

**PAULINE PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHURCH AND ITS GOSPEL
IN A SOCIALLY PENETRATIVE AND ENGAGING
MISSIOLOGICAL CONTEXT.**

by

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SUMMARY


The convergence of the Church, its Gospel and the World has become a critical area of New Testament Biblical Studies. This significance revolves around the 'relevance and impact' of the Church and her kerygmatic message in an increasingly secular and sceptic world. The secularization and scepticism is mainly driven by the dawning of a 'post-modern' twenty first century which has also ushered in an era of unprecedented technological and scientific advancement. This new-world, which is being advanced through the 'global village' phenomenon, and the broadening democratization and entrenchment of individual human rights in developing countries, seems to have discarded all 'absolutes', and only values that which can be verified empirically.

All this has left many individuals questioning the relevance of the Church and her message. Many seem to have designated the Church and her message as 'past the expiry date'. It is thus no longer uncommon for previously Christian societies to be described as Post-Christian societies.

The convergence of Church, Gospel and World has thus become very significant. The critical question is whether the Church is to close the door on the world and adopt an isolationist stance, or whether the Church is to fulfill her missiological and prophetic role by engaging and penetrating our twenty first century world with the message of the Gospel.

This short dissertation will consider selected aspects of Pauline Ecclesiological and Soteriological perspectives in a social context, and the Social conditions of the Pauline World. We will then consider how the three components – *Church; Gospel and World* – ought to converge in the missiological task of the Church.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Summary	I
	Acknowledgements	II
	Table of Contents	III
Chapter 1	INTRODUCTION	1
1.1	Problem Statement	1
1.2	Meaning and Scope Topic Title	2
1.3	Method and objective of Topic Title	3
Chapter 2	SOCIAL DIMENSION OF PAULINE PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHURCH	5
2.1	Introduction to the <i>Church</i> Concept	5
2.1.1	'Church' in Paul	6
2.1.2	Social aspects of the <i>Visible</i> and <i>Invisible</i> Church	7
2.1.3	The <i>Social Dimension</i> of the Church	9
2.2	Pauline Understanding of  \mathbb{M} ϵ $\&$ $\&$ \bullet \mathbb{M} \ast \diamond \mathbb{E} 10	
2.2.1	Old Testament Tradition around \mathbb{M} ϵ $\&$ $\&$ \bullet \mathbb{M} \ast \diamond \mathbb{E} 11	
2.2.2	Hellenistic Socio-Political Background of \mathbb{M} ϵ $\&$ $\&$ \bullet \mathbb{M} \ast \diamond \mathbb{E} 13	
2.2.3	Pauline usage of \mathbb{M} ϵ $\&$ $\&$ \bullet \mathbb{M} \ast \diamond \mathbb{E} 15	
2.3	Pauline Ecclesiological <i>Images</i> with a Social Dimension	19
2.3.1	The <i>People of God</i>	19
2.3.2	The <i>Body of Christ</i>	21
Chapter 3	SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PAUL'S WORLD	24
3.1	Political and Linguistic Setting of Paul's World	24
3.2	Social Values of Paul's World	26
3.2.1	Social Norms	26
3.2.2	Honour and Shame	29
3.2.3	Patron-Client Relationships	30
3.3	Social Stratification of Pauline Christians	32
3.3.1	Traditional view of Social Levels in Corinth	33
3.3.2	New Social Perspectives on the Corinthian Church	34

