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well have affected the kind of language which Paul uses.[16] One of the essential differences between 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5 is the fact that the former is dealing with the totality of humanity at the general resurrection, whereas 2 Corinthians 5 is dealing with the individual. Two different questions are therefore being asked and answered. In 1 Corinthians 15 the issue is, 'How are the dead raised and with what body will they come?', whereas in 2 Corinthians the issue is what happens to believers at death: 'Is there complete separation between them and Christ until the consummation of all things?', and 'Is it possible that believers may be with Christ (cf. Phil. 1.23) unclothed (i.e., without his heavenly body) until the consummation of all things, when they would be clothed with the body of glory (cf. Rev. 6.9–11)?'

An answer to these questions could be given by assuming that Paul's thought developed to a significant degree.[17] Such an answer assumes that what we have in these documents are three systematic presentations of Paul's thought at different stages of his career. While we cannot exclude the possibility that the apostle's thought *did* undergo some changes over the years (particularly as the imminence of his death loomed or the demands for community coherence intensified), it would be dangerous to suppose that the differences which can be detected necessarily mean significant shifts in his thought, as it is essential to take full account of the circumstances which led to the formulation within each letter.[18]

4

Major Themes of Paul's Letters

During this century, there has been a continuing debate between those who located the heart of Paul's gospel in Romans and Galatians in the idea of justification by faith, and those who have followed Schweitzer in speaking of Paul's mystical doctrine of incorporation in the body of Christ.[1] At the beginning of Romans, Paul sets out the heart of his gospel and begins with an eschatological foundation (Rom. 1.16ff.):

> For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, 'The

> one who is righteous will live by faith'. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and wickedness of those who by their wickedness suppress the truth.

The good news which Paul proclaims is about the power or saving action of God in the world.[2] This is the manifestation of God's righteous character; it is a God who liberated a people out of bondage in Egypt and keeps faith with them by manifesting righteousness in the eschatological acts of power associated with the life, death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The manifestation of God's righteousness is, ultimately, salvation to those who believe (though it is anticipated in this age through the Holy Spirit) and continue in that faith, but it involves judgement, wrath, working against all that stands against God. The action about which Paul speaks is not merely concerned with the individual's salvation (though that is included) but also with the demonstration of the power of God in the cosmos as a whole. This passage is important because it reminds us that Paul saw the effects of the Christ-event in more than individual terms. Christ's death was not just 'for me' (Gal. 2.20); its effects did not merely depend on its appropriation by the individual, for he believed it set in train a sequence of events which would lead to final acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ by the universe as a whole (1 Cor. 15.25f.; Phil. 2.11).

Paul's understanding starts with the resurrected Jesus whom he saw on the Damascus road, and the experience of the Spirit. The vision of Christ on the Damascus road was of the same kind as the visions granted to the Prophets at their call and is also similar to those described in some apocalyptic writings. Paul received the revelation (*apokalypsis*) of the gospel and as a part of it, the revelation of the 'mystery' (*mysterion*), namely, God's plan of salvation embodied in Christ for both Jews and Gentiles.[3] The resurrection of Jesus marks the beginning of the cosmic process of transformation (1 Cor. 15.20). Meanwhile Christ reigns in heaven with God, until the universal sovereignty is acknowledged throughout creation and God can be all in all (1 Cor. 15.28). By asserting the reality of the resurrection, even of just one person, Paul took up a Jewish eschatological scheme, and modified it. With the exception of Matthew 27.52f., which presents peculiar problems to the interpreter, early Christians did not assert that the general resurrection had taken place, but that it had happened only in the case of one human being. Therefore, it became necessary to modify the eschatological expectation by regarding the resurrection of Jesus as an anticipatory act peculiar to him, which nevertheless was a sign that the sequence of events associated with the coming of the kingdom of God had already been set in train.

