

MESSAGE OF PAUL

Four Areas:

(1) Paul and Authority

(2) Paul and the Gospel

(3) Paul and Eschatology

(4) Paul and History

I. PAUL AND AUTHORITY

A. Traditions

1. Mosaic Tradition—fundamentally, Paul is in concord with the tradition of Moses (Rom. 3:31), but this does not necessarily include agreement with all the traditions of the elders, that is, the oral traditions about Moses channeled through the Pharisees (Phil. 3:7; Gal. 4:9?)

- a. *Hermeneutic Veil*—(2 Cor. 3:12–18) a metaphor for reading the same words of the scriptures, but without seeing intimations of Incarnation, no ability to perceive the foreshadowing of Christ in the punctilious performance of oral law
- b. *Promised Beforehand*—(Rom. 1:2) whenever Paul preaches Christ he understands himself to be preaching the scriptures; he

would find abhorrent the thought that he was starting a new religion

2. Christian Tradition—a revelation of the gospel is not a revelation of the content of the gospel

- a. *“Received” Tradition*—(1 Cor. 15:1–8) that content of the gospel is a “received” tradition, carefully preserved by eyewitnesses, that Paul officially passes on to a new generation of believers. Paul uses that tradition: (1) he quotes a worship hymn in Phil. 2:1–11, (2) he quotes what apparently was an early, traditional Christian creed to open Romans (Rom. 1:3–4)
- b. *Word of the Lord*—(1 Cor. 11:23–26) Paul refers to the “word of the Lord” giving material derived from Jesus. Did he know Jesus? Most scholars think not. So this phrase too probably relates to the received tradition. One must think about this: while Paul preached the gospel, he never wrote a gospel.

B. Apostleship

1. Autonomous Call—(Gal. 1:1) Paul’s call as an apostle is not “by man,” that is, not by Peter, or James, or anyone else’s particular suggestion, nor “through man,” that is, not through any human

institution such as the Jerusalem church, or religious rite, such as laying on of hands, transferred to Paul his apostleship.

- a. *Unique Revelation*—(Gal. 1:12) Paul did not go into some kind of disciple apprenticeship as he had done previously under Gamaliel to become a Pharisee; he was not “taught” his gospel in any way that could be construed as official licensing for the gospel ministry by any human agency.
 - b. *Divine Initiative*—(Gal. 1:15) only when it pleased God did Paul find himself charged with a call to Gentiles; Paul himself certainly did not crank out the idea on his own. Don’t blame me—this whole thing was God’s idea, in case you’re wondering.
2. Unity of Gospel—while all this insistence on Paul’s independence might suggest Paul could care less for other Christian leaders, in fact, he felt them essential to the preaching of the gospel
- a. *Apostolic Approval*—(Gal. 2:2) Paul never felt he could ignore Jerusalem leaders, nor discount their rightful place in the whole enterprise of the gospel. Indeed, without their approval, his effort would be compromised (“lest somehow I might have run in vain”)

- b. *Unified Church*—(Gal. 2:8; Rom. 15:25–27) The one who worked in Peter worked in Paul as well, just to different target audiences. But Paul always worried that his mission to Gentiles never was fully and wholeheartedly accepted in Jerusalem. The collection from his churches he invested with heavy symbolic significance—a sign of the validation of the Pauline mission among Gentiles by the mother church in Jerusalem. If the gospel was preached as the breaking down of sinful barriers of human animosities through the power of God in Jesus, could the church be believed if she herself showed no such salvation within her own ranks? No unity, no gospel. Period.

III. PAUL AND THE GOSPEL

A. Word of the Cross

1. Metaphorical Language

- a. *Act*—redemption, ransom, sacrifice, victory over evil, old and new
- b. *Consequences*—acquittal, reconciliation, new humanity, forgiveness

c. *Implication*—the language of the cross is fluid, flexible, molded to the situation applied; this variability suggests in and of itself that the cross, while tremendously important for Paul, is not the coherent center around which all his theological reflection develops. The cross is, as it were, one stage removed from the unchanging core.

2. Common Elements

- a. *God does the acting.*
- b. *The acting is on sin.*
- c. *The benefit is for others.*
- c. *The death of Christ reveals.*

B. Word of the Resurrection

1. Fundamental Core—This is the generative center of Pauline thought, the unchanging core, the central conviction out of which his theology grows, the conviction laying at the heart of his conviction of apostleship, the only conviction which Paul specifically states that without which the Christian experience is impossible (1 Cor. 15:14).
The conviction of resurrection is twofold:

(1) *Jesus rose from the dead*, which requires a theological framework from which resurrection has more than passing interest.

