justification--undeserved and unearned. Charis displays its inner power by the destruction of sin within the soul. For Paul, Law and charis oppose one another.

Between charis and shalom there is an intimacy and interdependence. From charis flows shalom. Of course Paul did not use the Hebrew word *shalom* but rather the Greek word *eirene*, which we translate as "peace." In the classical Greek, *eirene* signified the interlude between the seemingly everlasting state of war. Eirene was a supreme good, as from it flowed all blessings both for land and people. It was a state that touched the souls of the people.

Shalom would be the Hebrew equivalent of eirene. In its root meaning, *shalom* signifies "well being," which encompasses material prosperity. It expresses not only a state of being, but the relationship that follows from the People of God that zealously guard and fulfill the covenant with Yahweh. Within such a relationship a person experiences the well being of salvation called peace of soul. The Rabbis taught that within such a state Satan could find no entrance. Only with the departure of shalom from the soul was the door left open for the entrance of Satan. The state of shalom or peace became the condition sine qua non for the Presence of God within the soul. In other words, peace creates the condition within the soul in which God may work. Without this peace God works *upon* the soul, but not *within* the soul. He stands at the door, knocks and says, "Peace be to this house!" If peace finds entrance, God follows.

For Paul, shalom expresses salvation in its deepest sense. It is a spiritual state produced by the soul's union with God; a state in which the sick soul finds healing, health and fullness of life. All turmoil and anxiety are absent and the spirit, flourishing in the environment established, spreads well-being to the entire person, and beyond the person; Creation itself is touched. When shalom rules the soul it becomes a power effecting the peace of the universe--"*The world itself will be freed in the glorious freedom of the children of God*" (Rom.8:21). Shalom flows from the death and resurrection of Jesus. "*Peace,*" says the Risen Jesus to the children of God.

Law is the opposite of shalom for it divides Jew and Gentile and Jew and God. Shalom or eirene denotes peace with God, humanity, and the universe. Of necessity, shalom demands the abolishment of the Law.

## THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

After his brief but poignant introduction, Paul wastes little time in addressing himself to the vital issue at hand. He accuses the Galatians of abandoning God in their rejection of the gospel of Christ and with their acceptance of another gospel. He curses those who spread another gospel. Paul writes:

*I am amazed that you are so soon deserting him who called you in accord with his gracious design in Christ, and are going over to another gospel. But there is no other. Some who wish to alter the gospel of Christ must have confused you. For even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel other than the*

*one we delivered to you, let a curse be upon him! I repeat what I have just said: if anyone preaches a gospel to you not in accord with the one received, let a curse be upon him! (Gal.1:6-9).*

These are extremely strong sentiments for an apostle of Jesus Christ.

Evidently the preaching of another gospel other than the gospel of Christ strongly stirs the soul of Paul. We should ask ourselves: What, precisely, is meant by the concept of gospel, and what in particular does Paul mean by the gospel of Christ?

The word gospel appears sixty times in the writings of Paul. To express the gospel idea, Paul uses the Greek noun *euangelion*. The plural never appears in the New Testament. *Euangelion* means “good news,” or “glad tidings.” Spoken words truly are powers. The power of spoken words is equal to the content of the words. They carry the power to effect what they proclaim. When the content of a verbal message is joyous it causes joy in the hearer. The writer remembers the joy experienced when he received the news that a very good friend, in dire financial circumstances, had won a thousand dollars a month for the rest of his life. If the content of the news is tragic, it immediately produces sadness. The writer well recalls the day at the Catholic University in Ponce, when they announced that President Kennedy had been assassinated in Dallas. The news plunged the entire campus into instant grief. If news is fearful or horrible, it causes fear and horror in the hearts of its hearers. Imagine what the reaction would be in the United States if an announcement came that the U.S. dropped a nuclear bomb on Moscow.

Because of the power of the spoken word, Jesus warned people they would be held accountable for the effect of their careless and idle words. What is said with an ounce of thought behind it, may cause a ton of harm. We are responsible for the content of our mouths.

Ours is not a silent world. Words constantly floods our ears. Radios and televisions run endlessly. There are people who even sleep with them on. Truly, a continuous stimulus fails to stimulate. We constantly tune out much of what is heard for our own protection. So over-stimulated by words, it now takes a sensational message to elicit a noticeable emotional response from us. Nevertheless, we are not immune to what we hear. Even words heard but not listened to produce their subliminal effects upon human feelings and behavior.

The ancient world made a bearer of bad news responsible for the effect of the news. When a messenger brought the news of Saul's death to David, he expected David to rejoice over the death of his enemy. However, the news caused David anguish of soul, and he ordered the messenger executed. We read in Second Samuel:

*As the Lord lives, who rescued me from all difficulty, in Ziklag I seized and put to death the man who informed me of Saul's death, thinking himself the bearer of good news for which I ought to give him a reward (2Sam.4:9).*

As far as possible, bad news was understandably suppressed. On the other hand, the evangelist, the bearer of good news, must be rewarded for the joy his news causes; they deserve a reward. If such be the case today, most of our nightly news announcers on radio and television would daily be flogged rather than be paid money.

*Euangelion* became the technical term for news of victory in the ancient world. The actual arrival of a messenger carrying news of victory caused joy with his very entrance into the city. His appearance itself announced the good news--his spear was decked with laurel, his head was crowned, and in his hand he held a palm branch. On entering the city the messenger raised his right hand calling out in a loud voice, "Rejoice Victory!" Joy filled the city and immediately sacrifice was offered and a feast celebrated. Good news was a gift of the gods and therefore celebrated with a sacrificial feast. A slow messenger of good news was often punished for delaying the joy of the people.

Good news itself possessed intrinsic value. It not only announced joy and well-being, it actually caused it. The act of proclamation was essential, as it was the utterance of the words that caused the joyous reaction. In both the Scriptures and in the imperial cult, the ascension of a king or caesar to the throne was considered a euangelion--a gospel for the people. It introduced a new era with the hope of lasting peace. It has been said that the Caesar on his throne and the Christ upon His Cross have very much in common. Both are gospels, but they belong to two different worlds.

When we speak of "gospel," let us understand that we mean the utterance of good news that actually produces well-being within the hearers. The very announcement of the Christian Gospel produces salvation within those who believe. *"Go into the whole world and proclaim the good news to all creation. The man who believes in it and accepts baptism will be saved" (Mk.16:15-16).*

Paul informs the Romans of his being *"set apart to proclaim the gospel of God."* (Rom.1:1). He goes on to explain this "gospel of God:"

*--the gospel concerning his Son who was descended from David according to the flesh but was made Son of God in power according to the spirit of holiness, by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord (Rom.1:4).*

Proclaiming the gospel in its essence is to proclaim the Person, Jesus Christ our Lord. Certain facts concerning this Person evidently are essential to the proclamation of the gospel: He is the Son of God who became a human being, *"The Word became flesh" (Jn.1:14)*, sent by the Father as Savior of the world. The Son of God, Jesus Christ, saved mankind by suffering and dying on the Cross--His death becoming the adequate atonement for all sin. *"Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.1:29)*; He saved mankind from death by His resurrection from the dead and at His ascension he entered into lordship of the universe. He sent forth the Holy Spirit of God upon His disciples, establishing the Kingdom of God on earth. This Jesus--the Lord--will judge the living and the dead. In essence, this is the content of the "gospel of God" and the "gospel of Christ." Paul wrote the Corinthians:

*Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you... I handed on to you first of all what I myself received, that Jesus died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures; that he was buried*

*and, in accordance with the Scriptures, rose on the third day...this is what we preach and this is what you believed 1(1Cor.15:1,3-4,11).*

**Peter preached to the household of Cornelius:**

*This is the message he has sent to the sons of Israel, the good news of peace proclaimed through Jesus Christ who is Lord of all... God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power. He went about doing good works and healing all who were in the grip of the devil, and God was with him... They killed him, finally, hanging him on a tree, only to have God raise him up on the third day... He commissioned us to preach to the people and to bear witness that he is the one set apart by God as judge of the living and the dead...everyone who believes in him, has forgiveness of sins through his name (Acts 10:36ff).*

**At Pentecost Peter had gone on to proclaim:**

*Exalted at God's right hand, he first received the promised Holy Spirit from the Father, then poured this Spirit out on us... God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified (Acts 2:33,36).*

The knowledge that Jesus is the final Judge of all mankind brings joy to those who believe, for it assures their salvation. There is no condemnation in Jesus Christ. As Paul told the Corinthians concerning the gospel: *"You are being saved by it at this very moment if you hold fast to it as I preached it to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain"* (1Cor. 15: 2).

The gospel of Jesus Christ is essentially still good news of victory--the Victory of Jesus over sin and death.

**REJOICE VICTORY!**

## CHAPTER 4

### NO OTHER GOSPEL

#### THE ANATHEMA

Paul knew from personal experience the power of the Gospel to save and drastically change a human being. He taught the Corinthians, *"You are being saved by it at this very moment if you hold fast to it as I preached it to you. Otherwise you have believed in vain"* (1Cor.15:2). As to his preaching the Gospel personally, he confessed, *"I am under compulsion and have no choice. I am ruined if I do not preach it"* (1Cor.9:16). It deeply concerned him that the Galatians failed to hold fast to it. His children in the faith were in the process of defecting from the truth.

Paul's epistle is literarily a diatribe. It was a teaching method of the time which consisted in brief, blunt statements and questions proposed to an imaginary listener with the writer often answering his own questions. This authoritarian method of teaching did not allow equal time to opposing ideas. When it came to God's glory and the salvation of souls, Paul refused to be tolerant.

With a fatherly concern, Paul feared for the salvation of the Galatians. Their behavior shocked and dismayed him. He viewed it as a defection from God, not merely as confusion concerning Christ. He wrote, *"I am amazed that you are so soon deserting him who called you in accord with his gracious design in Christ, and are going over to another gospel"* (Gal.1:6).

The Galatians are not only being turned away, they willingly cooperate in their defection. This defection is in process. The evil leaven has entered the mass and, given time, the corruption will be complete. There is no "other" gospel in the mind of Paul, this proposed "other" being no more than a perversion of the one true gospel--nothing but a spurious semblance. Paul's resentfulness for the Galatians does not reach rejection. He hopefully writes in order to correct their errors and return them to that path which assures salvation.

When it comes to the men responsible for the trouble in Galatia, it is another issue. It's a removal of the gloves, and no holds barred. Paul manifests sincere anger in the degree to which the matter disturbs him. He anathematizes those responsible. In a word, he curses them. He intends the curse, no doubt, as an implied warning to the Galatians as to the seriousness of the course upon which they are charted. Solemnly Paul declares:

*For even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel not in accord with the one we delivered to you, let a curse be upon him! I repeat what I have just said: if anyone preaches a gospel to you other than the one you received, let a curse be upon him! (Gal.1:8-9).*

It is a safe presumption that Judaizers from Judea have arrived in Galatia and are preaching, *"Unless you are circumcised according to the Mosaic practice, you cannot be saved"* (Acts 15:1). The Judaizers *"demanded that such Gentiles be circumcised and told to keep the Mosaic Law"* (Acts 15:5). Although these men professed belief in Jesus as the Messiah, Paul knew their teaching subtly destroyed the truth of the gospel. He viewed such men as false brethren, pseudo-Christians, wolves in sheep's clothing. Their sincerity did not impress him. He cursed and anathematized them. This implied he delivered them up to divine wrath, dedicated them to destruction. Such a curse implied spiritual death and deprivation of all spiritual blessings and means to grace. The cursed were considered dead to the Spirit of Christ. Paul's action definitely leaves little doubt that he considered himself infallible in this matter and that the Christian Religion possessed awesome spiritual powers. The Scriptures confirm that Jesus did impart such power to His Church:

*I assure you, whatever you declare bound on earth shall be held bound in heaven (Mt.18:18).*

*If you forgive men's sins, they are forgiven them; if you hold them bound, they are held bound (Jn.20:23).*

Paul's action is an implied belief in Jesus' declaration: *"Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth"* (Mt.28:18). Paul's curse was conditional and inclusive of himself and his companion. That it included angels intended to recall the Jewish belief that Moses received the Law

through the medium of angels. If an angel of the Old Covenant should bring from the heavens "another gospel" let that angel be cursed, says Paul. Paul clarifies that it is not some issue between preachers of the gospel giving various interpretations of the gospel; the issue at stake here is divine truth versus falsehood. Not even an angel from heaven can alter the truth that is in Christ! (We can well imagine the response of Paul to Joseph Smith, the Founder of Mormonism, who claimed to have received "another gospel" from an angel called "Moriah." Paul would have speedily told Moriah where to go.)

Paul's opponents accused him of watering down salvation in order to win the favor of men. They implied he taught a popular doctrine of "easy grace" in order to win human acceptance. They insisted that Paul sacrificed divine truth for the pleasure of people, thereby falsifying the true doctrine of salvation by claiming all men must be circumcised and observe the Mosaic Law in order to be saved. They believed that Paul was a hireling, a time-server without fixed principles, a veritable chameleon changing with every environment, a Jew with the Jews and a Greek with the Greeks.

Paul reasoned that men could no longer accuse him of seeking the good graces of men with his all inclusive anathema. He was aware of the displeasure his curse would cause. *"Whom would you say I am trying to please at this point--men or God? Is this how I seek to ingratiate myself with men? If I were trying to win man's approval, I would surely not be serving Christ!"* (Gal.1:10). Paul explicitly implies that being a disciple of Jesus Christ in no way pleases people of this world.

## DISCERNMENT OF SPIRITS

John the Evangelist agreed with Paul that Christians must not trust every person presenting himself as a gospel teacher. John writes: *"Do not trust every spirit, but put the spirits to a test to see if they belong to God, because many false prophets have appeared in the world"* (1Jn.4:1).

John insists there is a need to *"distinguish the spirit of truth from the spirit of deception"* (1Jn.4:5), for there are people who come in the name of Christ who are in reality an antichrist opposing the true Spirit of Christ. It is out of the Christian Communities that these deceivers emerge, warns John: *"It was from our ranks that they took their leave--not that they really belonged to us"* (1Jn.2:19.)



John insists these belong to a world alienated from Jesus. He wisely warns Christians to listen carefully with the third ear--to hear what is not being said. *"Theirs is the language of the world and why the world listens to them"* (1Jn.4:5). The spirit seeks the guru which pleases it. Mahatma Gandhi observed that a person usually got the guru one deserved.

Bishop Baldwin of Canterbury wrote:

It is written: "There are paths which a man thinks straight but which lead to hell." To avoid them, blessed John advises us to "test the spirits and see whether they are of God." But who can test the spirits unless God gives him the gift of discernment of spirits so that he can submit spiritual thoughts, affections, and intentions to penetrating and valid judgment? Yet discernment is the mother of all the other virtues and necessary for each of them, whether we be guiding others or directing and correcting our own lives.

To his companions, Timothy and Titus, Paul said:

*I charge you to preach the word, to stay with this task--whether convenient or inconvenient--correcting, reproofing, appealing--- constantly teaching and never losing patience. For the time will come when people will not tolerate sound doctrine, but, following their own desires, will surround themselves with teachers who tickle their ears. They will stop listening to the truth and will wander off to fables (2Tm.4:2-4).*

*There are many irresponsible teachers, especially from among the Jewish converts--men who are empty talkers and deceivers. They must be silenced. They are upsetting whole families by teaching things they have no right to teach--and all for sordid gain! ... Admonish them sharply, in an attempt to keep them close to sound faith, and unaffected by Jewish myths or rules invented by men who have swerved from the truth (Ti.1:10-11,13-14).*

The Christian Community received this warning in Second Peter:

*In times past there were false prophets among God's people, and among you also there will be false teachers who will smuggle in*

*pernicious heresies. They will go so far as to deny the Master who acquired them for his own, thereby bringing on themselves swift disaster. Their lustful ways will lure many away. Through them, the true way will be made subject to contempt. They will deceive you with fabricated tales, in a spirit of greed... These men pour abuse on things of which they are ignorant... They lure the weaker types. Their hearts are trained in greed (2Pt.2:1-3,12,14).*

The Christian Community must certainly seriously question any person whose teachings bring a divisive spirit into the Church--teachings that oppose the traditional teachings handed down from approved teachers through the centuries. As Paul told the Corinthians: *"I handed on to you first of all what I myself received"* (1Cor.15:3). Of course these false teachers claim the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Many centuries ago St. Cyril of Alexandria taught:

For though we are many separate individuals and Christ makes his and the Father's Spirit dwell in each separate one, yet that Spirit is himself one and indivisible. He therefore makes these separately subsisting individuals a unity through his presence; he makes them all be, in a way, a single entity through union with himself--"There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God, the Father of all." One Spirit dwells in us, and the One Father of all leads us through his Son to union with one another and with himself (St. Cyril of Alexandria).

It is of interest to note that in the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus commissioned His apostles early to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal and cast out demons, but he gave them no authority to teach until their training had been fully completed. This implied an understanding of His death and resurrection and its implication for mankind. Only then does He grant them the authority to teach. So to speak, then, He ordained them as Christian Rabbis:

*Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth; go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations... Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know that I am with you always, until the end of the world! (Mt.28:19-20).*

The Church rightly maintains that the Apostles received divine authority and assistance to teach the full revelation of God coming through Jesus Christ. Furthermore, it insists that the validly ordained Bishops of the Church have succeeded the Apostles as authoritative teachers within the Church, and today they teach in their names. Concerning bishops, Paul instructed Titus: *“In his*

*teaching he must hold fast to the authentic message, so that he will be able both to encourage men to follow sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it” (Ti.1:9).*

In order to protect Christian Revelation and Gospel Truth, no one can legitimately preach or teach publicly in the Catholic Church unless they do so in the name of the Bishop of the Diocese, and have been commissioned, in some way, to do so. Outside the Catholic Church the established institutionalized Christian Communities insist upon some control of the teaching and preaching within their respective congregations. However, many today seemingly exercise little control over the substance of what is preached or who is permitted to preach. Anyone with a glib tongue, a bible in hand, a bit of animal magnetism, and the medium of television can present oneself as an authority of Christian faith and morality and, alas, effectively sway millions. When it comes to what truly is the Will of God, too often it is the blind leading the blind to the pit. The sheep unscrupulously are led to the slaughter, and monetarily sheared along the way.

St. Thomas Aquinas gives this bit of sage advice: *“It is better to limp along the true way than to walk fearlessly apart from it. A man may limp along the true way and seem to advance but little, yet he does draw near the goal; but all the tireless running on the wrong road only takes one ever farther from the goal” (St. Thomas Aquinas).*

### PAUL BEFORE DAMASCUS

Paul declared that Jesus Christ Himself revealed the good news to him. *“I assure you, brothers, the gospel I proclaim to you is no mere human invention. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I schooled in it. It came by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal.1:11-12).*

Paul proceeds to demonstrate the truth of this statement, first, by recalling his life prior to his conversion:

*You have heard, I know, the story of my former way of life in Judaism. You know I went to extremes in persecuting the Church of God and tried to destroy it; I made progress in Jewish observance far beyond most of my contemporaries, in my excess of zeal to live out all the traditions of my ancestors (Gal.1:13-14).*

Paul's life prior to his conversion was public knowledge. At his hearing before King Agrippa, he testified that the Jews of Jerusalem knew the life he had lived since his youth. He said: *"They have been acquainted with me for a long time and can testify, if they wish, to my life lived as a Pharisee, the strictest sect of our religion"* (Acts 26:5).

When Paul addressed the Jews in the temple area he could say, *"I am a Jew, born in Tarsus in Cilicia, but I was brought up in this city. Here I sat at the feet of Gamaliel and was educated strictly in the law of our fathers. I was a staunch defender of God"* (Acts 22:3).

Paul probably came to Jerusalem as a young boy to live with his married sister (see Acts 23:16), and to study to be a Jewish rabbi. From childhood Paul had been introduced by his father into the Pharisaic sect of Judaism. *"I am a Pharisee,"* he said, *"and was born a Pharisee"* (Acts 23:6).

The name *Pharisee* implied "the separated ones," and they were Jews who separated themselves from anyone or anything that could contaminate them religiously. The Pharisees strictly observed all regulations of the Torah and numerous customs and traditions added by the rabbis to ensure a strict observance of the law. They accepted the prophets of Israel, and staunchly believed in an afterlife and the general resurrection of the good and the wicked. They tolerated no opposing ideas and refused to associate with those who held them. Paul implies there were distinctions in the degree one observed the Law, even among Pharisees. He insisted he surpassed many of his contemporaries. He became a veritable zealot in the observance of Judaism and in the defense of God. What the Galatians were now being taught by the Judaizers, Paul had even more strictly observed.

Even as a youth, Paul possessed that purity of soul that enabled him to wholeheartedly follow his religious ideas without tripping over his emotional needs or psychological deficiencies. Paul incarnated his faith into zealous action. Before Felix, the Roman Procurator, he professed, *"I believe all that is*

*written in the law and the prophets," and he confessed his hope "that there is to be a resurrection of the good and the wicked alike" (Acts 24:15). Because of his hope of eternal life he could say honestly, "In this regard I too always strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man" (Acts 24:16).*

Many share Paul's intense faith but lack the moral courage and fortitude to practice it to the same degree. Many who come to conversion do not do so with the moral integrity of Paul. The emotional disturbances of their lives, the residue of their past evil choices take their toll upon the soul. Many must embrace an asceticism of life for some time before they will possess that purity and strength of soul to completely abandon themselves to the will of God. St. Teresa of Avila spoke of "the bitter bread of self-knowledge" to be eaten daily along the way to union with God. Paul stood before the Jewish Sanhedrin, before men who knew him from youth, and before Gamaliel and declared, *"Brothers, to this day I have lived with a clear conscience before God" (Acts 23:1).*

Nevertheless there were times when this man with the "clear conscience" lived with an erroneous conscience before God, and these errors led a man of Paul's spirit to fight against the God he professed to love with all his soul. Presumably Paul was absent from Jerusalem during the public ministry of Jesus. Returning sometime after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, he probably encountered Christians for the first time in Stephen, while attending the "Synagogue of Roman Freedmen." Greek speaking Jews from Cyrene, Alexandria, Cilicia and Asia attended this synagogue while in Jerusalem (see Acts 6:9). Stephen, being a Greek-speaking Jew, no doubt attended this synagogue before and after his conversion. We are told that Jews from this synagogue engaged Stephen in debates, but they *"proved no match for the wisdom and spirit with which he spoke" (Acts 6:10).*

Paul and Stephen would have been acquainted. Were they ever friends? We cannot say. We do know that Stephen's arguments and preaching evoked an intense reaction in Paul against Stephen personally, and to Christianity in general. It is of interest psychologically that Paul approved the murder of Stephen but did not personally share in the stoning of Stephen. As he later said to Jesus, *"While the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood by and approved it. I even guarded the cloaks of those who killed him" (Acts 22:20).* If Stephen and Paul had ever been friends, the friendship ended with Stephen's conversion to Christ. Paul was the kind of man who would sacrifice anyone and anything for what he believed. Paul reacted to Christianity with

the violence of a fanatic, a religious zealot. Before King Agrippa he acknowledged:

*For my part, I once thought it my duty to oppose the name of Jesus the Nazorean in every way possible. That is just what I did in Jerusalem. With the authority I received from the chief priests, I sent many of God's holy people to prison. When they were to be put to death I cast my vote against them. Many a time, in synagogue after synagogue, I compelled them by force to blaspheme. Indeed, so wild was my fury against them that I pursued them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:9-11).*

Paul tells the Galatians, in so many words, that psychologically it was impossible for a man like himself to have been converted to Jesus Christ by any human presentation of the Gospel. Only some extraordinary spiritual experience could logically account for the fact that Saul of Tarsus was now the Apostle of Jesus Christ. Paul personally interpreted his vocation to have been in the category of the call of Jeremiah and Isaiah. We read in Jeremiah that the Lord said to him, *“Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I dedicated you, a prophet to the nations I appointed you” (Jer.1:5).*

The Prophet Isaiah writes: *“The Lord called me from birth, from my mother's womb he gave me my name. He made of me a sharp-edge sword and concealed me in the shadow of his arms... For now the Lord has spoken who formed me as his servant from the womb” (Is.49:1-2,5).*

Paul said of himself, *“But the time came when he who had set me apart before I was born and called me by his favor chose to reveal his Son to me, that I might spread among the Gentiles the good tidings concerning him” (Gal.1:15-16).*

## PAUL AFTER DAMASCUS

The Galatians are familiar with the account of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. The point Paul desires to stress is that he was not instructed in the gospel message by any member of the Church following his conversion--not even by the Apostles. What he knew of the Gospel he received through his personal encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and from subsequent visions. Paul proceeds to narrate a brief biography after his conversion to demonstrate the above truth.

To say the least, Paul's encounter with Jesus as Lord was a traumatic experience that affected every level of his personal existence. Save his naked devotion to the will of God, nothing remained as before. To his utter amazement he, Saul of Tarsus, by the will of God had suddenly become an appointed Apostle of Jesus Christ. All he could feel was, *"I am not worthy. I have been His persecutor."* His emotions ran the gamut. His human pride was totally devastated by the experience. Such an experience for a man of Paul's caliber demanded a time to reflect and contemplate. He must assess his experience in the prayerful light of God's grace. His past and future life must carefully be integrated into this divine call. Out of necessity he must be alone with God. He tells the Galatians, *"Immediately, without seeking human advisers or even going to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before me, I went off to Arabia; later I returned to Damascus"* (Gal. 1:16-17).

Some romantically envision that Paul, as did Moses and Elijah, spent time on Mt. Sinai. However, the journey to Mt. Sinai was a perilous journey under any conditions, and doubly so at the time of Paul's conversion. A war waged in the Sinai area between King Aretas IV and the Romans. Paul probably retired prudently to the desert area south of Damascus within the Nabataean Kingdom. There he prayerfully contemplated his commission. The Lord Jesus may well have communicated further with His servant Saul there in the silence of the desert.

Paul's stay in desert solitude was something less than three years. We next find him giving witness to his new-found faith in the synagogues of Damascus. To the Galatians he merely comments--*"later I returned to Damascus."*

Religious fervor naturally accompanies conversion, but religious prudence comes with the experience of time. Paul's fervor could not be doubted, but at times his prudence could be questioned. Prudence knows the goal to be achieved and the proper means by which to achieve it. Many godly enterprises fail because of imprudent zeal. Jesus warned His disciples to be prudent in this world as they fulfill their ministry. He told them, *"What I am doing is sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as snakes and innocent as doves. Be on your guard with respect to others"* (Mt.10:16-17).

Again he said, *"Do not give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before swine. They will trample them under foot, at best, and perhaps even tear you to shreds"* (Mt.7:6).

As mentioned, Paul returned to Damascus after his sojourn in Arabia. Soon he *"began to proclaim in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God."* His preaching of Jesus shocked the Jews of Damascus. They kept saying: *"Isn't this the man who wreaked such havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoke this name? Did he not come here purposely to apprehend such people and bring them before the chief priests?"* (Acts 9:21)

Paul became irrefutable in his presentation of Christ. He reduced the entire *"Jewish community of Damascus to silence with his proofs that this Jesus was the Messiah."* Their silence did not imply their consent. Paul gathered some disciples about himself, but apparently he made more enemies among the Jews than converts. Paul's ministry inspired some of the Jews to kill him with the official sanction of the ethnarch of King Aretas. *"Some of his disciples, therefore, took him along the wall one night and lowered him to the ground, using ropes and hamper"* (see Acts 9:19:25). This entire episode was a humiliation for Paul, and some years later he attributed it to his human weakness as he related the incident to the Corinthians:

*If I must boast, I will make a point of my weaknesses... In Damascus the ethnarch of King Aretas was keeping close watch on the city in order to arrest me, but I was lowered in a basket through a window in the wall and escaped his hands (2Cor.11:30,32-33).*

### PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM

The basket incident occurred about three years after his conversion. Only now does Paul return to Jerusalem. The persecutor returns as the apostle. But he receives no open-arm welcome from the Christian Community. Instead he meets fear and suspicion on his return there. Members of the Church avoid any contact with him. They place little faith in the story of his conversion. Many fear a subterfuge--the violent wolf returns in the sheep's clothing. Nevertheless, one Christian brother, Barnabas, puts faith in Paul. Befriended by Barnabas, his advocate before the Christian Community, Paul meets the leaders of the Church. Barnabas *"explained to them how on his journey Saul had seen the Lord, who had conversed with him, and how Saul had been speaking out fearlessly in the name of Jesus at Damascus"* (Acts 9:27b).

To the Galatians Paul gives this account after his flight from Damascus:

*Three years after that (his conversion) I went up to Jerusalem to get*



*to know Cephas, with whom I stayed fifteen days. I did not meet any other apostles except James, the brother of the Lord. I declare before God that what I have just written is true" (Gal.1:18-19).*

As mentioned earlier, this James, the recognized leader of the Jerusalem Community, was neither one of the Twelve Apostles nor the blood brother of Jesus. It is true that *adelphos*—"brother" in the classical Greek--meant blood brother. However, *adelphos* is used in the Septuagint Bible to translate the Hebrew *ah* when only kinsman was intended. Likewise *adelphos* appeared in certain Greek Egyptian papyri in the wide sense of relative.

Paul refers to Peter by the Aramaic *Cephas* (meaning rock)--the name given Simon by Jesus Christ. Paul says he went to Jerusalem *"to get to know Cephas."* Scholars have been quick to point out the use of the Greek word *historesia*, translated "to get to know." St. John Chrysostom observed that this is an expression usually reserved to express going to see a great and famous city; it suggests going to examine and study a place. Paul's use of the term seems to imply that Cephas is already something of an institution within the Church. The use of the term *historesia* implies Paul went to see Cephas, not out of common courtesy nor idle curiosity, but with the set purpose to learn. Presumably, Paul sought information about the ministry and teachings of Jesus, and the traditions of the early Church. This would not militate against Paul's claim of not receiving the Gospel from any man. These would be matters naturally sought from one of the intimate disciples of Jesus Christ.

We know more about Paul's first visit as a Christian to Jerusalem than he revealed to the Galatians. Not only did Paul visit privately with Peter, but he also publicly proclaimed Jesus Christ. He apparently wasted little time in showing up in the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen, taking over where Stephen left off. Paul felt personal guilt and responsibility for the death of Stephen, and experienced a deep psychological need to make reparation in Jerusalem for his death. The Lord Jesus denied Paul the luxury of fulfilling this need. Precisely at this time, while Paul prayed in the temple area, Jesus appeared to him and commanded him to leave Jerusalem. *"You must make haste,"* He said. *"Leave Jerusalem at once because they will not accept your testimony about me."* Paul reluctantly responded to this order, for he desired to remain and make restitution, regardless of the personal consequences. He complained:

*Lord, it is because they know that I imprisoned those who believed*

*in you and flogged them in every synagogue. While the blood of your witness Stephen was being shed, I stood by and approved it. I even guarded the cloaks of those who killed him!" ...Jesus said, "Be on your way!" (Acts 22:17-21).*

**Obedience is better than sacrifice!**

## **PAUL RETURNS HOME**

**The Christian Community in Jerusalem implemented this order of the Lord. Word reached "the brothers" that some of the Jews from the Synagogue of Roman Freedmen now plotted to kill Paul. The Church members acted swiftly**

**and prudently to the news of this murderous plot. Some of the brothers "*took him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus*" (Acts 9:31).**

**Paul's private visit with Cephas proved intellectually and spiritually rewarding for him. However, his brief public ministry in Jerusalem only resulted in nearly getting him killed, and, perhaps, in initiating another persecution for the Christian Community in Jerusalem. Seemingly the Church was not yet ready for Saul of Tarsus. Paul himself was not yet ready for his ministry within the Church. Paul's spirit needed tempering with patience and prudence. The Church at Jerusalem sent Paul home to Tarsus in Cilicia. To the Galatians Paul merely writes:**

*Thereafter I entered the regions of Syria and Cilicia. The communities of Christ in Judea had no idea what I looked like; they had only heard that "he who was formerly persecuting us is now preaching the faith he tried to destroy," and they gave glory to God on my account (Gal.1:21-23).*

**This covers a ten-year period of silence in the life of Paul. No more is heard of Paul for the next ten years, when Barnabas goes to Tarsus and brings Paul into the Christian Community at Antioch, and into a ministry of preaching and teaching. Now the Church and Paul are ready for each other and the divine mission for Paul rapidly unfolds itself...**

## CHAPTER 5

### THE SHEPHERD AND THE PROPHET

#### INTRODUCTION

Through means of a brief autobiography, Paul substantiates the statement that he received the gospel message through a revelation from Jesus Christ, and not through any such ordinary means as human instruction. The next step in defense of the gospel was for Paul to demonstrate that the gospel he preaches differs in no way from that taught by the Apostles. Paul relates his second visit with Cephas in Jerusalem in chapter two. On this occasion he sees James again, and meets John the Evangelist. These three men were the acknowledged leaders of the Jerusalem Community. By the time of the second visit, Peter concerned himself with the general welfare of the Christian Community, particularly in Judea. James, because of his close relationship with Jesus and his personal character, had become the accepted leader of the local Jerusalem Church. Paul narrates, *"Then, after fourteen years, I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, this time taking Titus with me" (Gal.2:1).*

It is generally believed that Paul converted to Christianity around 34 A.D. If this is correct, he visited Cephas first about 37 A.D., and the second visit would have occurred around 50 A.D. We know from Acts that Paul assisted Barnabas in Antioch: *"...For a whole year they met with the Church and instructed great numbers..."(Acts 11:26).* We read later: *"Paul and Barnabas continued in Antioch along with many others, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord" (Acts 15:35).*

Around Paul's first year in Antioch, Agabus, a Christian prophet, arrived from Jerusalem and prophesied *"that there was going to be a severe famine all over the world" (Acts 11:28b).* As a result of this prophecy the Christian Community set up a relief fund for the poor in Judea. They sent this money to the presbyters in Jerusalem through the care of Barnabas and Saul (see Acts 11:29-30). Some scholars maintain that this visit to Jerusalem is the same one mentioned by Paul in Galatians 2:1. However Acts makes no mention of any apostles in Jerusalem at this time. It makes reference only to the presbyters, which refers to the

local leaders. Apparently, this visit occurred at the time of Herod Agrippa's persecution against the leadership of the Church. Herod beheaded James, the brother of John, and intended to do the same to the imprisoned Peter. However, Peter escaped Herod and fled Jerusalem.

During a time like this, Barnabas and Paul would have made a hurried visit to Jerusalem and would have promptly returned to the safety of Antioch. On this visit Barnabas brought his young cousin John Mark to Antioch from Jerusalem. The Christian Community in Jerusalem often met in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Perhaps Mary persuaded her kinsman Barnabas to take her young son Mark to the safety of Antioch.

Apparently, this second visit with Cephas occurred sometime after Paul's first successful missionary enterprise among the Gentiles. Speaking with the leaders of the Church, Paul talks as a man who, from personal experience, formulated a method and policy of working among the Gentiles. This first missionary enterprise among the Gentiles occurred after taking alms to Jerusalem. Paul gives the following description of his second visit with Cephas:

*I went prompted by a revelation, and I laid out for their scrutiny the gospel as I present it to the Gentiles—all this in private conference with the leaders--to make sure the course I was pursuing, or had pursued, was not useless. Not even Titus, who was with me, was ordered to undergo circumcision, despite his being a Greek. Certain false claimants to the title of brother were smuggled in; they wormed their way into the group to spy on the freedom we enjoy in Christ Jesus and thereby to make slaves of us, but we did not submit to them for a moment. We resisted so that the truth of the gospel might survive intact for your benefit. Those who were regarded as important, however (and it makes no difference to me how prominent they were. God plays no favorites), made me add nothing.*

*On the contrary, recognizing that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter was for the circumcised (for he, who worked through Peter as his apostle among the Jews, had been at work in me for the Gentiles), and recognizing, too, the favor bestowed on me, those who were the acknowledged pillars, James, Cephas, and John, gave Barnabas and me the handclasp of*

*fellowship, signifying that we should go to the Gentiles as they to the Jews. The only stipulation was that we should be mindful of the poor—the one thing that I was making every effort to do (Gal.2:2-10).*

A strong sentiment exists among scholars that the meeting between Paul and the Church leaders described in Galatians is the same meeting reported in Acts 15. Certain discrepancies exist between the two accounts, but they are not irreconcilable. That there would be discrepancies between the two accounts shouldn't surprise anyone, especially when the authors had entirely different purposes in relating the same incident. Each presented the incident within the light of his purpose. In Acts, Luke records a meeting of Church leaders having historical importance for the entire Church in which Peter, Paul and James play a vital role; the decisions of this Jerusalem Council affect the future destiny of the Christian Church. On the other hand, Paul writes the Galatians about a meeting with Church leaders in Jerusalem having personal importance to his apostolic ministry, and which has a bearing upon the problem presently facing the Galatian Christians. He relates the incident within this context.

## THE SECOND MEETING

In Galatians, Paul mentions going (with Barnabas and Titus) to Jerusalem "again" after fourteen years. Some have assumed Paul meant "a second time" by "again," and have insisted the visit to bring alms to the poor is the one being described in Galatians. However, all that Paul really implies is that he met with Cephas once again after fourteen years. According to Acts, the Council at Jerusalem occurs after Paul and Barnabas return from their missionary enterprise among the Galatians. As we have already seen, the Christian Community in Antioch is being disturbed by Judaizers from Jerusalem who are insisting that the Gentiles observe the Mosaic Law. The Community is in a turmoil. *"Finally it was decided that Paul, Barnabas, and some others should go up to see the apostles and presbyters in Jerusalem about this question"(Acts 15:2).* Among the "some others" we may presume was Titus, a Gentile convert, one who embodied in himself the dispute at hand. Titus, a close associate of Paul and a prominent member of the early Church, receives no mention in Acts. It has been suggested that Luke, the author of Acts, and Titus were closely related—possibly brothers. This would explain Luke's reluctance to mention him personally in Acts.

Paul mentions going to Jerusalem as a result of a private revelation. This does not preclude the fact that he could have been sent as part of a delegation from Antioch. He may have been reluctant to be part of the delegation for personal reasons until instructed to do so by the Lord. On the other hand, the entire delegation may have been selected as a result of prophecy. The account in Acts leaves room for both a private meeting of the leaders with the delegation from Antioch and a public hearing upon the matter. It may be presumed that the results of the Council meeting have already been promulgated in Galatia, and its decrees were being misinterpreted by the Judaizers from Jerusalem.

The point Paul desires to make to the Galatians is that the leaders, in private, personally confirmed his presentation of the gospel. Paul says he went with the intention of laying out *"for their scrutiny the gospel as I present it to the Gentiles--to make sure the course I was pursuing, or had pursued, was not useless"* (Gal.2:2). This does not imply that Paul had doubts about the contents of his gospel presentation. His security in what he preached rested upon the personal testimony of Jesus Christ, not upon the confirmation of men! However, if Church leaders in Jerusalem were pursuing a contrary course (this is precisely what the Judaizers in Galatia preached), then these leaders would undermine his work and subsequently negate much of his labor. If their course differed from his, he wanted to know the reasons why, and probably had every intention of correcting them. However, Paul could report that the leaders of the Church were in full agreement with his policy.

Evidently the presence of his friend Titus became a test case at the meeting, which ultimately validated Paul's position. Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile convert to Christianity. He stands here now in the heart of Judaism, within the cradle of Christianity. Members of the party of the Pharisees insist Titus should be circumcised. Perhaps the leaders of the Church thought it best he should be for the sake of peace and Christian harmony. However, Paul stood adamantly against the circumcision of Titus. He saw with crystal clarity the true issue at stake. He does not hesitate to unmask his opponents as false Christians, comparing them to enemies secretly infiltrating another's camp with the purpose of sabotage. Paul's arguments won the day and the leaders did not order Titus to be circumcised. Paul's point to the Galatians is: how can they accept the teachings of men who insist that Gentiles be circumcised when the leaders of the Jerusalem Church made no such demands upon the Gentiles.

Paul, moreover, goes on to say that James, Peter and John recognized his extraordinary vocation as Apostle to the Gentiles. They compared his commission to Peter's, implying Paul's equality with Peter in this regard. They acknowledged that Paul was for the Gentiles what Peter was for the Jews. The distinction was probably one more geographical than ethnic. In other words, Paul would concentrate his ministry in pagan territory and Peter in Palestine. In actual practice they both would work for the conversion of both Jew and Gentile.

Paul ends his account of this incident by relating to the Galatians that *"those who were the acknowledged pillars, James, Cephas and John, gave Barnabas and me the handclasp of fellowship"* (Gal.2:9). This implies more than a meeting ending on friendly terms. It signifies a covenant of friendship has been entered into. They recognized each other as partners in this great apostolic enterprise.

#### MINDFUL OF THE POOR

The only stipulation placed on Paul and Barnabas was that they be mindful of the poor as they ministered to the Gentiles. The "poor" has generally been interpreted to mean, not the poor of the Gentile world, but the poor Jewish Christians of Judea. Seemingly the early Jewish Church suffered much from poverty. This poverty may have resulted from their first fervor when many sold their property and goods and laid the proceeds at the feet of the Apostles. Also, their personal poverty may have been the result of persecution at which time their property was destroyed or confiscated. The author of Hebrews makes mention of such when he wrote:

*Recall the days gone by when, after you had been enlightened, you endured a great contest of suffering...You even joined in the sufferings of those who were in prison and joyfully assented to the confiscation of your goods, knowing that you had better and more permanent possessions (Heb.10:32,34).*

Also, charity in Judea was dispensed through the local synagogues. Being mindful of the Jewish poor would always remain a concern for Paul. We find Paul later writing to the Romans:

*Just now I am leaving for Jerusalem to bring assistance to the saints. Macedonia and Achaia have kindly decided to make a*

*contribution for those in need among the saints in Jerusalem. They did so of their own accord, yet they are also under obligation. For if the Gentiles have shared in the spiritual blessings of the Jews, they ought to contribute to their temporal needs in return (Rom.15:25-27).*

## NO RESPECTOR OF PERSONS

In a few verses, Paul made several references to Peter, James and John as important men within the Church. His remarks are not without a tinge of cynicism and deprecation. It is not Paul's intention to show contempt for these leaders or to belittle them. It is a reaction of Paul, not to their position, but to his opponents' exaggeration of their position. Apparently, these Judaizers constantly referred to Peter, James and John as "the prominent" members of the Church, "the acknowledged pillars" of Christianity, those "important" in Jerusalem. Paul's reaction to all this makes clear that he will not be intimidated by the reputation of men on this earth. The judgment of God matters, not that of men. The judgment of God rests upon what the heart holds, not by the position of authority and power held in this world. The fact that a man knew Christ in the flesh did not of itself impress Paul. Few men knew Jesus of Nazareth more intimately than Judas Iscariot. Paul acknowledged the authority of James, Peter, and John in the Christian Community, but he was neither awed by their person nor overly impressed with their position.

The next episode narrated by Paul clearly manifests the truth of that statement. Paul relates an incident in Antioch which proves very uncomplimentary to the first head of the Christian Church.

Customarily the early Christian Community attended the synagogue on the sabbath. With the setting of the sabbath sun, the first day of the new week began, and with it the Christian Community gathered to celebrate the agape—the love feast—followed by the Lord's Supper. At first the Jerusalem Community gathered in the Cenacle, a large upper room in the home of Mary, the mother of John Mark. Apparently the agape was equivalent to a modern day "pot-luck," to which people brought what they could or desired. For the very poor of the Community, it would have been their one fine meal of the week. In a later letter of Paul to the Corinthians, we see that abuses had all but destroyed this lovely custom. In the Corinthian Church, membership consisted, no doubt, of many servants and slaves. Out of necessity, these



members sometimes arrived late for the agape, only to find all the food consumed. The first arrivals, being hungry, refused to wait for the late comers. Paul writes:

*First of all, I hear that when you gather for a meeting there are divisions among you, and I am inclined to believe it. There may even have to be factions among you for the tried and true to stand out clearly. When you assemble it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for everyone is in haste to eat his own supper. One person goes hungry while another gets drunk....Therefore, my brothers, when you assemble for the meal, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry let him eat at home, so that your assembly may not deserve condemnation (1Cor.11:18-21,33-34).*

When Paul wrote the Corinthians, he may have recalled the day some years before, when another Christian Community deserved condemnation and had to be severely rebuked by him in the person of one no less than Cephas, the head of the Church. For the benefit of the Galatians, Paul recalls this incident, as it added to the point he desired to make.

#### CEPHAS COMES TO ANTIOCH

As customary, the Antioch Community met on the first day of the week for the agape meal and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. On a certain occasion Simon Peter was present in Antioch. Peter entered into full fellowship with all members of the Church making no distinction between Jews and Greeks. However, at this time certain Jews arrived from Jerusalem, who refused to share in the agape meal with Gentiles. They separated themselves and their food. Simon Peter added insult to injury when he refused to eat with the Gentiles, joining in with the separated Jews. Peter's act was purely scandalous as it caused the other Jewish Christians, even Barnabas, to follow his example. The result was a complete division within the Church between the Jews and the Gentiles. It made a mockery of the Lord's Supper. It is hard to say how long the situation continued. No doubt Paul tolerated the situation but briefly.

At the Church assembly, Paul confronted Peter. The scandal was public, affecting the entire congregation. Hopefully, Paul waited until the completion of the agape meal. Such a public confrontation certainly would have curbed the community's appetite. It might have offended some of "the brothers" if

Paul had introduced such a delicate matter at table. However, the time and the place for it was the assembly. Not peace at any price for Paul! Nevertheless, he could have found guidance in the example of Jesus. When the Lord Jesus subtly confronted Peter over his denial of Him, we clearly read in John that the Risen Jesus waited until after they had breakfasted. We read: *"When they had eaten their meal, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?'"* (Jn.21:15).