Paul's hope is a theme which occurs throughout his letters (e.g., Rom. 5.2; 8.24f.; 1 Thess. 1.9f.; 2 Cor. 5.10). This hope complements the belief in the resurrection of Jesus. As 1 Corinthians 15.20ff. makes plain, the heart of

Christian experience is bipolar in character. It looks back to a decisive event at Calvary and Easter and forward to the completion of that train of events set in action by the cross.[4] Christians are in an 'in-between period', when they groan, longing for the consummation of the divine purposes (Rom. 8.18ff.), but they are assured that the time will come when, with the return of Christ, the elect will be vindicated (1 Thess. 4.15) and the creation be redeemed into the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8.21). That in-between stage is marked not by knowledge but by faith and hope (2 Cor. 5.7; Rom. 8.24f.). At present, the believer can only see in a glass darkly (1 Cor. 13.12). Seeing face to face or, in Johannine language equally drawn from Jewish eschatological ideas, 'being like Christ' (1 John 3.2), is still to come; it is the moment when Christ 'will change our lowly body into the likeness of his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself' (Phil. 3.21).

Paul's eschatological belief is not confined to the resurrection of Jesus and its consequences. The present 'in-between' stage is itself marked as an eschatological time. Paul can tell the Corinthians that they are those 'upon whom the end of the age has come' (1 Cor. 10.11). The sign of this is that believers now taste of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12.13; cf. Heb. 6.4). Picking up a belief, which is to be found in some Jewish texts (cf. *tSotah* 13.2), Paul thinks of the Spirit as itself a mark of the presence of the new age. It is 'the first fruits' (Rom. 8.23), the seal placed in the hearts of believers as a guarantee (Rom. 8.23; cf. Eph. 1.14; 2 Cor. 1.22; Acts 2.17). The return of the Spirit was believed to coincide with an outburst of prophetic activity, and such activity was characteristic of the Pauline communities (1 Cor. 12–14; Rom. 12.6; 1 Thess. 5.19; cf. Eph. 4.11; Acts 11.28). Like the book of Revelation, which marks the breaking in of the last things with the presence of the prophetic witness (Rev. 19.10; chs 10–11), Paul and his churches experience the revival of the gift of prophecy, a sign that the promises of God were being fulfilled. Thus the present is not merely a time of waiting, for the communities can already taste what it is like in the kingdom of God within the fellowship of the Church. Here 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal. 3.28; cf. Col. 3.11). It is the Spirit, of which all have drunk, which brings about this unity and breaks down divisions (1 Cor. 12.13), so that the community of believers can be compared to the human body, each with its different contribution to make but united to one another and to Christ by the Holy Spirit.

The twin beliefs of resurrection and Spirit are the foundations upon which the whole of Paul's theology is built. He starts with the conviction that Christ is vindicated and raised, and the experience of the Holy Spirit, and from these works back to an understanding of the world without Christ and a world under the Law and the rulers of this darkness. For Paul the concept

of the two ages is an important way of characterizing the difference between the past and the present (cf. Gal. 4.1–5). Christ delivers believers 'from the present evil age' (Gal. 1.4) and by implication allows them to participate in a new age (cf. Rom. 12.2; 1 Cor. 2.6ff.; 2 Cor. 4.4). Although Paul does not use the contrast between this age and the age to come (cf. Eph. 1.21) familiar to us from Jewish eschatology, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that he presupposes it.

