

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 procurator Junius Gallio Annaeus served Claudius in Corinth during the Emperor's 12th 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 is 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 Beroea. 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 Cenchrae, 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 Illyricum. 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”, I 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 impressive, 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. I 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 plenitude 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’ (1Thes 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 *egapemenoī*, 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 Nineteen: Transformation in Christ

Theosis=God makes us into Himself

Paul is Christ's trumpet, sounding His message. Paul's account of transformation in Christ expands John 17:22-23: *The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.* [American Standard Version] This is the Lord Himself speaking. He is the Way, Truth, and Life, John 14:6. He insists that He wants us to be one with Him just as He is one with the Father. There is no greater unity. Jesus became one with man in His flesh. He initiates this unity. This integration transcends merely being with Him. It is perfect incorporation in Him. We become Him. We do not understand this, but in a small way, we see people who perfect their marriage love by merging into one. In a large way, Jesus merges with us. He came that we may be one. Because Jesus is God, He came so that we could be one with God. This is theosis, or God making us into Himself.

This reality is too big for us to comprehend. But we delight in it. We can immerse in it for eternity, to speak poetically. We enjoy each glimpse of this mystery, which expands without end. Jesus tells it like it is. He came to make us one with Him just as He is one with the Father. When Jesus told His apostles this, it overwhelmed them. Two members of the Trinity were too much for them. But Jesus includes all Three. So Jesus came to make us one with the Trinitarian One.

This is stupendous. It's all right to be overwhelmed. If we are not shocked by this magnificent destiny, then we don't notice what Jesus said. Paul too was stunned. He rejoiced in this stunning mystery. It was primary in Paul's life because Christ's incarnation is the center of all His loving acts. You have your favorite Pauline expressions of this mystery. Romans 8:38-39 is a fine one: *For I am convinced 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 created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* Here Paul emphasizes the unity that Jesus establishes with us. No exalted being, no event, no creature, can disunite us from God's love, lived out in Jesus, and perfected in the Mystical Body. Since nothing outside us can break this unity, we can remain forever in it. Only we can disunite from God, by our free choice. God is Love. So He can't change His love for us. If we respond with freely-chosen love, then we stay united with Him. We're united, not as mud sticks to tires, but as the tire is the tire. Actually, we're more united than tire to itself, because spirit is active, and material is restrictive. Acts merge into one. Matter always alienates other matter.

When Paul greets his friends, he emphasizes that they are one in Christ. A fine example is Rom 16:7: *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.* Note how Paul loved those original Christ-followers. Christ united them into One. Paul celebrated that transformation into the One Christ. Original apostles passed on this faith by living their eyewitness experiences of Jesus unifying them in Everlasting Love. They loved Paul in Christ. Following Christ means loving everyone as Jesus loved them, in Trinitarian Unity. Other examples are: Rom 16:3; Rom 16:7; Rom 16:9; Rom 16:10; 1 Cor 1:2; Phil 1:23.

Paul points to this eternal mystery of Jesus unifying us into One in this classic expression: *For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.* Gal 3:26-29. Paul exuberantly proclaimed that God the Son came to us to invite us to be God's sons. If we accept that invitation, we adopt Christ-life, called faith. We live our belief. Acting out this belief, we request baptism into Christ. That choice washes away the "old man". That washing allows Christ to make us into Himself. A poetic way to say that is that we cloth ourselves with Christ. Once we unite with Christ, we become Christ. So our former identities as Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female, all disappear into Christ Jesus the One. This unity is the Mystical Body, of course.

As usual, the reality of this union surpasses words. But theosis is a fine one-word description. Translating this Greek word is difficult, but it means becoming God. It is God God-ing us, or unifying with us, so we become the nature of God. As we saw in the previous quote, we enter God's family. Abraham was the first to allow God to God-ify him, so we join the heirs according to God's promise. You notice that all this is very foreign. This is not every-day talk. Right! But this is what God does. Therefore it satisfies us. Theosis fulfills our ultimate desire for God by making us into Him.

Paul lives theosis. He accepts transformation into Christ. He allows Jesus to unite him with God. Thus Paul is alive in God. Paul is God-ed. Ever increasingly, Paul is God. That's why this immense experience overflows from him to us. All he is, does, and says, flows from this realization of God's transforming Love in Christ Jesus. Paul's message is unified. Salvation is yours, he says in Rom 3:24: *being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.* Jesus justifies. Then He unites with us by theosis. Jesus pays the infinite debt of sin. Then He invites us to join with Him, to become His by his loving power. Thus He redeems all who accept love-union. He integrates us with his Innocence, with His Self-giving, with His Mercy, and with His Justice. In their simplicity, all these aspects of God are One in Trinity. Finally, we encounter a Being that makes sense because everything fits together. Creatures are fractured, schizophrenic, so they can't satisfy us. They are pathetic, compared to the Being we need. Christ is the Being we need. He is God Incarnate. His unity with humanity invites humanity to unite with Him. This unification is theosis=becoming God.

This transformation in Christ enlivens us, as Paul says in Rom 6:11: *Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.* Alive-to-God is a fine way to say united with God, sharing His life, or theosis. Paul provides many memorable expressions of this transformation. *For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

Rom 8:2-4. This transformation in Christ to God exceeds our capacity to speak. Still, Paul makes paltry words do wonders, as this passage illustrates. Christ the Son of God brings his Spirit, the True Life, to animate the Mystical Body (Christ Jesus). This Divine Life frees us from the law of sin and death. Previously, we were slaves to these restrictions. But the Mosaic Law could not make infinite reparation for our sin against Infinity. God did. Infinity Himself repaired our infinite offense. His Son, the Word of God, accepted flesh, the same kind as ours, but never tainted by sin. So it was in the **likeness** of sinful flesh. This innocent flesh Jesus offered to make up for sin. This condemnation of sin in the flesh of Adam, Eve, and all their children, ended when God paid our debt. Jesus fulfilled the Mosaic law by his saving death on the cross. Now all formerly sinful flesh is redeemed. We who accept redemption walk no more by flesh, but by Spirit.

What transformation in Christ! What theosis! We can't comprehend it. But we can live it. Paul calls us to live it. *But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption.* 1 Cor 1:30. He reminds us that we accepted theosis in baptism, transforming us in Christ. He makes us become His wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. This transformation continues. It isn't complete during any moment in life. After death, God completes our transformation. *Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.* 2 Cor 5:17. Christ-life is brand-new. It is the freedom of the Children of God. Transformed in Christ, old sins are gone. As we confess sins, we give them to Jesus, Who came to take them all away. Gradually accepting transformation, we leave sin behind, and move on to life in Christ.

