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in

The New Cambridge companion to St. Paul

Ed. B. W. Longenecker.

Cambridge University Press pp 187-209

10 What Did Paul Think God Is Doing about What's Wrong?

MICHAEL J. GORMAN

One of the most unforgettable songs in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof* is entitled "To Life," or (in Hebrew and Yiddish) "L'Chaim." It joyfully expresses our deep longing for human flourishing. This desire for life is not far from the biblical notion of shalom. Often translated as "peace," the Hebrew word *shalom* also signifies life in its fullness, including right relations with God, with others, and with the entire creation.

Such fullness of life, however, often escapes us in this fractured world. The apostle Paul, looking back on his own story before being transformed by Christ, and scrutinizing both the wider world and his own people, sensed the need for such life: life in its fullness; a world restored to wholeness.

The previous chapter considered different aspects of the human predicament. Understanding Paul's perspective on the human condition is vital to appreciating what he sees as the divine solution to the human problem. In traditional language, this chapter will consider Paul's understanding of "salvation" – God's rescuing people, and eventually the entire cosmos, from the reign of the powers of Sin and Death, thereby offering the gift of new life through Jesus Christ. This means that the present chapter flows inevitably and inseparably out of the preceding chapter and into the next (which will focus specifically on what God is doing within Christian communities).

FRAMING THE SUBJECT

Paul makes use of various metaphors or images to explain his underlying understanding of salvation. These metaphors or images express his highly complex solution to a highly complex problem. The diverse images he uses are not just various expressions of one simple reality called "salvation" but are, instead, interrelated images of the diverse dimensions of this complex solution. Paul probes the breadth and depth of the problem's "fix" as fully as he explores the problem itself, and the

various metaphors and images are themselves essential components of Paul's multifaceted articulation of what God is doing in Christ.

Paul's various images of salvation are frequently interpreted in an individualistic and private way, reflecting the ethos of Western society, where (historically) most interpretations of Paul have occurred. Paul, in contrast, understands salvation and life to be corporate as well as individual, social and even political as well as "spiritual," and cosmic as well as human.

Because Paul was a Jew, his description of the multifaceted and multilayered resolution of the human condition is very Jewish in character. Images like new creation, new exodus, and new covenant are central to his discourse, and his understanding of salvation involves the rescue and renewing of a people – a corporate body, not just individuals. At the same time, Paul revised all of these images in light of the peculiar character of the story of Jesus, especially his death and resurrection.

So what does Paul's complex, corporate Jewish understanding of salvation look like? In brief, we may characterize what Paul thought God is doing as follows:

> God is creating a forgiven, liberated, and reconciled people who are being renewed together in the image of God, found in the crucified and resurrected Messiah Jesus, so that they, by the power of the indwelling Spirit, will lead lives of faithfulness, hope, and love as the body of the Messiah in the world – the people of the new covenant and new creation inaugurated by Christ's coming, death, and resurrection, all in anticipation of the restoration of the entire cosmos.

More briefly, we may say that, for Paul, God is now enabling transformative participation in the life of God the Father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This can all be captured in a single word: life.

DIVINE INITIATIVE: GOD'S GRACE

In Paul's view, human beings cannot simply extricate themselves from the mess that engulfs them. Neither can the Jewish law save people, whether Jewish or gentile. Although it is holy and good (Rom 7:12–13), the law cannot give life (Gal 3:21); it is impotent in the face of the human predicament (Rom 8:3). In fact, the situation is so dire that it is beyond human making; there are malevolent powers at work, especially what Paul calls the powers of Sin and Death. If the Jewish law cannot

give life and fix the problem, neither can human effort. Nor can political entities save humanity, as they are often corporate incarnations of the problems present in individuals and even instruments of the powers of Sin and Death; after all, "the rulers of this age ... crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8). Humanity is in a "dead end" situation that requires an intervention – a benevolent, divine intervention.

According to Paul, that is precisely what has taken place in what is sometimes referred to as the "Christ-event." More insightfully, some label it the divine *apocalypse* – an earth-shattering event of divine revelation. Note the following texts (drawn from across the Pauline letters) that stress God's initiative, paying special attention to the way some highlight the stark contrast between the human predicament and divine action:

- In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them. (2 Cor 5:19)
- For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3–4)
- [The Lord Jesus] was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification. (Rom 4:25)
- For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all. (Titus 2:11)
- For you know the generous act [lit. "grace"] of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich. (2 Cor 8:9)
- God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Rom 5:8)
- God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved. (Eph 2:4–5)
- When the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" (Gal 4:4–6)
- Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off [gentiles] have been brought near by the blood of Christ. (Eph 2:13)

Several observations about this brief collection of texts (which could easily be expanded) are in order:

(1) They testify to the inability of humans to engage in self-rescue, highlighting the merciful action of God to rectify the human condition. The key Pauline word for this is *grace*.
(2) They indicate that both gentiles and Jews (that is, all people) need saving.
(3) They inform us that the primary reality that needs to be addressed is sin, whether that be Sin (singular) or sins/trespasses (plural).
(4) They reveal that the divine intervention involves three parties acting in concert: (1) God (i.e., God the Father); (2) God's own Son; and (3) the Spirit, who is identified as both the Spirit of the Son (Gal 4:6 above; cf. Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19) and the Spirit of God (e.g., Rom 8:11, 14).
(5) They state or imply that this divine rescue occurs through both the death and the resurrection of Jesus, and through our participating in that two-part event.
(6) They suggest that the result of this rescue operation will be the reparation of relationships, both "vertical" (people to God) and "horizontal" (people to people, especially between gentiles and Jews).
(7) They demonstrate that salvation includes new life under the direction of the Spirit. For Paul, what God has done in Christ impacts the ethical life of believers. People are not just saved *from* something; they are saved *for* something.