It is a commonplace in rabbinic eschatology to find the contrast between the present age with all its inadequacies and weaknesses and the glorious future when God's kingdom would come, characterized by the contrast, 'this age and the age to come' (*ha- 'olam ha-zeh/ha- 'olam ha-ba'*).[5] The coming of Christ and the events of his Passion and resurrection mark a decisive turning point in God's dealings with humanity. Until Christ the Law was the custodian; it played its part as a necessary part of the divine economy in demonstrating transgression (Gal. 3.19; Rom. 5.20). Until Christ, there was no opportunity for the Gentiles to become heirs of Abraham except through circumcision and the acceptance of the Law.[6] But with the coming of Christ all this has changed. Now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the Law, though the latter bears witness to this righteous manifestation of God's power (Rom. 3.21). God acts in power and offers salvation. With the coming of Christ, humanity is faced with the challenge of either accepting the righteousness of God, or rejecting it and finding itself subject to God's wrath, which is now being revealed. The righteousness of God is demonstrated by a gracious divine willingness to act, despite human impiety (Rom. 5.6). The eschatological action of God is a free gift which one can do nothing to earn, but must either accept in faith and so escape the wrath which is coming (Rom. 5.8), or reject and find oneself under judgement. The way of God's saving act places all without distinction in the realm of sin (Rom. 3.23). All are part of the old aeon of sin and death. The only way of transferring from the old domain to the new is through faith in God's Messiah, who alone can deliver from the evil age (Gal. 1.4), for he has conquered those powers who dominate it and will ultimately demonstrate his triumph over them when they acknowledge his lordship (1 Cor. 2.9; cf. 15.25ff.; Phil. 2.11).[7]

The present is a time of both fulfilment and ambiguity for believers. They wait in hope (Rom. 8.18ff.), though they have the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8.23). Yet Paul regards the present as a time of struggle and suffering. We saw, in considering Jewish eschatology, that a central component of the future hope was the belief that before the age to come finally came, there must be a time of great distress on the earth, when the elect may be expected to suffer. It is a theme which is echoed in the eschatological discourses in the Gospels (Mark 13 and par., esp. vv.7–13). Paul often writes of tribulations, as, for example, in Romans 2.9, Romans 8.35 and in 1 Thessalonians 3.3, 7

(cf. Rev. 2.22; 7.14). Elsewhere, the sufferings of the present time are discussed in a context dealing explicitly with the eschatological events (Rom. 8.18), and it would appear that the travail and persecution endured by believers is viewed by Paul as their undergoing of that tribulation which is a necessary prelude to the arrival of the new age.[8] This suffering, however, is not seen as a necessary evil. Christians can rejoice in their present sufferings (Rom. 5.3). Indeed, it is possible for there to be reciprocal support between believers, so that the full quota of suffering is shared by all (2 Cor. 1.3ff.; Col. 1.24).[9]

In outlining Paul's gospel, nothing has been said so far about the cross. The question must be asked whether the death of Christ plays any *decisive and central role* in Paul's thought; did Paul view Christ's death as a sacrifice needed to reconcile humanity and God? Sacrificial terms are not frequent in Paul's thought,[10] and much will depend on the weight that is attached to the passage in Romans 3.21ff., where the word 'expiation/propitiation' makes its only appearance in Paul's letters and the word 'redemption' makes one of its occasional appearances. Many have argued that passages like Romans 3.21ff.; 4.25, which seem to reflect an emphasis on the sacrificial, atoning death of Christ, are relics of earlier formulae taken over by Paul and used in these contexts.[11] Paul does quote these formulae, and, therefore, indicates his acceptance of that understanding of the Christ-event, which gives a role to the atoning death of Jesus (e.g., Heb.; 1 Cor. 15.3; Mark 10.45; 1 Pet. 1.18f.; 2.21ff.).[12]

Paul, therefore, accepts that stream of interpretation which finds its classic expression in Hebrews, but for him the significance of the cross does not lie primarily in the significance of a death as an atoning sacrifice.[13] For Paul, Christ's death cannot be separated from his resurrection. Justification is only complete if both the death and resurrection are taken into account, as Romans 4.25 and 1 Corinthians 15 make plain. The cross is the stumbling block which finally puts to an end the wisdom of the world (1 Cor. 1.17ff.). The cruel and ignominious end of the messianic pretender is, in Paul's eyes, the decisive revelation of God's wisdom. In the cross the rulers of this age considered that they had defeated the lord of glory (1 Cor. 2.9). The cross marked the moment of triumph for Christ, when, by putting off the body of flesh, he triumphed over the principalities and powers (Col. 2.14f.; cf. 1 Pet. 3.22).

