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THE BASIS OF PAUL'S ETHICS IN HIS KERYGMATIC THEOLOGY

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Introduction

The title of this paper implies that *there is an important relationship between Paul's ethics and his theology and presentation of the gospel*. In fact, as we shall see, Paul's ethics sprang out of his theology. If this is true, it is of great importance for the modern church, at least if we ascribe normative value to Paul's way of making ethical judgements. It means that modern Christians are not free to make merely pragmatic or situational ethical decisions, but that these need to take basic theological principles fully into account.

It implies too that theology is the true driving force of ethics, at least at the conceptual level. If this is so, then the current situation in the church should be a matter of real concern, for, although there is a fairly lively interest in ethics, this is coupled with a widespread neglect of theology. This attitude is at best unbalanced and at worst it will rob ethical judgements and consequent actions by Christians of any distinctively Christian content. The church is called to witness to the world both by its message and by its life. It is imperative for us to face the fact that it is in grave danger of losing any distinctiveness in either.

It is another implication of our title that *Paul did not inherit a complete system of ready-made ethical judgements or precepts*. Paul had to work at ethical issues, to see how they related to the gospel he was commissioned to proclaim, and to make decisions accordingly. These decisions affected not only his own conduct but also that of those to whom he wrote his letters.

It could of course be argued that Paul as a Jew possessed a major ethical document in the Old Testament, and that all that was needed was for him to apply its precepts and encourage their application in the churches. Now it is quite true that he quotes the Old Testament in ethical contexts and that at many other points his ethics show its influence. Even as a Jew, however, he did not come to the Old Testament without presuppositions; before his conversion these were supplied by the Pharisaic training through which he had passed.

Although the ethical problems faced by the Christian churches had similarities to those raised for the Jewish synagogues, they were not completely identical. For this reason it was inadequate for him simply to apply the Jewish ethical tradition he had inherited from his Rabbinic mentors and forbears. In any case, we would expect the change in his theological perspective which followed from his conversion to affect his outlook on ethical matters. This then raises the question as to the hermeneutical principles he applied in giving ethical counsel to the churches, and, without doubt, these principles reflect his theology.

It could also be argued that he was a disciple of a great ethical Teacher, and that all he needed to do was simply to state and apply the ethical precepts of Jesus. Now he does do this from time to time, but there were, as he himself says, situations for which no clear guidance was given in the teaching of Christ. In such situations he made his own judgements, although he recognizes that he did not do so unaided. He says, 'Now about virgins: I have no command from the Lord, but I give a judgement as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy' (1 Cor. 7:25).

A further argument that might be advanced is that there was a Christian ethical tradition, itself reflected in his writings, so that he could simply apply its precepts. But, of course, new situations were arising all the time in the young churches for which he had some responsibility, and that tradition could not possibly cover every contingency.

Diverse Interpretations of Paulinism

I will use the term 'Paulinism', although realizing that it has some unhelpful nuances, as a designation for Paul's basic theological stance. This theological stance has not always been understood in the same way. As will be seen, the debate as to the nature of Paulinism has considerable bearing on the issue of the relationship between his theology and his ethics, because the central concept of his theology has so often been regarded as intimately related to his ethics. As Keck and Furnish say, 'What one identifies as the theological center of

Paul's gospel will, in large part, determine the way all other aspects of his preaching and teaching are construed.'¹

Keck gives a useful summary of 'Paul's Theology in Historical Criticism' in an appendix to his book, *Paul and his Letters*.² He concentrates on the history since the rise of the Tübingen School early in the nineteenth century. My own treatment owes something to his but also differs somewhat from it.

1. Paulinism as essentially freedom from the law through Christ. Characteristic Reformation teaching, especially in its Lutheran form, placed great emphasis on Paul's doctrine of justification as central to his whole outlook, and the Reformers employed it in their critique of the salvation theology and practice of the medieval church. They recognized in Augustine of Hippo one who had anticipated their own understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification.

