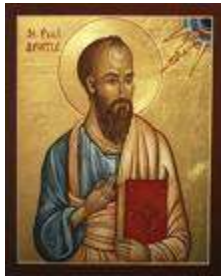


The Pauline Notion of Justification and Pastoral Outreach



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1. The Damascus Experience: A Paradigm for Conversion

Based on an analysis of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, R.N. Longenecker (Longenecker, “The Nature of Paul’s Early Christology,” 93) argued ‘that Paul’s basic Christian conviction and starting point for all his Christian theology was not apocalypticism, but functional Christology, because his commitment was not to a time table of events but to the person of Jesus. We disagree. It is our view that Paul’s conversion experience on the road to Damascus was an apocalyptic. It began a historical movement through the instrumentality of Paul.

Paul’s conversion affected his view of Jesus. Acts 9 is illuminating in this regard. The words of the Risen Jesus elicit a response from Paul that hints at his consciousness of being involved in a theophany. Paul asks, “Who are you Lord?” The identity of the divinity eludes him. Paul’s conversion experience was not a turning away from sin, but a turning towards Jesus as Lord and Christ who lives in communion with his disciples. This is the significance of the words “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” Paul’s conversion was linked to his acceptance of Jesus as the Son of Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts.

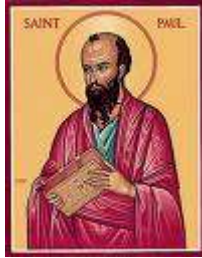
Saul of Tarsus was firmly committed to the Pharisaic interpretation of Jewish religion. For Saul of Tarsus, those who believed in Jesus as God’s Messiah were terribly mistaken. They were sinful, and in their sin were leading many Jews astray. Num. 25:1-5 sets a precedent to kill off idolatrous Israelites (cf. 1 Macc. 2:23-28, 42-48). The conversion was also linked to Paul’s re-interpretation of what he once perceived as the scandal of the cross (Dt. 21:23). Christ bore the curse on behalf of humanity, in exchange for which humanity is offered the righteousness of God (2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13).

The nature of Paul’s conversion experience contained the following features: (i) He has personally ‘seen Jesus our Lord’ (1 Cor. 9:1), (ii) What he saw was on par with all of Jesus’ other post resurrection appearances (1 Cor. 15:3-7), (iii) What he experienced was of the nature of revelation (Gal. 1:11-12, 16a), (iv) Jesus Christ was the agent of that revelation (Gal. 1:12), (v) The content of that revelation was ‘His (God’s) Son’, who was also the agent of that revelation (Gal. 1:16b), (vi) The ultimate purpose of the revelation was ‘so that I might preach him (God’s Son) among the Gentiles’ (Gal. 1:16c), (vii) Christ’s appearance had a revolutionary effect on his life, so that he came to consider ‘everything (particularly his past Jewish credentials and accomplishments) a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord,’ and to focus

only on ‘knowing Christ’ with all that such a consuming passion involved (Phil. 3:7-11). St. Luke makes one dominant point in all his accounts of Paul’s conversion: that Christ was the one who brought about the change in the strategy of divine redemption that occurred in Paul’s Gentile ministry – it was a commission that came directly from Christ himself {just as Christ had commissioned the Eleven for their ministries (Acts. 1:4-8)}.

Paul made a new commitment when he responded affirmatively to Christ’s encounter. He took on a new identity as a follower of Christ. Not only was he reticent to let go of his Jewish past, he had also been penalized five times for serious deviation from Jewish practice (2 Cor. 11:24).

God’s apocalypse of his Son Jesus, now risen and enthroned at the right hand of God, was made to this Saul, the Benjaminite, who had been circumcised on the 8th day, and who has been schooled in the ways of the Mosaic Law at the feet of Gamaliel (Acts 9:4). God’s apocalypse of his Son blinded Paul (Acts 9:8-9), because he who had made the Sinaitic Law the absolute point of departure for his theology, was now told that all theology had to have the Crucified Christ as the epicenter of all theological teaching. Paul used the Greek verb *Apocalypso* in order to describe God’s apocalypse of Jesus Christ. The Greek verb means ‘to reveal’ or ‘to unveil.’ Paul’s apocalyptic unveiling of something that was hidden, as though it had been eternally standing behind a curtain (contrast 1 Cor. 2:9-10). But, as it is written, ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him,’ God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything even, the depths of God (1 Cor. 2: 9-10).