Fr. Spicq sheds abundant light on this process, starting at Col 2:6-7: *As therefore ye received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and builded up in him, and established in your faith, even as ye were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.* Is it as simple as walking along with Jesus? Paul says so. See Spicq's *Agape in the New Testament*, p74. Paul notes that Jesus did the hard work. We follow along if we walk in Christ-love. This is **walking upon the new path of life**, Rom 6:4, or **walking in Christ**, Col 2:6. The Hebrew meaning of walk is to go in harmony with Jesus, "to conduct oneself, to live in a particular way according to particular principles", 75. Thus we progress on the way of salvation towards full transformation in Christ, to entirely live-out love. By walking along with God, in love, His children come to resemble their Father, Who is Love. If it weren't simple, no one would succeed. Over the millennia, millions of us have succeeded, so it must be simple. Rooted in Love-Revealed, we allow Christ to build us up, so that we become established in the faith Jesus taught us. Walking with Jesus allows Him to do most of the work. We do our share, which is often too much for us to bear. But if we bear it, we move right along in this Christ-walk. It's the footprints in the sand story: two when walking is easy, and one when difficult, because Jesus carries us. We allow God to make us into Himself, into Love, just as parents make children grow towards them to grow up and become adults. Love, or charity, is totally powerful.

Paul attributes "remarkable force and universal extension to charity", 75. It covers a multitude, 1 Peter 4:8, not only of sins but of virtues. Love is the basic act, moving all major good. If we accept Love, walking with Him, He transforms us. How does this occur? Paul gives this account in Ephesians 5:25-33: *Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. Even so ought husbands also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his own wife loveth himself: for no man ever hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as Christ also the church; because we are members of his body. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church.* As Spicq notes, we know that Christ loved the church because He gave Himself up for it. This is love in action: giving self up for the beloved. Christ's self-giving on the cross washes sin away. All His blood, and the water that gushed from His side when the centurion pierced His heart, flowed forth. He gave entirely, in word and work.

Cleansed by Christ's water and word, there's neither spot nor wrinkle left in the Church. Therefore the Mystical Body is holy, without blemish. Christ's self-giving teaches husbands how to love their wives. Walking in Christ-love, husbands unite with wives, becoming one. By this union, loving the wife is loving self. This love unites, or identifies, each human, enabling each to nourish the other, cherishing each other as Christ cherishes the Church. Jesus teaches us to love entirely, without reserve. Paul "emphasized what Christ has done for His Church in order that the faithful may understand the charity he is presenting to them as the model of their conjugal love", 79. Christ transforms us into Him. Imitating this theosis, husbands transform into wives, and wives into husbands. The entire Mystical Body becomes Christ, and Christ the body. This mystery is great, so great that we want to contemplate it for eternity. Meanwhile, we walk along, nourished by this mystery of transforming Love, expanding into theosis. Thanks be to God, for His magnificent Love.

St. Paul: Saturday Session Nineteen: Transformation in Christ 2

Theosis=God makes us into Himself

Paul emphasized the surpassing love that Love reveals in Christ. One striking emphasis is: *We do not live to ourselves, and we do not die to ourselves. If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord; so then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's.* Rom 14:7-8 [New Revised Standard Version] What an extreme life this is, to live unto the Lord. We do this because the Lord lived unto us. He poured Himself out for us on the cross.

Greater love than this no man has, John 15:13. God's extreme love for us prompts our extreme love for Him. This Love is extreme compared to tepid love, or affection, or practical manipulation that passes for love every day. Christ-Love is real. It is God Himself. We fall short of Love. But Love draws us ever closer to Him, as we walk with Him through life. Walking with Him means following Jesus, living in the Mystical Body, animated by Love. Paul is fully alive to this reality, and growing in Love every moment. Love challenges us to emerge from our cocoon into the fullness of Christ-life.

Paul expresses it in some detail in the previous verse 6: *Those who observe the day, observe it in honor of the Lord. Also those who eat, eat in honor of the Lord, since they give thanks to God; while those who abstain, abstain in honor of the Lord and give thanks to God.* Whether we observe, or eat or fast, we do all in the Lord. This is how we know that we belong to Jesus, that everything we do is done: with, for, in, by, and of Him. This is life in Christ, living Him. This is the Mystical Body alive and well in us as we progress toward God. God's love bursts through our finite limits, and unites us infinitely with Himself, the Infinite. If we agree with Him, if we second His motion, then He takes us to Himself. This is transformation in Christ. This is *theosis*. God is totally for us, so we are totally for God. Fr. Spicq frames it well: Christian life consists in loving Christ with the charity given by God, 83. [*Agape in the New Testament*, Vol 2]

Peace be to the whole community, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace be with all who have an undying love for our Lord Jesus Christ. Eph 6:23-24. This concluding prayer emphasizes the source of love and faith. This Source is the Trinity, which is Undying Love Itself. Jesus reveals Undying Love in the Flesh. If we let Christ transform us, then we follow behind Him, usually some distance behind. So we participate partially, with varying love for our Lord. Undying Love urges us on to extraordinary love. If we agree, we grow in Love. Therefore, Paul's wish comes true. The peace, charity, faith and grace he wants for the Ephesians flourish for every one who accepts Undying Love. If we accept these gifts, we can respond to these four surpassing ways to exist. Notice how they go together. There is no peace without charity, which doesn't exist without faith, which is His grace, or gift to us. As usual, Paul sees the whole whole-ly, and selects excellent words to describe that unified vision. It's a streaming clarion call.

Spicq unpacks this stream of words for us. These show some specifics of transformation, or *theosis*, 83. "Peace, the fruit of reconciliation, Rom 5:1, includes peace with God as well as peace among the brothers. It is the tranquility of the soul that possesses all the goods of salvation; it is the result of the gathering together of all creation in Christ, Eph 1:10." This neatly summarizes one of Paul's main themes in this epistle. A peaceful person is a striking contrast to most of us! Consider that for a moment. Paul accepts what Jesus gives: ***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you***, Jn 14:27. Love provides peace as His gift to all who freely accept it. If we accept, we do not invent peace; we do not create peace. We accept Christ's gift of peace. Then we have the real thing. All this is very clear to Paul, who spouts out a verbal version of that clarity for us here. Naturally, the verbal version is not as clear as Paul's vision. We grow as we go into God.

