
Original Paper

Kernel of Christianity: Apostle Paul's Vision, Commission, and their Intrinsic Connection to God's Economy

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Abstract

God's eternal plan is to dispense Himself into His people as life, as life supply, and as everything to them. What God had planned and accomplished and what He was applying in His salvation, Paul was carrying out in his ministry. Paul's ministry concerns the unsearchable riches of Christ, the economy of God, and the church. Viewed from God's perspective, these three are the gospel, His plan, and His goal. Paul's ministry is intrinsically related with God's eternal purpose. Apostle Paul was chosen by God to bear the responsibility for God's economy, and he also trained his spiritual son Timothy in this economy.

As believers in Christ enjoying the grace of God in the God's economy, we have been entrusted with the stewardship to minister Christ to others for their growth in life. Paul is always seen carrying out his commission within a company of related members. In fact, the book of Acts describes a body of witnesses bearing a corporate testimony. By exploring Apostle Paul life's journey, we will be able to understand his vision and commission, and participate in this commission in a meaningful way.

Keywords: God's economy, cultural background, diaspora, proselytism, covenant, heirs of Abraham

Introduction

Apostle Paul almost is one of the most effective and influential intellectuals in human history. His writings had generated more sermons, books, monographs, and journal articles than any other writings from the ancient world. Who is Apostle Paul? How did someone with his background and upbringing end up speaking, traveling, and writing in the way he did? What, exactly, happened on the road to Damascus that changed the course of Paul's life and the course of human history?

In this paper, this author will explore the core, and heart of the Paul's theological outlooks.

It will also cover three main subjects. First, this author will set the sights on some important aspects of Paul's cultural background to understand how his Christian beliefs were deeply influenced by his cultural background. Second, we'll look at how Paul's beliefs related to his ministry as an apostle. And third, we'll identify Paul's central theological outlooks, the crucial ideas on which Paul based many of the other things he believed.

Part I will explore Paul's cultural background that shaped his theology. Lots of things influence what we believe about God and about the world around us. This was true of the apostle Paul as well. The Holy Spirit led Paul into the truth of the Christian faith, but the Spirit also used many aspects of Paul's cultural background in the process of leading him to the truth. Therefore, if we want to understand the heart of Paul's theology, we have to be familiar with his background.

Paul grew up under two strong and diverse cultural influences. On one hand, his exposure to Gentile, Greco-Roman culture impacted him in major ways. On the other hand, his Jewish culture also significantly affected him. Paul's theology was deeply impacted by the Jewish hope that God would one day send the Messiah, the great son of David, who would end Israel's suffering and extend the

kingdom of God to the ends of the earth. Paul didn't see Christianity as a replacement of Judaism. Rather, he firmly believed that Christianity was the fulfillment of his Jewish heritage. Therefore, Paul's central Christian beliefs rose out of his Jewish heritage.

Paul was raised to be a devout Jew, but the New Testament also makes it clear that he was quite familiar with the Gentile, Greco-Roman culture in which he lived. Paul knew Gentile culture so well that he was able to walk the fine line of adapting his behavior to Gentile customs while still obeying Christ's law. Paul also showed himself to be knowledgeable of sophisticated Greco-Roman literature too. Paul's contact with Gentile culture equipped him to minister to Gentiles even outside the church. Unmatched and unrivaled, Paul was familiar with the values and beliefs of Gentiles, and he effectively used this knowledge to bring the gospel to Gentiles.

Part II will discuss the theology and practice of Paul's mission in comparison with and in contrast to the common practice and belief of the Judaism of his time.

Part III will explore God's kingdom administration and seen how God administered God's kingdom through His covenant representatives, and how God established appropriate policies as His covenants developed organically from Noah to Abraham, Moses, and David, before establishing the new covenant through Jesus. We've also explored how the dynamics of interaction between God and his covenant people involved God's divine benevolence, His tests of loyalty, and the consequences for obedience and disobedience.

Part IV will discuss Apostle Paul as a man of Prayer. From the Book the Romans he writes, "For God is my witness, that without ceasing, I make mention of you always in my prayers." With holy fervor, he daily poured out his heart to God, in behalf of the churches which he had planted amid the wilds of pagan religion. Paul viewed that men who lived for God would pray much, and that men who do not live for God would not pray.

Part V will discuss Paul's mission and its significant connection to God's economy. God had a particular purpose in mind when He created man. He wanted man to receive Him and be filled with Him. We were made to contain God. God created us specifically with three parts: a body, a soul, and most importantly, a human spirit. Our spirit, the deepest part of our being, has the ability to receive and contain God.

There is no single event, apart from the Christ-event itself, that has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul.¹ Apostle Paul is one of the greatest missionaries in the world history, and the author of the most epistles in the New Testament. He provided us with a great insight of the mysteries concerning Christ and the Church. Without his writings, we may not have a clear understanding of God's economy as we now have.

Part I Cultural Background

The Jewish diaspora is the dispersion of Israelites or Jews out of their ancient ancestral homeland (the Land of Israel) and their subsequent settlement in other parts of the globe. Diaspora involves: a shared memory of an idealized homeland; a promise to care for the homeland, including a strong desire and movement to return to the homeland; a strong group identity; a belief in a common destiny; and finally, a sense of empathy and unity with co-ethnics in their other places of settlement.

Distinctive Practices

The basic structure of family life in the Second Temple period follows the "Patrimonial household model", that is, a family unit with various kinship ties and a patriarch at the head of a hierarchical grouping. Yet Judean society continued to rely on this basic household structure all the way into the Roman period. This type of solidarity extended into the Diaspora. Practices such as circumcision as well as Sabbath observance allowed family members to maintain their clear identity and preserve their family unity in Diaspora settings. Through these practices, they were forged into a religious and social solidarity that would tolerate in all kinds of different environments, comfortable or difficult, friendly or hostile. The following four practices of the Jews served to differentiate Jews from Gentiles more than any other.

Monotheism

Monotheism believes in the oneness of God; it was prescribed in the First Commandment, “*Thou shalt have no other gods before me*”.² Jewish monotheism, however, denies the legitimacy of every other god. Tensions occurred between the Diaspora Jews and their host countries. The Diaspora Jews might accommodate some of the practices of the local culture, but definitely not anything that had to do with cultic practice. As a result, their refusal to worship any other gods than the God of Israel was easily observed to be a definitive characteristic of Judaism. Furthermore, Jewish monotheism has likely directed people to the Jews’ assertion of their own monopoly of truth about God and hence their intolerance toward foreign religions. Aristeeas claimed that “all the rest of mankind” is foolish in their worship of idols and God endowed the Jews with the Law as iron walls to prevent them from mixing with any of the other peoples and to preserve them from the “false beliefs” of the peoples.³ Philo admitted that the Gentiles might recognize the Maker of the entire cosmos, yet they worshipped created gods, and only the nation of the Jews could set aright this false cultic practice.⁴ Josephus also boasted of the excellency of Jewish monotheism.⁵ Intolerance toward foreign religions was poignantly observed by the Gentiles.

