

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Eleven

## *Summary of St. Paul's Life, and introduction to his Love-theme:*

### **Summary: St. Paul 101**

St. Paul exceeds every attempt to explain him. He lived large, was super-active, thought profoundly, and loved intensely. He excels all accounts of his accomplishments. His superlatives astound us. When he persecuted the Church, he was the very best persecutor. When he promoted the Church, he was the very best promoter. All we can do is sketch his main achievements. That opens the door for each of us to add insights worth sharing about this great servant of Jesus Christ.

Born in Tarsus around 10 AD, he was thereby a Roman citizen. His father provided excellent education, so Paul knew the Law, and was fluent in Hebrew /Aramaic, Greek and Latin. In Jerusalem he studied with Gamaliel, as Acts 22:3, and 26:4 mention. We find Paul's story in his epistles, Acts, and 2 Peter 3:15-16.

He described himself in these words: "I too am an Israelite, a descendent of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin," Rom 11:1; "circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, ... a Hebrew of Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; as touching zeal, persecuting the church; as touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless", Phil 3:6. Therefore he excelled among Pharisees, who prided themselves on keeping every jot and tittle. His zeal for Torah impelled him to attack Christians, hauling them back to Jerusalem in chains.

On such a mission he met Christ, Who converted him from law to grace. "And as he journeyed, it came to pass that he drew nigh unto Damascus: and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven: and he fell upon the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest: but rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. And the men that journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing the voice, but beholding no man. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw nothing; and they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. And he was three days without sight, and did neither eat nor drink, Acts 9:3-9.

Christ came to him, showing him new life. His circumcision name, Saul, represented his old, withered life. So I assume that he changed it to Paul, when he accepted Christ. While it's true that we do not have explicit Scriptural evidence that he changed his name to Paul, renaming follows the good example of Simon (Cephas) becoming Peter (Petrus), Mat 16:17-18. Many scholars propose that Saul and Paul were merely alternatives depending upon the language a person was speaking at the time. After Paul prayed and fasted for some days, Ananias cured his blindness, and scales fell from his eyes. Then Paul began to cure his spiritual blindness by learning all that Christians could teach about Jesus. Human attempts to convey Christ fall far short. So Christ spoke directly to Paul, showing him much more than humans could tell. Paul calls this peak of personal revelation "being raised up to the third heaven", 2 Cor 12:2.

Paul so lived Christ that he said: "I live now, not I, but Christ lives in me", Phl 1:21. His epistles flow from Jesus Christ, by divine love. We will explore these epistles, and Luke's accounts of Paul's missions throughout the Roman Empire. Paul reveals himself most completely in his epistles, which are stormy love letters to his brothers in Christ. Love is exactly what urges him, 2 Cor 5:14. Luke's account of Paul in Acts fills in many blanks, and provides context. Finally, historical records provide extra-biblical support for Biblical statements. All three of these sources highlight facets of Paul.

Secular historical supports include documentation that the procounsul Junius Gallio Annaeus served Claudius in Corinth during the Emperor's 12<sup>th</sup> year, 52AD. Acts 18:12 mentions that Paul appeared before Junius in Corinth. This connection is so clear that all authorities accept it. Also unquestionable is Claudius' expulsion of Jews from Rome in 49AD, mentioned in Acts 18:2. That is how Aquila and Priscilla, rich merchants, met Paul during their exile, and welcomed him to their home in Rome when they returned. In May 2008, some of us visited the church built over their home.

Roman records authenticate Acts 12:28 about the famine during Claudius' reign: 46-48AD. They also chronicle the change from Felix, procurator of Judea, to Porcius Festus, as Acts 24:27 notes. Though the date is not clear, it probably occurred in 60AD. At that time, Festus wanted to send Paul to Jerusalem for trial. To avoid assassins, Paul appealed to Caesar. Earlier, Pontius Pilate condemned Jesus to preserve peace in Judea, but zealots rebelled instead, around 36AD. Roman history notes that the emperor recalled Pilate to Rome at that time to answer for his conduct. Thus the outbreak of persecution after Stephen's stoning, Acts 7:58-60, was probably 36AD. That was the year of Saul's conversion to Christ.

Here is the most likely sequence of his development, from his epistles and Acts. Conversion outside Damascus, Gal 1:17, and Acts 9:1-22. Journey to Arabia to be with Jesus in prayer, Gal 1:17. Paul then returned to Damascus, Gal 1:17, where he spent 3 years in prayer and catechesis from disciples. His escape from Damascus in a basket is attested in 2 Cor 11:32-33, Acts 9:24-25, and Gal 1:17-18. As a Roman citizen, he could have appealed to Roman authorities for safe passage, so his escape must have occurred after direct Roman rule ended in 37AD. If this escape occurred between 37 and 39, then his conversion would have been 3 years earlier. This coincides with our other estimate of his conversion date.

Paul then went to Jerusalem, Gal 1:18-20, Acts 9:26-29. When he attempted to contact the apostles, they were afraid of him, and Barnabas had to convince them that Paul was committed to Christ. Paul then learned from the apostles, and moved freely around Jerusalem, representing Jesus to all men. So successful was his apostolate that Church leaders sent him to Syria and Cilicia, Gal 1:21-22, and to Caesarea and Tarsus, Acts 9:30. From there, he preached in Antioch, Acts 11:26/ In Gal 2:1, Paul says that after 14 years of spreading the Gospel, he went back to Jerusalem. The occasion was

the first Church Council. Acts 15: 1-12 affirms this Jerusalem visit, without mentioning that Council. Then Paul withstood Peter to his face in Antioch, Gal 2: 11-14, Acts 15:35. His next apostolic venture took him to Syria and Cilicia, Acts 15:41. Then South Galatia, Acts 16: 1-5, followed by North Galatia and Phrygia, 1 Cor 16:1, Gal 4:13, Acts 16:6.

From there, Paul moved to Philippi, according to 1 Thes 2:2, and 3:6, and Phil 4:15-16. Acts 16:7-10 mentions Mysia and Troas, and then Philippi, Acts 16:11-40. After that, Paul evangelized Thessalonica, by testimony from 1 Thes 2:2, and 2 Cor 11:9. This city is in Macedonia. Next came Thessalonica again, as 1 Thes 2:2 and 2:17-18, and Phil 4:15-16 affirm. Acts 17:1-9 notes that Paul preached in Amphipolis, Apollonia, followed by Thessalonica. Acts 17:10-14 then refers to Berea. From there Paul went to Athens, as 1 Thes 3:1, and 2: 17-18 remark. Acts 17: 15-34 confirms this visit.

Then Paul evangelized Corinth. Evidently, he was the first to preach Christ there, as 2 Cor 1:19, and 11:7-9 note. Acts 18:1-18 claims he resided 18 months there. During that time Timothy arrived, as 1 Thes 3:6 points out, with Silvanus, according to 1 Thes 1:1. Acts 18:3 says that Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia. According to Acts 18:18, Paul departs from Cenchræ, then leaves his friends Priscilla & Aquila at Ephesus, 18:19-21. Paul urges Apollos to visit Corinth, as he says in 1 Cor 16:12. Priscilla & Aquila sent Apollos to Achaia, as Acts 18:17 affirms. Paul himself goes to Caesarea Maritima, according to Acts 18:22. From there, Acts 18:22 says he journeys to Jerusalem. In that same verse, 18:22, Acts affirms that Paul stays for a while in Antioch.

For the second time, Paul visits Northern Galatia, as Gal 4:13 notes, and Acts 18:23 agrees. Then 1 Cor 16:1-8 recounts his stay in Ephesus. Acts devotes all of chapter 19, and part of 20, to this lengthy stay, perhaps for 3 years, and at least for 2. During this stay, Chloe, Stephanas and friends visit Paul (1 Cor 1:11; and 16:17), bringing an important letter (1 Cor 7:1) One of the reasons for his long stay seems to be imprisonment in Ephesus (1 Cor 15:32; 2 Cor 1:8). He sends Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17; 16:19).

Once out of prison, Paul visits Corinth. 2 Cor 13:2 calls this visit “painful”. Back in Ephesus, Paul hears about more misbehavior from Corinth, so he sends Titus with the letter “written in tears” (2 Cor 2:13). Paul writes about his plans to visit Macedonia, Corinth and Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3-8; 2 Cor 1\_15-16). Acts 19:21 refers to his plans to visit Macedonia, Achaia, Jerusalem and Rome. Meanwhile he ministers in Troas (2 Cor 2:12), then goes to Macedonia, as 2 Cor 2:13, and 9:2-4 affirm. Acts 20:1 seconds that motion to Macedonia. Paul mentions that Titus arrives (2 Cor 7:6), and goes ahead to Corinth (2 Cor 7:16-17), carrying a letter. It’s likely that this letter was interwoven into what we call 2 Cor.

From Rom 15:19 we learn that Paul visited Illyrcum. Rom 15:26, and 16:1 mention his trip to Achaia, and 2 Cor 13:1 shows that he visited Corinth. Acts 20:2-3 refers to three months in Greece, including Achaia. After that, Acts 20:3 notes that he tried to return to Syria, but went by way of Macedonia and Philippi (Acts 20:3-6). He stopped at Troas, says Acts 20:6-12, then Miletus (Acts 20:15-38). Acts 21:7-14 shows that he visited Tyre, Ptolemais and Caesarea. In Rom 13:22-27, Paul reveals his plans to visit Jerusalem, Rome and Spain. Acts 21:15 to 23:30 recounts his Jerusalem adventures, leading to his capture. Acts rounds out his life, noting his transportation to Caesarea, (23:31-23:32), and his journey to Rome (27:1-28:14). Then Acts 28:15-31 describes his two years of Roman imprisonment. It’s a puzzle why Luke does not mention Paul’s martyrdom. Perhaps it was well known throughout the Church at the time.

This compact account of Paul’s life sketches his main achievements. Many more events occurred than either he or Luke mention. As an example, tradition says he did visit Spain. This outline shows him to be so active that we would call him restless. Reading his epistles convinces us that Love urged him ever onward. He was afire with Christ. He understood his conversion to mean: “God was pleased to reveal his son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles”, Gal 1:16. Obviously, he grew in Christ, and thereby flared up in Love, always seeking to spread Love to all God’s children.

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#### **Paul’s Love Theme**

Love is the main theme of Paul’s life. Forever ardent, he first loved Torah, then Christ. Jesus took Paul to His heart, aflame with Love Himself. So Paul could insist: “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord”, 1 Cor 9:1. This experience might have filled him with pride, but Paul was so loving that he kept himself in perspective. “For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received: that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was

buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures; and that he appeared to Cephas; then to the twelve; then he appeared to above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain until now, but some are fallen asleep; then he appeared to James; then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to the child untimely born, he appeared to me also. **For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.** But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not found vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Whether then it be I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed” 1 Cor 15: 3-11. Paul shows us that sharing Jesus is all-important. In Christ-life we join His beloved. This loving union is the salvation which all of us desire, and which Paul lives to share.

Paul’s love rushes on, like his spoken word. To appreciate this, read his epistles aloud. That was the style of his time. Even the very long epistle to the Hebrews was meant to be read aloud at one sitting. Hence he instructs his helpers: “And when this letter has been read among you, read also the letter from Laodicea”, Col 4:16. 1 Thes 5:27 is even more emphatic: “I adjure you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the brethren.” If the reader was impressed, the effect was better than Paul himself, as 2 Cor 10:10-11 notes. People of that time considered the author to be spiritually present when his letter was read aloud, as affirmed in 1 Cor 5:4. We continue this tradition by reading epistle and Gospel at Mass.

When you read any of his epistles aloud, look for the elephant in the room: the exploding love of Christ. That explosion impelled Paul around the known world, seeking people who would accept and return Christ-Love. Luke was so impressed with Paul’s conversion from Torah to Christ, that he tells the tale three times (Acts: 9:3-19; 22:6-16; 26:12-18). Without mentioning the word “love”, it’s clear that Christ’s love enflamed Paul, who loved Him in return.

No doubt, each of you has his favorite love-passage from Paul. We want to incorporate them all. We do not need to systematize them all, but it’s wonderful to know that Fr. Spicq has done just that. His study of agape, or love, includes all of Scripture. In his second volume, on the New Testament, he shows how Paul experienced Jesus as love made human. See page 100. Jesus is incarnate Love, Ti 3:4. Love proceeded to live among us for some thirty years, modeling our life in Christ, or showing us how to live in Love. Jesus loved all humans, showing us that agape is universal. No person can be excluded from Christ-love, unless one freely rejects it. We are all God’s children, unified by His Love. Therefore every division is scandal. 1 Cor 12:27 expresses Christ-life and love among us: “Now ye are the body of Christ, and severally members thereof”. To be the body of Christ is to be Christ. So any separation among us is unacceptable. Paul’s great symbol for Love Himself is the mystical body of Christ. Just as it’s impossible to separate the hand from the arm without violence, so we are one in Christ. Love unifies. Hatred divides. In his love-flames, Paul shares Christ’s greater fire.