Spicq says of the second requested gift, 83: "Charity is the actualization of this gift of God and Christ. In this text, especially, charity must not be restricted to God's love for us, or to our love for God, or to fraternal charity. Pauline *agape* includes all these objects; it is God's own charity in which the Christian participates, in order to love God and his neighbor. By his participation, he 'walks in love', Eph 5:2. In wishing them 'love with faith', St Paul intends to bring out the completely original character of Christian love. It is supernatural, as we would say today, not only because it presupposes faith, but also because it is an enlightened love, taking its inspiration from the knowledge faith gives. It is aware that God's charity exists first, and therefore the believer's charity is a *redamatio*, a return to love awakened in him by God's love, Gal 2:20, so that he displays his gratitude in the service of his neighbor, especially in a husband's manifestation of love for his wife, Eph 5:25-33. Faith produces all the fruits of the Christian life by *agape*, Eph 1:15; Gal 5:6. 'Charity with faith' is an active, living faith, or, better, it is a love which is divine in its source, pure in the heart of the Christian, and boundless in its objects and acts. It can be known and possessed only through the Gospel message; it must be exercised with constant reference to the example and will of God and Christ, Eph 5:1-2." What a wonderful world of meaning!

It's a mind-full of thoughts. It's a great way to say that the Christian is transformed in Christ. If we follow Jesus we love with His love, with Love Himself. Unless we accept this gift of *agape*, Christ-love, we are not with Him. If we accept this gift, then we love with Undying Love. This is indeed a "completely original" kind of love. It's not created. It's Infinite, Eternal, Divine. That's why we call it supernatural, or above nature. If we accept Love Himself, He will love in us in His Divine way. This Love transforms us in Christ. This is *theosis*. This is much more than "completely original", but it certainly is that. No wonder Christians are so different from others. No wonder they can give witness, as martyrs, in every century. No wonder so many of them were martyrs to Nazi and Communist killers in that slum of a century just passed. No wonder they reached around the world, "boundless in objects and acts", like Mother Teresa of Calcutta. No wonder they inspired millions, like John Paul II. No wonder they can speak peace to Palestinians, like Benedict XVI.

Having accounted for peace, charity and faith, Spicq turns to grace, 84. “The ‘grace’ of verse 24 is both the love in which God permanently envelops the Christian, and the gift that infuses the love. It is the common action of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in favor of the Jewish and Gentile converts who are on the way of final salvation in the Church, Eph 2:5-8. In St. Paul’s greeting they are identified by their attachment to Christ, not by their objective adherence to the faith: ‘Grace be with all those who have a love undying for our Lord Jesus Christ’, v 24. The Christian loves the Savior who has brought him peace. His charity is obviously a religious consecration; it joins him to the Lord as a slave is joined to his master, Mth 6:24. Because charity proves itself in open acts and devotes itself without calculation, it can be considered a ‘profession’ of Christianity, 1 Cor 16:21. The convert is more than a believer who acknowledges Jesus as the Lord. He is a lover who commits himself to love forever. He ‘loves in love’.

“St. Paul used the phrase *en aphtharsiai* to modify ‘love’. The phrase shows that love is permanent and faithful – as in classical Greek – even though the word *aphtharsia* is not easy to translate. It appears seven times in the New Testament, all in St. Paul’s Epistles. He uses it to refer to eternal life, which is the reward for good works perseveringly accomplished by the just, Rom 2:7. It is peculiarly the condition of glorified bodies freed from corruption, 1 Cor 5:42; 50; 54; their incorruptibility is one of the supreme gifts of the Gospel, 2 Tim 1:10. Because whatever is incorruptible is unchangeable, *aphtharsia* describes everlasting, blessed life in God’s presence. The most nearly parallel text is Wis 6:19: ***Love means the keeping of God’s laws; to observe his laws is the basis for incorruptibility; and incorruptibility aphtharsia makes one close to God.*** In our text, *aphtharsia* has this eschatological meaning. It characterized the Christian’s love for Christ, which is faithful here on earth, and lives forever in heaven, 1 Cor 13:8; 13.”

Paul sees much more than we understand. So Spicq’s account expands our comprehension ever more into what Christ reveals. Indeed, His love is Love Himself. It is incorruptible, quite different from vagrant love. No wonder it transforms us into Christ, Who is God, causing *theosis*. Spicq identifies the word Paul uses to convey this vast meaning. It carries great meaning because, 85: “...Rom 2:7 and 1 Cor 15:42 [link this word] with honor and glory. Moreover, in our text it does not refer to things, but to a living love. St. Paul wants to show the character and condition of love which is imperishable because it is victorious, impervious to the trials and ravages of time. An undying love cannot be destroyed or damaged by difficulty or suffering. It endures, whatever the cost may be. It lasts as long as courage; it is as strong as death; in the end, it will triumph.” Strong as death is the phrase from Song of Solomon 8:6. Other Old Testament themes converge in this word because, 85: “In this sense, *aphtharsia* expresses *agape*’s quality of spirituality. The Septuagint had spoken of ‘the imperishable spirit of God, the lover of souls’, Wis 13:1, and ‘the imperishable light’, Wis 18:4. The Book of Wisdom declared: ‘God formed man to be *imperishable*; the image of his own nature he made him’ 2:23; it presented incorruptibility as the reward of spotless souls. Consequently spiritual and divine charity must be an exceedingly pure love.”

Thanks to Spicq, we penetrate beneath the surface of Paul’s words, to grasp more of their meaning. Because God’s love is Infinite, we will never finish probing into Love. It will be our eternal delight. To our amazement, we begin probing here on earth, and will continue forever. We see that the most important message from the Old Testament foretells human destiny, each soul incorruptible with God. Given our great attachment to matter, our very own flesh, we need all the help we can get to escape its limits. Pure love is the very best experience we have of eternal activity. God shares His very being, Love, with us, purifying our notion of love. Pure Love shining through Christ inspires us to accompany Him. As we “walk” along faithfully with Jesus, His Love transforms us. This *theosis* launches us into incorruptible love. So powerful is Love Himself, that He makes us into Himself. If we allow Him, He springs us from material limits into incorruptibility. His resurrection is the observable event that shows love to be more powerful than death. His overcoming of corruptibility fuels our love-fire. Because no image can compare to Love, we shift from one: incorruptibility, to the other: imperishable light. To complete the circle, God made us in His image, and perfects us in His image by *theosis*.