(2) *God raised Jesus*, which requires the uniqueness of Jesus over any other Jewish martyr who died faithful to God.

We spell out the background of thought under which Paul chose to present these two convictions, as well as how these convictions helped Paul interpret the death of Jesus.

2. Apocalyptic Framework—Of all the understandings about reality available to Paul—Stoic, Platonic, etc.—the framework of Jewish apocalyptic best supplied the background for Paul’s understanding of the resurrection of Jesus, for two basic reasons:

(1) First, the apocalyptic framework *incorporates the doctrine of resurrection as a central feature*. This doctrine developed in response to reflection on the unjust persecution of God’s people and how God will justify his people by setting right past injury and call the wicked to account. The idea of resuscitation was not unknown in the ancient world, and magicians were reported to have this power. But just coming back to life is not what the resurrection of Jesus means for Paul. Paul’s point is that *the*

resurrection has begun, the final eschatological act of God has begun, not a casual act of resuscitation that has no implications for the history of humankind.

- (2) Second, apocalyptic also *provides the framework of a deliverer to come*, one who had a unique role in the plan of God, as God's anointed who would inaugurate the justice of God's future reign. This would fit the role of Jesus as more than just another Jewish martyr who tragically died while doing God's will, answering why God would raise Jesus and not any other faithful Jew of the past.

3. Death of Jesus—This apocalyptic framework with its resurrection doctrine is the key for interpreting the cross of Christ for Paul.

Immediate implications can be drawn:

- (1) *Jesus was innocent* of all charges of violating God's will in the Law.
- (2) *Jesus' opponents were wrong*. God overturned their verdict.

Thus, their view of the Law stands condemned.

III. PAUL AND ESCHATOLOGY

CHRISTIAN REVISION OF JEWISH APOCALYPTIC VIEW OF HISTORY

<p style="text-align: center;">JEWISH APOCALYPTIC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kingdom of God</p>	<p><i>Explanation:</i> The Old Aeon created by the Fall of Adam is characterized by sin and death, covering past and present time. Sin will culminate in a time of testing for the righteous, and God himself will have to break into human history to bring this age to a close in a final apocalyptic struggle with the forces of evil. God will destroy evil, establish his kingdom, and thus inaugurate the New Aeon. This future new age of God’s righteousness will be defined by joy, peace, and the powerful presence of the Spirit of God.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">PAULINE ESCHATOLOGY</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Kingdom of God</p>	<p><i>Explanation:</i> God <i>did</i> break into human history through Jesus, who died on the cross to deal with sin. The Spirit and love of God poured forth on believers brings eschatological peace and joy. But history did not end as expected, and Old Aeon problems still exist. Thus, the present is a time of eschatological tension: the Old Aeon and New Aeon overlap for a time (“now — not yet”). The New Aeon has arrived in part, and God’s righteous kingdom has been inaugurated, but full consummation awaits the future.</p>

IV. PAUL AND HISTORY

A. History as Lordship

The apocalyptic framework that sets the background for Paul's thought also provides a built-in philosophy of history as theological history, history that cannot be told except from the presumption of a Creator God and his relationship to his created, yet rebellious, world. Thus, the history Paul is involved in spelling out in Romans particularly is about God in his relationship as Creator to his creation—told as the history of God's lordship over creation. Such a story line of God's lordship involves four important presuppositions.

B. Presuppositions

1. Survival—Creator Favor. The creature has a dependent role. The creature's existence depends on the Creator's favor. Paul presumes this dependent role on the part of humans. He calls the Creator's favor "grace" and the creature's proper response "faith" or "trust."
2. Destiny—No Control. Humans live with three illusions. One illusion is that they are master's of their own destiny. Truth be told, they are enslaved to a higher power. Their creaturely existence is defined by subjection to some lordship. The power of sin is that lordship that now rules the lives of human beings.
3. Ethics—No power. The second illusion is that in morality and ethics, what one needs to do is "try harder." When sin rules as a

power over one's existence, trying harder only gives sin more opportunity to enslave. Powerlessness makes ethical effort useless.

4. Gospel—No Neutrality. The third illusion is one of neutrality, as if we are in some neutral ground standing between a choice to sin and a choice not to. In fact, the choice to sin has been made long ago, and we stand in its power already. Long ago our race was plunged into the power of sin. Not to choose the gospel, therefore, is to choose sin, for sin already is there as the controlling power.