We will consider each of these observations more or less in sequence, though there will inevitably be some reshuffling and overlap. Moreover, we will focus our attention on various aspects of the fourth, fifth, and sixth observations, since the first three and the last are discussed in the previous and subsequent chapters of this book, respectively.

THE GOSPEL OF ISRAEL'S FAITHFUL AND GRACIOUS GOD: POWERFUL GOOD NEWS FOR ALL

In the first chapter of his majestic letter to the Romans, Paul describes his message of salvation as "good news" – that is, as the "gospel." It is the gospel of God concerning his Son (1:1, 3, 9), which Paul proclaims like a trumpeting herald without shame (1:15–16). This last remark raises the question, "Why might the gospel cause shame?" The answer: Paul's

gospel centers on a crucified Messiah, "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to gentiles" (1 Cor 1:23). Crucifixion was a horrific form of death and deterrence; it was a topic to be avoided in polite conversation. For Paul, however, the crucifixion of Jesus revealed, paradoxically, "the power and wisdom of God" (1 Cor 1:24). He captures this paradox in 1 Corinthians 1:18: "The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The saving power of the cross is not self-evident, but for those who have believed the gospel and are in the process of being transformed by its power, the cross is in fact the event of God's saving activity.

Of course the *cross* of Jesus has no saving power apart from the *resurrection* of Jesus, as Paul makes clear at length in 1 Corinthians 15 and in brief at the start of Romans: Jesus "was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by resurrection from the dead" (Rom 1:4). Accordingly, as we will see in more detail below, the saving event (and thus the good news) is constituted by both the death and the resurrection of Jesus. For now, however, we return to Paul's summary of the gospel in Romans 1, offering two further observations.

First, Paul indicates that the gospel was "promised beforehand through his [God's] prophets in the holy scriptures," and that Jesus (God's "Son" and the gospel's fundamental content) "was descended from David according to the flesh" (Rom 1:2–4). Paul's gospel recounts the promised saving activity of Israel's God through the royal Davidic Messiah, Jesus.

Second, echoing 1 Corinthians, Paul says this gospel "is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith, to the Jew first and also to the Greek [gentile]" (Rom 1:16). This salvation from the God of Israel is for all people because this God is the only God, the God of all (Rom 3:29). The phrase "Jew and gentile/Greek" becomes a refrain throughout Romans (1:16; 2:9–10; 3:9; 9:24; 10:12; 15:7–12).

The gospel, then, is power. It *affects* people. It *effects* transformation. It engenders life. As a "performative utterance," the gospel is a declaration that causes something to happen, like the performative utterances "I now pronounce you husband and wife" and "Let there be light." Paul summarizes the content of this transformative good news in Rom 1:17: "For in it the righteousness [or justice] of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written [in the prophet Habakkuk], 'The one who is righteous will live by faith'" – or perhaps "'the one who is righteous by faith (or faithfulness) will live!'"

This sentence has received significant scholarly scrutiny. My own interpretation is one shared by many, though not all: "In the gospel,

God's justice (that is, the transformative saving power of God that makes things right again) is revealed through the faithful death of Jesus for the purpose of creating a faithful people who share in the faithfulness of Jesus displayed on the cross and thereby share also in his resurrection life." This interpretation depends on both an analysis of Romans as a whole and a close reading of Rom 3:21–26 (discussed below), which is often understood as an expansion of the succinct summary of Paul's gospel in Rom 1:16–17.

THE (APOCALYPTIC) NEW COVENANT: THE SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

To say that the saving power of God is intended to create a people goes against the grain of much Western thinking about religion, and even much Christian thinking about "salvation." But if the gospel is grounded in Israel's Scriptures, then it will be about a people, and not merely about individuals. As Israel's Scriptures attest, the people of Israel had been chosen to be in a faithful and loving relationship with their God and to live righteously and justly in relationship with others, giving special attention to the weak, the immigrant, the widow, and the orphan. As such, this people would be a light to the gentiles/nations (Isa 42:6–7).

The two tables of the Mosaic law (Exod 20:1–20; cf. Deut 5:5–21) represented the fundamental obligations of this binding relationship, or covenant. These obligations were frequently summarized by Jews as love for God and love for neighbor, as we see even in the words of Jesus (Mark 12:28–34 and parallels) According to Paul, these basic obligations to God and others were not restricted to Jews but were expected of all people. However, human beings are covenantally dysfunctional – unwilling and unable to fulfill even the most basic obligations to God and to others. Instead, idolatry, immorality, injustice, and violence reign among humans (Rom 1:18–32).