Like the first disciples, who began from their Easter experience and viewed everything from the standpoint of that historical and existential occasion, Paul looked back on his former hopes, life and thought in the light of Christ’s encounter, and from that perspective (i) affirmed everything that earliest believers held to be true about Jesus, (ii) transposed some of their statements into language that would be more meaningful to Gentiles, and (iii) developed his own distinctive Christological proclamation. The immediate implication of Paul’s conversion was the conviction that Jesus is Israel’s Messiah, and the Son of God.

The genesis of Paul’s apocalyptic lies in Paul’s certainty, that God has invaded the present evil age, by sending Christ and the Spirit into it. There was a ‘before,’ the time when we were confined, imprisoned; and there is an ‘after,’ the time of our deliverance. The difference between this ‘before’ and ‘after’ is caused not by an unveiling but rather by the coming of Christ and his Spirit.

When Paul says in 1 Cor. 4:16 and Phil. 3:17, ‘Be imitators of me’ he is calling for a re-orientation of the lives of all Christians. For now ‘having been taken hold of by Christ Jesus’ they are being urged to follow the example of Paul in counting everything from

their past as garbage in comparison to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus (their) Lord' (Phil. 3:4-17).



2. Understanding Paul's Apocalyptic

Etymologically, the Greek noun 'apocalypse' means a revelation or an unveiling. However, today the understanding of apocalypse has recognized that it is a literary form or genre. Apocalypse is defined as a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal in so far as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial in so far as it involves another supernatural world. The form of the apocalypse involves a narrative framework that describes the manner of revelation. The main means of revelation are visions, and otherworldly journeys, supplemented by discourse or dialogue an occasionally by a heavenly book. The constant element is the angel who interprets the vision. Hence, the content of apocalypse has a temporal and spatial dimension.

Apocalypses are of two types: historical (Daniel) and otherworldly journeys. Ernst Kasemann stated that 'Apocalyptic was the mother of all Christian theology.' Klaus Koch distinguished between 'apocalypse' as a literary genre, and 'apocalyptic' as a historical movement. How is apocalypse related to apocalyptic? Does the literary type 'apocalypse' imply a social movement? Or does an apocalypse always contain apocalyptic eschatology (i.e. a historical movement towards final fulfillment at the end-times)?

Paul's gospel apocalyptic involves the motif of 'new salvation' – the experience of salvation in new categories distinct from the prescriptions of the Mosaic law. Paul's experience on the road to Damascus was apocalypse as well as apocalyptic. As apocalypse the divine messenger was the Son of God himself. The transcendent reality revealed was that eschatological salvation consisted in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Paul's apocalyptic consisted in a historical movement that sought to initiate a Law-less way of life in discipleship as opposed to the Law observant way of life. Paul's apocalyptic initiated a historical movement that was manifested in the way of life of the Pauline churches – which were not established as 'daughter churches' of the Law observant Jerusalem and Antioch churches. Paul's apocalyptic (i.e. a historical movement sparked by a revelation) would result in all nations profiting from the promise to Abraham that was fulfilled in Christ (Rom. 4:20-25; Gal. 3:6-9). Paul's apocalyptic is captured in Gal. 3:26, 'for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.'

How do we understand God's apocalypse of his Son to Paul? In ancient Israel, the king was said to become God's son at his enthronement (Psa. 2:7). From the formula quoted by Paul in Rom. 1:3-4, Jewish Christians prior to him celebrated Jesus' resurrection, as in effect his enthronement. For these Jewish Christians, Jesus was already descended from

David according to the flesh. So, when God raised him from the dead, God declared him to be Son of God with power.