The issue is made more poignant for Paul the Jew because, as he points out in Galatians 3.13, 'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.' The cross marks in the most decisive way possible the end of the old aeon. The period of the Law had come to an end with the cross, for the crucifixion of the Messiah had effectively shown that the Law was never intended as a means of salvation, but as a witness to the glory to come. The cross is to be understood as the gateway to eschatological glory for Christ and ultimately for believers. It stands before humanity as a scandal, representing a moment of crisis.

It appears to be folly to humanity, but in it is revealed the wisdom of God, because God has chosen what is weak and foolish (1 Cor. 1.27). It is only by accepting what is foolish in human eyes, 'a stumbling-block to Jews and folly to Greeks', that one will be able to see that in it God has offered the source of new life in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1.20). It is when one can see glory in the cross of Christ that a path is opened to a new creation where neither circumcision nor uncircumcision, Jew nor Gentile, Law or no Law have any place (Gal. 6.15f.). Just as the resurrection and the bestowal of the Spirit mark the dawn of the new age, so the cross just as decisively marks the end of the old aeon. It is only when believers die with Christ, something which takes place in baptism (Rom. 6.5ff.), that they can walk in newness of life (Rom. 6.4) and pass from the present evil age (Gal. 1.4). The death and resurrection of Christ mark the discontinuity between the old age and the new. History is divided into the era of the old Adam and that of the eschatological Adam (Rom. 5.12–21). The death of Christ involves the conflict with sin viewed as a cosmic power. The gospel announces the negation of the power of sin that controls the world: 'The old has passed away . . . the new has come' (2 Cor. 5.17), and a new creation has been established (*kaine ktisis*, 2 Cor. 5.17; Gal. 6.15).[14]

Being in Christ means being part of a new order, therefore, initiated by Christ's resurrection and entered by believers at baptism, when they receive the Spirit (1 Cor. 12.13). But it is not merely a relationship with an absent Messiah whose return is still expected but also a participation with others, who have been baptized in the same Spirit (1 Cor. 12.13), in a common life, almost a new holy space, initiated and determined by the events of Christ's life. The ideal picture of the new community (for this is what Paul offers in his letters; the reality was often very different) is of a group of individuals related to Christ through the Spirit (1 Cor. 6.15ff.), each of equal importance in the eyes of God and yet with different functions within the community. Paul's most distinctive image for the Church is the body (Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12).[15] If 1 Corinthians is anything to go by, its common life is characterized by a common meal (1 Cor. 11.18ff.), in which the community expresses its unity with its Lord through a repetition of the words and acts of Jesus at the Last Supper (11.23ff.): it is nothing less than a participation in the body and blood of Christ (10.16), an anticipation of the messianic banquet in the Last Days.[16] The meeting for worship is characterized by spontaneity: prophecy, visions and revelations and hymns, all contributed by different members of the community (1 Cor. 14.26f.). Women, if properly attired, may participate in the prayer and prophecy of the meeting (1 Cor. 11.5, 13).[17]

The community is a holy enclave amidst an age which is passing away. It is a community where the Holy Spirit dwells and is described by Paul as the Temple of God, the location of God's presence on earth (1 Cor. 3.16; 6.19). Like the righteous group in the desert, about which we now know so much

as the result of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the early Christian communities were a colony of heaven on earth, a present demonstration of the holiness of God.[18] They are the saints (1 Cor. 1.2), not because they keep the commandments and maintain the degree of purity necessary to be a holy people of God, but because they have been sanctified in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. 1.2); they have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6.19); they were washed, sanctified and justified (1 Cor. 6.11); and their bodies are a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3.16). The language of the cult and sacrifice is transferred to the life of the holy community. They offer spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12.1), and both apostle and community can by their deeds offer a sacrifice, acceptable and pleasing to God (Phil. 4.18; 2 Cor. 2.14f.).