Paul amplifies his body-symbol by saying: “Is Christ divided, was Paul crucified for you, or were ye baptized into the name of Paul?”, 1 Cor 1:13. He hoped to heal schism by reminding the Corinthians of Christ’s loving unity, and picturing attacks on His body. Similarly, he upbraided them for: “brother goeth to law with brother, and that before unbelievers? Nay, already it is altogether a defect in you, that ye have lawsuits one with another. Why not rather take wrong, why not rather be defrauded? Nay, but ye yourselves do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren”, 1 Cor 6:6-8. Perhaps we miss Paul’s loving focus because he doesn’t use the word itself in this passage. But the spirit of this practical injunction is love so intense that it need not be named. Charity is the only activity that builds up the body of Christ, 1 Cor 8:1. Thereby, it constitutes the spiritual life. To have charity is to have all perfection, Col 3:14. To lose charity is to lose everything, 1 Cor 13:1-3. Paul explains that love is Christ Himself, revealed by His incarnation. All follows from that act.

Paul shows how this follows: “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross”, Phil 2:5-8. If we unpack this pregnant sentence, we see how Paul compacted many important ideas. They include: we should accept Christ’s good example, so that we think as He thought. He thought that love was more important than status. Equal to God as He was, transcendent above all creatures, Jesus emptied Himself of all that glory so that he could take human nature to Himself. His Love urged Him to become one of us. So he took the form of a servant, in our likeness. Creator God became creature man. This humbles Him indeed. Moreover, he obeyed even unto death. That would have been extraordinary enough. But He went further, to die on a cross, like a slave. This is Christ’s infinite Love, acted out to teach us Love. Truly awesome! No wonder Christ’s love exploded Paul forth for us.

The Navarre Bible commentary on Corinthians amplifies the mystical body with Vatican II’s *Lumen gentium* extension to all Church members as God’s people. Quoting: “St Paul’s concept of the Church as a body goes far beyond the human concept of corporate unity, for between Christ and the Church, between Christ and Christians, a unity is established which is not just agreement on goals, or doing certain things together at particular times: it is a living unity, Christ communicates life to the Church and to Christians, thereby making them inseparable. St. Augustine writes: ‘Let us rejoice together and give thanks, for we have become not only Christians, but Christ. Do you realize that, brethren? Are you aware of the grace of God that is within you? Rejoice in wonder: we have become Christ. For if he is the head, and we the members, the whole man is he and us. The Apostle Paul says as much... The totality of Christ is the head and the members. What does head and members mean? Christ and the Church.’” Navarre Bible: *Corinthians*, p 18.

Fr. Spicq says it well: “St. Paul’s religion is based on the first, gratuitous, and eternal love of God who chooses his faithful, pardons their sins, and accords them final salvation. Christ, sacrificing himself in the service of men, is the realization in history of that love. At baptism he acquires new being in Christ, and lives under new laws of existence and behavior. He lives “in the newness of life”- religiously, divinely. God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit live in him, inspire him,

and move him by their own charity. They make the Christian life, which is participation in the life of the Trinity, be lived for God, in Christ, under the movement of the Holy Spirit”, p 100.

Because Paul lived in Love Himself, he experienced more than words can say. He had to stretch words way beyond their common extension. This is why Peter insisted that: “as our beloved brother Paul ... wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles ... wherein are **some things hard to be understood**, which the ignorant and unstedfast wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction”, 2 Peter 3:14-16. Not all of us can stretch as far as Paul in love.

Simply put, love pulls us so close to God that words cannot express our experience. Again, Fr. Spicq’s words work well: “The believer is so vitally bound up in divine charity that agape defines his essential being. It is the one supreme and absolute Christian value (1 Cor 13:1-3, & 13) whose plentitude of being is not determined by its object. It is pure spontaneity, governed from within by its own need for expansion and giving. As the expression of the Christian’s being, it directs all his behavior, attitudes, aims, and ways of doing things. The Christian’s moral life is not primarily the observance of commandments or acquiring of virtues, but rather the unfolding of the life of a reborn son of God walking in the dynamism of love.

“St. Paul’s ‘ethic of charity’ is comprehensible only because of the real divine adoption which makes the Christian an autonomous being at the same time that it places him under God’s vital ascendancy. The ‘interior man’, the believer, remains the same person he always was. He loses nothing of his personality or human qualities, but Christ begins to live in him, and the Holy Spirit moves him and guides him. Agape keeps the same spontaneity and generosity in the Christian that it has in God. It is like a self-determined will that inspires and regulates all Christian conduct, as the love of the heavenly Father determines his choices, his decisions, and his actions. As with God himself, agape is the expression of the Christian’s interior nature. Since the interior man is daily renewed, 2 Cor 4:16, his charity is truly the principle of the movement from within which is his life, and St. Paul considers ‘to imitate God’ a synonym of ‘to walk in and by love’. The more freely and spontaneously the believer loves, the more authentic and divine his love. The mystery of his greatness is that he is able, as God is, to take the initiative in loving. He is truly risen with Christ, and he no longer lives according to the flesh, but in the heavenly kingdom, Col 3:1-3, Phil 3:20. The great effort of his moral life is to acquire the unconditional liberty that will enable agape to become pure act.

“Charity is the inspiration and motive force of the new man’s every action. It extends to everything and everyone. Nothing is foreign to it, nor even the most ordinary aspects of family life. Because its truly divine nature is characterized by initiative and gratuitousness, and because no one lives for himself alone (Rom 14:7) charity concentrates especially on neighbor. St. Paul seems to unify and direct Christian morality by means of fraternal love, because the believer can love as God and Christ love only by giving himself to his neighbors and sacrificing himself for them. He behaves as a true son of his Father, making manifest what he is: a loving and generous creature who acts for the good of his brother. His moral conduct is the proof and flowering in act of the charity which has been infused into him, just as God’s actions are manifestations of his mysterious agape.

“As soon as St. Paul has pronounced the word charity, he has said everything there is to say about what God accomplishes for men’s happiness, and what man has to accomplish for his neighbor. He has defined the heart of Christian morality. The one thing we must do on earth is love. ‘Therefore, while we have time, let us do good to all men, especially to those of the household of the faith’, Gal 6:10. All the virtues can be considered ‘faith in action’ (1 Thes 1:3; Rom 2:6-7) when faith means adherence to the mystery of the divine love of which Christian charity is the manifestation and the final fruit.” Excerpted from *Agape in the New Testament*, p 100-102.

Pondering these words, we connect them to our experiences with Paul. Though he uses the word love only now and then, all his words express love. On the frequency of the word, Fr. Spicq notes that the verb *agapan* = to love, in its various forms, appears about as frequently in Paul’s epistles as in the synoptic gospels, namely 34 times to their 25, p 15. By contrast, the noun *agape* appears many more times in St. Paul than in the synoptic Gospels. Paul uses it 75 times in his 13 epistles, making it more frequent in his vocabulary than in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Moreover, Paul uses it more consistently as the center of his preaching: his gospel, or good news. Only St. John excels Paul in emphasizing love, p 103. Paul realized that God started this loving exchange. God loved us into existence, loved us out of sin, if we accept His saving blood, and will love us into heaven, if we remain faithful. Quite likely, we can devote more sessions to Paul’s love.

## St. Paul: Saturday Session Twelve: Love 2

### *Heart of Paul's Message: Love*

Definitely: love is Paul's main theme. Before his conversion, Paul loved Torah as much as anyone can love it. Because Torah is impersonal, no one can really love it. Nor can it return our love. But God is personal, actually three persons. So He can love us, and we can love Him. Israel, our ancestors in the faith, tried to love God, but He was so far away. Even when He revealed Himself to His chosen ones, He remained distant. Even covenanting with His beloved people, He remained obscure. As Paul noted, God's love for us was definite, but isolated in events which were few and far between, as covenants with Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. We cherish these revelations. They prepare us for His ultimate covenant. But His complete act of loving union is much more personal in Jesus Christ. All revelation is magnificent, but revelation in the flesh is God's greatest love-act. His Incarnation sanctifies matter, as God becomes man. Thereby He shows Himself completely. His life, death, and resurrection reveal Him to be Love. Paul trumpets this message to the world.

Fr. Spicq develops Paul's message in great detail, showing how he communicates Christ's love. Jesus spoke to the heart: The greatest law is to Love God with whole heart and soul, and the second is to love neighbor like self, Mt 22:39. Christ's dual command urged Paul to share this love. Fr. Spicq summarizes Paul's sharing on p 59, vol 2, of *Agape in the New Testament*. "... in Ephesians 1:10... St. Paul is speaking of God's bringing all things to unity under the primacy of Christ, leader of the universe. ... Love of neighbor is the principal point of the law, and all the other precepts hang from it. St. Paul's 'to sum up' corresponds to St. Matthew's 'to depend'. ('On these two commandments **depend** the whole law and the prophets' Mt 22:40.) Charity is the central point where all the commandments converge. They form a unit. [Col 3:14] The law 'culminates' in love. However varied are the virtues we practice, none has any meaning, or could even exist, apart from *agape*. Without love they would be empty, lifeless bodies without souls. The essence of Christian morality is love. The lover is immediately and spontaneously faithful to all his duties toward God, neighbor, and himself. He proves his gratitude toward God by his fidelity. He governs his dealings with other men by desire for their good. As his brothers' 'slave', Gal 5:13, he must be interiorly rectified before he can fulfill his obligations to them and to God."

Therefore charity is everything. All reality flows from charity, or *agape*, or perfect love. Paul lived that reality completely, and tailored his ministry to express God's love. This design follows directly from the fact that God is Love. Christ's life manifests His love in every deed. By expressing the Trinity, He showed us perfect personal interaction, in Perfect Love. He enables us to recognize mutual knowing and loving among the Three. With every passing day, we improve our understanding of this personal Love-Process. Because God is limitless, we can continue to improve our comprehension forever. God's infinity ensures our eternal improvement. Though we never finish understanding God's love, we delight in every step, each leading us to more love. Even in this vale of tears, we participate in Divine love dynamics. As Fr. Spicq shows, every Jesus-thing is about love. Every Christian-thing springs from God's love for us, and spreads to complete loving union with Him. It's all too simple for words.

Nothing but God's love truly matters. Nothing else is significant. All the rest is illusion. Jesus expressed this by his summary of the commandments: love God above all, and love your neighbor as yourself. Paul elaborates details as they applied to his beloved disciples. His fellow followers of Christ during the first Christian century had problems rather different from ours. But because Paul emphasized Love, the most important action, he uncovered the basis that supports action for all times, places, and people. He provides Love-treasure that we can apply to our own time and people.

#### *Unpacking Paul's Love-Treasure*

Fr. Spicq does all the heavy lifting for us. He learned Greek so that he could tell us in modern terms what Paul meant, and how his disciples understood his meaning, 2,000 years ago. The first epistle to the Thessalonians, in 51 AD, shows how Paul enriched the meaning of the verb *agapan*=to love, and made it a technical term for Christ's church, page 15. It begins simply: "Brothers *beloved* by God", 1 Th 1:4. It's the first use of this word for God's love of us. The synoptic Gospels use "*agapetos*=beloved" exclusively for the Father's love for the Son. Paul extends this divine love to us. This expansion is not perfectly new, because the Hebrew Scriptures emphasize that God loves Israel, His chosen people. As Paul insists in Rom 11:17-18, God grafts us wild olive shoots into the cultivated olive trunk. It is this holy trunk which sanctifies us. Symbols like olive grafting focus our attention on God's continued love of His chosen people, overflowing to us gentiles.

Though Paul rushes through all these facts like the Spirit-wind, we slow down to realize what happened. Love cared for His chosen people through two millennia, preparing them for the Messiah. When Messiah came, He was God Incarnate, surpassing all expectations. God-among-us was clearer than all previous revelation. As Paul emphasized, God also chose **all** people. No longer did we struggle with remote symbols, and occasional interventions. Instead, God was with us every second of every day, providing Eucharistic nourishment and continued apostolic ministry for **all** mankind. As Paul said in Eph 3:6, **all** who accept Christ are fellow heirs with the chosen people, sons by adoption, and full members of the Church. God's infinite love invites us all. We have only to accept Love. No barriers of place, time, or people restrain us. Free at last, and free for **all!**

Those who freely accept God's free love become *egapemenoi*, meaning "beloved" by God, as Fr. Spicq points out on p 16. He adds that: "... 'beloved' is one of the most authentic descriptions of the faithful. Its perfect participial form shows the immovable permanence of the love of God. Christians are forever the privileged objects of the Father's love". Dwell upon this marvel. God gives His infinite and eternal love to us. We are beloved in His perfect Love. No wonder that Paul could exclaim: "Who can separate me from the love of Christ? ... For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord", Rom 8:35-39.

Doubtless, you have your own quote ringing in your mental ear from Paul's love-trumpet. Isn't it amazing how one of his phrases sets off another? Over and over, you have heard his clarion call to love, and have responded in your personal way. Reviewing these few reminds you of many others.