The question was repeated three times, greatly disturbing Peter.

At sometime during the assembly Paul stood up and directed a question to Cephas, *"If you who are a Jew are living according to Gentile ways rather than Jewish, by what logic do you force the Gentiles to adopt Jewish ways?"* (Gal.2:14). Paul clearly and publicly accused Peter and the Jews present of hypocrisy. He did this he said *"as soon as I observed that they were not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel"*(Gal.2:14). Gasping, the congregation must have looked at Peter. Paul did not hesitate or await a response; he continued his address, which encompassed all the Jews present including himself.

Paul stressed the point that all the Jews present at the assembly, although they esteemed themselves to be in a favored position before God as the Chosen People, and disdained Gentiles as conceived in sin, they all recognized that their salvation lay, not in the observance of the Mosaic Law, but in their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, just as had all the Gentile Christians present at this assembly. Paul told the Galatians:

*We are Jews by birth, not sinners of Gentile origin. Nevertheless, knowing that man is not justified by legal observance but by faith in Jesus Christ, we too have believed in him in order to be justified by faith in Christ, not by observance of the law; for by works of the law no one will be justified (Gal.2:15-16).*

At this point Paul moves to attack the position of the Judaizers from Jerusalem. These men insisted that those justified in Christ sinned by not observing the law of Moses. Paul spots the contradiction involved in their position. If justification did not come from the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, how could they insist that those justified in Christ sinned by not observing the Mosaic legislation concerning foods, when Jesus Christ clearly

taught that a man is not defiled by what enters his mouth? Paul goes on to ask, *"But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we are shown to be sinners, does that mean that Christ is encouraging sin? (Gal.2:17).* Again he awaits no answer; he retorts, *"Unthinkable!"*

For the Jewish Christians present, Paul included, there is sin against faith if, after being justified through faith in Jesus Christ, they now seek to reestablish as a means of salvation what they previously rejected. Paul says, *"If, however, I were to build up the very thing I have demolished, I should then indeed be a transgressor"(Gal.2:18).*

The law and prophets testified to Christ. Accepting the Messiah is the true observance of the law. Therefore Paul insists that it was the law itself that forced him to abandon the law in order to follow the Messiah, revealed by the law. He tells the assembly, *"It was through the law that I died to the law, to live for God"(Gal.2:19).*

This incident recorded in Galatians caused a great deal of embarrassment to certain members of the early Church. The Ebionites used the incident to condemn Paul. Certain earlier writers sought to explain it away. Clement of Alexandria insisted that the Cephas mentioned was a disciple, and not the Apostle. However, Cephas was a unique name within the Bible. There was only one Cephas, but the one Cephas could and did act at times in two different ways. At one time he could promise to die with Jesus and come out swinging a sword. At a later moment he could deny and swear before servants and slaves—amid curses—he never knew Jesus of Nazareth. Origen of Alexandria insisted the whole incident to have been purposefully staged by Peter and Paul as a means for correcting the Judaizers. This opinion came under severe rebuke by Augustine, who insisted it made liars out of the Apostles, and undermined the integrity of the Scriptures.

If the Antioch incident occurred before the Council of Jerusalem, Peter's behavior would be more understandable and excusable. However, Paul seems to be narrating things in a chronological order, and the presumption must be that Peter, who in Jerusalem had proclaimed and decreed, *"Why, then, do you put God to the test by trying to place on the shoulders of these converts a yoke which neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? Our belief is rather that we are saved by the favor of the Lord Jesus and so are they" (Acts 15:10-11,* could a short time later commit actions that implicitly denied that same decree.

Actions speak louder than words. Actions convey the message more clearly than words. As an actor in a play, Peter played a part. Peter pretended to be what he was not, in order to please people. He lied in deed if not in word. Such behavior divided the body of the Church and made certain people in the Church the "untouchables." On the theological level, his behavior implied even more serious consequences: it implied that Gentile Christians still remained impure before God; it implicitly denied the cleansing effects of the Blood of Christ, and the Presence of the Holy Spirit within the baptized.

Peter was no Paul. The character of Peter has stimulated hope in the soul of many a Christian sinner. Few people possess the soul-power of the Apostle Paul. They may equal him in good will, but not in performance. They stumble along the Way due to their deficiencies of character and psychological needs. Peter clearly loved Jesus dearly, but Peter was a people pleaser. He had a need to be liked and accepted by others and this, at times, impeded the application of his beliefs and moral principles, which were sacrificed for social acceptance. As Paul observed in Antioch, *"He drew back to avoid trouble with those who were circumcised"* (Gal.2:12). Peter's behavior in Antioch was entirely in keeping with his character.

Jesus promised the Apostles that the Gates of Hell would never prevail against the Church. In a word, the Church on earth could not be destroyed. Christ gave no guarantee that the leaders of His Church would not be sinners or that their sins would not impede the progress of the Church on earth. The Church will go on despite human frailty but sometimes, due to human frailty, it will only crawl and limp along. It was Paul himself who taught the consoling doctrine called "vessels of clay." *"But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us"* (2Cor.4:7). A pope may claim infallibility, but no pope can claim indefectibility (sinlessness).

## PAUL THE PROPHET

That day in Antioch Paul played the prophet. As in the Old Covenant, there is within the New Covenant institutional and prophetic authority. There are people appointed to rule the Church in God's Name. From time to time within the Church, there are those raised up by God with the authority to correct and censure the general community of the faithful and, at times, those in authority who abuse their office and neglect their responsibility. This is the unenviable role of the Christian prophet. Prophets are seldom popular. They

go against the stream of things. History testifies that prophets do not fare too well in this world. As a mouthpiece of the Lord, they must often convict people of sin who have lost any conscious awareness of sin. When the words of a prophet fall upon inpenitent hearts, his prophecy becomes a pain to bear, and he is viewed as a bearer of evil. The bearer of light often becomes a personal object of hatred. Dark deeds love their cloak of night and detest the light.

Modern Christians often lack the moral courage to incarnate their faith in public practice. They become overly concerned about what people will think. They become more concerned about man than God. This is a serious defect in Christian character, with many bad side effects. All Christians are primarily called to witness to Christian Truth in their particular environment, in their society, in their homes. Failure to do so not only robs God of glory, but may cause serious harm to the souls of others. The Lord warned that those who were ashamed of Him in this world would find Him ashamed of them when He came in glory with the angels of Heaven.

Those finding Christian witnessing a particular problem should pray to Peter and Paul for moral courage. We should also pray that all Christian leaders will possess the moral courage to be "straightforward about the truth of the gospel." Let us not be presumptuous in this matter. Galatians makes it clear how even the best may fall.

### THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Paul places the Cross of Christ before the segregated Church of Antioch, knowing full well that this Cross upon which Jesus was crucified had ended all distinctions before God. Jesus, dying upon the Cross, died outside the law in the sense he died accursed by the law. Accursed is he who dies upon a tree! (see Dt. 21:22). Although personally sinless, Jesus dies as a sinner, having assumed the sins of mankind as his own. Christ stood before the Tribunal of Divine Justice bearing the sins of all mankind, and His fear was expressed in drops of blood. God's just sentence upon the sin-laden Jesus was death upon the Cross--*Ibis ad Crucem!* The death of the Outlaw.

*In his own body he brought your sins to the Cross, so that all of us, dead to sin, could live in accord with God's will. By his wounds you were healed (1Pt.2:24-25).*

*Even when you were dead in sin and your flesh was uncircumcised, God gave you new life in company with Christ. He pardoned all our sins. He canceled the bond that stood against us with all its claims, snatching it up and nailing it to the Cross (Col.2:13-14).*

Paul proclaims before Peter, Barnabas, and the entire assembly the depths of his faith in Jesus Christ and the practical extent to which his faith has reached. Dramatically he professes: *"I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; Christ lives in me" (Gal.2:20a)*. Paul has cast his eternal lot utterly upon Jesus Christ. Paul fully places the security of his eternal life in Jesus Christ, renouncing all else—in particular the observance of the Mosaic law. He clearly stated to the Philippians what he intended:

*But those things I used to consider gain I have now reappraised as loss in the light of Christ. I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. For his sake I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth and I may be in him, not having any justice of my own based on observance of the law. The justice I possess is that which comes through faith in Christ. It has its origin in God and is based on faith. I wish to know Christ and the power flowing from his resurrection; likewise to know how to share in his sufferings by being formed into the pattern of his death. Thus do I hope that I may arrive at resurrection from the dead.*

*It is not that I have reached it yet, or have already finished my course; but I am racing to grasp the prize if possible, since I have been grasped by Christ Jesus. Brothers, I do not think of myself as having reached the finish line. I give no thought to what lies behind but push on to what is ahead. My entire attention is on the finish line as I run toward the prize to which God calls me—life on high in Christ Jesus. All of us who are spiritually mature must have this attitude. If you see it another way, God will clarify the difficulty for you. It is important that we continue on our course, no matter what stage we have reached (Phil.3:7-16).*

To be crucified meant death. Paul died to his former life in Judaism at the moment of his Christian Baptism. With the reception of the Holy Spirit, Paul began a new life in Jesus Christ. He wrote:

*In baptism you were not only buried with him but also raised to life with him because you believed in the power of God who raised him from the dead (Col.2:12).*

The new life is no longer like the former--seeking justification before God through one's human struggles. Christ is the Divine Vine, and Paul is but a branch. The Holy Spirit has become the Source of Paul's life and righteousness. Through his total submission to the Spirit of Christ Paul can truly say, "*The life I live now is not my own; Christ lives in me*" (Gal.2:20).

From the time of his baptism, union with Christ became the central feature of Paul's life. His own union began with his personal crucifixion of mind and heart. The term "crucifixion" accurately describes the intense spiritual agony endured by Paul during the dark hours between meeting Christ on the Damascus Road and his baptism at the hands of Ananias. A world ended in those dark hours, making way for a new beginning.

When Paul writes, "*The life I live now is not my own,*" he does not intend to imply he has lost any conscious awareness of his own personal identity, as would be the case with some madman. There is no suggestion that Paul's own personality has been absorbed into that of Christ's. Paul makes this clear by saying, "*I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me*" (Gal.2:20b). Paul's personal feelings, emotions, needs, all remain the same. He remains totally aware of his own human frailty and personal defects, along with his personal gifts of nature and grace which were considerable. Nevertheless he subjected all these, the defects and assets, to his life of faith in Christ. Faith in Christ, and all that it implied, became the sole directing force of his life. The power of faith dominated Paul's life to such a degree that he could honestly say that for him to live is for Christ to live.

Paul's life of faith is motivated by personal love: The personal love of Jesus Christ for Paul, and the personal love of Paul for Jesus—"the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul does not look upon Jesus Christ—his life, death and resurrection—as some abstract cosmic occurrence with salvific application to mankind on an impersonal, universal level. The life of Jesus and all contained within it is a personal act of love for every human being. The Heart of Jesus Christ desires a personal response of love from every human being. Does the sun shine in the heavens for one person more than another, despite the fact one person may receive more benefit from the sun

than another? Just as each person receives daily, in keeping with their personal capacity and circumstances, the total gift of the heavenly sun, so the personal love of the Son of God is shared by each human person in keeping with their personal capacity to receive His love. Each fully receives the effects of Christ's death and resurrection in keeping with their measure to receive. If there are any limitations on the effects of Christ's life upon a person, the limitations are on the part of the receiving person.

## LIFE IN CHRIST

A life lived in total submission to the Holy Spirit is the life of Christ on earth. Christ lived that life on earth for thirty-three years. Paul does not wish to imply his own life was a carbon copy of the physical life of Jesus. After all, the Spirit of God is too creative for duplication. The life of Christ in every person will be totally unique. In actuality, it is Divine Love (Divine Power and Presence) that is expressed and made active and visible within the unique, particular circumstances of today. No one life is exactly the same as another. Father Judge would teach the lay apostles of his day that the circumstances of one's personal life are as unique to oneself as the skin on one's face. Within one's personal circumstances, only the individual person can make God present, and permit Christ to live again here and now.

Most days in the life of Christ were quiet days lived among the Galilean hills; days quietly lived in union with the Father's Will. Only his last years were extraordinary in any way. Most days of a life in Christ will be ordinary days. A quiet grace will be sufficient for the day. As in the life of Christ, some days will bring circumstances that challenge the depths of the spirit. Demands are made upon body, mind and soul. The words of Jesus then reassure the soul, *"My grace is sufficient for you!"* When the crises of life come, there is always the grace of crisis for those who live in Christ.

Christians must be prudent. Do not seek to live tomorrow on today's grace. "Tomorrow will take care of itself." Grace is the reality of God's present power within the lived experience. The power exists only in the reality. Foolishly, Christians often destroy their courage and confidence, their peace of mind and physical health by living the future in the present. They burden their minds and bodies with future, evil possibilities. Our wild imaginings may never become real, but our imaginings can indeed leave real evil residue within the body. Mark Twain once said, "I have suffered many things in life and most of them never happened."



Physical death is often a source of fear for Christians, despite the fact that Jesus told us not to fear the person or the thing that can only kill the body. The moment of physical death is an extraordinary time in one's life. It calls for extraordinary grace for the Christ within us to face death again. At the time of death for those in Christ, the grace *will* be extraordinary. There will be grace by which to die. Ninety-nine percent of the grace received is grace by which to live in Christ. God expects us to be good stewards of the gifts received. When the time comes for us to die, let us die with grace. In the meantime, it is the time of life. Let Christians live in grace that Christ may live in them.

## CONCLUSION

Looking into the eyes of his congregation Paul declares, in so many words, that he knows not what course other Christians may take, but as for himself, *"I will not treat God's gracious gift as pointless" (Gal.2:21a)*. Paul found spiritual freedom in the death of Jesus Christ. In his closing statement, Paul summed up well the position of his opponents and their transgressions against the Christian Faith. Paul declares, *"If justice is available through the law, then Christ died to no purpose!" (Gal.2:21b)*. The death of Jesus was being rendered meaningless by the teachings of the Judaizers. Paul's message was not lost upon Peter.

Paul effectively admonished Peter, and Peter recognized "the spirit of wisdom" in Paul. This spirit of wisdom brought Peter to a deeper understanding of the mystery of the faith entrusted to him. Later he teaches:

*Your rebirth has come, not from a destructible but from an indestructible seed, through the living and enduring word of God (1Pt.1:23).*

*Realize that you were delivered from the futile way of life your fathers handed on to you, not by any diminishable sum of silver or gold, but by Christ's blood beyond all price: the blood of a spotless, unblemished lamb chosen before the world's foundation and revealed for your sake in these last days (1Pt.1:18-20).*

With a grateful heart Peter later embraced Paul as *"Paul our beloved brother"*(2Pt.3:15).

## CHAPTER 6

### JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

#### MEANING OF JUSTIFICATION

Of the many meaningful concepts expressed by Paul, none are more important to understand than the terms justification or righteousness and faith. Their understanding is essential to the comprehension of the gospel message. In the last six verses of chapter two, Paul speaks five times of justification and three times of faith. The statement by Paul, "*A man is not justified by legal observance but by faith in Jesus Christ*" (Gal.2:15), became a fundamental principle of the Christian Religion.

In the classical Greek definition, the terms "just" or "righteous" (*dikaios*) were applied to a person who conformed self to the will or law of God. Such a person stood innocent before the eyes of God. The state of righteousness or justice (*dikaionune*) was achieved by fulfilling God's requirements for mankind. In a word, the person accomplished what was right. A person became justified by being placed in a right relationship with God. Such a person stood acquitted of all blame before God.

For Plato, justice became a cardinal virtue anchored within the soul of man, which directed him inwardly to live in order and harmony with the natural law of the universe. Such a man lived in the existing state of righteousness and justice. A just or righteous man rendered unto other men distributive justice; that is, giving to each his due. It became the foundation virtue for Utopia—Plato's perfect world.

In the Septuagint Bible (a Greek translation of the Old Testament), a righteous person (*dikaios*) was the one who fulfilled his duties before God by meeting God's requirements in all his interpersonal relations with God and man. The Mosaic Law became the standard by which man measured his duties towards God and man. A person satisfying these demands had right on his side, and possessed a righteous cause before God and man. The Jewish historian Josephus described the righteous man as one "who is obedient to the

commands of God." In Judaism an evil, unjust, unbelieving man was referred to as *adikos*—one without right.

For the Jewish Rabbis, the righteous (*dikaios*) were the ones who kept the Law in all its fullness. The merits of such a man outweighed his transgressions before God. The ungodly man was the one whose transgressions in life outweighed his meritorious deeds. The Rabbis put people in three categories: the perfect, the average, and the penitent. The perfect fully observed the Law of the Will of God and were wholly righteous. Such were the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The average or common people were the unrighteous, as their transgressions against the Law outweighed their merits. The penitents were those who had an equal balance between their transgressions and merits.

In the Old Testament, the Messiah was called righteous because it was known that his entire life would unfold in conformity with the Divine Will. The Messiah would be "the man of Righteousness," and righteousness itself would be characteristic of the messianic age. We read in Jeremiah:

*Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will raise up a righteous shoot to David; As king he shall reign and govern wisely, he shall do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah shall be saved, Israel shall dwell in security. This is the name they give him: The Lord our justice (Jer.23:5-6).*

The pious Jew prayed:

*O Lord, hear my prayer: hearken to my pleading in your faithfulness; in your justice answer me. And enter not into judgment with your servant, for before you no living man is just (Ps.143:1).*

The Jews believed that Yahweh heard this prayer on the yearly feast of the Atonement. On this day the people of Israel received acquittal for their sins, and they became as a new creation. It was common belief among the Jews that their final justification on the Day of Judgment rested upon their being children of the covenant promises—the descendants of Abraham.

The prevalent belief among many of the Jews in Paul's time, particularly with members of the Pharisee party, was that only those Jews who faithfully observed the Mosaic Law would stand justified before God at their death, and

would thereby be destined for Paradise. At the Last Judgment they would be justified on the basis of their good works—their faithful observance of the Mosaic Law. Here the term justification or righteous is equivalent to being saved.

The New Testament still preserved the Greek concept of justice as a moral virtue. Pilate, his wife, and the centurion at the foot of the Cross, all referred to Jesus as just, signifying that He was innocent and morally righteous. Most especially, the resurrection from the dead revealed the righteousness of Jesus as it validated His claim to be the Messiah. Jesus insisted the righteousness of His disciples must surpass the righteousness of the Pharisees in order for them to enter the kingdom of heaven.

In the New Testament, love becomes an essential element for righteousness (see Lk.14:14). And outside of its Pauline usage, righteousness signifies rectitude of life before God, resulting from conduct in keeping with the Will of God and pleasing to Him. The righteous stand upright before the judgment of God. Most especially, the New Testament regards the state of righteousness as a gift from God given to those who humbly seek it. Within the New Testament, God is often spoken of as the One who is vindicated and declared righteous. We read, *"They justified God by accepting baptism."* The Divine Judgment is acknowledged to be righteous.

Within the writings of Paul, the concept of righteousness or justification takes on a radically different significance in the Scriptures. Paul agrees with the Old Testament in that only the righteous can enjoy true fellowship and communion with God. The fulfillment of the Divine Will remains the cause of righteousness. However, Paul proclaims that no man is righteous before the Law. The Law must be perfectly fulfilled, and no man accomplishes this. All stand as sinners before the Law. Paul writes, *"It is not those who hear the Law who are just in the sight of God; it is those who keep it who will be declared just"* (Rom.2:13). Paul goes on to say, *"It is as the Scripture says: 'There is no just man, not even one; there is no one who understands, no one in search of God'"* (Rom.3:10-11). Paul concludes that righteousness cannot come from the Law. It only serves to prove all men are sinners.

Paul insists that a new dispensation for justification has been granted by God through Jesus Christ; a door to righteousness for all mankind has been opened. *"Just as through one man's disobedience all become sinners, so through one man's obedience all shall become just"* (Rom.5:19). Man, by his

works, cannot establish righteousness before God or merit eternal communion with God. The righteousness of man flows only from God's decisive act of intervention for mankind in Jesus Christ. In Christ a Divine righteousness is established, and mankind is brought into this Divine righteousness—is enabled to share in it.

Jesus Christ lived a life of total obedience to the Will of God. *"I am not seeking my own will,"* Jesus said, *"but the will of him who sent me"* (Jn.5:30). His life culminated and perfected itself in a supreme act of obedience—His death upon the Cross. As Jesus was both God and man, His obedient death upon the Cross was infinitely meritorious in the eyes of God, possessing infinite atonement value for sinful mankind. The death of the God-Man atoned for all sin and merited justification for all mankind. God graciously willed that this justification be granted to all sinners who would accept, in faith, the saving act of God that was accomplished in and through Jesus Christ. It was to this that Paul referred when he said, *"I will not treat God's gracious gift as pointless"* (Gal.2:21).

The grace of justification or righteousness is granted to all sinners who, in fact, accept baptism and receive the Holy Spirit as the first fruits of redemption. The justified person is brought into the very Body of Christ. St. Thomas of Aquinas taught that at that moment the merits of Jesus Christ are applied to the believer as if he himself merited them. Therefore it is through faith in God and His Christ that the individual sinner is brought to share in the work of salvation.

In the light of this truth, Paul turns from righteousness under the law as only a passing stage in the economy of salvation. Indeed he must now teach,

*We, who know...a man is not justified by legal observance but by faith in Jesus Christ, we too have believed in him in order to be justified by faith in Christ, not by observance of the law; for by works of the law no one will be justified... If justice is available through the law, then Christ died to no purpose (Gal.2:16,21).*

Man's justification is a historical fact centered in the death of Jesus upon the Cross, which completely satisfied and vindicated Divine justice. The forgiveness of sins becomes an act of Divine righteousness. Justification has become an act of grace in which God graciously grants to sinners the status of Christ in His eyes. Paul speaks often of justification in the present tense,

implying that a person now enjoys the condition of righteousness before God. He preached in the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch,

*You must realize, my brothers, that it is through him that the forgiveness of sins is being proclaimed to you, including the remission of all those charges you could never be acquitted of under the law of Moses. In him, every believer is acquitted.*

For those who found this too good to believe, Paul adds:

*Have a care, then, lest what was said by the prophets be realized in you: "Look on in amazement, you cynics, then disappear! For I am doing a deed in your days which you never would have believed even if you had been told" (Acts 13:38-41).*

### FINAL JUSTIFICATION

Paul does not teach as some have suggested—"Once saved, always saved!" He does teach that the present condition of righteousness possessed by the baptized Christians is the foundation of hope for the Day of Judgment, when the state of righteousness will be perfected and made permanent. With Jewish tradition, Paul maintains that no one possesses salvation or righteousness permanently until, at the Last Judgment, the Judge of the Living and the Dead proclaims it to be a fact. Those presently justified in Jesus Christ can look forward with confidence to the final sentence. However Jesus warned His disciples not to be presumptuous of salvation. He told them:

*None of those who cry out, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. When that day comes, many will plead with me, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not exorcised demons by its power? Did we not do many miracles in your name as well?" Then I will declare to them solemnly, "I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evildoers!" (Mt. 7:21-23).*

To the Romans Paul wrote:

*Do not suppose, then, that you will escape his judgment...the just judgment of God will be revealed, when he will repay every man for what he has done: eternal life to those who strive for glory, honor,*

*and immortality by patiently doing right; wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and anguish will come upon every man who has done evil, the Jew first, then the Greek... With God there is no favoritism (Rom.2:3-11).*

To the Corinthians Paul said,

*Mind you, I have nothing on my conscience. But that does not mean that I am declaring myself innocent (righteous). The Lord is the one to judge me, so stop passing judgment before the time of his return. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and manifest the intentions of hearts. At that time, everyone will receive his praise from God (1Cor.4:4-5).*

Obviously there is a present state of righteousness before God—of acquittal of sin—but there is also a life of righteousness that must flow from this gracious spiritual condition. One can possess the former without the latter. One can begin in the spirit and end in the flesh. The Scriptures clearly teach, through the words of Paul, that final justification or salvation is not only a result of faith, but of a righteous life. A person is juridically acquitted of all sin and declared to be righteous (saved) only when the Just Judge declares in his favor at the Last Judgment. Then the person's life in Christ will be weighed in the balance. *"Affliction and anguish will come upon every man (Christian) who has done evil... There will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who has done good" (Rom.2:9-10).*

## THE MEANING OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

As we have seen, Paul clearly holds that the spiritual condition of justification is essential for communion with God, and for eternal salvation. He insists this condition cannot be merited by human effort. Righteousness, as a gift of God, comes only to a sinner through a personal act of faith in Christ. Faith is absolutely essential as a means for salvation in Paul's theology. Therefore, the understanding of this concept of faith is vitally important for us. The Greek word *pistis* is used by Paul to express this concept of faith. Let us seek to understand what Paul means by the term.

*Pistis* denotes a thing worthy of trust. It denotes the guarantee that creates the possibility of trust and produces security. *Pistis* is that which can be relied upon. It signifies a dependable belief—that which creates certainty and

conviction in a person. The term came to signify an oath of fidelity or the pledge of faithfulness. The person possessing *pistis* possessed the quality of faithfulness. Even within the classical Greek, *pistis* was closely related to obedience. A person may have the duty to trust the word or command of one worthy of trust, and *pistis* implied that one acted in obedience to that word or command.

In summary, the word *pistis* (translated as faith in English) expresses a rich variety of thoughts: trustworthy, guarantee, security, reliability, dependability, certainty, faithfulness, obedience. In other words, the concept of faith expresses that which becomes a veritable internal Rock of Gibraltar for the human personality. It is certainly more than a mental conviction concerning the truth of one's creed. A quality such as faith permeates the entire personality of its possessor, affecting his or her entire life.

In the Old Testament, faith always describes man's reaction to God's action in this world, whether in a nation or an individual person. When translating the Hebrew concept of faith into Greek, the word *pistis* is used in the Greek Septuagint Bible. The Old Testament presents two primary reactions of man to God's action, namely, fear and trust. Both concepts are expressed about 150 times in the Old Testament. The immediate reaction to the presence of the supernatural in the Old Testament is fear. The Book of Daniel narrates a good example of this during the banquet given by King Belshazzar. We read:

*Suddenly, opposite the lampstand, the fingers of a human hand appeared, writing on the plaster of the wall in the king's palace. When the king saw the wrist and hand that wrote, his face blanched; his thoughts terrified him, his hip joints shook, and his knees knocked (Dn.5:5-6).*

Daniel confessed when he first beheld the angel Gabriel, "*When he came near where I was standing I fell prostrate in terror*" (Dn.8:17a). Such fear was not relegated to the Old Testament. Luke gives this account of Zechariah's vision in the temple:

*An angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was deeply disturbed upon seeing him, and overcome by fear (Lk.1:11-12).*



In the case of Zechariah he was punished for failing to trust:

*But now you will be mute—unable to speak—until these things take place, because you have not trusted my words. They will all come true in due season (Lk.1:20).*

It is of interest that Luke makes no mention of any fear in Mary at the appearance of a celestial being. Only his greeting, not his presence, troubled her: *"She was deeply troubled by his words, and wondered what his greeting meant" (Lk.1:29).*

Obviously such reactions as fear and trust touch the entire person. Faith in the Old Testament was certainly more than mental certitude concerning divine truths. Biblical faith touched man, totally affecting his inner life and its external manifestations. Faith became a fundamental willed decision for God, which implied turning aside from the powers of this world and relinquishing reliance upon one's own personal strength. For Isaiah, it involved a rejection of all fear of human might, and a fundamental distrust of it. The Lord was Israel's Rock of Security—*"Trust in the Lord forever!"* says Isaiah, *"For the Lord is an eternal Rock" (Is.26:4)*. Speaking to Isaiah the Lord said, *"Fear not, be not troubled....Is there a God or any Rock besides me?" (Is.44:8)*.

Faith has its effect, not only upon the present, but on the future as well. The believer has a security about the future because God's promises will be fulfilled. Faith creates an expectant hope and a stillness of spirit, which patiently awaits the manifestation of divine providence. Doubts and murmurings are alien to this spirit. The believer expresses faith in God's trustworthiness by an obedient submission to His commands. For Israel, disobedience was the fruit and sign of infidelity.

The Sacred Scriptures of the Jews were produced over the centuries. All the Jews accepted the first five books of the Bible, the Torah, as inspired. In the time of Jesus, the Sadducees restricted inspiration to the Torah, while the Pharisees extended it to include the prophetic works also. Certain natural effects flowed from belief in the inspiration of the Scriptures, which had a detrimental effect upon the quality of Jewish faith. Practically speaking, divine inspiration became restricted to the accepted inspired works. Inspiration took on a frozen aspect. The Will of God became static and historical. Faith and obedience to God was directed by the past and became restricted by the past.

This depersonalized the Will of God for the individual. For many, the Scriptures replaced God. This greatly externalized religion, making it a matter of letter rather than spirit. It nourished the spirit of hypocrisy. The past became canonized while God was excluded from the everyday situations of life. It created a spiritual mentality that suffered the present, while awaiting salvation from above or a miraculous intervention in time. There was a general faith in the Providence of God, which looked primarily to the End Times for the juridical judgment of the Just God.

In its desert days, the faith of Israel was decidedly different. God's presence and judgment were daily experienced within the life of Israel. God's living presence was experienced as history unfolded, and the daily response of man to the Will of God affected the day and changed the tide of history. Believers may have suffered, but not passively. It was the sufferings of battle, and they experienced the joy of victory and the agony of defeat. Faith lived in the desert.

What befell Israel befell Christianity in the practical application of the Christian Faith. It was expressed by "a pie in the sky" faith and a passive resignation to the ills and evils of this world—piously crediting it all to divine providence. Especially in Christian Fundamentalism, we have a return to the letter and legalism of Judaism, relegating the Will of God to the historic; and God's presence, here and now, to the miraculous intervention.

In the New Testament, *pistis* remains as the leading term by which to describe the religious relationship between God and man. It implies accepting the Christian proclamation; it implies turning in trust to the One God and His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ; it implies accepting and trusting what has been done in and through Jesus Christ, and what will be done in and through Him. The confession of Jesus as Christ and Lord is intrinsic to this faith, along with accepting His bodily resurrection from the dead. These beliefs constitute an inner unity as the lordship of Christ flows from His resurrection from the dead. Christian Faith or *pistis* is belief in the gospel. This is the faith that leads to salvation. *"For if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved. Faith in the heart leads to justification, confession on the lips to salvation"* (Rom.10:9-10). The name Christian is synonymous for such a believer.

**There is a difference between the Old Testament faith and Christian faith. The Jews placed their faith in the God who acts, but not in the Acts of God. They experienced the God who acts in their history. Christians must believe, not only in the God who acts, but in particular Acts of God. In the Incarnation and the Resurrection, God acted in Jesus Christ. Even though this action was not experienced by the Christian people, it must be accepted in faith on the testimony of the Apostles. That the Jesus Crucified is the Risen and Ascended Lord must be accepted on faith. That the folly of the Cross is the Wisdom of God is certainly not self-evident; it is known through faith.**

**Christian Faith is obedience to the commands of God that lead to righteousness of life, but it is much more. It is the obedience of faith to the Way of salvation opened through Jesus Christ. As this Way of Salvation brings the forgiveness of sin, it is a faith that implies turning away from sin. This is the faith of Paul.**

**For Paul, faith must be more than an inward orientation of one's life toward God. There is an objective, concrete way of salvation offered through Jesus Christ, and this way must be accepted in faith. A person must believe in the gospel message, and this means believing in Jesus Christ. Confessing that Jesus is Lord implies a rejection of self-reliance for salvation. It demands a turning from self to Christ, and the acceptance of His lordship over one's life. As Paul expressed it, *"I have been crucified with Christ, and the life I live now is not my own; Christ lives in me"* (Gal.2:19-20).**

**Within the Pauline concept of faith, a Christian must accept the salvation of mankind through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as a divine historical fact. What occurred in history becomes actualized in the present through the reception of baptism, which follows the profession of faith in Jesus. A profession that must essentially echo the creed preached by Peter at Pentecost, *"Let the whole house of Israel know beyond any doubt that God has made both Lord and Messiah this Jesus whom you crucified"* (Acts 2:36).**

**The faith that leads to salvation is actualized through repentance and baptism. As Peter continued to preach on Pentecost, *"You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 2:38).**

**Christian Faith throws open the door of salvation and becomes the first step to union with God. As Paul teaches, faith leads to a justification or**

righteousness that consists in newness of life, a person becoming, through grace, a new creation in Christ. Man, under grace, receives a new understanding of human existence. It is the human life lived under grace. As Paul expressed it: *"I still live my human life, but it is a life of faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me"* (Gal.2:20). It is a faith that trusts in all circumstances of life and death that the grace of Jesus Christ will be sufficient.

A life lived under grace is a life lived under the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, Christian Faith is not a static condition but finds expression in the daily flow of human life. As it is a life lived in constant temptation, it is a faith which must constantly prove itself; it is a life that must be lived in the world. Of this John wrote, *"...the whole world is under the evil one"* (1Jn.5:19b). Therefore it is a life subjected to temptations from the world, the flesh, and the devil. Again John teaches the people of faith:

*Have no love for the world, nor the things that the world affords. If anyone loves the world, the Father's love has no place in him, for nothing that the world affords comes from the Father. Carnal allurements, enticements for the eye, the life of empty show—all these are from the world (Jn.2:15-16).*

Faith must strengthen and direct the soul of a Christian in this world. As Paul taught, *"Use the faith you have as your rule of life in the sight of God. Whatever does not accord with one's belief is sinful"* (Rom.14:22-23). He goes on to say, *"Each should be certain of his own conscience"* (Rom.14:5).

Obedience becomes intrinsic to the act of faith because faith stands in opposition to the natural person and human certitude. The natural man must be willing to surrender to the demands of faith in order that the believer may remain faithful. Faith and obedience remain the two sides of the same coin. Through the psalmist the Lord instructs His people (Ps.95:7-11):

*Today, if you should hear his voice, harden not your hearts as at the revolt in the day of testing in the desert, When your fathers tested and tried me, and saw my works for forty years. Because of this I was angered with that generation and I said, "They have always been of erring heart, and have never known my ways." Thus I swore in my anger, "They shall never enter into my rest" (Heb.3:7-11).*

With this background, perhaps we can better understand Paul's own confession, *"The justice I possess is that which comes through faith in Christ. It has its origin in God and is based on faith"*(Phil.3:9). Paul never rested presumptuously in the divine gift of justification or righteousness. His entire life, as a Christian, was in pursuit of complete conformity with Jesus Christ; wherein lies Christian perfection. With Paul we may say it is faith that makes a person a Christian, but it is by one's works that the value of one's Christianity will be measured—weighed in the balance.

## RELIGIOUS FOOLS

The behavior of the Galatians exasperated Paul. When he considered what he had preached among them, what they had believed, what had been the effects of faith in their lives, and now what they had turned to—this watered down mixture of Judaism and Christianity—he could presently only view them as fools, bewitched fools fallen under the power of evil. Their behavior defied reason and denied any logic to their religious beliefs. Theirs is a case of crass ignorance—culpable and sinful behavior. For these Galatians, this is not merely a matter of mind, but heart as well.

With the reception of Christian Baptism, the lives of the Galatians had been manifestly changed. The internal effects of the reception of the Holy Spirit produced peace, joy and love, the essential conditions for a Christian environment and community, along with external gifts of the Holy Spirit, such as tongues and prophecy, signs and wonders for the building up of the Christian Community in faith and love. We can see from Acts that signs and wonders accompanied the reception of baptism. After Paul baptized the twelve disciples of John, we read, *"As Paul laid hands on them, the Holy Spirit came down on them and they began to speak in tongues and to utter prophecies"* (Acts 19:6). Earlier, the convert Simon Magus of Samaria--

*...watched the signs and the great miracles as they occurred, and was quite carried away....Simon observed that it was through the laying on of hands that the apostles conferred the Spirit, and he made them an offer of money with the request, "Give me that power too, so that if I place my hands on anyone he will receive the Holy Spirit"* (Acts 8:13,18-19).

Such phenomena occurred in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea, and we can see from Paul's instruction on the proper conduct for church meetings, such

gifts as tongues and prophecy were common gifts in early Christian Communities (see 1Cor.4:1-40). Such gifts were seen as external proof of the internal reception of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 10:45;11:15).

There had been no lack of evidence of the reception of the Holy Spirit by the Galatians. The presence of the Holy Spirit had testified to their justification before God. Paul used the reception of the Holy Spirit, and the signs and wonders that accompanied the reception, to demonstrate the present foolish position of the Galatians. Addressing himself directly to the conditions and problems at hand Paul writes:

*You senseless Galatians! Who has cast a spell over you—you before whose eyes Jesus Christ was displayed to view upon his cross? I want to learn only one thing from you; how did you receive the Spirit? Was it through observance of the law or through faith in what you heard? How could you be so stupid? After beginning in the spirit, are you now to end in the flesh? Have you had such remarkable experiences all to no purpose—if indeed they were to no purpose? Is it because you observe the law or because you have faith in what you heard that God lavishes the Spirit on you and works wonders in your midst? (Gal.3:1-5)*

Paul insinuates that the Galatians have fallen under the power of some "evil eye," turning them away from the Crucified Christ who Paul had vividly displayed before their very eyes. In other words Paul had drawn a picture for them of the salvation flowing from the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Paul sees this turning toward the observance of the Mosaic Law for salvation as a return to the works of the flesh. It betrays their faith in the Holy Spirit, which was given to them as the first fruits of their redemption. For Paul, the flesh is the opposite of the spirit, and it symbolizes all that is not Christ—the non-Christ.

### THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

Paul turns to the example of Abraham as a second step in refuting the position the Galatians had taken. It is to be noted that Paul's method of using Scriptures to prove a point, or build a case, would not be a method acceptable today. Paul received his scriptural training in Jerusalem under Rabbi Gamaliel I, who trained him in the accepted rabbinical methods of the period that still survive today in the Talmud. The Rabbis, as all pious Jews, held the

Scriptures, in their entirety, to be the inspired Word of God. The whole of Scripture and all its parts were inspired. The Rabbis maintained that since each part was inspired, each part could stand on its own merit apart from its proper context. Any segment of Scripture could be used to support a moral or theological position without any reference to the text in its proper context. Today, as the Second Vatican Council has taught, we recognize that for a text to be properly interpreted, it must be seen in its proper context, and reflected against the entire background of Christian Revelation—both written and oral.

Paul viewed all things that occurred in and through Jesus Christ as preordained by God before time. Not only preordained, but much of it prefigured within the Old Testament. The Old Testament became a shadow of the reality to come in the New Covenant. Before the beginning of time, God, in His inscrutable Wisdom, willed that the Nations would be justified through faith in Christ. Paul discovered this divine reality prefigured and foretold in the Old Testament within the life of one no less than the Father of the Jewish People—Abraham. Paul maintained that long before Yahweh entered into the covenant of circumcision with Abraham, Yahweh made a promise to Abraham that through his seed all the Nations would be blessed. Paul interpreted this seed of universal blessing to be the Messiah—Jesus Christ. In Jesus, the promise to Abraham had been fulfilled.

What is even more to Paul's point is the fact that Abraham, long before circumcision, found favor in the eyes of God. Righteousness and justification were reputed to Abraham—or credited to him—on the grounds that he was a man of faith. The justification of Abraham was a gracious gift from God.

Abraham stands forth pre-eminently as the man-of-faith. His entire life displayed a heroic trust and confidence in the Word of God, a trust that demonstrated its depths by a life of heroic obedience, culminating with Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his beloved son at the command of Yahweh. Such faith resulted in his justification before God, and brought forth from God a promise to bless all nations through his seed. Paul tells the Galatians:

*Consider the case of Abraham: he "believed God, and it was credited to him as justice." This means that those who believe are sons of Abraham. Because Scripture saw in advance that God's way of justifying the Gentiles would be through faith, it foretold this*

*good news to Abraham: "All nations shall be blessed in you." Thus it is that all who believe are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith (Gal.3:6-9).*

### A CURSE NOT A BLESSING

The Jews, quoting Leviticus 18:5, "*Keep, then, my statutes and decrees, for the man who carries them out will find life through them,*" maintained that justification came through the observance of the Law. Paul refutes their claim maintaining that the necessary condition for justification under the Law was impossible to man—"*the man who carries them out will find life through them.*" In Paul's mind, to fail intentionally or unintentionally to observe the law in its entirety brought down upon a man the curse of the broken law. On Mount Ebal, Moses enumerated the curses to befall Israel if the Law was not totally observed:

*But if you do not hearken to the voice of the Lord, your God, and are not careful to observe all his commandments which I enjoin on you today, all these curses shall come upon you and overwhelm you (Dt.28:15).*

According to Paul, all men stood before the Law unjustified and cursed. He writes:

*All who depend on observance of the law, on the other hand, are under a curse. It is written, "Cursed is he who does not abide by everything written in the book of the law and carry it out." It should be obvious that no one is justified in God's sight by the law, for "the just man shall live by faith." But the law does not depend on faith. Its terms are: "Whoever does these things shall live by them" (Gal.3:10-12).*

Paul goes on to maintain that the Messiah Himself became accursed under the Law by His death on the cross precisely in order to free all men—Jews and Gentiles—from the curse of sin. In so doing, He established faith in Himself as the new criteria for justification, and for inheriting the promise made to Abraham. Paul identifies the reception of the Holy Spirit as the fulfillment of this promise. Paul insists:

*Christ has delivered us from the power of the law's curse by himself*



*becoming a curse for us, as it is written: "Accursed is anyone who is hanged on a tree." This has happened so that through Christ Jesus the blessing bestowed on Abraham might descend on the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, thereby making it possible for us to receive the promised Spirit through faith (Gal.3:13-14).*

The Prophet Habakkuk proclaimed: *"The just man, because of faith, shall live" (Hb.2:4b)*. Habakkuk foretold the establishment of new criteria for salvation, which transcended the Law and placed the condition of the human heart above the external works of one's life. Agreeing with the prophet and Paul, the author of Hebrews writes, *"My just man will live by faith and if he draws back I take no pleasure in him" (Heb.10:38)*. The three agree that the foundation of true religion is heartfelt trust in God. Later we see that James seeks to keep the record straight, guarding faith and religion against those teachers who degrade faith to a barren and sterile assent of the mind to religious truth. He insists, *"A person is justified by his works and not by faith alone... Be assured, then, that faith without works is as dead as a body without breath" (Jas.2:24,26)*.

Recognizing the essential relationship between faith and salvation, Paul continues to defend his position against the accusation that the Mosaic Law, given after the promise made to Abraham, took precedence and nullified whatever preceded it. Appealing to human law and custom, Paul draws an analogy between a last will and testament and the promise made to Abraham.

There is an implied analogy between a legal contract and a religious covenant. Paul writes:

*Brothers, let me give you an everyday example. You cannot add anything to a man's will or set it aside once it is legally validated. There were promises spoken to Abraham and to his "descendant." Scripture does not say "and to your descendants," as if it applied to many, but as if it applied only to one, "and to your descendant;" that is, to Christ. My point is this: a covenant formally ratified by God is not set aside as invalid by any law that came into being four hundred and thirty years later, nor is its promise nullified. Clearly, if one's inheritance comes through the law, it is no longer conferred in virtue of the promise. Yet it was by way of promise that God granted Abraham his privilege (Gal.3:15-18).*

Paul wishes to emphasize that a contract or covenant results from the mutual agreement between two parties, and may be terminated by their mutual agreement. But in the case of a will or last testament, only the will of the testator is involved. What is bestowed upon the heir does not flow from the law, or from the merits of the heir, but from the will of the testator. In regard to the case at hand, Yahweh made a promise to Abraham; He made this promise with no strings attached. Because of the fidelity of God, the promise cannot be made void by any subsequent covenant entered into with the Jews—a covenant that Paul finds decidedly inferior in nature to the promise.

Paul goes on to emphasize that the collective singular, "seed," is used, not "seeds." The Jews made a big point in emphasizing the selectiveness of the divine choice among the children of Abraham: Ishmael had been rejected in favor of Isaac; Esau in favor of Jacob. Paul follows this line and maintains that all descendants of Abraham in the flesh are rejected save Jesus Christ, the recipient of the promise. Jesus is, for Paul, the source from which will flow the new family of God. All those who accept Jesus Christ in faith are truly the children of Abraham and heirs of the promise. They become one with Christ partaking of His Holy Spirit. They constitute the Church of God on earth.

In a passage very difficult for interpreters (Gal.3:20 has received over 300 different interpretations), Paul insists that the Law cannot be the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. If it were, then justification would be through the Law. He wrote, *"If the law that was given was such that it could impart life, then justice would be a consequence of the law"* (Gal.3:21b). Paul goes on to point out that the Law came in the form of a contract, which called for the agreement of more than one party for its validity. In keeping with the rabbinical thought of his day, Paul maintains that the angels of Yahweh promulgated the Law, using Moses as the mediator between heaven and earth. But the promise came in the nature of a gracious gift, and its fulfillment depends only upon God--it rests solely upon the faithfulness of God. Paul goes on to inquire that if the Law is not the fulfillment of the promise, *"Does this mean the law is opposed to the promises of God?"* (Gal.3:21a). As the promise and the Law both proceed from the will of the one God, Paul knows such a thing is impossible, and responds to his own question with, "Again, unthinkable!"