To reduce the conflict and accommodate to their Hellenistic environments, the Jewish concept of monotheism was presented by some Diaspora Jews with a philosophical bent which appealed to pagan intellectuals. Some of the Gentile authors saw Jewish monotheism as a kind of henotheism, that is, a belief in one god as supreme without denying the existence of other gods.

The Jews’ loyalty to the state was attacked due to their failure to erect statues for the emperors. Instead the Jews’ practice of dedicating synagogues to emperors reveals their endeavor to use such occasions to express their loyalty⁶ to the reigning monarchs as a substitute for erecting statues of the emperor. Another important factor of Jewish monotheism was the avoidance of cultic images, which has been prescribed in the Second Commandment, as “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.”⁷

Sabbath Observance

Sabbath observance was the most noticeable Jewish practice and was the “center pillar of life under the covenant”. It was prescribed by God in the Fourth Commandment, “Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy”. He appointed the Sabbath day to be a symbol of the promise of entering into His eternal rest in glory. The Sabbath was “holy” and its seriousness was underlined by the death penalty for transgressors. This weekly event was the foundational structure of the Jewish way of life which kept the Jews strong in belief and practice and maintained their solidarity. The moral obligation for man to keep the Sabbath day holy recurs throughout the Old Testament. It was a binding ordinance at creation long before it became the fourth of the ten moral laws of God (see Ex. 20:8–11; Deut. 5:12–15) annexed to Sabbath observance throughout the Old Testament prophets. For instance, Isaiah spoke of the spiritual blessings that come from a joyful observation of the Sabbath (Isa. 58:1–14).

The Jews’ seven-day week calendar itself was very peculiar to the Gentiles. Balsdon claims that the later adoption of the seven-day week into the Roman calendar might well be influenced by Jewish Sabbath observance.⁸ In addition to this peculiarity, the way the Jews had observed the Sabbath provoked the imagination of the Gentiles. The practice of Sabbath observance included Scripture reading and sermon, song singing, and the forbidding of certain activities, such as work, walking certain distances, and drawing water. Some of the biblical texts indicate concern about a trader’s ability to maintain faithfulness to the Commandments and his own occupation. Nehemiah expresses concerns that the activities of the coastal traders are blatant and have obvious violations against the Sabbath rules; he says: “*There dwelt men of Tyre also therein, which brought fish, and all manner of ware, and sold on the Sabbath unto the children of Judah and in Jerusalem*”.⁹ Similarly, Ben Sira views that trading in the market places is a tremendous threat to pious living.¹⁰

Tacitus charged the Jews with being lazy because of their abstention from work. Philo answered the charge by saying that the Sabbath does not advocate idleness but it is for the renewal of the body for fresh work after diligent labor for six days.

The cruelty of Antiochus IV in enforcing new laws against the population became legendary. He prohibited customs such as Sabbath observance.

Not only Gentile intellectuals derided the Jewish Sabbath. Many of the Jews' enemies also took advantage of the observance of the Sabbath, especially in times of war.

Male Circumcision

Circumcision was the sign of God's covenant with Abraham (see Gen 17:9–14). Circumcision conveys a covenant promise of curse and blessing. Circumcision carried the promise of judgment for those who broke covenant with God. If the demands of the covenant were met, God would fulfill His promise to cut off the sin of His people. The cutting away of the foreskin of the flesh denoted God's promise to cut off covenant breakers from His presence, His people, and His blessing.

Petronius viewed circumcision as the specific feature of the Jews. But this single trait was viewed as the proof of one's Jewishness. The Jews who disguised the mark of circumcision in order to fit into Hellenistic culture were considered as apostate because they had "abandoned the holy covenant."¹¹ According to this author's several Jewish friends' opinions.

Though this practice was merely for Jewish males, but it still had some side effects on Jewish women in terms of their own marriage options. Barclay claims that the function of circumcision is for Jewish fathers to discern with whom can they arrange marriage for their daughters, thus discourages intermarriage in order to maintain the Jewish ethnic purity.¹² Josephus' mention that circumcision was for the purpose of keeping Abraham's posterity "unmixed" with others probably also refers to intermarriage. This concern for ethnic purity was a key note in Ezra's and Nehemiah's reform, because many of the exiles, including the priests, the Levites, and the officials, had "mingled the *holy race* with the peoples around them." The seriousness of Ezra's and Nehemiah's zeal to correct this problem was revealed through Ezra's anguish upon learning about the intermarriages and Nehemiah's harsh treatment of the offenders. Surprisingly, and probably due to the precarious existence in the recent return from the Exile, the problem of intermarriage was resolved by forced divorce of their foreign wives.

Separatism at Meals

Meals were a major setting for social intercourse in Greco-Roman world. Their basic social significance lies in the expression of friendship. The injunctions of prohibiting certain foods were given with the call to consecrate oneself and be holy.¹³

The distinction between clean and unclean food was crucial for any Jewish identity.¹⁴ Douglas points out that food denotes meaning, similar to what a language does in a society, "If food is treated as a code, the messages it encodes will be found in the pattern of social relations being expressed. The message is about different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across the boundaries."¹⁵

Philo further explained, however, that the reason for the prohibition was because of the undesirable traits of those creatures and because the consuming of their flesh would influence one's moral life.¹⁶ Moreover, in antiquity, meals often had cultic association both in public feasts and private homes. Abstaining from food, especially meats associated with idols, was a necessary precaution in accordance with the Jewish Abstaining from food, especially meats associated with idols, and was a necessary precaution in accordance with the Jewish monotheism.

Jewish Social Networks

Jewish distinctive practices are preserved in the Law. Social structure was also organized around the Law. During the Exile when the Jews were divested of their religious institutions in the homeland, there emerged a new form of social structure—the synagogue, through which they could methodically preserve their faith and thus guarantee their survival in any kind of Gentile environment.

Emergence of Synagogue in the Diaspora Communities

In larger Jewish communities, such as in Rome and Alexandria, there was a central communal organization called *politeuma* by which the Jews could maintain a certain degree of internal autonomy,

while in smaller Jewish settlements the synagogue was the essential unit of communal organization. Baron estimates that there were five million Jews living in Diaspora in the first century. If this were the case, there should have been hundreds and thousands of synagogues in the Diaspora to the Gentiles, the presence of a synagogue would indicate the existence of a Jewish community, large or small.