The second part of Christ's law is to love neighbor as self. Naturally, Paul gets right down to that part in 1 Thes 4:9: "Concerning brotherly love, you need not have anyone write to you, since you yourselves have learned from God to love one another". How important it is to realize where that love comes from. Love Himself shows us in Jesus how beloved we are, and how we should pass that Love on to all God's children. Paul reviews his love for his Thessalonians in a long passage from Thes 2:1 to 3:13. This love flows from Love-in-action in Christ. All His apostles share Love, as 1 Pt 2:5 expresses. So all are beloved brethren, members of Love's family, united by Love.

Fr. Spicq, p 17, distinguishes clearly: "This brotherhood is not the same kind of thing as the diffused benevolence of a fictitious relationship or political friendship which sometimes unite persons, nor is it just a title of honor used to begin a letter. The union between Christians is as real as a blood relationship. Although it is invisible, and exists between very many persons at once, each Christian is perfectly aware of it." Though Paul trumpets this message, all apostles say the same, each in his own way. Peter, the Rock, says: "Remember that you are experiencing the same sufferings as befall your brothers all over the world", 1 Pt 5:9. This reminds us that we are "one in Christ", Gal 3:28. All apostles echo Jesus: "You may be one as I and the Father are one", Jn 10:30. Jesus puts it this way: "And the glory which you have given me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we *are* one; I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that You sent Me, and love them, even as You love Me" Jn 17-22-23.

Everything fits into the One, as the Three do. Jesus pours Trinitarian Love on us. If we accept, we become One as the One. Then we live this Oneness in Christ's Church, serving our brethren. As Peter shows, we suffer all over the world, as Jesus suffered for love of us. In Greek, this brotherly love is *philadelphia*. It is as close to the oneness of the One as we can get. We advance step by step, so we continue to progress toward Love by loving other persons, our neighbors. As Fr. Spicq says: "Once he has been sanctified & consecrated to God by baptism, the disciple of Jesus is, as it were, vowed to the practice of fraternal love: 'You've purified your soul by submission to the truth, that you might have a sincere brotherly love. Therefore, fervently and unaffectedly love one another from the bottom of your hearts', 1 Pt 1:22. Brotherly love is a constitutive element of the Christian's being. The divine calling which separates the neophyte from the world, & purifies him from sin, also makes him belong exclusively to God, so that he becomes holy. His consecration to the Lord places him among the people of God. It constrains him to cherish his brothers, other children of the one Father, not superficially in words alone, because he is commanded to do so, but spontaneously and from the heart; not merely in some circumstances & sometimes, but actively, constantly, and intensely. Romans 12:10 shows that fraternal love unites a kind of innate tenderness with a most respectful attention. It is totally different from camaraderie, which can often be abrupt, and not particularly respectful. The behavior of the Christians to one another is a totally original expression of the loving communion of brothers who adore one Lord. It has both the sweetness & confidence of family love, and the respect and delicacy religious persons necessarily feel for the holy creatures who are their brothers in Christ. Such a love can exist only in the Church. Christians can be distinguished from the rest of men by this love so perfectly aware of itself, and so deliberately maintained & exercised. 'Persevere in brotherly love', Heb 13:1. Brotherly love must be reciprocal, of course, since it exists for those who live by the same grace. But its purest, most active respect and devotion cannot confine themselves to a restricted group. In other ways *agape* will extend itself to all men", 18. This restates Paul coordinating all: "Now may our God & Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints", 1 Thes 3:11-13. Paul fits so much into so few words. He identifies Love's source in Love, which urges us to overflow in love for each other. Paul extends this love to all of God's children, and reminds his beloved that he gave the good example of loving all of them. Why? Because that's God's plan for us, the ultimate holiness of heart that makes us pure and blameless before Love Himself. When Christ comes again, He wants us to be one in the One Love that the Trinity is. Paul expresses this in his musical key. Peter's key is different, but no less loving: "... with brotherly affection, & brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ", 2 Pt 1:7-8. To know our Lord is to love as Love loves. Now we each have our key to trumpet this message

## St. Paul: Saturday Session Fourteen: Love 4

### *Applications of Paul's Message: Love*

By popular demand, all St. Paul's quotes are in bold italic, for easy identification.

***“What no eye has ever seen, what no ear has ever heard, what no human heart has ever thought of, namely, the great blessings God holds ready for those who love him”***, 1 Cor 2:9. You know the immensity of this blessing. Paul affirms that we who love God will experience what human equipment is incapable of experiencing. Paul insists that God provides Himself, Who is beyond sensory apprehension (eye, ear), and beyond human thought. In Paul's day, because of the great emotions that accompany great thoughts, men believed that the heart was the bodily organ we employ to think. But none of our finite knowing equipment can attain infinite God. Yet God has a way to unite with us. It is infinite Love. When we love along with infinite Love, we and Love are one. God's infinity absorbs our finity. Then we become the ONE He built us to be.

Hence Paul's famous phrase: ***“Now there abide these three: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love”***, 1 Cor 13:13. Faith is our guide to Love here below, and hope is our incentive, but love is the act of Love Himself. We participate in Love by loving on earth, then we unite with Love in heaven. Once we're in heaven, we are ONE in Love/Unity. So faith and hope are useless. Once we possess Love, we no longer believe or hope. It behooves us, therefore to start today what we will do forever: love Love Himself. Paul trumpets this message to the world. Paul goes up in flames of Love. That's why he was such an apostle. He let Love live in him. After persecuting Love for a few years, he yielded to Love, and allowed Love to impel and direct him.

Love becomes human in Jesus Christ. Love Himself walked among us. He taught us how to live, die, and resurrect, so that we can be with ONE by, in, and for Love. The completion of our ragged life is all ONE in Love. That's the Unity God created us to be. Greeks call this unfolding process theosis, εοσι. They mean our becoming-God. God godifies us, or makes us into infinite Love. St. Irenaeus says it clearly: God became man so that man could become God. We westerners seldom mention this, much less do we have a word for it. Instead, we emphasize love, the activity and the Person. Our way is to practice love, until Love perfects love in us.

All these words remind you of Paul's many affirmations that love is our principle project. 1 Corinthians is full of memorable ways to say that. Let's focus on how God will transform us into Love. Paul bursts forth: ***“God indeed revealed them to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit fathoms all things, including the depths of God's mind. For what human being understands human affairs except the human spirit that is in him? Thus also no one has comprehended God's affairs except the Spirit of God. Now we did not receive the spirit of the world, but the Spirit which is from God, in order that we might comprehend the things freely given us by God; and we speak of them in words not instructed by human wisdom, but instructed by the Spirit, for we interpret spiritual matters by spiritual words”***, 1 Cor 2:10-13.

This Anchor Bible translation may sound strange to you, but it conveys meaning quite well. Paul says that The Spirit reveals what we know about Love. Then Paul shows the Spirit's qualifications. He reminds us that the Spirit is Perfect Understanding. Our own minds, in God's image and likeness, resemble God's. After original sin our understanding is partial and shadowy. But our spirit understands better than other men. Paul says that Jesus left us His Spirit, Who is one with the Father, just as the Son is One. Accepting this dynamic makes us ONE by Love. Individually, we and the Trinity are ONE. Our little human person becomes ONE with the Three Persons. All four of us are ONE. That's what Love does. It unites into ONE. Expanding to the community, as each person is ONE with the Persons, so all of us are ONE together. This Unity is Divine.

Paul knows that the Corinthians do not understand this. They do not know, step by step, how this process unfolds. But the Spirit takes them to Love. As Fr. Spicq expresses it: “In contrast to the ‘world's rulers’ of verse 8, who did not recognize God's wisdom in Christ, ‘those who love God’ adhere to Jesus, and recognize him as Lord of glory. The first light given, therefore, illuminates the Son of God crucified, and those who are faithful to

him because they love God, receive, besides, an eschatological knowledge about the future life. St. Paul speaks of this knowledge again in 1 Cor 13:12. None but the ‘charitable’ are enlightened by the Spirit.

“Those who love God’ have the privilege of being initiated into the mystery of their salvation, of the happiness that will crown it, and of the means of attaining it. Their knowledge, revealed by the Spirit, is not the result of keen intellectual insight, but rather of *agape*, which makes the faithful more ‘spiritual’, able to grasp the meaning of a spiritual secret, and the value of a spiritual joy. It must be pointed out here that the ‘beatitude’ of the ‘mature’ (v 6), of ‘those who are ripe for it’, is intrinsically linked to the ‘passion’ of the Son. St. John later discovered the charity of the Father in this mysterious relationship”, 25-26; *Agape in the New Testament*.

It’s all very clear to Paul that Love is mysterious because Love transcends our experience. But God infuses Love into us. First the Father infuses Love by creating us. Then the Son infuses Love by teaching and redeeming us. Then the Spirit infuses Love by perfecting the Son’s work. This perfecting includes comfort in our trials, and encouragement along the hard way of Love, the way of the cross. But most importantly, the Spirit shares with us God’s secrets. Here, Paul affirms that the Spirit interprets God’s gifts to us. Chief among these gifts is God Himself: Love. This massive gift defies complete explanation, but Paul gets part of it across to us.

**“Mere knowledge breeds conceit; it is love that builds. If anyone thinks he knows something, he does not yet know how to know. But if a man loves God, he is known by him”**, 1 Cor 8:1b-3. Paul emphasizes how human knowledge puffs man up to claim knowledge about divine things, like God’s love. People misinterpret Paul, because he speaks from God’s love, but they do not listen from God’s love. These people imitate Paul’s words, but **not** his deeds. However, only deeds show Love. Paul calls the Corinthians to love by showing how love improves knowledge. Paul insists that love is knowledge, just as, in God, Love=Knowledge. When man loves God, God knows man by mutual love. Then knowledge radiates out so that the loving man knows God. This is the necessary process, naturally, since God is Love. Love overcomes divisions, making all one. Paul constantly reaffirms this love-dynamic. It is the mark of truth. Only if man loves God does man know God. If man loves God, then man overflows with Love of his fellow men. Paul is a living example of this love, serving his beloved in spite of trials, tribulations, and attacks. Love-in-act exhibits Love. It’s not theory; it’s act.

The specific act Paul deals with here is bolstering weak faith. Some Corinthians worried that meat sacrificed to idols, then sold in public, was somehow spiritually contaminated. Their faith was weak, divided by superstition, as if idols had power. Other Corinthians realized that idols are figments of someone’s imagination. So there are no “gods” who could curse the meat. They understood that eating this meat was no problem at all. A few of these learned people despised their weak brothers. They challenged them to abandon their superstitions. This is not half bad. But what would love do instead? Paul asserts that love would refrain from eating meat sacrificed to idols, for their weak brothers’ sake. That’s 1 Cor 8:1a: **“Now concerning meats offered to idols.”**

We admit that Paul’s thoughts run ahead of his language. The result is linguistically ambiguous, as Fr. Spicq points out on p 27. Manuscript, P<sup>46</sup> is clearer: **“If anyone thinks he has knowledge, he does not yet know how to know; but if anyone loves, he is the man who possesses knowledge.”** (1 Cor 8:2-3) As Fr. Spicq wisely says: “St. Paul is trying to show that true religious knowledge seeks the good of the other person, not its own interest”, 27. See 1 Cor 10:24, 33; 13:5. Fr Spicq reminds us that we must read each passage in light of all the others. This context enables us to grasp Paul’s meaning. Considering all that Paul says, we notice that he often integrates love and knowledge. True knowledge flows from true love, from Love Himself. All three Persons are Love, and They love us in ways that overflow all descriptions. Knowing and loving are One in our Source. As we accept our Source, knowing and loving unite in us. This Unity is God’s Gift. To Paul, this is obvious, because he lives Love. Jesus showed him how to do this. Christ’s Spirit is Love, living in Paul. The Father started this love-dynamic. Paul affirms that all Three live in the man who accepts Christ.

Living this Love, Paul sees some Corinthians complacent in human knowledge that sacrificed meats aren’t contaminated. They fall short of divine knowledge precisely by despising their brother who doesn’t know that. What’s Paul’s basic reason for seeing this? Divine knowledge is Love. It’s the identity of Pure Being:

Knowledge=Love. Because Paul lives this Unity, he sees all these connections clearly and immediately. Trying to express these connections is so huge a problem that Paul frequently stumbles in his attempt. So we look beyond each stumble, survey the entire epistle, and learn more about his meaning. By surveying all his epistles, we get even more. By adding what Acts tells us, we get the entire picture passed down from the first century.

Then we pray Paul's message. By reading his epistles prayerfully, we open ourselves to his profound interaction with Love. That interaction is Love Himself, manifest in Jesus. But Jesus reveals both the Father and the Spirit, so Jesus Unifies us. No longer treating us as servants, Jesus treats us as members of His family, John 15:15. All family members know the inner secret of Love. Love is Trinity, is One. By accepting Love, we enter this Divine Dynamic. This Dynamic urges us on, as Paul points out in 2 Cor 9:7: "***Let each one give as he has determined in his heart, not grudgingly, or from compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.***" In the context Paul shared with us, it's clear that love makes us cheerful, even when we give away scanty resources. All is ONE in Love for Paul, because he gives himself totally to Jesus Who gave Himself totally to Paul. By His incarnation, life, death and resurrection, Jesus gave Himself totally to all of us. May we respond totally.