## THE PURPOSE OF LAW

If the Law neither opposes the promise nor produces justification then *"What is the relevance of the law in such case?"* asks Paul. To the mind of Paul the Law had a good but limited purpose. It was promulgated through the medium of angels because of the transgressions of men, and *"it was to be valid only until that descendant or offspring came to whom the promise had been given"* (Gal.3:19). Paul had this to say about the Law in a letter to Timothy:

*We know the law is good, provided one uses it in the way law is supposed to be used—that is, with the understanding that it is aimed, not at good men but at the lawless and unruly, the irreligious and the sinful, the wicked and the godless... (Tim.1:8-9).*

Paul recognized, in his letter to the Romans, the existence of a divine law intrinsic to nature itself—a law recognized by men as "the natural law." Such a law directs the consciences of all men. Paul wrote the Romans:

*Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made. Therefore these men are inexcusable (Rom.1:20).*

With the Galatians, Paul does not view morality from the point of view of the natural law, but from the Jewish view. He argues that the revelation of the Mosaic Law forced the knowledge of sinfulness on the consciences of men; the argument being that there is no sin where there is no law. Objectively, the offense existed before the Law, and the Law was promulgated to convict man of sin and to awaken in his heart a fear of God's wrath for such deeds. Paul answers his own question about the purpose of the Law: *"It was given in view of transgressions"* (Gal.3:19). To the Jewish mind, sin was the failure to observe the Mosaic Law. The Law, in particular the Ten Commandments, encompassed God's Will, not only for the Jews but for all mankind. In the words of Paul the *"Scripture has locked all things in under the constraint of sin"* (Gal.3:22a). He asks, *"Why?"* Paul sees the Law as becoming a means of bringing about the fulfillment of the promise that justification would come through faith. To his question he gives the answer, *"So that the promise might be fulfilled in those who believe, in consequence of faith in Jesus Christ."*

Paul continues to explain the purpose of the Law from another standpoint. He views the condition of the Jews before the coming of the Messiah as a time of religious immaturity. Religiously they were like immature children who, in order to be trained properly for their future role in society, must be, as children, under the supervision of a strict tutor. Paul sees the Mosaic Law as the religious tutor of the Jews. He explains:

*Before faith came we were under the constraint of the law, locked in until the faith that was coming should be revealed. In other words, the law was our monitor until Christ came to bring about our justification through faith. But now that faith is here, we are no longer in the monitor's charge (Gal.3:23-25).*

Paul does not refer to religious faith itself, which was always present among the Jews, but faith in Jesus Christ raised from the dead.

#### EFFECTS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH

Paul saw faith in Jesus Christ as the door to religious maturity. He knew such faith had a drastic, personal effect upon the believer. Such a faith was no mere mental assent to truth, but a power that literally incorporated the believing person into Christ. Believers literally constituted the new spiritual Body of Jesus Christ as they all shared His One Spirit. Spiritually, Christians are not many but One. They have become many members of the One Body, which is Christ. As a consequence of this union and incorporation, each individual, united with Jesus Christ, is a Son of God. Paul powerfully and beautifully expressed this truth in these words:

*Each one of you is a son of God because of your faith in Christ Jesus. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus. Furthermore, if you belong to Christ you are the descendants of Abraham, which means you inherit all that was promised (Gal.3:26-29).*

## CHAPTER 7

### SONS OF GOD

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul declared the supreme Christian dignity when he said: *"All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourself with him" (Gal.3:27)*. Jesus Christ identified the baptized with His very self. He does not distinguish between His own person and that of the baptized, although they remain distinct persons. Christ creates a corporate personality of which He is the Head and the baptized are its members. *"All are one in Christ Jesus,"* says Paul. Yet all remain distinct individuals with their unique responsibilities. All share with Christ the one Holy Spirit, and the merits and graces of Jesus Christ become those of the Body. The dignity and holiness of Christ are imputed to the baptized. God's perfect love flows through the baptized casting out all fear.

There remains for the baptized the responsibility to be fruitful. As the Body of Christ, there can be nothing less. There is a Kingdom of God still to be wrought within the hearts of men and spread over the face of the earth. To His disciples Jesus said:

*I am the vine, you are the branches. He who lives in me and I in him, will produce abundantly... My Father has been glorified in your bearing much fruit and becoming my disciples...it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure so that all you ask the Father in my name he will give you... The command I give you is this, that you love one another (Jn.15:5,8,16,17).*

Loving another Christian is loving Jesus Christ in a concrete realistic fashion. Withdrawing our love from another Christian is withdrawing our heart from Christ. Jesus commands love and fruitfulness for the sake of our personal happiness. Only through this means can the Body experience the same joy as the Head: *"All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete,"* says the Lord to His disciples (Jn. 15:11).

So many corollaries flow from the principle of faith that Christians are one in Christ. How true the words of Pope Paul VI, "We are all responsible for our times and our brothers." True Christians are known not by their membership in the Church, but by their fruits.

## BEFORE THE MESSIAH

Paul taught the Gentile Galatians that they had become children of Abraham and inheritors of all that was promised through their faith in Jesus Christ. He viewed their previous pagan condition as somewhat analogous to the Jews' condition before the coming of the Messiah. All the world was in bondage, held in the condition of spiritual childhood. The Mosaic Law served as the tutor of the Jews and convicted them of sin. The pagans, on the other hand, were like orphaned children abiding by the will of their departed Father. Although in the future they would inherit all, while still in the state of childhood (spiritual immaturity), their condition was no different from that of a slave. Paul wrote:

*Brothers: as long as a designated heir is not of age his condition is no different from that of a slave, even though in name he is master of all his possessions; for he is under the supervision of guardians and administrators until the time set by his father. In the same way, while we were not yet of age we were like slaves subordinated to the elements of the world (Gal.4:1-3).*

Although all were in a like stage of spiritual immaturity, there was a major difference between the children of Israel and those of paganism. The Jews possessed true knowledge of God as Father and were directed by divine revelation. For the pagans, it was more or less a time of spiritual darkness. They were like children lost in a dark forest with no true knowledge of their Father or how to reach Him. They looked to the stars above their heads to guide their fate. On a more practical level, human philosophies and governments directed their external conducts while reason and conscience directed their internal lives. Paul referred to these things as "the elements of the world."

Although the pagan world found itself in spiritual darkness, Paul maintained in his letter to the Romans that God had not left them without light, and their present condition was due to their perversity.

*They certainly had knowledge of God...In fact, whatever can be known about God is clear to them; he himself made it so. Since the creation of the world, invisible realities, God's eternal power and divinity, have become visible, recognized through the things he has made (Rom.1:21,19-20).*

Paul agreed with the author of Wisdom who wrote: *“For all men were by nature foolish who were in ignorance of God, and who from the good things seen did not succeed in knowing him who is, and from studying the works did not discern the artisan” (Wis.13:1).*

Nevertheless, Paul still maintained that God directed the pagans through the human conscience. He wrote: *“When Gentiles who do not have the law keep it as by instinct, these men although without the law serve as a law for themselves. They show that the demands of the law are written in their hearts. Their conscience bears witness...” (2:14-15).*

Such conditions endured until Christ came in the divinely predestined moment. The hour of His coming is referred to as "the designated time" or "the fullness of time." It remains a divine secret why God sent His Son to earth when He did. Men contemplate the fact and offer their conjectures. St. Thomas Aquinas reasoned that God delayed the coming of His Son until the moment mankind exhausted all human resources in its search for salvation, and were forced by its evident weakness and evilness to look to heaven for salvation and longing for its Savior. Others maintain that the human race had to be preconditioned for the acceptance of the spirit and teachings of the Messiah. First, it must learn the elementary principles of religion and morality, and be subjected to a compulsory obedience to learn proper conduct. Others have seen the rise of the Roman Empire, in the providence of God, as being a vital part of "the fullness of time." With its laws and order and conquest of the known world, the Roman Empire created a climate conducive for the spreading of the Gospel. The Greek language had become universal, and the Hebrew Scriptures had been made accessible to the Gentile world by the Septuagint Bible, a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Jewish synagogues were scattered throughout the Gentile world. Apparently the Messiah came when the world was most in need and best prepared to receive Him.

## THE INCARNATION

Paul tells the Galatians, *"But when the designated time had come, God sent forth his Son born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal.4:4)*. There is a possibility that this letter is the first written Scripture of the New Testament. If so, it is probably the first Scripture reference to the great Christian Mystery of the Incarnation: Jesus is God-Man. Paul's words imply the pre-existence of God's Son, and the divinity of that Son. He tells us that God's Son has become a human being and a Jew — *"born of a woman, born under the law."* In Christ we have a Person who possesses both a divine and a human nature. He is a Person clearly distinct from the Person of the Father, as He is sent forth from the Father. Coming forth from God as Son, He is of God— a sharer in the Divine Nature. Herein lies the foundation for belief in the Christian Mystery of the Most Holy Trinity.

In the Epistle to the Philippians Paul writes of Jesus Christ: *"Though he was in the form of God, he did not deem equality with God something to be grasped at. Rather, he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, being born in the likeness of men. He was known to be of human estate, and it was thus that he humbled himself...(Phil.2:6-8a)*.

The Epistle to the Colossians clearly states:

*He is the image of the invisible God, the first-born of all creatures. In him everything in heaven and on earth was created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations, principalities or powers; all were created through him, and for him. He is before all else that is. In him everything continues in being... In Christ the fullness of deity resides in bodily form (Col.1:15-17;2:9).*

Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church has fought many battles in defense of the divinity and the humanity of Jesus Christ. In the universal Church Council of Ephesus in 431 A.D., the Mother of Jesus was acclaimed Mother of God as a defense against Nestorius, Patriarch of Constantinople, and his followers, who maintained against the traditional teachings of the Church that the Son of Mary was not the same person as the Son of God. The Church but echoes the teaching of Luke, who recorded these words of the blessed Elizabeth, mother of John the Baptist:



*Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and cried out in a loud voice: "Blest are you among women and blest is the fruit of your womb. But who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?"(Lk.1:41-43).*

Some have wanted to see in the phrase, "born of woman," a Pauline reference to the virgin birth. However, most scholars agree that the expression neither confirms nor denies the virginity of Mary while it does confirm the humanity of the Messiah.

Paul maintains that the Messiah, as a Jew, was subject to the Mosaic Law. In Him the Law reached perfect fulfillment. Jesus was obedient to the Will of God—"obediently accepting even death, death on a cross" (Phil.2:8b). And yet, because of this obedience, he died under the curse of the Law. Paul explains that the Son of God was "born under the law, to deliver from the law those who were subjected to it, so that we might receive our status as adopted sons" (Gal.4:5). As long as the Jews remained under the law they remained in the status of "designated heir," no different from that of slaves. Jesus fulfilled the law, and through His obedience reached, as a man, spiritual perfection. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews wrote:

*Indeed, it was fitting that when bringing many sons to glory, God, for whom and through whom all things exist, should make their leader in the work of salvation perfect through suffering... Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered; and when perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Heb.2:10;5:8-9).*

A Jew or Gentile achieves the status of adopted son of the Heavenly Father through their identification with Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself is the only begotten Son of God, and through a mystical union with this Son, both Jew and Gentile receive the status of adopted sons sharing completely in the life and glory of God's natural Son. As Paul wrote: "All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with him. There does not exist among you Jew or Greek, slave or freeman, male or female. All are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3:27-28).

Reflecting upon this truth, St. John Eudes wrote of the relationship between Jesus and the Christian:

He is indeed to you what a head is to its members. All he has is yours: spirit, heart, body, soul, and faculties. You must use them all as though they were your own, so that by serving him you may praise and glorify him.

Not only do you stand in a relation to God's Son, but you ought also to be in him as members are in their Head. Have no true life except in him, sole Fountain of true life; for apart from him you will find only death and loss. He should be the sole principle of your vital movements, acts and powers. Live out of him and for him....You are one with Jesus as members with their Head, and you ought to be one with him in spirit, soul, life, will, counsel, and heart. And he ought to be your spirit, heart, love, life and everything else.(St. John Eudes)

#### PROOF OF SONSHIP

Paul saw within the reception of the Holy Spirit proof of the divine adoption. At the time of Jesus' baptism we read: "*The Holy Spirit descended on him in visible form like a dove. A voice from heaven was heard to say: 'You are my beloved Son. On you my favor rests'*" (Lk.3:22).

John [the Baptist] gave this testimony also: "*I saw the Spirit descend like a dove from the sky, and it came to rest on him... Now I have seen for myself and have testified, 'This is God's chosen one'*"(Jn.1:32,34).

We see from the Scriptures a correlation between the reception of the Holy Spirit and divine favor. Paul sees it not only as a sign of grace and favor, but of sonship as well—primarily where there occurs a permanent indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Paul taught the Romans, "*We have the Spirit as first fruits,*" and he saw this possession of the Holy Spirit as the foundation of Christian Hope: "*And this hope will not leave us disappointed, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us*" (Rom.5:5).

To the Corinthians Paul wrote: *“God is the one who firmly establishes us along with you in Christ; it is he who anointed us and has sealed us, thereby depositing the first payment, the Spirit, in our hearts”* (2Cor.1:21-22). We read in Ephesians:

*In him you too were chosen; when you heard the glad tidings of salvation, the word of truth, and believed in it, you were sealed with the Holy Spirit who had been promised. He is the pledge of our inheritance, the first payment against the full redemption of a people God has made his own, to praise his glory. (Eph.1:13-14)*

To the Galatians Paul said: *“The proof that you are sons is the fact that God has sent forth into our hearts the spirit of his Son which cries out ‘Abba!’ (‘Father!’) You are no longer a slave but a son! And the fact that you are a son makes you an heir, by God’s design”* (Gal.4:6-7).

For the ear that can hear there is here a quiet intimation of the doctrine of the Most Holy Trinity: *“God has sent forth into our hearts the Spirit of his Son.”* The Holy Spirit is spoken of as “the Spirit” of the Son because the Holy Spirit proceeds forth from all eternity from the Father and the Son. As man, the Son received the Holy Spirit at His baptism as a permanent gift to His humanity. As the Repositor of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit is Christ’s Gift to give. He is the Dispenser of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of John makes clear the personal distinction between the Son and the Holy Spirit. Jesus tells His apostles:

*I will ask the Father and he will give you another Paraclete—to be with you always: the Spirit of truth...the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will instruct you in everything and remind you of all that I told you... When the Paraclete comes, the Spirit of truth who comes from the Father—and whom I myself will send from the Father—he will bear witness on my behalf... If I fail to go, the Paraclete will never come to you, whereas if I go, I will send him to you (Jn.14:16-17a, 26; 15:26; 16:7b).*

It is the mind of the Catholic Church that the Scriptures make clear both the divinity of the Holy Spirit *“who comes from the Father”* and the personal distinction of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son, from whom the Holy Spirit was sent forth. One does not send oneself but another. Again, this

distinction is made quite clear in the divine commission recorded in Matthew: "*Baptize them in the name 'of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit'" (Mt.28:19b)*. Paul certainly possessed an understanding of the Mysteries of the Incarnation and the Most Holy Trinity, and he sought to ground the faith of his converts in this foundation of Christian Truths!

The presence of the Holy Spirit creates a filial relationship with the Father. It is analogous to a parent's protective love of a small child and the child's absolute confidence and trust in that love. St. Theresa of Lisieux confirmed that she arrived at the knowledge of such love through her love-experience with her earthly father. Such knowledge left no room in her heart for fear. Scholars have been quick to observe that *abba* in Aramaic is a term of affection and endearment and best translated as "poppa" or "daddy" rather than by the more formal term of "father."

While on a tour of the Holy Land a priest was standing outside the Jerusalem museum that housed certain scrolls from Qumran when suddenly he heard a small voice crying frantically, "Abba! Abba!" It was the very first time he had ever heard those words outside of the Gospel readings. Turning to find the source of the sound, he saw a small girl about five years old anxiously running around like a lost little birdie chirping "Abba! Abba!" Then out of the crowd stepped a huge, dark, fearful looking man who gently took the child by the hand. Together they walked calmly down the steps from the museum. As her hand rested securely in the hand of her father, her previously frantic little heart was at peace. The priest quietly said to himself, "That is what you (God) have really been trying to teach us, isn't it!"

Because of what the Holy Spirit accomplishes within the soul, Paul, once again, confirms, "*You are no longer a slave but a son! And the fact that you are a son makes you an heir, by God's design" (Gal.4:7)*. Paul cannot over-emphasize the truth that such spiritual blessings flow from the love and predilection of God, and is in no way attributable to man's merits. It is all unmerited grace through Jesus Christ.

Reflecting upon the present exalted spiritual state of the Galatians, Paul cannot but contrast it with their past spiritual condition. Paganism had held them in the bondage of slavery. Ever fearful of the unknown and the supernatural, they lived in dread of offending the gods they interminably sought to appease through rituals often frightful in nature. Paul found some

excuse for their previous idolatrous life. From the darkness of their minds they worshipped their false gods in ignorance.

Writing later to the Romans from the city of Corinth, he was far less generous in his attitude toward paganism. In Athens he had experienced the intellectual sophistication and prideful spirit of paganism, and in Corinth he had witnessed the moral degradation and enslavement of paganism. He attributed to the pagans an irreligious and perverse spirit hindering the truth in their perversity. He wrote, "*These men are inexcusable.*"

*These men who exchange the truth of God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator... They claimed to be wise, but turned into fools instead; they exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images representing mortal man, birds, beasts, and snakes... They did not see fit to acknowledge God, so God delivered them up to their own depraved sense to do what is unseemly...delivered them up to disgraceful passions (Rom.1:25,22,28,26).*

Such men experience the Wrath of God, which consists in abandoning them to their evil.

### RETURN TO ENSLAVEMENT

Regardless of the Galatians previous culpability, or lack of it, Paul now finds their behavior inexcusable and censorious. How can they now, so willingly, turn to feed their spirits upon the husk of this world after having tasted the banquet of the Spirit? They have been rescued by the love of God from the enslavement of paganism, and recognized as sons of the heavenly Father. Paul sees this serious flirtation and fascination with the teachings of the Judaizers, as a return to a different form of enslavement. They are returning to routine and mechanical religious observances in order to please God and win the grace of salvation. Such a system can only engender, once again, fear and servility. This they willingly substitute for life in the Spirit. They forsake gospel spirituality, its freedom, and its call to maturity for religious practices that foster spiritual retardation. Spiritually the Galatians appear very similar to the Jews of the desert who longed to return to their old enslaving pleasures of Egypt when they discovered the price of freedom too high for their taste.

Paul said to the Galatians:

*In the past, when you did not acknowledge God, you served as slaves to gods who are not really divine. Now that you have come to know God— or rather, have been known by him—how can you return to those powerless, worthless, natural elements to which you seem willing to enslave yourselves once more? You even go so far as to keep the ceremonial observance of days and months, seasons and years! (Gal.4:8-10).*

Most probably Paul refers to the liturgical observances prescribed in the Mosaic Law. He speaks of these practices as lacking the power to strengthen or enrich the soul. This judgment is made in light of what has transpired in Jesus Christ, and in light of the fact that these practices are being substituted for faith in Christ as the means of salvation. Apparently, Paul himself, as did a great deal of the early converts from Judaism (see Acts 21:20), continued to observe many Jewish customs and rituals to some degree. However, he no longer saw these things as a means to salvation, although they could still be spiritually useful and advantageous.

Apparently the degree to which the Galatians have entered into these Jewish practices and abandoned the teachings of Paul leave a sinking and fearful feeling in Paul's heart. He gives vent to these emotions by writing, *"I fear for you; all my efforts with you may have been wasted"* (Gal.4:11). Paul is like the farmer who ploughed his field, sowed his seed, watched the grain grow, only to see it completely covered by a summer flood. Was all his loving labor in vain? Has so much effort produced so little lasting fruit?

### MEMORIES OF BETTER DAYS

What Paul wrote triggered his mind back to earlier days in Galatia. He looked back nostalgically to happier times. He recalled how he had once lived among them, not as a Jew, but conformed to their way of life, demonstrating the catholicity of Jesus Christ. He sought to teach them by his example that faith in Jesus Christ, not membership in the Jewish religion, was essential for eternal salvation. Paul plainly demonstrated his apostolic technique in a letter to the Corinthians:

*Although I am not bound to anyone, I made myself the slave of all so as to win over as many as possible. I became like a Jew to the*

*Jews in order to win the Jews. To those bound by the law I became like one who is bound (although in fact I am not bound by it), that I might win those bound by the law. To those not subject to the law I became like one not subject to it (not that I am free from the law of God, for I am subject to the law of Christ), that I might win those not subject to the law. To the weak I became a weak person with a view to winning the weak. I have made myself all things to all men in order to save at least some of them. In fact, I do all that I do for the sake of the gospel in the hope of having a share in its blessings (1Cor.9:19-23).*

Paul well understood that the supreme command is the salvation of souls. All else becomes secondary. He distinguishes well the essentials of life eternal from the non-essentials of time. He knows what must be preserved at all cost and what may be abandoned. Some lesser souls put everything on the same level.

The irony of the situation is that the Galatians now embrace what Paul had abandoned in order to win them. In the face of this he writes, "*I beg you, brothers, to become like me as I became like you*" (Gal.4:12). As a source of his spiritual security, Paul had renounced the practice of the Jewish religion for an absolute faith in the merits of Jesus Christ as the means of salvation. As he told the Philippians later:

*But those things I used to consider as gain I have now reappraised as loss in the light of Christ. I have come to rate all as loss in the light of the surpassing knowledge of my Lord Jesus Christ. For his sake I have forfeited everything; I have accounted all else rubbish so that Christ may be my wealth and I may be in him, not having any justice of my own based on observance of the law. The justice I possess is that which comes through faith in Christ.. (Phil.3:7-9).*

Paul assures the Galatians that this is not an issue of personal animosity between them and himself. Personally they had never been anything but kind and gracious toward Paul. He recalls how he happened to preach the gospel message to them. At the time he arrived in Galatia he apparently had had another destination in mind for evangelization. He ended up in Galatia because of a personal infirmity.

There has been much conjecture concerning this mysterious illness of Paul's. Some find clues in the text itself that he may have been afflicted with epilepsy, and others discover that he probably suffered from an eye disease. Dr. Ramsey suggested that Paul contracted malaria in the malaria infested low lands of Perga. Because of this illness he could not evangelize in Perga, but had to proceed, out of necessity, to the healthier, higher altitude of Pisidian Antioch to regain his health. In Luke's narration in Acts we read that the apostles sailed from Cyprus to Perga in Pamphylia. All that Luke relates is that John Mark abandoned the apostolic expedition there, and Paul and Barnabas "*continued to travel on from Perga and came to Antioch in Pisidia.*" (Acts 13:14a). Luke makes no mention of any attempt at this time to evangelize in Perga. However, he does tell us that on their return trip from the Galatian country, "*They passed through Pisidia and came to Pamphylia. After preaching the message in Perga, they went down to Attalia*" (Acts 14:24). Obviously something impeded their preaching there the first time, but not the second.

What we do know about Paul's illness is that it was debilitating, and had some disagreeable physical aspects that were a trial to those around him. In a word, Paul preached to the Galatians when he was weak and not in his best form. Nevertheless, they received him in an extraordinary manner. Jesus Christ could not have been treated better. He confesses to them:

*You are aware that it was a bodily ailment that first occasioned my bringing you the gospel. My physical condition was a challenge which you did not despise or brush aside in disgust. On the contrary, you took me to yourselves as an angel of God, even as if I had been Christ Jesus! (Gal.4:13-14).*

Paul wonders loudly what has gone wrong along the way; has he now become an anathema to them? "*What has happened to your openhearted spirit? I can testify on your behalf that if it were possible you would have plucked out your eyes and given them to me*" (Gal.4:15).

## PRICE OF TRUTH

Paul had done nothing to harm the Galatians. What he had done was out of love for their eternal salvation. At great personal cost he had lovingly shared with them the gospel truth. He led them out of the darkness of paganism into the saving light of Jesus Christ. He had spoken some hard words to them, but



they had been spoken for their shock value, in hopes of forcing upon their conscious awareness the seriousness of their situation. Paul is like a loving parent who cannot remain silent in the face of their children who are consorting with corrupt and criminal types. Paul puts a very powerful psychological question to the Galatians, "*Have I become your enemy just because I tell you the truth?*"

We have only to look at the lives of the Old Testament prophets to see how unwelcomed truth can stir deadly hatred in the hearts of its hearers. John the Evangelist identified Jesus as the Light of this world—as a Light of Truth revealing the darkness of sin within the hearts of men. Precisely because Jesus was Truth, he stirred up deadly hatred in men's hearts that sought His extinction. John explained it well:

*The judgment of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were wicked. Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it for fear his deeds will be exposed. But he who acts in truth comes into the light, to make clear that his deeds are done in God (Jn.3:19-21).*

We need not ask what happens when the unwelcome light enters into the preferred darkness.

Truth is power. It is a power like the sun. It is a power like radiation. Truth is light but too much light hurts and harms the eyes and may cause blindness. When the light of truth is too much for the heart to bear, the heart may reject the truth for the softer lie, leaving the soul in a less painful darkness. It can cause a reaction of hatred toward the harbinger of truth. Truth, like radiation, can heal. Error causes much physical and psychological illness. Too much truth at one time, like an overexposure to radiation, can cause more harm than good. Truths spoken imprudently to another may result in serious harm to the soul. Truth is a power to be handled patiently and prudently. There is a time to speak and a time to refrain from doing so. There is a time to speak only so much and no more. The amount of truth must not be more than the soul can bear and handle constructively. When using the healing light of truth, both timing and quantity are essential.

We know that certain people, because of their emotional state, are not good subjects for contemplative prayer, precisely because such prayer will

eventually throw light into the darkness of the person's subconscious. The light of contemplative prayer will reveal hidden evil, un-repented sins and many unholy desires and motivations. Such revelations can lead to a serious emotional breakdown. However, for psychologically healthy people, who are somewhat grounded in reality, such light can become an indispensable means to spiritual growth and maturity. There is no need to fear the light of truth coming from the Holy Spirit of Truth. The Lord is a gentle teacher; He does not flood the soul with truth. He is like the lamp with the three way switch: dim, bright, and brighter. He presents the truth that the soul can bear and is in needs of for today's progress. St. Teresa of Jesus spoke of it as the "bitter bread" of self-knowledge to be eaten daily on the road of prayer. Those who can take it should pray in the words of Cardinal Newman, "Lead thou me on kindly Light. Lead thou me on!"

Paul cannot but wonder if it is not the truth he preached to the Galatians that is causing them to close their hearts to him, seeing him now as the enemy of their salvation. Thinking of "enemy" turns Paul's mind back to those Judaizers, the real enemies of their salvation. No doubt Paul possessed the gift of discernment of spirits, and he certainly discerned the spirits of the men who were subverting the faith of the Galatians.

### SARAH AND HAGAR

Apparently, these Judaizers were presently hovering over the Galatians like anxious mother hens giving their undivided attention to the spiritual welfare of these misguided Christians. The Galatians naturally responded favorably to all this flattering attention. They remind one of these present day Catholics who leave the Church to join some religious sect because they receive such flattering attention from its membership. They willingly sell their Catholic birthright for the porridge of social attention entitled "warm fellowship." We agree with Paul that such social attention and fellowship is good if done for the proper motive. Often it has been used to seduce emotionally starved people away from the truth and enslave them in error. Speaking of the Judaizers, Paul writes:

*The people I have referred to are not courting your favor in any generous spirit. What they really want is to exclude you so that you may court their favor. It would be well for you to be courted for the right reasons at all times, and not only when I happen to be with you (Gal.4:17-18).*

Paul discerns that all this flattering attention given to the Galatians is in order for the Judaizers to get their hooks into them, to separate them from Paul and his kind, and to make the Galatians dependent upon the Judaizers as their spiritual teachers and fathers.

Paul sees this situation as serious. How it has come to this dangerous state baffles him. When he left them, they had seemed so well on the right path and on a sure road to religious maturity. Now they are regressing and back where they began. Paul uses the analogy of a pregnant mother and her child to express the closeness of his own emotional and spiritual ties with the Galatians. He humbly confesses, "*You are my children, and you put me back in labor pains until Christ is formed in you. If only I could be with you now and speak to you differently! You have me at a complete loss!*" (Gal.4:19-20).

Paul must deal with this delicate situation by letter. It is a situation that in ways escapes him. He is unable to put his finger upon the real pulse of the problem. It is all very frustrating for him. As he put it, he feels "at a complete loss!"

Paul may have felt somewhat lost and frustrated by the Galatian affair, but despair itself was alien to him. Paul essentially fights with the intent to win. If one thing proves ineffectual, he takes another tactic. Since the Judaizers made so much of being descendants of Abraham, and staunchly supported their position with the Scriptures, Paul now seeks to fight fire with fire. He shrewdly seeks to turn the force of their own arguments against them. His method would leave a lot to be desired by today's audience, but Paul proceeds in the accepted rabbinical fashion of his time. He begins with a question to the Galatians, which he will answer, "*You who want to be subject to the law, tell me: do you know what the law has to say?*" (Gal.4:21). Following the example of the Jewish philosopher Philo, Paul now resorts to allegorizing a section of the Scriptures.

The Judaizers emphasized the importance of being a descendant of Abraham, and Paul points out that Abraham had more than one son, mentioning the son by a slave woman (Ishmael) and the son by a free woman (Isaac). No mention is made of the children of Keturah, who was married to Abraham after the death of Sarah. We know from Genesis that God promised descendants to Abraham. When no children were born, Sarah, his wife, gave her maid servant, Hagar, to Abraham in order to bear a son for Abraham and Sarah. Ishmael was born to Hagar when Abraham was 86 years of age. However,

Ishmael was not the son of the promise. Many years later an old and sterile Sarah miraculously bore Abraham's son Isaac, the divinely promised heir. Abraham was 100 years old. When Isaac reached the age of three, Abraham celebrated his weaning with a great banquet. At the time we are told:

*Sarah noticed the son whom Hagar the Egyptian had borne playing with her son Isaac; so she demanded of Abraham: "Drive out that slave and her son! No son of that slave is going to share the inheritance with my son Isaac!" (Gn.21:9-10).*

Some have insisted that Ishmael was teasing or tormenting Isaac rather than "playing" with him. Paul seems to accept this interpretation. We know from Genesis 16:5-14 that very hard feelings had existed between Sarah and Hagar for years. Ishmael may have picked up some of his mother's animosity.

Paul tells the Galatians, "*All this is an allegory: the two women stand for the two covenants*"(Gal.4:24a). Hagar, being a slave, brings forth children into slavery, and is a representative of the Mosaic Covenant made at Sinai in Arabia that brings forth children subjected to the Law, and therefore to slavery. Sarah as a free woman brings forth children of the promise and into freedom, representing the New Covenant of the Spirit. The child of Hagar was a result of nature—a child of the flesh. The child of Sarah was a result of heavenly intervention—a child of the spirit. The natural sterility of Sarah who produces a child through the grace of God calls to Paul's mind the words of Isaiah:

*Rejoice, you barren one who bear no children; break into song, you stranger to the pains of childbirth! For many are the children of the wife deserted—far more than of her who has a husband! (Gal.4:27).*

These words originally applied to Sion, whose cities had been deserted but were now receiving back the exiles. As Hagar represented the earthly Jerusalem bringing forth children unto slavery, Sarah, on the other hand, represents the heavenly Jerusalem now bringing forth children free in the Spirit.

This all applies to the Christian Church, which does not produce natural children but children through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In a word, Paul sees Hagar as representing Judaism and Sarah as representing Christianity, and he insists there exists incompatibility between the two. One

persecutes the other. Paul makes his application. He began by asking the question, *"Do you know what the law has to say?"* What is the consequence of all this? Now he asks, *"What does Scripture say on this point?"* Paul answers the questions: *"Cast out slave girl and son together; for the slave girl's son shall never be an heir on equal terms with the son"* of the one born free (Gal.4:30).

Not too subtly Paul tells the Galatians to get rid of these Judaizers. Any relationship with them can only mean a loss of freedom and bondage. There is a veiled warning to the Galatians. Remember, even though Ishmael was a dutiful son, because of his innate nature he had no lasting place in the Father's house. This belonged to the one who possessed the true spirit of sonship. *"Therefore, my brothers,"* Paul reminds them, *"We are not children of a slave girl but of a mother who is free"* (Gal.4:31).

The Heavenly Jerusalem, who produces true sons of God.

## CHAPTER 8

### FREEDOM OF GOD'S SONS

#### INTRODUCTION

By using the allegory of Sarah and Hagar, Paul attempts to demonstrate to the Galatians the fundamental differences between the Old and the New Covenants. He especially seeks to show the relationship within the two covenants between God and man. Adherents to the Sinai Covenant, represented by Ishmael, have inherited an enslavement that guarantees no lasting place within the Father's House. People of the New Covenant, represented by Isaac, have inherited freedom and, as heirs of Christ, possess an assured position within the Father's House.

For Christians now to embrace the order of the Old Covenant was, in the eyes of Paul, a repudiation of Jesus Christ. Not only would this involve moral servitude, but, and much more dangerous, it would actively cut one off from Jesus Christ. That implied being cut off from the effects flowing from the life and death of Jesus.

Paul exhorts the Galatians, *"It was for liberty that Christ freed us. So stand firm, and do not take on yourself the yoke of slavery a second time!" (Gal.5:1).* The text indicates that a systematic practice of circumcision has become common practice. And this to Paul's mind indicates a transfer of faith in Christ to confidence in the Torah for salvation. Paul warns:

*Pay close attention to me, Paul, when I tell you that if you have yourselves circumcised, Christ will be of no use to you! I point out once more to all who receive circumcision that they are bound to the law in its entirety. Any of you who seek your justification in the law have severed yourselves from Christ and fallen from God's favor!(Gal.5:2-4).*

From the words he used, Paul implies that a serious rupture has occurred in the life-growth process. A relationship has been severed upon which depended

the essential elements of life. It is, on the natural level, in the category of divorce or death in a husband-wife relationship. This break with Christ results not only in the paralysis of the spiritual life, but also increases the demand for a greater dependence upon legal observance for justification. Christians seeking their justification through legal observance travel on a dead-end street because, through their severance from Jesus Christ, they have "fallen from God's favor!" The author of Hebrews expresses it this way:

*For when men have once been enlightened and have tasted the heavenly gift and become sharers in the Holy Spirit, when they have tasted the good words of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to make them repent again, since they are crucifying the Son of God for themselves and holding him up to contempt. Ground, which drinks in the rain falling on it again and again, and brings forth vegetation useful to those to whom it is cultivated, receives the blessing of God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless; it is soon cursed, and finally is burned (Heb.6:4-8).*

#### FAITH INFUSED WITH LOVE

Confirming a fundamental Christian dogma, Paul writes, *"It is in the spirit that we eagerly await the justification we hope for, and only faith can yield it" (Gal.5:5)*. It is not in the works of the flesh—the observance of the Mosaic Law—that a true Christian seeks righteousness before God, but through faith in the merits of Jesus Christ. If the Galatians desire to achieve righteousness through works, then Paul will devise for them the true Christian formula. He tells them, *"In Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor the lack of it counts for anything; only faith, which expresses itself through love" (Gal.5:6)*.

Circumcision had its value in the Old Covenant, but for the baptized in Christ it was meaningless as a means to salvation. In fact, circumcision for those in Christ could be extremely detrimental, as Paul pointed out, if done for the wrong motives. We know Paul himself had Timothy, a Galatian, circumcised. His mother was a Jew and his father a Greek. Paul desired to have Timothy as a traveling companion, and he circumcised Timothy because it made it easier for Timothy to associate with Jews. He was circumcised for expediency and not for salvation. However, this action, no doubt, left Paul open to the accusation of being pragmatic and unprincipled when it came to religious truth.

Paul makes clear what is essential "in Christ Jesus." Faith is essential. It is the door that leads into Christ through baptism. According to John, it is the first work. The Jews asked Jesus, "*What must we do to perform the works of God?*" *Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God: have faith in the One whom he sent'*(see *Jn.6:28a-29.*) However, baptism is a birth into the spirit and life of Jesus Christ, which implies the activity of Christ. Love is essential. The energy of Christ's life is defined as divine love; the products of His life were works of love. A Christian with faith but no love can be compared to the stillborn or to a crib death. As James warned: "*...faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead ... For just as a body without a spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead* (*Jas.2:17,26*).

Paul himself wrote, "*If I have faith great enough to move mountains but have no love, I am nothing*" (*1Cor.13:2b*). Jesus Christ Himself taught that true love of God and neighbor was the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets. Without a life of charitable works there is truly no divine evidence of the Holy Spirit operative within the soul. Where there is no presence or activity of the Holy Spirit, there is no guarantee of salvation, no foundation for hope. Faith inflamed with charity will save. Naked faith alone is not enough, it must be clothed with the chasuble of charity.

For a time the Galatians had progressed in the essentials of the Christian life: faith and love. They had walked the assured path of eternal life. However, as we see, they had run into a stumbling block. The Judaizers had diverted them from the path of true faith. As Paul pointed out, their diversion along the Way was of no small consequence; their eternal salvation was on the line. The Lord himself warned His disciples:

*Be on your guard against false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but underneath are wolves on the prowl. You will know them by their deeds. Do you ever pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from prickly plants? Never! (Mt.7:15-16).*

Paul discerned the fruit and knew the evil he had to deal with. The Judaizers were a corruptive leaven in Galatia. A favorite image of Paul was to compare the Christian quest with running a race for a crown of glory.



Paul tells the Galatians:

*You were progressing so very well; who diverted you from the path of truth? Such enticement does not come from him who calls you. "A little yeast can affect the entire dough." I trust that, in the Lord, you will not adopt a different view. May condemnation fall on whoever it is that is unsettling you (Gal.5:7-10).*

Paul goes on to add his personal malediction on the advocates of circumcision: *"Would that those who are troubling you might go the whole way, and castrate themselves!" (Gal.5:12).* Probably Paul intended to place the Judaizers on the same level as the pagan priests of Cybele, who practiced castration upon themselves. Apparently, Paul had been accused of advocating circumcision himself. The grounds for the accusation may have been the Timothy affair. Paul simply responded to this charge with,

*As for me, brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why do the attacks on me continue? If I were, the cross would be a stumbling block no more (Gal.5:11).*

It was the cross that made the way of circumcision null and void. For this reason Paul preached the Cross, and it was a stumbling block for the Jews.

### FREEDOM FOR THE GREEKS

The freedom of the children of God is an essential message within this epistle. Paul clearly stresses that this freedom is lost by a return to the Mosaic Law. However, Judaism is not the only dangerous direction to go in. In the heart of every baptized Christian there is an internal war to be waged in order to entrench and to extend the Kingdom of God within the human soul. Salvation begins in the spirit with faith. If faith is to reach perfection within a person, it must be extended to the entire person. Paul views the flesh (*sarx*) of man as the implacable enemy of the spiritual life, a major obstacle to Christian Freedom. Paul wrote the Galatians:

*My brothers, remember that you have been called to live in freedom— but not a freedom that gives free rein to the flesh. Out of love, place yourselves at one another's service. The whole law has found its fulfillment in this one saying: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." If you go on biting and tearing one another*

*to pieces, take care! You will end up in mutual destruction!*  
(Gal.5:13-15).

Paul uses the Greek word *eleutheria* when speaking of freedom. For our own understanding, we need to ask what Paul means by freedom. It will aid in the interpretation to understand the concept of freedom within the culture of Paul's time. Both for the Jew and Greek, the concept of freedom was understood in antithesis to the concept of slavery. Slavery was a concept familiar to all. Around the time of Christ it is estimated that there were over sixty million slaves within the Roman Empire. The economy of the Empire rested upon the back of slavery.

The common Greek word for slave was *doulos*. Slaves were considered a lower level of humanity, and as ethically inferior. Human autonomy was set aside in slavery; the slave possessed no personal rights. The state of slavery reduced a human being to the category of property (chattel), with no rights before the law. The slave as well as his family belonged to the slave owner. The will of the master became the will of the slave. The master could do as he desired with a slave. Slavery was considered such a despicable state that a Jew could be excommunicated from the synagogue for calling another a slave.

Within the Greek world, freedom was defined first in relationship to government. To be free meant to be politically free within the political society under which one lived. Freedom for the individual was determined and measured by law. Law limited the freedom to be sought and obtained. There existed only freedom under the law—never beyond nor in opposition to the law. The law, being the common will of the governed, guaranteed the citizens freedom from the tyranny of the individual. The law protected the individual from the inordinate claims of individuals or special groups. For the Greek, democratic government was the highest form of freedom. Such government guaranteed citizens the right of free speech and the right to alter the government through common consent of the citizens. Freedom essentially meant self-government, self-determination. The Greek fought fiercely for political freedom. They particularly despised the Persians, who permitted themselves to be governed as slaves.

With the rise of Greek philosophy, the concept of freedom developed from a political to a philosophical concept. The Greek philosophers sought the more radical freedom of the individual, not under political government, but under the law of man's own human nature and uniqueness. Freedom came to be

associated more with self-autonomy and personal independence. The philosopher looked to human nature and the laws of the universe for guidelines and horizons for human freedom. The interpretation of freedom depended upon one's definition of human existence. In general, it was understood to be as independent self-determination.

To seek freedom was to strive for whatever achieved self-determination. As a means to this end, the Greeks prized general knowledge of life, self-knowledge, and rational insight into one's own unique existence. Experience taught the philosopher that much in the external world lay beyond human control. True freedom must essentially be centered in internal freedom—the freedom of the human soul under the complete control of its own will.

The Cynics found the essence of freedom in the possibility of individual initiative. The man that is perfectly free moves among men without being moved by them. For Epictetus, only the sage is free. Unwise men, he held, are slaves no matter what form their bondage takes. For Aristotle, the free man was the man completely independent of anyone. The free man was a self-contained island. For Aristotle, it was a form of slavery to be unable to live without the support of others—even friends. In a word, to be free, man must be godlike.

Plato discovered in man a law for the common good—a supra-individual aspect of man. This law became the basis of his ideal human life. Obedience to such a law was freeing, not degrading. For the Stoics, freedom was man's control over the menacing external existence through a conscious and deliberate control over one's internal life. In a word, freedom was man in possession of his own soul. There exists a striking similarity between the Stoic's concept of freedom and that of Buddhism. For the philosopher, the fruit of such freedom—wherein its enjoyment consisted—lay in the inner peace of the soul, a peace arising out of a soul at rest in unshakable assurance.

The Greek philosophical concept of freedom closely approximates the description of the original sin in Genesis: the pride of man seeking autonomy even from its Creator; man turning from a Higher Good to self-fulfillment as the proper perfection and goal. The destiny of man is self-willed independence of the Will of the Creator. The "Non-Serviam!" (I will not serve!) of Lucifer finds a re-echo in the heart of man.

## NEW TESTAMENT FREEDOM

The New Testament cannot place human freedom in self-autonomy and independence. It knows that true freedom is not essentially threatened by the external world but by the internal world of the soul. The external world itself has become threatened and corrupted by the soul's perversion of human liberty. Paul writes:

*Indeed, the whole created world eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. Creation was made subject to futility, not of its own accord but by him who once subjected it; yet not without hope, because the world itself will be freed from its slavery to corruption and share in the glorious freedom of the children of God. Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now (Rom.8:19-22).*

Man turning in upon himself is a turning in upon a deficient being, a turning to a lost cause. The sum total of all human possibilities does not equal a whole, complete, happy human being. The Sacred Scriptures insist that man was created for the glory of God, and when cut off from that glory, there is no fulfillment or perfection for humanity. How can any soul rest complacently in the "perfection" of any being destined to corruption and death? The Scriptures confirm that man cannot possess true freedom in the face of sin and death. New Testament freedom is man's freedom from sin, freedom from the Law, freedom from death.

Paul sees clearly that the power of sin over the soul destroys the freedom of the soul to follow its intellectual and spiritual lights. It can desire the good but lacks the will to achieve it. He wrote the Romans that unredeemed man is "*weak flesh sold into the slavery of sin,*" unable to even understand his own actions. He does not what he wants to do, but what he hates. Paul insists that "*the desire to do right is there but not the power.*" The end result being that he does not the good he wills to do, but the evil he does not intend to do (see Rom.7:14-19).

The New Testament makes clear that there can be no freedom within a human existence dominated by sin. Such a life experiences lawlessness, and no discipline, which results in some degree of moral anarchy. The concupiscent cravings of the flesh center earthly life in a carnal existence. Paul writes the Romans:

*You must realize that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are the slaves of the one you obey...although you were once slaves of sin, you sincerely obeyed the rule of teaching which was imparted to you...(but) You enslaved your bodies to impurity and licentiousness for their degradation... What benefit did you then enjoy? ... for the end of those things is death...The wages of sin is death... (Rom.6:16ff).*

There exists in man an intense will for the preservation of his earthly life, and this desire does not lead to freedom but to enslavement, and ultimately to death. In the New Testament, freedom must begin with freedom from sin. To preserve this freedom man must also be freed from an inordinate desire for self-preservation of earthly life, which drives him to a self-centered, selfish conservation of physical life.

Sin secretly achieves what human nature desires—independence from God. Sin is false and deceptive by nature. Under its cloud the true reality of man is denied, and the expression of God within human reality is blocked. Man creates an illusion of godliness. In the darkness of self-deception he pursues independence and autonomy. He becomes dominated by an existence oriented to self. Separating himself from God, man cuts himself off from the Source of Life. This very process brings about death for a life that is alienated from the Source of Life; it initiates its own deterioration and corruption. Human existence, conceived as autonomous from God, produces works with death as its fruit. The autonomous life is self-destructive.