3.3.3	<i>Common Meal</i> Problems in Corinthian Church	37
3.3.4	New Social Challenges for the Corinthian Church	40
Chapter 4	PAULINE PERSPECTIVES ON THE GOSPEL	44
4.1	The Pauline Gospel	44
45	4.1.1 The 'ἄλληλοῦς ἡ ἀλλοτρίωσις' in Paul	
	4.1.2 Essence of Pauline Gospel	48
	4.1.3 Origin of Pauline Gospel	52
4.2	The Pauline Gospel and Jesus	54
	4.2.1 <i>Christianity or Paulianity?</i>	55
	4.2.2 Jesus in Paul's Gospel	58
4.3	Thematic Statement of the Pauline Gospel	63
	4.3.1 The Power of God	64
	4.3.2 The Salvation of Believers	65
	4.3.3 The Universality of the Gospel	67
	4.3.4 The Righteousness from God	67
Chapter 5	CONVERGENCE OF CHURCH, GOSPEL AND WORLD IN PAUL	70
5.1	Convergence of Church and Gospel in Paul	70
71	5.1.1 The Gospel as 'ἡ ἀλλοτρίωσις' of the Church	
	5.1.2 Gospel and Spirit in the Missiological Task of the Church	73
5.2	Convergence of Church and Society in Paul	74
	5.2.1 Not <i>Integration</i> but Missiological <i>Convergence</i>	74
	5.2.2 Church in <i>Society</i>	75
	5.2.3 Biblical Mandate for Engagement	77
5.3	Convergence of the Gospel and World in Paul	79
	5.3.1 The Gospel and Pluralist Societies	79
	5.3.2 Church as ' <i>Conduit</i> ' of the Gospel	80
	5.3.3 Gospel as Solution for Humanity's Indictment	81

5.4	The Social Responsibility of the Church to Engage and Penetrate the World with the Gospel	82
	Bibliography	85



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

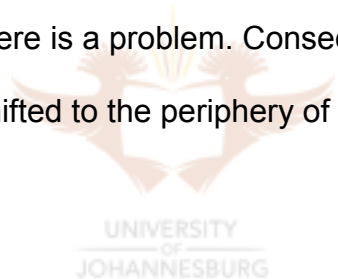
In view of the seeming marginalization and 'disengagement' of the church from broader society, it appears as though Christian belief and praxis is effecting an ever-diminishing impact on broader society. Indeed, in many traditionally 'Christian' countries descriptions like post-Christian and secular are more apt. Internationally [in many western countries that are predominantly 'Christian'], and in South Africa where national statistics still indicate a majority 'Christian' population, there seems to be little evidence of a true Christian culture.

Seemingly the *Church* is abandoning the secular and pluralist world and withdrawing to its own 'island' and lifting the drawbridge, while bemoaning the fact that its ecclesiastical voice is being declared redundant. In so doing, the *gospel* is stripped of its primacy and the 'vehicle' for engaging the world is withdrawn, even though this is done unknowingly. The missiological and engaging task of the *church* is thus consequently neglected or even abandoned.

In his article *Preaching the Gospel in Academy and Society*, Placher poses relevant questions; ". . . how should one try to introduce a passionate Christian concern in national life? . . . should [*one*] remain silent? (1992:7, italics added). The Pauline perspective indicates that the *gospel* transforms individuals and communities, even in pluralist and unbelieving communities,

and the church needs to recognize the transforming power of the *gospel* and utilize it to engage the unbelieving world.

However, in some contexts, it appears as though the *church* is discarding its penetrative and engaging role with contemporary society, thus functioning in isolation. This is a consequence of a very strong 'inward' focus that undermines the primacy of the *gospel*, which, if acknowledged, warrants a strong engaging 'outward' focus. Responding to a recent in depth survey on the role and influence of mainline churches in public life [in the United States], Mathewes posits that churches have to be 'players' in civil society, not just referees (2002: 558). He highlights that *churches* have not yet figured out how to do that and few have realized that there is a problem. Consequently, the missiological task of the Church is being shifted to the periphery of the Church's activities.



1.2 Meaning and Scope of Topic Title

The topic title of this dissertation is “Pauline Perspectives on the Church and its Gospel in a Socially penetrative and engaging Missiological context.” There will be four primary domains of study, namely:

- The Church
- The Social context of Paul's World
- The Gospel
- Convergence of Church, Gospel and World in Mission

These will be brought together to make a strong case for the centrality of the *gospel* in Mission, as evidenced in some of his own undisputed epistles (as in Rom.1:1; 2Cor. 4:1-6 and Gal.1:11:12, 15-16]. Dunn views Paul's statement concerning the *gospel* in *Rom. 1:16-17* as a thematic statement for the entire letter (1998: 340). Stuhlmacher is correct in asserting that Paul's apostolic office is inseparably connected to his *gospel* [*and missiological task*] (1994:22, italics added).