Jewish prophets long before Paul had recognized Israel's failure to keep the covenant, both its "vertical" and its "horizontal" dimensions. They promised a day when a "dead" Israel would be revivified, a day in which the law and the Spirit of God would be internalized, with the law placed in the human heart (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:17–20; 36:23–28; 37; Deut 30:1–8). At that time, the covenant would be renewed and the people would live faithfully as originally set out by God: "I will be your God, and you will be my people" (a scriptural refrain known as the covenant formula). In other texts, certain prophetic voices expected

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the gentiles to be included in the scope of God's future blessings, an expectation that became central to Paul's theology. This renewed covenant involves such a transformation of the people and their relationship with God that Jeremiah calls it a *new* covenant (Jer 31:31), and Paul, echoing both Jeremiah and Jesus, uses the same language (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; cf. Luke 22:20).

Although some scholars doubt the importance of "covenant" for Paul, it seems clear that Paul believes the death of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit have inaugurated this new covenant. As illustrated by Gal 4:4–6 (quoted above), the death of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit belong hand in hand and must not be separated. This two-part divine intervention has created a people that is not marked by physical circumcision but is open to all: "real circumcision is a matter of the heart – it is spiritual and not literal" (Rom 2:29a). This spiritual heart surgery is what Paul calls becoming part of a "new creation" (Gal 6:15). That is, the new covenant also means new creation, and hence new life (see also 2 Cor 5:17, discussed below).

The influential scholar E. P. Sanders coined the term "covenantal nomism" (from Greek *nomos*, "law") to describe the essence of Second Temple Judaism. This term summarizes Sanders's answer to two basic questions: (1) how did Jews *get into* the covenant, and (2) how did they *stay in*? Sanders proposed that they *got in* by grace and *stayed in* by faithful obedience, that is, by observance of the law. They did not get in, or "earn" salvation, by good works (as many Christians have thought over the years). Whatever the fate of Sanders's proposals, his questions are important, and are taken up by Paul. How do we "get in"? Paul's answer is, "By the grace of God demonstrated in the death of Jesus." How do we "stay in" and keep covenant? Paul's answer is, "By the power of God made available by the indwelling Spirit."

This new covenant is, however, *radically and unexpectedly* new; hence the label "apocalyptic" new covenant. God's act was a shocking revelation. No prophet foresaw the odd way God would intervene. No prophet imagined that the shameful death of a crucified Messiah would inaugurate the new covenant.

We turn now to consider Jesus' strange but saving death, though this cannot be considered in isolation from either his coming ("incarnation") or his resurrection. Indeed, we will start with the inseparability of these major aspects of what God has done in Jesus for the salvation of the world, before looking in some depth at the significance of the cross in Paul's theology.

THE *MEANS* OF SALVATION: THE MESSIAH'S COMING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION/EXALTATION

In this and the following sections of the chapter, I will distinguish between the *means* and the *mode* of salvation: that is, the *objective* act of God and the *subjective* human response to that act.

The Unity of God's Action in Christ

Although it is sometimes thought that Christ's death is *the* saving event for Paul, this perspective underestimates Christ's initial coming (what Christians would later call "the incarnation") and especially his resurrection. Together, Christ's coming, his death, and his resurrection/exaltation are sometimes designated "the Christ-event." It is perhaps best to replace this rather cold term with "the Christ-story," as long as we remember that the story refers to real events, or one dramatic event in three movements, not to some pious fiction.

Regarding the initial coming of Jesus, several texts suggest that this is an important part of Paul's vision of the Messiah's activity. Galatians 4 speaks of God's sending the Son, born of a woman "under the [Jewish] law" (Gal 4:4). Second Corinthians 8:9 characterizes the "grace" (or "gift") of Jesus as his self-impoverishment for our enrichment. This text probably refers to the entirety of Jesus' mission, including his incarnation and death, while emphasizing the incarnation in particular. Similarly, the Christ-poem in Philippians (which some call Paul's "master story") portrays "the mind of Christ": Jesus Christ first voluntarily "emptied himself" (figuratively speaking) in becoming human and then, similarly, humbled himself in an obedience that led to crucifixion:

> Though he [Christ Jesus] was in the form of God, [he] did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. (Phil 2:6–8)

But this, of course, is not the end of the story. The Philippian poem ends not in death, but in exaltation:

> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue

> should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil 2:9–11)

This inseparable connection between Christ's death and his resurrection is consistently depicted throughout Paul's writings, including the following texts:

- [Jesus our Lord] was handed over to death for our trespasses and was raised for our justification. (Rom 4:25)
- Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. (Rom 8:34)
- For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might be Lord of both the dead and the living. (Rom 14:9)
- And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. (2 Cor 5:15)
- [Paul's apostleship is] through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead. (Gal 1:1)
- For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. (1 Thess 4:14)

This pattern of humiliation/suffering/death leading to exaltation/vindication/life is common in Israel's Scriptures, reaching a climax in Isaiah's fourth servant poem (Isa 52:13–53:12): "Therefore I [YHWH] will allot him [my servant] a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out himself to death, and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (53:12; cf. 52:13).