The synagogue, then, was the point of communal organization of the Jews in the Diaspora. The organization of synagogues was established for economic, ethnic, cultural, social, or religious purposes. Its function was to “create a small *cosmos* within the chaos that had replaced the former order, to cope with the sense of loss and powerlessness that most people, particularly immigrants, felt in the new ethnic melting pot”. The Diaspora Jews found this kind of voluntary association useful for religious and social purposes. Thus, the synagogue functioned not just as a place of worship but also as a community center for the purpose of education, especially for the study of the Law, for the purpose of charity, as court, guest houses, dining rooms, and for other communal affairs.

Generally speaking, the synagogues were quite independent from each other and had their own respective leadership. It is depending on its own size and origins. The Diaspora synagogues were led not by rabbis or priests, but by lay persons occupying the office. The function of all of them included the first, building the synagogue, and improving its structure; and the second, in charge of the worship service.

Diaspora Jews Connection to the Homeland

For the Diaspora Jews, the hostile Gentile environment may have sometimes intensified their link with the homeland. As the psalmist said, “If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy.” (Ps. 137.5-6) As the windows of Daniel’s prayer chamber faced toward Jerusalem, the Diaspora Jews also oriented their synagogue buildings toward Jerusalem and positioned the Torah shrine on the wall closest to Jerusalem. (Dan.6.10).

The Diaspora Jews’ financial contributions to the Jerusalem Temple further highlighted the importance of the Jerusalem Temple in sustaining their bond with the homeland. The most important of their financial contributions was the half-shekel annual temple tax, the chief source of revenue for the Jerusalem temple. This export of large sums of money to their homeland often caused such tensions in the local communities that the Diaspora Jews had to make frequent appeals to the emperor to insure their right to send this “sacred money” to Jerusalem. This contribution was considered as essential as Sabbath observance or other Jewish distinctive practices.

Moreover, the Diaspora Jews’ pilgrimage to Jerusalem served to strengthen the tie between the Diaspora and the homeland. The temple tax was usually sent to Jerusalem by convoys during the festive occasion with multitudes of Jews on their way to Jerusalem.

Link With Other Diaspora Communities

The pilgrimages of the Diaspora Jews to Jerusalem on festive occasions provided them with an opportunity to bring about friendship and affection among the Jews from other Diaspora communities through meetings and festive meals. Through these frequent contacts around the Diaspora on a personal level, the Jews were bound together on community level. Hence, the Diaspora communities were ready to band together to aid one another when needs occur.

Part II Paul’s Understanding of his own Mission

Paul made clear his mission is to accomplish the full inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God. As an apostle to the Gentiles, Paul also shared his anguish over the unbelief of his own people, though he believed that all Israel would be saved eventually, through jealousy aroused by the success of his Gentile mission.

The Pauline theology stressed that Paul’s missionary practice are his views concerning the election of Israel and the salvation of the Gentiles, his Christology in relation to Jewish messianic expectation, and his view of the Jewish Law in relation to salvation. The discussion of Paul’s mission theology and practice provides a basis for the understanding of his life and thought, and his relationship to Judaism.

The Election of Israel and the Salvation of the Gentiles

God's election of Israel goes back to the call to Abraham. One of God's promises included in the call was that all people on earth would be blessed through Abraham. (Gen.12.3) Later, when God reaffirmed his promise to the Exodus generation, God said, "Though the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." (Exo. 19.5-6) As a priestly kingdom, Israel was to be wholly consecrated to God, as well as to be a medium between God and the rest of the world. In the second of the four servant songs in Isaiah, God said that the mission of the Servant was not only to restore Israel, which was "too small a thing", but also to be "a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth". Through these repeated narratives of God's promise, it can obviously be seen that God's eye was not just on Israel, but on humanity as a whole. The call of Abraham did not focus simply on Israel, but carried great significance for all humanity by providing a solution to the human plight. Paul and his fellow Jews had different views regarding the way God would work out his promise.

Jewish Perspective

God elected Israel as God's treasured possession because of His love and promise to Israel's forefathers. (Deut. 7.6-8)

Though Israel went into exile due to the fact of the nation had not obey the covenant, Isaiah continued to use the language of election to prophesy that they would return to the homeland. (Isa. 41.8-10)

God's election of Israel is the starting point of Jewish theology. Israel as a whole was considered a corporate unity in a covenant relationship with God. Unlike the modern emphasis on individual salvation, the Jews hoped for a collective redemption of the Jewish nation. Their conception was that an individual's salvation came from being a member of the saved group.¹⁷ This corporate aspect of Judaism also means that an individual's sin affects the destiny of the whole group.

As for the hope of the restoration of the kingdom of Israel, Isaiah also prophesized that God would restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back the remnant of Israel. (Isa. 49.6a) Since the exiles were ruled by the Gentiles, how was the nation of Israel to be restored? Those militant Jews looked forward to their restoration by way of the destruction of the Gentiles. Some Jews, however, looked forward to the conversion of the Gentiles and their sending gifts to the Temple, and even their studying the Law.

Paul's Perspective

As a Jew and an apostle to the Gentiles, the tension between God's election of Israel and God's offer of salvation to all that have faith in Jesus Christ posed a difficult question for Paul. In Romans, chapters nine to eleven, one sees Paul's anguish over the unbelief of the Jews, as well as his struggle because of the conflict between his Jewish and Christian convictions. Paul believed that the inclusion of the Gentiles in God's salvation and the current state of Jewish unbelief did not alter God's promise to Abraham and God's covenant with Abraham.

First, Paul defended this by charging that Jew and Gentile alike, were sinners and equally in need of salvation. (Rom. 3.9, 23). He argued that God was the God of both Jews and Gentiles. Since there is only one God, there is only one way to salvation, which is by faith in Jesus Christ. (Rom. 3.30)

Then, in an attempt to defend God's faithfulness in the face of Jewish unbelief, Paul echoed the Jewish conviction that there is an Israel within Israel, i.e., physical descendency was no guarantee of a place in God's election. (Rom. 9.6b) Paul enumerated the special favors God had given to the Jews, such as sonship, the covenants, the receiving of the Law, temple worship, the promises, and most of all, the Messiah. However, Paul put blame on those unbelieving Israelites who caused the word of God to have seemingly failed.

God's sovereignty, in terms of predestination, however, does not release humans accountability Paul pointed out that the obvious fault of those Jews who were excluded from salvation at this time was that they did not believe in Jesus Christ. Instead of accepting God's righteousness provided through faith in Christ, the Jews "erred by seeking the wrong righteousness, not by the act of seeking".