Luther thought of Paul essentially as a converted Pharisee. His life had been characterized by a consciousness of moral failure, expressed classically in Romans 7. Augustine too had been impressed by this, for it had an echo in his own experience. This sense of failure they believed had been induced in Paul by his unsuccessful attempts to keep the law of Moses in order to be justified by God. To Paul the gospel centred in the cross, interpreted in legal terms as a divine act of penal substitution. This did not mean that the law had no abiding function beside its elenctic or convicting function, for Paul was no antinomian. Most Reformed theologians have held that for Paul the law had a continuing place as setting standards for Christian character and conduct.

For the Reformers, of course, Paulinism, although the classic presentation of Christian truth, was not out of harmony with the rest of the New Testament, even though the justification terminology might not appear elsewhere very frequently.

Then came F.C. Baur and the Tübingen School, who held that in fact there was profound theological disharmony in

¹ L.E. Keck and V.P. Furnish, *The Pauline Letters* (Nashville, 1984), p. 40.

² L.E. Keck, *Paul and his Letters*, second edit. (Philadelphia, 1988), pp. 126-58.

early Christian history. This history was dominated by conflict over the law between the early Petrine and the slightly later Pauline churches. The latter were predominantly Gentile and held tenaciously to his doctrine of freedom from the Mosaic law. With this assumption, the Tübingen School maintained that only Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Galatians were definitely genuine Pauline writings and that Acts was a deliberate rewriting of history motivated by a desire to bring the two groups together. Rudolf Bultmann also emphasized the forensic element in Pauline theology, and he showed a remarkably clear understanding of it and how it cohered with other aspects of Paul's thought.

Here is Bultmann's view of the apostolic doctrine of the cross:

The Jesus who was crucified was the pre-existent incarnate Son of God and as such he was without sin. He is the Victim whose blood atones for our sins. He bears vicariously the sin of the world, and by enduring the punishment for sin on our behalf he delivers us from death.³

This is the basis for Paul's justification doctrine.

That hardly sounds like Bultmann's own theology and of course it is not! He made it clear, of course, that he could not accept this teaching at all, and he declares 'This mythological interpretation is a hotchpotch of sacrificial and juridical analogies which have ceased to be tenable for us today.' So, as we shall see, he gave Pauline theology instead an existentialist interpretation.⁴

Luther's approach to Paul's teaching has been much questioned recently. F. Watson, summing this up says that:

The work of Stendahl, Davies, Sanders and Räisänen is symptomatic of a very widespread feeling of dissatisfaction with the Lutheran approach to Paul. This is also apparent in the work of such scholars as M. Barth, G. Howard, J.D.G. Dunn, N.T. Wright, and (perhaps most significantly) in the important new three-volume

3 R. Bultmann, in H.-W. Bartsch (ed.), *Kerygma and Myth* 1 (London, 1962), p. 35.

4 *Ibid.*

commentary on Romans by U. Wilckens. The process of 'deLutheranizing Paul' is well under way.⁵

There has also been much discussion about the crucial passage in Romans 7. J.C. Beker, for example, asserting that most scholars have come to a new consensus, says that there is

convincing evidence that Romans 7 is not autobiographical.... This is one of the instances in which New Testament exegesis seems to me to have made decisive and irrefutable progress, despite the fact that many scholars have continued to see Paul's own frustration with the law as one of his reasons for denouncing its validity as a way of salvation.⁶

Also of course, largely through the work of E.P. Sanders,⁷ there have been attempts to re-design the image of Pharisaism that most of us have and to view it as finding the centre of Israel's relationship with God not so much in the law as in the covenant of which, of course, the law was an important expression. This then means, if Sanders is right, that there was more emphasis on grace in the Pharisaic outlook than has been generally understood.

The debate continues, but it should be clearly realized that it raises questions not only whether Paul's conversion was simply theological, with little or no basis in his ethical experience, but also whether the presentation of Pharisaism in the Gospels is really accurate. As this presentation is, in general, common to them all, a negative verdict would have very serious implications. Of course, what the theological leaders of the Pharisees taught and what the rank and file Pharisees of Galilee taught might well have been somewhat different in emphasis. It is the former we know from the Rabbinic literature; it is chiefly the latter that comes before us in the Gospels.