Where does all this transformation in Christ go? Paul avers: ***From now on there is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*** 2 Tim 4:8. In Paul’s time, crowns meant much more than they do today. Our term is “success”. Crown or success puts the finishing touches to victory, celebrating a great achievement. The greatest of all achievements is allowing God to make us into Himself: *theosis*. Righteous people remain faithful to Christ’s gifts, and allow Him to transform them entirely into God Himself. The Lord Jesus Christ is the inerrant judge, Whose decisions are Justice Himself. We translate the Greek word *agapan* as “longed for”. This stands for loving in the sense of high esteem, appreciation, and preference, Spicq 86-87. Our ultimate desire is for God, Who is our ultimate reward, our complete happiness. “That day” is the Second Coming of Jesus. We love to see that coming because we love Jesus. Being one with Him is our purpose. Some people call it our “existential” reason, because it’s our reason to exist. God created us, or made us exist, so that we could exist divinized at One with the One. Love Himself freely gives Himself to us. He gave visibly in Jesus Christ, for 33 years on earth in tangible form, then in the Mystical Body, still visible and tangible, but dispersed among His followers, who are “walking” with Him towards ultimate transformation. Though Love is free, it is so appealing that it commands our response. Hence Christ said: ***I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.*** Jn 13:34. See: Jn 15:12;17; 1 Jn 3:11; 3:14; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11; 4:12; 2 Jn 1:5

St. Paul: Saturday Session Twenty: Transformation in Christ 3

Theosis=God makes us into Himself

As we noted on 6/20/09, divinizing man is dynamite. On the positive side, it makes ultimate sense. It satisfies our deepest desire. But on the negative side, it's too close to Original Sin. It's too much like Adam shortcircuiting his way to God. Sure, it's safe to say *theosis* is transformation in Christ. But this transformation makes us Christ. He was God, so we become God. How can we balance this strange process? Obviously, transformation does not make us God from all eternity. It does not make us one of the Divine Persons. We do not become charter members of the Trinity. Instead, God creates us in time, too late to be exactly God, too late to be God by our nature. But He raises us up to His nature, as Paul says many times. Perhaps you have a set of favorite passages. Here are some that I love. ***And it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me***, Galatians 2:20. Christians thinking about this saw Christ living in them once they accepted Him. Their first acceptance was Baptism. Then they accepted Him in Holy Communion. Each experience transformed them more completely. Transformation is growth in God's love uniting persons, making one into One.

Paul extends this organic union. ***As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith***, Col 2:6-7. Christians live in Christ by faith. Somehow faith makes God and us one. How? ***For he was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God. For we are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God***, 2 Cor 13:4. Living with Christ by the power of God is perhaps Paul's most definite expression of *theosis*. ***But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us***, Eph 2:13-14. Christ's love-power draws us sinners to Him, and unites us in Him, even destroying our hostility. Spiritually, we are one with God, and with each other in God. ***But anyone united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him***, 1 Cor 6:17. Love Himself unites us to Him: ***So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin, and alive to God in Christ Jesus***, Romans 6:11. We can't identify all the mechanical steps, but we do experience this unity. Somehow Love transcends the difference between Creator and creature.

Love makes lovers one. Even human love unites two humans into one who is greater than either human lover. If God loves us, His union with us will be even greater. No wonder we don't understand it. The Catholic Catechism says that we exist to be one with God. See #'s 2548-2550. "The promise [of seeing God] surpasses all beatitude... In Scripture to see is to possess... Whoever sees God has obtained all the goods of which he can conceive." In that statement, St. Gregory of Nyssa sketches a unity that we'll develop next. We unite with whatever we know, and contemplation is knowing God. We unite with whatever we love, and contemplation is loving God. Contemplation unites knowing with loving. So contemplating God unites us with Him. It is one-ing by knowing and loving. When God unites, He "Ones" us perfectly.

Hence the Catechism says "The Spirit and the Bride call whoever hears them to perfect communion with God". Perfect communion is perfect union with the object, in this case God. St. Augustine develops this mystery: "...God Himself will be virtue's reward; He gives virtue and has promised to give Himself as the best and greatest reward that could exist. ... ***So that God may be all in all***, 1 Corinthians 15:28." 2550. To be all in all is rather complete *theosis*. St. Gregory of Nyssa, in his Great Catechism, # 1031, says: "If you inquire how divinity is conjoined to humanity, you will have first to inquire as to what the coalescence is of the soul with the flesh. [To know the coming divine unity, we must grasp the present unity of soul and body.] If you do not know the manner by which your soul is united to your body, do not imagine that the other question needs to be understood by you either. In the case of the soul and body, while we believe that the soul is something other than the body because the flesh, when the soul is isolated from the body, becomes dead and inert, we still do not know the manner of their union. So too in that other inquiry, while we confess that the divine nature differs in majesty from a nature that is mortal and perishable, we are not capable of perceiving the manner of the conjunction of the divine and the human. Yet the miracles recorded do not permit us to doubt that God was born of the nature of a man."

Gregory shows by these, and other, reasons that our comprehension is quite limited. If we take on faith what God reveals, then we expand our comprehension. But important truths do not yield to us all at once. Instead, they nourish us by continued improvements, especially through divine inspiration. This is why real theologians are saints. They dwell in revelation because they dwell in God, the Revealer. In this passage, St. Gregory probes Incarnation. Because it is a huge mystery, it nourishes us without end. Therefore, we do not expect closure. We can't clamp down on Incarnation as we can clamp down on where we left our keys. But where we left our keys is not interesting. It's practical, but once we find the keys, we lose interest immediately. By contrast, the Incarnation is forever interesting. It's so immense that we're fascinated forever. Gregory shows us a progression of interest: union of soul and body, then Incarnate union of God with man in Jesus. As we progress through these steps, we gain momentum for the ultimate union of God with man in heaven.