True freedom demands freedom from a self that moves, unconsciously perhaps, but assuredly towards death. Jesus taught all would be disciples, *"If a man wishes to come after me, he must deny his very self ....Whoever would preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will preserve it"*(Mk.8:34-35).

## FREEDOM FROM LAW

True freedom demands freedom from the Law. Paul insists that the Law does not lead to freedom, but to enslavement. Of itself the Law is holy, as it expresses God's claim upon man. It calls man to the fulfillment of God's Will, a Will that expresses God's love for mankind. The Creator of man knows what completes and perfects man. The revealed Will of God calls man to embrace this Will. Through such a union of wills, man unites intimately with

God, and shares in that fullness of life that is God's to impart. Herein lies the road to true freedom.

However, human nature, dominated by sin and dedicated to self-glory, perverted the Law of God. Instead of the Law becoming a means for union with God, it became a means for freedom from God under the Law. Under the Law, man selfishly fashioned his own self as he interprets the Law for himself. Man succeeds in fulfilling his needs and accomplishing his will under the Law. The Law of God is followed just as a man follows a wheelbarrow.

Perverting the Law into a mere legal system, albeit divine, the Jews, as did the Greeks, had guidelines for their autonomy and independence. The deviousness of human nature manipulates the Law of God in order to create a world acceptable and comfortable to itself. We know that in the time of Christ three distinct groups of Jews—Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes—took the same Torah, and produced three different religious personalities.

In the terminology of Sigmund Freud, the Torah, for all three groups, was the super-ego--the powerful external demand upon their existence. The instinctual natures of these groups (their id in Freudian terms) adapted their lives to the demands of the super-ego (Torah), while at the same time adapting the Torah to their instinctual needs and desires, resulting in their unique religious personalities, and their conscious religious selves (their egos in Freudian terminology). The Jew was able to stand before God in a state of meritorious achievement, putting God in his debt and at his service. Justification became their legal due before God. Confronting this situation, Jesus Christ responded:

*How accurately Isaiah prophesied about you hypocrites when he wrote, "This people pays me lip service but their heart is far from me. Empty is the reverence they do me because they teach as dogmas mere human precepts." You disregard God's commandment and cling to what is human tradition (Mk. 7:6-8).*

Paul has insisted that, in the end, the Law reveals, in a concrete religious experience, the sinfulness of humanity. There can be no freedom for Paul that does not lead to an existence free of sin. Human existence, in order to be free, must enjoy freedom from sin, Law, and death! There must be freedom from the Law, because experience proves how well law-abiding people manipulate the Law to further their selfishness, while abiding under the cloud of moral

respectability. We have but to look into the Deep South and South Africa to see how the evils of racism prevailed under the mantle of the law—human and divine. Too often Law expresses and sustains the secret, inordinate desires of man. Freedom from Law can certainly mean that the pharasaic in man can no longer parade its self-righteousness and lordship before God.

### PARADOX OF CHRISTIAN FREEDOM

The Christian concept of freedom is indeed a paradox. The New Testament teaches that the way to freedom does not lie in the control and the possession of the human soul, the basis of individual existence. It does not lie in being self-possessed, but in being dispossessed of self. It concretely lies in the sacrifice of self. The only possible way of coming to one's true self is by surrendering the human will to the Will and Power of God. A life controlled by God comes to true self-control.

Human existence came to true freedom through the act of Jesus Christ. Paul writes:

*The spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death. The law was powerless because of its weakening by the flesh. Then God sent his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh as a sin offering, thereby condemning sin in the flesh (Rom.8:2b-3).*

"It was for liberty that Christ freed us," wrote Paul. He teaches that Jesus Christ has freed man from those powers that enslave the human person: sin, Law and death. These freedoms should result in liberation of the spirit. However, the opportunity to be free does not in itself guarantee freedom. We are now liberated to follow the road to freedom. Before this "freeing" we were, using the imagery of Therese of Lisieux, like birds stuck in the mud, unable to fly into the sun, only able to gaze longingly at our desired destination.

As mentioned already, the path to freedom is a paradoxical one. It is the path in life taken by Jesus Christ. Jesus did not set Himself out upon a road of self-fulfillment or self-discovery, but rather, a path of self-emptying. No navel gazer Jesus Christ! He turned from the natural instinct of self-preservation to embrace a divine call to self-sacrifice. *"He emptied himself and took the form of a slave...he humbled himself, obediently accepting even death, death on a cross" (Phil.2:7-8).* The night before His death, He performed the service of a

Greek slave by washing the feet of His disciples. Following upon this humbling act He told His disciples:

*You address me as "Teacher" and "Lord," and fittingly enough, for that is what I am. But if I washed your feet—I who am Teacher and Lord—then you must wash each other's feet. What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do (Jn.13:13-15).*

Jesus called His disciples to a life of self-sacrificing service to others.

The entire life of Jesus was an act of God. This act was accomplished through the complete surrender of the human will of Jesus to the divine Will of the Father, as mediated to the humanity of Jesus through the Holy Spirit. This act of God, incarnated in the body and soul of Jesus Christ, led to the glorification of Jesus in His rising from the dead. Was there any human being ever as free as the Risen Jesus Christ? Within the Risen Christ is displayed the fullness of the freedom of the sons of God. *"That is why, if the son frees you, you will really be free" (Jn.8:36).*

### FREEDOM UNDER THE SPIRIT

The Gospel calls man to freedom and marks the way. It teaches that the act of God, acted in Jesus Christ, must be re-enacted within the disciples of Jesus. It is the foundation of a new life of freedom. It is the freeing seed which, when matured, will reap true freedom as its harvest. In order for the act of God to be re-enacted in the disciples there must be a complete surrender of the human will to the divine Will. The spirit must say with Christ, *"I have not come to do my own will but the will of Him who sent me."*

An environment of self-surrender is the necessary milieu for the activities of God's life-giving Spirit--the Holy Spirit. The basis of human freedom lies in the human spirit renouncing personal rights and claims and being submissive to the action of the Holy Spirit. It is only through such a submission that the just demands of the Law will be fulfilled. According to Paul, *"so that the just demands of the law might be fulfilled in us who live, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit" (Rom.8:4).*

In the life of a disciple that is completely submissive to the Spirit of God, the life of Christ has a real presence. A life so open to the Spirit becomes grounded in the incarnated love of Jesus, causing to be an unselfish and self-



forgetting life. A life dynamically under the power of the Holy Spirit cannot be self oriented. Finding freedom in self-fulfillment is like a fish finding the sea in a bowl; a bird--the sky in a cage. Only the fish that swims the sea is free; only the bird soaring in the heavens can taste freedom. Through His life in the Spirit, Jesus Christ found the sea and the sky and knew that from out of a life in the Spirit arises the freedom of the sons of God.

Through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at baptism, a Christian is freed from sin and the Law. In such freedom there is no fear of death. As the baptized grows in obedience to the teachings of Jesus, the liberating power of the Holy Spirit grows within the soul. The liberating love of the Holy Spirit hovers over the soul of the baptized, as does a mother eagle over her nestlings, urging the baptized to abandon the nest of self-interest and seek the freedom discovered only in a life of actualized love.

It is this liberating love that frees the spirit from its own destructive selfishness. The divine Spirit of Love forces the soul out of its isolated and protective environment, and causes it to be concerned with the cause of Christ, the salvation of others. It loses itself in a self-forgetful love of neighbor, which expresses itself in service that reflects the righteousness of God. It is service that brings into existence the power of the Kingdom of God. Such persons experience on this earth the highest degree of freedom: a freedom from self, and the freedom to follow unhindered the flight of the Holy Spirit along the path of divine love.

Full human freedom cannot be achieved in this life. Human existence remains in a fallen state. Physical existence must still be given up to death. Freedom from death must still be experienced through the door of physical death. It is in the resurrection of Jesus Christ that the Christian beholds freedom from death. As with Jesus Christ, only in eternity does the true disciple of Jesus experience the fullness of freedom. Paul teaches: *“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, then he who raised Christ from the dead will bring your mortal bodies to life also, through his Spirit dwelling in you (Rom.8:11).*

## LIBERATING LOVE

In this earthly existence, the Holy Spirit continues the work of freedom within the submissive soul through the constant activity of liberating love. Nevertheless, the disciple continues to be in bondage to a carnal nature which,

through devious and secretive ways, seeks to exert its lordship over the soul. In the face of its own destructive selfishness, the soul must constantly choose to love others before self. As Paul observed:

*Yes, we know that all creation groans and is in agony even until now. Not only that, but we ourselves, although we have the Spirit as first fruits, groan inwardly while we await the redemption of our bodies. In hope we were saved. But hope is not hope if its object is seen... And hoping for what we cannot see means awaiting it with patient endurance (Rom.8:22-25).*

Paul insists that Christian freedom cannot give free reign to a carnal nature. This results in license, not freedom. License given to carnal nature results in gross slavery to the flesh--to sin. Such behavior leads to the disintegration of the Christian Community and to its individuals. Paul expresses this destruction when he wrote. *"If you go on biting and tearing one another to pieces, take care! You will end up in mutual destruction."* (Gal.5:15). Paul knew such disintegration resulted when the flesh had free rein. The antithesis to all this, he insists, is love.

Love alone preserves the Christian Community, and develops the person within the community. Paul is so emphatic on this point that he insists, *"The whole law has found its fulfillment in this one saying: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'"* (Gal.5:14). He exhorts the Galatians, *"Out of love, place yourselves at one another's service"* (Gal.5:13b). With James, Paul continues to call forth a faith that concretizes itself, not in creeds alone, but in deeds—in meaningful service to neighbor. James saw this love expressed most authentically in care and concern for the poor, *"Looking after orphans and widows in their distress and keeping oneself unspotted by this world make for pure worship without stain before our God and Father"* (Jas.1:27).

When the New Testament speaks of love, it uses the Greek word *agape*. *Agape* was not a word commonly used before the New Testament times. When St. Jerome sought to translate *agape* into the Latin he realized that *amor* failed to express the meaning intended. Jerome translated *agape* as *caritas*. In the English language, love and charity have been used to express the meaning of *agape*. Yet neither of the two words conveys to us the proper meaning of *agape*.

The Greeks had only four words by which to express love: *eros*, *philia*, *storge*, and *agape*. *Eros* expresses love that is predominantly on the physical level and always involves sexual attraction. This word does not appear in the New Testament perhaps because by that time the word had become synonymous with lust. *Philia* is used to express the highest quality of natural love. It includes the physical side of love but it also includes very much more. It describes the highest kind of human love--true friendship. It nevertheless leaves something lacking: permanence. The light of love can grow dim and its warmth can be lost. *Storge* expresses the very limited concept of family love: the love of parent for a child and the child's love for the parent—love of brothers and sisters and kinfolks. *Agape* hardly occurs in the secular Greek literature. Some see it as a word coined by Christians to express a new quality and attitude towards others that were born in the Christian Community and flow from the Presence of the Holy Spirit.

Agape emerges within the Community and the heart of a Christian as unconquerable goodwill that will never seek anything but the good of its fellow man. It is a spirit that is neither conditioned nor curtailed by what other people do in word and deed, nor whom they may be.

One of the distinguishing qualities of agape lies precisely in its ability to love the unlovely and the unlovable. It is love lavished upon others without a thought of whether or not they are worthy to receive it. "*Your Father in heaven lets the rain fall and the sun shine upon the good and the evil.*" Agape-love proceeds from the nature of the lover rather than from the merits of the beloved. No one merits agape-love. As Christians have experienced this love without merit of theirs, it should be dispensed by them to those without merit: "*My dear people, since God has loved us so much, we too should love one another*" (Jn.4:11).

Christians learn the nature of agape-love from experiencing God's love in their own lives. God's love comes to us when we are sinners and enemies of God. Therefore, if God's love truly dwells within us, love ought to flow towards those who have "sinned" against us, and whom we recognize as our enemies. St. John writes:

*God is love (agape) and he who abides in agape abides in God and God in him....Everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God. Anyone who fails to love can never have known God, because God is Agape (1Jn.4:16b) (1Jn.4:7b-8a).\**

Agape-love involves a total response of the personality. It begins in the will and permeates the mind and heart, clothing itself in emotions and affections. Agape-love is a divine gift to the Christian, nevertheless it does not just happen within the heart. It is willed into expression by the Christian.

Agape gives the power and determination to love those we dislike. Humanly speaking, it is easier to walk on water than to love others in the spirit of agape-love. It is quite impossible without the operation of the dynamic love of the Spirit of Jesus within the spirit of man:

*The love of God has been poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit which has been given us" (Rom.5:5).*

To the Thessalonians Paul wrote: *"As regards brotherly love, there is no need for me to write you. God himself has taught you to love one another" (1Thes.4:9).*

## CHAPTER 9

### THE SPIRIT AND THE FLESH

#### PAUL'S CONCEPT OF MAN

Paul knew well that agape-love, a love that directs you to place "yourselves at one another's service," is the fruit of the Spirit. In a community where there is "biting and tearing one another to pieces" the Spirit has been suppressed and the flesh dominates. Paul says to the Galatians:

*My point is that you should live in accord with the spirit and you will not yield to the cravings of the flesh. The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly opposed. This is why you do not do what your will intends (Gal.5:16).*

Paul implies that the flesh is dominating the lives of the Galatians. He teaches that an internal war wages within the soul of every human being. The human soul is a veritable battlefield upon which one's eternal life is decided. In this war the flesh and the spirit are bitter antagonists.

In his letter to the Thessalonians Paul prayed, "*May he preserve you whole and entire, spirit, soul, and body, irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1Thes.5:23). Seemingly Paul speaks of the entire person as a trinity: spirit, soul and body—three-in-one. It is necessary to understand Paul's concept of a human being to better grasp his teachings on the conflict between spirit and flesh. Let us at least define, as clearly as possible, the terms: body, soul, spirit, and flesh.

We normally think of man as being composed of body and soul. Is the spirit something distinct from the soul? Or, is the spirit to be taken as synonymous with soul? In our language they could be interchangeable, but Paul wrote in Greek. Paul described a whole person as being *pneuma* (spirit), *psyche* (soul), and *soma* (body). In the Greek, *pneuma* and *psyche* are not interchangeable. Let us begin with that dimension of man that is most familiar to us: the body—the *soma*, the human body.

Paul speaks of the body in three ways. *First*, he sees the body in a neutral fashion and speaks about men dishonoring their bodies through perversions (see Rom.1:24). Twice he uses the physical body and its parts as symbolic of the Church as the Body of Christ. Paul speaks here of the physical body, and there is no condemnation implied.

*Second*, he speaks of the body in a way that implies its imperfections and the dangers of the body. He speaks of sin in the body: “*We must realize that our former selves have been crucified with Him to destroy this sinful body and to free us from the slavery of sin*” (Rom.6:6). \* Paul speaks of the mortality of the body that will die because of sin, “*Though your body may be dead, it is because of sin...*” (Rom.8:10)\*. He insists the body must be brought under control: “*I treat my body hard and make it obey me, for having been an announcer myself, I should not want to be disqualified*” (1Cor.9:27)\*. *Third*, Paul never implies that the body is evil in itself. It, too, is subject to redemption: “*...we too groan inwardly as we wait for our bodies to be set free*” (Rom.8:23)\*. The body will be transformed, “*And He will transfigure these wretched bodies of ours into copies of His glorious body*” (Phil.3:21a)\*. The body can be offered to God: “*You should use your body for the glory of God*” (1Cor.6:20c).\*

*Finally*, Paul teaches that the body for the Christian is the Temple of the Holy Spirit: “*Your body you know is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you since you received him from God*” (1Cor.6:19)\*.

In conclusion we may say that even though the body is doomed to death and is greatly responsible for the sins of men, the human body can in no way be equated with the flesh. When Paul speaks of flesh he is not speaking about the human body itself.

## PSYCHE AND PNEUMA

Paul speaks of Adam as possessing a *psyche*—a human soul. “*Adam, the first man, became a living soul (psyche)*” (1Cor.15:45a). The soul is natural to man and is apparently the source of human life. Plato taught that the soul, or *psyche*, is a pure spiritual principle, the subject of thought--distinct from the body, and immortal. The soul is the real person for Plato. Aristotle unites the soul and the body, making them both essential components of the human person; for Aristotle the soul separated from the body is an incomplete person.

The ancient Hebrews did not possess the same concept of life as did the Greeks. Their concept was more concrete than abstract. For the Hebrews, God was the source of all life. Man possessed a *nepes*, and according to Genesis, man received the breath of God into his nepes and became a living being. When this breath of God departs the nepes of man, death comes to man. The nepes is the seat of appetites and emotions. Usually the Hebrew refers to the "heart" rather than the "nepes" as the seat of knowing and willing in man. Nepes is translated into the Greek as psyche, but it does not carry the same meaning as soul.

Paul speaks of Jesus Christ, in contrast to Adam, as being a life-giving spirit—*pneuma*: *"the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit" (1Cor.15:45b)*. Jesus seemingly becomes the principle and origin of the spirit in man. The Spirit is the divine and heavenly dynamic force conceived as uniquely existing in Jesus. The Pneuma is a creative, life-giving force possessed by Jesus, and dispensed by Him to the Church: *"You are in the spirit, since the Spirit of God dwells in you. If anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ" (Rom.8:9b)*.

It is not easy to determine if there is a real distinction between the soul of a man and the spirit of a man. There is no doubt that a real distinction exists between the Spirit of God and the soul of man. But the question arises concerning the nature of the pneuma of man. Is it something other than the Presence of the Holy Spirit in man? Is the pneuma of man a direct effect of the Presence of the Holy Spirit in the souls of the just?

Some early Christian writers maintained that only the Christians, as a result of baptism and the reception of the Holy Spirit, possessed a pneuma as an essential part of their being--the consequence of being a new creation. However, many Christian mystics held the pneuma of man to be natural to man, and the very "ground of one's being." The pneuma of man is the dimension for divine communication, the highest dimension of a human being, the creative place where the divine communicates with the human. It is the source from which proceeds inspiration and Wisdom. From this point in man, the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit seeks to move out into the person to bring redemption to the entire human being—body and soul. Whether the pneuma of man is a natural faculty or a supernatural one remains a mystery.

## THE FLESH

The word Paul uses for flesh is not soma but *sarx*. Apparently Paul means something more by flesh than our human bodies with all their feelings, emotions and desires. Even though in the writings of Paul, the term *sarx* can refer to the human body, or human life itself, it assumes a meaning beyond human life in the theology of Paul. *Sarx* assumes a formidable role as the very enemy of spiritual life and personal salvation. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, "*The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; the two are directly opposed.*" Paul recognizes almost a schizophrenic condition in man and so writes, "*This is why you do not do what your will intends*" (*Gal.5:17*).

Paul does not deny freedom of will, nor responsibility for personal sin, but he understands that the effect of sin reaches deeply into the will of man. It touches the will and weakens it considerably. but it goes further than that. Sin has created a condition—a monstrous condition—that all the good willing in the world will not rid us of it or release us from its control. The results of sin have left us spiritually impotent. Unaided by grace, holiness and fulfillment of the will of God never becomes more than desires and dreams for the human will.

The human body certainly becomes the bodily instrument of sin, but the body can be purified and even glorified, the flesh cannot; the flesh must be eliminated and eradicated. The "flesh" is the man of sin. The flesh is what man has made of himself, in contrast with man as God made him. The flesh is man as he has allowed himself to become, in contrast with man as God meant him to be. The flesh stands for the total effect upon man of his own sin and of the sin of his fathers and of the sins of all men who have gone before him. The flesh represents human nature—total human nature—that is weakened, vitiated, and tainted by sin. The flesh is man as he is apart from Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. What is required to meet this situation is not good advice or good example, but deliverance!

Paul divides humanity into two kinds of people: the *psychikon* person and the *pneumatikon* person. Each one of these persons possesses a principle and source of activity; each has its own prototype. Adam is the source of life and prototype of the *psychikon* person. This mortal person is destined to corrupt



and die. This is the natural and unspiritual person. Whether this person is naturally good or evil, he or she cannot understand or evaluate the things of the Spirit. The psychikon person possesses all the essentials of a human being but cannot come to knowledge and union with God:

*An unspiritual person [psychikon] is one who does not accept anything of the Spirit of God: he sees it all as nonsense; it is beyond his understanding because it can only be understood by means of the Spirit (1Cor.2:14).\**

*The unspiritual are interested only in what is unspiritual... It is death to limit oneself to what is unspiritual... That is because to limit oneself to what is unspiritual is to be at enmity with God: such a limitation never could and never does submit to God's law. People who are interested only in unspiritual things can never be pleasing to God (Rom.8:5-7).\**

The pneumatikon person is of the Spirit. Jesus is the source and the prototype of the pneumatikon person:

*If there is a natural body, be sure there is also a spiritual body. Scripture has it that Adam, the first man, became a living soul; the last Adam has become a life-giving spirit [pneuma]. Take note, the spiritual was not first; first came the natural and after that the spiritual. The first man was of earth, formed from dust, the second is from heaven. Earthly men are like the man of earth, heavenly men are like the man of heaven. Just as we resemble the man from earth, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven (1Cor.15:44-49).*

Paul seems to imply that this pneumatic quality comes from Jesus Himself. It is Christ, present in the soul, that makes a man spiritual--a pneumatikon person. Paul also infers that as long as a person operates solely through his psychic nature he does not come into a true relationship with God. God is Spirit, and only the Spirit can discern God! For this reason, it is concluded that the pneuma of man is the dimension for divine communication. Here God establishes His beachhead in mankind. Paul writes:

*These are the very things that God has revealed to us through the Spirit....Now instead of the spirit of the world, we have received the*

*Spirit that comes from God, to teach us to understand the gifts that he has given us. Therefore we teach, not in the way in which philosophy is taught, but in the way that the Spirit teaches us: we teach spiritual things spiritually... A spiritual man...is able to judge the value of everything....we are those who have the mind of Christ (1Cor.2:10ff).\**

Paul teaches us that we have an earthly body, an earthly life, an earthly dimension--and this is *psychikon*. Removed from the Presence and Grace of the Holy Spirit is the life of the flesh. In some degree it will impede the Holy Spirit, and life in the Spirit. A true Christian must seek to rise above this *psychikon* nature and open himself to the pneumatic presence within—to the very Mind of Christ.

A Christian does not become completely spirit-filled within this life. A Christian will always dwell within a *psychikon* body—an unredeemed body—and will go into the grave in a *psychikon* body. However, if our souls have become spirit-filled, we will die in Christ, and we will rise one day from the graves in spirit-filled bodies--in a spiritual body which has been brought into the fullness of the redemption. As Paul wrote the Corinthians:

*And if the Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, then He who raised Jesus from the dead will give life to your own mortal bodies through his Spirit living in you... A natural body (psychikon) is put down and a spiritual body (soma pneumatikon) comes up (1Cor.15:42-44).*

All people begin as *psychikon* persons, as unspiritual beings. As Paul wrote: "Take note, the spiritual was not first; first came the natural and after that the spiritual"(1Cor.15:46). A person normally possesses a degree of human freedom—freedom of the will. As a consequence they are morally responsible agents to be held accountable for their actions. As unspiritual people we are more or less (in comparison with others) good or evil. The *psychikon* person may become subjected to either the Spirit or to the Flesh with entirely different consequences. As Paul observed:

*Make no mistake about it, no one makes a fool of God! A man will reap only what he sows. If he sows in the field of the flesh, he will reap a harvest of corruption; but if his seed-ground is the spirit, he will reap everlasting life (Gal.6:7-8).*

When the natural person becomes subjected to the Spirit, a process of spiritualization begins. The Spirit inaugurates the process of redemption and sanctification that ends only with the resurrection of the body from the dead for those who persevere and walk in the Spirit. As one cooperates with the grace of the Holy Spirit, one grows in virtue. A life dominated by divine grace produces an abundance of good deeds. The soul moves toward spiritual maturity and, in the words of Paul, puts on "the Mind of Christ." However, we must remember that the body remains unredeemed in this world and will always be a source of problems and a cause of suffering on earth. For this reason Paul wrote the Corinthians:

*I do not run like a man who loses sight of the finish line. I do not fight as if I were shadowboxing. What I do is discipline my own body and master it, for fear that after having preached to others I myself should be rejected (1Cor.9:26-27).*

The body rebels and struggles against its own spiritualization, and strives to control the soul that exercises power over it. A person will continue to experience human weakness and frailty regardless of their spirituality. Sins will be credited to them from these sources.

Man, by refusing to become what God Wills, becomes purely man-made—a self-made man; he becomes a creature in opposition to the Creator. This is the psychikon person, the natural man (the child of Adam) subjected to the Flesh. Sowing in the field of the flesh, he becomes a man of sin and reaps a harvest of corruption. His theme song goes, "I did it my way!" The spirit of the flesh that dominates a person causes corruption on every human level. It affects the theological, the psychological, the physiological and the sociological aspects of human life. Paul points this out when he gives Galatians a list of the works of the flesh.

### WORKS OF THE FLESH

Jesus taught His disciples to tell a man by his deeds. By deeds you can discover the wolf under the lamb skin (see Mt.7:15-16). Paul presents a portrait of a man of the flesh, and he gives a list of the deeds of the flesh. It is more a popular list than an exhaustive one (to do that was nigh an impossible task). Paul had experienced the inventiveness and creativeness of evil in men, "*ingenious in their wrongdoing*," he said (see Rom.1:30). Paul tells the Galatians:

*It is obvious what proceeds from the flesh: lewd conduct (porneia), impurity (akatharsia), licentiousness (aselgeia), idolatry (eidolatreia), sorcery (pharmakei), hostilities (echthra), bickering (eris), jealousy (zelos), outbursts of rage (thumos), selfish rivalries (eritheia), dissensions (dichostasia), factions (hairesis), envy (phthonos), drunkenness (methe), orgies (komos), and the like (Gal.5:19-21a).*

Perhaps this particular list of works of the flesh reflected sins especially common among the Galatians.

In Romans, Paul seems to imply that idolatry was the primary sin of man, primary, at least, in the sense that idolatry perverts the primary relationship of a human being. A creature not properly oriented towards the Creator loses the compass for life's direction, and ultimately fails to be properly oriented to anything else. Unwilling to properly love God, the ability to love anything else deteriorates. Human relations are built upon the quicksand of fallen nature, which quickly sinks into self-concerns and illusions.

Paul insists the existence of God and His Divinity are knowable to man, but in his pride of mind, man refuses to give glory and thanks to God. As human perversity turns from the light of truth, the mind and heart wander in darkness. Jesus once said: "*And if your light is darkness, how deep will the darkness be!*" (Mt.6:23). Man's worship of himself and other created beings substitutes for worship of God. Superstition replaces faith; sorcery and witchcraft flourish.

In cultic pagan worship the science of drugs flourished, and secret chemical formulas produced diverse results upon their recipients, from ecstatic experiences to physical death. It is not without reason that Paul closely associates idolatry with *pharmakei*—the occult knowledge and use of mysterious drugs--in a word, sorcery. Even among some people today drugs are fostered as a means to achieve mystical experiences, and are advocated as a quick means to union with God. In the Saturday Evening Post (231), October 18, 1958, Aldous Huxley wrote an article: "Drugs that Shape Men's Minds," in which he maintained that certain drugs can induce a state in which a mystical experience can be had by removing ordinary mental obstacles, permitting a latent mysticism to surface. The ecumenical monk, Thomas Merton, seeking to be many things to many people, gave this response to Huxley:

I am in no position to dispute what you say about the effect of drugs... Perhaps I shall make a trial of them one of these days, so that I will know what I am talking about... It seems to me...real mystical experience would be more or less incompatible with the consistent use of a drug (The Hidden Ground of Love, pg. 437-38).

Merton seriously questioned pharmakei in its modern application but, nevertheless, appeared to remain open to its mystical possibilities. Paul apparently had no doubt of their mystical possibilities and their failure to lead man to God. Pharmakei was a work of the flesh that was subject to the lord of this world--the Prince of Darkness.

For Paul, the most obvious works of the flesh were in the area of human sexuality. Here the physiological dimension of man is perverted. Paul saw the perversion of sex as a natural outcome of man refusing to properly glorify God.

*These men exchanged the truth of God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator... In consequence, God delivered them up in their lusts to unclean practices; they engaged in the mutual degradation of their bodies (Rom.1:25,24).*

Paul insists that God honors the perverse will of man: "*God therefore delivered them up to disgraceful passions*" (Rom.1:26), and he leaves no doubt as to what he means by "disgraceful passions":

*God therefore delivered them up to disgraceful passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and the men gave up natural intercourse with women and burned with lust for one another. Men did shameful things with men, and thus received in their own persons the penalty for their perversity...so God delivered them up to their own depraved sense to do what is unseemly (Rom.1:26-28).*

When Paul enumerates for the Galatians the works of the flesh, he mentions firstly *porneia, akatharsia and aselgeia*. These three works represent the three stages of moral corruption.

Porneia is the sinful sexual act. In the Scriptures the word can apply to all extra-marital and unnatural sexual intercourse. It was especially applicable to fornication, adultery and homosexual acts. The Old Testament considered

porneia as one of the seven evil spirits. In a most ruinous fashion, the spirit of porneia drives the soul away from the true God and leads it into the worship of Belial and into other forms of idolatry. Porneia was one of the three nets of Belial, and pertained to the spirit of iniquity. Belial is a synonym for Satan. According to the Essenes, those caught in the net of porneia were the children of darkness. Philo considered the spirit of porneia a disgrace, a scandal and a blot on all mankind. The Book of Revelation identifies porneia as one of the sins unbelievers will cling to in the last days despite divine judgment (see Rev.9:21). Those who are found guilty of sexual immorality are consigned, along with cowards and traitors to the faith, murderers, sorcerers, idol-worshippers, and the depraved and deceivers of every sort to "*the fiery pool of burning sulphur, the second death*" (see Rev.21:8).

### THREE STAGES OF CORRUPTION

Introducing a person into sexual immorality would be a first stage in moral corruption. Once a person has been introduced into sexual immorality, the second phase of corruption, *akatharsia*, begins. The evil spirit of porneia moves into the mental faculties, contaminating the mind with sinful sexual thoughts. Dirty thoughts obsess the mind and awaken immoral desires. Such thoughts and desires lead naturally to repeated acts of immorality. Sexual immorality becomes ingrained within the character of the person. The second stage of corruption is completed.

Up to this point the person may harbor shame and guilt over their sinfulness, and attempt to keep their deeds secret. Publicly they may maintain an entirely different image. However, the third stage of corruption, *aselgeia*, ends this pretense. Aselgeia reduces the soul to the state of shamelessness. Their sinfulness is now irresponsibly and publicly flaunted without caring what others may think or feel. They often brazenly defend their vice and condemn virtue itself.

A society as well as an individual can become completely corrupt. When one considers the attitude of today's society towards sexual immorality and murder of the unborn, it appears our society has reached the third stage of corruption. It now shouts from the rooftop what many individuals of the society have long been in secret.

## WORKS CORRUPTING SOCIETY

Paul's enumeration of the works of the flesh indicates that sin embraces man and what he touches. Many would admit that the so-called "flesh" sins, although more dramatic, may be in the category of evil, less evil than other sins. St. Thomas taught that the corruption of the best is the worst. The sins, therefore, that pervert the mind and soul are the worst; the spiritual sins are worse than the sins of the body. Of course, the degree of guilt may be just the reverse. Sins that are socially unacceptable will cause greater feelings of guilt.

Turning from God, man turns to self. He becomes the object of his supreme good. He seeks to make himself a god, or to find his god in another. This perversion of the essential end of man touches his entire personality and permeates his will, mind, and emotions. Man can eagerly sacrifice the common good—the welfare of society—for his own personal ambitions. Withdrawing his will from seeking the good of neighbor, man asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" The first to ask the question was the first to murder his brother. Such an environment gives birth to the spirit of *echthra*—the spirit of enmity that expresses itself in hate, contempt and indifference to the needs of other human beings. This spirit breeds the users, the manipulators, the schemers, the exploiters, and the murderers.

*Echthra* spawns its own child. Such selfish orientation towards other social beings naturally begets *eris*—the spirit of contention and strife. A social order perverted by personal enmities and hatreds degenerates into strife, which destroys social peace. It is of little good to seek the restoration of social order and peace when the spirit of *echthra*, the root cause, remains unchecked.

When one makes personal goods the only end for being, then the goods possessed by others—be they material or otherwise—can become a source of disturbance that gives birth to two evil sisters—the spirit of *zelos* (jealousy) and the spirit of *phthonos* (envy). The desire for the goods of others has become a motivation of evil within the heart. Jealousy desires to possess the goods belonging to another, and its spirit gives birth to theft and injustice. On the other hand, the spirit of envy begrudges the naked fact that another possesses good. The envious do not so much desire the goods themselves as much as they desire to deprive the other of them, for fear they may cast a shadow upon themselves. The envious are the destroyers of the property, the works, the fame, or the merits of others. They seek, not to enrich themselves, but to impoverish others. Envy is a sickened spirit that shrinks the soul.

Often others stand in the path of a person's desire. Frustration of the desires of the impatient person gives rise to the spirit of *thumos*—the hot anger that seeks to bulldoze anything or anyone out of its path. Anger constantly seizes the selfish person because in this world, other people often block personal wants and desires. No other car has the right to be in front of them, no other person has a right to have wants that impede their present gratification. *Thumos* stimulates fights, quarrels, and all manner of irrational words and deeds, leading to injury and death.

People of the flesh are incapable of community service from altruistic motives. Upon their entering public or community service, a spirit of *eritheia* motivates them, which perverts their services and charities as they seek personal profit and benefit. Being incapable of unselfish service, they pervert political power and position for personal ends. *Eritheia* in public servants breeds bribes, graft, unjust legislation, and other social injustices.

There are others who are filled with the spirit of *dichostasia*. So negative of soul, they seek no personal benefits from society, but rather strive to destroy the harmony of society. Lacking any peace of soul, they can leave nothing at peace. Deliberately, they foment divisions within families, friends and organizations. They experience perverse satisfaction when things crumble about them. *Dichostasia* spawns the gossip, the slanderer, the rioter, the anarchist. Their desire is not to build, but to destroy.

There are others who make a doll house of their hearts, and would box in the whole world to the narrow confines of their own minds and hearts. They are possessed by the spirit of *hairesis*, the narrowness of mind that refuses to tolerate another that falls short or goes beyond their creed. With their cults, their cliques, and their heresies they destroy universality, catholicity. The spirit of *hairesis* breeds racial, religious, and ethnic prejudice, and foments social injustice and persecutions.

God created man as a social being. "It is not good for man to be alone!" People should enjoy the company of other human beings in a spirit of camaraderie and joy. That men should enjoy the fruits of this earth and of their labors is the Will of God. In the Scriptures we read, "*Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a merry heart, because it is now that God favors your works*" (Eccl.9:7).



No puritanical god created man. Again Scriptures tell us,

*Wine is very life to man if taken in moderation. Does he really live who lacks the wine which was created for his joy? Joy of heart, good cheer and merriment are wine drunk freely at the proper time... Wine and music delight the soul (Sirach 31:27-28;40:20).*

When man fails to properly relate to God, he ends in perverting the created world and corrupts himself in the process. The last two works of the flesh mentioned by Paul pervert social pleasure: the spirit of *methe* that leads to drunkenness and its brother spirit *komos*, the spirit of debauchery that turns social gatherings into orgies and brawls. The Scriptures tell us:

*Headache, bitterness and disgrace is wine drunk amid anger and strife. More and more wine is a snare for the fool; it lessens his strength and multiplies his wounds (Sirach 31:29-30).*

This is the portrait of the man of the flesh as painted by Paul for the Galatians. Perhaps it is a portrait in which many of us can discover some striking similarities? When writing to the Romans, Paul added to his portrait of the man of flesh. Living in Corinth broadened his experience. He wrote:

*They are filled with every kind of wickedness: maliciousness, greed, ill will, envy, murder, bickering, deceit, craftiness. They are gossips and slanderers, they hate God, are insolent, haughty, boastful, ingenious in their wrongdoing and rebellious toward their parents. One sees in them men without conscience, without loyalty, without affection, without pity (Rom.1:29-31).*

In summary, we may say Paul teaches that man will be subjected to the Spirit or to the Flesh. Under the flesh he will produce works of the flesh, which ultimately corrupt the nature of man and corrupt what he touches. Paul never ceases to teach that a person will ultimately reap what has been sown. He warns what the ultimate outcome of such a life will be: *“I warn you, as I have warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God!” (Gal.5:21b)*. One who does not choose God in time will not be chosen by God in eternity.

What Paul described as the man of the flesh should bear no resemblance to the true Christian. He declares: "*Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires*" (Gal.5:24). In a word, they have recognized that their natural life lived beyond the Will of God was a way of sin, leading to eternal death. That was the "old man" and they have become a "new creation" in Jesus Christ. This implied death to the old, that the new may be. They have died to their old way of life. It no longer exists for them.

Now they put on Jesus Christ, through submission to the Holy Spirit of God, and through their intelligent obedience to the teachings of Jesus and His Church. They overcome evil by doing good. Such a life becomes possible only through the action of the Holy Spirit within the soul. We have already recognized that Paul realized man had a part to play in all this when he mentioned how he chastised his own body in order to bring it into submission. The Christian that does not prudently recognize and deal with their unredeemed passions and desires will, sooner or later, discover they have built their castle upon sand. All that the Spirit builds can be lost unless the soul remains a vigilant watchman for the enemy within—the man of flesh.

In contrast to the works of the flesh, Paul now presents the fruits of the spirit. It should be noted that he speaks of the *works* of the flesh but the *fruits* of the Spirit. Works are the product of personal labor; the individual is their source and origin. However, the fruits of the spirit are not attributable to personal labor, nor do they find their origin and source in the soul of man. They are a result of the Presence of the Holy Spirit within the soul. They come to fruition within the soul because the Holy Spirit has been free to work within that person.

All the honor and glory belong to God. There can be, Paul insists, no law against the fruits of the Spirit, for they are a product of the Holy Spirit working within a person. We may impede the action of the Holy Spirit, but we certainly cannot legislate against the Holy Spirit.

*In contrast, the fruit of the spirit is love (agape), joy (chara), peace (eirene), patient endurance (makrothumia), kindness (chestotes), generosity (agathosune), faith (pistis), mildness (prautes), and chastity (egkrateia) (Gal.5:22-23).*

**When we study these fruits of the Holy Spirit on a deeper level, we will discover what a beautiful portrait Paul portrays here of the soul under grace, living in submission to the Holy Spirit.**

**Paul logically deduces that if the Holy Spirit is the source of Christian life, then this same Holy Spirit ought to be the principle of activity in our life; the prime mover behind what we say and do. *"Since we live by the spirit, let us follow the spirit's lead" (Gal.5:25)*. If this is the case, Paul says, then *"let us never be boastful, or challenging, or jealous toward one another" (Gal.5:26)*. Such things are works of the flesh and, as such, must be eradicated from our lives and the community. Where there is the life and the lead of the Holy Spirit, the fruits of the Holy Spirit flourish abundantly--Christianity flourishes.**

## CHAPTER 10

### THE LAW OF CHRIST

#### LOVE, JOY AND PEACE

The spiritual life of the soul develops from its intimate relationship with the Holy Spirit—a hand-in-glove relationship. A person may possess ministries and charismatic gifts and yet fail to develop a vital spiritual life. One may be too busy "in the Spirit" to develop any spiritual life. This is precisely why certain people with genuine charismatic gifts and ministries can end so deeply mired within the flesh and, after a rocket-red-glare Christian existence, end so scandalously and dismally in sin. The Scriptures do not say to discern them by their gifts, but by their fruits and, indeed, by the absence of the fruits of the Holy Spirit. Where the fruits of the Spirit blossom is another story. Where there is a personal and intimate love of God good fruit is produced—not the counterfeit so well simulated by the Evil One. Not without reason has Lucifer, the Arch-deceiver, been known as the Noon-Day Devil.

Love, joy, and peace are primary to the life in the spirit, and they are the first three fruits mentioned by Paul. They are intrinsically related to the life that "walks in the Spirit." Where these three absent themselves, you find trouble. The greatest of all is the love entitled *agape*. Within itself it expresses the life of God and the personality of the Holy Spirit. For a human soul to be alive in God, it must be ignited with the flame of agape-love. Where it is absent, one finds only a simulated life in the Spirit. Without it, Paul said, "*I am nothing! I gain nothing!*" And in all my holy talk and pious prattle, and although I quote the entire Bible by chapter and verse, I am no more than "a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal." People can be programmed to speak and act like Christians, but unless permeated by the spirit of agape-love they are no more than robots. Agape-love is the living blood stream of the spiritual life, and its presence is the only true sign of life in God—even if one has the faith to move mountains!

*Chara*, or joy, is found where love reigns. Joy is the experience of the soul coming to life. It experiences life at the extremities of one's being, where being

strains beyond the boundaries of self in order to transcend self-life. Chara is the morning that is filled with new light, life, and vigor. For the Greeks, chara expressed a state of euphoria. Philo found in joy one of the highest goods to be possessed and persevered in only by the wise of heart. In the Scriptures, it is an experience inseparable from union with God, and is indeed a concrete experience of salvation. God is salvation, and within the experience of joy, the soul experiences the living Presence of Salvation. In the New Testament, joy is the immediate result of finding one's God. Chara becomes a fire that cannot be contained, ardently seeking to communicate itself to another. It is identifiable as "spiritual intoxication" and "high on the Spirit." Joy has been called "the infallible sign of God's Presence." And for this reason St. Teresa of Jesus exclaimed: "God deliver me from sad saints!"

In the New Testament we discover that chara is not incompatible with suffering in this world, because joy for a Christian is especially related to union with Jesus Christ. When the soul suffers because of its union with Christ, the soul feels a more intimate union with Jesus, the Man of Sorrows. It experiences itself more deeply united with the life of Christ. When the Apostles were ordered scourged by the Jewish Sanhedrin we read:

*The apostles for their part left the Sanhedrin full of joy that they had been judged worthy of ill-treatment for the sake of the Name...they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Messiah. (Acts 5:41-42)*

A priest once related how reluctantly he answered the call to the priesthood. He pictured the seminary as a dark curtain behind which the sun never shone. To enter such a life was the end of all happiness for him. Only from the conviction that it was the undeniable Will of God for him did he enter. From the day of his entrance, he experienced an overwhelming sense of joy, and he realized he had never previously been truly happy a day or a moment in his life. In retrospect, he observed that his entrance into the seminary was perhaps his closest act of pure love of God's Holy Will. Always, the effect of such love is joy, because joy is being alive in God.

*Eirene*--shalom or Peace--is as closely associated with love as is joy. It, too, blossoms when the soul experiences an environment of salvation. Among the Jews, shalom is a greeting carrying the blessing of well-being, which strongly emphasizes material blessings. The Old Testament assured the Jews

that shalom would be the result of their fidelity to their Covenant with Yahweh. It is a condition experienced by a soul that is in harmony with its Creator and with creation itself. The Rabbis insisted that Satan could not enter such an environment. Rabbi Hillel maintained that even Gentiles in the state of peace remained beyond the power of Satan. Shalom is the divine milieu. Hillel insisted that envy, strife and discord opposed the Will of God. These destroyers of peace create the environment in which Satan flourishes and evil abounds.

In the New Testament, peace resulted from the soul's reconciliation with God. Peace is the condition experienced when the soul is well ordered and fulfilled. The state of Shalom was perfectly realized in the Resurrected Jesus. Jesus has become the Cause and Source of Peace:

*It pleased God to make absolute fullness reside in him and, by means of him, to reconcile everything in his person, both on earth and in the heavens, making peace through the blood of his cross (Col.1:19-20).*

John has made it clear that agape-love is not a feeling or an emotion, but a dynamic force that brings the creative, redemptive, and sanctifying power of God into the world. Where there is love there is action! Love, and the joy that flows from it, finds confinement or containment nigh impossible, as it is communicative by nature. Peace is the environment in which both love and joy operate. Peace is the first gift of the Risen Savior to His Church: "*Peace be with you!*" (Jn.21:19). Love, joy, and peace are the experiences of a soul alive in God; they are truly the foretaste of heavenly bliss.

## VIRTUES REVEALING LOVE

The next three fruits mentioned by Paul are directed toward making agape-love visible and concrete in social relationships. We begin with *makrothumia*, a virtue sorely needed by Christians in "the vale of tears." In Greek, it signifies a spirit patiently resigning itself to certain inevitable sufferings and hardships. Plutarch used *makrothumia* to describe the steadfastness of a general or soldier, putting up with the hardships of battle and war until they reached their desired goal of victory. For the Stoics it was that virtue needed in order to persevere in tedious work. In the Old Testament, it appears as a unique characteristic of God, who patiently suffers the sinfulness of mankind. It finds expression in the full and generous forgiveness of the repentant

sinner. It is not equated with self-control as it has a more positive characteristic. Makrothumia is enduring patience permeated with mercy. The same concept is expressed in the New Testament.

Here it is even more emphatically taught that the person experiencing the makrothumia of God must in turn express this same makrothumia by bearing the faults, failings, and sins of other human beings. Makrothumia is no mere endurance—much less mindless indulgence. It is a spiritual force—fruit of the Holy Spirit—rooted in the grace of God, which displays itself in a spirit of long-suffering for the spiritual good of others. It is not a virtue that wears a grim and pained expression. It does not express itself through an uptight spirit or with clenched teeth. It is saved from all this by the fruit of the Spirit *chrestos*. Makrothumia wears the friendly mantle of *chrestos*.