Lastly, Paul explained further that there was a remnant of ethnic Israel who were saved, and in the end,

when the full number of the Gentiles had come into the Kingdom, all Israel will be saved, because “God’s gifts and his call are irrevocable.” (Rom. 11.1-6, 26-9). Paul believed that God had not nullified the election of Israel by extending his call and grace to the believing Gentiles, (Rom. 11.1-2) but that God used the success of the Gentile mission to incite the Jews to jealousy so that they would be saved eventually. In other words, a mutual benefit existed between Jews and Gentiles. (Rom. 11.11-14) Paul’s use of the olive tree illustration, he maintained that the believing Gentiles were grafted *among*, not *in place of* the Jews, which means that Gentiles did not take the place of the Jews in salvation, but were added to the number of the saved. Therefore, God’s promise to Abraham did not fail.

Messianic Expectation

Jewish messianic expectation is related to the Jews’ hope for the future. Since the Exile, the Jews had been subject to various foreign rules. The Jews longed for deliverance from the oppression of these foreign rulers. As to how to accomplish this goal, the Jews had different approaches to the liberty they desired. On the one hand, there were Jews who would not hesitate to take up arms when opportunity arose. On the other hand, there were Jews who would rather die passively than to violate the Law.

Common Jewish Perspective

Since the Exile, there was a yearning among the Jews for a restored Davidic kingdom. Jeremiah prophesied that God would raise up a descendant of David, who, unlike any previous descendant of David, would be the ideal king. (Jer. 23. 5-6) In Isaiah, this ideal king would not just sum up in himself all the finest qualities of the best rulers, but his kingdom would last forever. (Isa. 9.7)

Contrary to the Apocrypha, the Pseudepigrapha are filled with detailed descriptions of the messianic hope. In *1 Enoch* there is a detailed description of the Messiah in chapters thirty-seven to seventy-one. Drawing from the allusions and imagery in Daniel (Dan. 3.13) and Isaiah (Isa. 49; 52.13-53.12), the author described a pre-existent heavenly figure, who had the features of the Son of Man the exalted servant of God, and the Messiah although there is no reference to a messiah in *Jubilees*, it does contain a messianic expectation similar to that found in the Apocrypha, that is, that Israel will be punished because of the nation’s sinfulness.

Generally speaking, the Jews in the first century acknowledged that their current plight was due to the sins of the nation. No matter what kind of messianic expectations they held the Jews believed their redemption would come from repentance of their sins and the pious observance of the Law.

They believed that when the messianic age comes, the exiles will be reassembled in the homeland and the Temple will be purged and rebuilt, which will enable the Observance of the whole Law, especially, the cultic commandments. The righteous will be vindicated and the wicked punished. In the end, a universal peace will be installed on earth.

Against the background of such a common messianic expectation, it is obvious that Jesus’ life and work did not fit well into the picture because he did *not restore Israel* or usher in universal peace. The Jews expected sinners to be chastised, but Jesus associated with “sinners” and preached a message of forgiveness.

Furthermore, the message of a crucified messiah would certainly be rejected by the Jews. In the eyes of non-believing Jews and Gentiles, the crucifixion of Jesus was definitely a matter of shame, for crucifixion was a supreme form of Roman penalty for people who committed serious crimes or high treason, for prisoners of war, or for slaves.

Paul’s Perspective

There was a rapid Christological development in the years following the death and resurrection of Jesus. Jesus was crucified as “The King of the Jews”. (Matt. 27.37) He was vindicated by God by being raised from the dead, provided the pivotal point for the Christological exploration of the Jewish Scriptures. In other words, the early Christians looked back on these two historical events and supplied the content of the title Messiah with the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The promise to David and his house in Nathan’s oracle (2 Sam. 7.10-7) prophesied a future Davidic prince.

By tracing Jesus' genealogy to prove that Jesus was the promised Son of David, the Messiah, Matthew, and Luke tried to establish Jesus' honor through his royal and priestly kinship. Furthermore, in the eyes of the New Testament writers, especially the author of the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross was often described as glory and glorification, because it was followed by his resurrection and ascension. Jesus' resurrection and enthronement by God as Lord and Messiah was a status-elevation ritual and a reversal of status from shame to honor.

Observance of the Law

For the Jews, what mattered most was not who was the messiah, but rather that the messiah delivers them from oppression. When Paul claimed that Jesus was the Messiah *and* that Gentiles could be saved without becoming Jews first. This kind of preaching not only implies the nullification of God's election of Israel, but also bypasses the observance of the Law for salvation, the foremost concern of the Jews after the Exile. On the issue of the antithesis of faith and the Law, Paul did not have a standard, pre-formed tradition to which he could resort. Due to the nature of his Gentile mission, Paul had to work out the solution on the run. As a result, as some scholars have claimed, sometimes Paul seemed to be inconsistent in his view on this difficult issue.

Common Jewish Perspective

The Exodus was a pivotal event in Jewish history, for it stands for both God's deliverance of Israel from slavery and destruction, and their election as his people. God delivered the Israelites dramatically and then bound them to himself by a covenant as their God. God's gracious, unmerited deliverance was thus the grounds for the covenant and the giving of the Law. The Sinai covenant was a conditional suzerain-vassal type of covenant, which regulated the relationship between a suzerain and one of his vassals. The suzerain demanded total loyalty and service from the vassal and pledged protection of the vassal's kingdom, conditional on the vassal's faithfulness and loyalty to him.

The condition of the Sinai covenant was Israel's total consecration to God as his people who lived by his rules. (Exod. 19.5) After the Exodus, the Israelites were instructed by God to teach their children whenever they inquired of the meaning of the Law by saying that "the Lord commanded us to obey all these decrees and to fear the Lord our God, so that we might always prosper and be kept alive, as is the case today. And if we are careful to obey all this law before the Lord our God, as he has commanded us that will be our righteousness." (Deut. 6.24-5) Therefore, observance of the Law provided the Jews with a God-given way of living to stay in the covenant and helped them to see that "election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement."¹⁸ Neusner calls attention to the linking of observance of the Law to the coming of the Messiah.¹⁹ Since the coming of the Messiah concerns the fate of the nation rather than that of the individual, if *all* Israel has the right attitude and does the right deeds, according to the Law, then their salvation would arrive.

The Law was a supreme treasure to the Jews. Its observance was a way to show their devotion to God. Furthermore, the Law provided the Jews a sense of security in staying within the covenant. Josephus pointed out that by living under the Law as under a father and a master, the Jews might be guilty of no sin, neither voluntary nor out of ignorance. It was believed that the disloyalty of the nation had brought God's judgment and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Exile. Therefore, after the Exile, the Jews tended to be meticulous in observing the Law.