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Fifteen: Discipleship

## *Applications of Paul's Message: Discipleship*

### **Introduction: Paul's Discipleship Compared to the Original Disciples of Christ**

As The Jerome Biblical Commentary shows on p 1322, Jesus called disciples to serve as He served. All true disciples imitate Christ. He gave everything for us, and called others to follow His lead: Mat 9:18-22; Mk 1:16-20; Jn 1:43. Just as Jesus differed from Moses, so these disciples differed from rabbinic disciples. Jesus is the huge difference. He is God-man, Incarnate God. None can compare. He is Revelation in the Flesh. He gives His all for the Kingdom. He changes everything. That's why we mark time by His arrival. All His disciples give in like manner, 100%, even unto death. He selects 12 apostles to symbolize the 12 tribes of the Chosen People. Each gave his life for God's people. Paul, though born out of time, was an apostle, as he says: ***Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, <sup>2</sup>which he promised afore through his prophets in the holy scriptures***, Rom 1:1-2. ***Inasmuch as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I glorify my ministry***, Rom 11:13. ***Paul, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God***, 1 Corinthians 1:1. (ASV translation) Paul also gave his life for love of his converts. Discipleship means giving all one's life.

Both epistles to the Corinthians refer to Paul's apostolic mission. Why? Because some people in Corinth challenged his authority. See: 1 Cor 9:1; 1 Cor 9:2; 1 Cor 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; and 2 Cor 12:12. We see that Paul imitated Jesus rather well. He earned his authority by giving his life for his people. Jesus suffered much more, but Paul suffered for his beloved, the mystical body of Christ. Discipleship means suffering for the beloved, all the way to death.

Discipleship was Paul's life, as he insists in further quotes. Galatians 1:1 is particularly enlightening: ***Paul, an apostle, not from men, neither through man, but through Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead***. Here Paul traces his discipleship to Jesus. No mere man can give Jesus-discipleship to others. Only Jesus can. Why? Because Jesus is the Father's disciple, and is divine. God the Father, in the mystery of Trinitarian Love, inspires Discipleship. All Three are disciples of each other in the Divine Act. But God the Son, Incarnate, reveals God to us in the flesh. Naturally, God the Spirit participates equally. But we have a hard time tracing even one Divine Person. So we learn from God-man's example of discipleship that Divinity sends Divinity to ransom man. Discipleship means God-given gift, dispensed from the Father to the Son, Who passed it on to his followers, by the Spirit. This is the discipleship dynamic.

Jesus is the Father's Disciple, from Whom we learn discipleship. Paul learned it from Him, and exemplified it by imitating Him, even giving his life for his beloved. Jesus gave Life for all men, while Paul gave his life for some men, the ones he met. Paul's discipleship is lesser, more limited, but the same kind. It is Love in action, serving the beloved. Discipleship means loving service. Christ's living example enlivens everything. Without Him, there are no Jesus-disciples.

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and Christ Jesus our hope***, 1 Tim 1:1. This statement teaches us that Jesus commanded His followers to continue apostolic service. Christ insisted that we share His message, as His original apostles did. So discipleship means obeying God's command. ***For there is one God, one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself a ransom for all; the testimony to be borne in its own times; <sup>7</sup>whereunto I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I speak the truth, I lie not), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth***, 1 Tim 2: 5-7. Paul tells us that all disciples come from the one God, through His mediator, Christ Jesus, Whose example must be expressed to others. Therefore God appointed Paul to express this example as preacher and apostle. This powerfully conveys the fact that all disciples obey God.

***Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, by signs and wonders and mighty works***, 2 Corinthians 12:12. Today we forget that disciples worked miracles: "signs and wonders and mighty works". Today we strive to look like everyone else, never stick out, blend into the crowd. But discipleship stands out, allowing God to work wonders through us. Even if we do not cure cripples, our moral miracles stand out. Among so many addicts, how do disciples remain sober? In the midst of sexual license, how do disciples remain pure? God does the heavy lifting for disciples, showing these moral signs wonders and mighty works through them all over the world.

***Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus through the will of God, according to the promise of the life which is in Christ Jesus***, 2 Timothy 1:1. Here Paul emphasizes both the source of discipleship, i.e. God's will, and the Kingdom, or the life of Christ, which disciples share with all who accept it. Discipleship means sharing Christ-life. Disciples share not just God's truth, but God's Love. This combination is more than truth and goodness. It is new life from Jesus through disciples to all who welcome it. It is the coming of the Kingdom of God. Paul contrasts this life to empty experience, or death, or sin. Before we accepted Life, we were dead in sin. You have a favorite Pauline quote showing how Jesus saves us from sin-death into Christ-life. I like Rom 6:2-4, which we can shorten to: we are dead to sin, alive in Christ. Others showing how Christ rescues us from death for His life include: Rom 1:15; 5:14; 6:11; 6:23; 7:4; 8:10; Heb 2:14; Ep 5:12; 5:14.

Perhaps Pauline emphasis on Life impresses you most. Uniting in Christ-life is the major reason to be disciples. Paul emphasized this with his own disciples, who carried on his apostolic mission. Down the line from Apollo, Titus, Timothy, and a host of Pauline ministers, we are also disciples. You probably remember a dozen disciples Paul mentions: Sosthenes, Aquila, Priscilla... Without listing them all, we will move from Paul's personal discipleship to how he extends it to others. From there we can move on to the present, and consider our own discipleship.

## Paul's Disciples

***I planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. <sup>7</sup>So then neither is he that planteth anything, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. <sup>8</sup>Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: but each shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. <sup>9</sup>For we are God's fellow-workers: ye are God's husbandry, God's building,*** 1 Corinthians 3:6. How can anyone improve on this description of discipleship? Each disciple acts for God, Who does the real work, perfecting our weak efforts. Discipleship means letting God work through us.

***Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not to go beyond the things which are written; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other. <sup>7</sup>For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? but if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it?,*** 1 Cor 4: 6-7. Paul admonishes his disciples to be humble, to be true to what each is, rather than puffing self up to appear more. Also, he forbids strife, because it's not of God. Disciples must be of God, unifying unto Unity. Discipleship means receiving from God, and giving all glory to Him.

***Already are ye filled, already ye are become rich, ye have come to reign without us: yea and I would that ye did reign, that we also might reign with you. <sup>9</sup>For, I think, God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, both to angels and men. <sup>10</sup>We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye have glory, but we have dishonor. <sup>11</sup>Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; <sup>12</sup>and we toil, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; <sup>13</sup>being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things, even until now,*** 1 Cor 4: 8-13. Paul contrasts some Corinthians to real disciples, showing how he and Apollo suffer for them, made a spectacle to the entire world, fools for Christ. But false disciples rest on their false wisdom, strong and glorious. Paul depicts many real discipleship qualities here. Real disciples are despised by the rich and powerful. Fools for Christ, real disciples look stupid to the worldly wise. These weak, dishonored real disciples hunger, thirst, are naked, beaten, and without permanent home. They toil with their own hands, blessing all who revile them, and enduring all persecution. They entreat God to forgive those who defame them, even if these defamers treat them like filth. Discipleship means offering persecution from powerful people up to God, as Christ did.

***I write not these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children. <sup>15</sup>For though ye have ten thousand tutors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I begat you through the gospel. <sup>16</sup>I beseech you therefore, be ye imitators of me. <sup>17</sup>For this cause have I sent unto you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, who shall put you in remembrance of my ways which are in Christ, even as I teach everywhere in every church,*** 1 Cor 4: 15-17. Paul expressly invites them to imitate him. He does this because he "fathered" them in faith by imitating Jesus. Paul relates everything to ultimate Unity. We separate factors to clarify them, but really they are one. Discipleship means Christ, taught everywhere, in every church, Christ's way. As Christ is One, so are all His disciples.

***Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? <sup>7</sup>Purge out the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, even as ye are unleavened. For our passover also hath been sacrificed, Christ: <sup>8</sup>wherefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth,*** 1 Cor 5: 6-8. Some Corinthians gloried in sex-abuse. Paul shows this sin opposes Christ's Passover sacrifice. Paul calls these superficial Corinthians back to discipleship-discipline. Sincerity and truth, in Christ's sacrifice of the Mass, should purge out the old leaven of sin. Then fall-aways will return to Christ-Unity. Discipleship means moral integrity. Even one atom of immorality corrupts an entire person. One person spreads disease to the community, as a little leaven spreads throughout all the dough, to raise all the bread. Disciples abandon sin-death for Christ-life.

***I wrote unto you in my epistle to have no company with fornicators; <sup>10</sup>not at all meaning with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous and extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world: <sup>11</sup>but as it is, I wrote unto you not to keep company, if any man that is named a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such a one no, not to eat. <sup>12</sup>For what have I to do with judging them that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? <sup>13</sup>But them that are without God judgeth. Put away the wicked man from among yourselves,*** 1 Cor 5: 9-13. Paul extends specific cases of sin-death beyond sex abuse to possession-abuse, and to commitment-abuse. Abusers corrupt the community, and must be excluded. Naturally, if they repent, they rejoin. But they reject brotherhood because they reject discipleship, which means holiness in Christ. This review of Paul's powerful pronouncements sketches discipleship so well that we can apply it to our present condition.

## Our Discipleship

Collecting all these discipleship meanings, we see that God reveals discipleship in His Being. Christ manifests it to us in the Flesh. As Jesus gave ALL, suffering and life, so do disciples, who live Love in action. Love Himself commands that we be disciples by living Love. This Life is a miracle, shining forth, and sharing Christ. Christ-life replaces death-sin. God works through disciples, so disciples never claim results for themselves. Instead, they suffer persecution for God's glory. Disciples are one in the One. That's how they become holy in the Holy.

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Fifteen: Discipleship

## *Applications of Paul's Message: Discipleship*

### Our Discipleship Continued

***Let there be no debt except the debt of mutual love, because he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. For the commandments: You shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet, ..., all are summed up in this saying: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. Love does no evil to a neighbor. Love, therefore is the fulfillment of the law.*** Rom: 13:8-10. This is the profound love that drives disciples. Christians love to share Christ-life. Just as Jesus calls all to love, He calls all to evangelize everyone. Therefore, He calls us to be apostles.

As Fr. Spicq notes, here Paul uses the verb *pleroun*, which means “to satisfy in full”, or “to finish completely”. Moreover, he uses the perfect tense to show an already finished action, 57. This is the fullest fulfillment possible. In fact, it transcends the law. Why? Because the law refers to external actions, while Christ’s internal love vivified His actions. That’s the love, His very own, that enlivens us if we love in Christ. It is Christ’s Love, or Love Himself, that lives in us, and overflows to others. Paul brims with Christ-life, or Love, and sheds It upon us. So we want to second his motion. Then we will be disciples of Love, to fill the universe with Love. This discipleship is worth doing.

Doing it fulfills the old law by living the new Law of Love. Divine love enlivens the Mosaic law, bringing it to fullness in Christ. Fr. Spicq insists that the law of the Gospel is Love, 58. Jesus teaches love in the sermon on the mount, but teaches it most perfectly by His life, death, and resurrection. Imitating Christ means giving ourselves entirely, as He did. Paul trumpets that message emphatically and often. ***I exhort you, therefore, brothers, in view of the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a sacrifice, living, holy, pleasing to God.*** Rom 12:1. “Sacrifice” comes from the Latin: *sacris facere*, meaning “to make holy”. If we make our bodies holy to God, then we put them at His disposal. As Jesus taught, His disposal is to share Christ-life, or to be disciples/apostles, spreading Christ. His mercies include becoming man by incarnation, being a perfect living example for us, and dying for our sins. In view of these mercies, love urges us to offer our bodies as Jesus did. That response to God’s mercies pleases God. Moreover, it pleases us, and everyone around us.

***For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.*** 1 Corinthians 9:16. Paul is so compelled by Christ-Love that he is woeful without discipleship. Paul could not be unless he shared Christ-Love with everyone. Though not as great as Paul, we must do our share by preaching to all the people we encounter. With practice, we too can catch this compulsion. Fear not, it’s a long time coming. We do not need to worry about becoming woeful soon. The flip-side of Paul’s compulsion is the joy of expanding Christ-Love.

***How will they preach unless they are sent? Just as it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news of good things!”*** Romans 10:15. All discipleship begins in Christ. He sends us forth to preach. Paul quotes Isaiah 52:7, commending the bringers of good news, and proclaiming their feet to be beautiful. This poetic expression transcends time to illumine the darkness past, present and future. Before Christ, the covenants foretell Him. While He lived among us, He enlightened us. After His resurrection, His disciples proclaim Him. All life-currents unite in Christ, Who gives Himself, the ultimate Joy, because He is Love. Christ sends Paul, and sends us as well, to keep sharing Christ.