Gregory delights in contemplating these unions, and extends them to the Mystical Body, in # 1035. "Since it has been shown that it is not possible for our body to become immortal except it be made participant in incorruption through communion with the Immortal, it is necessary to consider how it is possible for that One Body, though distributed always to so many myriads of the faithful throughout the world, to be whole in its apportionment to each individual, while yet it remains whole in itself. ... This Body, by the indwelling of God the Word, has been made over to divine dignity. Rightly then, do we believe that the bread consecrated by the word of God has been made over into the Body of God the Word. ... In the plan of His grace He spreads Himself to every believer by means of that Flesh, ... blending Himself with the bodies

of believers, so that by this union with the Immortal, man too may become a participant in incorruption. These things He bestows through the power of the blessing which transforms the nature of the visible things to that [of the Immortal]. Gregory expands our consideration to the Eucharist, showing that God's transformation is the same there. He unites human soul with human body, Himself with humanity, Himself with apparent bread, and Himself with believers.

Gregory goes on to show that these unions are greater than ours with our souls, # 1071. "The creature does not participate substantially in the rational soul, as if by indwelling in it; for so to participate is proper to God alone." Gregory doesn't worry about mechanical steps. Instead, he's delighted to dwell in what God reveals in Christ. This dwelling expands him, so that he can write these important things to delight us. If we dwell in them, we begin to see more of God's masterful mysteries. Because God created us, He is closer to us than we are to ourselves. All these considerations point to *theosis*, perfect union with God. St. Gregory's words are in Jurgen's *The Faith of the Early Fathers*, vol 2, pp 47-62.

The Orthodox Wikipedia says: "**Theosis** ("deification," "divinization") is the process of a worshiper becoming free of *hamártia* ("missing the mark"), being united with God, beginning in this life, and later consummated in bodily resurrection. For Orthodox Christians, Théōsis is salvation. [But it is much more. *Thus he has given us, through these things, his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of lust, and may become participants of the divine nature*, 2 Pet. 1:4. Peter says it more clearly than Paul.] Théōsis assumes that humans from the beginning are made to share in the Life or Nature of the all-Holy Trinity. Therefore, an infant or an adult worshiper is saved from the state of unholiness (*hamartía* — which is not to be confused with *hamártēma* "sin") for participation in the Life (*zōé*, not simply *bios*) of the Trinity — which is everlasting.

[Naturally, people in the East misinterpreted this. So Eastern Fathers insisted that] "...*theosis* is not to be confused with the heretical (apothéōsis) – 'Deification in God's Essence', which is imparticipable. [This last word tells us that God's essence is **not** something in which we can participate. No one but God can participate in His essence. How-ever, we must take God seriously. So] the statement by St. Athanasius of Alexandria, 'The Son of God became man, that we might become God', indicates the concept beautifully. 2 Peter 1:4 says that we have become '... partakers of divine nature.' Athanasius amplifies the meaning of this verse when he says *theosis* is 'becoming by grace what God is by nature' (*De Incarnatione*, I). What would otherwise seem absurd, that fallen, sinful man may become holy as God is holy, has been made possible through Jesus Christ, who is God incarnate. Naturally, the crucial Christian assertion, that God is One, sets an absolute limit on the meaning of *theosis*: it is not possible for any created being to become, ontologically, God, or even another god. Through *theoria*, the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ, human beings come to know and experience what it means to be fully human (the created image of God); through their communion with Jesus Christ, God shares Himself with the human race, in order to conform them to all that God is in knowledge, righteousness and holiness. *Theosis* also asserts the complete restoration of all people (and of the entire creation), in principle. This is built upon the understanding of the atonement put forward by Irenaeus of Lyons, called recapitulation.'

"For many fathers, *theosis* goes beyond simply restoring people to their state before the Fall of Adam and Eve, teaching that because Christ united the human and divine natures in his person, it is now possible for someone to experience closer fellowship with God than Adam and Eve initially experienced in the Garden of Eden, and that people can become more like God than Adam and Eve were at that time. Some Orthodox theologians go so far as to say that Jesus would have become incarnate for this reason alone, even if Adam and Eve had never sinned.

"All of humanity is fully restored to the full potential of humanity because the Son of God took to Himself a human nature to be born of a woman, and takes to Himself also the sufferings due to sin (yet is not Himself a sinful man, and is God unchanged in His being). In Christ, the two natures of God and human are not two persons but one; thus, a union is effected in Christ, between all of humanity and God. So, the holy God and sinful humanity are reconciled in principle, in the one sinless man, Jesus Christ. (See Jesus' prayer as recorded in John 17.) This reconciliation is made actual through the struggle (*podvig* in Russian) to conform to the image of Christ. Without the struggle, the praxis, there is no real faith; faith leads to action, without which it is dead. One must unite will, thought, and action to God's will, His thoughts, and His actions. A person must fashion his life to be a mirror, a true likeness of God. More than that, since God and humanity are more than a similarity in Christ but rather a true union, Christians' lives are more than mere imitation, and are rather a union with the life of God Himself: so that, the one who is working out salvation, is united with God working within the penitent both to will and to do that which pleases God. Gregory Palamas affirmed the possibility of humanity's union with God in *His energies*, while also affirming that because of God's transcendence and utter otherness, it is impossible for any person or other creature to know or to be united with God's *essence*. Yet through faith we can attain *phronema*, an understanding of the faith of the Church.

"The journey towards *theosis* includes many forms of praxis. Living in the community of the church & partaking regularly of the sacraments, and especially the Eucharist, is taken for granted. Also important is cultivating 'prayer of the heart', and prayer that never ceases, as Paul exhorts the Thessalonians. This unceasing prayer of the heart is a dominant theme in the writings of the Fathers, especially in those collected in the *Philokalia*. See page 4 for excerpts from it.

"Theosis in the Christian West Although the doctrine of *theosis* came to be neglected in the Western Church, it was clearly taught in the Roman Catholic tradition as late as the 13th century by Thomas Aquinas, who taught that 'full participation in divinity which is humankind's true beatitude and the destiny of human life' (*Summa Theologiae* 3.1.2).

"Some Protestant use of the term 'theosis' In addition to the strong currents of *theosis* in early and some contemporary Catholic theology, one can find it as a recurring theme within Anglicanism: in Lancelot Andrewes (17th c.), the

hymnody of John and Charles Wesley (18th c.), Edward B. Pusey (19th c.), and A. M. Allchin and E. Charles Miller (20th c.). The Finnish school of Lutheranism led by Tuomo Mannermaa argues that Martin Luther's understood justification to mean *theosis*. *Theosis* as a concept is used among Methodists, especially in relation to the *pietist* movement, and in the distinctive Protestant doctrine of *entire sanctification* which teaches, in summary, that it is the Christian's goal, in principle possible to achieve, to live without any sin. In 1311 the Council of Vienne declared this notion, 'that man in this present life can acquire so great and such a degree of perfection that he will be rendered inwardly sinless, and that he will not be able to advance farther in grace' (Denziger §471), to be a heresy. Instead of *theosis*, **sanctification**, being set apart or made holy, is the term that is used more in Protestant theology. Specifically, *progressive sanctification* is the term that is used for the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit, whereby an individual is made more holy. The Protestant conceptions of praxis, phronema, ascetical theology, and sacraments are quite different from Catholic and Orthodox understandings, but the use of the term *theosis* may illustrate a commonality of objective or hope.