A critical text connecting Christ's death and resurrection appears in another gospel summary, one that Paul received and passed on to the Corinthians. This summary contends

> that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. (1 Cor 15:3b–5)

Here we see the two-part saving event of (1) Christ's death for sins and (2) his being raised (by God) on the third day, each according to Scripture (recall Rom 1:2). The reality of each component is demonstrated, respectively, by reference to (1) Christ's burial and (2) his appearances. As we will discuss below, people benefit from this

two-part saving act by not only believing that it occurred (and occurred for their benefit) but also by participating in it.

New Exodus and New Covenant: Christ's Death for Sin, for Sins, for Us

According to Paul's account of the Lord's Supper (in which he again passes on a tradition he has received), Jesus said this on the eve of his crucifixion: "This [broken loaf of bread] is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me .... This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24–25; cf. Luke 22:14–20). Jesus' imminent death would be the inauguration of the new covenant, just as covenant renewal in Israel came by sacrifice (Exod 24:1–8).

The gospel summary in 1 Corinthians 15 says Jesus died "for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3). Israel's covenant relationship with God required the forgiveness of sins, and this was accomplished by sacrifice. Closely related to the claim that Jesus died "for our sins" is the claim that he died "for us" (Rom 5:6, 8; 2 Cor 5:14–15; 1 Thess 5:10). There is significant debate about the precise meaning of "for us." It is most likely, however, that both phrases ("for our sins" and "for us") are drawing on Isaiah's description of the suffering servant:

> Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases; yet we accounted him stricken, struck down by God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have all turned to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all .... They made his grave with the wicked and his tomb with the rich, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his days; through him the will of the Lord shall prosper. Out of his anguish he shall see light; he shall find satisfaction through his knowledge. The righteous one, my servant, shall make many righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isa 53:4–6, 9–11)

It is the suffering, dying Messiah who is the source of salvation, of forgiveness for sins. Jesus, as the fulfillment of Isaiah 53, inaugurates the new covenant by his act of self-giving love and service, dying for others and their sins, not his own. For this reason, Paul stresses the

sinlessness of Jesus: "For our sake he [God] made him [Christ] to be sin who knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21). This is almost certainly an allusion to Isaiah 53, especially vv. 10–11.

But Christ's sacrificial, covenant-renewing death for sins did not occur on just any night; in Paul's presentation, as in the gospels, it happened at Passover, the time when Jews remembered their exodus from Egyptian slavery: "Our paschal lamb, Christ, has been sacrificed" (1 Cor 5:7b). The inauguration of the new covenant is, therefore, also the event of a new exodus: a liberation. The tyrant now is not the enslaving Egyptian pharaoh, but Sin. This is not sins (plural) but Sin (singular and capitalized) – the power that enslaves (Rom 3:9), that renders people incapable of doing what they know they should do or want to do (Rom 7:14–23).

Both kinds of sin need to be dealt with: sins (plural), meaning "trespasses" or violations of the commandments, and Sin (singular), the force that is beyond and behind those various sins. Sin is a power that both surrounds and overwhelms people from without (Rom 7:14), and indwells and manipulates them from within (Rom 7:17, 20). This insidious force needs to be defeated and replaced with a beneficent and more powerful force. *The death and resurrection of Jesus as a second exodus, God's liberating act of deliverance, accomplishes the defeat; the gift of the Spirit, God's empowering act of indwelling presence, is Sin's replacement.*

Romans 3:21–26 offers a case study in this way of thinking about what God has done in Christ. Although this passage is fraught with interpretative challenges, it presents Christ's death as dealing simultaneously with both sins and Sin. Here is my translation, with important alternatives from the NRSV appearing in brackets:

> But now, apart from law, the saving justice ["righteousness"] of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the justice ["righteousness"] of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ ["faith in Jesus Christ"] for all who have faith ["believe"]. For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and lack ["fall short of"] the glory of God; they are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a means of expiation ["sacrifice of atonement"] by his blood, effective through Christ's faithfulness ["through faith"]. He did this to show his justice ["righteousness"], because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is just ["righteous"]

> in that ["and that"] he justifies the one who shares in the faithfulness of Jesus ["has faith in Jesus"].

This passage is the initial substantive account in Romans explaining the divine solution to the human predicament. Although we will return to it later in this essay, for now we need to note two main images used in reference to Christ's death: (1) "redemption" (3:24) and (2) "means of expiation" by his blood (3:25, sometimes translated as "sacrifice of atonement" or "mercy seat").

The word "redemption" refers to the liberation of slaves, alluding both to the ancient practice in general and to the liberation of enslaved Israel in particular. Christ's death effects liberation from the power of Sin. The image of expiation, sacrifice of atonement, and/or mercy seat (in the holy of holies of the Jewish temple, where the priest made sacrifice for sins) refers to the removal of sins; Christ's death also takes care of trespasses. In other words, this text recognizes both Sin and sins, claiming that Christ's death deals with both, effecting both forgiveness (expiation) and liberation (redemption). The human condition has been addressed in its totality with one saving act. Notice how both aspects are captured by Paul at the start of his letter to the Galatians: Jesus Christ "gave himself for our sins to set us free from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4).