2. Paulinism as essentially participation in Christ. Can the whole Pauline doctrine of salvation be understood in

5 F. Watson, *Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 18.

6 J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Edinburgh, 1980), pp. 478-9, n.23.

7 E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (London, 1977).

terms of justification or are other categories needed? We might perhaps add a category like adoption, which J.I. Packer characterized as a much neglected aspect of Paul's thought that should be taken alongside his justification doctrine.⁸ This however, although somewhat different, still relates to an objective transfer of the sinner into a new position, just as justification does, although now conceived more in terms of the family than of relationship to the divine law.

The idea of participation is however somewhat different. In relation to the atonement it relates more to representation than to substitution, and of course, there have been participationist doctrines of the atonement going back into the patristic period, perhaps represented most strikingly in the Recapitulation doctrine of Irenaeus.

Towards the close of the nineteenth century, the History-of-Religions School arose. Its members taught that the Christian faith very early became Hellenized, and they regarded this as one feature of the general tendency to philosophical and religious syncretism which prevailed at the time.

Wilhelm Bousset,⁹ for instance, taught that the Antioch church, living in a major Hellenistic centre, included many converts drawn from Hellenistic cults. It was natural that, in such a syncretistic atmosphere, they should simply transfer to Jesus the belief they already had in a supernatural lord. Salvation was secured by incorporation into him through the initiation-rite of baptism and the sacred meal of the eucharist, ideas already congenial to them through the mystery religions.

Paul, Bousset said, inherited this theology and so had a participationist view of the Christian's relationship to Christ. Paul, however, gave more ethical content to the resulting 'life out of death' than was usual in the mystery cults.

Bousset practically ignored Paul's Jewish and legalistic background and put very little emphasis on the justification concept.

Albert Schweitzer attacked the Hellenization theory. Keck quotes Schweitzer as saying that, according to the History-of-Religions School,

Paulinism ought to be detached from early Christianity and closely connected with Greek theology. The contrary is the

⁸ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (London, 1973), pp. 230-32.

⁹ W. Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (London, 1971).

case. It stands in undisturbed connection with the former, whereas it shows no connection whatever with the latter.¹⁰ For Schweitzer, Jesus, early Christianity, and Paul are continuous, with 'a continuity grounded in the Jewish apocalyptic theology they all shared'.¹¹

It comes somewhat as a surprise therefore to find that Schweitzer too maintained that Paul held to a participationist view of salvation, and that this in fact prepared the way for the ultimate Hellenization of the Christian faith, which, in his view, took place in Asia Minor after Paul's death. This was his emphasis in his two major books on Paul.¹²

It is important to understand precisely what Schweitzer is asserting. He says:

One thing which surprises us in the Pauline Christ-mysticism is its extraordinarily realistic character. The being in Christ is not conceived as a static partaking in the spiritual being of Christ, but as a real co-experiencing of his dying and rising again.... The believer experiences the dying and rising again of Christ in actual fact, not in an imitative representation.¹³

Through union with Christ, Paul held, believers are assured of a place in the kingdom that is to be ushered in at his return. Schweitzer attacked those, like H.J. Holtzmann, who held that Paul's union with Christ concept is 'an essentially ethical relation'.¹⁴ The sacraments are realistic acts, truly effecting union with Christ, and not merely symbols. They have of course ethical implications, but in essence they are efficacious acts, effecting real incorporation.

E.P. Sanders warmly approves of this participationist interpretation of Paul and credits Deissmann and Schweitzer with 'discovering' it.¹⁵ Bultmann on the other hand reacted against it and divided up the passages in which it is found under different headings so that he did not need to discuss it

10 A. Schweitzer, *Paul and his Interpreters* (London, 1912), p. 230.

11 *Op. cit.*, p. 134.

12 *Paul and his Interpreters* (see n. 10 above) and *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, second edit. (London, 1953).

13 A. Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, pp. 13, 16.

14 *Ibid.* p. 17, n. 1.

15 E.P. Sanders, *op. cit.*, p. 453.

as such at all,¹⁶ and he found its various elements in such features of Hellenism as gnosticism and the mystery religions. In this, as in other ways, Bultmann shows that he never really got away from the old History-of-Religions movement.