***For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel, not in cleverness of speech, so that the cross of Christ would not be made void.*** 1 Corinthians 1:17. Notice the way that Christ sends Paul: “not in cleverness of speech”. Fancy words distract from Christ’s cross. Jesus dying for love of us is the message. So Paul does not cover the cross with puffy words. Instead of voiding the cross by rhetoric, Paul delivers Christ as He delivered Himself to us. Naturally, we learn from Paul’s good example to be disciples who do the same. Plain-spoken is the best way, or we might mislead people from Love’s simple expression. So our own speech should imitate Christ. He spoke simply to the poorest of the poor, the most ignorant of the ignorant, and the weakest of the weak. They understood Him, as we hope that today’s needy people understand us. Instead of repeating what we learned in learned terms, we find simple ways to address simple people.

***For indeed Jews ask for signs, and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*** 1 Corinthians 1:22-25. As usual, Paul overflows with the Spirit, providing more in three sentences than we can unpack in a book. But he is sure that “Christ crucified” is the disciple’s message, even if Jews seek signs, like walls of water standing to either side in the Red Sea crossing, and even if the Greeks want wisdom, like Plato provided. Paul is sure that neither miracles nor wisdom is worth having. Christ crucified is revelation in the flesh, given up for us to take our sins away. When we trade in the death of our sin, Christ provides His very own life for us. If Christ wanted to provide signs or wisdom, He could have. He didn’t. Nor should we replace Christ’s acts with literary limitations. To be disciples, we must preach what Christ preached, the way He did. Ultimately, that means we too will give our lives in Love. If we do, then the power and wisdom of God flow through us to the people who are dying for it. In his memorable way, Paul reminds us that God’s foolishness is wiser than anything man can produce, and God’s weakness is stronger than our strongest effort.

***What then is my reward? That, when I preach the gospel, I may offer the gospel without charge, so as not to make full use of my right in the gospel.*** 1 Corinthians 9:18. Paul assures us that preaching the gospel is reward enough.

Though others preached for pay, Paul preached for free. He sustained himself by making tents, you recall. Others did not get rich by preaching, but sustained themselves in order to preach. Paul was so enveloped in Love Himself, that preaching Love to others was lovely, delightful, all-absorbing, and eternally enriching. Paul needed to eat and drink something. He needed to purchase parchment and ink. He often paid for transportation from city to city, and he contributed to the needs of his beloved converts. But all this was for the Gospel. What he spent came partially from donations, but mostly from his hand labor. Each apostle has a right to sustenance, so that he can pass the gospel on. But Paul did not exercise that right.

***For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Light shall shine out of darkness," is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.*** 2 Corinthians 4:5-6. Paul never ego-trips. Ego trips always trip over the ego. Instead, Paul preached Christ Jesus, his way of saying the mystical body of Christ. This is another way to say the kingdom of God that Jesus preached. Because Christ-life is so vast, we can express it many ways. Paul gives us dozens of expressions of Christ-life. Here he uses light. God said that light shall shine out of darkness first in Genesis, then in his covenants with men, then in His prophets, and finally in his psalmists, especially David. Light is the most prominent metaphor for God Himself. Therefore, it is ideal for Christ, Who proclaimed Himself to be the Light of the world, John 8:12; John 9:5. Paul proclaims Jesus to be the One who shines in our hearts, so we see the glory of God in the face of Christ. Paul grew up on Old Testament quotes about light, and exalted in them. Prophets like Isaiah promised the Messiah to come like dawn breaking, or light banishing darkness. He meant that the Messiah would replace the evil of sin with the goodness of redemption. Some of these references can be found in: Isaiah 60:1; Isaiah 9:2; Isaiah 51:4; Psalm 18:28; Psalm 27:1; Psalm 36:9; Psalm 37:6; Psalm 43:3; Psalm 49:19; Psalm 89:15; Psalm 119:105; Psalm 119:130.

In our minor ways, we shine the light of Christ into darkness. Our discipleship is like Paul's by projecting Christ into the present world. Folks now reject Christ just as thoroughly as those people who crucified Him long ago. If the world rejected Christ, we can expect it to reject those who bear His light to them today. So we must abandon ego-tripping, forgetting about our comfort, as we proclaim Christ. If we bear Love Himself to others, He clarifies our darkness, fills up our gaps, and corrects our mistakes. We don't do all the work ourselves. Instead Love gradually takes over, as much as we give to Him, so that He shines through us. Ideally, we remove all opaque ego-tripping, so He can shine clearly through.

***But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ.*** Galatians 1:8-10. One of the reasons Paul was so often persecuted is that he never compromised Christ. He's eager to compromise all smaller items, even the law he worshiped as a kid. But he never interjects his personal preferences into Christ-life. Paul insists upon the undiluted Gospel. That's why he counteracted heretics, who preferred their whims to Christ. In short, Paul remains faithful to Christ. So he never changes Christ's message. He emphasizes that in this quote by calling himself a bond-servant, or slave of Christ. He speaks harshly to the Galatians because they accepted heresy. They accepted a perversion of Christ's message: going back to Torah (Jewish law). After all, it was easier to follow mechanical laws than to love as Christ loved.

Hence he rebuked them: ***You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?*** Galatians 3:1-2. Christ-life often demands direct rebukes, about which the Galatians did not feel good. But when they abandoned Christ-life for some fantasy that looked easier, they made a foolish mistake. Love demands that Paul correct them. Love demands that Paul prevent their self-inflicted harm of abandoning Jesus for Moses. In our times, many people reject this kind of tough-love. The consequences are all around us. Would love allow that much self-destruction? Not Christ-Love. Why doesn't Paul allow the Galatians to abandon Christ for Torah?

***But I, brethren, if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted? Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished.*** Galatians 5:11. The main reason is that the Galatians rejected the cross, meaning the Christ Who died for our sins. This death is Love-divine. He wants us to live in Him, to become Christ-Love. Many people stumble over the cross. They can not expand their minds as far as Christ's death to redeem them. So some Galatians rejected the cross, replacing it with Torah. In plain language, this rejection betrays Christ-life. Paul will not betray Christ-life, and urges the Galatians to quit betraying Christ. Instead, he insists, do what Christ did. Paul knew that his life would be easier, he would feel better, if he agreed with the majority of Jews, rejected the cross, and accepted Torah. But he never betrayed Christ.

Among the many things that Paul did, let us imitate at least the few highlighted here. If we do, we will be disciples in the same way that Paul was Christ's disciple. Quite likely, we will be less effective. But we will do what Jesus asked us to do. We will go teach all nations, Matthew 24:14. As always, Paul trumpets the Word more effectively than we can, so here is a fitting final statement from him. ***I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.*** 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Sixteen: Gifts of the Spirit

## *Applications of Paul's Message: Spirit's Gifts*

### Paul's Use of the Spirit's Gifts

Because Paul lists several gifts, we will quote again the lists he gives, all from the New American Standard version. *Since we have gifts that differ...: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness,* Romans 12:6-8 *For to one is given the word of wisdom ... to another the word of knowledge...; to another faith ..., and to another gifts of healing ..., and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills,* 1 Cor 12:8-11 *God appointed in the church, first apostles, 2nd prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.* 1 Corinthians 12:28

Let's take them in that order, skipping repetitions and virtues. They are: prophecy, teaching, exhortation, wisdom, knowledge, healing, miracles, distinguishing spirits, tongues, interpretation of tongues, and administration. Faith is indeed a gift of the spirit, but it's a theological virtue. Giving and showing mercy are virtues, even if they are spirit-gifts. So this list is fairly complete, excluding virtues. No doubt Paul himself would admit other gifts of the Spirit, and so would we. At the end of our previous study, I listed more. But this is a sufficiently representative list from Paul.

In his epistles, Paul mentions prophecy often. Above all, he provides proportion: 1 Corinthians 13:8-10: *Love never fails; but if there are gifts of prophecy, they will be done away; if there are tongues, they will cease; if there is knowledge, it will be done away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part; but when the perfect comes, the partial will be done away.* Paul saw prophecy in the context of love, as he saw everything. However exciting prophecy is, it's temporary, passing away to perfect Love. Tongues and knowledge are also steps toward perfection, or God, as they merge into Love Himself. Though passing, prophecy is very useful, as Paul says in 1 Cor 14: 1-3: *Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy. For one who speaks in a tongue does not speak to men but to God; for no one understands, but in his spirit he speaks mysteries. But one who prophesies speaks to men for edification and exhortation and consolation.* When Paul edified, exhorted and consoled his flock, he prophesied. By this definition, his epistles overflow with prophesy. Through two thousand years, his prophesies ring out to all Christ's followers.

1 Thes 3:11 shows prophesy by exhorting: *You likewise know how we exhorted every one of you, as a father does his children, how we encouraged and pleaded with you to make your lives worthy of the God who calls you to his kingship and glory.* Here Paul praises the value of prophecy to encourage us toward God. Christ comes to ransom us from sin, so that we can follow Him as King. Because whoever sees Jesus sees the Father and the Spirit, the Trinity is King of our hearts. If we accept salvation, we want Jesus to rule us, to establish His kingdom. This glorifies God by admitting His love for us. It is all about accepting His infinite love. Paul urges us to accept God, thus to glorify Him.

Similarly, you have your favorite quotes of Paul edifying and consoling his flock. To edify is to build up. Paul loves to build us up in Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:11 exemplifies his constant edifying, along with exhorting: *Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.* This is the finest kind of edification, because he commends them for what they are doing. Then he assures them that they can keep accomplishing this building. Paul is popular in all ages precisely because his touching exhortations build us up. They also console us. This is the advantage of Love: it encompasses everything. Jesus showed that Love is the center of existence. There's no more important act than love. It radiates all the virtues at once. Love-acts simultaneously: edify, consol, exhort, and express all virtue. Jesus shows us how, Paul takes Him seriously, so he imitates Him. We strive to take them both seriously, and imitate them.

A fine example of consoling us is 2 Corinthians 1:3-7: *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; or if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which is effective in the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer; and our hope for you is firmly grounded, knowing that as you are sharers of our sufferings, so also you are sharers of our comfort.* We can spend a life time unpacking the many meanings this passage conveys. It rings so true because it illuminates our experience. Indeed, God, Father of mercies, is comfort Himself. Though we usually ignore Him, we realize as we emerge from distress, that His comfort consoled us. However much we suffer, as Paul says, comfort grows along with affliction. Looking back upon our darkest hours, we find merciful Love sustaining us through it all. Among Paul's wonderful expressions, this one strikes closest to our hearts because he reminds us that Jesus shared our sufferings. Actually Jesus suffered much more than we, to console us, and thus prophesy.

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 illustrates how comfort works: ***Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.*** All comfort is from our Lord Jesus Christ. He and the Father and the Spirit are ONE. God is the infinite source of both consolation and of the virtue of hope. It's His gift, or grace. But comfort isn't just feeling good. It is a way to live, in every good work and word. Comfort names one facet of Love. If a person loves, then a person consoles, and thereby prophesizes. St Francis once said: "Let's go preach to the people." Then he and the monk walked silently among them. Love oozed from them to the people, preaching the only message worth proclaiming. Philemon 1:7 says this exceptionally well: ***For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.*** Love refreshes, just as God's Love creates. Prophecy is love expressed.

1 Corinthians 14:6 combines several of the gifts in one expression: ***But now, brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching?*** Actually, the Spirit is ONE: all gifts fit together. We divide them to focus more perfectly upon them. After we focus clearly, we know, and can integrate all our knowledge into ONE. Prophecy reveals God's love for us. So do tongues and revelation and knowledge. We distinguish them to understand, but they live as ONE. 1 Corinthians 14:22 shows how tongues function: ***So then tongues are for a sign, not to those who believe, but to unbelievers; but prophecy is for a sign, not to unbelievers, but to those who believe.*** Unbelievers need something unusual to know that Christ is present in His followers. Tongues show God to them. So tongues are not a big deal in the Church, where prophecy is the great sign. If we exhort, encourage, and console, then we prophesy. Then we edify the Church, the Body of Christ, the glory of God. But tongues are worthwhile signs for nonbelievers. Incidentally, they can encourage believers, but Paul prefers prophecy.

Paul is even more enthusiastic about knowledge and wisdom. Romans 11:33-36 sings: ***Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor? Or who has first given to him, that it might be paid back to him? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*** This hymn of glory to God reveals Paul's wonder at Truth Himself. God shares his wisdom and knowledge with us. These gifts surpass mere signs because they identify us with God's deeper spiritual acts. God's revelation overwhelms us, unsearchable and unfathomable as His ways are. Paul's rhetoric highlights the difference between God's knowledge and ours by sharp questions. Who has known the Lord's mind, or counseled him? Who taught God, so He could pay it back to us?