In a nearby text echoing Gal 1:4, Paul describes this saving, liberating divine act as one motivated by Jesus' self-giving love: he "loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). This is partly why Paul can say that God's justice (Rom 3:21–22) and love (Rom 5:1–11, treated below) are manifested in Christ's death; the Father and Son are working in concert. Similarly, Paul says both that the Son handed himself over to death (as in Gal 1:4; 2:20) and that God, for our sake, delivered him up to that death (e.g., Rom 4:25; 8:32). What one does, the other does.

Justification and Reconciliation

It is the combination of forgiveness for sins and liberation from Sin (as expressed in Rom 3:21–26) that brings people into right covenant relation with God. That, I would suggest, is the basic meaning of "justification." Justification, then, is more than a forensic or juridical transaction carried out in a divine courtroom ("I, the righteous divine judge, declare you, the guilty human, innocent"), and it is certainly not a legal fiction ("I declare you innocent even though you are actually guilty"). If justification is in any sense a pronouncement, it is a performative utterance; it effects transformation, the restoration of

covenantal and intimate status: "I will be your God, and you will be my people." Because justification has this personal and relational character, Paul can easily pair it with reconciliation:

> Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ .... For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. But more than that, we even boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation. (Rom 5:1, 10–11)

Before exploring this passage in more detail, we should first note how it combines the past, present, and future dimensions of salvation. This threefold reality is celebrated in the Lord's Supper (see 1 Cor 11:17–34), in which (1) Christ's death is remembered and re-experienced, (2) his presence and love are known in the way others are treated (especially the least and the last), and (3) his future coming (*parousia*) is anticipated. In relation to this threefold saving act of God, Paul envisions a community characterized by the triad of faith, love, and hope (1 Cor 13:13; Gal 5:5–6; 1 Thess 1:3; 5:8).

The shocking aspect of the divine reconciliation narrated in Romans 5 (cited above) is that God, in love, has taken the initiative while we were *enemies* (v. 10). In Rom 5:6–8 Paul describes humanity as "ungodly" and "sinners," not as "righteous" (or "just") or "good" people who deserve God's love. The normal way of effecting reconciliation in antiquity required the offending party to take the initiative to seek reconciliation with the offended party; by contrast, Paul highlights how the offended party (God) lovingly initiated the reconciliation: Christ died "for us" (Rom 5:8). That same love was then "poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us" (Rom 5:5).

As in Galatians 4, the saving activity of God entails the gift of both the Son and the Spirit. Paul offers an extraordinary portrait of three actors in the drama of salvation in intricate, intimate relationship, with the death of the Son and the gift of the Spirit constituting the demonstration of the Father's love.

The identity overlap between the Father and the Son appears explicitly in 2 Corinthians 5, where Paul states that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself" (5:19, author's translation). Here we see once again that God takes the initiative; and the object of reconciliation is not merely Israel but the world. We also witness another example of the connection between justification and reconciliation. Within the

wider context of this verse we also see an explicit emphasis on the transformative character that results from God's reconciling initiative – a radical transformation that is described as proof of the inbreaking of the new creation: "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (5:17).

In this context, Paul probes the reconciling, new-creation-inaugurating event of Christ's death and resurrection, noting various dimensions of transformation:

- an *existential* transformation that radically alters a person's identity and orientation to life: "For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them" (2 Cor 5:14–15).
- an *epistemological* transformation that completely rearranges a person's "intellectual furniture": "From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once knew Christ from a human point of view, we know him no longer in that way" (2 Cor 5:16).
- an *ethical* transformation that immerses a person within a new moral world: "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness [or "justice"] of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

This last point merits further comment. Although neither "justify" nor "justification" appears in 2 Cor 5:21, the verse has generally, and rightly, been understood as a text about justification. Justification, then, must be understood as both participatory (we participate in Christ) and transformative (we are transformed in Christ). Paul expresses this in what some have called an "interchange" formula: there is an interchange between the sinless one who "became" sin (that is, became fully identified with sin in his role as sacrifice) and sinners who can become like the sinless one.

The purpose of this exchange was so that *in Christ* (and this location is critical) people who were sinful might become righteous, or just. Justification produces just people – people who exist in and are shaped by the living, resurrected Messiah who embodies the justifying, justice-making activity of God. Paul does not say that the gospel entails merely *believing in* the saving justice of God but *being transformed into* that justice, embodying it corporately and individually. This is because Christ was and is the location of God's justice. Those who are in Christ are, literally, in the center of God's dynamic, saving, transformative justice.

Similar interchange texts exist, including 2 Cor 8:9 (quoted above) and Gal 3:13–14: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us ... in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." As in 2 Corinthians 5, this passage in Galatians 3 also implicitly expresses the purpose of the interchange in terms of transformation: the Spirit is the divine provision, promised by the prophets, for the moral and missional life expected of God's people (an aspect that Paul unpacks at length in Gal 5–6).