The view that union with Christ is central to Paul's theology was developed for Scottish and other English-speaking readers, by James S. Stewart in his influential book, *A Man in Christ*.¹⁷ To him union with Christ was more central than justification in the soteriology of Paul.

3. Paulinism as essentially preparation for the second advent of Christ. Schweitzer, anticipated somewhat by Johannes Weiss, held, in opposition to most of the liberals of his day, that early Christianity, following Jesus, was essentially apocalyptic in its outlook and message. Jesus came to proclaim the imminent incursion of the kingdom of God. The apocalyptic message was taken over by his followers in terms of a second advent, and so was inherited by Paul, who believed that Christ would return to wind up the present world order by ushering in the kingdom of God.¹⁸

Just as, according to Schweitzer, the ethics of Jesus were interim ethics, in which the disciple was always to have his eye on the imminent end of the present order, so Paul's ethics too were essentially ethics of the interim, now conceived as the period between the two comings of Christ. He says that 'Paul's ethic... is born, like that of Jesus, of the eschatological expectation'.¹⁹

Käsemann, a leading pupil of Bultmann who eventually reacted somewhat against his teaching, emphasized the importance of apocalyptic. Early Christianity, he said, was characterized by 'Enthusiasm', attributed to the Spirit of God. This, along with apocalyptic, was found in early Jerusalem Christianity. The possession of the Spirit was viewed as the pledge of the *parousia* of Jesus. On Hellenistic soil, however, and especially at Corinth, apocalyptic did not have a natural

16 E.P. Sanders, *ibid.* makes this point about Bultmann.

17 J.S. Stewart, *A Man in Christ* (London, 1935).

18 A. Schweitzer, *Mysticism*, pp. 52-100.

19 *Ibid.*, p. 309.

home and so Paul, who did think apocalyptically, had to restrain somewhat the charismatic enthusiasm of the Hellenistic Christian converts.

J.C. Beker, in his work, *Paul the Apostle*,²⁰ advocates an apocalyptic approach, as the subtitle of his book, 'The Triumph of God in Life and Thought', shows. Apocalyptic was, he believes, the main theological motif of Paul's thought, for the gospel itself is essentially a proclamation concerning the future.

4. Paulinism as essentially existential action in response to God's action in Christ. This is especially associated with Rudolf Bultmann. He emphasized Hellenistic and especially gnostic influences, but what to him was unique in Christianity was the claim that God had acted in Christ. So he set out to demythologize Christianity.²¹ 'Bultmann recast both gnostic mythology and New Testament theology into existentialist categories, so that despite differences in vocabulary what came to light was a remarkably similar self-understanding.'²² He thought of New Testament thought in general and Pauline thought in particular as classic statements of early existentialism.

God has acted in Christ's death and resurrection, although we should note that for Bultmann the cross was historical and the resurrection mythological! This action of God now constitutes for the Christian a pattern of existential living, and his proper response is to adopt that pattern for his own life. He is to accept his death before its time and this will result in a life out of death that will be devoted to God's will.

It has to be said that Bultmann's conception is open to two most serious criticisms. First, he has been guilty of eliminating all the evidence on which other views are based simply by declaring that evidence to be the product of myth-making. Secondly, his own exposition is not simply coloured by but based entirely on a philosophical viewpoint which first came to clear expression in the nineteenth century in the works of Kierkegaard and, in the form to which he

20 See n. 6 above.

21 L.E. Keck, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

22 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

subscribed, emerged only in the twentieth century in the work of Heidegger.

5. The elusive coherence of Paulinism. As we have seen, Paulinism has been interpreted in at least four major different ways, which prompts us to wonder if there is really one golden key that will open the door to the whole theology of Paul. There seem so many possibilities. Beker, who, as we have seen, interprets Paul apocalyptically, admits that this is not carried through consistently in all that Paul wrote, especially, it appears, at the practical, ethical level. He says that there are clearly instances where the situational demands suppress the apocalyptic theme of the gospel (*e.g.* Galatians), or where the theme seems to impose itself on the situation (*e.g.* 1 Corinthians 15). Notwithstanding Paul's occasional inconsistencies, however, his hermeneutical intent is clear. 'He is able to grasp the basic truth of the gospel without minimising its situational relevance', he says,²³ in summarizing chapter 7 of his book.