Paul's Perspective

In the context of salvation, he asserted that no one would be justified in God's sight by observing the Law (Rom. 3:20). He judged that the Law created the consciousness of sin and brought the wrath of God. On the other hand, when Paul spoke of the law in the context of Christian conduct (sanctification, right living before God), then he maintained the value and validity of God's law. For example, when Paul listed the various forms of human wickedness in 1 Timothy 1:8-10, he explicitly asserted, "We know that the law is good" (verse 8).

The key to Paul's understanding of the law is the cross of Christ. From this perspective he both refuted and affirmed the law. He repudiated the law as the basis of justification: "If justification were through the law, then Christ died to no purpose" (Gal. 2:21). God intended to save the entire world by sending

His Son, and since Jesus could not have died in vain, there was no such thing as righteousness by the Law. On the other hand, Paul taught that the law is "holy", "just", "good", and "spiritual" (see Rom. 7:12, 14, 16; 1 Tim. 1:8) because it exposes sin and reveals God's ethical standards. Thus he stated that Christ came "in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us" through the dynamic power of His Spirit (see Rom. 8:4).

Gentile Christians faced a crucial problem: Could they enjoy full citizenship among the people of God without becoming members of the covenant community through circumcision?

At one time Paul apparently had believed that Gentiles had to conform to the whole Mosaic Law, including circumcision, in order to be saved. The phrase "but if I ... still preach circumcision" (see Gal. 5:11) suggests this.

Paul's divine commission to preach the gospel to the Gentiles changed his view. He understood that Gentiles shared in salvation without having to become part of the covenant community through circumcision. To defend this conviction Paul appealed to the example of Abraham (see Romans 4; Galatians 3), who, before he was circumcised, became the father of all who believe.

Practice

Jewish Proselytism

Proselytizing was not a large widespread movement and certainly not sanctioned by Jewish leaders before modern times. But in recent decades, according to this author's Jewish friends, there has been a discreet but significant outreach by Jewish movements. This outreach has been open to all but have often centered on partners in interfaith relationships. Many people from all backgrounds have discovered that Judaism has been spiritually satisfying to them, and some choose to become Jewish through conversion.

During the Greco-Roman period, despite some anti-Jewish attitudes mentioned above, Judaism had much more attraction to Gentiles. Jewish antiquity intrigued many. In the search for universal truth, the Greeks and Romans regarded things of antiquity and eastern as more divine and credible. Another reason for the Gentiles to be attracted to Judaism was Jewish monotheism and piety. Though the Jews were often criticized because of their exclusiveness and misanthropy, they were admired by Gentiles with respect to the cardinal virtues highly valued in the Greco-Roman world, such as wisdom, courage, temperament, and justice. All the virtues mentioned above were found in the person of Moses, the Jewish lawgiver and the ideal leader. Since Moses was well known in the non-Jewish world, his reputation won the admiration of Gentiles. Finally, some Gentiles may have been converted to Judaism for practical reasons, such as the benefit of charities and accommodation available to travelers provided by the synagogues.

There were several methods that the Jews used to convert the Gentile: First of all, the Jews believed that conversion was an act of God. This belief was related to the Jews' eschatology which stated that at the end of time Gentiles would come to worship God in Jerusalem. Second, some evidence of Jewish missionary activities points to the sending of missionaries who were engaged in evangelism among the Gentiles. Third, the synagogue, a multi-purpose Jewish communal center primarily for the instruction of the Jews, was a venue for the Gentiles to learn about Jewish belief. Fourth, a virtuous life style was a powerful way to attract Gentiles to Judaism.

Economic factors might have been the reason that the Jews wanted to proselytize the Gentiles Jews. For example, in the case of King Izates' own conversion, the Jewish merchant Ananias might have gained advantage in his business.

Second, the election of Israel led to the Jews' sense of superiority. They viewed the Gentiles as unclean and as living a less desirable life than the Jews, and, in turn, the Gentiles might defile the people, the land, and especially, the Temple.

Third, the Jews' sense of superiority became a sense of responsibility. As a light for the Gentiles, the Jews believed that they were guides to the blind Gentiles and they were compelled by a "profound sense of their obligation to glorify their God in the Gentile world".

Fourth, proselytism was a natural reaction of the Diaspora Jews' mixing with the Gentiles in their daily life, whether "altruistically or as a defensive response to charges of aloof 'misanthropy.'"

Finally, another motive of the Jews in seeking converts might have been related to their desire to seek pagan patronage in the community. Luke records that the opponents of Paul in the synagogue often incited the leading men and women in the city who were affiliated with the synagogue to drive Paul and his fellow workers out of their territory.

Paul's Missionary strategy

Paul's unique calling was to reach the Gentile world with the gospel and to bring the "full number" of Gentiles to faith. As his ministry unfolded, Paul's unique vision of a single body of God's people comprised of Jews and Gentiles became ever clearer. This vision, though, was not easily realized.

Synagogues as a Base of Operations

Paul adopted a strategy of using the synagogues as a base of operations. The accommodation and hospitality the synagogue provided for travelers provided Paul with initial contacts and much needed logistics when he first arrived in a city.

The synagogue also provided Paul with a traditional and established location with regularly scheduled meetings by both Jews and Gentiles, who were open and eager to seek God and were familiar with the Jewish Scriptures. Since it was the synagogue's custom of inviting visitors to comment on the scriptures that were read during the service. This gives Paul ample opportunities to preach.

The synagogue was a proper venue for Jews to propagate their belief and recruit proselytes and God-fearers. The phenomenon that Jews and Gentiles could worship the same God together under the same roof in the synagogue was a Jewish Universalist conception, not Paul's invention, which provided the ideological common ground for Paul's argument that in Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek." (Gal. 3.28)

From Paul's self-understanding of his mission, he came to the synagogue to fulfill the intended mission of the synagogue, according to God's perspective rather than the common Jewish perspective. In other words, Paul did not consciously intend to form a new Jewish sect or create a new religion. He argued for lifting the existing barriers, the observance of the Law, which was the greatest step for a God-fearer to become a full proselyte.