All of this takes us back to Rom 3:21–26 to offer two additional (somewhat more controversial) observations. First, we should probably understand its subject to be the "justice" of God understood as *the saving activity of God that makes things right and brings about justice*. This means that the liberation and forgiveness offered in Christ are transformative, making people right with God and therefore also righteous/just. As with the exodus, those released from bondage are delivered into a new bonded relationship with God the deliverer – a new covenant of such radical fidelity that Paul can refer to it as a re-enslavement. This new slavery is not to the power of Sin, of course, but to righteousness/justice – that is, ultimately to God (a subject that Paul examines at length in Rom 6, expanding the discussion further in Rom 12–15).

Second, we should probably also understand the manifestation of God's justice to be the *faithfulness of Jesus*. This claim reveals my conclusion about a huge debate in Pauline studies: does Paul refer to faith *in* Jesus or the faith (faithfulness) *of* Jesus when he uses a particular Greek phrase (*pistis Christou* and its variations in Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; Phil 3:9; see also Rom 1:16–17)? In my view, the evidence best aligns in favor of "the faithfulness of Jesus" (compare *pistis Abraam*, the "faith [or faithfulness] of Abraham" in Rom 4:16). Thus Rom 3:26 conveys the idea that justification comes by "participating in the faithfulness of Jesus," that is, by participating in his death and, consequently, his resurrection.

We turn now to Paul's understanding of salvation as participation in Christ's death and resurrection.

THE *MODE* OF SALVATION: PARTICIPATING IN THE MESSIAH'S DEATH AND RESURRECTION

How does a person benefit from, or appropriate, the salvation offered by God in Christ? People often imagine that Paul's answer to this question is simply "faith" (e.g., Rom 10:9–10) or "faith and baptism" (see 1 Cor 6:11).

Such a view is true enough, but only if both faith and baptism are understood as modes of *participation* in Christ.

To see the point, we can place side by side two passages that focus on Christ and on believers respectively. In 1 Cor 15:3–9, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the gospel is summarized in a sort of mini-creed that narrates four main acts in a dramatic salvation story: (1) Christ's death, (2) his burial, (3) his resurrection, and (4) his post-resurrection appearances. In Romans 6, this drama reappears as a narrative of believers' experience, as they enter into the story, participating in each of its four acts:

Dramatic Act	*The Story of Christ (1 Corinthians 15)*	*The Story of Believers (Romans 6)*
Death	Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures (15:3)	died to Sin ... baptized into his death (6:2–3); united with him in a death like his (6:5); our old self was crucified with him (6:6); died with Christ (6:8); dead to sin (6:11)
Burial	he was buried (15:4a)	buried with him by baptism into death (6:4)
Resurrection	he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures (15:4b)	*Present (resurrection to new life):* just as Christ was raised from the dead ... so we too might walk in newness of life (6:4); alive to God in Christ Jesus (6:11; cf. 6:13) *Future (bodily resurrection):* we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his (6:5); we will also live with him (6:8)
Appearance	he appeared to Cephas ... the twelve ... others (15:5–9)	present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life (6:13)

In other words, believing the gospel (or affirming the creed) is not merely assenting to its truths; it also involves participating in its story or, more precisely, participating in the reality that the story narrates. Being baptized means being immersed into water, which signifies being immersed into Christ and his story – an image of full participation and transformation. To be baptized is to be *transferred* from *outside* Christ *into*

Christ and his story. From then on, the immersed (baptized) person is "in" Christ, which means both being in covenant relationship to Christ as Lord and being part of his body, the "church" or "assembly" (Greek *ekklēsia*). As individuals and as a community, "the immersed" live life "*in* Christ" and "*with* Christ" – phrases we find repeatedly in Paul's letters.

To believe and be baptized is also to be transformed (through sharing in Christ's death and resurrection) into something altogether new – becoming part of the new creation. And in becoming immersed and transformed, the immersed begin enacting the Christ-story, step by step, as a living embodiment of it. This starts at baptism, is reaffirmed at the Lord's Supper, is performed in daily life, and continues until death or the second coming of Christ (the *parousia*). Paul's vision of new life in Christ, therefore, is one of resurrection *in* the body now (a life of holiness and justice; Rom 6:4, 11–19), followed by resurrection *of* the body later (eternal life; Rom 6:8, 20–23).

This helps to shed light on the motif of "justification by faith" in Paul's thinking. Justification by faith is a significant aspect of Galatians and Romans, and it is present or assumed in other letters too. But as we have already seen, justification needs to be understood in covenantal and relational terms, and not merely legal or forensic categories. We will see as well that faith also needs to be understood in Paul as something more than assent to truth or even trust in a person.

But first, it is important to note that there is disagreement among Pauline scholars about the place of justification in Paul's thought. Some would say justification by faith (or, more precisely, justification by grace through faith) is the distinctive and central mark of Paul's theology. Others contend that it is of secondary importance to his notion of participation in Christ. Still others think that these two themes are both important in Paul but are fundamentally independent of each other (though not necessarily incompatible) – one is forensic (or legal) in character, involving a divine verdict of "not guilty," while the other is participatory, involving union with Christ.