"Deification in Mormonism" The doctrine of *theosis* or deification in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints differs significantly from the *theosis* of Orthodox Christianity. In Mormonism it is usually referred to as *exaltation* or *eternal life*. While the primary focus of Mormonism is on the atonement of Jesus Christ, the reason for the atonement is exaltation which goes beyond mere salvation. All men will be saved from sin and death, but only those who are sufficiently obedient and accept the atonement of Jesus Christ before judgment will be exalted. One popular Mormon quote, coined by the early Mormon 'disciple' Lorenzo Snow in 1837, is 'As man now is, God once was; As God now is, man may be.' This was taught first by Joseph Smith while pointing to John 5:19 of the New Testament, 'God himself, the Father of us all, dwelt on an earth, the same as Jesus Christ himself did.' (Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, pp. 345-46).

"In the Mormon Book of Moses 1:39 God tells Moses, 'this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man.' In that chapter, God shows Moses a vision depicting some of God's vast creations including a vast number of worlds created for other people—a sampling of what God created in the past and what he will continue to do forever. Each world was prepared and peopled by God for the purpose of bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of humankind. By immortality is meant personal resurrection so that each individual can continue to enjoy a perfect, physical body forever. By eternal life is meant becoming like God both in terms of holiness or godliness and in glory. It is commonly believed by members of the Church that, like God, an exalted human being is empowered with the privilege to create worlds and people in an endless process of exalting humankind."

"Of all the Mormon doctrines including polygamy, critics generally deem this doctrine the most offensive or even blasphemous. Some Mormons argue that even assuming mainstream Christianity's definition of God's omnipotence and omnibenevolence, not only can God exalt mortal man, but God must do so. The argument is that if God is all-powerful, then God is capable of exalting man, and if God is all-good, then God should or must exalt man. They also point to comments by Christ & Psalmists that refer to the Divine nature and potential of humans as children of God. Some Mormons also suggest that discussions of *theosis* by early Church Fathers show an early belief in the Mormon concept of deification, although they disagree with much of the other theology of the same Church Fathers, most notably the doctrine of the Trinity. The Mormons' belief differs from the Orthodox belief in deification because the LDS believe that the core being of each individual, the 'intelligence' which existed before becoming a spirit son or daughter, is uncreated or eternal. Orthodox deification always acknowledges a timeless Creator versus a finite creature who's glorified by the grace of God. Mormons are clear promoters of henotheism, and the Church Fathers have absolutely no commonality with their view."

Orthodox theologians clearly and completely distinguish opposing views of *theosis*. They claim that God extends His divinity to us, making us His family. As 2 Peter 1:4 states, God makes us participate in His **divine nature**. Wondering about this, we see clearly that God does not make us His nature in every way. Instead we participate in His nature. But it is in divine nature that we participate. Since God is Almighty, it is a mistake to limit His might. His infinite inventiveness surpasses all limits we might try to impose on Him. Eastern theologians apply many scripture passages to support their conclusion that grace perfects us into divine participation. Starting with God as Father, they show that He lifts us up to be part of His family. ***See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are.*** 1 Jn 3:1. God loved us into existence by creation. Thus we're all His children. ***Beloved, we are God's children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is. And all who have this hope in him purify themselves, just as he is pure,*** 1 Jn 3:2-3. St. John believes that we will be like Him when we see Him as He is. This transforming sight will make us participate in what we see. To participate in God is to become God in some way. What transforms us? ***But as many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on his name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God,*** Jn 1:12-13. These quotes show the difference between begotten and adopted: ***If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him,*** 1 Jn 2:29. ***Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God,*** 1 Jn 4:7. ***Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him,*** 1 Jn 5:1. ***In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits among His creatures,*** James 1:18. Orthodox theologians focus on regeneration, as St. Gregory of Nyssa showed.

The Spirit Himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God, Rom 8:16. In some restricted way, we are God because we are the same nature as He. When Jesus rose from the dead, He changed His human nature. After His resurrection, matter could not confine Him. He went through locked doors. He exists now throughout creation both in body

& spirit. His transformation of human nature somehow affects all of us. Jesus shows us what we will be transformed in Christ.*which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead, according to the Spirit of holiness, Jesus Christ our Lord*, Rom 1:2-4. Paul alludes to transformation: *For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren*, Heb 2:11. Paul tells us that we will be united in nature, to be brothers of Christ, and sons of God. That union follows from Christ's love, uniting us organically to Him: 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Cor 1:30; Gal 3:28. Our belief is our free acceptance of Love's union, Phil 1:29. Thus we allow Christ to graft us into Him, Rom 11:17 & 24. Eucharist nourishes us in Christ, as Jn 6:48-55 shows: *I am the bread of life. ... I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh. ... Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.*

By accepting God's love enfleshed in Christ, we let Love transform us into Him. The *Philokalia* records Orthodox spirituality. There, St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth record St. Maximos the Confessor's inspiring passages. In volume 2 of the 1981 edition, p 216, #30, Makarios explains virtue: "... he means the divinizing virtues which give rise to the love that unites man with God and with one another. This love wrests the soul away from all that is subject to generation and decay, and from all intelligible beings that are beyond generation and decay, and in so far as this can happen to human nature, it intermingles the soul with God Himself in a kind of erotic union, mystically establishing a single shared life, undefiled and divine. By truth he means the sole and unique cause, origin, kingdom, power and glory of created beings, from which and through which all things were made, and are being made, by which and through which the being of all things is sustained, and to which the lovers of God dedicate all their diligence and activity." What a poetic description of deification, and affirmation that it begins on earth! If we accept Love, we are Love.