*Chrestos*, in Greek, expresses a certain characteristic possessed by a person or thing especially seen through the eyes of another to which the person or thing relates. If a person sees another person as being *chrestos*, it implies the person is honest, upright, and of fine moral character. In particular, it expresses a quality of refined humanness in relation to others. The Greeks used *Chrestos* as a proper name. In the city of Antioch, the Greeks confused the two words *Chrestos* and *christus*. Hearing the disciples of Jesus constantly speaking about the *christus* with the Jews, they jokingly referred to them as *Chrestionoi*. We could roughly translate that to mean those "goodie-goodies."

Nicknames often stick when the coined word accurately catches the personality of a person or a group. We read in Acts: "*It was in Antioch that the disciples were called Christians for the first time*" (11:26). The original form was probably "Chrestians" and later corrected to Christians. The concept remains much the same in the Scriptures, expressing especially the excellence of a person or thing. For Paul, it expresses a spirit that moves graciously among other human beings with a sensitive awareness to their needs and situation. In a word, the *chrestos* is kind, and the word aptly describes a perfect lady or gentleman.

At the very source or heart of *Chrestos* you will find the virtue of *agothosune*, which expresses goodness, and implies moral excellence. For the Greeks, the possessors of *agothosune* were pleasing to the gods. It expressed a state of salvation. In the New Testament, *agothosune* pre-eminently concretized itself in Jesus Christ. It demonstrates itself in personal relationships. It is written of

Jesus:

*Jesus continued his tour of all the towns and villages. He taught in their synagogues, he proclaimed the good news of God's reign, and he cured every sickness and disease. At the sight of the crowds, his heart was moved with pity (Mt.9:35-36a).*

That is what agothosune truly means. It is active goodness that truly proclaims the reign of God. The possibility of such a life of goodness exists for the Christian because it is a fruit of the Holy Spirit. A life of such fruitful goodness should be the moral goal of excellence for which each Christian should strive.

### VIRTUES SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

The last three fruits of the Holy Spirit enumerated by Paul especially manifest themselves in personal relationships: in relationship to God, to other human beings, and to oneself. The first of these is *pistis*—faith. We have previously spoken of this virtue in depth. Sufficient to say here it is the foundation for a relationship with God. It is the door that opens our lives to the divine possibilities. Being listed in such a fashion, it probably carries the connotation of faithfulness in relationship. It is that quality by which the soul remains constant in its commitments. Faithfulness is one of the special qualities of agape-love.

*Prautes* is one of the most beautiful of the social virtues. *Prautes* denotes, in Greek, the gentle and the pleasant, the quality of spirit that soothes and calms the irritated and excited. It stands in opposition to all that is rough, hard, violent, brusque—explosive. The character possessing *prautes* expresses a quiet dignity and friendly composure not lost in the face of unpleasant situations. When abused, it refuses to give place to bitterness. It is a very active attitude as opposed to a passive acceptance. *Prautes* is a deliberate acceptance of life and people, whether at best or worst. The life of Jesus particularly demonstrated the spirit of *prautes*. This characteristic demonstrated for the Greeks greatness of soul in its superior degree of acceptance. Paul referred to *prautes* when he spoke of the "gentleness of Christ." It is that spirit of meekness that enables a person to correct an erring brother without arrogance, impatience, or anger. Paul encouraged its exercise when he told the Galatians:

*My brothers, if someone is detected in sin, you who live by the spirit*



*should gently set him right, each of you trying to avoid falling into temptation himself. Help carry one another's burdens; in that way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Gal.6:1-2).*

Paul sets here an example of a fellow Christian who has been surprised in the act of committing a sin. He urges Christians to treat the sinner tenderly. He implies that the sinner possesses a claim upon this consideration from the community. The person of this sinner must be treated with the same gentleness a physician would use to set a broken limb. Here correction is done with the sole purpose of restoration of the sinner to grace and to Christian Community. Such a delicate task can only be executed properly by gentleness of spirit.

Paul changes from the singular to the plural within the text to emphasize that it is a moral responsibility of the entire community to deal in a meek and gentle manner with sinners. Paul encourages each individual to realistically assess their own spiritual life, so that being motivated by a humble awareness of their own potential for sin, they will be encouraged to deal humbly and sympathetically with erring brothers and sisters. To the Pharisee, Jesus said, "*Go and learn the meaning of the words, 'It is mercy I desire and not sacrifice.'*" (Mt.9:13a). To His disciples He said, "*Learn from me, for I am gentle and humble of heart. Your souls will find rest*" (Mt.11:29b). If Chara is of the morning, Prautes is of the evening—restful and peaceful.

*Egkrateia* is the last fruit of the Spirit enumerated, and it applies to the internal strength of the soul. This gift puts steel in the will, and makes much goodness possible in human life. In Greek, the root of the word denotes power and lordship possessed over oneself or another. *Egkrateia* expresses possessing power within oneself, to be inwardly strong and self-composed. Through the virtue of *egkrateia*, the soul stands free of external controls. Through self-restraint, this spirit controls the external environment and its own internal desires of the flesh. It maintains its freedom to follow the Will of God.

Philo saw *egkrateia* as the inward power that enables the soul to be superior to any desire. For Philo, *egkrateia* is especially exercised to control of food, sex, and the use of the tongue. Perhaps for this reason our text narrowly translates *egkrateia* as chastity, which is certainly included, but the concept is much broader. For Paul, it expresses that spirit within an athlete that enables him to refrain from all things that might injure or hamper his ambitions for

victory in the stadium. Paul practiced *egkrateia*, he insisted, not for self or salvation, but for the sake of his brothers. Jesus Christ demonstrated *egkrateia* when He set His face like flint and proceeded towards Jerusalem, knowing Calvary and death awaited Him.

Paul wrote the Galatians, "*The whole law has found its fulfillment in this one saying: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'*" (Gal.5:14.) Interestingly, Paul omits any mention of love of God. Apparently, Paul presumed love of neighbor (*agape-love*) would hardly be possible without love of God. Perhaps there is an even deeper, mystical reason why Paul omitted an expected reference to the love of God.

### THE RULE OF CHRIST

Since the Incarnation of God's Son, love of mankind has been radically changed. God so identified with humanity that it was no longer possible to love God without a love of mankind. In the words of Scripture, if we cannot love people, whom we see, made to the Image of God, how can we love the invisible God? To profess such a love would be an illusion and a most dangerous self-deception, with serious eternal consequences. For this and other reasons, Paul insists upon a concrete love of neighbor as the criterion of a Christian. According to the Scriptures, Jesus was the fulfillment of the Law, especially for Paul. It was in His love of neighbor that Jesus brought the Law to its fulfillment and perfection. This self-sacrificing love of Jesus became the measure and rule for Christian life. Paul speaks of it as the "law of Christ." And it is the rule of Christian conduct. It is the law of Christ that transcends the legal, and totally spiritualizes law.

This "law of Christ" was the rule of His own earthly life. Within His life Jesus reflected the love of the Heavenly Father as illustrated in the parable of the Prodigal Son. It reveals the freedom involved in divine love. The son, no longer desiring a loving relationship with his father, is permitted to leave with his material blessings. The father honors the son's desire to live an autonomous and independent life. He honored the will of his son by refusing to interfere in his life, even when the son's willed decisions brought evil consequences. These things were the negative side of freedom. However, when the repentant son began his return home—his will once again oriented towards his father—the father, filled with gentle and compassionate love, hastened to meet the son on the road. No bridges were burned!

This law of Christ found expression in Jesus' encounter with the woman at the well, the woman caught in adultery, the penitent woman at the banquet, and the thief upon the cross. It is most evident in His kind and gentle dealings with the sorrowful Peter who denied and abandoned Him. Jesus was totally open to forgive Judas, but Judas, in the perversity of his pride, chose the way of despair. Jesus commanded His disciples:

*I give you a new commandment: Love one another. Such as my love has been for you, so must your love be for each other. This is how all will know you for my disciples: Your love for one another (Jn.13:34-35).*

It should be noted that the measure of love called for in the hearts of the disciples is the measure of love in the Sacred Heart of Jesus. It is now love others as you have been loved by Jesus. In our condition of sinful alienation from God, Jesus has come to us with compassionate love. What we have received, we are commanded to give. It is not so much that disciples are called to imitate the love of Jesus, as they are to make real the love of Jesus in their relationships. The very love of Jesus must be permitted to empower the human heart, and the fruits of the Holy Spirit must flourish there. James wrote: *"You are acting rightly, however, if you fulfill the law of the kingdom" (Jas.2:8a).*

Paul was most conscious of the Christians' capability of creating an anti-Christian environment within the Church. He warned the Galatians against creating and living in environments that were totally non-Christian. *"If you go on biting and tearing one another to pieces [like animals], take care! You will end up in mutual destruction" (Gal.5:15).* He goes on to encourage, *"Let us never be boastful, or challenging, or jealous towards one another" (Gal.5:26).*

It is exactly such un-Christian attitudes that erode the power of love and create a destructive environment within the Church. Paul encouraged each Christian to recognize their personal responsibility to the Body of Christ--the Christian Community. He exhorts, *"Help carry one another's burdens." (Gal.6:2a).* This means having a personal concern for the difficulties and grief that burden the souls of other people, especially those burdens that impede the soul from obtaining the goals of the spiritual life. Christians must recognize their responsibility to others. This does not mean to live their lives or play God with them, but to do what one can to make the lives of oppressed

or discouraged brothers and sisters easier and more tolerable. This must especially be done for those who present themselves in need before the door of our lives.

Paul has no delusions about the cost of such discipleship. It takes one's resources and stretches one's capacities, especially when one deals with the ungrateful and selfish. Often there will be no personal appreciation or gratitude expressed for the kindnesses rendered to others. Loving some people is like pouring water through a sieve. Nevertheless, Paul discovered the secret of such loving. It is precisely such gifts of love, given with no conditions or expectations, that take the most from us and, in the end, give the biggest return to us. Through such love, the power of love grows and matures within the soul. Not even God can give a soul its own growth and maturity. Many of the saints recognized enemies and the unfriendly as their greatest benefactors, because they called forth from them kindness, patience, and forbearance in great measure. Paul exhorts the Christians of Galatia, "*Let us not grow weary of doing good; if we do not relax our efforts, in due time we shall reap our harvest*" (Gal.6:9).

## OVERCOMING EVIL

As Paul knew, shadows were in every human life. Within the soil of the soul, weeds and wheat grew side-by-side. The negative existed alongside the positive. Paul assumed a positive approach towards evil—eradicating it indirectly. He did not encourage people to concentrate upon their weaknesses, defects, and sins, but to give full attention to their personal power for good, to their talents, and to their abilities. His sage advice was, "*Overcome evil by doing good!*" In a word, do the good you are capable of doing. Move evil out of the soul by not allowing time, space, and energy for it. As the old song goes, accentuate the positive; eliminate the negative. This was Paul's means for winning the race.

He goes on to encourage the Galatians, "*While we have the opportunity, let us do good to all men— but especially those of the household of the faith*" (Gal.6:10). Paul warns that the opportunities of life can pass one by. The days of merit will end, and then there will be the day of judgment when God "*will repay every man for what he has done...there will be glory, honor, and peace for everyone who has done good*"(Rom.2:6,10a). Charity must not remain at home but it must begin there "*especially those of the household of the faith.*" None of

the street angels and house devils. It is often easier to love the stranger than the kin. Those closest to us too often challenge our love, and reveal the poverty of our hearts. It is only the love in the household that gives genuineness to love in the market place.

To achieve such a desired environment within a Christian Community, Paul knew the necessity for humility as its foundation virtue. Humility is truth, but it is more than intellectual light. Humility is "walking in truth." To produce humility, truth must be incarnated in the awareness, attitude and actions of a person. It implies self-knowledge in both the negative and the positive, the evil and the good, the defects and the talents. Humility neither closes its eyes to the shadows nor blinks before the light of one's own worth. True self-awareness can properly direct one's relationship to God, society and self. With humility comes an acceptance of self; a recognition of personal limitations and powers. It liberates the soul from any preoccupation and over-concern with the opinions of others. It leaves the soul free to be itself and nothing but itself in relation to God, society, and self. The humble accomplish the most good in life, for they know what they can accomplish and what is beyond them. They do not paralyze their potentiality by fear of failure, nor do they court failure through imprudence, self-deception and delusion.

The Galatians are urged to this humility when Paul writes, "*If anyone thinks he amounts to something, when in fact he is nothing, he is only deceiving himself*" (Gal.6:3). Such a person lacks self-knowledge which opens him to self-deception and future disillusionment. Paul encourages each person to base personal estimates on concrete deeds and acts, not on delusive thoughts and imaginings. He especially warns them not to measure themselves by the deeds of another. This can often lead to vanity or discouragement. There was a saying in the Deep South: "Every tub must stand on its own bottom." Paul goes on to write: "*Each man should look to his conduct; if he has reason to boast of anything, it will be because the achievement is his and not another's. Everyone should bear his own responsibility*" (Gal.6:4-5). In other words, a Christian is like a soldier going into battle where each soldier is expected to carry his own pack.

There is a burden to being a Christian in this world, a pack to be carried. Or to put it in Christian terms: a cross to be taken up. Each and every Christian has personal responsibilities that must daily be faced and fulfilled. None can fulfill another's personal responsibilities; each has his own. When we feel the

weight of these responsibilities Peter reminds us “...that the brotherhood of believers is undergoing the same sufferings throughout the world. The God of all grace, who called you to his everlasting glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish those who have suffered a little while” (1Pt.5:9-10).

As Paul's letter draws to a close, he reminds the Galatians of a very practical expression of charity and responsibility within the Christian Community. They are to share their material goods with those in the community who devote their time and energy to the spiritual development of the Church. “The man instructed in the word should share all he has with his instructor” (Gal.6:6).

Paul chooses to end his epistle in his own handwriting, dispensing with the scribe he used until now. Paul says, “See, I write to you in my own large handwriting!” (Gal.6:11). A man who made his livelihood by making tents from goats’ hair could be excused for not having a refined and delicate handwriting. Some attribute his writing in large letters to the fact that he had poor eyesight, which is a possibility.

Returning to the essential theme of his epistle, Paul recalls one final time the controversy between circumcision and the cross, between the Judaizers and himself. Throwing the light of humility upon the subject, he casts a negative shadow over the troublemakers and their doctrine. He discloses their ignoble motives. In Paul's discernment, these men did not work for the spiritual good of the Galatians but rather for personal selfish interest. They wanted the approval and the acceptance of the Jews, thereby escaping the persecution that was inflicted upon teachers such as Paul, who taught the full doctrine of Jesus Christ. Paul tells the Galatians:

*Those who are trying to force you to be circumcised are making a play for human approval—with an eye to escaping persecution for the cross of Christ. The very ones who accept circumcision do not follow the law themselves. They want you to be circumcised only that they may boast about your bodily observance (Gal.6:12-13).*

## THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Paul encourages those who need to be boastful before others to be at least objective and truthful. Boast about those things achieved through one's own efforts, not the efforts of others. He noted it was the pride of the Judaizers to boast before the Jews the number of Christians they had persuaded to be circumcised. In a word they were saying, even though they accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, see what good orthodox Jews they remained. They were numbered among those of whom James spoke to Paul, "*You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have come to believe, all of them staunch defenders of the law*" (Acts 21:20). Paul makes it clear to the Galatians that he had one boast, one boast only, and his boast lay in nothing accomplished personally by himself. He sought no personal glory in the eyes of men. He exclaims, "*May I never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ!*" (Gal.6:14a).

For Paul, the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross epitomized and symbolized the life and destiny of Jesus. The vision of the Son of God crucified before his eyes—a deed perpetrated by men of this earth—mirrored to him the sinfulness of the humanity, in which he shared, and the corruption of the world in which he lived. Before the cross, he experienced the utter poverty of the human soul and its desperate need for salvation. Before the cross of Christ and in the light of Christ's life, Paul found nothing within himself of which to boast. Not only did the Cross mirror the evilness of men, but it clearly manifested the evilness of sin in the eyes of God.

The condition of sinful man before God deeply moved Paul. Out of the darkness of the Cross, like the sun breaking through dark, stormy clouds, the infinite merciful love of God and its human incarnation, the Sacred Humanity of Jesus Christ was mirrored to Paul. He experienced the love of God for sinners, and he understood that nothing in heaven, on earth, or in Hell could separate him from the love of God coming through Jesus Christ.

Paul knew that the death of Jesus upon the Cross and the shedding of His Precious Blood had washed away his sins, opened to him union with God, brought salvation to him, produced his sanctification, and granted him the status of divine sonship through faith and union with Jesus Christ. What else could there be for Paul? And so he could honestly say, "*Through it, the world has been crucified to me and I to the world*" (Gal6:14b). For Paul, this world

was dead; sin ruined it all, and darkness ruled over it. And Paul was dead to this world. Its glamour and glory, its power and prestige, were but vanities for Paul. The world had become but a sepulcher housing the man of the flesh.

Paul's knowledge of the Cross of Christ had its practical consequences in his life on earth. In its light he could say, *"It means nothing whether one is circumcised or not. [The act itself could contribute nothing to salvation.] All that matters is that one is created anew"* (Gal.6:15). Peter explained well to the Jews on Pentecost how to be "created anew."

*You must reform and be baptized, each one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ, that your sins may be forgiven; then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit... Thus may a season of refreshment be granted you by the Lord when he sends you Jesus, already designated as your Messiah (Acts 2:38;3:20)*

This saving knowledge of the Cross of Christ must be shared. Paul must preach, to Jews and Gentiles alike, Christ Crucified—*"the power of God and the wisdom of God"* (see 1Cor.1:24). *"For Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the gospel—not with wordy 'wisdom,' however, lest the cross of Christ be rendered void of its meaning!"* (1Cor.1:17). Paul was under compulsion to preach Christ, and he confessed he was lost if he failed to do so. He had no doubt about the results of such preaching:

*The message of the cross is complete absurdity to those who are headed for ruin, but to us who are experiencing salvation, it is the power of God. ...but we preach Christ crucified—a stumbling block to Jews, and an absurdity to Gentiles (1Cor.1:18,23).*

Paul paid the price for preaching in synagogues and public market places. The Jews scourged him in the synagogues, and the Gentiles stoned and flogged him in the market places and imprisoned him in their jails. For preaching the gospel, the body of Paul had been scarred by the lash. As pagan priests branded their bodies as slaves of their temples, Paul viewed his scarred body as having been branded for Christ. These scars left no doubt at all to whom he belonged and to whom he gave allegiance. He wrote to the Galatians in closing, *"Henceforth, let no man trouble me, for I bear the brand marks of Jesus in my body"* (Gal.6:17). Paul was the unconditional servant of Jesus Christ.



**Upon all the true sons of Abraham, those begotten not of the flesh but of the spirit, and upon all who follow in a spirit of self-sacrificing love, Paul blesses:**

*Peace and mercy on all who follow this rule of life, and on the Israel of God... Brothers, may the favor of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen (Gal.6:16,18).*

**The end of Paul's letter to the Galatians.**

**PRAISED BE JESUS CHRIST!**

# **ST. PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS**

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **PAUL IN MACEDONIA**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

**Paul the Apostle established numerous Christian Communities within Asia Minor and Europe, but none were more dear than the Macedonian churches founded in Philippi and Thessalonica. Certainly these churches became his consolation, causing him the least concern. This is all the more remarkable when you consider how brief a time Paul spent in the formation of these two communities. Perhaps Paul found in Macedonia a fine quality of people with a natural character well suited to spiritual formation. Of all his converts, only from the Macedonians did he permit financial contributions toward his support. Paul had no fear that these Christians would misinterpret his motives or be presumptuous in their relationship with him. This fact points to maturity of character in these Macedonians.**

**Macedonia was the land that bred Alexander, the conqueror of space and peoples: a terrestrial lord said to have wept for lack of worlds to conquer. But in truth, his time ran out in the face of unknown, unconquered worlds. This mortal Macedonian dreamed dreams only a Christ could accomplish. Alexander beheld a catholic vision and believed himself sent by heaven "to unite, to pacify and to reconcile the whole world...to marry the East to the West."**

**Alexander initially used the force of arms by which to unite peoples: but the only force that unites without destroying is the power of love. The realization of his dream must be left to another conqueror, Jesus of Nazareth. His time, too, ran out prematurely on earth, but unlike Alexander the Great, His power did not. Paul's coming to Macedonia was, in part, a realization of this dream, but on an entirely higher level than envisioned by Alexander.**

Paul arrived in Macedonia around 51 A.D. after a successful ministry in Antioch and Southern Galatia. Led by the wind of the Spirit, Paul came to Alexandrian Troas in Asia Minor in the company of his traveling companions, Silas and Timothy. Since the "we" narrative in Acts begins here, Luke the Evangelist probably joined Paul in Troas.

Prevented by the Spirit from carrying the gospel north into Bithnia, Paul and his companions waited in Troas for some sign of God's Will in this matter. One night, while in prayer, Paul received a vision in which he beheld a Macedonian saying to him, "*Come over to Macedonia and help us*" (Acts 16:9c). Recognizing this as divine direction, Paul and his companions immediately set out for Macedonia to bring the gospel to Europe. Sailing from Troas they crossed the Aegean Sea and came to the port city of Neapolis. They moved on from there to Philippi, which Luke describes as "*a leading city in the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony.*" Luke tells us, "*We spent some time in that city*" (see Acts 16:12). A "Roman colony" implied an area colonized and peopled by retired Roman soldiers, officials, and their families; a place fiercely loyal to all that was Roman.

#### PERSECUTED IN PHILIPPI

Paul was a cosmopolitan apostle. He prudently chose cities of the Roman Empire in which to establish the Christian Church. By establishing the Church in strategic geographical centers, he sought to ensure its rapid expansion. Luke mentions the result of Paul's locating in Ephesus and holding daily discussions in the public lecture hall of Tyrannus: "*This continued for two years, with the result that all the inhabitants of the province of Asia, Jews and Greeks alike, heard the word of the Lord*" (Acts 19:10).

From Acts we know that Paul customarily began evangelizing in the Jewish Synagogues. Attending the Sabbath service, he sought an opportunity to address the congregation that consisted of Jews and also Gentiles favorable to Judaism. It was among this latter group he made the deepest impression and drew numerous conversions. This naturally antagonized those Jews who rejected the gospel message. Those Jews, at times, incited persecutions against Paul and the new converts.

The members of the early Church were not only believers but active proselytizers. They recognized their moral responsibility toward the salvation of others and could not remain silent, even in the face of social unpopularity.

They acknowledged their vocation to be a witness for Jesus Christ in the world. From Luke's account there appears to be no synagogue in Philippi. This comes as a surprise in light of the fact that the city was an important commercial center. It suggests a strong anti-Jewish sentiment within the area. This may have been a reaction to Claudius' edict banishing all Jews from Rome. There may not have been enough male Jews in the city to constitute a synagogue. Twelve were needed. However, some Jewish prayer services were held out along the river bank. Luke relates, *"Once, on the sabbath, we went outside the city gate to the bank of the river, where we thought there would be a place of prayer"* (Acts 16:13).

There by the riverside, Paul made his first convert in Europe, the Lady Lydia, a rich merchant from Thyatira in Asia Minor. Lydia offered Paul and his companions the hospitality of her home with these words, *"If you are convinced that I believe in the Lord, come and stay at my house"* (Acts 16:15b). They accepted her hospitality, and no doubt her home became the first Christian Church in Macedonia.

An incident occurred in Philippi which ultimately forced Paul and his companions into leaving the city. A certain slave girl, possessing the gift of clairvoyance, attached herself to the apostles. For several days she followed them around the city loudly proclaiming, *"These men are servants of the Most High God; they will make known to you a way of salvation"* (Acts 16:17). Paul discerned the girl to be possessed. What they did not need was an evil spirit testifying to their mission and the worth of the gospel. Paul, annoyed by this unwanted endorsement through such a medium, *"turned around, and said to the spirit, 'In the name of Jesus Christ I command you, come out of her!'"* Then and there the spirit left her" (Acts 16:18). With that exorcism, the girl lost the gift of clairvoyance. As this gift had profited her owners, they became incensed over the exorcism, and denounced Paul and Silas before the local authorities as trouble makers. They complained to the authorities: *"These men are agitators disturbing the peace of our city! Furthermore, they are Jews, which means they advocate customs which are not lawful for us Romans to adopt or practice"* (Acts 16:20-21).

This accusation insinuates a spirit of anti-Semitism in the area. Under Roman law, the Jews could practice their religion in Roman cities, but they were forbidden to publicly proselytize. This is one reason Paul preferred to spread the gospel through the synagogues. Under Roman law, Christian evangelists were always considered criminals perpetrating civil disobedience. For this

reason it was important that the Christian Religion remain under the umbrella of Judaism as long as possible.

The public accusations stirred up a civil crowd against Paul and Silas. As a result, the city magistrates ordered them stripped, flogged, and imprisoned. This unfortunate occurrence placed Paul in a position to convert his jailer and his family. Also, he had his moment of satisfaction with the city fathers. They, themselves, had seriously violated Roman law by flogging two Roman citizens without a formal trial. The accused became the accusers. The alarmed city fathers hastened to apologize, and to plead with Paul and Silas to leave town, for the preservation of civil peace. They obliged, but before leaving town *"the two first made their way to Lydia's house, where they saw and encouraged the brothers; afterward they departed"* (Acts 16:40). This ends the "we" section in Acts for awhile. Apparently Paul leaves Luke in Philippi to assist the newly established Christian community. Paul learned from the Galatian experience the danger of leaving an immature church unattended.

#### PAUL IN THESSALONICA

Paul, Silas and Timothy headed west. They traveled the Via Egnatia, a magnificent Roman road running from Dyrrhachium on the Adriatic Sea to Constantinople on the Black Sea, a major artery connecting the West to the East. Such Roman roads not only greatly facilitated travel, but contributed largely to the preservation of the Pax Romana (peace) throughout the Empire. Over such roads, Roman troops could be easily and quickly dispatched from one area to another.

Traveling some 92 miles along the Via Egnatia, the apostles came to the important trading city of Thessalonica, known today as Solonika. Approaching Thessalonica they could see on the far horizon, to the southwest, the cloudy heights of Mt. Olympus. Once the imaginary home of the gods, Mt. Olympus now housed only snow and ice. Blessed by nature with a fine harbor, this site had long supported a city. Six hundred years earlier Herodotus spoke of it as Thermai, meaning "the Hot Springs." Here Xerxes, the Persian, established a naval base for the conquest of Europe. In 314 B.C. Cassander, a general of Alexander the Great, rebuilt the city, renaming it after his wife, Thessalonica, the half-sister of Alexander. Annexed by the Romans in 146 B.C., it became the capital of Macedonia, a Roman Province comprising the northern part of Greece. In the Civil War following the death of Julius Caesar, the citizens supported Octavius at the battle of Philippi. Consequently

Thessalonica became a free city with its own municipal government. When the apostles arrived in Thessalonica around 51 A.D., it was the second largest city in Greece and the seat of the Roman proconsul.

Luke presents only a skeleton outline of the activities of the three apostles in Thessalonica. His account in Acts only covers a time of less than a month. However, the actual time the three spent in Thessalonica was probably a few months. We know from Paul's letter to the Philippians that he was in the city long enough to receive financial gifts from Philippi on two different occasions. He wrote, "*Even when I was at Thessalonica you sent something for my needs, not once but twice*" (Phil.4:16). He stayed long enough in the city to have engaged himself in his trade of tent making. He spoke about the good example of the hard labor he had left behind in Thessalonica:

*We did not live lives of disorder when we were among you, nor depend on anyone for food. Rather, we worked day and night, laboring to the point of exhaustion so as not to impose on any of you (2Thes.3:7-8).*

In Thessalonica the apostles found a Jewish synagogue. As customary, they attended the Sabbath service and sought an opportunity to instruct the congregation concerning Jesus Christ. Acts records:

*Paul joined the people there and conducted discussions with them about the Scriptures for three sabbaths. He explained many things, showing that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the dead: "This Jesus I am telling you about is the Messiah!" (Acts 17:2-3).*

Some Jews were convinced, but others strongly opposed Paul's teachings. By the end of the three weeks the congregation, no doubt, was sharply divided over the question of Jesus of Nazareth. Jason, one of the converts, offered the hospitality of his home to the apostles, and it became the meeting place for the newly formed Christian Community. Paul's teaching had the greatest effect among the God-fearing Gentiles attending the synagogue. From these Gentiles, a great number, along with numerous prominent women, became believers.

Paul's success among the Gentiles was too much for his Jewish opponents. They hired some bums, who daily hung around the town square, to incite a riot over the apostles' activities. A mob marched on Jason's house intending to

drag Paul and Silas before a general assembly of towns-people. Having learned from their experience in Philippi, Paul and Silas were nowhere to be found. Unable to find the apostles, the mob dragged Jason and some other disciples before the city magistrates. Thus began the persecution of the Christian Community in Thessalonica. To disturb the peace within a Roman city was a serious matter. The mob loudly accused Paul and Silas of perverting public order and advocating rebellion against Rome, a most deadly charge.

*These people who have been creating a disturbance all over the world have now come here, and Jason has welcomed them. They all act in opposition to the decrees of Caesar and claim instead that there is another king, Jesus (Acts 17:6-7).*

These were most serious charges and not entirely groundless. Proclaiming Jesus the Messiah was equivalent to acknowledging Him as King of the Jews. Among the general population of the Jews, the Messiah was to be the descendant of King David, who would deliver them from foreign oppression. A day would come when Rome would seek to eliminate all known descendants of David. Proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah could have serious repercussions for the early Church. The four Evangelists took pains in the written gospels to demonstrate the spirituality of Jesus' kingship: *"My kingdom is not of this world."* Through their accounts of the Roman trial of Jesus, the evangelists emphasize that the Roman government did not find Jesus guilty of sedition. Pilate, the Roman Procurator speaks these words at the trial of Jesus, *"Speaking for myself, I find no case against this man" (Jn.18:38).*

The early Christians were very vulnerable to an accusation of civil disobedience. The Jews knew this and strove to use it against them. As already mentioned, the only protection against the law was for Christians to present themselves before the Romans as true Jews, and restrict their missionary activities to the synagogues. Once they stepped beyond these boundaries they were subject to accusations of civil disobedience, impiety and atheism as they rejected all legally accepted religions. Later in Corinth, we see that Paul had a real victory over his Jewish enemies. When they accused him before Gallio, proconsul of Achaia, of *"influencing people to worship God in ways that are against the law,"* Gallio refused to acknowledge any distinction between Jews and Christians, saying to the Jews:

*"Since this is a dispute about terminology and titles and your own law, you must see to it yourselves. I refuse to judge such matters." With that, he dismissed them from the court (Acts 18:15-16).*

Luke relates that the city magistrates in Thessalonica released Jason and the other disciples on bail. That same night, under the cover of darkness, the disciples sent the apostles west to Beroea. Paul and Silas found a much better reception from the Jews in Beroea.

*Its members were better disposed than those in Thessalonica, and welcomed the message with great enthusiasm. Each day they studied the Scriptures to see whether these things were so. Many of them came to believe, as did numerous influential Greek women and men (Acts 17:11-12).*

The apostles successfully continued their work in Beroea until a report of it reached the Jews in Thessalonica. Some of these Jews immediately hurried over to Beroea *"to cause a commotion and stir up the crowds."* The disciples in Beroea thought it best to send Paul out of the Province of Macedonia. Under escort, they took Paul south as far as Athens, which was in the Roman Province of Achaia. Silas and Timothy remained behind in Beroea with instructions to join Paul later at Athens.

### TIMOTHY REVISITS THESSALONICA

Apparently, Paul instructed Timothy to return to Thessalonica and assess the situation there. It would not have been safe for Silas to return to Thessalonica because he was on the "wanted list." Silas waited in Beroea for Timothy's return from Thessalonica. Since the apostles' departure from there, the newly formed Christian Community had been an object of persecution and harassment. Paul looked upon these converts as his dear children in the faith, and he felt a fatherly concern over their physical and spiritual well being. In order to receive news about them and send them encouragement, he willingly sacrificed the company of Silas and Timothy and determined to go it alone for awhile in Athens.

Any effort on Paul's part to evangelize the Athenians was just about fruitless. Pride of mind ruled in this city; several more centuries would pass before Athens would accept the "folly of the cross." Disappointed, depressed and deprived of brotherly support, Paul moved on south to Corinth where he



would successfully labor for the next two years. Here Silas and Timothy found him, bringing him news and perhaps a letter from the Christian Community in Thessalonica. First Thessalonians is Paul's response to Timothy's report.

In his letter, Paul follows the customary literary form of the day, consisting of the greeting that identifies the sender and receiver, followed by a thanksgiving and a blessing. Out of Paul's letters a Christian format itself develops. Seventy years later Ignatius of Antioch writes his letters to the churches in the same Pauline fashion. The contents of First Thessalonians concerns itself with Paul's gratitude for their perseverance in the faith, with the example of Christian living he left them, with their obligation to follow this example of faith lived in love, with the doctrine of the Second Coming, and with the obligation to grow in Christian holiness in order to share in Christ's glorious return.

### LIVING IN FAITH

Paul's earlier letters paint in broad strokes the nature of Christian Faith in these early days of Christian life. Those early Christians clearly saw their life in Christ as a preparation for sharing in the victorious return of Jesus in glory. They lived their life with an eye upon the future. They did not judge their lives of living faith by the here and now, but by what was to come. The doctrine of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ remained vividly before their eyes, serving as a constant stimulus to the living out of their Christian lives. It encouraged them, willingly and joyfully, to make the necessary sacrifices demanded by faith in order to ensure sharing in the glorious victory of Jesus, whose return would come suddenly and unexpectedly, as the thief in the night, or as a lord returning to his household after a long absence.

In the early apostolic days, the Second Coming was a major doctrine vitally affecting Christian Faith. Luke presents angels saying to the early members of the Church: *"Men of Galilee why do you stand here looking up at the skies? This Jesus who has been taken from you will return...(Acts 1:11)*. The angelic message implies that, in the meantime, there is work to be done by these sky gazers. The doctrine of the Second Coming was widely proclaimed by the Church, and stimulated its members to evangelize. However, the doctrine was often misunderstood and misinterpreted to the detriment of the Christian Faith. Paul seeks to deal with this problem in Second Thessalonians.

Second Peter, believed by many scholars to have been written around the end of the first century by an unknown writer, primarily deals with the effects that the delayed Second Coming of Christ has on Christian Faith. The author writes:

*In the last days, mocking, sneering men who are ruled by their passions will arrive on the scene. They will ask: "Where is that promised coming of his? Our forefathers have been laid to rest, but everything stays just as it was when the world was created."*

Here the author probably expresses what was presently being voiced to the Christians. The writer responded:

*This point must not be overlooked, dear friends. In the Lord's eyes, one day is as a thousand years and a thousand years are as a day. The Lord does not delay in keeping his promise--though some consider it "delay." Rather, he shows you generous patience, since he wants none to perish but all to come to repentance. The day of the Lord will come like a thief (2Pt.3:3-4;8-10a).*

Paul possessed a fatherly concern for all those converted through his ministry. His writings demonstrate a particular concern for the quality and degree of their faith--the very foundation of their spiritual life. Well grounded in the Christian Faith, Paul clearly understood its repercussions in time and eternity. No tribulations in this world at the hands of an evil generation could compare with the eternal reward that faith brings. "I consider the sufferings of the present," he wrote in Romans 8:18, "to be nothing compared with the glory to be revealed in us."

Through faith, Paul stood firmly implanted in wisdom and fortitude. Few of his converts stood as firmly grounded in faith as he. Time demonstrated that the tribulations suffered for being a Christian weaken the faith of many. The possibility of this deeply concerned Paul. To insure against their defections, he labored diligently to establish their faith upon a veritable Rock of Gibraltar, so that they would become like houses built upon firm foundation: "When the rainy season set in, the torrents came and the wind blew and buffeted his house. It did not collapse; it had been solidly set on rock" (Mt. 7:25).

He would say to Christians: "Test yourselves to see whether you are living in faith; examine yourselves. Perhaps you yourselves do not realize that Christ

*Jesus is in you--unless, of course, you have failed the challenge (2Cor.13:5). He called them to examine the nature and quality of their faith--to examine their lives for evidence of living in faith. Paul wisely understood the relationship between practicing one's faith and strengthening one's faith. Its practice in daily human relationships made the difference between a faith built upon sand or upon rock. The daily practice of faith firmly establishes it. "Only faith," he taught the Galatians, "which expresses itself in love" is truly a living faith (see Gal.5:6).*

## THE CHRISTIAN PRILGRIMAGE

Paul experienced living-in-faith as life lived under the power and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Such living called for the mortification and rejection of all those desires, ambitions, and inclinations in one's personal existence that impeded, opposed, or rejected the Spirit of God--the Spirit of agape-love. Paul told the Galatians, *"My point is that you should live in accord with the spirit and you will not yield to the cravings of the flesh" (Gal.5:16)*. Paul certainly does not deny the reality of these cravings in the best of Christians. He speaks of their presence and the need to control them. In a word, a Christian lives life as if these cravings did not exist as far as any concrete expression of them goes. As Paul expressed it, *"Those who belong to Jesus Christ have crucified their flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal.5:24)*. This crucifixion of the flesh becomes a day-by-day dying affair, because as long as the Christian lives in this world, life must be lived out within the dimension of unredeemed flesh, which always naturally opposes the workings of the spirit. It constitutes a daily internal war for the Christian. Augustine teaches Christians in his Commentary on the Psalms:

The Body everywhere shows that it is not glorified but greatly tempted. Indeed, our life as pilgrims cannot be free of temptation, for it is through temptation that we advance. No one knows himself if he has not been tempted, nor can he be crowned unless he conquers, or conquer unless he struggles, or struggle unless he meets the enemy and be attacked (Augustine: Commentary on the Psalms).

Paul's positive advice to Christians is to overcome evil by doing good (see Rom.12:21). One does not deny the presence of evil within oneself, or its potential, but one does deny the powers of the mind and the will to the service of evil. The Christian directs these powers to service of the good. In the words

of Paul, they "*cling to what is good*" (Rom.12:9). Paul encourages, "*Let us not grow weary of doing good*" (Gal.6:9). Peter writes, "*Let those who suffer as God requires continue in good deeds, and entrust their lives to a faithful Creator*" (1Pt.4:19).

Certain Christian preachers seemingly emphasize, in word and deed, the negative aspects of religion. Perhaps this is due largely to their personal cultural or theological backgrounds. The New Testament Scriptures do confirm that the Christian religion must be lived out in an environment in which "the world, the flesh, and the devil" oppose it. This certainly suggests that there will be a degree of tribulation and personal persecution within the life of a genuine Christian. Nevertheless, Paul certainly does not desire to leave the impression among his converts that their religion is a "pie in the sky" faith-- a religion that offers only a cross on earth and a crown only in heaven. In his letters, Paul prays that his converts and fellow Christians will experience grace and peace. As we have seen from our study of Galatians, these are not nebulous, ethereal wishes but realistic gifts of the Holy Spirit which, here and now, introduce the Christian into the redemption achieved through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These gifts create within the Christian soul a new quality of life. Presently Christians are a new creation conceived in the joy of the Holy Spirit. Paul often speaks of joy in the Spirit. He speaks of the Thessalonians as receiving the gospel "*despite great trials, with joy that comes from the Holy Spirit*" (1Thes.1:6).

A Christian may be a pilgrim upon earth but, to a degree, heaven should be experienced here and now through the manifestations of grace, peace, and joy. Paul wrote to the Romans: "*The kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking, but of justice, peace, and the joy that is given by the Holy Spirit*" (14:17). One does not so much go to heaven as human existence itself becomes heavenly. Someone once said that at its worst, life on earth is Hell or Purgatory, depending upon what one lets the circumstances of life do to one. Rather, the true Christian makes it a Limbo, a Mt. Nebo, from which one not only can see, but can taste heaven. Primarily, heaven is a state of being, and only secondarily a place to be.

Paul makes clear what other Scriptures confirm--joy (*chara*) is a condition that flows from union with God. In the Christian, it is evidently an effect of the gift of the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural gift that raises the quality of human life and existence to the highest level of being. The Greeks spoke of joy, or *chara*, as a state of euphoria. For Philo it was one of the highest of

goods, and obtained only by the wise of heart. Jesus spoke of His disciples receiving a joy which the world could not receive, nor could the world deprive them of receiving it. He encouraged them, *"Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full"* (Jn.16:24). Separated from the Will of God, such joy cannot be found. Joy is a quality of life intrinsic to the Divine Being.

Joy permeates the body and soul, but its origin lies within the spirit. For this reason, what occurs in the body, or to the body, or within the lower soul of man, cannot of itself touch or destroy the joyful quality of Christian existence. Paul could write the Corinthians: *"I am filled with consolation, and despite my many afflictions my joy knows no bounds"* (2Cor.7:4b). Paul encouraged Christians, regardless of their life circumstances: *"Rejoice always!"*

As evidence of their reception of the Holy Spirit and cooperation with Him, Paul looked for a dynamic expression of faith within the lives of Christians. This dynamic presence of the Holy Spirit, concomitant with His gifts, amply compensated for any losses in this world, making all necessary sacrifices well worth it. Writing to the Corinthians, he says:

*We do not lose heart, because our inner being is renewed each day even though our body is being destroyed at the same time. The present burden of our trial is light enough, and earns for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (2Cor.4:16-17).*

The Christian religion, truly understood and properly applied, leads the individual unhesitatingly to personal maturity. No human life can have any greater natural goal of soul than its own personal growth and development. If within our life-time, we fail to achieve some measure of maturity of soul, all other achievements are meaningless. What does it profit us if we gain the entire world and destroy ourselves in the process? Through means of subtle praise and direct admonitions, Paul urges the Thessalonians to greater Christian maturity in Christ.

## CHAPTER 2

### ESSENTIALS OF CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

#### COMMUNITY OF FAITH

In the foundation of a Christian Community at Thessalonica, we have an example of Church expansion in its first century, expressed in a microcosmic fashion.

In Luke's gospel account, Jesus had sent forth His disciples two-by-two as His witnesses. Jewish law and custom demanded two or three male witnesses for validity of testimony. An apostolic team of three--Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy--arrived in Thessalonica between 50 and 51 A.D. under the leadership of Paul of Tarsus.

Silvanus, known also as Silas, was formerly a member of the Jerusalem Community, and had been sent as an official delegate to Antioch during the circumcision dispute. After Barnabas' dispute-with Paul, Silas replaced Barnabas as Paul's traveling companion. Timothy was a young Christian from Southern Galatia. He was of a Jewish mother and pagan father. Both his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois were Christians. Paul met Timothy in Lystra during his second journey into Southern Galatia. Being personally impressed with Timothy and having received a glowing report concerning him from the Christian Community, Paul invited him to join their missionary team. In order to facilitate Timothy's association with Jews, Paul had him circumcised. As his mother was Jewish, Timothy would have been considered a Jew--Judaism is passed through the mother. A close relationship, as with father and son, developed between Paul and Timothy. Paul would later speak of Timothy as "*my own true child in faith*" (1Tm.1:10), and "*my child whom I love*" (2Tm.1:2).

The community aspect of Christianity clearly sounds from the very first notes of this epistle. The apostolic team of Paul, Silvanus and Timothy send greetings of redemption, grace, and peace to those Thessalonians assembled in the name of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. We read, "*Paul,*

*Silvanus, and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians who belong to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be yours" (1Thess.1:1).*

The Church at Thessalonica was an assembly of people united through their beliefs in God. It was a small society formed through faith. Its cohesive elements were its religious beliefs. These particular beliefs made this assembly a Christian community. Essential to this community were the beliefs in the Fatherhood of God and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Within the word structure of this greeting, there exists an equation between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. There is an echo of Jesus' admonition to the disciples: *"Have faith in God and faith in me" (Jn.14:1b).*

Having faith in Jesus Christ implies accepting Jesus' revelation of God, whom He uniquely reveals as His Father and, through Him, the Father of His disciples. Jesus possesses a unique Father-Son relationship with God. He alone says, "My Father." His disciples are taught to pray, "Our Father." In a word, this filial relationship, possessed by a Christian with God, rests upon their faith-relationship with Jesus Christ and with the Church established by Him. Only in so far as a person is "in Christ" as part of His Body--the Church, does he or she have this unique relationship with God that is enjoyed uniquely by Jesus Christ.

Within the Christian Community, the relationship of the faithful with the Father and the Son assume different external manifestations--although in essence both relationships are identical. The Christian sees the relationship to the Father more as a filial relationship. Jesus Christ must be acknowledged as Lord of the assembly and of the person. This implies personal and communal submission and obedience to His Will. However, since Jesus is the perfect lover of the Father, such submission and obedience to Jesus can only lead the disciples into a perfect filial relationship with their heavenly Father. In this filial relationship, Jesus is the Way, the Light and the Life. Because of our own internal darkness, we must often follow the Way of Jesus with only the Lamp of Faith to guide us.