One way of considering these issues, in conjunction with the question of the meaning of faith for Paul, is to look closely at Gal 2:15–21. (Along the way, we will note its similarities to baptism by co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Christ in Romans 6.) The opening and closing of the passage are particularly important. Here is how the NRSV translates the passage:

> We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but

> through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law ...
>
> For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing. (Gal 2:15–16, 19–21)

This passage is a critical part of Paul's response to the question of whether and why Jewish and gentile believers belong at the same table. It is often described as an exposition of the meaning of justification by faith, which it is. But it is also a passage that both includes the explicit language of *co-crucifixion* with Christ and strongly implies *co-resurrection* to new life. It is therefore often described as an exposition of participation in Christ and his story, which (again) it is. Rather than an either-or, justification and participation are a both-and. Unfortunately, however, these two characterizations of the passage (justification, participation) are often seen as sequential (whether in this text or more generally in Paul's theology). That is, justification by faith is thought to precede, or at least be distinguishable from, co-crucifixion and its resulting new life with Christ dwelling within.

But the structure of this passage (which begins and ends on the subject of justification) will not permit such a separation or sequence. Rather, Paul is defining justification by faith in terms of participation: co-crucifixion and co-resurrection. Justification is inseparable from union with Christ. As in baptism, the old self dies and a new self is born (esp. 2:20). In other words, for Paul the internal act of faith and the external act of baptism are inseparable and (together) effect new life. It is a life of allegiance to and participation in a new lord, an existence focused not on oneself but on the indwelling crucified and resurrected Messiah Jesus (cf. Rom 14:7–9; 2 Cor 5:15).

To further complicate matters, however, this passage also contains some crucially important language like that of Romans 3, possibly referring to Christ's faithfulness in three places. Here is the alternative reading supplied by the NRSV of Gal 2:16 and 20 (note the italicized texts):

> yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through *the faithfulness of* Jesus Christ. And we have come to

> believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by *the faithfulness of* Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law ... and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by *the faithfulness of* the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

If this rendering is correct, then Paul says that justification, while requiring belief/faith (the *mode* of justification), is nonetheless grounded in Christ's act of faithfulness (the *means* of justification), and even the believer's new life is grounded in the ongoing reality of that faithfulness. Faith is a sharing in Christ's faithfulness, his obedience to the Father (cf. Rom 5:19), and specifically his death. Thus, faith as participation is as much *allegiance* as it is *trust*, which is why Paul can speak of the "obedience of faith" (Rom 1:5; 16:26).

Faith, then, by God's grace and the working of the Spirit, actualizes all the intended outcomes of Christ's death and resurrection. This grace-and-Spirit-enabled faith both liberates and enslaves; it incorporates and inaugurates. It liberates people from the interlocking directorate of hostile and enslaving powers in order to re-enslave those same people as God's beloved and obedient children; it incorporates people into Christ; and it inaugurates in them a new life of faithfulness and love.

The faithful, self-giving love that Paul sees in Christ's cross is the antithesis of the idolatry, self-centeredness, will to power, domination, greed, hatred, and violence that Paul documents especially in Romans 1–3. The new life of the new covenant and new creation will (or at least should) embody this antithesis of the surrounding culture's practices that are idolatrous and/or unjust and immoral. The ecclesial body of Christ is an alternative culture that (paradoxically) is intimately involved in the world, like Christ himself (just as the poem about Christ's self-giving in Phil 2:6–11 is presented in Phil 2:1–5 as the pattern for those in Christ). But this way of life is possible only by the working of the Spirit.

EMBODYING THE NEW COVENANT: THE MUTUAL INDWELLING OF CHRIST/THE SPIRIT AND BELIEVERS

The Gift of the Spirit

We have seen from Gal 4:4–6 and Rom 5:1–11 how Paul reveals the divine work of salvation to consist of a double gift: the gift of the Son and the gift of the Spirit. The experience of salvation is also a partaking

of this double reality (1 Cor 6:11). Both individuals in Christ (1 Cor 6:19) and communities in Christ (1 Cor 3:16) are temples of the Holy Spirit, manifestations of the God revealed in the Messiah Jesus for the sake of the world:

> Do you not know that you [all] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [or "among you all"]? (1 Cor 3:16)
>
> Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own? (1 Cor 6:19)

This indwelling Spirit ensures the empowerment and transformation of those who participate in Christ's death and resurrection.

The Shape of the Spirit-Filled Life

As the people of the new covenant and new creation, the Spirit-filled body of Christ is called to be the revivified people of God that was promised in Israel's prophetic literature. They are to be a community of shalom, of anticipatory participation in the coming eschatological kingdom of peace: "the kingdom of God is ... righteousness [or justice] and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:17). The next chapter of this book will have much more to say about the shape of life in Christ by the Spirit. For now, we will make two observations.