Ancient Israel in 8th Century BC understood herself to be descended from God (Ex. 4:22-23; Hos. 11:1). There was also a tradition about God sending Moses and the prophets to Israel (Ex. 3:10; Isa. 6:8; Wis. 9:10, 17). References to God sending from heaven into this world his angel, his wisdom, his Spirit are also found in the OT (cf. Gen 24:40; Wis. 9:10, 17). All three elements in the background of the title son of God are reflected in Paul's reference to the Son in Galatians. But apart from these three, the most significant is Paul's reference to Son in terms of love unto death – the Son's faithfulness. In this apocalypse of Jesus, Paul sees the Lord alive, present and enthroned by God, having been raised from the realm of those who have died (Gal. 1:1, 3). Paul draws on Jewish traditions in which the merciful and righteous person is called God's son (cf. Sir. 4:10; Wis. 2:18). Ancient Israelite portrait of Israel as God's son must also be kept in mind (Ex. 4:22). Paul insists with great emphasis that the church has become the community of God's sons by its incorporation into God's only Son (Gal. 2:20; 4:6-7). God's redemptive invasion of the cosmos is the sending of his Son, and he the Son, is faithful unto death. And so, in Gal. 2:20, Paul will speak of the Son's love and the Son's faithfulness, both being enacted in his giving up of his life for the salvation of the world.

3. Consequences of Paul's Apocalyptic

The blindness that afflicts Saul for three days, until such time that Ananias lays hands upon him (Acts 9:17-19), demonstrates the total upheaval cause in his theological outlook by God's apocalypse of the Son. Saul must adjust his perspective; he must shift the absolute point of theology from the Sinaitic Law to the Crucified Jesus, the Messiah of God. The gift of the Holy Spirit restores sight to Saul. The three days of fasting was in preparation for the reception of the Holy Spirit, through whom he would be led by God in further revelation. Fasting and prayer are essential if one is to be led by God in further revelation.

When Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ, he does not refer to a private and mystical event experienced by him alone. He refers not only to his participation in the death of Christ, but also to his participation in Christ's crucifixion, which is paradigmatic for all Christians. Participation involves his own death to the Law that previously formed his cosmos (Gal. 2:19; 6:14). God dispatched the Spirit into the believer's hearts transforming them into soldiers active on the Spirit's battlefield. God's new creation and the new apocalyptic community called to the front trenches in God's apocalyptic war against the powers of the present evil age, is the church.

What took place in Paul's conversion was not a setting aside of God in favour of Jesus, but what occurred was an overwhelming realization that God's salvific purposes for creation and humanity were now focused in the work and person of Jesus. Paul affirms that Christ's redemptive work was 'according to the will of our God and Father (Gal. 1:4), that 'God sent his Son' (Gal. 4:4-5), that 'God was in Christ reconciling the world to

himself' (2 Cor. 5:19), that believers are 'being justified freely by his (God's) grace' (Rom. 3:24), that 'God presented him (Christ) as a sacrifice of atonement (Rom. 3:25), that it is God who shows 'justice,' is himself 'just' and who 'justifies sinners' (Rom. 3:26), that God exalted him (Jesus Christ) ... and gave him the name that is above every name' (Phil. 2:9). Paul articulated his theological insights in four principal ways.

3.a Jesus is the Sacrifice of Atonement

God's new initiative in the salvation of humanity takes place in the death of Jesus on the cross (Rom. 3:21-25). God put forward Jesus as the '*hilasterion*' – seat of mercy – in order to reveal his divine righteousness. The sacrificial death of Jesus replaces *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement). All humanity is reconciled to God by the faithfulness of Jesus demonstrated in blood. Therefore, as stated in Rom. 1:17, 'the righteousness of God is reveal through faith (faithfulness of Jesus) for (in order to evoke) faith (in Christian believers concerning Jesus) - cf. Ramaroson (ScEspr 39{1987}:91).

3.b Jesus is Our Righteousness

Because Jesus is the expiation put forward by God, justification is the work of God, and an unmerited act of graciousness towards humanity. Christians are able to appropriate for themselves the fruits of redemption which Christ won for humanity, '... always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body' (2 Cor 4:10).