***For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the cleverness of the clever I will set aside." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.*** 1 Cor 1:18-21 The most obvious gift of God's wisdom is Christ's cross. When the Spirit gives us knowledge and understanding of this wisdom, His gifts transform us. Before these gifts, we repeated the slogans that people claimed were wise. That acquiescence arouses Paul's sarcastic "wisdom of the wise". God destroys it. The less developed fraud: "cleverness of the clever", means sharp business deals, like selling failed mortgages as securities. God doesn't have to destroy them. They destroy themselves, as recent experience attests. God merely sets them aside. Those who claim to be wise evaporate in the light and heat of God's wisdom. Ultimately this is God's prophecy, which the world calls foolishness, but which saves those who believe.

***For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block, and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.*** 1 Cor 1:22-25. Paul affirms that real wisdom is Christ crucified. In spite of those who reject Jesus, He is the Word of God, the sacrament of God, Revelation in the Flesh. Because Christ is God, he manifests God's power and wisdom. If God had any foolishness, it would be wiser than the wisest man. If God had any weakness it would be stronger than the strongest man. These expressions strike us because they stretch words toward God.

In 1 Corinthians 2:3-12 Paul sums all this up: ***I was with you in weakness, and in fear and in much trembling, and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God. Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, "Things which the eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him." For to us God revealed them through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches all things, even the depths of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.*** Real wisdom is the Spirit. By His gifts, the Spirit inspires us, spirits us, to raise us up from bodily dis-

tractions. Wisdom guides us to the supreme Spirit-gift, which is Love. In Love, we surpass what eye can see, and ear hear. We consider what never had entered man's heart: Love Himself. Spirit, searching all things, even God. Amazing. Amen.

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Sixteen: Gifts of the Spirit

## *Applications of Paul's Message: Spirit's Gifts*

### Overview: Christ's Revelation of the Spirit

Jesus is Revelation in the Flesh, so everything begins with Jesus. He came to us through the Holy Spirit, as the accounts of His infancy show: Matthew 1:18; Luke 1:15; Luke 1:35. This Holy Spirit descended visibly upon him when John baptized him, Luke 3:22. Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to us all: ***If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?*** Luke 11:13 (American Standard Version) St. John the Baptist proposed that Jesus would surpass him precisely by exceeding the baptism of water by the Spirit: ***I baptized you with water; but He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.*** Mark 1:8. In His most intimate interaction with us, at the Last Supper, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit: ***But now I am going to Him who sent Me; and none of you asks Me, 'Where are You going?' But because I have said these things to you, sorrow has filled your heart. But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you. And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment; concerning sin, because they do not believe in Me; and concerning righteousness, because I go to the Father and you no longer see Me; and concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world has been judged.*** John 16:5-11 Jesus sends His Spirit, the third Person of the Blessed Trinity, to be our Helper, the Soul of each and every one who believes in Christ, the Heart of the Church.

The Holy Spirit spectacularly descended upon the apostles at Pentecost. ***When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance.*** Acts 2:1-4

The Spirit strengthened the frightened Apostles, inspiring them to speak with confidence, Acts 2: 5-7. As the Spirit moved them, all different languages flowed, and each listener heard the Word in his own language, Acts 2: 8-11. To bolster the Apostles, the Spirit chose Paul: ***While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them".*** Acts 13:2 Enlivened by the Spirit, Paul strove to share the Spirit's work in him with all Christ's followers. All the Apostles shared the Spirit, but Paul spoke the Spirit most explicitly. He explained the Spirit's gifts, poured out so abundantly upon Paul himself, and upon all who accepted Christ, now more alive in the Spirit than before in the flesh. Let us hear Paul as he expounds the gifts.

### St. Paul: the Spirit's Gifts

In the **Jerusalem Biblical Commentary**, 49:59-64, we learn that Paul responded to controversy in Corinth by putting the Spirit's gifts in order of importance. Paul's first-hand experience showed him which gifts were most important. They were not the ones emphasized in Corinth, where ego-tripping tripped the people up, and split the church, 1 Cor 12:1-3. Corinthians used the "feel-good" standard to judge the gifts. If they thrill me, they're great. Paul reminded them that Jesus is Lord, not thrill. Since all gifts have the same source, they have the same purpose, which is to serve God. But God is invisible and intangible, so the gifts' purpose is to serve the church. Is one person gifted, and is he puffed up with pride?

Then Paul reminds them: ***Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*** 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. All credit goes to God, because the Holy Spirit grants these gifts. The remedy for pride is to give credit where it's due: to the Holy Spirit. If anyone feels good about the Spirit's gift, give glory to God. If not, give glory to God. Feelings are not the point. The gifts are the point, ultimately for serving the community.

It was hard for Corinthians to overcome feeling good, because their pagan life was all about gushing over this or that stimulus. Ecstatic feelings were the whole point of pagan superstitions. But Corinthians, baptized into the new life of Christ, now live for higher goals. Along the way to these goals, enjoyment is greater than anything they could whomp-up before. This should teach them that feelings are fringe-benefits of achievement. Christ-life is more thrilling than their former excitements. Because the community split over feelings, Paul tried to get them beyond emotions, into more stable grace-life. In full life, emotions flow freely because we do not try to capture them, to extend their warm, fuzzy, fun. On the negative side, complete life refuses to prevent feelings' cold, piercing pain. Paul tries to focus them on Christ instead.

The basic struggle was between Corinthians who sought sensations and those who sought to serve. Incidentally, Paul lists different gifts in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Cor 12:5-11; 27-30, and Eph 4:11. It helps to remember that the Spirit can't be confined, and does not have a limiting list of gifts. Whatever we list is a fine start, but not the end of what the Spirit can do. Paul was helping Corinthians deal with larger issues than a gift-list. Paul says it best: ***Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion***

*of his faith if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.* Romans 12:6-8

*Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.* 1 Cor 12:5-11 This is the most complete list that Paul provides. Notice that he emphasizes that all gifts are for the common good.

*And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, various kinds of tongues.* 1 Corinthians 12:28 Notice how Paul combats wild feelings of superiority for the minor gifts. He lists apostles first, then prophets, then teachers. But consider what it would be like to speak in tongues through Spirit-gift. Authority, prophecy, teaching and healing miracles seem insignificant compared to the tongues that I just spoke. These other gifts occur only occasionally, but speech can go on. If I had just spoken in a foreign tongue, I would be so full of myself that I could overlook other gifts. My ego-trip would erase everything else, and exalt my personal achievement over all. This is the personal problem Paul tried to solve, as Jerome Biblical Commentary 63 notes. He wanted the gifted person to acknowledge where the gift came from. Instead Corinthians were prideful. This deviation from Christ-life split the community. Hans Urs von Balthazar emphasizes several conflicts in *Paul Struggles with His Congregation: The Pastoral Message of the Letters to the Corinthians*. Naturally, we will not dwell upon this split, but we take warning from the temptation to pride, lest we claim for ourselves what the Spirit gives to us.

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.* Ephesians 4:11 Here Paul emphasizes the foundation for gifts: all for the work of service, for building up the body of Christ. This is the goal worth getting. Every time the Spirit provides gifts, it's to build up Christ-life. Paul hammered that point home. *All are not apostles, are they? All are not prophets, are they? All are not teachers, are they? All are not workers of miracles, are they? All do not have gifts of healings, do they? All do not speak with tongues, do they? All do not interpret, do they? But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.* 1 Corinthians 12:29-31

*If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing.* 1 Cor 13:1-3 This more excellent way is love. All gifts are for love, so that we can first accept Love, then love our neighbors all the way to Love Himself. This is how to cherish Spirit-gifts. All is for God, Who is Love. In this context, we can see why the number of gifts varies. Love is most important, and the Spirit, Who is Love, gives us what we need the most. In that context, the gifts are not rigidly numbered.

Therefore, we isolate seven gifts from Paul's various lists. Over the centuries, our prayerful thinkers, called theologians, have distinguished the virtue of faith from Spirit-gifts, so it does not appear after the third century. Nor do we include tongues and interpretation. In the enthusiasm of the early days, these gifts were quite important. By them, many people noticed the truth of Christianity, and followed the Way. But as people settled into Christ-life, morality improved remarkably, and daily virtue became more important. Therefore, the Church proposes seven rather different gifts. Why? As St. Thomas Aquinas shows, we use our minds (intellects) to understand the next step to take toward God, and our wills to choose that step. So wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and counsel help us know what to do, while fortitude, piety and fear of the Lord help us do it. These practical gifts are less exciting than the ones Paul mentions. But they fit better into a Christianized society. Their number is also symbolic of or doing all that we need to do, covering the ground, as seven is the sacred number for an adequate amount. Theologians applied Spirit-gifts to daily life in a Christian world.

The first gift of **wisdom** requires God's assistance to look beyond details that confuse us, so that we can see the fullness of God's plan. By wisdom, we see the whole, wholly. Humans can't do that without divine assistance. You notice that Paul uses wisdom, but doesn't use these explanatory words. Instead, he shows this gift in his own actions, and promises it to his followers. **Understanding** gets us from the holistic view down to patterns of world events. Paul navigates from the complete picture into these patterns, and wants all Christians to do the same. **Knowledge** goes all the way down to details, as Paul himself did throughout his career. **Counsel** enables us to check with God for specific enlightenment, and to work with others about obscure items we don't need to know for daily operations. All these mind-expanding activities are simple human virtues, but no not go far enough. So Spirit-gifts perfect these ways to learn.

As the many martyrs of the first centuries showed, Spirit-inspired choices distinguished Christian life from all others. Without divine support, **fortitude** would fail, so it's one of the more important gifts, strengthening us to do God's will in all things. **Piety** enables us to worship God beyond the usual human limits. **Fear of the Lord** is awe and wonder at God's infinity, especially His infinite Love. It's the opposite of servile fear of evil, because it's loving union with God.

## Saturday Session 17: St. Paul: Gifts of the Spirit, session 3

### Healing & Miracles

Paul refers to these as the lesser gifts, 1 Cor 13:8-10; 1 Cor 14:1-3. Nonetheless, they are important, and we rejoice to see more of healing miracles these days. Paul insists that love is the main gift, from Love Himself. But these lesser gifts apply love personally, especially for people who meet Christ through healing. Miracles clearly proclaim God's power and love. These gifts open new hearts to Christ. An example: Paul's cure of Publius set off the conversion of Malta, Acts 28:7-10. Many other examples, from Isaac's birth to Abraham and Sarah on up to now, reveal God.

As Paul and Barnabas showed in Ephesus, when people tried to treat them like gods, man is merely an instrument, Acts 14:13. All healing is from God by His Spirit. If we take credit for healing, we break contact with God. When we consider gifts, let's be totally clear Who gives them. Paul certainly was. That's why he used the dramatic gesture of ripping his garment to repudiate the Ephesian priest's attempt to worship him. Instead, Paul emphasizes service.

At his conversion, Paul learned that the Church is Christ's body, Acts 9:1-6. Paul's overwhelming experience of Christ identified Christians as intimate elements of Christ's body, each of us a precious cell in this Mystical Body. ***For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*** Romans 12:4-5. [All quotes are from the American Standard Version.] In this Divine light, we understand that healing miracles are for Christ's members, us.

In fact, the Spirit is the soul of the Mystical Body, like your individual soul animates your distinct body. Naturally, the Spirit does more than any single human soul does, but the analogy enlightens us. Spirit-gifts flow directly from the Spirit animating Christ's Body. Therefore, we should expect them to abound. Most healing will be spiritual, since healing from sin is the main reason Jesus came, but physical and psychological healing follow naturally. Many miracles of healing occur each day. Most of them are not recorded. Only a few, like those at Lourdes, become widely known. The Spirit works miracles to show that someone like John Paul the Great is holy. Church authorities thoroughly test these miracles to be sure that they are authentic. Only then can beatification and canonization proceed.

#### Discernment

***For God is my witness, how I long for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus. And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.*** Philippians 1:8-11. Paul always works from Christ's love, the heart of Christianity. He's enflamed by the love Jesus came to ignite on earth, Luke 12:49. At first, Jesus alone burned with this Divine Fire. But as He contacted men who accepted Him, they caught fire also. Finally the entire Mystical Body burns with Christ-love. When Paul uses the words *Christ Jesus* he means the Mystical Body. In Paul's understanding, this is total love, spread from Jesus throughout all His followers. The Spirit tends His flame, blowing where He will, John 3:8, to spread fire throughout the entire community. God's flame envelops the Mystical Body.

The breath of the Spirit is more than our prayer, but it certainly is our prayer. So Paul immediately prays that the flame of Love abound in his beloved Philippians. But many distractions competed for their attention. So they needed discernment to approve excellent things. We do too. If we discern excellent things, and reject non-excellent things, then we are sincere. We take sincere from the Latin pair of words: *sine cere*, meaning without wax. This sign, on honey, meant that the container held pure honey, without wax hidden beneath a half inch of honey in a six inch deep bowl. Another way to say it, less poetical, is that the sincere person is integral, all together. Discernment enables us to tell the excellent from the impure. If we choose the excellent more and more, we become more excellent. We become more unified, more one in Christ. There is no better way to be. In Christ by free choice, we become increasingly blameless. Thus we prepare for the day of Christ, when He comes to take us to Himself. Individually, that's the day we die. Collectively, for those in earth on that day, it's His second coming in the flesh. *Jesus Christ*, meaning the individual by that name, provides righteousness for us. If we partake, if we willingly accept, then each of us glorifies God. Our cooperation with God's saving plan praises God. When we accept His redemption, we offer glory and praise. Paul insists that this acceptance is the best we can do. More acceptance gives more glory and praise, and we live Christ-life more fully.