Maximos exclaims, 218, # 36: "He who aspires to divine realities willingly allows providence to lead him by principles of wisdom towards the grace of deification. He who does not so aspire is drawn, by the just judgment of God, and against his will, away from evil by various forms of discipline." Definitely, God provides transformation into Himself for those who accept His offer. Commenting on Isa 11:2 (the gifts of the Spirit), in #38, Maximos affirms: "... by wisdom, the indivisible union with God, whereby the saints attain the actual enjoyment of the things for which they long. He who shares in wisdom becomes God by participation, and, immersed in the ever-flowing secret outpouring of God's mysteries, he imparts to those who long for it a knowledge of divine blessedness."

Maximos unites God's abilities with His Incarnation, to draw us to Himself, p 146, #40: "The Lord is wise, just, and mighty by nature. Because He is wise, He could not be ignorant of the way in which to heal human nature. Because He is just, He could not save man, whose will was in the grip of sin, in a tyrannical fashion. Because He is almighty, He could not prove unequal to the task of completing His healing mission." In # 43, Maximos describes the completion of that healing mission: "The Lord gave clear evidence of His supreme power in what He endured from hostile forces when He endowed human nature with an incorruptible form of generation. For through His passion He conferred dispassion, through suffering, repose, and through death, eternal life. By His privations in the flesh, He re-established and renewed the human state, and by His own incarnation He bestowed on human nature the supernatural grace of deification. [44] God became true man, and bestowed on human nature a new or second form of generation, leading us through suffering to the pleasure of the life held in store for us." This restoration of our nature fulfills it, even more than Adam and Eve were full of life. Our ultimate end is to unite with God: p 282, #88 "You should understand that God stimulates and allure in order to bring about an erotic union in the Spirit; that is to say, He (Spirit) is the go-between in this union, the one who brings the parties together, in order that He may be desired and loved by His creatures. God stimulated in that He impels each being, in accordance with its own principle, to return to Him." Orthodox theologians distinguish clearly between *theosis* and *apotheosis*. They inspire us with their descriptions of divinization to breathe with both lungs: East and West.

St. Paul: Saturday Session Twenty-one: Grace

Paul popularized grace by enriching this term with meaning and value. His popularization is clear when we count the number of times New Testament authors use this word. In the New American Standard Bible, Matthew and Mark never use it. Luke uses it only once. John uses it 3 times. In Acts, Luke uses it 11 times. In epistles, James employs it once, Peter 10 times, John once, and Jude once. In Apocalypse, John uses it once. But grace is such an important part of Paul's experience, that he uses it 84 times. Clearly, Paul says more about "grace" than all the others put together. In raw numbers, Paul's 84 uses overwhelm all other authors' 29 uses. Why is Paul so into grace? Among the many reasons, we must rank Paul's conversion first. The grace of Jesus struck him so emphatically, and remained in his memory so clearly, that he developed his experience mightily.

Fr. Ceslaus Spicq, OP helps us understand grace in vol 2 of his *Agape in the New Testament*. On p 84, he starts with Rom 3:24: "**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.** ... The 'grace' of verse 24 is both the love in which God permanently envelops the Christian, and the gift that infuses the love. It is the common action of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in favor of the Jewish and Gentile converts who are on the way of final salvation in the Church (Eph 2:5-8). In St. Paul's greeting, they are identified by their attachment to Christ, not by their objective adherence to the faith; **Grace be with all those who have a love undying for our Lord Jesus Christ** (Rom 16:24). [Spicq's translation differs from the NASB: **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**] The Christian loves the Savior Who has brought him peace. His charity is obviously a religious consecration; it joins him to the Lord as a slave is joined to his master (Mt 6:34). Because charity proves itself in open acts, and devotes itself without calculation, it can be considered a 'profession' of Christianity (1 Cor 16:21). The convert is more than a believer who acknowledges Jesus as the Lord. He is a lover who commits himself to love forever. He 'lives in love'."

Spicq's account shows us that grace starts and finishes in love. No wonder Paul emphasized grace so much! Grace is God's love flooding us, if we accept it. Because God is Love, He gives Himself to us. He is the gift. Love is the Gift as well as the Giver. When God gives Himself to us, He unites with us. We can't completely comprehend this unity, but we love it. When grace envelops us, we are as full as we can be. This fullness is Love. Love increases us as it fills us. So we ever expand if we love being loved by God. Our expanse naturally overflows into loving our neighbor. As our love of neighbor increases, we advance along the way to final salvation in the Church. Not only do all the pieces fit, they blend into one. We and Love unite as One. As we noted in considering *theosis*, God does all the heavy lifting. If we cooperate, we allow Him to make us into Himself, into One. Grace is a fine way to express this overflow of Love. No wonder we convert and commit ourselves to Love forever. Spicq can hardly improve on what happens to each: "He 'lives in love'."

The original Greek that Paul wrote is much richer, more densely meaningful, than English. So Spicq translates the Greek verb as *have a love undying* while NASB translates it as *be*. There's room enough for all these more restricted English verbs there. Spicq alerts us to the love-flow that *grace* conveys. Whenever we see that English word, we should remember that it stands both for the Giver and the Gift, Who is Love. Even more detailed, Spicq adds: "St. Paul uses the phrase *en aphtharsai* to modify 'love'. The phrase shows that love is permanent and faithful – as in classical Greek – even though the word *aphtharsia* is not easy to translate. It appears seven times in the New Testament, all in St. Paul's Epistles. He uses it to refer to eternal life, which is the reward for good works perseveringly accomplished by the just (Rom 2:7). It is peculiarly the condition of glorified bodies freed from corruption (1 Cor 5:42, 50, 53, 54); their incorruptibility is one of the supreme gifts of the Gospel (2 Tim 1:10). Because whatever is incorruptible is unchangeable, *aphtharsia* describes everlasting blessed life in God's presence. The most nearly parallel text is Wisdom 6:18; 'Love means the keeping of God's laws; to observe his laws is the basis for incorruptibility; and incorruptibility (*aphtharsia*) makes one close to God'. In our text *aphtharsia* has this eschatological meaning. It characterizes the Christian's love for Christ, which is faithful here on earth, and lives forever in heaven (cf 1 Cor 13:8, 13). [That should sound familiar, from our work on love.]