Keck observes that,

Given the nature of the Pauline corpus, it is not surprising that from time to time scholars have asked whether Paul was a *coherent thinker*. To understand Paul's thought as theology one must first assemble the pieces into as coherent a whole as possible, giving each element its proper weight.²⁴

As far back as 1872, Lüdemann argued that Paul's thought lacked coherence. He said that in Romans 1-4 (and Galatians) salvation is through atonement, justification and faith, while in Romans 5-8 (and Corinthians) it is destruction of the flesh and liberation of the spirit through participation in Christ and bestowal of the Spirit. In this way, Lüdemann embraced both the juridical and the participatory interpretations.²⁵ Somewhat similarly, Sanders maintains that Paul, ministering as he did both to Jews and Gentiles, held together the juridical and

23 J.C. Beker, p. x.

24 L.E. Keck, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

25 H. Lüdemann, *Die Anthropologie des Apostels Paulus* (Kiel, 1872).

participatory categories and so two concepts of the human plight.²⁶

Keck and Furnish go further and say that Paul combined three different approaches.

Most interpreters could agree that all three of these doctrines (justification by faith, the life in Christ, the final triumph of God) play some role in Paul's thought and that they are, in fact, somehow interrelated. However, there is no consensus about which, if any, can be identified as the theological centre of his gospel. This is one of the decisions each interpreter must make, at least provisionally, if the task of interpretation is to proceed; for every specific Pauline text needs, eventually, to be read within the context of Paul's overall thought.²⁷

It is surely significant that Albert Schweitzer, who had a most distinctive view himself and also a great gift for demolishing the positions of other scholars, should admit that there are more sides to Paul's theology than the one for whose recognition he is well-known. He says,

There are in fact three different doctrines of redemption which in Paul go side by side: an eschatological, a juridical, and a mystical.... Paul lives at the same time in the simple ideas of the eschatological doctrine of salvation, in the complicated Rabbinical and juridical conceptions, and in the profundities of the mysticism of the being-in-Christ, passing freely from the one circle of ideas to the other.²⁸

It is true that Schweitzer regarded the mystical doctrine as the most important, but he does recognize the existence of the other two.

As we have seen, J.C. Beker views Paul's thought as primarily apocalyptic, but he recognizes that there are other motifs at work, and he seeks to integrate them by using the techniques and literary tools of structuralism. He emphasizes Paul's hermeneutic. The deep structure or primary language is the apocalyptic meaning of Christ, the surface or secondary is the particular linguistic expression, like justification and participation.²⁹

26 E.P. Sanders, *op. cit.*, pp. 501-8.

27 L.E. Keck and V. Furnish, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

28 A Schweitzer, *op.cit.*, p. 25.

29 J.C. Beker, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-19.

This would seem, however, to have troubling negative possibilities. It may turn out to be little better than Bultmann's position, for in its surface or secondary language may turn out to have no more ultimacy than Bultmann's 'myth'. We might also compare Paul Tillich's understanding of much theological language, both in the New Testament and in later theology, as simply symbolic of the one colourless reality which lies beyond it and is other than it, that is, Being or Ground of Being. Twentieth-century theology has proved fertile in devising ways of eliminating elements of New Testament theology it finds uncongenial or thinks inconsistent.

Paulinism as rooted in the *kerygma* and its Old Testament background. There is however a way of integrating the diverse elements in Paul's thought which does not sacrifice the ultimacy of any of them, and it is to see all his thought as based on and as a development of the primitive Christian *kerygma*.

C.H. Dodd, in *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments*,³⁰ argued that one *kerygma* should be seen as the basis of all the diverse material to be found within the New Testament. It is true that there have been many attempts to overthrow his thesis, but it can still be well supported. We may analyse it in a threefold way. There is, first of all, the proclamation proper, which is the apostolic assertion that God has acted in Christ, particularly in his death and resurrection, for human salvation, sealed by the gift of the Spirit, and in anticipation of his second advent. Then there is the support for that proclamation in terms of the Old Testament anticipation of which it was the fulfilment. Finally, there is the practical application of this message to the hearers in terms of the call for repentance and faith and baptism. How does this *kerygma* relate to the three main interpretations of Paul's thought which we have identified?