Though the Spirit provides discernment, He doesn't make us follow it. We can reject it. Rejecting discernment misses the mark of excellence. Missing this mark is what we mean by sin. We make the effort to find options, select one, choose it, and act it out. But our rejecting act falls short of excellence, short of what we really want. This lack of the good that should be there is evil, or sin. Paul often reminds his beloved converts that they have left this counterproductive sinful life behind. In his own case, Paul calls his sinful self his "old man", or "old self" in the new translation, Romans 6:6. The sinful man is redeemed by Christ, ransomed by His death on the cross. Paul is more poetic and emphatic: ***For if we have become united with Him in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.*** Rom 5-7.

As usual, Paul cascades forth meaning and value. A theologian could write an entire book about Paul's meaning in this short sentence. We unite with Jesus in the likeness of His death by baptism. Pouring water on a baby's head is our

tame imitation of emersion, which more expressly shows our entry into another medium, water, meaning death. As air and water are very different, life and death are much more different. We must leave one to enter the other. Just as water washes off dirt, Christ's redemptive death cleans away our sins, only more so. His death cleanses more completely than water ever could. Jesus reaches into the depths of our beings to not only wash sin away, but to correct our bad decisions. Correcting sin makes us innocent again, freed from sin-slavery. Once free from sin, our evil no longer separates us from God. Once united with God, we achieve our purpose. Everything that God created us to be, we are. Eventually we will be like Jesus in His resurrection. Resurrected, in renewed flesh, like sinless Adam and Eve, we shall be quite different from our former sinful selves. These old selves, crucified with Him, die completely. Sin is done away. We're no longer slaves to sin. Christ has redeemed us from slavery. Oh happy day. No wonder we celebrate Easter so enthusiastically.

### **Tongues**

1 Corinthians 13:1 is the famous phrase: *If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but do not have love, I have become a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.* Tongues attract attention, as we noted earlier with Pentecostal experience in Jerusalem. By tongues, people unfamiliar with Christ come to know of Him. But Paul insists that: *brethren, if I come to you speaking in tongues, what will I profit you unless I speak to you either by way of revelation or of knowledge or of prophecy or of teaching? Yet even lifeless things, either flute or harp, in producing a sound, if they do not produce a distinction in the tones, how will it be known what is played on the flute or on the harp? For if the bugle produces an indistinct sound, who will prepare himself for battle? So also you, unless you utter by the tongue speech that is clear, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. There are, perhaps, a great many kinds of languages in the world, and no kind is without meaning. If then I do not know the meaning of the language, I will be to the one who speaks a barbarian, and the one who speaks will be a barbarian to me. So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church. Therefore let one who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret. For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is the outcome then? I will pray with the spirit and I will pray with the mind also; I will sing with the spirit and I will sing with the mind also. Otherwise if you bless in the spirit only, how will the one who fills the place of the ungifted say the "Amen" at your giving of thanks, since he does not know what you are saying? For you are giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not edified. I thank God, I speak in tongues more than you all; however, in the church I desire to speak five words with my mind so that I may instruct others also, rather than ten thousand words in a tongue.* 1 Cor 14-6-19. Thus Paul provides perspective for Corinthians who overemphasized tongue-speaking.

### **Administration**

Administration, for Paul, is rather different from our notion. *He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth. In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ would be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.* Ephesians 1:10-14. Paul's *administration* sums up all things in Christ. All things means the entire universe. Everything created will be our inheritance by His will. His counsel, His concept, and His intention will permeate all creation when He administers all things perfectly. We join in His administration if we accept the Spirit-gift of administering our little things according to His will. He includes us to properly order all things, because we are His image and likeness. Our imitation of Christ praises His glory. If we accept being sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit, we administer along with Him. The more we imitate him, the more we inherit His orderly kingdom. The more we act as He acts, the more we join Him in praising and glorifying God. Everything unifies in Christ. God's intended order unfolds for His children, us. We order our little things as He orders the universe.

In Latin, *ministrare* means to serve, and *ad* means towards. So administration means service toward others. Focusing on the Spirit, we see that He serves us, and teaches us to serve those around us. Spirit-service to all, in all, and through all, is Paul's meaning of administration. Now we see why the Spirit must gift us with administration that praises and glorifies God. All attempts to administer fail without this Spirit-service-gift. With it, success flows, as Paul shows by his very own example. *To me, the very least of all saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confident access through faith in Him.* Eph 3:8-12. So we implore the Spirit to gift us with administration of this redemptive, salvific, mystery.

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Eighteen: Mystical Body of Christ

## *Extensions of Paul's Message of Christ Jesus*

Paul proclaims the marvelous Mystical Body in this fine phrase: ***For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*** Romans 12:4-5. [All quotes are from the American Standard Version.] Jesus' eyewitnesses were so impressed by Love Himself that their memories overwhelmed them. Their remembrances of Him alive clouded His resurrection. See: Mark 16:14; Luke 24:6; Luke 24:34; Luke 24:35. The Holy Spirit's shifted their views from Christ Incarnate to Christ Resurrected. It took Pentecost to achieve this shift. But Paul had no experience of pre-resurrected Jesus. Christ appeared to him after rising, after achieving the unity with His followers that is the Mystical Body. Therefore Paul's experience is the Mystical Body from the start. Jesus appeared to Paul as Head of the Mystical Body. This is why the Jerusalem Biblical Commentary (JBC) affirms that Paul seldom refers to Christ in His earthly existence. All Paul knew was Christ risen into glory. Paul knew "these climactic events of Jesus' career, rather than ... His ministry, personality, or even His message", p 1386. Even when Paul alludes to what he learned from eyewitnesses, he refers to "the Lord", *Kyrios*, or Christ transcendent by resurrection into glory. You can see this in Paul's quotes of Jesus: 1 Thes 4:2; 15; 5:2; 13; 15; 1 Cor 7:10-11; 25; 9:14; 11:23-25; 13:2; Rom 12:14; 17; 13:7; 14:13-14; 16:19.

Quite simply, Paul meets Christ as risen Lord, beyond His earthly existence, into the Mystical Body. All is one for Paul. Jesus' apostles experienced Christ partially. Only later, with great effort, did they unify their fragmentary experiences into One. The Holy Spirit had to inspire this Unity at Pentecost, Acts 2:3-4. It took the apostles over three years to integrate their experiences. Even then one could say that Paul had to instruct Peter, Gal 2:11. His instruction encourages us, because it shows members of Christ's Body strengthening each other. Eyewitnesses proclaimed the *kerigma*, or basic truths of Christ-life to Paul, first in Damascus, later in Arabia, and then in Jerusalem. Paul delighted in their instruction. But no doubt it was vague compared to the clarity of Paul's first experience of Christ as the Mystical Body Lord. This *Kyrios* instructed Paul in this Mystical Body, and sent Paul to expand this Mystical Body throughout space and time. Thank the Lord, he accomplished that task quite well.

### **Mystical Body Inspires Paul's Mission**

As we noted in previous sessions, Paul's Torah (law) training prepared him to recognize the Messiah. Paul saw how Jesus fulfilled the law, bringing it to climax in the New Law of Love. Paul's Hellenistic education enabled him to relate well to gentiles, and thus communicate Christ effectively throughout Mediterranean civilization. As JBC, p 1387 notes, "Other NT writers could claim a Jewish background and Hellenistic contacts, but none of them have Paul's profundity in understanding the Christ-event, except possibly John." Paul's profundity proceeds from his Mystical Body experience. Faith-life animated Paul in Christ. This Christ-life was not obscured by theories. Instead, he accepted Jesus entirely, so Jesus lived in his heart. ***For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.*** Phl 1:21. See also Gal 2:20. These, and many of your favorite quotes, show Christ-flame, or Love, flowing from Paul to all he met. May it flow unimpeded from us all.

Paul shows this Christ-flame operating in many famous statements. One of my favorites is: ***However, you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Him. If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.*** Rom 8:9-11. During your personal review of Paul, you no doubt dwelt in this wonder: that Christ absorbs you into His spirit. You experienced escaping the flesh into the spirit because God's Spirit dwells in you. The Holy Spirit, Who is the Spirit of Christ, dwells in the Mystical Body. Everyone who belongs to Jesus accepts His redemptive sacrifice. If we turn our sins over to Jesus, He removes sins, or death, from us. Christ's righteousness washes our sins away, enlivening His Spirit in us. As usual, Paul sees the whole whole-ly, and proceeds immediately to the resurrected Christ, Who resurrects us also. As we unpack what Paul said, we notice that he gives glory to each Trinitarian Person. Glory to: God the Father, Who creates; God the Son, Who redeems; and God the Holy Spirit, Who cares for us now. Because Jesus rose, and ascended into heaven, He sent His Spirit to us, Jn 16:5-14. Both Paul and John see supreme unity in God's many acts to save us.

Everything God did, from creation through redemption toward the end-days, is right there in Paul's vision. Because Christ inspired him, he oozes and spurts Jesus. So flames flash forth from Love Himself. JBC develops this theme from p 1388 to p 1402. It takes that many pages to show the various dimensions of Paul's vision. The technical name for this integrated sight is Christocentric soteriology. This means redemption-study centered on Christ. God's acts are so rich in meaning and value that no human can express everything. What God did surpasses our comprehension. In the Mystical Body of Christ there are too many meanings and values. Paul's theology must be centered in Christ because of his Damascus experience of Jesus. Christ appeared risen and living in the people Paul persecuted. This is the Trinity's One Being, acting through Three Persons. The Word of God, Jesus Christ, incarnates so He can teach us. Because salvation history is one in Christ, and Christ inspired Paul, all is united. Jesus is Revelation in the Flesh. He is the Single Message of the Single God. He teaches us that God is One in Being, but Three in Persons. Jesus reveals the Trinity in Unity. Christ's words express His life. His life is complete revelation, enhanced by His words. The Trinity is Incarnate in Him. First His life ex-

presses Trinity then His words: ***Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father***, Jn 14:9. The Trinity accomplishes our redemption, dying with Jesus on the cross. Then the Trinity, lives Christ-life in time through His Mystical Body. In the 2000 years since Christ rose from the dead, His Body is visible in His members. We make His Mystical Body tangible today, and others will keep it going.

Every cell of Christ's body proclaims Paul's message. 1 Cor 1:22-25 is his clarion call: ***For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*** Unity shines through these words. Paul re-focuses us. He shifts us away from signs and wisdom, that imitators of Moses and Plato seek. Instead, Christ on the cross expresses God Who is Love. Jews stumble over this scandal, which is foolish to Gentiles. So they reject Christ. But we accept Christ's salvation, and enter His Mystical Body. Whether we were Jews or Greeks before, we become Christ after. Christ worked greater signs than Moses and all the prophets put together. He is the power of God. Christ is wiser than all Greek philosophers together. He is the wisdom of God. Stretching language, we could say that Christ is Power/Wisdom. Jesus teaches us this Power/Wisdom by redeeming us all, washing away all human sins in His blood, flowing from the cross. There is no greater act than Infinity repaying our infinite debt to Infinity. The greatest miracle ever done is Mercy Himself on the cross redeeming us from Justice Himself.

Justice and Mercy meet when God pays our sin-debt. Only Infinity could blend Justice with Mercy to take our sins away. He didn't cancel the debt, He paid it. This act shows that Infinite Love loves us infinitely. Small minds can't encompass this Large Act. But if we accept this Magnanimous Act, we glimpse Infinite Love becoming Lord by dying on the cross. This glimpse urges us to dwell on, and in, this infinite act of love. Paul impels us to join with our Head, Christ, and to pulse with His life in the Mystical Body. Then we grow in Christ. Paul summarizes this excellently:

***And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*** Eph 4:11-16. Paul combines Spirit-gifts with Mystical Body in this rich message. The Spirit animates the Mystical Body, and all His gifts build it up, equipping the saints to serve. Each cell lives increased unity of the faith. Faith-life is Christ-life. The more we believe, the more we live Christ. If we mature, we attain fullness as body-cells, and Christ's body matures to fullness in Him. Personally, we advance from childish fancies to speaking the truth in love. Thus we grow into Love = Christ. He is our head, our Lord, our leader. From being like leaves in the wind, we mature into functional parts of the Mystical Body. Solid cells, we work properly, for the growth of the body, building up in Love. Love is the key. Love is Christ, Who is the Soul of this Body. Love is the Trinity, acting as One, though Three Persons. Who sees Christ, sees the Father and the Spirit. Who sees the Mystical Body, sees the Trinity, plus all those angels and saints who accept God.