1.3 Method and Objective of the Topic Title

This research will employ the use of literary and exegetical methods in analyzing the selected relevant Pauline texts. However, our analysis of these selected texts will not be exhaustive, but will rather be applied implicitly for our discussion purposes.

Our theological analysis will mainly be drawn from the thirteen letters that comprise the Pauline corpus [not exclusively though], with a particular focus on some of his undisputed letters, especially Romans and 1 Corinthians. Our study will not cover the full spectrum of Pauline Ecclesiology and Soteriology exhaustively. Instead, these will only be covered to provide insight for understanding Pauline thought.

This research will hopefully contribute meaningfully towards the continuing debate on the relevance and credibility of the *gospel*, in the engaging task of the *church* with an increasingly secular and pluralist *world*. We will posit that the contemporary Church is not be withdrawn and closed in on itself, but ought

rather to be engaging and penetrating our 'World' while retaining its distinctive character.



CHAPTER 2

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF PAULINE PERSPECTIVES ON THE CHURCH

2.1 Introduction to the Church Concept

The church can be described as the most tangible aspect of Christianity, but simultaneously, it is also the most misunderstood. This misunderstanding is primarily because of the multiple contemporary usage of the term.

The contemporary understanding of the term *church* is commonly linked to high-steeped buildings, which are used as venues for corporate Christian worship. It is often used to refer to a particular Christian denomination e.g., Baptist Church; Presbyterian Church; Methodist Church *etc.* The most common contemporary usage of the term is mainly as a *building*, referring to a place of meeting for Christian worship. However, a biblical understanding of the term demands a clear distinction between a *building* and a group of *people* who are committed to a relationship with God.

According to the OT the covenant community of Israel is called ‘the people of God’ (cf Lev 26:12; Jer 31:33b). There is an evident prediction of an extension of this ‘people of God’ into NT times (Joel 2:28-29; Zec 2:11), which will be inclusive beyond particular nationalities. The Church is this new people of God. The descriptive terms that applied to Israel are now applicable to the Church – “I will be their God, and they will be my people” (2Cor 6:16b). It is thus people in relationship with God that constitutes the Church, not a physical building. The NT concept of church primarily refers to *people* who have been reconciled to God through the redemptive work of Jesus Christ (Rom 10:9, 13). Such

people acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and they commit themselves to living distinctively, as followers of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:9a). It is thus *people* that constitute a church and not merely a *building*.

The Church as a localized group of redeemed and believing people, can thus be regarded as one of the most fundamental visible realities of the Christian faith. These introductory notes on the 'church' concept will briefly examine '*Church*' in Paul, followed by brief discussions of *The Visible and Invisible Church* and *The Social Dimension of the Church*.

2.1.1 'Church' in Paul

Much has been written about the focus of Pauline ecclesiology and there are varied views regarding this focus. Beker refers to *Eschatology and Christology* as the two main constituents of Paul's ecclesial thought (1980:303), while Dunn draws our attention to the primacy of the frequent Pauline usage of $\kappa\epsilon\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ (church) and '*the church of God*' as an obvious starting point for Pauline ecclesiology (1998:537).¹ Considering Paul's Jewish heritage, the latter phrase probably originates from Israel's self-identity as *qahal Yahweh* or *qahal Israel* in a broader eschatological application.²

Yet another broadly held view is that Pauline ecclesiology is mainly based on the characteristic Pauline formula, $\kappa\epsilon\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\omega\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ (in Christ).³ This

¹ $\kappa\epsilon\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ is principally the Greek word for 'assembly'.

² Where *qahal* is principally the Hebrew form for 'assembly'.