Paul says little explicitly about the exercise of authority within the community (apart, that is, from persuading Christians to accept the basis of his own divine authority). The Lord is the Spirit (2 Cor. 3.17), and it is the Spirit who inspires the Church and bestows gifts for edification upon its members (1 Cor. 12.4ff.). There are some gifts which call for particular mention: apostleship, prophecy, miraculous deeds, teaching, helping, administration, speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 12.28). Only once in the indisputably authentic letters (that is, outside Ephesians and the Pastoral Epistles) is mention made of bishops/overseers and deacons (Phil. 1.1).This contrasts with the Pastoral Epistles, where 'Paul' instructs his helpers to set up church officers in the various communities to carry on the work. In Acts, Paul and Barnabas are represented as those who set up elders in the churches (Acts 14.23), though this finds no explicit parallel in the authentic Pauline letters. Nevertheless, mention should be made of the occasional hint which indicates that Paul did not entirely ignore the provision of oversight in his churches, for example 1 Corinthians 16.15f. Here we have a recognition of pastoral oversight, though without the word 'overseer' (*episkopos*) being used. The basis of it may be related to one of the gifts in the list in 1 Corinthians 12, though it is not explicitly so stated there; only that as the earliest converts the household of Stephanas have a position of pre-eminence, based not only on the length of their discipleship but also on the quality of their ministry and social position.[19]

As far as Christian living was concerned, Paul refused to allow his communities to adopt an escapist attitude, so that the purity of their life and the ideals of their faith might be translated into practice without hindrance from the world (1 Cor. 5.10). There is an uneasy tension here between the belief that the life of the age to come can already be experienced and that in Christ all barriers are transcended, and the fact of relating to 'the old age', in the practical advice given by the apostle. Paul refuses to allow the converts to shake the fabric of society too much (1 Cor. 7.17ff.).[20] Even within the life of the community, contemporary cultural norms intrude (1 Cor. 14.34).[21] Even if Paul does not challenge the relationship between slave and master in his

detailed ethical advice, the harsher realities of that relationship are mitigated (Col. 4.1). Nor should one miss the significance of the advice to Philemon to regard his runaway slave Onesimus as a 'beloved brother' (Philemon v. 16).

Paul may have been influenced by the view that the present world order was not much longer to be in existence and would be swept away in the establishment of the kingdom of God on earth (cf. 1 Cor. 7.26: 'In view of the impending distress it is as well for people to remain as they are', and also v.31). State, slavery and sexual relationships are not explicitly challenged by Paul. Yet it would be a mistake to miss the revolutionary concept for which Paul fought: the breaking down of barriers between Jew and Gentile. His confrontation with Peter at Antioch (Gal. 2.10) indicates that previous patterns of relating cannot now apply to life in the Christian community. The Spirit apportions the gifts in ways beyond human control, for with God there is no partiality. While we may expect that, in practice, the more important gifts of oversight would have been linked with the head of the household rather than the humbler (in terms of wealth and status) members, that pattern is not explicitly supported by Paul. The focus of the revolution is complete communion between Jews and Gentiles within the body of Christ. Pauline Christianity eschewed withdrawal from the world and stressed the need for accommodation with the old aeon. In this the ethical principle of care for the weaker brother and sister enunciated in 1 Corinthians 8 and based on 'the law of Christ' (Gal. 6.2) injected a fresh dimension into the ethical response of the believer, which slowly made its impact on the surrounding culture.[22]

5

Apostle to the Gentiles

Why did Paul have the burning conviction that he had been set apart as the apostle to the Gentiles, commissioned by the Messiah himself to preach the good news to the nations (Gal. 1.16)? The answer to that question probably lies in some of the Jewish traditions he had inherited. We have already noted that Jesus would have shared the beliefs of many Jews that Jewish outcasts (Isa. 11.12) and some Gentiles would participate in the glories of the new age.[1] Such ideas have their origins within the Bible (e.g., Zech. 8.20) and were taken up in later Jewish sources (e.g., 1 Enoch 90.30), where the acceptance by the Gentiles of the way of Israel takes place as one of the