Belief in the Lordship of Jesus implies more than personal submission. Jesus proclaimed, *"Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth" (Mt.28:18).* This proclamation implies His power to act in any situation, both in heaven and on earth, in matters great and small. Faith in the Lordship of Jesus Christ implies belief in that power. In a time of necessity, a Christian should readily call upon the Lordship of Jesus Christ to concretely express

itself in the needful situation at hand. In a practical devotion to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, it must be understood that in our present situation on earth, many things resist submission to the Will of God. Paul teaches us:

*Christ must reign until God has put all enemies under his feet...  
When, finally, all has been subjected to the Son, he will then subject himself to the One who made all things subject to him, so that God may be all in all (1Cor.15:25,28).*

The work of Jesus to bring all things under submission to the Will of God continues on earth. Where the perversity of free will hinders the Will of God, Jesus will work in keeping with a respect for human freedom and the plan of creation. Within these boundaries, the Lord can, and will, mightily express His Lordship when so beseeched by the faithful. The Lordship of Jesus Christ is ours to call upon!

#### A DIVINE SHADOW

Any theology into which authentic faith is placed does not remain an abstraction. The beliefs will shape man's concept of self, and direct his relationship with other human beings and toward life in general. The Old Testament reveals man to be made in the Image and Likeness of God. For believers, God should become, in some fashion, their pattern for human existence. Such persons would expect their lives on earth to reflect at least a shadow of the divine existence.

The revelations of the New Testament carry us beyond the theology of Judaism. As Christians, our concept of God is unique. We worship the Triune God. Nevertheless, most Christians fail to express the Christian concept of God in any practical manner. Their creed may be correct, but their concrete lives fail to reflect the Triune God.

Do most Christians primarily see God as Father, and their relationship with Him to be intimately personal? Seemingly many Christians, through their formal religious training, conceive God more in philosophical terms than in biblical ones. They see God as the infinite, supreme, self-sufficient, immutable, all-powerful Being. Such concepts give license to soar into the realms of infinite fantasy. God can readily become the Supreme, Immovable Isolate, alone, independent of all things.



Any practical endeavor to incarnate such a divine concept into a human life is destined to distort any biblical presentation of God, and produce a spirituality alien to the Scriptures. Seeking to become godly--in the sense of being independent, self-possessed, aloof, and above other beings--is likely to produce a religious monstrosity, in other words, to become an unapproachable island, a no man's territory where only the gods may walk. Unfortunately some individual Christians, in the name of religion, do become like stones, emotionally and psychologically, never realizing how closely their lives may pattern the evolution of a god of rock. Rocks are energized matter, which have lost the ability to communicate energy outside of themselves, and have thereby lost the power to continue on the road of evolution. Rocks, regardless of their beauty, are retarded energy. The youth of the sixties sang a song, "I am a rock. I am an island... And a rock can feel no pain." Nor does it feel alive.

The nature of God remains the deepest mystery. Nevertheless, divine revelation throws light upon the mystery of God. We know God is One. We know that within the One God dwells the Holy Trinity of Persons--God is Father, God is Son, and God is Holy Spirit. Personal unity resides in God in the community of love. Three Persons dwell in union, forming the Primary Assembly that is the prototype for the Church on earth, and called by Paul the assembly that belongs to God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The life of the Triune God is expressed outside Itself in creation, redemption, and sanctification. Christians pray: "Blessed be God the Father who has created us. Blessed be God the Son who has redeemed us. Blessed be God the Holy Spirit who has sanctified us. Blessed be the Holy and Undivided Trinity, now and forever!"

## CHRISTIAN SURVIVAL

Paul makes clear to the Thessalonians that they are an assembly that belongs neither to the earth nor to man. Their community belongs to "*God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*" (1Thes.1:1b). This knowledge must effectively direct the entire course of the community. The lives of its members must be lived in grace and peace. The Assembly of God, or the Church, is essential on earth for the People of God to reflect the Image and Likeness of the Triune God. Only a holy community can accomplish this reflection. A true Christian cannot exist independently of Church communion. To be Christian, and alone, is an implied contradiction. The life of God is reflected and actually made

present on earth only in a loving community. There is no promise of God's presence among the excommunicated. *"Where two or three are gathered in my name,"* says Jesus, *"there am I in their midst."* (Mt.18:20.)

The Christian Religion is not so much the saving of individual souls as it is the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Seemingly, the salvation of the individual flows from its proper relationship to the Church, which constitutes the Kingdom of God on earth. On her death bed, St. Teresa of Avila could proclaim, "I rejoice to die a Daughter of the Church." Paul identified the Church as the Body of Christ. He assures us that salvation consists in being "in Christ." Being in Christ implies being a member of the Body of Christ, the Church. St. Augustine taught, "The Holy Spirit does not pursue the separated member."

For the Christian Community to authentically reflect the life of the Triune God on earth, it must also be expected to be creative, redemptive, and sanctifying. Is it too much to expect that the individual who shares in the life of God would also enrich the Church on earth through a creative, redemptive and sanctified life?

The Christians of Thessalonica, a majority of whom are Gentile converts, must live within an environment and culture completely pagan, with neighbors who worship and live in a manner forbidden to them as Christians. At work, play and perhaps at home, there would be pressure to live in a fashion implicitly denying their Lord. They must exist within social and economic pressure to abandon their faith. At times, they would be subjected to powerful physical and psychological pressure that would sometimes lead to physical persecution. The strength of perseverance for the Christian would primarily lie in an enlightened faith, and within the unity of a loving community. In order to survive and develop, believers must be united in love. There is strength in unity. In Proverbs 18:19 we read, *"A brother is a better defense than a strong city."* The Book of Hebrews teaches:

*Let us hold unswervingly to our profession which gives us hope...  
We must consider how to rouse each other to love and good deeds.  
We should not absent ourselves from the assembly, as some do, but  
encourage one another; and this all the more because you see that  
the Day draws near (Heb.10:23-25).*

From the depths of his many years as an evangelist in England, John Wesley wrote in his journal on August 1763: "I was more convinced than ever that the preaching like an apostle, without joining together those that are awakened, and training them up in the ways of God, is only begetting children for the murderer." Wesley went on to observe the meager results after twenty years of preaching all over Pembrokeshire: "but no regular societies, no discipline, no order or connection; and the consequence is, that nine in ten of the once awakened are now faster asleep than ever."

The Psalmist sang, "*How good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity.*" St. Hilary of Poitiers commented upon this text:

It is "good and pleasant for brothers to dwell in unity" because, when they dwell in unity, they form the Church, and when they call each other "brother," one loving will binds them together... For it's only right that in the People of God brothers should be united under One Father and One Spirit, dwelling harmoniously in one House and living as members of one body (St. Hilary of Poitiers).

Paul informs the Thessalonians that he, along with Silvanus and Timothy, form a prayerful community. The three of them hold up the Thessalonians before God in common prayer. "*We keep thanking God,*" he writes, "*for all of you and we remember you in our prayers*" (2Thess.1:2). He tells the Thessalonians that they pray for their growth in holiness, and for God's blessing upon their undertakings. "*We pray for you always,*" he says, "*that our God may make you worthy of his call, and fulfill by his power every honest intention and work of faith*" (2Thes.1:11).

Paul knew that one of the fruits of a loving community is offering common prayer for the needs of others. He told the Corinthians, "*Our prayer is that you may be built up to completion*" (2Cor.13:9). He wrote the Romans, "*The God I worship in the spirit by preaching the gospel of his Son will bear witness that I constantly mention you in prayer*" (Rom.1:9). Paul urges the Thessalonians to develop a rejoicing and grateful spirit as the Will of God for them, "*Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus*" (1Thes.5:16-18). Paul reminds Timothy that those who have set their "*hope in God*" continue "*night and day in supplications and prayers.*" He urged all Christians to pray for all peoples, and especially for political leaders and for peace for the common good. He wrote:

*First of all, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving be offered for all men, especially for kings and those in authority, that we may be able to lead undisturbed and tranquil lives in perfect piety and dignity. Prayer of this kind is good, and God our savior is pleased with it, for he wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth (1Tm.2:1-4).*

Father Judge taught members of the Missionary Cenacle, "Our prayer should not be narrow personal prayer; it should reach to the throne of God only after having touched the farthest bounds of God's creation and mourned in every human misery and rejoiced in God's goodness to all."

Paul urged the Thessalonians to pray for him and his companions that they could continue to spread the gospel, and be delivered from the power of evil people. "*Brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may make progress and be hailed by many others, even as it has been by you. Pray that we may be delivered from confused and evil men*" (2Thes.1-2a). Paul would have been in complete agreement with the thoughts Sir Walter Scott placed upon the lips of the dying King Arthur:

If thy shall never see my face again, pray for my soul. For more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. For what are men more than sheep and goats--that nourish a blind life within their brain--if knowing God they lift not arms in prayer for themselves and for those they call "friend"... The whole round world is bound by chains of gold about the feet of God (Sir Walter Scott).

## ROOTS OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

In his thanksgiving, Paul praises the spirituality of the Thessalonians. He writes:

*For we constantly are mindful before our God and Father of the way you are proving your faith, and laboring in love, and showing constancy of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ (1Thes.1:3).*

Paul intimates it is not enough for a Christian community to possess faith that remains sterile and fruitless in the face of human needs. A faith that truly saves will manifest itself, as St. James insists, in works of charity. Such a faith, in Paul's mind, expresses itself in labors of love and in a hope that produces perseverance in the faith.

Faith, hope and charity are the foundations of Christian spirituality. Any life not motivated by these three fundamental, supernatural powers cannot call itself, in the Christian sense, spiritual. A life is made definable by the source of its life. If a Christian spiritual life exists, it must flow from these powers, manifesting the operations of the Holy Spirit within the soul. Paul testified to the spirituality of the Thessalonians when he told them: *"You are proving your faith...laboring in love...showing constancy of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."*

Rooted and nourished, these powers produce life in God. Spirit must come from Spirit. The religious spirituality of a person--its presence or its absence--is determined by these three virtues. James warned Christians of the first century that a life of faith without charity *"is as dead as a body without breath"* (Jas.2:26b). It is not uncommon for Christians to seek spiritual direction who have no spiritual life to direct. All their "goodness" finds its roots in the natural, often in the flesh. Not a few Christians seek psychotherapy under the guise of spiritual direction. There is nothing, of course, wrong with seeking therapy, but a spade should be called a spade.

Paul speaks of the supernatural origin of the Thessalonians' faith. Their faith came through hearing the gospel, and was not a product of natural design or motivation. Paul writes:

*We know, too, brothers beloved of God, how you were chosen. Our preaching of the gospel proved not a mere matter of words for you but one of power; it was carried on in the Holy Spirit and out of complete conviction (1Thes.1:4-5b).*

Paul's later words to the Corinthians are equally applicable to the Thessalonians: *"When I came among you it was in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation. My message and my preaching had none of the persuasive force of "wise" argumentation, but the convincing power of the Spirit. As a consequence, your faith rests not on the wisdom of men but on the power of God" (1Cor.2:3-5).*

## SUCCESSFUL EVANGELIZATION

Successful evangelization depends much on the arduous labors of the evangelist. However, make no mistake, its ultimate fruitfulness depends upon the operation of the Holy Spirit. The evangelist must prudently plough and sow the seeds, but the Lord grants the increase.

Paul implies that the conversion of the Thessalonians resulted not only from having the gospel preached to them, but having it preached to them out of "complete conviction." In a word, the faith of the evangelist begets faith. An exposition of faith preached out of intellectual conviction alone may touch the mind, but may leave only an intellectual appreciation in the hearer. The personal conviction of the evangelist is important in the effective proclamation of the gospel: he becomes a living channel of the Holy Spirit. Of course, essential to conversion, is the Presence of the Holy Spirit.

Much prayer should be offered to the Holy Spirit for those being evangelized. The seeds of faith must simultaneously be sown and nourished. Joy of soul becomes the indisputable sign of true conversion. Through the grace of the Holy Spirit the human spirit becomes alive in its deepest depths, and joy permeates the soul.

It must be remembered that effective proclamation of the gospel depends upon the condition of the hearers. Men are not robots but free agents. The human heart must be open to receive the gospel, to the engrafting of the Word, to a reception of the Holy Spirit. Because of this necessity, John the Baptist in the desert and Simon Peter in the temple first preached repentance. They called men to a change of heart.

Some souls have erected barriers to the approach of God's Holy Spirit. Seemingly, evidence verifies where a soul remains deeply wedded to sin, as in the case with Antipas and Herodias, where there is intellectual pride; as among the men of Athens, where there is spiritual complacency; as with the Pharisees, where there is indifference to spiritual values; as among the Gentiles, the words of gospel truth fall upon the hearts of hearers as rain pounding on a tin shed. Certain sins harden the human heart toward repentance. At times these sins may not be apparent, or even within the conscious awareness of the person, but deep within these sins remains a formidable obstacle to conversion.

Some men reject the Word of God with vehemence, finding active expression in overt persecution, as in the case of the Jews of Thessalonica and with the young Saul of Tarsus. The Gospel account of John supplies this explanation for this phenomenon:

*Flesh begets flesh, Spirit begets spirit... The judgment of condemnation is this: the light came into the world, but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were wicked. Everyone who practices evil hates the light; he does not come near it for fear his deeds will be exposed (Jn.3:6,19-20).*

If the light comes near to such a person, we might add, he or she will seek to smash it, to extinguish it.

### CHRISTIAN PERSEVERANCE

Writing within the first years of Church evangelism, Paul's words are permeated with genuine optimism and hopeful expectation. Paul, along with other early members of the Church, would come to a sobering realization that all things well begun in Christ do not always end well. The Church would come to experience people who sincerely converted to Christ and shared in the initial joy and power of the Holy Spirit, but with the passing of time, defect from the Christian Faith.

We find an explanation for this phenomenon in the Gospel parable of the sower. This parable divides the hearers of the gospel into different groups, of which the first have a built-in obstacle or hindrance to the acceptance of the gospel truth. The parable speaks of these as being under Satan's influence. The gospel message, finding immediate rejection, takes no root. Such souls prefer their own peculiar light to the Light of Christ.

Those in a second group are spoken of as "rocky ground." These souls, lacking character development, have no foundation for spiritual formation. It is said of these that they initially experience a joyful conversion. All goes well as long as their lives remain free from the Cross of Christ, as long as religion remains a pleasant experience. These are the sunshine Christians, flowers in the cranny walls. When circumstances demand they pay a price for their faith, when it becomes a source of suffering rather than consolation, their enthusiasm, along with their faith, withers and dries up. They fall away. The Lord said of them, "*being rootless, they last only a while*" (Mk.4:17a).

The third group is composed of fruitless Christians. They live their lives within an environment, internal and external, hostile to their faith. It is faith lived among thorns, getting choked out. Each human life has only so much time and so much energy. Failing to direct the human heart properly toward God and eternity, it becomes misdirected toward self and the world. It is life losing the compass of life. Self-gratification and worldly pursuits consume one's time and energy. Faith becomes sterile. The Lord said of them: "*Anxieties over life's demands, and the desire for wealth, and cravings of other sorts, come to choke it off; it bears no yield*" (Mk.4:19). For these, the time of life passes and personal energy is consumed, and the primary purpose of life remains unfulfilled. Jesus taught the disciples to seek first the Kingdom of God and His Glory and the rest would come to them. He encouraged them, "*Be not anxious. Your heavenly Father knows you need all these things.*"

The parable implies that a great many apparently do not persevere in the faith. However, it does teach that there are those who hear and take to heart the message of the gospel. They love the Word of God, which guides the development of their entire lives. They are "good soil" in which the Seed takes firm root and bears rich fruit.

In Galatia, Paul had firsthand experience of seed sown in shallow ground; and in Corinth, of seed sown in stony soil; and in Thessalonica, of seed sown in good ground. In his later formation of converts, Paul sought to avoid the Galatian problems; his concern that the Thessalonians were properly instructed and given edifying Christian example is most evident in this epistle. How many people, without a solid moral or theological foundation, are brought into the Christian Church and abandoned after baptism? They are left to survive the best they can in rocky soil, amidst the thorns. No small wonder so many converts melt back into that gigantic wave of the un-churched within a few years, and take their ranks among the millions of the spiritually abandoned. If Christians hope to survive in a fruitful way in this pagan world, on-going religious education is essential for all.

As the first representatives of Christ in Thessalonica, the apostolic team understood their responsibility to witness in word and deed. What they teach by word must be seen incarnated by their actions. The Thessalonians must see a sermon as well as hear it. As Booker T. Washington observed: "For what you are cries so loud, I cannot hear what you are saying!" Paul's apostolic team, relatively speaking, would have only a brief time in which to establish the Christian Church in this city. At most, a few months were allotted to them.



They must deeply sow the roots of Christian Faith, which must withstand the test and trials surely to follow. The lesson of Galatia was well learned: wolves in sheep's clothing would surely follow on Paul's footsteps. With the coming of the night, the sowers of cockle would surely enter the wheat fields.

The example left by Paul and his companions became a concrete pattern of love upon which the Thessalonians could model themselves. This they did. Paul could later confirm their behavior to be truly Christian. He wrote:

*You know as well as we do what we proved to be like when, while still among you, we acted on your behalf. You, in turn, became imitators of us and the Lord, receiving the word despite great trials, with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit (1Thes.1:5c-6).*

Not only did the Thessalonians receive the Gospel, but they received it joyfully amidst persecution. Nothing demonstrates more their imitation of the Lord and Paul than their efforts to become heralds of the Good News throughout the Provinces of Macedonia and Achaia. The heart cannot contain joy as perfume within a bottle. As with love, it bursts forth with a diffusive force. Personally experiencing the love of God in conversion, the heart brims over with joy. With prophetic urging, a person desires to share with others the joy of salvation. Is this not itself a sign of the Presence of the Holy Spirit who longs to scatter this Divine Fire throughout the universe? The apostolic activities of the Thessalonians and the quality of their faith enable Paul to sing their praise. Paul writes:

*Thus you became a model for all the believers of Macedonia and Achaia. The word of the Lord has echoed forth from you resoundingly. This is true not only in Macedonia and Achaia: throughout every region your faith in God celebrated, which makes it needless for us to say anything more. The people of those parts are reporting what kind of reception we had from you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve him who is the living and true God and to await from heaven the Son he raised from the dead-- Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come (1Thes.1: 7-10).*

Later, Paul holds up the Thessalonians as an example of generosity to the Corinthians. He seeks to stir up a little holy generosity within the Corinthians. He tells them:

*Brothers, I should like you to know of the grace of God conferred on the churches of Macedonia. In the midst of severe trial their overflowing joy and deep poverty have produced an abundant generosity. According to their means--indeed I can testify even beyond their means--and voluntarily, they begged us insistently for the favor of sharing in this service to members of the church. Beyond our hopes they first gave themselves to God and then to us by the will of God (2Cor.8:1-5).*

### SPIRIT OF PRUDENCE

From Paul's reference to the Thessalonians turning away from idols, we may presume the majority of the converts among the Thessalonians were Gentiles rather than Jews. Converting Jews and Gentiles would demand two entirely different approaches. The queenly virtue of prudence calls for the evangelist to use the proper means to lead a person to faith in Christ. We can place needless stumbling blocks to truth. It would certainly be important, at least today, to distinguish between the essentials of the Christian Faith and the cultural developments within a religious faith. Too often people put all things on the same level, placing needless obstacles to conversion. The writer recalls the difficulty, in the early days of his priesthood, of finding catechetical material not needlessly offensive to Protestants interested in Catholicism.

In Paul's day, of course, a Christian culture would hardly have existed. The problem would have been the inherited Jewish culture. Within the First Century, the evangelist would have been faced with dealing in one way with Jews steeped in a biblical faith and tradition, and in another way with Gentiles steeped in paganism with its myths and superstitions. Prudence dictates that an evangelist should understand the religious and social backgrounds of those he or she desires to convert.

How did the early evangelist confront the pagan people of their day? Comparable literature of the time does not seem to indicate any widespread zeal for the cults of the gods. As it is today, religion for so many people is part of their cultural environment. Religious customs and habits are accepted as part of the lived environment and accepted without any particular mental

appreciation or religious enthusiasm. We have some evidence in the New Testament that religious cults were most zealously supported by those men who depended upon them financially. Probably the most important cult of that time dealt with the worship of the State, embodied in the worship of the emperor. Such a cult had greater political than religious significance.

*Christians of the first century approached the conversion of pagans both in a positive and negative fashion. Positive in that they proclaimed the universal will of God: For he (God) wants all men to be saved and come to know the truth (1Tm.2:4).*

Jesus Christ, being the veritable will of God incarnated, is described: *"God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all" (1Tm.2:5).* As Peter preached: *"There is no salvation in anyone else, for there is no other name in the whole world given to men by which we are to be saved" (Acts 4:12).*

The Will of God, as incarnated in Jesus Christ, equated itself with enduring love, overwhelming mercy and compassion for all mankind. To share in the reality of this salvific love resulted--as we have so often emphasized--in a personal experience of great joy. It can be presumed that the early band of evangelists were a joyful lot. Their evident joyful confidence must have been an attractive stimulus to people living constantly in superstitious fear and amidst mental and spiritual confusion and darkness. No doubt, they preached the gospel with the authority of conviction.

However, there is the negative side to this coin, and the early Christian preachers did not neglect it. Their teachings make it crystal clear that the presentation to the world of Jesus Christ and His gospel brings judgment upon the world. This forces men to make a decision, a decision that reveals the true inner person, whether one is conscious of it or not. The evangelist saw salvation or condemnation riding upon a decision for Christ or against Christ: *"The man who believes in it (the gospel) and accepts baptism will be saved: the man who refuses to believe in it will be condemned" (Mk.16:16).* Paul preached to the pagans in Athens:

*God may well have overlooked bygone periods when men did not know him: but now he calls on all men everywhere to reform their lives. He has set the day on which he is going to "judge the world*

*with justice” through a man he has appointed--one whom he has endorsed in the sight of all by raising him from the dead (Acts 17:30-31).*

The evangelist John taught, *“Whoever believes in the Son has life eternal. Whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but must endure the wrath of God” (Jn.3:36).*

In order to turn men from idolatry, the early Church did not hesitate to preach the Wrath of God. (This concept is discussed at some length in our commentary on Romans.) If love failed to motivate the heart as it often fails to do so where there is much poverty of heart, the evangelist used fear and man's natural sense of self-preservation to stimulate conversion to Christ. Paul warned both the impenitent Jew and Greek:

*Your hard and impenitent heart is storing up retribution for that day of wrath when the just judgment of God will be revealed, when he will repay every man for what he has done...wrath and fury to those who selfishly disobey the truth and obey wickedness. Yes, affliction and anguish will come upon every man who has done evil, the Jew first, then the Greek (Rom.2:5-9).*

Seemingly, Paul saw both Jew and Gentile under the Wrath of God from which only Jesus Christ could deliver them. Paul wrote the Thessalonians: *“Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1Thess.1:10b).*

Paul apparently expected the Second Coming of Jesus Christ to come within his lifetime--at least at this time of his life, he believed this. The Church expected the Day of Judgment to be concomitant with the Second Coming. The return of Jesus would bring the fullness of salvation to the faithful. Paul cautioned Christians to live their daily lives in preparation for the Lord's return. It must not catch them unprepared like the thief in the night. Hope, along with faith and love, must affect the daily living of their lives. They must live daily in the hopeful anticipation of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Paul's teachings would have echoed the words of Jesus as recorded by Luke:

*Be on guard lest your spirits become bloated with indulgence and drunkenness and worldly cares. The great day will suddenly close in on you like a trap. The day I speak of will come upon all who dwell*

*on the face of the earth. So be on the watch. Pray constantly for the strength to escape whatever is in prospect, and to stand secure before the Son of Man (Lk.21:34-36).*

**Paul would teach the Thessalonians this teaching of Jesus:**

*Men will see the Son of Man coming on a cloud with great power and glory. When these things begin to happen, stand erect and hold your heads high, for your deliverance is near at hand (Lk.21:27-28).*

## CHAPTER 3

### EVANGELISM WITH LOVE

#### INTRODUCTION

Paul appears to have been plagued throughout his apostolic life by people who sought to destroy his effectiveness within the Christian Community by attributing to him all kinds of evil and base motivations. Often he became the victim of character assassination. That he would suffer this at the hands of his enemies is no surprise. These men recognized in Paul a formidable enemy to be destroyed. Acts tells us:

*Certain Jews formed a conspiracy in which they bound themselves by oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul (there were more than forty of them who took the oath together) (Acts 23:12-13).*

If they had kept their oath, Paul would have had forty less enemies. Surprisingly, many of those who did seek to destroy Paul's character were members of the Christian Community. They caused the problems in Galatia, and their motives were obvious. They disagreed entirely with the theology preached by Paul. They sought to undermine his teachings by destroying his character.

Among Christians, there can be a misguided humility that remains silent in the face of personal injustice. It can be an act of genuine humility to remain silent in the face of false accusations, however, the greater good must be considered. One must be able to discern between a desire to be humble and a desire to be seen as humble. Some so poorly understand the virtue of humility that they mistake genuine humility for pride, and pride for humility. Pride adores wearing a subtle, humble mask. St. Thomas More gave this description of Richard III of England who was reputed to have murdered two small nephews in order to sit briefly upon the throne of England: "Humble in expression and arrogant of heart, outwardly friendly where he inwardly hated, not hesitating to kiss whom he meant to kill. He spared no man's death whose life withstood his purpose."

Humility may call forth self-defense. Jesus was certainly not silent when accused of being possessed by Satan. Certain accusations, if believed, not only hurt a reputation but destroy it. At times, the good work accomplished by people and their potential to do future good work is destroyed as well. In order to work successfully in society, a good name is needed. Protecting one's good name and potential to continue God's work in the world may be more important than humble silence in the face of false accusations. Truth is still the best defense against the lie. However, truth must be heard to be effective. Paul wrote, *"We are concerned not only for God's approval but also for the good esteem of men"* (2Cor.8:21).

A Catholic Chaplain once related to the writer that he had received an emergency call to perform a burial that was being held up because the assigned chaplain was intoxicated. After the service, he wrote a letter to Chaplain Headquarters in Washington explaining the details of the situation. Luckily for him, the next day a letter arrived at headquarters accusing him of drunkenness and holding up a burial service for four hours while he was being sobered up. Such an accusation was capable of destroying his career as a chaplain.

For good and sincere Christians, it is not easy to realize that everyone in the Christian Community who appears to be as good and sincere as themselves may not be so. Naiveté is no virtue. The Church established by Jesus Christ on this earth is not an assembly composed only of saints. It is not a "holiness church." The Church is composed of potential saints who are presently sinners. Some of them will become saints, and some will remain sinners while helping others to become saints. In Jesus' Church the wheat and weed will grow side-by-side, and the fisherman's net will contain fish both good and bad.

Jesus instructed His disciples, *"You can tell a tree by its fruits."* In other words, good trees and good people produce good fruit. It sounds simple enough, and may be so when dealing with figs, grapes and lemons. However, it becomes complicated advice when applied to people. If anyone within the Christian Community prophesied, exorcised demons, or worked miracles, we could certainly consider those things good fruit. We would presume that those who did such things were good people and, perhaps, saints. Yet Jesus goes on to teach:

*None of those who cry out, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of God but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. When that day comes, many will plead with me, "Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in your name? Have we not exorcised demons by its power? Did we not do many miracles in your name as well?" Then I will declare to them solemnly, "I never knew you. Out of my sight, you evildoers!" (Mt.7:21-23).*

Now that does complicate things, because it makes the criteria of goodness something more internal to the heart than external to the deed. Obviously, whatever is done in order to be good in the eyes of the Lord must be in keeping with the Will of God. We see that such gifts as prophecy, exorcism and healing are ministries within the Church, given for the building up of the Body of the Church. They testify to God's loving presence within the Community, not the holiness of the ministers. The minister has a moral obligation to use gifts in keeping with the Will of God. Holiness of life consists in one's entire life being rooted in the Will of God. This includes the intention and motivation for good deeds. Evidently only Jesus can be the final judge of goodness as he alone is "the tester of our hearts".

Many people within the Christian Community begin in the spirit but end in the flesh. There is a phenomenon in natural human growth in which there is a tendency to return to a more pleasant or comfortable stage of being when a higher stage of development becomes too painful; the adult will become the child again. This, too, can happen on the spiritual level. As soul-growth becomes more spiritual and rarified, the effects of growth and its rewards become less sensible and pleasant. The soul is tempted at such times to return to the natural level to seek its success in the development of natural talents, or in perfecting intellectual abilities.

Some members of the Christian Community never rise higher than natural motivation. For diverse reasons they enter a Christian movement, often deluded as to their own motivations. They become wolves in sheep's clothing, fully convinced they are sheep. Some others, as Richard the Third, appear as doves, but are poisonous serpents. Even some of those serpents can be deluded into thinking they fly on the wings of the dove. Christians must not be surprised to find subtle and blatant manifestations of the flesh among their fellow Christians. This should not be a source of scandal but of caution: "*Let anyone who thinks he is standing upright watch out lest he fall*" (1Cor.10:12).



The Scriptures teach us to expect that among the faithful there will be members who are users, manipulators, and exploiters. Their loveless hearts are truly at enmity with other members of the Church who become grist for the mills they grind. Within the very first Christian Community we have the example of those two little foxes, Ananias and Sapphira (see Acts 5:1-10).

A Christian Community can become an easy environment for certain people to fulfill their particular needs for attention, esteem, power and importance. Within the nakedness of their souls, they may be totally irreligious. Religion becomes a means to a baser end. Out of charity and humility that is too often misguided, some give way to such people who, like hungry lions, go about seeking time and energy from whomever they can devour. A Christian Community must be on guard against manifestations of *zelos* and *eritheia* within the Church.

As we know *zelos*, or jealousy, leads the human heart to seek, through evil means, the goods of another. Targets of jealousy, within the Community, are often those members esteemed because of their authority, or talent, or special service to the community. As the jealous heart seeks this attention, esteem, and praise for itself, it will seek through one means or another to remove those who impede its attainment. As the jealous rise over the bodies of others, they are willing to destroy the reputation and good works of others in the process.

The spirit of *eritheia* will manifest itself in those members who seek position and authority within the community for selfish purposes. Certain people, incapable of unselfish service, will ardently seek leadership within the Church for their own personal ends. Their personal ambition supersedes the common good of the Church. They will channel the progress of the Church, if permitted, down a dead-end street. When their plans and designs are impeded, these frustrated people may well become the source of contention and strife in the Church. The spirit of *eris* will enter their hearts, and those persons who obstructed the plans become the target of animosity and destruction. These evil spirits, incarnated in the hearts of Christians, destroy the social peace of the Christian Community. They often leave it fragmented.

Perhaps the sickest spirits of all, capable of being manifested within the Church, are *phthonos* and *dishostasia*. They manifest themselves within those negative souls who seek the destruction of good rather than the possession of it. Envy or *phthonos* directs itself towards the good possessed by an individual

or group. The goods of others--possessions, works, successes, fame--are seen by the envious as casting a negative shadow over themselves or, better still, a light upon their poverty. They seek to deprive rather than possess. They seek to impoverish others rather than enrich themselves. Their souls, like those of ants, are small and mean.

The spirit of *dishostasia*--a sister spirit to *phthonos*--directs its negative energy towards society in general. People with this spirit receive a perverse satisfaction in destruction of social order. Lacking peace of soul they can leave nothing in peace. With fangs in their tongues and poison in their fingers they deliberately foment contention and strife within families and communities. These people foster gossip and slander and find satisfaction in the disintegration of the community.

Such a picture of Church life is not a pleasant one, but it is a bird's eye view of its negative side. Many communities have been destroyed, and individual Christians lethally wounded because Christians have remained spiritually naive toward its membership. Shepherds of such communities can become blind guides of the blind. Jesus gave some very practical advice to His disciples when He told them:

*What I am doing is sending you out like sheep among wolves. You must be clever as snakes and innocent as doves. Be on your guard with respect to others (Mt.10:16-17a).*

*Do not give what is holy to dogs or toss your pearls before swine. They will trample them under foot, at best, and perhaps even tear you to shreds (Mt.7:6).*

*Be on your guard against false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but underneath are wolves on the prowl (Mt.7:15).*

### PAUL'S SUBTLE DEFENSE

None could accuse Paul of religious naiveté. His enemies often accused him of the opposite. Paul possessed that practical shrewdness encouraged by Jesus. In his letters to the Galatians and Corinthians, he explicitly defends his reputation against evil insinuations, misrepresentation of facts and false accusations. He prudently fought fire with fire. He did not hesitate to unmask certain members of the Church. He wrote:

*Such men are false apostles. They practice deceit in their disguise as apostles of Christ. And little wonder! For even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. It comes as no surprise that his ministers disguise themselves as ministers of the justice of God (2Cor.11:13-15a).*

Paul's letter implies that there are those (and there will be those) who come in God's name, preaching religion and encouraging conversion, but their piety and zeal for souls are masquerades. Anxious to please their listeners, they use flattery of speech and simulate lofty spirituality. Beneath their fine, exalted words and pious demeanor lies a greedy heart. These spiritual frauds delude the simple and unwary. Playing their own game, they are the winners. Their greed determines the winning stakes. For some it is fame and glory, or power and authority; and for the baser among them, it is for gold and silver. Cautiously they conceal their greedy intentions. Men who traffic in Christ would be quick to impute impure motives to others. Paul often became the recipient of such evil projections as he was accused of deceit and trickery, of being a user of flattery and a seeker of fame.

In the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul's self-defense is a bit subtle and lengthy. As he wrote in response to Timothy's report, we must read between the lines to discover certain aspects of this report. No doubt Timothy reported that certain elements continued to work against Paul. This could be expected from the Jewish enemies who followed him to Beroea and drove him South to Athens. The contents of the letter suggest that Paul was dealing with subtle criticisms of himself within the Christian Community, criticisms that Paul wished to confront and nip in the bud.

Paul begins by recalling how effective the ministry had been among the Thessalonians. In his dealings with others, his self-forgetfulness is magnificently evident. His personal fatigue and poor psychological state were never permitted to control his working for the salvation of others. When they preached in Thessalonica, Paul and Silas were still recovering from their humiliating treatment in Philippi, where the city magistrates publicly stripped them naked and flogged them. Paul's words to the Corinthians may aptly describe the state of the apostolic team on their arrival in Thessalonica: *"When we came among you it was in weakness and fear, and with much trepidation" (1Cor.2:3).*

Added to all this, they also encountered strong opposition from certain Jews in the city. Nevertheless God gave them the strength to proclaim the Good News and to persevere in its proclamation despite persecution. They preached not from a personal spirit of natural confidence but in a spirit of complete and sincere conviction. Their God-given responsibility motivated their preaching.

Later Paul could write Timothy, *“I charge you to preach the word, to stay with this task whether convenient or inconvenient”* (2Tm.4:2a). Timothy had seen this admonition incarnated in Paul. As Paul later told others:

*Yet preaching the gospel is not the subject of a boast; I am under compulsion and have no choice. I am ruined if I do not preach it! If I do it willingly, I have my recompense; if unwillingly, I am nonetheless entrusted with a charge* (1Cor.9:16-17).

Paul does not hesitate to invoke God as witness to his sincerity and purity of intention in proclaiming the gospel. He writes:

*The exhortation we deliver does not spring from deceit or impure motives or any sort of trickery; rather, having met the test imposed on us by God, as men entrusted with the good tidings, we speak like those who strive to please God, “the tester of our hearts,” rather than men. We are not guilty, as you well know, of flattering words or greed under any pretext, as God is our witness! Neither did we seek glory from men, you or any others, even though we could have insisted on our own importance as apostles of Christ* (1Thes.2:3-7).

Paul could write the Corinthians:

*Conscience gives testimony to the boast that in our behavior toward all and especially toward you we have always acted from God-given holiness and candor: this has been prompted, not by debased human wisdom, but by God's goodness* (2Cor.1:12).

Paul possessed that lover's heart which desires to give everything possible, and delicately avoids being a burden in any way to loved ones. Paul had one boast and none could take it from him--he preached the gospel free of charge. As he could tell the Corinthians:

*When I was with you and in want I was a burden to none of you... In every way possible I kept myself from being burdensome to you, and I shall continue to do so. I swear by the Christ who is in me that this boast of mine will not cease in the regions of Achaia! (2Cor.11:9-10).*

While in Thessalonica, Paul rose while still dark to toil as a tent maker. His evangelizing time would have been restricted to the evenings and to the Sabbath. If possible, he evangelized while he worked. He says in his letter:

*You must recall, brothers, our efforts and our toil: how we worked day and night all the time we preached God's good tidings to you in order not to impose on you in any way (1Thes.2:9).*

Paul could receive from others--he gratefully received the gifts from Philippi. However, in this matter, the spiritual well-being of others so concerned him that he scrupulously guarded against anything that could be used by the Enemy to harm them. He never wanted them to be subjected to the temptation of believing he served them from impure motivation. His converts certainly had to hear such accusations leveled against Paul. His conduct among them had been so above reproach that he could sincerely write: "*You are witnesses, as is God himself, of how upright, just, and irreproachable our conduct was towards you who are believers*" (1Thes.2:10).

#### A MINISTRY OF LOVE

The ministry in Thessalonica concerned itself solely with the conversion and spiritual advancement of the converts. Not content with their conversion, Paul and his companions continued to labor for their growth in holiness. Paul could write, "*How we encouraged and pleaded with you to make your lives worthy of the God who calls you to his kingship and glory*" (1Thes.2:12). All this expressed loving evangelism. What effect did such loving evangelism have upon the Thessalonians? Paul could rightly say, "*You know well enough, brothers, that our coming among you was not without effect*" (2:1). He had much to thank God for in this matter and went on to say:

*That is why we thank God constantly that in receiving this message from us you took it, not as the word of man, but as it truly is, the word of God at work within you who believe (1Thes.2:13)*

As a result of such evangelism, their faith rested not on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Their faith rested not only in the power of God experienced in their reception of the Holy Spirit, but in the power of God personally experienced through the ministry of Paul and his companions. From their example, the Thessalonians knew how to live as Christians. The example was not lost upon them; it produced rich fruit. They could bear up and persevere in the faith in the face of persecution from their fellow citizens.

### REACTION TO THE JEWS

Paul compared these Gentile Christians, amidst their sufferings, to the very hallmarks of Christianity--the Judean Christians. They truly were legitimate offspring of the Mother Church. He writes them:

*Brothers, you have been made like the churches of God in Judea which are in Christ Jesus. You suffered the same treatment from your fellow countrymen as they did from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and persecuted us (1Thes.2:14-15a).*

Paul's feelings, at this moment, run deep against his fellow Jews. We know from the account in Acts that the Jews in Corinth--where he was writing the letter--opposed him and denounced him in a body before the proconsul Gallio. If these latest antagonists' actions were proximate to the writing of this letter, it would explain the vitriolic outburst which followed:

*Displeasing to God and hostile to all mankind, they try to keep us from preaching salvation to the Gentiles. All this time they have been "filling up their quota of sins," but the wrath has descended upon them at last (1Thes.2:15b-16).*

Paul implies that since the Jews actively impede bringing salvation to the Gentiles, they have, in fact, become the enemies of mankind. Some scholars see the last statement--"*the wrath has descended upon them at last*"--to be a marginal gloss written after the fall of Jerusalem. There existed a Jewish belief that God allotted peoples and nations a measure of evil. When they reached the fullness of their measure, the punishment of God descended upon them. The author of Second Maccabees expresses his opinion that the Jews were exempted from this law of divine retribution. He writes:

*Thus, in dealing with other nations, the Lord patiently waits until they reach the full measure of their sins before he punishes them~ but with us he has decided to deal differently, in order that he may not have to punish us more severely later, when our sins have reached their fullness. He never withdraws his mercy from us. Although he disciplines us with misfortunes, he does not abandon his own people (2Mc.6:14-16).*

The author of verse sixteen of Thessalonians implies this dispensation had ended for the Jews; now they experience the Wrath of God. A more mellow Paul writes some years later from Corinth on the divine destiny of the Jews. Here he insists that their rejection is temporary:

*Does their stumbling mean that they are forever fallen? Not at all! Rather, by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles to stir Israel to envy... Brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery lest you be conceited: blindness has come upon part of Israel until the full number of Gentiles enter in, and then all Israel will be saved... In respect to the gospel, the Jews are enemies of God for your sake; in respect to the election, they are beloved by him because of the patriarchs. God's gifts and his call are irrevocable (Rom.11:11,25-29).*

## A MINISTRY OF SERVICE

In the New Testament, Jesus gave authority to the apostles and instructed them on how to use it. He pointed out that although He was truly the Lord, He had been among them as one who serves. The washing of the feet incident in John's gospel account symbolically expresses the life and death of Jesus. Within its context Jesus says, *"What I just did was to give you an example: as I have done, so you must do... no messenger (apostle) outranks the one who sent him"* (Jn.13:15-16).

The Apostles must not lord it over their subjects in their exercise of authority, nor make others their authority. We see from Paul's words to the Thessalonians, *"even though we could have insisted on our own importance as apostles of Christ,"* he was aware of his position of authority within the Church. Personal experience verifies that many Christian ministers make their authority felt, and they do lord it over others in an un-christlike manner. Some display an attitude of superiority and disdain for their parishioners or

subjects. The attitude of some ministers suggests that they serve the people of God grudgingly and joylessly as hirelings instead of shepherds.

What attitude did Paul project toward those to whom he ministered? Paul understood that essentially the Will of God, no matter how expressed, is universal, unlimited love. From this awareness he wrote:

*If I speak with human tongues and angelic as well, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and, with full knowledge, comprehend all mysteries, if I have faith great enough to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give everything I have to feed the poor and hand over my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing (1Cor.13:1b-3).*

Paul makes clear that whatever is not propelled upon the wings of love remains earthbound. Whatever is done in the Name of God but not through the power of love is vanity. Needless to say, good done for any reason should have a comparable effect. Feeding the hungry for ambitious reasons will certainly fill empty stomachs, but the souls of the benefactors remain as poor as before. Most receive what they seek and, in Jesus' mind, have received their reward.

Paul's ministry was evangelistic love. His actions paint an exquisite portrait of loving evangelism. It clearly demonstrates how true love of God expresses itself concretely in loving service to mankind--in self-forgetting service, counting not time, energy or resources in the ministry to others.

In what way did Paul's conduct express such an attitude toward the Thessalonians? His attitude was completely devoid of any sense of superiority. In general he expressed and experienced a fraternal sentiment toward his fellow Christians, one that was warm and affectionate in nature. His relationship could be expressed in two words, brotherhood and friendship. Generally speaking, Christians were his dearest brothers in Christ. Most sincerely he could write the Thessalonians: "*So well disposed were we to you, in fact, that we wanted to share with you not only God's tidings but our very lives, so dear had you become to us*" (Thes.2:8).



In particular circumstances and with certain individuals, as with Timothy, Paul's sentiments and expressions could be parental, expressed in both paternal and maternal terms. He viewed his own dealings with the Thessalonians as gentle as a mother with her baby. He could write: "*While we were among you we were as gentle as any nursing mother fondling her little ones*" (2:7b). "*You likewise know how we exhorted everyone of you, as a father does his children*" (2:11).

The departure from Thessalonica had been unexpected and unplanned. Paul and his companions were forced to become fly-by-nights, departing without taking proper leave of their friends. Paul felt keenly the subsequent separation from his friends. He could express his feelings only in terms of being suddenly orphaned in the world: "*Brothers, when we were orphaned by separation from you for a time--in sight, not in mind--we were seized with the greatest longing to see you*" (2:17).

#### PAUL'S UNREQUITED DESIRE

Timothy apparently reported to Paul that certain people in Thessalonica felt Paul had lost interest in them, and that his affection for them, if anything, had been decidedly temporary. Nothing could be further from the truth. In Paul's heart, no one replaced another. The capacity of his love only increased in order to embrace new friends and brothers in Christ. Now settled down in Archaia, the Corinthians had become Paul's heart's interest. In the simplicity of his love, he could write, "*You are our boast and our delight...Who, after all, if not you, will be our hope or joy, or the crown we exult in, before our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?*" (2:20,19).