³ So, e.g., A. Botma and A. Van Aarde . 1996. "Die formule $\kappa\epsilon\kappa\lambda\eta\sigma\iota\varsigma$ $\tau\omicron\upsilon$ $\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\omega\sigma\tau\omicron\varsigma$ as basis van die Pauliniese ekklesiologie" in *Hervormende Teologiese Studies* 32/1 (285-317).

formula, with all its implications and depth, is indeed a critical and definitive aspect in Pauline ecclesiology.

A case can also be made for the centrality of the *body of Christ* motif in Paul's ecclesial thought. Two of his undisputed letters indicate the prominence of this body motif (1Cor 12:12-27; Rom 12: 4-5).⁴

The above-mentioned foci, some of which we will discuss further at a later stage, all highlight essential aspects of Paul's ecclesial thought. None of these can be denied if we are to remain true to a Pauline perspective on the church.

2.1.2 Social Aspects of the *Visible* and *Invisible* Church

Descriptions of the church as *Visible* and *Invisible* mainly relate to its existential nature. Some scholars draw a distinction between the visible and invisible church, while others dispute such a distinction. According to Erickson this distinction appeared as early as Augustine and it was first articulated by Martin Luther and then incorporated into Calvin's theology as well (1985: 1043).

Luther used the distinction to deal with the evident discrepancies between the qualities of the church as described in Scripture, and the characteristics of the empirical church that he observed in his time. Erickson's understanding is that the distinction is not merely between the *local* and *universal* church but rather the extent to which the true church is to be identified with the present earthly institution of the church, but he also equates, though indirectly, some segment

⁴ Scholars are still divided as to whether this motif demands a *literal* or *metaphorical* interpretation.

of the visible church with some local collection of believers (1985:1044).⁵ This indicates a parallel association between *visible* and *local* on the one hand, and *invisible* and *universal* on the other. Other scholars, like H. Wayne House, are more assertive about this association (1992:116).⁶

The observable, empirical church in a given geographic locality thus becomes the *visible church*, while the world-wide community of redeemed believers, that is unable to assemble as a corporate body in the sense of a locally visible church, is generally referred to as the *invisible church*.

However, it would be wrong to assume that all affiliated individuals within a given local assembly are indeed authentic members of the church, in its true sense.⁷ Organizational affiliation, or even membership, within the structures of an empirical local believing community, should not be mistaken for incorporation into the *true church*. Authentic incorporation into the *church* is only effected through personal acceptance and experience of the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.

⁵ Even within a local group of believers it cannot be stated for sure who are the *true believers* and thus a component of the visible church. It is difficult, if not impossible, for any observer to accurately identify the true believers i.e., visible church, within any localized believing community.

⁶ H. Wayne House acknowledges the distinction but he also equates Local Church with the Visible church and Universal Church with the Invisible church directly, and he tabulates the distinction as follows:

Visible Church - Membership comprised of saved and lost; Only currently living people; Many local churches; Differing denominations; Part of the body of Christ; Differing types of government; Ministering the ordinances (sacraments)

Invisible Church - comprised of saved only; Both dead and living in Christ; Only one universal church; No single denomination; The entire body of Christ; Christ the only head; Ordinances fulfilled.

2.1.3 The Social Dimension of the Church

While we recognize that it is the *believing community* in any given locality that make-up the church, we also acknowledge that individual believers are the 'building blocks' of any given local church. These individuals continue to function as believers beyond the framework of the believing community. They simultaneously remain functional members in their familial and societal networks, and are therefore not divorced from their routine social activities within the broader society. It has to be emphasized that all of their lives, within broader society, is lived within the context of being new creations in Christ (1Cor 5:17). Their social interaction within the broader social environment is marked by a commitment to live in newness of life (Rom 6:4).