The righteousness of Jesus proclaimed by his faithfulness demonstrated in his blood calls Christian believers to embrace the spirituality of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18). The crucified Christ is the power and the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24). Therefore, to embrace the cross of Christ is to live in the wisdom of God; to partake of the crucifixion in and through moments of rejection, and betrayal is to experience the sustaining power of God. Thus together with Paul Christians could say, 'we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ...' (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

3.d Jesus is Our Liberation from Within

In 1 Cor. 15:50, Paul says, 'I tell you this, brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.' For Paul, the flesh – *sarx* – is sinful because it is the sphere in which sin operates (Rom. 7:5, 8-11, 18-19, 23; 8:3). Therefore, the Mosaic Law which set the standard was rendered impotent and failed in its purpose (Rom. 7:14).

In Gal. 2:15-16 Paul says, 'We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in



Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.’ Justification is appropriated to oneself by remaining united to Jesus. Paul refers to this mystical union with Christ, which is sustained by sharing in the crucifixion of Christ in the midst of daily travails, as life in Christ or life with Christ (Rom. 6:8; 8:1, 10, 17; 12:5; 15:17; Eph. 2:5). In Gal. 2:20 Paul says, ‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.’

To become like Christ, Paul advocates self – emptying in the name of Christ. In Phil 2:6-7, Paul says of Jesus, ‘who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.’ Jesus, who in his pre-existent state was ‘in the form of God’ and did not exist apart from God, now empties himself by taking on another form, which was completely alien to his divine nature, namely the form of a slave. Therefore, Christ’s self emptying was not an impoverishment but rather an enrichment – he acquired a new form, that of a slave. Paul views the process of self-emptying as a ‘taking upon oneself’ the garment of Christ. To ‘put on put on the new nature, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’ (Eph. 4:24) the believer must adorn himself with Christ. A few relevant Pauline texts are appended hereunder:

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| Eph. 4:13 | ... until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; |
| Eph. 4:15 | Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, |
| Gal. 5:1 | For freedom Christ has set us free; stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. |
| 2 Cor. 5:17 | Therefore, if any one is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. |

This inner liberation resulting from transformation in Christ, empowers the Christian to be at the service of humanity, and to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11-13). No human or heavenly power can thwart the growth of the body, for it is expanding by means of divine intervention (Col. 2:19). It is filling the world (Col. 1:18-20; 2:9; 3:15). The Body of Christ will triumph in the face of an evil that can reach cosmic proportions. Not only must Christians lead a virtuous life, but also to maintain conventional household existence. At the same time, believers must never forget that they ultimately belong to another world. To quote Paul, ‘So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor. 5:6-7).



3.c Jesus is Our Mission Imperative



It is logical to assume that Paul's theology of justification was a direct result of his encounter with the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus. His theology of justification was in large part a working out of this experience of apocalyptic. The call was to commission him to a Gentile mission in order to fulfill Israel's calling to be a light to the nations.

The mission commission involved a radical change in Paul's theological perceptions on the mediation of salvation. The transformation of theological perceptions had a direct impact on his spirituality.

- i. Paul accepted the Community as the body of Christ because the Risen Lord accused him of persecution – 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' (Acts. Acts 9:4)
- ii. Christian believers who were baptized into the death of Christ, were therefore, united into one body of Christ. They were also nourished by the one loaf and the one cup (1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12-14).
- iii. Justification in Christ is sustained by collaborating in establishing and sustaining communion.
- iv. The way of life described by the phrase 'justified in Christ' demands a spiritual maturity that understands why eating 'food offered to idols' does not defile an individually, but sensitizes the believer who possesses such mature faith to refrain from such practices if it were to scandalize a 'weaker' Christian of a less developed faith (1 Cor. 8:13).

- v. The mission imperative demands that the Christian transcends barriers of race and culture. Such transcendence of race and culture demands emotional and human maturity. Adaptability is part of the mission imperative, but it can be accomplished only by those who are psychologically mature. Paul's insistence in this regard is evident in the following texts:

Rom. 10:12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and bestows his riches upon all who call upon him.