To see them once again had been more than a feeble desire with Paul. It had been a willed decision. He who wills an end, wills the means to the end. However, Paul's attempts to return to Thessalonica were blocked, perhaps by the very men who hounded him out of Macedonia. Paul declared to them in his letter, "*So we tried to come to you--I, Paul, tried more than once--but Satan blocked the way*" (2:18). We can only conjecture what obstacles are symbolized in the expression, "*Satan blocked the way.*"

Unable personally to go to Thessalonica, Paul took the next best step. He sent Timothy at some personal sacrifice to himself. It meant being left alone and friendless in sophisticated Athens, where he was tagged a "seed picker," a

pseudo-intellectual who, in a sense, the Athenians laughed out of town. Paul wrote the Thessalonians:

*That is why, when we could endure it no longer, we decided to remain alone at Athens and send you Timothy. He is our brother and God's fellow worker in preaching the gospel of Christ (3:1-2a).*

Paul desired to return to Thessalonica for at least three reasons: he missed the warm and affectionate associations he had with the Christian Community there; he knew they were suffering persecution and was anxious to know how it affected their faith; and lastly, he desired to complete their spiritual formation that was terminated by his abrupt departure. Paul tells them he sent Timothy to them *“to strengthen and encourage you in regard to your faith lest any of you be shaken by these trials” (3:2b-3).*

As we have seen in Acts, certain hostile Jews stirred up opposition to Paul, forcing him to leave Thessalonica under the cover of darkness. The anger, first directed towards Paul and Silas, was now projected towards Jason and his fellow converts. The Jews accused them of disregarding the civil law. These accusations resulted in an on-going persecution of the Christian Community. Paul had expected as much and tried to forearm them. As he wrote:

*You know well enough that such trials are common lot. When we were still with you, we used to warn you that we would undergo trial; now it has happened, and you know what we meant (Thess.3:3-4).*

Simon Peter, himself, saw the Gentile Christians as aliens in a pagan world, people *“who live as strangers scattered throughout”* the known world. He, too, expected them as Christians to suffer in this world, and reminded them that *“If anyone suffers for being a Christian, however, he ought not be ashamed. He should rather glorify God in virtue of that name” (1Pt.4:16).*

Peter encouraged the Gentile Christians:

*Stay sober and alert. Your opponent the devil is prowling like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, solid in your faith, realizing that the brotherhood of believers is undergoing the same sufferings throughout the world (1Pt.5:8-9).*

It was the knowledge of such sufferings and the knowledge of what persecution could do to brothers weak in faith that concerned Paul. He was most anxious for a report on this matter. He wrote them, *“That is why I sent to find out about your faith when I could stand the suspense no longer, fearing that the tempter had put you to the test and all our labor might have gone for nothing” (Thes.3:5).*

No matter what form persecution assumed, both Peter and Paul saw the personal presence of Satan as its source. The different forms were but his instrumental agents for destroying the Kingdom of God on earth. As we read in Ephesians:

*Our battle is not against human forces but against the principalities and powers, the rulers of this world of darkness, the evil spirits in regions above (Eph.6:12).*

#### TIMOTHY’S REPORT TO PAUL

Timothy happily reported back to Paul that the Thessalonians, solid in the faith, had resisted the tempter. They still stood firm in the faith and in love. Their affection for Paul remained as strong as ever. They too longed to see him again. As a result of Timothy’s report, Paul could write:

*We have been much consoled by your faith throughout our distress and trial--so much so that we shall continue to flourish only if you stand firm in the Lord (Thes.3:7-8).*

Paul’s love was deep and intense. He found it impossible to have a “holy detachment” from the effects of his apostolic work. He would feel bitter disappointment if the time and energy invested proved fruitless in the end. Not because it would be his personal failure, but their personal loss, perhaps their eternal loss. “Love seeks the good of the beloved,” and cannot but suffer when the beloved is deprived of a vital good. The news of the Thessalonians standing firm in the faith refreshed and revived the spirit of Paul. He was once again undergoing the trials and tribulations in establishing the Church at Corinth. The good news from Thessalonica renewed Paul’s hope that, despite the present discouraging circumstances in Corinth, his present labors in Corinth would be fruitful. As long as the Christian Faith flourished in Thessalonica, the life of Paul would flourish in hope and confidence.

Timothy's report is not completely positive. Paul diplomatically suggests, in a spirit of prayerful thanksgiving, that the Thessalonians are not yet perfect Christians. Work still remains to be done, and Paul prays to be granted the opportunity of completing their formation in the faith. He writes:

*What thanks can we give to God for all the joy we feel in his presence because of you, as we ask him fervently night and day that we may see you face to face and remedy any shortcomings in your faith (Thes.3:9-10).*

Breaking forth in prayerful utterance, Paul expresses the hope that God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ will aid his speedy return to Thessalonica, and accomplish the spiritual completion of his brothers and sisters in Christ:

*May God himself, who is our Father, and our Lord Jesus make our path to you a straight one! And may the Lord increase you and make you overflow with love for one another and for all, even as our love does for you. May he strengthen your hearts, making them blameless and holy before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones (Thes.3:11-13).*

With these closing words of chapter three, Paul once again expresses the essential unity existing between the Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They possess one loving will and purpose for us--our sanctification and our salvation.

The Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ will return in glory to this earth at the End Time. Reconfirming this belief, Paul adds that the Lord will be accompanied on that Day by the saints. Jesus rejected a world that was alienated from God. He refused its power and glory. In the end, the world rejected Jesus and the God He perfectly served.

The Scriptures teach that this same Jesus--crucified on the Cross and raised from the dead--will return in the power and glory of God. All creation, then, shall be subjected to Him. On earth, Jesus prayed to His Father that His disciples would be wherever He would be. The Father heard this prayer. True disciples of Jesus who have died are with Him in glory. As they, too, rejected the world, or were rejected by the world for the sake of Christ, they will

return in glory with Him on the Last Day: *“If we have died with him we shall also live with him; If we hold out to the end we shall also reign with him”* (2Tm.2:11-12).

Paul speaks of *“the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones,”* and indeed, confirms the Christian belief that the saints consciously survive physical death and dwell presently in glory with Christ. They will return with Him in glory. It is his holy hope that the Thessalonians, by their lives of perfect charity, will be acknowledged among the saints of God on that Day.

## CHAPTER 4

### CALLED TO GREATER HOLINESS

#### HOLINESS VIA LOVE

At this point in his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul turns from personal defense and joyful remembrance to spiritual exhortation. He urges the Thessalonians to “make still greater progress.” Paul ardently desires that his converts would be prompted to observe the laws of God out of gratitude for their deliverance from paganism and the enslavement of sin. He readily admits the good being accomplished in their lives, but he also wisely notes their deficiencies. Much more must yet be accomplished if the Thessalonians are to survive as Christians in a pagan world, if they are to advance to that maturity to which Christ called them and by the grace provided for them, and if they are to be recognized as beloved disciples by Jesus Christ at His Second Coming. In a world that is under the power of the Evil One, it would always be necessary for Christians to row or swim against strong currents. Spiritual complacency would be disastrous. Resting upon the oars of accomplished virtues results in grave spiritual loss.

Whether Paul returns to Thessalonica soon, or whether circumstances delay his return indefinitely, he seeks--present or absent--the spiritual growth and development of the Thessalonians. By the grace of God, progress can be made with or without him. They presently stand firm in the Faith. Their Christian community is a veritable house of religious integrity founded upon the solid rock of God's Word. Now it must become a community permeated and inundated with the fire of God's Holy Spirit. This will guarantee the removal of all those spiritual deficiencies keenly noted by Paul. We find such deficiencies of Faith where faith fails to flower fully in agape-love.

It is Paul's prayerful ambition that his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica literally abound in love. He sees agape-love as the root and foundation of all Christian activity and as the only possible evidence of life in God. It is his wish that the Thessalonians be so filled with the loving Spirit of God that they reach out, in God-like fashion, to all mankind, and “*overflow with love for one*

*another and for all.” Such a condition alone ensures a “blameless and holy- life before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his holy ones” (Thes.3:12,13). A blameless and holy life is one that is separated from sin and consecrated for the accomplishment of God's Will.*

Agape-love empowers the human will. The human will--unaided by divine grace--remains weakened and vitiated by sin, prone to self-interest and indulgence. Agape-love can steel the human will against following its own selfish interests, and against those enticements that lead to a separation from the Will of God. Such a love grants power to the soul to prefer the Will of God before all else. It enables the soul to accomplish much good in the Name of Jesus Christ. The recipient of such a gift must know that agape-love is power for action. Action is of the essence in agape-love; it accomplishes good deeds. It follows that for agape-love to be experienced within the soul, and to ultimately affect the human will, it must be activated. Within personal action, love becomes a reality. It is only when the sin-prone human will surrenders to the powerful action of Divine Love that the redemption of the human will actually begin to be accomplished. Each human will must willfully cooperate with the grace of agape-love in order for the reality of this love to be in the human soul and within human activity.

The Scriptures teach, "God is Love!" Agape-love essentially expresses the Life of God. It will follow that a loving human life will fulfill the Will of God. Such a love, activated within the human spirit, makes God present within the soul and its activities. A holy deed consists of such activity. It is through such a means that a Christian abides in holiness and grows in holiness. God calls us to this holiness, and Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to this holiness. He writes:

*Now, my brothers, we beg and exhort you in the Lord Jesus that, even as you learned from us how to conduct yourselves in a way pleasing to God--which you are indeed doing--so you must learn to make still greater progress. You know the instructions we gave you in the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you grow in holiness (1Thes.4:1-3a).*

Using a unique combination--for the New Testament--of the two verbs, “beg” and “exhort,” Paul seeks to convey a sense of immediacy and urgency in his exhortation to the Thessalonians. He grounded this urgency in their mutual faith in the Lord Jesus.

## ROOT OF HOLINESS

When exhorting Christians "*in the Lord Jesus,*" Paul implies that the source of their strength to live a life of holiness is rooted into their faith in Jesus Christ. Through their profession of faith and baptism, they have become one with the Lord. Now they have access to the strength of Christ in order to accomplish the good that the Holy Spirit inspires. Paul does not imply that holy conduct flows from the natural powers of the human soul. Although the human spirit is capable of goodness, personal moral weakness, corruptive environment and other conditions seriously curtail moral goodness.

The sanctification of the Christian primarily implies a consecration that removes a person from the sinful and contaminating world, setting them apart for the worship of God. Paul views the life of a Christian as a veritable altar from which acceptable praise and sacrifice daily ascend to God. Secondly, the sanctification of the Christian consists in the actual accomplishment of God's Will. Through humble obedience, the human spirit flows in unity with the Divine Will and becomes a reservoir and channel of the Holy Spirit. The power to accomplish what is godly follows upon humble submission to the Divine Will. The effect of such submission and action is holiness of person. In the mind of Paul this personal holiness affected those things related to and touched by the holy person, particularly the children of mixed marriages and unbaptized marriage partners. It might not be too much to say that personal holiness blesses, in some degree, the entire universe.

## HOLINESS AND SEXUAL MORALITY

At this point Paul introduces the concept of Christian chastity into his letter by turning to the subject of sexual morality. Perhaps Timothy has reported some deficiency in the matter of sexual conduct, which would not be surprising among those recently converted from paganism. Thessalonica was an import seaport. Such centers often catered to sexual vices. It has been suggested that there existed at this time the pagan cult "Cabiri," which included sexual orgies in its worship. Sexual conduct in the pagan world of the Greco-Romans left much to be desired--probably perfectly mirrored in our Western society of today. Juvenal, the Roman poet, speaks of a Roman matron who left a record of marriages and divorces not equaled even by a Hollywood actress: eight husbands in five years. Seneca wrote, "Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married."



Conjugal chastity was not a virtue esteemed in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day. Paul clearly and distinctly teaches that the practice of chastity is the Will of God, and he just as clearly and distinctly teaches (in Romans) that the rejection of this virtue by individuals and societies incurs the Wrath of God. Paul knows sexual immorality is incompatible with Christian holiness. Paul writes:

*It is God's will that you grow in holiness: that you abstain from immorality, each of you guarding his member in sanctity and honor, not in passionate desire as do the Gentiles who know not God; and that each refrain from overreaching or cheating his brother in the matter at hand; for the Lord is an avenger of all such things, as we once indicated to you by our testimony. God has not called us to immorality but to holiness; hence, whoever rejects these instructions rejects not man, but God who sends his Holy Spirit upon you (Thes.4:3-8).*

Some disagreement exists among scholars--ancient and modern--over the translation of verse four in chapter four. They are nearly equally divided upon the subject. The problem centers on the translation of the Greek word *skeuos*, literally translated as "vessel." One school of thought insists that in this text, vessel should be understood as wife, especially in context with the verb *klasthai*, which is sometimes used for "taking a wife." The text would translate: "*That each of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor.*" In this context Paul urges marriage and conjugal chastity as a safeguard for holiness. Paul teaches that a wife must be loved and honored as a person, and not selfishly exploited for sexual gratification. If "vessel" is understood as "body," Paul then teaches that the human body must be an instrument of love and not a means for self-gratification and exploitation of others. In this context, Paul urges personal chastity, encouraging self-control and bodily discipline.

On the side of "vessel" being interpreted as wife, we know that the Rabbis used the term vessel to mean a wife, and in 1Pt.3:7 the term *skeuos* is translated as wife. It is a thought favored by Paul. In Corinthians, he viewed marriage as a safeguard against immorality: "*But to avoid immorality, every man should have his own wife and every woman her own husband*" (1Cor. 7:2). In Thessalonians he is emphasizing the holiness of the relationship and the honor due the marriage partner.

Again, some scholars disagree over the translation of verse six in chapter four, insisting the word *pragma* refers to business, and verse six warns against injustice in business matters. They would translate verse six to read “*that no one go too far and cheat his brother in business.*” However, it has been observed that nowhere else in the New Testament does *pragma* mean business, but always means “thing,” “matter,” or “deed.” Other scholars insist that Paul is discussing one subject--the matter of sanctification, and the duty of every Christian to avoid sexual immorality in order to preserve their holiness. In verse five he cautions against lustful passion in marriage, which uses the body of another person for self-gratification. In verse six he condemns the disgraceful cheating of a brother through adultery with his wife, or fornication with his daughter. Paul sees a true Christian relationship in marriage as a protection against sinful passion and sexual immorality.

Paul's argument for personal chastity and conjugal chastity is based upon the Will of God--not upon nature or society. He simply states that God forbids sexual immorality, and whoever fails to accept such morality rejects the Will of God, and will ultimately experience the Wrath of God.

The concept of sexual impurity, as advanced by Paul in the New Testament, very much reflects the ancient Jewish concept of impurity. Among them, an impure act corrupts the entire person, rendering him or her unfit for worship and communion with God. They distinguished between ritual and moral impurity by the penalties attached. There was no distinction between the actual states of impurity because they made no distinction between the physical and spiritual aspects of a person. Whatever renders a person impure before God renders the entire person impure before God. The state of impurity was diametrically opposed to the state of holiness.

Chapter twenty of Leviticus and twenty-two of Deuteronomy teach sexual immorality to be a grave evil by imposing the penalty of death upon the guilty. These Scriptures imply that the presence of such sinners among the People of God to be an evil leaven that should be purged from the community before the entire people become contaminated. Leviticus sums up numerous prohibitions: “*Do not conform, therefore, to the customs of the nations...because all these things that they have done have filled me with disgust for them*” (Lv.20:23).

Deuteronomy teaches, *“There shall be no temple harlot among the Israelite women, nor a temple prostitute among the Israelite men” (Dt.23:18)*. Nevertheless, we read in 1st Kings 14:21ff that during the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon and Naamah the Ammonite, *“Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord... There were also cult prostitutes in the land. Judah imitated all the abominable practices of the nations.”* When the Prophet Nathan, in the name of God, confronted King David with his adulterous affair with Bathsheba, he put his finger directly on the root of the problem. He accused David of selfishness--a selfishness that led him into despising the commandments of God. Selfishness is the perversion of self-love, and where it rules the soul, proper love of God and neighbor become impossible.

The Book of Wisdom implies that the illegitimate children of the adulterers and fornicators will be visible evidence for the sinfulness of their parents on the Day of Judgment, *“For children born of lawless unions give evidence of the wickedness of their parents, when they are examined” (Wis.4:6)*. Commenting on Deuteronomy 23:25, Rabbi Simon ben Zoma succinctly expresses Jewish morality on the temptation and sin of adultery and fornication:

Look not on thy neighbor's vineyard, if thou hast looked, enter not; if thou hast entered, regard not the fruit. If thou hast regarded them, touch them not; if thou hast touched them, eat them not. But if thou hast eaten, then thou dost eject thyself from the life of this world and of that which is to come (Rabbi Simon ben Zoma).

It is to be noted that Rabbi Simon ben Zoma stresses the fact that the sinner has ejected himself from eternal life. He makes the choice and he bears the price of it.

### EFFECTS OF SEXUAL IMMORALITY

In our study of Galatians, we noted three Greek terms used in the New Testament to express sexual immorality and its degrees of corruption: *porneia, akatharsia, and aselgeia*. *Porneia* refers to the sexual act itself. Usually it expresses fornication, but it may be used to express any act of sexual immorality. *Akatharsia* is impurity of spirit. In early Judaism, impurity of body had a clinging, permeating force affecting the entire personality. *Akatharsia* expresses that degree of corruption that has moved from a bodily act to the corruption of the human spirit. It can be characterized as dirty

mindedness. Within the New Testament, akatharsia expresses the state of absolute alienation from God, the state of heathenism, the state of the pre-Christian life. Akatharsia characterizes the un-regenerated person whose actions are determined by natural passion and lust; never the Will of God. Akatharsia is the very opposite of holiness. *Aselgeia* expresses the third degree of moral corruption. At the point of *aselgeia*, the person is so given over to excessive sensual gratification that one loses all sense of public decency. One ceases to hide one's immorality and, at times, flaunts it. It is the condition to which man comes when cut off from the grace of God. *Aselgeia* characterizes the people of Sodom and Gomorrah and the pagan world in general.

Porneia, akatharsia, and *aselgeia* are three classic works of the flesh. Flesh is defined in this context as the unredeemed human person, or the human being controlled by natural passion, rather than the Will of God. Following the flesh can but end evilly for a person. Paul gave this warning to the Galatians: *"It is obvious what proceeds from the flesh... I warn you, as I have warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Ga1.5:19-21).*

Paul urged the Christians of Colossae to war against their evil inclinations:

*Put to death whatever in your nature is rooted in earth: fornication (porneia), uncleanness (akatharsia), passion (pathos), evil desires and that lust (or covetousness) which is idolatry. These are the sins which provoke God's wrath (Co1.3:5-6).*

Paul is quite aware that some Christians gave themselves over to such immorality before their baptism. He went on to say, *"Your own conduct was once of this sort, when these sins were your life" (Col.3:7).* In the same vein he wrote the Corinthians:

*Do not deceive yourselves: no fornicators, idolaters, or adulterers, no sodomites, thieves, misers, or drunkards, no slanderers or robbers will inherit God's kingdom. And such were some of you; but you have been washed, consecrated, justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (1Cor.6:9b-11).*

Paul was too realistic a minister of Christ to believe that the grace of baptism had permanently eradicated all such vices from the Christian Community. We find him again writing to the Corinthians: *"I may have to mourn over the many*

*who sinned earlier and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and sensuality they practiced" (2Cor.12:21b).*

The author of Ephesians found it necessary to remind Christians living in a pagan world that they cannot live as pagans, and he makes it clear to them how pagans do live. We read:

*I declare and solemnly attest in the Lord that you must no longer live as the pagans do...without remorse they have abandoned themselves to lust [aselgeia] and the indulgence of every sort of lewd [akatharsia] conduct. (Eph.4:17-19).*

The Ephesians are not left in doubt as to what sins are incompatible with Christian holiness. They are told, "*As for lewd conduct (porneia) or promiscuousness (akatharsia), or lust of any sort, let them not even be mentioned among you; your holiness forbids*" (Eph.5:3).

No doubt the Christians of Ephesus, as Christians do today, heard many arguments from their neighbors in favor of sexual misconduct. In order to dispel any confusion on this subject, the author enumerates with crystal clarity the sins that alienate the Christian from the kingdom of God. He tells the Ephesians:

*Make no mistake about this: no fornicator [ pornos ], no unclean [ akathartos ] or lustful [ or greedy ] person--in effect an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no-one deceive you with worthless arguments. These are sins that bring God's wrath down on the disobedient; therefore have nothing to do with them (Eph.5:5-7).*

One of the last works of the New Testament, Second Peter, reminds Christians:

*He blanketed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in ashes and condemned them to destruction, thereby showing what would happen in the future to the godless. He did deliver Lot, however, a just man oppressed by the conduct of men unprincipled in their lusts [aselgeia] (2Pt.2:6-7).*

## SOURCE OF CHASTITY

The essential reason Paul gives for these prohibitions against sexual immorality is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the baptized. He speaks to the Thessalonians of "*God who sends his Holy Spirit upon you.*" In the mind of Paul, the Presence of the Holy Spirit affects the entire person--spirit, soul, and body. He teaches the Corinthians:

*Every other sin a man commits is outside his body, but the fornicator sins against his own body. You must know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is within--the Spirit you have received from God. You are not your own. You have been purchased, and at a price. So glorify God in your body (1Cor.6:18b-20).*

Paul's advice to Christians is, "Flee fornication!" or, as our text reads, "*Shun lewd (porneian) conduct*" (1Cor.6:18a). Paul exhorts Christians to be spiritual athletes. To the Corinthians he wrote, "*Athletes deny themselves all sorts of things. They do this to win a crown of leaves that withers, but we a crown that is imperishable.*" Paul practiced what he preached, "*What I do,*" he says, "*is discipline my body and master it, for fear that after having preached to others I myself should be rejected*" (1Cor.9: 25,27).

Paul is too practical to deny that natural sexual desires can tempt Christians to express these desires in sinful ways, especially when such expressions were part of their personal history previous to their conversion. As he said, "*These sins were your very life.*" He knew their vocation in Christ called them to be witnesses in this world. They must live in a pagan world that encourages vices opposed to Christian holiness, that looks upon adultery and fornication as natural as eating and drinking. A person faced with imminent danger has two choices: fight or flight. When faced with the danger of sexual temptation, Paul prudently advises flight. "Flee fornication!"

Such advice is wisely based upon the knowledge of human nature and the power of sexual temptation. The same awareness finds expression in the old monk's advice to the young monk concerning sexual temptations: "Pray that the urge and opportunity do not come at the same moment!" To remain chaste in the world demands the grace of God, self-discipline, and mortification of the senses. St. Augustine prayed that God would grant to him the virtue of chastity that He demanded from him.

Since it is the Will of God, the Christian church must urge chastity among Christians. Their holiness forbids anything less. Sexual impurity, as clearly revealed in the Scriptures, in a particular way destroys the holiness to which God calls each person. Without such holiness it is impossible to see God: *"Blest are the pure of heart for they shall see God."*

A person must make a choice for purity of heart, which implies purity of person. The God who chose us must still be chosen by us to finalize the choice. A choice for chastity--often a choice daily renewed--is not an easy one, but the Scriptures insist this essential choice affects eternal life. For this very reason Paul tells us in First Corinthians 9:27, *"What I do is discipline my body and master it, for fear that after having preached to others I myself should be rejected."* Many Christians could do with a bit of that salutary fear. Christians having personal difficulties in regard to chastity will do well to remember Jesus' words to Paul, *"My grace is enough for you, for in weakness power reaches perfection"* (2Cor.12:9). And keep in mind the wise maxim, "God helps those who help themselves."

Christianity has not been misdirected in its emphasis upon chastity. (This is not a denial of the accusation that historically Christianity overemphasized chastity, at certain times and in given cultures, to the detriment of the proper balance that is essential to virtue and the preservation of Truth.) Modern psychology confirms more and more that human sexual expressions are acts that affect the entire human personality and being. There is no such thing as "casual sex." A sexual act may be casually enacted, but its effect upon the human person is anything but superficial. An effect does not have to be consciously experienced in order for it to be powerfully effective. Exposure to radiation is a good example of this.

The sacredness of human sexuality is rooted in the sacredness of the human person. The holiness of human sexuality is rooted in the Presence of the Holy Spirit within the person. Wherever the sense of personal sacredness or holiness is lost, the door is open to human exploitation and the abuse of self and others.

Human sexuality involves generative powers. No other human act can be as equally causal. Seemingly, the perversion of such power should have its comparable effect. "The corruption of the best is the worst." That the power exists for the preservation of humanity is not to deny that sexual expression has other human and personal ends as well, such as expression of conjugal

love. But the perversion of such power will have an equally ill effect on humanity. (What is said about the perversion of one end will apply equally to the perversion of other ends.) Paul clearly expounds upon this thesis in the opening chapter of Romans.

To speak on sexual morality can cause strong emotional reactions among a goodly number of people. There resides a good deal of fear, suppression and guilt in the area of sexuality. Much of the reaction may be irrational, insofar as the fear or guilt does not arise from actual personal sin, or if it does, it is out of proportion to the sins committed. Let us recall that Jesus Christ never called anyone to guilt, only to repentance.

Guilt is a feeling of culpability or blameworthiness for an offense or crime, carrying with it a fear of rejection and punishment, and a loss of self-esteem. In the civil sense, the guilty one feels like a criminal, and all which that implies. In the moral sense, the guilty one feels like a sinner, and all which that implies.

When a person feels the emotional effects of a crime or sin, without actually being responsible for the crime or sin, the feeling is described as irrational guilt. We know children often feel guilty for the suicide of a parent, or the divorce of their parents. People who were sexually molested in childhood by a member of the family or friend often experience irrational guilt as a consequence of the molestation. Obviously, in such cases therapy is needed. Some parents and teachers over-stress sexual morality in the training of children. Some Christians have reduced the instruction on sexual morality to one Commandment--the Sixth. As a result, sexual sins and their concomitant guilt are all out of proportion. Proper education is needed in such cases.

Let us not overlook the point. Some of us *should* feel guilty. Guilt may be the proper state for our moral condition. In a case of genuine guilt--when a crime or sin is justly imputed to us, and we experience the emotion of guilt as a consequence--we need to understand that the best means for deliverance from personal guilt is through proper repentance. Guilt is caused by un-repented sin. Understanding the importance of repentance in the recovery of persons from alcoholism, the AA program calls upon the recovering alcoholic to make reparation, as far as possible, for the harm caused by excessive drinking.



Some people experience what is called "floating guilt" as a result of suppressed sins. They consciously refuse to acknowledge the immorality of certain conduct or accept moral responsibility for certain wrong deeds. As a result, they may continually experience guilt and anxiety over small faults, all out of proportion to what has been done. A person may refuse to acknowledge the evilness of an action, but that does not render the act less evil nor negate its evil effects. Regardless of how consciously viewed, an evil act produces evil effects. One cannot change the nature of arsenic and its effect by labeling it "sugar."

In the perpetration of any evil deed, it must be remembered that within Christian morality, it takes more than the evil deed to make a sinner. To be a sin, it must be a human act; understanding and willing must accompany the deed. There must be some degree of understanding of the malice involved, and the freedom of will in accomplishing it. In other words, a person must know the act is evil and then freely will the act. To tag a person a sinner for committing a sinful act, one must be able to discern correctly the internal disposition of the soul. For this reason the Scriptures wisely point out that such judgment should be left to God.

### BROTHERLY LOVE

Having taught the Corinthians how profitless it is to sacrifice without love, even one's entire life, Paul has no intention of isolating the practice and preservation of chastity from agape-love. To be as pure as angels, but as unloving as demons, was of no profit to self or society. In his presentation of chastity, conjugal love is presented as the opposite of selfish lust, and the bond of Christian marriage as the opposite of a life of sexual injustice--a life of adultery and fornication. All such conduct, in the mind of Paul, equals selfishness incompatible with Christian love. He urged chastity as a means of perfecting love of neighbor and personal growth in holiness. Chastity, however, is only one aspect of agape-love. Any love that expresses the life of God must indeed be a many splendored thing, and a power of infinite splendor. After his brief exhortation to chastity, Paul immediately returns to the subject of agape-love. He writes:

*As regards brotherly love, there is no need for me to write you. God himself has taught you to love one another, and this you are doing with respect to all the brothers throughout Macedonia (1Thes.4:9-10).*

Paul uses the word *philadelphias* to express the concept of brotherly love. In classical Greek this word refers to the love of one's blood brother. By the use of the term, Paul implies the intimate family relationship existing among members of the Christian community. Christians are members of God's Family through their incorporation into Christ through baptism and through their reception of the Holy Spirit. In a unique fashion, Christians have become "sons of God" and brothers to one another. For Paul, only the word *philadelphias* expresses the proper relationship between Christians. Paul confirms that the Thessalonians excel in brotherly love. No one needs to teach them, as God himself has been their Teacher. No doubt Paul makes reference here to the prophecy of Jeremiah, who foretold the pouring out of the Spirit of God into the hearts of God's children:

*But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord. I will place my law within them, and write it upon their hearts; I will be their God and they shall be my people. No longer will they have need to teach their friends and kinsmen how to know the Lord. All, from least to greatest, shall know me, says the Lord... (Jer.31:33-34).*

It is the Spirit of God that motivates the Thessalonians to brotherly love. More than once Paul made pointed references to their gift of the Holy Spirit. Over and above this, all Christians have before their eyes the example of the self-sacrificing love of Jesus Christ. He who is Lord and Teacher left the example of His life and death as the Light to guide the lives of all His disciples. Despite the visible evidence of brotherly love, Paul notes that there is room for growth in charity. Perhaps Timothy brought to Paul's attention the conduct of certain Thessalonians that gave evidence of a defective love of self and society. We find Paul writing:

*Yet we exhort you to even greater progress, brothers. Make it a point of honor to remain at peace and attend to your own affairs. Work with your hands as we directed you to do, so that you will give good example to outsiders and want for nothing (1Thes.4:10b-12).*

Apparently, certain individuals were neglecting their social obligation to support themselves by the work of their profession, subsequently making unnecessary and unjust demands upon the charity of others. In this self-induced idleness, they found time to meddle in the affairs of others. Paul was no bleeding heart that encouraged charity which fostered irresponsibility.

Paul saw these defects in love as detrimental to the individuals, because they would be without necessities; as detrimental to the Christian Community because it made unnecessary demands upon their charity; as detrimental to society in general because it reflected a bad image of Christianity to the pagans. Some see this defective behavior as the result of a mistaken notion among the Thessalonians concerning the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The story is told of a young charismatic monk who, while walking one day in the monastery garden, came upon an older monk sitting upon a bench engaged in contemplative prayer. Being more an activist than a contemplative, the young monk immediately engaged the old monk in conversation about the Parousia. "Do you think," he inquired of the old monk, "the Second Coming will come before you die?" "No, I don't," he replied. "Well, then," continued the young monk, "do you think it will come a short time after your death?" "I do not," he replied. "Oh! Then you think it will be a long time after your death?" The old monk again replied, "I do not." In a most scandalized tone the young man responded: "You don't believe in the Second Coming!" "I did not say that," responded the other. "Your words imply disbelief," insisted the young monk, "for you said you didn't think it would come before your death and neither a short nor long time after your death. That implies disbelief to me!" The old monk patiently responded, "Your mistake is that you *think* that. I am not *thinking* about the Second Coming of the Lord. I have discovered through the years that when I am concerning myself about the business of another, I am neglecting my own business."

## CHAPTER 5

### THANATOS AND PAROUSIA

#### IGNORANCE AFFECTS FAITH

Paul desired, as mentioned earlier, to return to the Thessalonians in order to “*remedy any shortcomings in their faith.*” For this same purpose he now writes them. He had previously experienced the evil effects of ignorance of faith. Faith is both a confident trust in the Person of the Lord and an obedient response to religious truth: to a creed of faith to which the intellect consents. These truths become spiritual lights guiding the soul on the Way of the Lord. Without an adequate understanding of the Christian truths, the soul stumbles along the Way, serving the Lord in trial and error. Ignorance is a blindfold upon good will, causing it to do more harm than good.

It is quite true that many Christians, in the full light of Revelation, fail to follow the Way of Christ. This may be due to weakness of character and/or the perversity of human will. Deeply buried in every human heart lies that satanic rebellion of *non serviam* (I will not serve!). Nevertheless much harm comes into every dimension of human life, not so much from the evilness of human will but because of human ignorance. Teresa of Avila confessed ignorance caused her more suffering on earth than demons and devils.

The bliss of ignorance is short lived. Paul does not desire Christians to remain ignorant of the Faith. With defective faith comes defective behavior. Precisely such ignorance now causes a problem in Thessalonica. Paul writes to them, “*We would have you be clear about those who sleep in death, brothers: otherwise you might yield to grief, like those who have no hope*” (1Thes.4:13). A better literal translation would read: “*Now we do not wish you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those sleeping lest you grieve as those who have no hope.*”

The Thessalonians were defective in their knowledge concerning Christian death. How one looks upon death can affect the quality of one’s present life. A danger existed in Thessalonica that the death of beloved Christians could produce in family and friends the same hopeless grief experienced by non-believers over the death of their loved ones. The problem in Thessalonica is

concerned not merely with the fact of death, but death in relation to the Parousia--the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

The sorrow of the pagan over death is grief without hope. In respect to afterlife, the pagan's attitude toward the physical body was totally negative at that time. Even the mention of the resurrection of the body by Paul provoked ridicule from the Athenian scholars. The general attitude toward the human spirit itself was not overly positive. There existed a belief of survival after death in a form much like the Hindu concept of the astral body. For a time the soul existed as a delicate material substance, closely resembling the human body. The ancient Hebrews believed these departed souls dwelt in Sheol--a misty, nebulous and shady region beneath the earth, ruled by Yahweh, where the dead resided awaiting their final destiny.

From Sheol, the Witch of Endor summoned the spirit of the departed Samuel. In a séance she tells King Saul, "*I see a preternatural being rising from the earth... It is an old man who is rising clothed in a mantle.*" The spirit of Samuel said to Saul, "*Why do you disturb me by conjuring me up?*" Saul replied, "*I have called you to tell me what I should do.*" Saul didn't have much time left to do much. Samuel informed him, "*By tomorrow you and your sons will be with me*" (1Sam.28:8f). In later Jewish writing (Enoch), we find Sheol divided into two regions: one for the wicked and one for the righteous. Jesus made reference to this distinction in his narrative about Lazarus, the poor beggar, and the Rich Man as found in the sixteenth chapter of Luke.

Either Paul failed to explain adequately the Christian concept of death, or the Thessalonians failed to grasp his explanation--probably a little of both. Apparently, he left among them the expectation that they would all survive until the Second Coming, and consequently they would be assumed into Heaven. The realistic fact of certain Christians subsequently dying caused doubt and uncertainty. Was their death due to a defect of faith? In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul clearly insinuated a relationship between a healthy life and the worthy reception of the Eucharist, attributing sickness and death to carelessness in this sacrament. Could their dead have any hope of sharing in the glory of the Parousia?

On the other hand, the Thessalonians may have been ill-informed concerning the resurrection of the dead. They could not envision how their departed loved ones could share in the heavenly moment when Christ returned gloriously to earth. Undoubtedly, Paul spoke in glowing terms on the subject of the Second

Coming. The thought that their dead would not share in this ecstatic moment was a cause of sadness and grief. The Thessalonians needed a proper understanding of the theology of Christian death.

### JUDEO-CHRISTIAN CONCEPT OF DEATH

In keeping with Jewish tradition, Paul spoke of physical death as sleep. Sleep was a euphemism for death, both in Grecian and Hebrew literature. Jesus used this expression when he told his disciples, *“Our beloved Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to wake him”* (Jn.11:11). When they misunderstood him, he plainly said, *“Lazarus is dead”* (Jn.11:14). The author of Acts relates of Stephen’s death, *“and with these words he [Stephen] fell asleep”* (Acts 7:60).

Paul often spoke of Christian death as sleep. Writing to the Corinthians he said, *“After that he [the Risen Jesus] was seen by five hundred brothers at once, most of whom are still alive, although some have fallen asleep”* (1Cor.15:6). Again he writes, *“If her husband dies [sleeps] she is free to marry whomever she wishes, provided that it be in the Lord”* (1Cor.7:39b). Some have insisted that such a sleep implies “soul-sleep,” a period of total unconscious repose until the resurrection of the body. Certain Old Testament Scriptures seemingly support such a concept. For instance we read in Ecclesiastes: *“...the dead no longer know anything...For them, love and hatred and rivalry have long since perished. They will never again have part in anything that is done under the sun”* (Eccl.9:5-6).

Job says, *“as a cloud dissolves and vanishes, so he who goes down to the nether world shall come up no more. He shall not again return to his house [body]: his place shall know him no more”* (Jb.7:9-10).

In the light of other Scriptures, such texts ought to be interpreted as a reference to earthly life only. When the body enters into a deep natural sleep, it is truly dead to the world. However, it seldom enters into total unconsciousness. There is the internal world of dreams in which the spirit remains quite active while the body sleeps. From the time of physical death, the soul may be asleep to the world it left behind, but it is very conscious of the mysterious world of the spirit that is now hidden from the eyes of flesh.

In our Lord's day, members of the Party of the Sadducees refused to believe in angels, spirits, or resurrection of the body for, as they insisted, "*it is not in the Torah.*" Jesus corrected these men, telling them:

*You are badly misled, because you fail to understand the Scriptures or the power of God... As to the raising of the dead, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the burning bush, how God told him, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob"? He is the God of the living not of the dead. You are very much mistaken (Mk.12:24-27).*

Other Scriptures certainly do indicate conscious life after death. We read in the Book of Wisdom:

*But the souls of the just are in the hand of God, and no torment shall touch them. They seemed, in the view of the foolish, to be dead; and their passing away was thought an affliction and their going forth from us, utter destruction. But they are in peace [shalom]... In the time of their visitation they shall shine, and shall dart about as sparks through stubble; They shall judge nations and rule over peoples, and the Lord shall be their King forever (Wis.3:1-8).*

While dying on the Cross, Jesus said to the Good Thief, "*I assure you: this day you will be with me in paradise*" (Lk.23:43).

The sleep of death for the Christian implies rest from labor and a glorious awakening. We read in Revelations: "*I heard a voice from heaven say to me: 'Write this down: Happy now are the dead who die in the Lord!' The Spirit added, 'Yes, they shall find rest from their labors, for their good works accompany them'*" (Rv.14:13). In a vision John saw the saints in glory identified,

*These are the ones who have survived the great period of trial, they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. It was this that brought them before God's throne: day and night they minister to him in his temple, he who sits on the throne will give them shelter... He will lead them to springs of life-giving water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes (Rv.7:14-17).*

Paul certainly viewed earthly life as a separation from God, terminated by physical death. He fully expected to consciously survive physical death. Writing to the Corinthians he said,

*We know that while we dwell in the body we are away from the Lord. We walk in faith, not by sight. I repeat, we are full of confidence and would much rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord (2Cor.5:6b-8).*

Again he writes to the Philippians:

*I have full confidence that now as always Christ will be exalted through me, whether I live or die. For, to me, life means Christ, hence dying is so much gain.... I long to be freed from this life and to be with Christ, for that is the far better thing, yet it is more urgent that I remain alive for your sakes (Phil.1:20b-21,23b).*

Pious Jews at the time of Jesus believed in the resurrection of the dead. Martha, the sister of Lazarus, expressed this belief when she replied to Jesus' assurance that her brother would rise from the dead: "*I know he will rise again,*" Martha replied, "*in the resurrection on the last day*" (Jn.11:24).

## RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

The New Testament presents Christian death as a transformation of human life, not as the finality of it. The certainty of a glorious transformation of the body through a subsequent resurrection rested upon the fact of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The Christian may say in the words with which Mary Queen of Scots concluded her last will and testament, "In my ending is my beginning."

Paul's doctrine of the resurrection of the body is woven like a golden thread through the tapestry of his theology. He returns us to Adam as the prototype for all mankind. In Adam lies our original innocence and its loss in rebellion against God. Adam symbolizes humanity's source, corrupted through sin. When a certain English gentleman commented upon the loss of his original innocence, G. K. Chesterton dryly replied, "The only thing he knows about original innocence is that he never had it." As Paul writes,



*Scripture has it that Adam, the first man, became a living soul... The first man was of earth, formed from dust... Earthly men are like the man of earth... (1Cor.15:45b,47a,,48a).*

Adam left mankind as an evil heritage, the consequence of sin. We read in Genesis: *“My spirit shall not remain in man forever, since he is but flesh. His days shall comprise one hundred and twenty years” (Gn.6:3)*. A hundred and twenty years may sound good to some, but the statement, in its relation to eternal life, is a death sentence, a decree of human mortality due to human immortality. Human beings will, like flowers in the fields, grow, blossom and die. Such life is called flesh, to distinguish it from the life of God. Flesh symbolizes human life at its deepest depths in rebellion against its Maker. Such a life inevitably moves by the course of its nature toward *harmatia* (sin) and *thanatos* (death).

Paul sees in the life and death of Jesus the new beginning for the human race. Living out His life from start to its finish in harmony with the will of God, Jesus becomes the prototype of the new human being. In Jesus the reign of *harmatia* (sin) over humanity ended. In His resurrection He reversed the ancient order. Jesus terminated the reign of *Thanatos* (death). Jesus Christ became the Source of eternal life for mankind through His life, death, and resurrection. Referring to Jesus as “the last Adam,” Paul writes,

*If our hopes in Christ are limited to this life only, we are the most pitiable of men. But as it is, Christ is now raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. Death came through a man: hence the resurrection of the dead comes through a man also. Just as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will come to life again, but each one in proper order: Christ the first fruits and then, at his coming, all those who belong to him. After that will come the end (1Cor.15:19-24a).*

The Book of Hebrews pictures Jesus as the “pioneer” of our salvation. Jesus first walks the path that each disciple will traverse. Paul sees the disciples of Jesus as experiencing the life of the Risen Christ within their lives. Jesus had died once for all and could not die again, as death held no power over him.

What did this imply for the disciples of Jesus? Seemingly the Church grew in understanding of it. Did being freed from sin imply freedom from physical death--a consequence of sin? Perhaps such a belief existed among some early

disciples. Paul seemed to imply something along such lines when he spoke about the unworthy reception of the Eucharist:

*He who eats and drinks without recognizing the body eats and drinks a judgment on himself. That is why many among you are sick and infirm, and why so many are dying (1Cor.11:29-30).*

This teaching implies that the worthy reception of the Holy Eucharist produces life-giving effects within the recipients. Perhaps the early Christians did not see themselves so much as incapable of dying, but that they would not die before the Parousia.

### THE DAY OF THE LORD

Nevertheless, good Christians continued to die. The living Thessalonians questioned how these dear dead would be able to share in the glorious return of Jesus Christ. Their doubts and fears upon the subject upset their peace of heart and troubled their faith. Paul attributes these troubles to their “shortcomings in the faith,” to their ignorance concerning the Parousia.

The early Christians inherited from Judaism a solid belief in the “Day of the Lord,” an expression that signified the moment in the history of the Chosen People, when Yahweh would directly interfere in the affairs of the world in order to exalt His People above all the nations. This Day of the Lord was seen as a time when the Just would rise from their graves, and all mankind would be subjected to Divine Judgment. We read in a Jewish apocryphal work,

*And the Lord will come with His holy angels and with the armies of the holy ones from the seventh heaven...and He will give rest to the godly whom He shall find in the body in this world (Asc. Isa. IV, 14:15).*

In another similar work, we read, “The archangel Michael summons the angels and sounds the trumpet to herald God's approach for judgment” (Apec. Mosis, XXII).

The Christian Community equated the Day of the Lord with the Parousia of Jesus Christ. Paul clarifies for the Thessalonians that the Resurrection of the

Just would occur at this time. Concomitant with the parousia would be the General Judgment of mankind. Therefore, the Day of the Lord would consist of the Parousia, the Resurrection of the Dead, and the General Judgment.

Apparently, the Thessalonians had separated, within their minds, the Parousia of the Lord from the Day of Judgment and the Resurrection of the Dead. Paul ties it all together for them. He writes:

*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, God will bring forth with him from the dead those also who have fallen asleep believing in him. We say to you, as if the Lord himself had said it, that we who live, who survive until his coming, will in no way have an advantage over those who have fallen asleep. No, the Lord himself will come down from heaven at the word of command, at the sound of the archangel's voice and God's trumpet; and those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then we, the living, the survivors, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Thenceforth we shall be with the Lord unceasingly. Console one another with this message" (1Thes.4:14-18).*

Although Paul makes no mention of judgment in this text, it is a fact that is very prevalent in other teachings. He tells the Corinthians: "*He will strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus [Christ]" (1Cor.1:8).*

He warns them, "*The Lord is the one to judge me, so stop passing judgment before the time of his return. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and manifest the intentions of hearts. At that time, everyone will receive his praise from God" (1Cor.4:5).*

To his spiritual son Timothy he writes: "*From now on a merited crown awaits me; on that Day the Lord, just judge that he is, will award it to me--and not only to me, but to all who have looked for his appearing with eager longing" (2Tm.4:8).*

In his epistle, James confirms that the parousia of Jesus will be a time of judgment. He writes:

*Be patient, therefore, my brothers, until the coming of the Lord... Steady your hearts, because the coming of the Lord is at hand. Do*

*not grumble against one another, my brothers, lest you be condemned. See! The judge stands at the gate (Jas.5:7-9).*

To encourage the early Christians, Peter tells them:

*You may for a time have to suffer the distress of many trials; but this is so that your faith, which is more precious than the passing splendor of fire-tried gold, may by its genuineness lead to praise, glory, and honor when Jesus Christ appears (1Pt.1:6).*

*Rejoice instead, in the measure that you share Christ's sufferings. When his glory is revealed, you will rejoice exultantly (1Pt.4:13).*

## THE PAROUSIA

It is generally agreed that the First Letter to the Thessalonians is one of the earliest Scriptures of the New Testament. Within this epistle we possess our most primitive account of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, which, no doubt, reflects the general teaching of the Christian church on the Parousia. The word *parousia* itself means "presence" or "arrival." A technical use of the word would describe the ceremonial visit of a ruler to a city, or to an apparition of a god bringing divine assistance. Within a Christian context, it could refer to the Coming of the Holy Spirit or the return of Jesus as Lord. The Christian presentation of the Second Coming of Jesus draws heavily upon the revelation recorded in Daniel. We read there:

*As the visions during the night continued, I saw One like a son of man coming, on the clouds of heaven. When he reached the Ancient One and was presented before him, He received dominion, glory, and kingship; nations and peoples of every language serve him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not be taken away, his kingship shall not be destroyed (Dn.7:13-14).*

The vision pictures the last act in world history in which God's reign upon earth is established and all hostile powers are brought into subjection. In the Jewish interpretation, the "son of man" represented Israel, the People of God. From the gospel accounts we know that Jesus not only appropriated the title "Son of Man," but at his trial before the Jewish high priests, he applied the text from Daniel to Himself. The vision from Daniel, therefore, dominates the Christian presentation of the Second Coming.

With lively description, in figurative language, Paul portrays the dramatic suddenness and swiftness of the Parousia. First, Paul explains who can expect to participate in the glorious return of Jesus: those who have believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and hold to those truths implied in such belief. It implies belief in God's power to triumph over sin and its evil consequences, a belief in the redemption and salvation; it implies the acceptance of the lordship of Jesus over one's life.