We thus recognize a definite social dimension of the localized believing community. This is evident in the continued active involvement of individual believers, and the corporate believing community, within the extended broader society. It is *this* aspect that brings about the external social dimension of the Church. The Church, with her new and alternative 'newness' of life, lives and displays her alternative lifestyle within the broader society. This is the active, practical witness of the church that ought to impact on the broader social environment. There is therefore two-fold social dimension of the Church', *within* the believing community, and *without* the believing community, i.e., in society at large.⁸

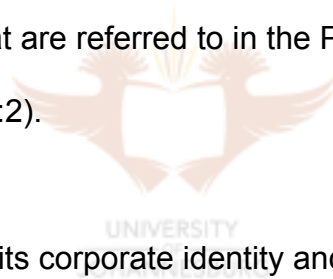
⁷ I.e., The redeemed and believing community that obeys and knows Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit and open to the control of the Holy Spirit.

⁸ The Pauline corpus reveals a very strong *internal social dimension* of the Church, which is initiated by the distinct nature of the believing community as people that are 'in Christ'. This is characterized by the

However, it has to be recognized that it is a community of believers that comprises the church, not an individual believer on his/her own. It should not be assumed that the presence of an individual believer is to be equated with the presence of the church.

It is the functional collective body of believers, whatever its numeric size may be, that constitutes 'church'. Heyns correctly asserts that "whenever a small group of believers meets in a home, it is described as an

$\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \text{H} \text{v} \text{e}$ " (1980:44). The numerical size is not a definitive factor. It need not be a large gathering of believers before it can be accepted as 'church'. Small gatherings, for the express purpose of communal worship or ministerial function, also constitute church. This is clearly evidenced in the 'household churches' that are referred to in the Pauline corpus (e.g., 1Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5; Phm 1:2).



The empirical church, in its corporate identity and through its individual members, is thus a socially active component within the broader society. While a clear distinction can be drawn between the church and secular society, the reality of the social dimension of the church within broader society – in its engaging role - demands our critical attention.

2.2 Pauline Understanding of $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \text{H} \text{v} \text{e}$

It is generally accepted that Pauline usage and understanding of

$\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \text{H} \text{v} \text{e}$ was informed by his Judaistic background. Many

usage of $\text{e} \bullet \bullet \text{m} \bullet \square \blacklozenge \text{X}$ and $\text{e} \bullet \bullet \text{m} \bullet \square \blacksquare$ which are generally translated as "one another" and "each other" e.g., 2Thes 1:3, Rom 12:5

notable Pauline scholars affirm this view. Barrett, for example, indicates that Paul's usage of the term has its origin in Old Testament Judaism (1994:121). Beker also traces the Pauline understanding and usage of $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\beta\alpha\tau\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ to terms in Judaism (1980:315). Dunn concurs with them in accepting the suggestion that Paul's usage was drawn directly from Israel's self-identity (1998:537).

Since Paul was familiar with the urban setting of his time, it can also be concluded that he was fully aware of the secular understanding of the term.

The Pauline understanding of $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\beta\alpha\tau\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ must thus be seen against two backgrounds, Old Testament Judaism and the Hellenistic Social setting of his time. We will therefore look at the Pauline understanding of $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\beta\alpha\tau\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$ under three categories: Old Testament tradition of the term; Hellenistic Social background of the term; and Pauline usage of the term.

2.2.1 Old Testament Tradition around $\mu\epsilon\tau\epsilon\beta\alpha\tau\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma$

There is no doubt about the strong impact of the Old Testament (OT) on Pauline usage and understanding of the term. As a devout adherent of Judaism, Paul was very familiar with the Old Testament.⁹ His self-description reveals that he was a 'Hebrew of Hebrews' and a Pharisee (Phil 3:5). This indicates that Paul would have had a good understanding of Israel's self-identity as the people of God. It is within this framework that two Hebrew terms,

edah and *qahal*, informed Paul's understanding of

מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים These two OT terms were very significant in Paul's understanding of מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים This is especially true for *qahal*.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, regularly translates *edah* by ἐκκλησία • θεοῦ • Ἰσραὴλ and *qahal* by

ἐκκλησία • θεοῦ • Ἰσραὴλ

ἐκκλησία • θεοῦ • Ἰσραὴλ is a compound noun (ἐκκλησία, together; and θεοῦ • Ἰσραὴλ, to bring) that denotes a 'bringing together' or an assembly of people. Roloff renders מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים as a national assembly; congregation; congregational assembly, church [*local*]; the Church (1990:410, *italics added*). There is thus a close similarity in the two Hebrew terms. Though there is evidence of a broader application, both refer to a community in relationship with God. The combined usage of *qahal Yahweh* and *qahal Israel* ('assembly of God' and 'assembly of Israel') are indicative of this relationship with God.