We will consider first justification and union with Christ. These are both related to the central facts of the *kerygma* and therefore to each other. The effect of Christ's death is to justify the believer and the effect of his resurrection to hold

30 C.H. Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and its Developments* (London, 1964).

out the possibility of union and so of communion with him. Not only so, but Paul occasionally relates justification to Christ's resurrection (*e.g.* Rom. 4:25), and of course, he taught that union with Christ involves identification with him both in his death and his resurrection. The Spirit of God features in Paul's soteriology both as evidence of our justification (Galatians) and also as the living bond of our union with Christ.

What about the second advent? This too has a place in the *kerygma* – although Dodd, as is well known, held that in much of the New Testament, including the writings of Paul, realized eschatology increasingly takes over, so that the end is already given in the saving facts that have been accomplished in Christ. Now we may accept that there is an important element of realized eschatology in Paul's thought without relegating the unrealized element to second-class status. Paul in fact gives an eschatological dimension to his salvation doctrine, as more and more New Testament scholars are emphasizing.

We have still to consider the place of the Old Testament background in the *kerygma* and also the place of repentance, faith and baptism, and so we will move on to consider the implications of Paul's kerygmatic theology in the ethical sphere. First, however, there is another issue we must address briefly.

Theological Influences on Paul's Ethics

1. The Old Testament. Ethics has a theological basis in the Old Testament, for it is clearly based on the nature of the God whose revelation of himself is there recorded, and whose expressed will, reflecting his character, found expression in its commands. Those commands were, of course, largely to be found in the Mosaic law.

The law cannot however be viewed in isolation. As Paul himself showed in Galatians, it was preceded by God's promise to Abraham. As a study of the Old Testament shows, it was also preceded by the redemptive act of the exodus and this is itself mentioned at the opening of Exodus 20, which records the Decalogue.

In that the promise, the exodus and the law all have their origin in God, we would expect the Pauline ethic to bear the marks of them and to be consistent with them, for God's

purpose may have moved on, but God's character had not changed.

2. Contemporary Judaism. Paul's conversion meant that he had to re-think the interpretation of the Old Testament and therefore the understanding of it in which he had been reared. This would focus especially on the law, because this was so central to the Pharisaic outlook. As we have seen, some modern writers, following E.P. Sanders, have emphasized that behind the Pharisaic commitment to the law was a concern for the divine covenant with Israel, and that this was even more fundamental than their commitment to the law. Even if this is so, however, there is no doubt that, in terms of the practical *ethic* of the covenant, this was conceived to have its basis in the law.

It is not surprising therefore to find that discussion of the law, its purpose and functions, is prominent in the teaching of Paul.

3. Contemporary Hellenism. The conflict between those who interpret Paul's thought Hellenistically and those who interpret it against a Rabbinic background is by no means over. There is no doubt that many of Paul's social attitudes and moral instructions can be paralleled in the popular Hellenistic philosophies of his day.³¹ This was, however, the period of Middle Platonism, when Platonism was being modified by all kinds of other philosophical and religious ideas, and there were many different versions of it current at the time. In fact philosophical and religious syncretism was the very atmosphere of the Hellenistic world at this time and, as we see from Philo, Hellenistic Judaism was not exempt from it.

The real question, however, is not one of parallels but of influence. Ethical parallels there may have been, and Paul may even have been aware of them. Just as Rabbinic teaching can provide parallels to some of the precepts of Jesus without this undermining the distinctiveness of his outlook as a whole, so the presence of parallels with Hellenistic ethical concepts need not call into question the biblical and gospel

³¹ V. Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville, 1988), pp. 27, 28, 44-51.

roots of his ethics. After all, he could quote pagan poets even to illustrate theological concepts, while at the same time, as B. Gärtner has shown,³² being completely true to the Old Testament roots of the gospel.

4. Christ and the gospel. Paul's encounter with Christ was of course the greatest of all the influence we can discern. We will explore this in the next section of this paper.