Paul's Gentile Mission

There was a new category called "God-fearers", or "sympathizers" that were given to the Gentiles who were drawn to Judaism, or for various reasons wanted to be closely associated with the synagogue, but did not wish to take up the yoke of the Law. The Jews might have created the category of God-fearers because, there was a positive attitude, and compassion towards the Gentile converts. Philo says that proselytes had to give up much to become Jews, such as leaving their friends and their own people, and as such they should be granted special friendship. Also, for the sake of their existence and survival in the Diaspora, the Jews needed to find common ground with their Gentile neighbors. Lastly, the Diaspora Jews were willing to make concessions in order to win Gentile patronage to consolidate power for their prosperity. Thus, the existence of God-fearers in the synagogues indicates that there was a gray area, or a "soft boundary line", in first century Diaspora Judaism in an effort to incorporate Gentiles into the Jewish fold.

This group of God-fearers has long been assumed to have existed in synagogues. However, Kraabel argues strongly against such a view.²⁰ Kraabel claims that Luke used God-fearers as a symbol to account for the legitimacy and continuity of Christianity with Judaism. Kraabel's hypothesis, which is an argument from silence, has been rejected or seriously questioned by many scholars. His conclusion cannot prove conclusively that there never was a group of God-fearers associated with Diaspora synagogues. The reason that this term appeared in Luke's writings but was not found in many Jewish inscriptions may be due to the fact that there was no need to identify these people.

Paul bravely took on this unsolved problem of Diaspora Judaism and endeavored to convince the Diaspora Jews that faith in Christ was God's plan of salvation for both Jews and Gentiles. Paul first had

to convince the Jews that Jesus was the promised messiah. He began with a summary of what God has done from Abraham through David, after which Paul moved quickly to Jesus Christ. He affirmed that Christ was the climax and fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes begun with Abraham. However, the Jerusalemites and their ruler crucified Christ because they did not understand the Jewish Scriptures concerning the coming of the Messiah. But God vindicated Jesus by raising him from the dead. Thus, forgiveness of sins came through Jesus, which was a better way, or *the* way, to achieve righteousness than through the Law. The ramification of this fact was that the Gentiles were to be incorporated into the people of God without observance of the Law.

Anyone who advocated such a Law-free approach toward the status of the Gentiles among the Jewish communities undoubtedly would incur serious consequences. Paul stated that he had been subjected to the thirty-nine-lash synagogue discipline on five occasions. In the Diaspora setting, Paul did not have to subject himself to this kind of punishment as well hardship, had he not intended to continue to stay within that Jewish community. Paul was willing to be labeled a deviant and to conform outwardly to the institution of the synagogue so that he could continue his persuasion in spreading Gospel as his own mission.

Paul's attempt to reform Jewish practice concerning the salvation of the Gentiles was important for his Gentile mission. Because of his ecclesiology that Jews and Gentiles became one body in Christ, he had to prevent his Gentile converts from being drawn back to the practice of common Judaism.

Redemption of the Gentiles

God's redemptive work in Israel's history had in view the redemption of the Gentiles. For Paul, the climax of God's Salvation was great harvest of the Gentiles. Paul regarded himself as a priest of the gospel of God, to see to that the offering of the Gentiles, which was sanctified by the Holy Spirit, was acceptable. This expectation of Gentiles bringing offerings to the Jerusalem Temple is well attested in the Jewish Scriptures. For aforementioned reasons, the collection for the saints in Jerusalem is connected with the eschatological framework. Based on the passage, Isa. 11.10, Paul believed that since Jesus Christ, "the root of Jesse", had come, it was time for the Gentiles to be brought under his own rule, and the offerings of the Gentiles, represented by the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, signified the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Paul did not have a well-established foundation that he could hold on to during his Gentile mission. Unlike the other apostles whose ministry stayed primarily within Jewish circles, Paul's Gentile mission drove him into an uncharted area of Jewish theology and practice. Under such circumstances, Paul had to work out his theology and practice regarding many inter-related issues as he went. For example, Law observance was not a problem for those Jews who became Christians, whereas it was the most acute point of conflict in Paul's ministry. Had Paul himself and the Jews not seen his ministry as Jewish, Paul could have gone as far as he wished in sailing into the uncharted territory. However, salvation was of the Jews. Paul had to go back to the old territory and re-map some of the not-so-well defined areas of Jewish theology, particularly those concerning the status of the Gentiles in God's overall plan of salvation. Paul's practice inevitably clashed with Jewish proselytism and made the Diaspora Jews jealous of his success and reject his message and reform.

Part III Heirs of Abraham

God's Promises to Abraham

God's initial promises to Abraham consisted of land, nationhood, and blessing to Abraham and his heirs, as well as to all peoples on earth.

Common Jewish Perspective

The promise on one level refers to material blessing. Abraham's descendants will be numerous, and will inherit a land uniquely suited to facilitate their unique role in human history:

"And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing." (Genesis 12:2)

"... Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him,

So shall thy seed be." (Genesis 15:5)

"... Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward" (Genesis 13:14)

However, to the first-century Jews, it was not easy for the Jews to weigh literally the promise that the nations be blessed by Abraham. The Jews' most prized heritage was God's giving of the Law through Moses as proof of God's election and blessing.

Paul's Perspective

By the time of the first century, the Jews had added the observance of the Law as another qualification for the true heirs of Abraham. Those who were physical heirs but renounced the Jewish practice of the Law were labeled as apostates and were not longer considered as heirs of Abraham. However, for those that were both physical heirs of Abraham and observant of the Law, John the Baptist seemed to have a negative assessment on some of the Jews' boasting based on their physical lineage with Abraham. He redefined true heirs are those who repented and believed in Jesus Christ, the exclusive seed of Abraham.

In Gal. (3:27), Paul explained that the promise of a blessing to the nations was given to the seeds of Abraham, but to a specific seed, who was Christ. Now that Christ has come, the rite of entry into God's people is no longer circumcision (available only to males) but baptism, available to all. *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ"*.

In Galatians (3:28), *"There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."* Differences in ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status do not magically disappear, of course, but Paul declares them to be irrelevant in the body of Christ. For one to be baptized into Christ means being clothed with Christ and finding one's primary identity and value in Christ. All who belong to Christ share fully and equally in the inheritance of God's promises and the call to live as God's children and heirs.

Paul reminds us that the law can never justify or save us. In fact, it can only imprison us. It is Christ who frees us from the curse of the law and makes us children and heirs of God.

Abraham's Faith

Common Jewish Perspective

Abraham provided the Jews an ideal example of the relationship between one's faith in God and obedience to God in terms of observance of the Law.

For the Jews, to receive circumcision represented one's obedience to God and commitment to observe the whole Law. Although circumcision was given some five hundred years before the giving of the Law at Sinai, Jewish tradition held that Abraham himself observed the Law.

Paul's Perspective

In the passage, Rom. 3.21-31, Paul stressed that all have sinned, both Jews and gentiles alike, that God provided a universal solution for the problem, which was by grace through faith in Jesus Christ who offered himself as a sacrifice of atonement for sin of all humanity.