1 Cor. 9:20-22 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law -- though not being myself under the law -- that I might win those under the law. To those outside the law I became as one outside the law -- not being without law toward God but under the law of Christ -- that I might win those outside the law. To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.



Gal. 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

Col. 3:11 Here there cannot be Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free man, but Christ is all, and in all.

For Paul, the conversion experience on the road to Damascus convinced him that Israel had been called to be a 'light to the nations' apart from the Law. Israel had been addressed as God's first born son (Ex. 4:22). Now, in the 'apocalyptic' on the road to Damascus, Jesus, is revealed as the Son of Yahweh, the Lord of Hosts, and is identified with the persecuted community of believers. Up to that point, Paul had persecuted Christians on account of their proclamation that Jesus was then Messiah of God. Paul persecuted them also on account of the fact that they consciously chose to ignore the obligations prescribed by the Mosaic Law. Yet, on the road to Damascus, God so apocalypsed Jesus to Paul, that he realized that he had erred greatly in persecuting Christians. The specific revelation convinced Paul that in Jesus, Israel had accomplished God's designs of becoming the light to the nations. This was quite apart from the Mosaic Law. The profundity of the revelation blinded Paul. He who was an exemplary Jew and Pharisee could no longer 'see.' Paul would have to be guided to 'see.' Ananias was to be the chosen instrument for this specific mission, and he himself would have to learn to trust in the mysterious ways in which God worked. In Jesus, Israel would accomplish its vocation of becoming a 'light to the nations.'

- vi. Suffering is an integral part of mission, and justification in Christ implies the capacity to understand the power inherent in suffering in the name of Christ in

the course of mission. As Paul says, ‘But we have this treasure (cf. the gospel of Christ) in earthen vessels, to show that the transcendent power belongs to God and not to us (2 Cor. 4:7). The power inherent in the proclamation of the Gospel come into automatic effect in the face of adversity in the course of mission so that Paul says, ‘We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed ...’ (2 Cor. 4:8-9).

- vii. Pauline spirituality is a spirituality based upon the triumph of the cross (1 Cor. 1:18, 22-24). Hence, justification implies a way of life based upon this theological perspective.
- viii. Justification in Christ which set us apart for mission instills in the missionary the conviction that teaching sound doctrine is an essential component of mission (Titus 2:1). Justification is not a ‘state of grace’ detached from the practical implications of mission. It is a state of grace whereby the individual is made adaptable to the needs of the community being evangelized, and is steeped in sound doctrine that he disseminates with enthusiasm and conviction, while fostering fellowship and communion.
- ix. Justification in Christ leads to the profound awareness of the efficacy of prayer and its importance in mission (Eph. 6:18; Col. 1:9; 4:3; 1 Tim. 2:8). In prayer we open ourselves to the dynamism of the Trinitarian presence within us (Rom. 8:26).
- x. Justification engenders a lifestyle that is itself a prophetic witness to mission. As Paul says, ‘Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ’ (1 Cor. 11:1).

4. Conclusion

Justification is an act of God. It is wholly unmerited on the part of human beings. Justification is God’s gracious gift of salvation through remission of sins by the sacrificial death of Jesus, the Son of God. God demonstrated his righteousness through forgiveness of sins.

The faithfulness of Christ is meant to evoke a faith response in human beings. This faith response is not meant to be an intellectual exercise or emotional experience. It may constitute both to a certain degree, but at the heart of ‘faith’ is commitment to a way of life centered on the ‘crucified Christ.’ Faith in itself is a divine gift, because man cannot know God unless God reveals himself first (Rom. 1:19-20). Yet, an adequate and appropriate response is possible to mature human beings. Emotional maturity empowers the Christian relish the fruits of justification.

Justification makes a person other oriented. Justification can be measured in practical terms through one’s ability to foster and sustain communion. For communion – between God and man through the mediation of Jesus Christ - is at the heart of God’s Kingdom.