Qahal appears to be the more significant OT term with regard to its influence on Paul's understanding of מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים Its primacy is mainly derived from the fact that it is mostly rendered as מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים in the Septuagint (LXX). Dunn states that מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים occurs about 100 times in the LXX, where the underlying Hebrew term is principally *qahal*, 'assembly' (1998:1031). Beker is more precise in stating that *qahal* is rendered both as ἐκκλησία • θεοῦ • Ἰσραὴλ [35 times] and as מַעֲבָדִים • קָהָל • אֱלֹהִים [almost 70 times] in the LXX (1980:315). Dunn's generalisation in favour of *qahal* and

⁹ Paul wrote about his own devotion to Judaism in Phil 3:5-6 "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; a for legalistic righteousness, faultless."

Beker's observation of a dual interpretation of *qahal* indicates an interpretive overlapping that draws our attention to a measure of similarity between the two Hebrew terms (*qahal* and *edah*).

For our present discussion, the OT significance of *qahal* is evident in its application to an 'assembly of God's people' (It will be argued that this description is equally applicable to the New Testament church).

However, it must be noted that in the OT context, *qahal* is used to indicate a multiplicity of assemblies. These included both religious and general assemblies.¹⁰ *Qahal* was thus used broadly to indicate different kinds of assemblies. But our focus here is on the OT application to '*people in relationship with God*', just as the New Testament Church is in relationship with God. We concur with Heyns in his assertion that in a book like Leviticus the term signifies a community of people that are engaged in cultic acts (1980:38). These cultic acts were practiced as an expression of their relationship with God.

Without becoming engrossed in the finer distinctions between *qahal* and *edah*, we can safely conclude that both Hebrew terms refer to an assembly of people. Of greater relevance to us, is the application to an assembled community that is in relationship with God. Herein lies their (*qahal* and *edah*) significance and influence on Paul's ecclesial understanding.

¹⁰ Erickson draws our attention to various applications – an assembly with religious significance [e.g., De 9:10; 10:4; 23:1-3]; a more general assembly of the people [e.g. 1Ki 12:3]; an assembly of women [Jer 44:15] and of children [Ezr 10:1; Neh 8:2]; gathering of troops; and in Ezekiel, an assembling of nations other than Israel [Egypt, 17:17; Tyre, 27:27; Assyria, 32:22] (1985:1031).

2.2.2 Hellenistic Socio-Political Background of *ἐκκλησία*

We have already stated that the New Testament (NT) concept of *ἐκκλησία* must be understood in the context of its background in the OT and in Classical Greek. But there was certainly also a secular Hellenistic Socio-political usage. This is mainly evident in the socio-political experience of *πολιτῶν* citizens in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's time.

General meetings or gatherings of *πολιτῶν* inhabitants were also referred to as *ἐκκλησία*, 'assembly'. Schmidt correctly draws our attention to Acts 19:32,39¹¹

As evidence that the NT itself confirms this secular usage (1965:513). Here the term is used to describe a riotous assembly of Ephesian craftsmen and their workers.

Other scholars confirm this secular application of

ἐκκλησία Roloff, for example, writes that "In classical Greek as well as in Hellenistic literature, it became a technical expression for the assembly of the people, consisting of free men entitled to vote (1990:411).¹²

Schmidt concurs and elucidates the point further when he writes that in this early usage *ἐκκλησία* is the assembly of the *πῶς* in Athens and in most Greek *πόλεις* (1965:513).

¹¹ There are three occurrences of *ἐκκλησία* in Acts 19:32,39 and 41. These are all translated as 'assembly' in the *New International Version* translation.