The apostle Paul uses to this verse to establish the fact that Abraham's pattern of justifying faith is normative for all that are righteous before God (see Rom. 4:22-25), that it is not by works of the Law, rather by "hearing with faith" that we are justified (see Gal. 3:5-6).

The Role of Abraham

Jews have different views on the interpretation regarding how Abraham was related to them and to the rest of the world. The exclusivists saw themselves as the exclusive biological inheritors of Abraham, through Isaac, Jacob, the latter's twelve sons and the tribes of Israel. Jews thus often imagine, believe in, or construct Abraham not only as a Jew, but also the "first Jew"; on the other end, the inclusivists minimized the biological relation that the Jews claimed to have had with Abraham's Covenant with God and maximized the spiritual relation instead, with the key thing being "faith" and not "birth".²¹

The claim that we are all children of Abraham certainly grows initially on Christian soil. Paul's letter to the Galatians (3:6-4:11) teaches that Christians too share in the promises and blessings of Abraham. Christian faith links in an unmediated way with the faith of Abraham, thus making Christians heirs to the promises made to Abraham. Now, this claim stands at the heart of Judaism's difference with Christianity. Judaism's self-definition as a people bound by a covenant with God, the roots of which go back to Abraham, is at odds with a Christian understanding that Abraham is a figure whose spiritual heritage is available to all who are willing to confess the proper faith, even outside the boundaries of Israel and its covenant.

Jesus' Link with Abraham

Jesus is the ultimate seed of promise. He miraculously was born to fulfill every promise God ever made to mankind. Paul saw the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises in Christ. He is the Seed who would make every promise come true. God told Abraham that through him every nation on earth would be blessed. Jesus is our blessing. Not just his death, but also his very life. His life lives in us by faith. In Christ we have every spiritual blessing (Eph. 1:3).

In Galatians Chapter 3, Paul equates having faith with being a son of Abraham. He states that God's intention from the inception of his covenant with Abraham was that blessing would come to all the nations through Abraham. Paul, with a discussion of the Law and its relation to Christ demonstrates that it was always the God's intention that faith be the basis for being an heir of these promises of justification and blessing. From the beginning of God's promises to Abraham, it was God's intention that this fatherhood through faith extend beyond Abraham's physical descendants to include Gentiles, that Abraham's blessings are shared by those who believe. The Law did not secure one's relationship to the Abrahamic promises. Rather, the Law was provided to lead those under it to trust in Messiah as the promised justifier.

The Mosaic covenant was God's covenant with Israel given through Moses after He delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Moses, who led the people out, served as the mediator of this contract, which was made at Mount Sinai. The Mosaic Covenant contains the moral disposition of who God is. He would bring His people into the land He had promised to Abraham centuries before (Exodus 6:2-8). God gave the Israelites regulations to properly worship Him. He provided detailed instructions regarding the structure of the tabernacle where the people were to come to make sacrifices for their sins. God established a priesthood through Aaron's line to act as mediators between Himself and the people. If the people obeyed God, He would bless them with things like fruitful wombs, fruitful crops, prosperity, and defeated enemies. If they broke the covenant, they would be cursed with things like disease, drought, and defeat (see Deuteronomy 27-28).

The Davidic covenant continues the trajectory of both the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants. God's plans for David and Israel are clearly intertwined. In 2 Samuel 7, God promises a descendant of David to reign on the throne over the people of God. It is a continuation of the earlier covenants in that it promises a Davidic king as the figure through whom God would secure the promises of land, descendants, and blessing. This covenant becomes the basis for hope of a Messiah and makes sense of the Gospels' concern to show Jesus was the rightful King of the Jews. The Davidic covenant thus identifies more precisely the promised "seed" who will mediate international blessing: he will be a royal descendant of Abraham through David.

The Extension of the Blessing/Salvation to the Gentiles

The "new covenant" refers to the covenant mediated by Jesus through His death and resurrection (1 Timothy 2:5-6). Jesus perfectly fulfilled the old covenant and ushered in the promised new covenant (Matthew 5:17-18; 27:26-29; Hebrews 8:6).

The old covenant was not intended to be permanent. Jeremiah the prophet wrote, "Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and

they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (see Jeremiah 31:31–34).

The reason the Lord gave us the Mosaic Covenant, according to the Book of Galatians, chapter 3, is so that mankind would become aware of the fact that they can't earn God's blessing based on their own works. The Mosaic Covenant is conditional and temporary, unlike the Abrahamic Covenant that's unconditional. It is a temporary administrative covenant designed keep Israel and mankind in place until Messiah could come. The Abrahamic Covenant is permanent, built upon the foundations of faith, God's sovereignty, and the promises of God.

Abraham was used by Paul and the early Christians to serve three purposes. First, in light of his soteriology, Abraham's exemplary faith was used by Paul to argue that salvation came from justification by faith in Christ apart from the works of the Law. Second, in light of his ecclesiology, the Abrahamic covenant was used by Paul to prove the inclusion of the Gentile Christians as the heirs of Abraham. Abraham was the father of both Jews and Gentiles. In Christ, "there is neither Jew nor Greek." Third, in light of his missiology, Paul used Abraham as a scriptural basis to justify his Gentile mission.

Part IV Paul, a Man of Prayer

With holy fervor, Paul poured out his heart to God daily in behalf of the churches which he had planted. The following highly interesting extracts show how much even an inspired Apostle Paul valued intercessory prayer:

To the Romans, "Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;" (Rom. 15:30)

He entreats the Thessalonians, "Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you". (2 Thessalonians 3:1)

To the Hebrews he writes, "Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly". (Hebrews 13:18)

To the Corinthians, "Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf". (2 Corinthians 1:11)

To the Philippians; "For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ." (Philippians 1:19)

To Philemon; " But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you." (Philemon 1:22)

Prayer is a precious privilege of a true believer who pour his heart at the mercy-seat, sprinkled with the blood of Jesus, and makes known his needs to God.

Our Lord took Paul and made him a pattern of what He can do for one who was a sinner. "Pray without ceasing" was simply the expression of his daily life. He saw the need of much and unceasing prayer, day and night.

It is also important to know what Paul prayed as to know how frequently he did so.

In the Epistles, we have a number of distinct prayers where Paul expresses his heart's desire for those to whom he writes. In Ephesians (1:15-23), he prays for the Spirit of wisdom to enlighten them to know their calling, their inheritance, and the mighty power of God working in them. In Philippians (1:9-11), Paul prays for whom he writes spiritual knowledge, blameless life, and then a fruitful life to the glory of God. Paul was so at homes in the holiness and omnipotence of God and His love that such prayers were the natural expression of what he knows God could and would do.