The Gospel Ethics of Paul

The great ethical principles we see at work in Paul's life and teaching all come from the gospel itself or from the Old Testament interpreted in the light of the gospel. Consider the following:

1. The gospel presents us with a challenge as well as a blessing. Paul says to the Philippians, 'Conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ' (Phil. 1:27; cf. Eph. 4:1; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12).

2. Through the gospel Christ has established his right to command his people. He is Lord of all, for this he died and rose again, and his ethical teaching needs to be taken with great seriousness (1 Cor. 7:10). Paul clearly regarded this teaching as constituting an abiding ethical challenge to the Christian.

3. The Christian's acceptance with God is grounded in Christ's atoning work, accepted by faith. This is true whether Paul is expressing this in terms of legal righteousness or of adoptive sonship. Both are to be viewed as new positions, the products of God's grace, with their basis in Christ's work. We can see this clearly, for instance, in Romans 3 and Galatians 3. This means that, however ethical activity is to be conceived, whether as evidence of grace or as grateful response to grace, or as both, it cannot be rightly viewed as the means of acceptance with God.

32 B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Lund, 1955).

4. The Decalogue is an abiding standard for the ethical dimension of the godly life. The *kerygma* makes reference to the Old Testament as bearing witness to the gospel of Christ. This might well imply that the discontinuity between the law and the gospel suggested in passages like Romans 3 and the Epistle to the Galatians cannot be taken as a complete theology of the relationship between the testaments. Indeed, a passage like 2 Corinthians 3 strongly suggests elements of continuity also.

This applies in particular to the Decalogue, the heart of the Mosaic legal system. P.D. Miller has argued convincingly for the special place of the Decalogue in the Old Testament legal system.³³ This place is so special that it is difficult to think it was intended to be applicable only within the Old Testament economy.

Paul encountered professing Christians who clearly held to an antinomian view of the Christian life, and some at least of these argued for complete ethical licence for the Christian, and lived accordingly (Rom. 6:1ff.).

Antinomianism and licentiousness are commonly identified, but it would be useful to distinguish them, confining the use of the former terms to the realm of theory and the latter to that of practice. S. Westerholm,³⁴ for instance, holds that Christians are not, for Paul, under the law even as a standard of behaviour (a theoretically antinomian position) but rather are to walk in the Spirit. Nevertheless God does not change, so this means that the Spirit leads them to do the moral will of God which, in fact, seems like obedience to the law. In this case 'antinomianism' does not lead to licentiousness.

Did the Spirit communicate the moral will of God entirely by direct inward guidance? To say this would not be true to the facts, for Paul, who knew himself to be an instrument of the Spirit, addressed many objective moral imperatives to the churches to whom he wrote.

We must however put a large question mark against the idea that, for Paul, the Old Testament moral law was now without

33 P.D. Miller Jr., 'The Place of the Decalogue in the Old Testament and its Law', *Interpretation* 43 (1989), pp. 229-42.

34 S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith: Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (Grand Rapids, 1988), p. 173.

relevance or function for Christians. It is remarkable, for instance, how many commands of the Decalogue are to be found in the Epistle to the Colossians. It is true that he there says that the written code has been cancelled, but he appears to expound this mostly in ritual terms (Col. 2:14-23). Imperatives in this Epistle repeat or are apparently based on the sixth (anger, rage, malice, 3:8), seventh (3:5), ninth (3:9) and tenth commandments (greed, which is idolatry, 3:5). Also, love is all-comprehensive (3:14).

If we can accept as Pauline the Epistle to the Ephesians, which has so much teaching parallel to that to the Colossians, we find that this is even more remarkable in this regard, for all the commandments from the sixth to the tenth are found in some form or other in Ephesians 4:25-5:7, while the fifth commandment is actually quoted (and in its full imperative form) in Ephesians 6:1-3. If such imperatives are to be found in Paul's letters to the churches, is it not highly probable that he will also have given such teaching orally when establishing a church or subsequently visiting it?

5. The character of Christ is an abiding challenge to the Christian. In a theology which is based on an act of supreme sacrificial love, it is impossible that the character of the Person who performed this act should be a matter of ethical indifference.