If you say that this is hard to understand, you understand its immensity. You identify its main value. Easily understood things bore us. But hard to comprehend things intrigue us. There's always more to know. What we know is good, so there's always more to love. We call inexhaustible fascinating being: mystery. Since our act of knowing identifies us with what we know, we become this fascination. We become this mystery. Our act of loving also identifies us with what we love. So we become the mystery we love. Between the two, we become any mystery that we give our selves to. By giving ourselves away to mystery, we grow. If we are better at loving, then we love the mystery. Either way, or using both our acts of identifying, we unite with mystery. Created mysteries intrigue us for a long time. But they end, and we move on. The Mystical Body is the main mystery. Somehow it's God plus His followers. It's the union of God with free creation. What more could we want? As NJB, p 1389, attests: Paul sees the Gospel as mystery. It's not a finished, static mystery, but an ongoing, dynamic force in the universe. As Paul puts it: ***Jesus ... is delivering us from the coming wrath***, 1 Thes 1:10. Jesus, everlasting Life, visible in His Mystical Body, acts wherever His followers live in Him.

Paul was so imbued with Christ, so receptive to His mystery, that he lived Mystery Himself. We follow behind, but we too experience Mystery. This is the Mystery for which God created the world. This is the culmination of creation. God creating humans is marvelous. Humans rejecting God is tragic. God saving us from sin is barely believable. But He did. Then He united His followers with Him. This union is so intimate that we become flesh of His flesh, bone of His bone, by allowing His Spirit to animate us. This is the Mystery of the Mystical Body. It perfects creation beyond our wildest expectations. For all eternity, we can delight in this Mystery. Never exhausting its rich meaning and value, we will learn more and love more without end. That's Infinity present in and by Christ. That's what we want to contemplate eternally. That's what will finally satisfy our infinite longing. Only Infinity can fill our infinite need for Infinity.

# St. Paul: Saturday Session Eighteen: Mystical Body of Christ

## *Applications of Paul's Message: Christ Jesus*

### Paul's Experience with Christ's Body

Paul never saw Christ's earthly body. Jesus appeared to Paul some years after He rose from the dead, 1 Cor 9:1, & 15:8. We usually date Paul's knowledge of the Mystical Body of Christ from those appearances. Christ Jesus "seized" him, Phil 3:12. After Christ seized him, Paul was equal to the other apostles, 1 Cor 15:5-7. Paul even claims that God called him from his mother's womb, Gal 1:15. That's puzzling. Paul's contemporaries hardly noticed this calling during the years that Paul tried to kill Christians. However, Paul's life does resemble Jeremiah's, because both answered God in spurts, with hesitation, heading in the wrong direction too often, and complaining about God's call. So Jeremiah and Paul fit this description: ***Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you came out of the womb, I sanctified you. I appointed you as a prophet to the nations***, Jer 1:5. The Anchor Bible develops this similarity in its introduction to 1 Corinthians, p 4. First Paul thought God called him to exterminate Christians. Later he discovered instead that God called him to be Christ's apostle to the nations. This diametrical shift changed history.

Though this is a *toto caelo* shift, a wise man would have seen it coming, because Christ perfects the law of Moses. Paul insists that precisely his Mosaic training led him to Christ. Raised a Pharisee, Paul lived and loved the Mosaic law, Phil 3:5-6; Gal 1:14; 2 Cor 11:22. Without knowing it, Paul used the Law to accept Christ. As Jesus often said, Moses taught about Him, the Christ to come. See: Luke 24:27, Mat 17:3, Mk 9:4, Mk 12:26-27, Lk 9:30, Lk 20:37, Lk 24:44, Jn 1:45, Jn 3:14, Jn 5:45, Jn 5:46, Acts 3:22, Acts 26:22-23. Moses was really all about Jesus.

As the Jerusalem Biblical Commentary (JBC) notes, p 1384, this preparation enabled Paul to envision the Old Testament (OT) vividly, and to live it fully. So he could properly interpret it as prophesying Jesus. To interpret it that way, Paul used the exegetical method, so familiar to Jewish scholars, called *midrash*. This method acknowledges that there is always a deeper meaning behind Scripture's words. Biblical scholars excavate this meaning. Because God is perfect, His word cannot be confined to any one detailed expression. Instead, God's word transcends every interpretation. Therefore, we must interpret and reinterpret often, finding more perfection in Scripture. Paul refers to Scripture as light, because it shines more perfectly as we comprehend it better. God compels apostles to share this light, to proclaim the gospel, to enlighten all men. As Paul puts it: ***For God who said: 'Let light shine out of darkness', has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory on the face of Christ***, 2 Cor 4:6.

This light is God's love, the center, or sun, radiating all light and warmth to us. Love Himself seized Paul, and convinced him that ***Jesus is Lord***, 1 Cor 12:3; Rom 10:9; Phl 2:11. Paul, after all, saw the face of Christ. By seizing Paul near Damascus, Jesus instantly delivered so much revelation that Paul spent the rest of his life explaining it. Naturally, Christ provided more revelation after this initial seizure. But the light of Christ so illumined Paul's mind that he saw how Moses proclaimed Jesus to be Lord. This is the ***mystery of Christ***, Eph 3:4. This is the Mystical Body.

As the JBC, p 1385, says: "That "revelation", Gal 1:12, 16, impressed Paul *first* with the unity of divine action for the salvation of all humanity, which is manifest in both the old and new dispensations". Christ is the head of all humanity. Christ enlivens all humanity, inviting each and every person to Christ-life. Therefore the Mystical Body images this unity very well. As the human soul animates every cell, so Christ enlivens every person who joins His body. This image fulfills the deepest meanings of the Old Dispensation, or Testament. Jesus struck Paul like lightening. Paul conveys this instant bolt from above gradually: ***As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"*** Acts 9:3-5. All quotes are from the New American Standard. In these several sentences, Paul expresses in steps what happened in a flash. We're happy to follow these steps to comprehend some of Christ's revelation.

First we understand that to persecute Christians is to persecute Christ. Then we see the Mystical Body from this fact. It takes longer to see how Moses prophesied Christ. As JBC continues: "The Father who revealed his Son to Paul was the same God that Paul the Pharisee had always served. He was the creator, the lord of history, the God who continually saved his people Israel, and who proved to be a faithful lord of the covenant despite Israel's infidelities. Probably because he had been a Pharisee, preoccupied with the minutiae of the law, Paul never manifested a profound understanding of that 'covenant', so infrequently does he speak of it. Yet his experience near Damascus did not alter his fundamental commitment to the 'one God'." This reinforces the Anchor Bible claim that Paul was consistent. His commitment remained the same. But he saw further into his Mosaic commitment, into the Messiah who fulfilled the law.

JBC: "*Second*, that vision taught him (Paul) the soteriological value of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah in God's salvific plan. If his basic theology did not change, his Christology did. As a Jew, Paul had shared the messianic expectations of his people, Dan 9:25, 1Qumran Scrolls 9:11, looking forward to the coming of a messiah (of some sort). But the vision of the risen Christ taught him that God's Anointed One had already come, that he was ***Jesus our Lord, who was handed over for our offenses and raised up for justification***, Rom 4:25. Before ... Damascus, Paul certainly knew that Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified 'hung on a tree', and hence 'cursed' in the sense of Deut 21:23, Gal

1:13; 3:13. This was one of the reasons he, as a Pharisee, could not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus was a ‘stumbling block’, 1 Cor 1:23, one ‘cursed’ by the very law that Paul, so zealously observed, Gal 3:13. But that revelation impressed him emphatically with the messianic, soteriological, and vicarious value of the death of Jesus of Nazareth in a way that he never suspected before. With a logic that only a Pharisee could appreciate, Paul saw Christ Jesus taking upon himself the law’s curse, and transforming it into its opposite, so that he became the means of freeing humanity from malediction. The cross, which had been a stumbling block to Jews, became in his eyes the **power and wisdom of God**, 1 Cor 1:24. Henceforth, he would understand that crucified ‘Lord of glory’, 1 Cor 2:8 as his exalted Messiah.”

These few steps show how much happened instantaneously outside Damascus, and there’s more to tell. But pause a bit to reflect on this JBC comment. Instantaneously, Paul saw in the risen Christ the Messiah Moses promised. True, Paul had first rejected Jesus because of the stumbling block of the cross. But in that instant, Paul recognized that Christ became cursed for our salvation. The entirety of Jesus is lord, or *soter*, because he overcomes death by paying all debt for all of us. As the **wages of sin is death**, Rom 6:23, Christ wins through death by the infinity of His divinity. No death from sin remains for the Mystical Body. Thus did Jesus transform the law’s curse into blessing, and become everyone’s exalted Messiah. Experiencing this realization in a flash, Paul spent the rest of his life attempting to express it. And here’s more.

JBC, p 1386: “*Third*, that revelation impressed Paul with a new vision of salvation history. Before the encounter with the Lord, Paul saw human history divided into three great periods: 1. from Adam to Moses: without the law; 2. from Moses to the Messiah: with the law; 3. the messianic age: when the law would be perfected or fulfilled. The experience near Damascus taught him that the messianic age had already begun, introducing a new perspective into salvation history. The *escaton*, ‘end time’, so avidly awaited before, had already started, 1Cor 10:11, although a definitive stage of it was still to be realized, as was hoped not too far in the future. The Messiah had come, but not yet in glory. Paul realized that he, with all Christians, found himself in a double situation: one in which he looked back upon the death and resurrection of Jesus as the inauguration of the new age, and another in which he looked forward to his coming in glory, his *parousia*.”

Digesting that paragraph can take us a while. Christ is infinite impact, so His revelation extends forever. As Paul accepted Jesus outside Damascus, and experienced His Mystical Body, he comprehended more of this impact than we may ever grasp. This third part of that revelation changed Paul’s historical vision. No longer in the time of the Mosaic law, Paul emerged into Messianic time. Beginning with Christ’s death and resurrection, the end time, or *escaton* is upon us. The more we accept it, the more we orient to Christ’s second coming in glory, His *parousia*. Between the start and finish of this Messianic age, we live in Christ, and reach out to those who are unaware of Him. Apostolic time has dawned, the time to enhance Christ’s body by inviting cells to join, and assisting cells to grow in Christ. How enlightening this revelation is appears in all Paul’s magnificent efforts to invite and assist. We can’t witness his missionary trips, but can revel in his missionary letters. Thus he pulses still through the Mystical Body, the mystery of Christ.

As JBC continues: “Far more than his Pharisaic background, therefore, or even his Hellenistic cultural roots, that revelation of Jesus gave Paul an ineffable insight into the ‘mystery of Christ’. It enabled him to fashion his ‘gospel’ to preach the fundamental good news of salvation in a form that was distinctively his own. However, Paul did not immediately understand all the implications of the vision accorded him. It provided only a basic insight that was to color all that he was to learn about Jesus, and His mission among human beings, not only from the early church’s tradition, but also from his own apostolic experience in preaching ‘Christ crucified’, 1 Cor 1:23.”

Rightfully, Paul’s entire life, from the womb, answered God’s call. Step by step, Paul mastered the Old Testament, then experienced its fulfillment in Christ. Step by step, Paul decoded this fulfillment, revealed outside Damascus, and more fully expressed each day. That glorious set of steps inspires us to take our own steps into Christ crucified, the glory of God. These steps help us mature in Christ, as if we were cells in His body. His body is more real than any biological body, and we are more real than any cells therein. The organism of the Mystical Body transcends biology. It will exist for all eternity, after biology is over. The Mystical Body is the reason for biology. It is the destiny of the greatest biological being: man. By sharing in this magnificent vision, man matures into full spiritual life. Thus Paul hands on, *paradidonai*, what he has received, *paralambanein*, 1 Cor 11:2:23; 15:1-3. This is the apostle’s job: to accept what God provides, and thus receive revelation, then hand it on. Handing it on is personal, loving, living, sharing. It is from the hand, not from the shovel, much less from the bulldozer. Just as Love reveals, so we must love revelation, then love each neighbor to whom we hand Love on. As this reciprocal loving unfolds, each Mystical Body cell enlivens every other one.

JBC, p 1386, # 17 notes that this is the rabbinic process: pass on to, *maser le*, what we receive from, *qibbel min*. Paul learned early exactly what he practiced the rest of his life. First he absorbed the tradition he received, then he handed it on, passing it around the entire church, to nourish each cell of the Mystical Body. You find all this in **the customs of the churches** 1 Cor 11:16; **fidelity to tradition**, 1 Thes 2:13; Phil 4:9’ 1 Cor 11:2’ 15:2; Rom 6’17; 2 Thes 2:13; 3:6. Yes, someone could just memorize the words, reducing revelation to merely **the tradition of human beings** Mk 7:8; 1 Thes 2:13. But Paul saw beyond this surface resemblance to God’s tradition. That’s what he sought in the Old Testament, found in Christ outside Damascus, and elaborated in his epistles for the Mystical Body. This elaboration grew into the New Testament, which has nourished the Mystical Body for two thousand years. What wonder Christ wrought outside Damascus.