Paul's requests for prayer prove that he does not count prayer a special prerogative of an apostle; he calls the humblest and simplest to claim his right. Paul does not think that only the new converts or feeble Christians need prayer; he himself, as a member of the body, is dependent upon his brethren and their prayers.

Our prayers for others are built on the premise that our will is aligned with God's in an important way; namely, we have the shared desire for others to come to the knowledge of gospel truth, to repent, to be baptized, and to be saved through God's grace.

Part V Paul's Vision, Commission, and God's Economy

God's economy is the Triune God's plan to dispense Christ as life into His chosen people for their full salvation, for the building up of the Body of Christ for His expression, and for the heading up of all things in Christ. The apostle Paul was chosen by God to bear the responsibility for God's economy.

Paul first encountered our Lord Jesus on the way to Damascus. While Saul was trembling and astonished, he asked the Lord, "Lord, what do you want me to do?" The Lord said:

16 But rise and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to make you a minister and a witness both of the things which you have seen and of the things which I will yet reveal to you.

17 I will deliver you from the Jewish people, as well as from the Gentiles, to whom I now send you,

18 to open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me. (Acts 26:16-18 NKJV)

The heavenly vision that Paul received was constituted of two mysteries—the mystery of God (Col. 2:2), which is Christ, and the mystery of Christ (Eph. 3:4-6), which is the church.

These two mysteries are actually one incorporated mystery in God's economy—the great mystery of Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32). Paul received this earth-shattering revelation on the day of his conversion. Paul's vision and understanding of Christ is the center and circumference of God's economy.

Paul's vision issued in a commission. Paul's commission is intrinsically related to the contents of his vision—Christ and the church. His commission was to announce Christ and build up the church (Eph. 3:8-10). Paul's commission was a stewardship, a distribution of the riches of Christ for the producing of the church as the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:23).

In Ephesians 3:8-11 Paul summarizes his ministry:

⁸ *Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ;*

To describe Paul's ministry, the first thing that Paul says he is doing is announcing the gospel. He is preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul was not preaching a doctrine to be understood instead, he was preaching a Person to be experienced. The gospel is Christ, with all the riches of His Person, work, and attainments. (Eph. 3:8)

In 1 Cor 1:9, "Faithful is the God who called you to participate in his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." We have been called to participate in and enjoy Christ. We cannot experience anything that is not immediately present and subjective. Paul reveals that the objective Christ we read about in the Gospels—the last Adam—became the life-giving Spirit in resurrection and is now joined to us as one spirit. Thus, for us them to experience of the unsearchable riches of Christ, Paul emphatically points us to the human spirit (2:11), the life-giving Spirit (15:45), and the mingled spirit (6:17). To deny the existence of the human spirit, to deny that Christ is the Spirit, and to deny the mingling of God and man as one spirit is to deny the factors that enable us to experience Christ. This is to deny a central focus of Paul's ministry and to miss God's economy.

⁹ *And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ:*

The economy of the mystery is simply God's economy. It is perhaps the most significant concept in the Bible. Paul indicates that his ministry was a dispensing of food, a stewardship in God's economy; his teaching was feeding. In 1 Corinthians, Paul opens the letter to the Church in Corinth with absolute assurance of their redemption. What they needed was not an economy of redemption, but an economy

of dispensing. Paul doesn't come with worldly wisdom or a problem-solving mentality. He comes as a steward to dispense food.

¹⁰ *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God,*

¹¹ *According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:*

God's goal is that Christ, in many aspects, would be expressed through the church. We become the venue for God's expression. God's goal isn't heaven; it is the expression of Christ through the church. Paul shows that when we are functioning properly as the Body of Christ, especially in prophesying, God will be expressed among us.

"But if all prophesy and some unbeliever or unlearned person enters, he is convicted by all, he is examined by all; the secrets of his heart become manifest; and so falling on his face, he will worship God, declaring that indeed God is among you." (1 Cor. 12:24-25)

God is working in His economy to dispense the unsearchable riches of Christ into the church for His corporate expression in eternity.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discuss the interconnections between the life of Apostle Paul and his theology. We explore how Paul's cultural background in both Jewish and Gentile contexts deeply shaped his theology. We looked into some of the ways Paul's apostolic ministry led him to apply his theology to the practical needs of the Christian churches to whom he wrote his epistles.

It would be difficult to overestimate how crucial these perspectives on Paul and his theology are. They open the way for understanding the original meaning of what the most prolific New Testament writer taught the Christian church in his day. Every time we read from Paul's letters, we must keep in view his cultural background, his apostolic ministry, and his central beliefs. As we do, we'll gain a deeper awareness of what Paul taught the early church.

This paper also explores Paul's understanding of his mission and strategies. Paul's approach to his mission was to do so simply, clearly, and without pretense and human sophistication. Paul clearly stated his goal in Roman 15.20, which was to take the gospel to places where it was previously unknown. Paul understood that the gospel message was the news of the physical crucifixion and bodily resurrection from the dead of the Son of God—the Lord Jesus Christ—for the forgiveness of sin and the reception of eternal life with God the Father. Paul constantly did follow up with the churches that he had planted. Constant follow up and oversight for the purpose of fidelity to the Lord and his message was an essential part of Paul's strategy. Another important aspect of Paul's strategy was adapting himself to the cultures that he engaged. Paul explained this in 1 Corinthians 9.19-23; his point was that he did not require pagans to act like Christians or Jews before he explain the gospel to them. Additionally, Paul knew it was important that as he entered new mission fields that he was not a financial burden to those he was attempting to reach. In other words, he did not hit them up for money, nor did he immediately require them to give their money away. Another extremely important element of Paul's strategy was partnering with others in the work of missions (see Phil 2.19-22; 2 Tim 2.2; Acts 20.2-4). Paul's most well know disciple and partner was Timothy, but there were many others (e.g., Barnabas, Silas). Consequently, an integral part of Paul's strategy was to instill within all local churches a passion for missions and a sacrificial partnership with him as he went from them to proclaim the gospel.

Paul's commission was a stewardship, a distribution of the riches of Christ for the producing of the church as the fullness of Christ (Eph. 1:23). While Paul occupies a special place in this commission, he certainly is not working alone. The book of Acts describes a body of witnesses bearing a corporate testimony. In fact, Paul is always seen carrying out his commission within a company of related members, and he always seems to be seeking to bring others into his calling.

To be a witness for Christ, we must see the vision that Paul saw. Otherwise, we will not be able to participate in this commission in any meaningful way. The vision produces the commission, and the

commission is directed and governed by the vision.

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Notes

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