Physical death will be no impediment to sharing in the victory of Jesus Christ. Whether living or dead, the faithful will share in the Parousia. Paul proceeds to explain how the dead will participate, however, he does not speak of the state of those who are asleep. He merely confirms that they will have equal status with the living when that stupendous moment arrives. This teaching, he insists, rests upon the authority of Jesus. Either it is part of the revelation received by the Apostles from Jesus, or Paul received it in private revelation or through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Whatever its source, Paul sees it as acceptable on the authority of God.

The Parousia will begin with a command. The Greek word used for command--its only use in the Scriptures--expresses the order of a general to his soldiers, a captain to his crew or a hunter to his dog. Obedience is the only response to such a command. All Heaven responds to this command as it issues forth from God the Creator. The time of the Parousia, its pregnant moment, results from no natural or preternatural evolution, but flows from the free will of the Eternal Father.

The voice of the archangel will be heard in response to God's command. Paul does not name the archangel, but the presumption is that it is Michael. Jewish tradition identifies Michael as the leader of the good angels and the Defender of God's People. Daniel especially mentions him in relation to the resurrection of the dead:

*At that time there shall arise Michael, the great prince, guardian of your people; It shall be a time unsurpassed in distress since nations began until that time. At that time your people shall escape, everyone who is found written in the book. Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; Some shall live forever, others shall be an everlasting horror and disgrace. But the wise shall shine brightly like the splendor of the firmament, And those who lead the many to justice shall be like the stars forever (Dn.12:1-3).*

We read in a Jewish apocryphal work--already quoted---“The archangel Michael summons the angels and sounds the trumpet to herald God's approach for judgment (Apoc. Mosis XXII). Michael's appearance will symbolize God's protection for His People on earth.

Paul also mentions the sound of the trumpet. It not only symbolizes the moment of final judgment, but the sound of the trumpet is the joyous call to God's People to assemble in worship before Yahweh. It was a sound of consolation as it announced the coming of Yahweh to rescue His people from hostile oppression.

### REFLECTIONS OF JEWISH COMSOLOGY

Paul speaks of the believers being caught up in the clouds. Within the Old Testament, clouds are instruments God used to manifest His Divine Presence. By placing the saved in the clouds with the Lord, Paul teaches that they will share the eternal life and glory of God.

Paul writes of the descent of Jesus and the ascension of the saints for the heavenly meeting within the clouds. This description reflects the cosmology of Paul's time. Hebrew thought pictured the world as an inverted bowl of which the conclave ceiling was the heavens, the home of God and His angels. The earth was seen as a platform beneath the inverted bowl, surrounded by water and supported by six pillars, beneath which lay the abyss. Within the heart of the earth lay Sheol, the land of the dead. Within this context of creation, a person would descend to the earth, and the faithful, in order to go forth to meet their King, must ascend into the air.

In this letter, Paul makes no mention of the physiological changes that occur in our earthly bodies at the time of the parousia. He merely says: “*And those who have died in Christ will rise first. Then we, the living, the survivors, will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air (1Thes.4:16b-17a).*” However in First Corinthians, Paul explains in some detail how our earthly bodies will be transformed into heavenly bodies. These heavenly bodies will be as different from our earthly bodies as a seed is from the blossoming flower.

He goes on to say:

*Now I am going to tell you a mystery. Not all of us shall fall asleep, but all of us are to be changed--in an instant, in the twinkling of an*

*eye, at the sound of the last trumpet. The trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed (1Cor.15:51-52).*

## DAY OF DELIVERANCE

The Gospel according to Mark gives an account of the Second Coming, which is attributed to Jesus Christ Himself. Also it is presented in descriptive, apocryphal language which, while not to be taken literally, does indeed impart a true vision to those understanding such figures of speech. Mark records:

*During that period after trials of every sort the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shed its light, stars will fall out of the skies, and the heavenly hosts will be shaken. Then men will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He will dispatch his angels and assemble his chosen from the four winds, from the farthest bounds of earth and sky (Mk.13:ff).*

After giving a similar description, Luke in his Gospel account adds these words of warning by Jesus:

*Be on guard lest your spirits become bloated with indulgence and drunkenness and worldly cares. The great day will suddenly close in on you like a trap. The day I speak of will come upon all who dwell on the face of the earth. So be on the watch. Pray constantly for the strength to escape the tribulations that are imminent and to stand secure before the Son of Man (Lk.21:34-36).*

To the mind of Paul, what he describes is the moment of divine deliverance for the People of God, both living and dead. He wishes to make clear in this letter that neither death nor any future cosmic crisis will separate Christians from their Divine Lord. They are assured on the authority of the Lord, that their blissful reunion with Him will have the added joy of everlasting reunion with other beloved Christians. Such consoling truths should be a constant source of comfort and encouragement to all Christians.

*The parousia is not a time of fear for Christians but of joy, a joy ardently longed for. Jesus tells us: "When these things begin to happen, stand erect and hold your heads high, for your deliverance is near at hand" (Lk.21:28).*

## CHAPTER 6

### CHILDREN OF LIGHT

#### THE TIME AND SEASON

The historical knowledge of the Christian Faith possessed by the Thessalonians depended completely upon the teachings of the evangelists. There were no written Gospels to read. What the Thessalonians knew depended upon the teaching authority of Paul. As he wrote to the Corinthians:

*Brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and in which you stand firm... I handed on to you first of all what I myself received (1Cor.15:1-3a).*

Paul speaks of the oral tradition within the Church, those truths handed on to the Christian Community through the teachings of the Apostles. Paul constantly insisted upon his role as an Apostle of Jesus Christ in order to ensure and to verify his authority to teach Christianity. The New Testament Scriptures were born when certain Christian evangelists began to record these oral teachings, and to present the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth in some systematic, written form. The New Testament Scriptures truly begin with Paul's letters to the Galatians and the Thessalonians.

The Catholic Church has rightly insisted that the New Testament is the fruit and the effect of authoritative teaching power within the Christian church. It cannot recognize the New Testament as the teaching authority within the Church, but as an infallible, authoritative source for Christian teaching. The Scriptures of themselves are dead letters that cannot cry out in pain when mutilated, cannot scream in outrage when misinterpreted, cannot explain themselves when misunderstood. We read in Second Peter:

*Paul, our beloved brother, wrote you this in the spirit of wisdom that is his, dealing with these matters as he does in all his letters. There are certain passages in them hard to understand. The ignorant and the unstable distort them [just as they do the rest of Scripture] to their own ruin (2Pt.3:15b-16).*



The Scriptures depend upon the living, teaching authority in the Church for their proper interpretation. The Risen Lord said to the Apostles:

*Full authority has been given to me both in heaven and on earth: go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations...Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. And know I am with you always, until the end of the world! (Mt. 28:18-10).*

Jesus Christ commissioned the Apostles to teach authoritatively in His Name. The Church recognizes the Bishops of the Church as the successors of this authority within the Christian Community. This teaching authority remains guaranteed and protected by the Presence of "I am" until the end of time.

These earliest epistles of Paul echo for us some of the essential oral teachings prevalent in the very earliest days of Church life (first twenty years). These Scriptures maintain that those who have believed in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, accepted on earth the Lordship of Jesus, will share in a glorious resurrection from the dead. At that time they will share, in some manner, in the divine status enjoyed by Jesus Christ.

Those who have died in Christ, Paul insists, will one day be reunited in their resurrected bodies with one another, through Jesus Christ, for all eternity. This will occur on the Day of the Lord when Jesus returns glorious and victorious. These early Christians saw the glorious return of the Risen Jesus as the climactic moment of God's salvific intervention into the world. To this climactic moment, they applied all the traditional biblical imagery. Paul presents these truths clothed with such imagery.

Natural curiosity in Christians would certainly foster the desire to know exactly when Jesus would return in glory. As Christian life grew more difficult in this world, the longing for the parousia would be more ardent. From our earliest teachings, we see that Jesus left behind the idea that His return would be *sudden*. Perhaps it is easy, when longing is at its peak, to interpret "sudden" as "soon." Paul makes it clear to the Thessalonians that the moment of Jesus' Second Coming is both secret and sudden. These facts, he insists, are well known to them. In other words, they had been part of his oral teaching. He writes them:

*As regards specific times and moments, brothers, we do not need to write you; you know very well that the day of the Lord is coming like*

*a thief in the night. Just when people are saying, "Peace and security," ruin will fall on them with the suddenness of pains overtaking a woman in labor, and there will be no escape (1Thes.5:1-3).*

**In a word--what will be a joyful moment for believers will be a frightful one for unbelievers. It will be the Day of Wrath.**

**The two expressions, times and seasons, frequently appear together in literature. "Times" refers to the ordinary measure of duration, which would include the year, the month, the day, the hour, the minute. "Seasons" has reference to a fixed and established moment in time for a decision or celebration. We speak of the Christmas Season. The Jews expected the coming of the Messiah to occur in the Passover Season.**

**Throughout the centuries, men and women have constantly prophesied the year, the day, the hour and the place of the Second Coming. Paul's words to the Thessalonians imply that we can know neither the time nor season of the Parousia. The Scriptures written later reflect the same thought. Jesus' relatives say to Him in John's gospel account:**

*"If you are going to do things like these, you may as well display yourself to the world at large." ...Jesus answered them: "It is not yet the right time for me, whereas the time is always right for you" (Jn.7:4b-6).*

**We read in the Acts that the disciples asked the Risen Jesus:**

*"Lord, are you going to restore the rule to Israel now?" His answer was: "The exact time it is not yours to know. The Father has reserved that to himself... then you are to be my witnesses...even to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:6-8).*

**Matthew records for us this teaching of Jesus:**

*As for the exact day and hour, no one knows it, neither the angels in heaven nor the Son, but the Father only. The coming of the Son of Man will repeat what happened in Noah's time. In the days before the flood people were eating and drinking, marrying and being married, right up to the day Noah entered the ark. They were totally*

*unconcerned until the flood came and destroyed them. So it will be at the coming of the Son of Man...Stay awake therefore! You cannot know the day your Lord is coming... The Son of Man is coming at the time you least expect... Happy that servant whom his master discovers at work on his return! (Mt.24:36ff).*

Martin Luther displayed a prudent wisdom when he said, "If I knew the Second Coming was coming tomorrow, I would still plant my apple seed today." Someone said that when Noah sought contributions from his neighbors to help finance the construction of the Ark, they refused to help saying, "We must save our money for a rainy day."

Certain quotes prescribed to Jesus seemingly imply that He, too, expected His return to be not only sudden but soon. For example: "*When they persecute you in one town, flee to the next. I solemnly assure you, you will not have covered the towns of Israel before the Son of Man comes*" (Mt.10:23). And again we read: "*I assure you, the present generation will not pass away until all this takes place*" (Mt.24:34).

Some scholars suggest that there has been a blending of Jesus' prophetic teachings on the Destruction of Jerusalem and the Second Coming, and such references as the above refer to the destruction of Jerusalem. Others suggest that these different views reflect the uncertainty of the early Church on this matter, an uncertainty rooted in the sayings of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the Scriptures make one point clear: the Second Coming will arrive suddenly and surprisingly like the thief in the night. Its effects will be as inescapable as the pains of childbirth for a pregnant woman. That it will occur at a time when people feel peace and security may be a reference to the days of Jeremiah when Jerusalem refused to believe Yahweh would permit the destruction of Jerusalem. The lesson to the Christian Community remains constant in all the Scriptures: Be watchful! Be prepared!

### CHILDREN OF THE DAY OR NIGHT

As Paul insinuated, the Parousia will be a fearful and terrible moment for the children of darkness. As they dwell under the dark mantle of Satan, it will find them ill-prepared to meet the Lord. The Book of Revelation speaks of their terror:

*The kings of the earth, the nobles and those in command, the wealthy and powerful, the slave and the free--all hid themselves in caves and mountain crags. They cried out to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us! Hide us from the face of the One who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! The great day of their vengeance has come. Who can withstand it?" (Rv.6:15-17).*

The very living of the Christian life will be a preparation for the Parousia. The quality of such a life will render them prepared at all times. It shall be for them a glorious day of liberation and justification. Paul tells the Thessalonians:

*You are not in the dark, brothers, that the day should catch you off guard, like a thief. No, all of you are children of light and of the day. We belong neither to darkness nor to night (1Thes.5:4-5).*

Paul intimates the coming of a great cosmic conflict between good and evil. Traditionally, in the Old Testament light and day represented goodness and the Presence of God. The dark and the night symbolized evil and Satan. Isaiah warns: *"Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil, who change darkness into light, and light into darkness, who change bitter into sweet, and sweet into bitter" (Is.5:20).*

Members of the Jewish Community at Qumran were called sons of the light. They were taught to hate and to war against the sons of darkness. Certain Rabbis held the present age to be utter night, and the age to come to be all day. Job speaks of those happier days before misfortune struck:

*Oh, that I were as in the months past! as in the days when God watched over me, While he kept his lamp shining above my head, and by his light I walked through darkness; As I was in my flourishing days, when God sheltered my tent (Jb.29:2-3).*

The Psalmist sang of Yahweh, *"A lamp to my feet is your word, a light to my path" (Ps.119:105).*

Paul tells the Thessalonians that the children of light are wide-eyed and sober, while in contrast, the children of darkness are asleep and drunk. The children of the day remain constantly watchful. Being watchful, in the context of being prepared for the Parousia, means to be sober. Being sober implies a love of

moderation, freedom from excess in any extreme. The life of the sober Christian is one filled with a controlled spiritual energy, finding expression neither in religious enthusiasm and excitement nor in slothful and lazy indifference, but in the calm and steady fulfillment of one's moral obligations and one's apostolic ministry. A sober life proceeds from the depth of its own spirit. Spiritual sobriety is the fruit of religious maturity.

The earthly circumstances of human existence demand such watchfulness. The moment of the Lord's return remains uncertain, while the Christian soul remains surrounded by its enemies. Peter speaks of Satan as a hungry lion on constant prowl seeking someone to devour. The early Christians, indeed, viewed their life on earth as warfare.

### CHRISTIAN ARMOR

Paul's encouragement to the Christians to be watchful calls to mind the image of a watchman or an armed guard. The Old Testament spoke of Yahweh as coming forth armed to do battle against His enemies and to protect the just ones. Isaiah says of the Lord, "*He put on justice as his breastplate, salvation, as the helmet on his head*" (Is.59:17a). We read in the Book of Wisdom:

*He shall take his zeal for armor and he shall arm creation to requite the enemy, He shall don justice for a breastplate and shall wear sure judgment for a helmet, He shall take invincible rectitude as a shield and whet his sudden anger for a sword, And the universe shall war with him against the foolhardy (Wis.5:17-20).*

In Ephesians, Christian armor reflects the spiritual armor described in the Old Testament:

*You must put on the armor of God if you are to resist on the evil day,... Stand fast, with the truth as the belt around your waist, justice as your breastplate, and zeal to propagate the gospel of peace as your footgear. In all circumstances hold faith up before you as your Shield, it will help you extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the spirit, the word of God (Eph.6:13-17).*

As noted in Thessalonians, Paul describes the protective Christian armor as the theological virtues of faith, hope and love. And, indeed, he is right in doing so for, without these powers being activated within the soul, there is no Christian life to protect. The activities of these virtues are the genuine proofs of being alive in Christ.

In speaking of faith and love as the breastplate, and hope as the helmet, Paul does not essentially differ from the spiritual armor described in Ephesians. The difference being that Ephesians looks at the same thing, but from a different aspect, and is more detailed in its description of our spiritual armor. Ephesians speaks of *“justice as your breastplate,”* where justice could certainly be synonymous with righteousness--the state of grace that makes a person pleasing to God. Such a state as justice or righteousness in a Christian results from *“only faith which expresses itself through love” (Gal.5:6).*

Ephesians speaks of salvation as the helmet of a Christian, while Thessalonians speaks of hope as the helmet. While in this world a person is never “saved,” at most, he or she is only in the *process* of being saved. Salvation is an on-going process that can never be claimed until decreed so by the Lord on Judgment Day. The only means by which salvation can be claimed is through the virtue of hope. In this context salvation and hope are synonymous.

Referring to the Thessalonians as the children of light, Paul implies that the Word of God guides their steps along the Way of the Lord. Gospel teachings become a spiritual light by which a Christian, through Faith in that Gospel, discerns the good from the evil and the wheat from the weed, and walks securely through the valley of darkness. If a Christian does not wish to be among those whom the thief catches unaware, he or she must avoid becoming a child of darkness. Paul makes it clear that darkness is a state of spiritual stupor, of moral indifference and unconcern for one’s eternal welfare. The children of darkness are like drunks asleep in a blazing house. He encourages, *“therefore let us not be asleep like the rest, but awake and sober!”*

In writing to the Romans, Paul makes clear the meaning of moral darkness:

*It is now the hour for you to wake from sleep, for our salvation is closer than when we first accepted the faith. The night is far spent: the day draws near. Let us cast off deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us live honorably as in daylight: not in carousing*

*and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the desires of the flesh (Rom.13:11b-14).*

It was reading these words that called St. Augustine from darkness to light. John records these words of Jesus:

*The light is among you only a little longer. Walk while you still have it or darkness will come over you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. While you have the light, keep faith in the light; thus you will become sons of light (Jn.12:35-36).*

Paul instructs Christians in Ephesians:

*There was a time when you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Well, then, live as children of light. Light produces every kind of goodness and justice and truth. Be correct in your judgment of what pleases the Lord. Take no part in vain deeds done in darkness: rather, condemn them (Eph.5:8-11).*

Paul goes on to say to the Thessalonians:

*But since we are of the day must be alert, let us be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love and the helmet that is hope for salvation. For God did not destined us for wrath, but to gain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we my live together with him. Therefore, encourage one another and build one another up, as indeed you do (1Thes.5:8-11).*

## CHILDREN OF GOD

To speak of Christians as children of light implies that they are children of God. Through Jesus Christ their lives are in God. As the tree cannot live when not rooted in the earth, so also the Christian cannot live when not rooted in God. When the life-giving Spirit of God flows through the human soul, that person becomes alive in God. The very nature of God is identified as love.

John writes, *“God is Love!”* Love is the very breath of life for a Christian. Such love gives a quality to existence, raising human life to the level enjoyed by Jesus Christ. Being of itself divine energy, such love cannot be static. In his gospel, John speaks of love only as a verb--a quality of action; never as a noun--a thing merely being. This loving quality of Christian life alone gives personal existence to God’s activity in a unique fashion, within and through human lives. Nothing could better prepare a human being for a conscious encounter with the Persons of God than human existence activated by love, for such a life is already in and of God. It already rests within His Hands and resides under His protective Wings.

As the quality of such divine energy is so finely spiritual, it can only be known, possessed, and activated within the human soul through the finely spiritual faculty of Faith. Faith reveals reality hidden from the gross senses. Faith sees the way to eternal treasure, which the dark light of human intelligence cannot discover--life in God through Jesus Christ.

The final rewards of spiritual victory come only after the battle, a battle running concomitant with earthly life; a battle in which the soul experiences its frailties and failures and even defeats; a battle in which the heart knows its desires for respite and its temptations to capitulate to its enemies--the world, the flesh, the devil. In such an arena, faith must be sustained by the supernatural power of Hope, which sees assurance of final victory through the achieved victory of the Victor, Jesus Christ, whom Faith reveals as the loving Savior of the human soul. With hope in Christ, the Christian is able to battle on, despite the apparent negative aspects of battle, meager gains, and human uncertainty of victory. Exhorting the Corinthians, Paul writes, *“Be on your guard, stand firm in the faith, and act like men. In a word, be strong. Do everything with love.”*

Love is not like radiation that emanates automatically from our natural essence. Love is divine energy that lives in deeds of good will, born within the sacrifice of self. In the battle for the Kingdom of God, the war of the soul, Paul calls forth active faith and love. In a war, a vigorous offense is the best defense. Paul exhorts, *“Overcome evil by doing good.”* This applies both to external and internal evil.

Active faith and consuming love will protect the soul from forming destructive habits. They guard the soul from “fulfilling the lust of the flesh.” Like barnacles on a ship’s keel, indolence, indifference and indulgence form within



the soul where faith and love lie dormant. Unused powers are lost, and with the loss of faith and hope, the Christian soul is lost. What Paul truly says is that the only adequate defense against the encroaching darkness is daily living a holy life, while awaiting the Coming of the Lord. From his knowledge, which is grounded in the Spirit, Paul infallibly teaches, *“There are in the end three things that last: faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love”* (1Cor.13:13).

In this epistle, Paul clearly expresses the source and foundation of Christian Hope: God's most fruitful good will towards us. As Paul put it, *“God has not destined us for wrath but for acquiring salvation”* (1Cor.5:9a). He immediately goes on to declare that God's good will toward us has incarnated itself in Jesus Christ. He assures us that the acquisition of our salvation comes *“through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* Here we have one of the earliest written testimonies to the Church's belief in the atoning and redemptive death of Jesus Christ. Paul tells us, *“He died for us, that all of us, whether awake or asleep, together might live with him”* (1Cor.5:10). Paul beheld the inspirational source of Christians' love for one another in the love of the Father for us, and in the love of the Son for us.

### LOVE EMBRACES COMMUNITY

Never does Paul separate Christian love from communal responsibility, as it essentially expresses the Love of God on earth. Christian love finds its prototype in the Divine Love. In the Godhead exists the loving communion of giving and receiving from which eternally flows the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Divine Love is eternally and infinitely fruitful within the Divine Nature. Flowing outside itself, Divine Love finds expression in time through creation, redemption, and sanctification. Christian Love should be, in some fashion, creative, redemptive and sanctifying. Indeed, where there is impotence, inversion, and indifference there can be no love of God, no Christian life.

All Christians have a moral responsibility toward their brethren and their times. Each is responsible for the Church, the coming of the Kingdom of God. Out of love for Jesus Christ, Paul exhorts those strong of faith to refrain from any actions that scandalize the weaker brethren. All are exhorted to build up the Church. Each must be an encouragement and strength to the others. Paul tells the Thessalonians, *“Therefore, encourage and build one another up, as indeed you do”* (5:11). To encourage is to strengthen!

In concluding his epistle to the Thessalonians, Paul makes sixteen points for the establishment of a holy and healthy community. He sounds each point clearly and boldly, like distinct musical chords. Nevertheless, they are not isolated and disconnected thoughts. There is an underlying harmony of thought. Paul writes:

*We beg you, brothers, respect those among you whose task it is to exercise authority in the Lord and admonish you; esteem them with the greatest love because of their work. Remain at peace with one another. We exhort you to admonish the unruly; cheer the faint-hearted; support the weak; be patient toward all. See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all.*

*Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not stifle the Spirit. Do not despise prophecies. Avoid any semblance of evil. Test everything; retain what is good (1Cor.5:12-22).*

Paul understood the need for organization and authority in church life. Anything else would have been completely foreign to his experience. Acts relates that Paul and Barnabas, on their first missionary journey, installed presbyters in each church they founded. The local churches, no doubt, patterned their organization after that of the Jewish synagogue. There elders governed with both judicial and punitive powers, and a ruler of the synagogue (*archisznagogus*) managed the building and religious services. In his epistle, James speaks of the local church as a synagogue (James 2:2).

The reference here to authority is too sketchy to tell us much about organizational authority in the community. We know they possessed superintendents or managers ("*those who are over you*"). As Paul adds, "*over you in the Lord,*" he implies that these men serve in the Name of Jesus--in a word, in His place and with His authority. We know they labor and toil. The word used, *chopiao*, implies strenuous effort resulting in weariness.

A community life depends upon certain people sacrificing their time, energy, and talents for the common good, for the affairs of the community. Paul's words imply that these leaders exercise care and concern for the flock. The word that is translated "are over" also means "are concerned about." It is their duty to admonish the members: keep before them the Mind and the Will

of the Lord, and exhort them to ready obedience. Toward such leaders, Paul gives one directive only: respect and esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

The word translated “respect,” derives from the Greek verb for “know.” Knowledge and respect are intimately related. Respect is knowing the work another does and appreciating the person for it. Some hard workers in the Church receive no esteem from the membership because no one knows how hard they work--except the Lord. In this case, Paul infers the Thessalonians know the sacrifices of time and energy made by their leaders. Paul tells them that these men have a right to their love for their works. The Greek expression used by Paul conveys the idea “at the highest level.” It is not so much because of their position in the Lord that this love and esteem is due, but because of their work. It is this quality of love that sustains the leaders amidst the labors they undertake and the contentions they must bear.

#### THE IDLERS, THE FAINTHEARTED, AND THE WEAK

Where such understanding and love for leadership exists, there is a foundation laid for peace in the community. Paul exhorts the community to “*remain at peace with one another.*” By peace, he means more the tranquility of order. He desires all that the Hebrew word *shalom* implies--total well being, the fullness of God's blessings. A proper environment must exist in the community before *shalom* roots and blossoms. Paul urges its establishment with the following exhortations, in which he notes three classes of Christians needing the community's special attention.

The idlers, or better still the disorderly, are the first mentioned. The Greek word itself calls to mind a soldier who is out of rank. These would be the extremists, the busybodies and the loafers. Among these, authority will find reluctant obedience. Paul was probably speaking to them when he wrote: “*Make it a point of honor to remain at peace and attend to your own affairs. Work with your hands as we directed you to do*” (1Cor.4:11). Paul wants the whole community to stay on their case--admonish them.

The fainthearted are the second class needing special attention. The word connotes people small of soul. Greek literature applied the word to those citizens who shirked active duty in the army; they evaded the State's call to service. Confronted with trials and troubles they grow fainthearted. In Thessalonians, this would apply to those depressed and disheartened over

persecution and the delayed Parousia. The Community is urged to console these souls. Isaiah teaches us that it is a divine work *“to revive the spirits of the dejected, to revive the hearts of the crushed”* (Is.57:15c).

The weak are the third class called for attention. The weak need community support. This refers to those weak in faith, and to the morally weak who have those tendencies toward immorality described earlier. They must not be ignored, scorned, or abandoned. The Greek word that is translated “support” or “help” says much more. It calls for a real physical interest. The verb *chesthe* means “to cleave to,” “to put your arms around.” In a word, Paul says to love the weak! *“Love never wrongs the neighbor, hence love is the fulfillment of the law”* (Rom.13:10).

### IMPORTANCE OF PATIENCE

None deny that these three classes of people cause suffering in the community, tempting others to every degree of uncharitableness. They are sources of personal upset and threats to community peace. For these reasons and more, Paul now tells the Christian Community to be patient with all. Without the virtue of patience, none of the above is possible. Patience is a quality of endurance within the throes of suffering. Patience possesses the hope of bringing eternal good from the evil that is suffered. The patient spirit has the ability to continue on a tranquil course of loving concern in spite of being in the midst of pain. Not without wisdom does Paul teach that patience is the first fruit of love. It is, indeed, a godly quality, a fruit of the Holy Spirit (see Ga1.5:22).

It is one thing to practice patience with annoying defects of character and another thing to deal with personal assaults. There is a natural tendency to become very impatient and to retaliate when injured. As a practical encouragement to develop patience and grow in love, Paul counsels, *“See that no one returns evil to any other; always seek one another's good and, for that matter, the good of all”* (1Cor.5:15). Evil exists in the world, and few will live without becoming victims of it to one degree or another. Paul warns Christians never to be involved in doing evil. Actions flow from our spirit, and there is a constant circular effect upon what we do and what we become. We are what we do! A person cannot continue evil actions without becoming an evil person. The prudent defense against negative behavior is a positive offense. Paul writes the Corinthians, *“When we are insulted we respond with a*

*blessing” (1Cor.4:12b). Peter teaches Christians, “Do not return evil for evil or insult for insult. Return a blessing instead. This you have been called to do... (1Pt.3:9).*

It is not enough that Christians patiently absorb evil. Evil must be counteracted with good works. Paul says, *“Always seek one another’s good. Good done in return for evil is the only way to assure community unity and growth.”* The Greek text implies more than the seeking of good, it encourages us to “run” after the good. Make the accomplishment of good the priority of our life. It will guarantee our own goodness. The scope of our good deeds, Paul insists, must be catholic. Our good will must not be exclusive and parochial, it must be inclusive of all our brethren.

As we have already observed, our external actions flow from our spirit. Needless to say, the behavior encouraged by Peter and Paul does not flow from a spirit rooted in human nature. Such a way of life is virtually impossible unless the human spirit is constantly sustained in action by the power and presence of God residing within the soul.

### PRAYERFUL AND JOYFUL THANKSGIVING

All Christians received the Holy Spirit, each is His temple. Rarely do Christians permit the Holy Spirit to permeate their souls to such a degree that they become instruments of His grace and power on earth. Precisely in order to make his exhortations realistic, Paul tells the Thessalonians, *“Rejoice always, never cease praying, render constant thanks; such is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (1Cor.5:16-18).* He seeks to turn their hearts toward the inner source of their Christian lives. Christianity is far more than moral obligation to God and neighbor. It is a way of life rooted in God. It is a life primarily determined by its inward activities--its orientation to the God within. It is a quality of life externally recognizable by its continuous joy, constant prayerfulness and thankfulness in all circumstances.

A modern prophet defined joy as the infallible sign of God’s Presence. In Greek usage, “rejoice” was above all a greeting to the gods, as joy was their property. To behold the beauty of God in man or nature caused joy to the soul as the soul beheld a reflection of divine beauty. To behold such beauty meant life. Joy was a total experience encompassing the whole person, culminating in

feelings that completely transport consciousness above self-awareness. For this reason a state of joy can be compatible with a state of physical or mental suffering. The strongest stimulus stimulates!

The Old Testament teaches that joy is to be found only in God. It is wisdom to know that God is the object of joy. The Scriptures associate joy essentially with salvation. The concrete demonstration of salvation within the soul becomes the specific reason a person experiences joy. The soul knows God's salvific power in some positive sense, and joy infallibly results. We read in Isaiah:

*I rejoice heartily in the Lord, in my God is the joy of my soul; For he has clothed me with a robe of salvation, and wrapped me in a mantle of justice, Like a bridegroom adorned with a diadem, like a bride bedecked with her jewels (Is.61:10).*

We read in Proverbs 10:28a, "*The hope of the just brings them joy.*" Such joy cannot remain internal; it seeks external expression in festal joy which, in the Scriptures, culminated in a banquet. The Rabbis would say, "There is no joy without eating and drinking."

Joy, prayer, and thankfulness relate intimately as blossoms upon the same branch. The wise tell us that joy is proper to God, and what is proper to God reaches human beings only through prayerful and mystical union with Him. The spirit of prayer and thankfulness arises out of the soul's awareness of God as the Source of all realized salvific blessings.

Experience teaches that unless Christian faith is constantly sustained through prayer, it cannot persevere in a life of goodness to others. Jesus told the parable of the unjust judge and the persistent widow to teach "*the necessity of praying always and not losing heart*" (Lk.18:1). To the Colossians, Paul writes, "*Pray perseveringly, be attentive to prayer and pray in a spirit of thanksgiving*" (Col.4:2). Rendering constant thankfulness recognizes God's loving presence in all circumstances of life. To omit thanksgiving in prayer is like clipping the wings of a bird and still expecting it to fly into the heavens. Paul preached to the Philippians:

*Rejoice in the Lord always! I say it again. Rejoice! Everyone should see how unselfish you are. The Lord is near. Dismiss all anxiety from your minds. Present your needs to God in every form of prayer*

*and in petitions full of gratitude. Then God's own peace, which is beyond all understanding, will stand guard over your hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus (Phil.4:4-7).*

We can say where there is joyless Christianity, there is no shalom. There the dynamic, effective Presence of the Holy Spirit is blocked and impeded. The human heart, elevated and sanctified, constantly experiences salvific joy and a growing spirit of prayerfulness and thankfulness, regardless of its earthly circumstances. The question is asked, *"What is the will of God?"* Paul answers, *"That Christians will always be joyful, ceaseless in prayer and in all circumstances give thanks to God."*

Paul has spoken of the fruits of the Holy Spirit that build personal spirituality. His thoughts now automatically turn to public prayer, and a gift of the Holy Spirit given for building up the Community--prophecy. He tells the congregation, *"Do not stifle the Spirit."* Immediately he indicates how this may occur: *"Do not despise prophecies" (5:19-20).*

During the worship service, the Holy Spirit moves certain believers to utter inspired messages of encouragement and admonition, and on rare occasions to speak of future events, as did Agabus in Antioch. As Paul knew, to exercise such a gift opened the door to foreign spirits--the deluded and self-deceived--to sow their weeds. The easiest solution to the problem would be to suppress the problem. Paul saw this as a rejection of the Holy Spirit. Taking a wiser and saner approach, he calls upon the community to exercise discernment, *"Test everything; retain what is good. Avoid any semblance of evil" (1Cor.5:21-22).*

The words translated as "retain" and "avoid" both come from the same root; one means to hold fast, and the other means to hold off. Paul makes a play on words: hold fast to the good, hold off on any form or semblance of evil. In Greek, the term "good" expresses the beautiful, the aesthetic ideal. Paul's use of "form" or "semblance" may be a reference to those various manifestations of self-deception induced by the Evil One.

Paul calls the community to discern if the prophecies are of the Holy Spirit. The traditional criterion by which true prophecy is discerned from the false is its content. A true prophecy cannot contradict the inspired Scriptures, the revelation of God through Jesus Christ and the Apostles. Of course, the content must be worthy of the Holy Spirit and possess the power to convict its

listeners. The Second Vatican Council teaches: "The charismatic gifts, whether they be the most outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolations for they are exceedingly suitable and useful for the needs of the Church."

Concluding his letter with a customary blessing, Paul calls to mind that the Father in Heaven is the God of Peace and therefore the Source of Shalom--health, happiness and prosperity--and that the gift of perfect holiness is His alone to bestow. He prays, "*May the God of peace make you perfect in holiness.*"

As Paul continues his blessing, he specifies his requests. As the Thessalonians look forward to the Second Coming with anticipation and some anxiety, Paul prays that the Father will preserve them completely free from sin and dedicated in body, soul and spirit to His worship until the coming of Jesus. The blessing continues: "*May he preserve you whole and entire, spirit, soul, and body, irreproachable at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*" (1Cor.5:23).

The Greek text makes clear that the "entire you" is the spirit (*pneuma*), the soul (*psyche*), and the body (*soma*). All three nouns refer to the individual human being. This has led scholars to question: Was Paul a believer (a *trichonomist*) in the three components of human nature namely, *soma*, *psyche*, and *pneuma*? Among pagan writers a popular division of human nature was body-*soma*, life-*psyche* and intelligence-*nous*. Jerome, Thomas Aquinas, and Luther (among others) think Paul held for the threefold (tripartite) division of human nature. Others such as Eusebius, Theodore of Mospuesta, and Ambrose (among others) feel Paul held to the standard belief of body and soul. Men such as Theodore of Mospuesta insisted only that a Christian possessed a "spirit-pneuma" as a result of the reception of the Holy Spirit.

Paul, no doubt, would have been greatly influenced by the anthropology current in Judaism, which spoke of the *ruah* as the divine component of human nature, and the *nepes* as the human part--the natural soul.

Whatever Paul believed, many modern scholars appear to favor the opinion that Paul conceived man as being composed of body and soul; the "spirit-pneuma" being the highest dimension of the human soul. It is at this dimension of the human soul where the Divine and the human may encounter. The effects of such an encounter may affect the entire human personality.



Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would be affected to the degree that when Jesus returned in glory, He would find them irreproachable in body and soul. To reassure them he adds, *“He who calls us is trustworthy, therefore he will do it” (1Cor.5:24)*. Paul insists that along with him, they too have been “called” by God. Biblically, that implies that God has chosen them for salvation, therefore they have full assurance that it shall be accomplished through His power.

As Paul prayed for the disciples, and recalled his own call, he feels the personal need for God's grace for himself and his companions. Although an apostle and minister among them, he feels himself no less a member of the Christian community--their brother in Christ. To emphasize the quality of their relationship, he has called them brothers fourteen times in this letter. Now he asks, *“Brothers, pray for us too.”* Do not forget Paul, Silas and Timothy, who love and pray for you. (One wonders how often those who frequently criticize their spiritual leaders who serve and so often pray for them, ever give one thought in prayer for those they criticize.)

Paul adds, *“Greet all the brothers with a holy embrace” (1Cor.5:26)*; or as the Greek text says, *“...with a holy kiss.”* Apparently, this custom of giving the kiss of peace was strictly Christian. From as early as 150 A.D. we see Justin Martyr speaking of the kiss of peace as part of the Christian Eucharistic celebration.

With the closing command, *“I adjure you by the Lord that this letter be read to them all” (1Cor.5:27)*, Paul may have inaugurated the New Testament. Paul feels the content of teachings and admonitions within the letter are important enough to warrant the solemn charge to the leaders to read it to the congregation, and privately to any member absent on the day read. In such a manner the New Testament was born.

Paul ends his letter to the Thessalonians with his customary blessing: *“May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1Cor.5:28)*. For the twenty-second time within this short epistle Paul mentions that thought which dominates and directs his life--**JESUS CHRIST IS LORD!**

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# **INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP**

## **A Seven Year Catholic Bible Study**

Commentary by: James P. O'Bryan, S.T.

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2. A spiral-bound Student Manual (Meditations) containing a corresponding Summary of the Lecture and Worksheet for each week's study. Each student should purchase a copy of the Student Manual to keep a personal record of their responses to the questions, as well as notes that might be taken during the lecture or group sessions.

Note: A few studies are available only in 3-ring binders. One copy each of the Teacher's Manual and Student Manual are purchased, and copies of the student manual must be made for each participant.

## WEEKLY BIBLE STUDY CLASS FORMAT

### First Hour - Small Group Sharing:

- Students break into their small groups (10 or fewer participants)
- Prayer said aloud together (Example: Prayer to the Holy Spirit)
- Songs can be sung
- Sharing begins (approximately 45 minutes)
- Stretch / Break for coffee etc. (10-15 minutes)

### Second Hour – Lecture:

- Prayer said aloud by lecturer.
- Lecture begins for the following week's study (approximately 45-60 minutes)

### Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week

The study can be adapted for 10 to 400 people. Committed people needed may vary depending upon the number of students.

### Recommended Personnel:

- Lecturer: To present the material
- Small Group Leader: One for every 10 people sharing answers.
- Secretary: Functions might include making copies of materials (not required if participants each have their own spiral bound student book), distributing copies as required; advertising; registration; collecting fees (where applicable for materials, etc.)

### Purpose:

The motivating purpose for the formation of the Bible Study is to preserve and impart the Christian Faith as understood and transmitted by the Catholic Church through the centuries. Since "ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ," is there anything more important for a sincere Christian than a study of the Scriptures?

### Recommended Work Assignments for Parish Studies

#### Secretary

Will place announcement of day, time and location in the Sunday bulletin beginning four weeks prior to the Bible Study beginning. A flyer can also be posted on the parish bulletin board.

Accept registrations by mail, phone, through the parish office or personally.

Collect fee, if applicable, at the first session of the Bible Study. The registration fee can be used to defray the cost of the study (workbooks printing, coffee etc.) and is also a form of commitment by persons attending to complete the study. You may choose to have a “love offering” bowl for ongoing costs, i.e., coffee etc.

Be responsible for coffee, treats at break.

Each week reproduce the Summaries/Worksheets for entire group and distribute to each small Group Leader (This may be done by rectory personnel). This is not necessary if each student purchases a personal workbook.

### **Group Leader**

Through years of experience, it has been found that it is best to strictly follow the discipline listed below.

--After community prayer, group shares worksheet answers for the week.

--Working in a clockwise order, the student to left of the leader answers the first question. The leader then asks if anyone has an additional or different answer. Move then to the next student, who answers question number (2) and so on, through all the questions for the week. The leader should help ensure answers are in accordance with the Catholic Church. If in doubt, check it out!

--It is the group leader's responsibility to confine discussion to the subject matter being dealt with in the weekly lesson. (Sharing problems or special prayers can be done after lesson is completed) If extraneous discussion is not regulated, the questions will not be answered in the time allotted.

--If a student has a question on the subject and no agreement can be reached, put that student in charge of finding the answer through a priest or any Catholic resource. The answer is to be brought back to the group the following week. (The leader should research the question as well.)

--ONLY students who have done their written homework may participate in the discussion. Others are encouraged to attend, listen, and write down the answers. There is much to be learned from one another, so incomplete homework is no reason to stay away. On the other hand, sharing off-the-cuff (without prayerful study and written answers) has proven too often to be disruptive and misleading.

--If the student is self-centered and tries to dominate the discussion, the group leader must speak to him privately and gently explain the problem, requesting his cooperation within the study guidelines. If the student persists in unacceptable behavior, that student is asked to remain silent or leave the study. (It is better to lose one destructive student than to lose the entire group.)

- Try to bring out the best in each student.
- Occasionally there is just one correct answer; when that is given, do not allow haggling, just move on to the next question.
- At the end of the discussion period, distribute next week's Summary/Worksheet for the students' home study (not required if participants have purchased individual workbooks).
- If time runs out before ALL questions are answered, BREAK anyway. People need the coffee break in order to move around and relax. This is very important. The student needs to be refreshed and ready to concentrate on the upcoming lecture. This should seldom occur. Manage your time; a student may really need an answer to the last question. Time allowed is 45 minutes for small group sharing.
- The first night of the study is a good time to explain the expectations of the group. We share as a community in love, kindness and consideration. This is not just an intellectual study.

### **Lecturer**

Open with a short prayer.

Prepare (rehearse / edit) and deliver the commentary on Sacred Scriptures for the week. Present the material with personal enthusiasm.

Each lesson contains a great deal of material. The lecturer should read and rehearse ahead of time for a most effective presentation. It need not all be presented. Time allowed is 45-60 minutes per lecture.

You may also elect to play Fr. O'Bryan's recorded tapes or CD's. These are available wherever the studies are sold. They are also excellent for personal review and reflection. (Note: many groups have done years of lessons listening to Father's original recordings...they are great!)

**Total Class Time - 2 Hours Each Week!**

## **ESTABLISHING A CATHOLIC BIBLE STUDY IN YOUR PARISH**

### **The Catholic Bible Study: INVITATION TO CHRISTIAN DICIPLESHP**

By James P. O'Bryan S.T.

This Bible Study is designed to be presented by the laity but it may also be presented by religious. The number of participants will determine whether the study should be presented in the parish hall, class-rooms, or in homes. Some parishes have fifty or more people wanting to attend. (When this study was first presented by Fr. O'Bryan, it drew from the entire diocese, not from just one parish. There were 200 people at both the morning and evening session for the seven years...that's right, 400 people each week attended the study in one place.)

Many groups, large and small, still prefer to use the original (and recommended), method because it provides the fullness of the work. First, the full lecture, or an edited version, is presented by a "lecturer". The lecturer should spend time in prayerful preparation each week before presenting the material, and it should be presented with enthusiasm. Tapes and CDs of Father's original lectures are also available for purchase. They often are used in place of a lecturer. Listening to his recorded lectures at leisure, and being able to pause and replay them provides a wealth of information each week.

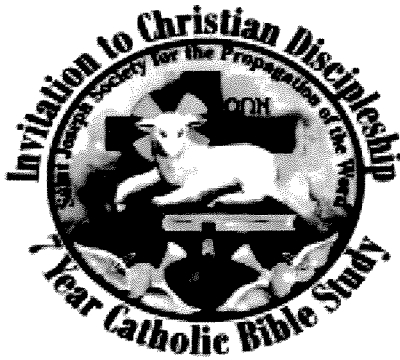
The homework portion of the study calls us to obedience and daily prayer as we strive to complete our assignment. Homework is a major factor in our personal spiritual growth. How much time will you give to God? The recommended method requires 2 hours each week as a group and additional study time at home, but the rewards are tremendous. This format may be used in homes or parishes.

A variation on the above, used successfully with High School groups (as large as 50) and adults, is to present the Summaries in place of the full lecture. Homework is assigned, answers are shared in a group, and then the Summary is read for the following week. All students have their printed assignments or workbooks. Homework may be trimmed to one or two questions per day for high schoolers (they already have homework to do). This method can reduce a session to about one hour total rather than 2 hours. This method is useful for severely time-challenged people, but the summaries only include about 20% of the complete lecture. However, the purchase of the recorded lectures which can be listened to during the week may be useful in providing a fuller experience for those who are unable to attend the full sessions.

A more recent method has also been successful for small home groups. Instead of using the Lectures and a lecturer, only the Bible and the Summary/Worksheets or Meditation Workbooks are used. Group members take turns reading aloud the Summary and the Bible references in the workbook--answering the questions as they go along. This eliminates the requirement for homework. A leader is still necessary at each meeting--one leader can be chosen for the whole study, or the attendees can take turns. (Note: Again, listening to parts of the recorded lecture in free time during the week may be helpful in providing more than the 20% of information given in the Summary. Also, the homework portion, though a pain to many, has a place in our lives as we strive to be more obedient to God's call).

All of the above styles have proven to be successful for different people in different situations. Start one in your community today!





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\* Available June 2008; (All are available now in 3-ring binder form @ \$40 + tax + S&H)

### **Other Catholic Teachings by Fr. O'Bryan**

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### **LIBROS EN ESPANOL**

Most of the scripture studies shown above are available in Spanish. The Spanish versions are student workbooks in 3-ring binders 8 1/2" x 11". These may be ordered at the price of \$14+ \$1.09 tax + \$5 shipping & handling (\$20.09 total).