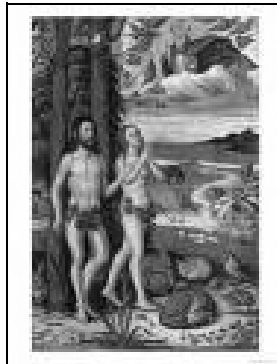


life as a Pharisee and his knowledge of the Mosaic Law with what Jesus' death and resurrection had achieved. Paul had been brought up to believe that the way to salvation was by strict adherence to the Law. Non-Jews could not be saved, therefore, because they were not subject to the Law, unless they converted to Judaism and followed all the required Jewish practices. In Romans, Paul outlines his theological answer to this problem: **no-one**, Jew or gentile, can become righteous through observance of the Law alone and, in fact, all the Law does is identify our sinfulness (ch.3 and 7). What provides salvation, the thing that makes us righteous in the eyes of God, is faith in the person of Jesus Christ 'God's saving justice given through faith in Jesus Christ in all who believe' (ch.3).

In making his argument, Paul shows that it was Abraham's faith in God, who promised him an heir and descendants, that made him righteous in the eyes of God (Gn.15). It was not circumcision or the Law that made him righteous because neither of these two future requirements existed at the time. Paul also makes the contrast between Adam and Christ (Rm.5), with Adam portrayed as the originator of sin and death, and Jesus Christ as the answer to sin. Through faith in Jesus everyone can now be made righteous in the eyes of God.



Paul does not dismiss the value of the Law. He argues that it had its proper place in the course of God's plan, for us to recognise our sinful inclinations and make us realise that we need God's intervention to give us a way out of our predicament (Rm.7). The Law had its fulfilment in Christ (Rm.10). Nor had God abandoned his chosen people, in fact they remain his chosen people. The opportunity exists for them to be saved, notwithstanding their rejection of Christ, through God's mercy, while their failure to accept Jesus had actually proved beneficial in opening a way for the salvation of the gentiles (Rm.11).

St. Paul

4. An Outline of the Theology of St. Paul



Questions for Reflection

1. How crucial was Paul's conversion experience on the road to Damascus for his theological thinking?
2. What are the main ideas in Paul's theology?
3. How does Paul reconcile the Mosaic Law with the effects of Jesus' Death and Resurrection?

St. Paul's Damascus Experience

St. Paul's theology was determined by what happened to him on the road to Damascus. That experience changed Saul the Pharisee into Paul the Christian apostle. For Paul, as he would repeat often, he had been privileged by a revelation of Jesus as Son of God (Gal.1), as Lord (1 Cor.9), as Lord of Glory (1 Cor.1).



That revelation would eventually cause Paul to recognise three essential truths that would form the core of his theological thought:

- Salvation was open to all
- Salvation was made available because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ
- The Messianic age had now come

Other Influences on St. Paul

Although Paul emphasised he had not received his gospel message from any human source (Ga.1), it is also clear that he accepted and used the apostolic tradition to enhance his teaching (1 Cor.15) and this, too, no doubt influenced his theological thinking. Similarly, his own experiences and encounters with his fellow Jews, so often the cause of suffering for him, forced him to reflect on the relationship between the OT covenant and the new covenant in Christ in ways that allowed him to maintain a continuity between the two.

The Essence of St. Paul's Theology

There are several different views on what might be termed the core of St. Paul's theology. Some centre it on Justification by Faith, some on the redemptive work of Christ, some on the contrast between flesh and spirit. But if we return again to Paul's Damascus experience, there is a strong argument for placing Paul's vision of the resurrected Lord as the key factor

The Resurrected Christ

St. Paul's theology is, essentially, a Christological theology. At one level, it appears that it is the **crucified** Christ that is central to Paul's

theology 'while the Jews demand miracles and the Greeks wisdom, we are preaching a crucified Christ (1 Cor.1). However, Paul does not separate the death of Jesus from his resurrection. For Paul the two are inextricably linked, but the crucial factor for Paul is that Jesus has been **raised from the dead** 'if Christ has not been raised our preaching is without substance and so is your faith' (1 Cor.15). In this passage Paul goes on to contrast Jesus with Adam, the latter being the cause of death and Jesus' resurrection being the cause of life.



In Romans, Paul declares that it was the resurrection that defined Jesus as Son of God (ch.1), that it was the resurrection that made us righteous (ch.4), while the declaration of faith required by Paul (ch.10) was of the risen Lord 'if you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord, and you believe God raised him from the dead'. The letter to the Philippians (ch.2) places the same emphasis on the resurrection 'for this, God raised him high and gave him the name above all names'.

The Mystery of Salvation

Mystery is a keyword in Paul's theology. It is God's wisdom (1 Cor.2), and it is the divine plan to save Humankind through Jesus' death.

Body of Christ

Paul addresses the human body first, as the temple of the Holy Spirit and, as such, sexual sins dishonour it (1 Cor.6). But Paul distinguishes between flesh and the body itself so that the latter can become united with Christ and be set free.(Rm.8). Uniquely, Paul directly links our bodies with the Body of Christ (Rm.12 and 1 Cor.12). This concept is developed to a higher, cosmic level with the identification of the Church as the Body of Christ, with Christ its Head, in the letters to the Colossians and especially Ephesians, although these letters may not be written by Paul himself, but by a disciple extending his theology

Paul's Synthesis of OT Law and the New Covenant

Much of Paul's theological effort was spent on reconciling his former