"But 'incorruptible' is not exactly the same as 'immortal', and the word's usage does not limit its meaning to the idea of duration. In Rom 2:7 and 1 Cor 15:42, it is associated with honor and glory. [**Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?**] Rom 2:4 illustrates translating *aphtharsia* as repentance. 1 Cor 15:42 shows translation as imperishable: **So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body.**] Moreover, in our text it does not refer to things, but to a living love. St. Paul wants to show the character and condition of love which is imperishable because it is victorious, impervious to the trials and ravages of time (2 Tim 4:8, and by contrast: Mt 24:12). An undying love cannot be destroyed or damaged by difficulty or suffering. It endures, whatever the cost may be. It lasts as long as courage; it is as strong as death; in the end, it will triumph. (cf 2 Mc 9:22, & 17:12).

"In this sense, *aphtharsia* expresses *agape*'s quality of spirituality. The Septuagint had spoken of 'the imperishable spirit of God, the lover of souls' (Wis 13:10, and 'the imperishable light' Wis 18:4). The Book of Wisdom 2:23 declared: **God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him**"; it presented incorruptibility as the reward of spotless souls. Consequently, spiritual and divine charity must be an exceedingly pure love. Here again is

the typical Pauline opposition between charity and impurity. *Aphtharsia* understood as ‘integrity’ is the opposite of deterioration, ruin (Eph 4:22), and disgrace (1 Cor 15:42-43). As an adjective, it means ‘not corrupted, not spoiled, not damaged’, as in 1 Peter 1:4: God has begotten us anew ***that we might possess the inheritance which is imperishable, flawless, unfading.*** Integrity and holiness are joined in Titus 2:7. [***in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified,***] St. John Chrysostom commented on our text: ‘The very spiritual love of charity is a beautiful love; just as a virgin guards herself from bodily defilement, so this love is preserved from all evil’ (*In Epist ad Eph*, PG 62:174). In concluding his Epistle, St. Paul refers to the example of Christ’s undying love for the Church he purified and sanctified (5:25 ff). Those who love Christ must love him in the same holy, unchangeable way.

“All these nuances of meaning: incorruptibility, immortality, imperishability, purity, beauty evoke the permanence of *agapan* [love]. Perhaps St. Paul would have written ‘with permanence’ instead of ‘in permanence’ if he had not just written ‘with faith’, and ‘with all those’. The phrase: ‘a love undying for our Lord Jesus Christ’, is intended to explain the essence and true nature of Christian charity. It is a religious love, quite unlike earthly love. It is spiritual, pure, and unchangeable. It is faithful in all circumstances, and its constancy triumphs even over death itself. Charity for the Lord Jesus Christ is of itself incorruptible.”

Much of this is familiar to you from our study of love (*agapan*) some months ago. The main point is that Christ reveals love that can’t fit into merely human categories. We have no words for Christ-love, Who is Love Himself. Paul was alive to this difference, and used *agapan* to point at Christ’s inexpressible love. Paul used *aphtharsia* to emphasize all that Spicq lists here. It’s worth repeating: incorruptible, immortal, imperishable, pure, beauty, and permanence. This adverb communicated all these aspects of *agapan* which Christ shows us. And **grace** pours all these riches upon us. Behind the word is all that we have said, plus more that defies speech. Love is noun and verb because it never quits expanding. Love increases all it touches, considering it as a noun. Love increases being, considered as a verb. Christ demonstrated Love to us. He was revelation in the flesh, God in the flesh, Love in the flesh. That’s why He changed history, and why we mark time by His coming. Before Him Love had not come in the flesh. After Him, Love’s coming changes everything.

Grace is the Christian way to abbreviate all that we have said here, expressing it in a single word. Paul’s experience outside Damascus manifested grace stupendously. Spicq (p 407) notes how Paul says it: “***The grace of our Lord was lavished superabundantly on me along with faith and love that [are] in Christ Jesus.*** 1 Tim 1:14. [At Damascus Christ overwhelmed Paul’s angry prejudice with Love.] ... He (Paul) has just recalled his life as a persecutor of the Church. Applying the theological principle: ***Where sin abounded, grace did more abound.*** (Rom 5:20), he stresses two elements in his conversion: God’s choice of him, a sinner, which was absolutely and unpredictably gratuitous (*charis* cf 1 Cor 15:9-10); and God’s mercy, which was an act of magnificent splendor. ... ‘Was lavished superabundantly’ translates the verb *hyperpleonazo*, which is not used anywhere else in the Bible. It is not found in the Greek language before the Psalms of Solomon 5:19, and Vettius Valens (85,17). However, it corresponds perfectly to St. Paul’s love of using superlatives whenever he wants to exalt the generosity of God’s love, or the effectiveness of His interventions among men. He speaks of ‘the grace of our Lord (*charis tou kyriou*) instead of ‘the grace of God’ because it was Christ in person Who converted him on the road to Damascus. Through Christ, God’s grace poured into Paul, and overflowed in him. It continues to live in him in its two principal effects, ‘with faith and love that [are] in Christ Jesus’ (*meta pisteoskai agapes tes en Christoi Iesou*). The wording shows clearly that faith and charity are infused virtues characteristic of truly Christian life, and given in an extraordinary degree (*hyperpleonasen ... meta*). The preposition *meta* indicates both accompaniment and instrument, as it did in 1 Tim 4:14. Faith and charity are concomitant with grace because they emanate and derive directly from it. Paul the sinner has been profoundly changed by these two qualities which have become part of him. He has been constituted a Christian, and the two virtues he has acquired are a manifestation and an ‘epiphany’ of the Lord’s grace. St. Paul presents himself as the type of saved sinner (v 15-16) precisely because, henceforth, he ‘exists in Christ Jesus’ by means of faith and charity. Grace is invisible, but the Christian’s profession of faith and works of charity are not. The Apostle, therefore, looks upon his conversion as a revelation of the mercy of God, or, rather, as a universally valid demonstration of the patience of God toward sinners. ***I obtained mercy for this reason, that in me first Christ Jesus might display his perfect patience as an example of those who would later believe in him, and thus attain eternal life.*** 1 Tim 1:16. [NASB: ***Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life.***] In the New Testament, patience is presented as the first response of *agape* (1 Cor 13:4). In God it extends credit, in a sense, to the sinner, so that he will not suffer total loss. God suspends the breath of his wrath, given him time to repent, and ‘prolongs’ his mercy, instead of punishing him on the spot. More specifically, the Incarnation of Jesus is ordained to the manifestation of God’s love, the essential object of the Church’s credo: ***For I am the least of the apostles, and not fit 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 toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God with me.*** 1Cor 15:15-16. What a grace!