First, the amazing grace, or divine gift, displayed in Christ is (in the words of John Barclay) *unconditioned* but not *unconditional*. God's wholly unmerited gift comes with the expectation of an appropriate response. This is due both to the reciprocal character of gift-giving in the ancient world (so Barclay) and to the similar mutuality of the covenant between God and God's people in the Bible. The covenant formula, "I shall be your God and you shall be my people," is not merely a statement about election by God or even intimacy with God. It is, like the declaration of justification discussed above, more like a performative utterance. It brings about a mutuality of commitment and thus action on the part of both parties in the covenant.

Second, because Paul refers to the new-covenant gift of God's Spirit as the *Holy* Spirit (e.g., Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 6:19; Eph 1:13) and the Spirit *of the Son* (e.g., Gal 4:6), a primary activity of the Spirit is to make believers holy (both individually and corporately) by transforming them into Christlike people. Practically speaking, God's act of salvation means the creation of a community of Jews and gentiles with a new heart, by virtue of internal rather than external circumcision (Rom

2:25–29), who, enabled by the Spirit, live faithfully toward God and lovingly toward others, thus fulfilling the "just requirement of the law" (Rom 8:3–4). The very purpose of Christ's incarnation and death was to create such a multicultural community of transformed people (Gal 5:6, 13–14; Rom 8:3–4; 15:1–12; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 2:11–22), in collective worship of the one true God (Rom 15:1–13).

This transformation is nothing other than ongoing participation in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The narrative shape and pattern of the Christ-story becomes the shape and pattern of believers: a life story of sacrificial faithfulness to God and self-giving love for others. In other words, believers fulfill the covenant's "vertical" requirement (to love God) and the "horizontal" requirement (to love neighbor) in a Christlike way, the way of Christ seen in his self-emptying incarnation and self-humbling death for others. This cross-shaped life-pattern is sometimes called cruciformity, or conformity to the crucified Messiah. It does not mean primarily suffering, but faithfulness and love, which (nonetheless) often results in suffering. Thus, the ecclesial body of Christ is cross-shaped.

At the same time, however, because believers participate in Christ's resurrection as well as his crucifixion, cruciformity is suffused with the life and power of the resurrection. It is life-giving, both for those who embody the cross-shaped love of Christ and for those who receive it. It is *resurrectional* cruciformity: "For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor 4:11). This is not a spirituality or story of triumphalism, or of pursuing individualistic self-fulfillment; instead, it is a story of self-giving love that, paradoxically, is full of joy and life: the life of God the Father, Christ the Son, and the Spirit of the Father and the Son.

CONCLUSION: THE FUTURE OF SALVATION

We have already noted that, for Paul, salvation is a reality with past, present, and future dimensions. While much has already been said about the future of salvation, there is still more to be registered here, even if only briefly, and as a way to conclude our reflections on Paul's view of what God is doing in the world.

The reality of God's new creation has begun in Christ by the power of the Spirit, who is the down payment on, and guarantee of, final glory (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:14). But the new creation is not yet complete. Human beings, even those in Christ, do not experience the fullness of

God's presence, God's glory, in their lives. The powers of Sin and Death obviously still exist, and often seem victorious. Salvation, the kingdom of God, is both "already" and "not yet." The "blessed hope" (Titus 2:13) is Paul's answer to the "not yet" dimension of God's rescue project. This hope is focused on the "day of the Lord": the "appearance" (*epiphaneia*) or "(second) coming" (*parousia*) of Jesus, and the glorious aftermath of that event (see, for instance, 1 Cor 15:23–28; 1 Thess 4:13–18; 2 Tim 4:1–8).

The notion of "the day of the Lord" comes from Israel's prophets. In the hands of Paul, it maintains the twofold character of the prophetic tradition: wrath and judgment on the one hand, and salvation and human flourishing on the other. Paul's emphasis is on the latter. He believes the coming of Jesus will result in the transformation of those who are alive in Christ and the bodily resurrection of those who have died in Christ. This will lead to eternal, incorruptible life in the presence of God as "adopted" children of God and heirs of Christ (Rom 8:10–30; cf. Gal 4:5). Suffering will give way to the fullness of glory (2 Cor 4:17–18) as the process of conformity to Christ in his humiliation and exaltation reaches its glorious climax (Rom 8:17, 29–30).

Paul further claims that "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26, a claim that has generated various interpretations). He also believes that this final salvation of humans will trigger the liberation of all creation, which (like humanity itself) has been subject to pain and suffering (Rom 8:18–25). God's rescue project extends to all of creation – "all things" will be reconciled in Christ (Col 1:19–20; Eph 1:9–10). Finally, Paul believes that the cosmic powers of Sin and Death that have ravaged God's good creation will be fully and finally defeated (1 Cor 15:20–28, 54–57).

Paul sometimes refers to this saving activity of God as a "mystery" – something that is revealed but is also somewhat inscrutable. Its goal, however, is clear: the undoing of Sin and Death and all their consequences in order to bring about that which God has intended from the beginning for humanity and for all creation. In the words of the song from "Fiddler on the Roof," the saving justice of God is a rescue project that is truly summarized in the refrain "l'chaim, l'chaim, to life!"

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