It is clear enough that the reader of Paul's letters faces the challenge of Christ's character. It is widely recognized that it was Christ who sat in the 'studio' of Paul's imagination when he wrote 1 Corinthians 13. Also, in Philippians 2, he commends the humble, sacrificial mind of Christ, and in 2 Corinthians 10:1 the meekness and gentleness of Christ. There can be little doubt that his perspective on the character of Christ and his example for Christian living is centred on Calvary and the events that led to it, and in this respect we might compare the First Epistle of Peter.

The very strong Pauline emphasis on love is also surely related to the character of Christ. Certainly it stems also from the character of God, but that character was supremely revealed in Christ.

6. The Christian is one with Christ in his death and resurrection, so that the Christian life is a life out

of death. The *kerygma* called for repentance, faith and baptism. Paul appeals to the baptism of the Roman Christians in countering licentiate antinomianism (Rom. 6:1ff.). The symbolism of their baptism, with its enactment of death and resurrection, signifies that incorporation into Christ means participation in the central events of his work.

The atoning death, with its judicial release from sin, and the resurrection, with its pledges of new life, contain the basis, the challenge and the promise of a new life-style for the Christian. In practice, this involves a deepening of repentance in the constant putting off of the old nature and a deepening of obedient faith in the constant putting on of the new (Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:9, 10).

7. Heavenly resources are pledged to the Christian through the exaltation of Christ. Again, assuming the Pauline authorship of Ephesians, we find that in that Epistle Paul takes further the teaching given in Romans 6 about the consequences of our incorporation into Christ. Exalted as we are with him, Christ is for us the source of all spiritual blessings, and these are our resources for practical Christian living. The exhortations to walk in the light, in love, to walk as he walked, and so on, are the practical consequences of the assertion that we are seated with him in the heavenlies.

In Philippians, Paul makes it clear (as does the second letter of Peter) that the practical expression of these resources takes place through knowledge of Christ (Phil. 3:7-11), and so through the communion that union makes possible and that was illustrated in our Lord's teaching in his allegory of the vine and its branches.

8. The Holy Spirit channels these resources in the everyday experience of the Christian. Paul's doctrine of the work of the Spirit is strongly ethical. The mutual indwelling of Christ and the Christian and the indwelling of the Spirit appear to be two sides of the same coin (Rom. 8:9-11). In practical terms it is the Spirit whose activity provides the dynamic for actual Christian living (Gal. 5:22-26).

This dynamic is not channelled automatically, but requires the grace-secured co-operation of the Christian, who is to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:25), and to refrain from grieving the Spirit (Eph. 4:30).

The primary fruit of the Spirit is love (Eph. 5:22), and it is love for Christ and love for others that is to motivate the ethical life of the Christian. Without it, the good deeds of a Christian are empty of true virtue (1 Cor. 13:1-3). Here then is God's character of holy love, to which the Old Testament bears witness and which God's Son expressed in his earthly life, now channelled into and through the life of the Christian.

9. The return of Christ is an ethical spur to the Christian. The Christian is to live his life in the light of the return of Christ when all will be judged (Rom. 14:9-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Any period of crisis prior to Christ's return will likewise sort out the Christian's priorities and help him or her to make ethical decisions (1 Cor. 7:26, 29-31).

10. In all this Paul was at one with the ethical perspective of the early church. Paul's acceptance of the ethical paraenesis common to the early church is not in doubt, as A.M. Hunter showed convincingly.³⁵ He may not have had to develop that paraenesis in some ways because of new ethical challenges and dilemmas faced by the churches, but he did not depart from it in principle.

11. Paul sometimes appealed to the ethics of the prevailing culture of his readers to support precepts established on other grounds. There are examples of this in 1 Corinthians 11:14 and in his use of a quotation from Menander in 1 Corinthians 15:33. We might compare this with his quotation of pagan poets in the Areopagus address in Acts 17. In both cases, the revelation in Christ and its interpretation of the Old Testament formed the basis of Paul's ethical counsel, but he recognized that at times this might coincide with the best of pagan ethics.

³⁵ A.M. Hunter, *Paul and his Predecessors*, second edit. (London, 1961).