¹² Schmidt is citing *CIG I, 739, No. 1567* in the *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 1.

¹³ J.H. Thayer renders *πῶς* as "the people, the mass of the people assembled in a public place". He also states that in classical Greek *πῶς* denotes the people as organized into a body politic (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Edinburgh, 1901).

¹⁴ *πόλεις* is the plural form of *πόλις*, thus denoting 'cities'.

Use of the term can also be traced back to Classical Greek. Erickson affirms this view in stating that $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\upsilon\lambda\eta$ is found as early as Herodotus, Thucyclides, Xenophon, Plato and Euripides [5th century BC onwards] (1995:1031). This indicates that even at this early stage the term was most probably used in a socio-political framework.

The most common secular use $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\upsilon\lambda\eta$ in the Greco- Roman world of Paul's time was thus in the socio-political context of a common 'gathering' or 'assembly' of citizens in a given $\pi\omicron\lambda\iota\tau\eta\varsigma$

2.2.3 Pauline Usage of $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\upsilon\lambda\eta$

Having shown that $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\upsilon\lambda\eta$ predates Paul and his contemporaries, we can now focus on Paul's usage and application of the term. A survey of the NT indicates that he used the term more than any other NT writer. Dunn asserts that of the 114 occurrences of $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\upsilon\lambda\eta$ in the NT, 62 of these are in the Pauline corpus [i.e., undisputed Pauline letters and deutero-Pauline letters], mostly in 1Cor (1998:537).¹⁵

We have already discussed the backgrounds that influenced Paul's understanding and adaptation of $\mu\epsilon\tau\alpha\beta\upsilon\lambda\eta$. This influence is particularly notable in his understanding of the Hebrew words *qahal* and *edah*, but also in the Greco-Roman socio-political usage of his time. These are all related to a 'gathering' or an assembling of people. In the Hebraic OT setting it

was ‘*Qahal Yahweh*’ and ‘*Qahal Israel*’ as an assembled company or community of people in relationship with God that had a bearing on Paul. In the socio-political setting of the Greco-Roman world of his time it was the general assembling of citizens in a given city or district. This central thought of an ‘assembled’ group of people with a common purpose remained pivotal in his NT adaptation of $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e} \text{e}$

Arguably the most significant influence on Paul came from his strong upbringing in Judaism as indicated in Phil 3:5-6. This, we can safely assume, resulted in a definite familiarity with *qahal Yahweh* and *qahal Israel*. We affirm Dunn’s suggestion that “since Paul speaks so often of ‘*the church of God*’ it is hard to doubt that he had in mind this distinctive background (1998:538).¹⁶ The significance of this particular influence on Paul’s usage of $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e} \text{e}$ is highlighted by Dunn’s reminder that the *LXX* translates the ‘*qahal Yahweh*’ with $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e} \text{e} \ \& \blacklozenge \square \text{h} \square \blacklozenge$, the ‘assembly of the Lord’ (1998:538).

Paul’s frequent usage of $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e} \text{e}$ in his letters is done in a new context and adaptation. He used the term to describe local social groupings of people that assembled as followers of Jesus Christ. He thus referred to these assemblies of believers in Jesus Christ as $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e} \text{e}$, which is rendered as ‘*church*’ in most of our English translations of the NT.

¹⁵ K.L. Schmidt notes that there are no occurrences of the term in Mark, Luke, John, 2 Tim., Titus, 1-2 Peter, 1-2 John and Jude (*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Volume III, Michigan, 1965, pg. 504*).

¹⁶ Dunn gives the following lists from Pauline letters:

‘The church of God’ – 1Cor 1:1;10:32; 11:22; 15:9; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:13

‘The churches of God’ – 1Cor 11:16; 1Thes 2:14; 2Thes 1:4

‘The church in God’ – 1Thes 1:1; 2Thes 1:1.

Since most of his ecclesial correspondence was addressed to followers of Jesus Christ in specific geographic locations, he linked

ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ (the church of God) with a particular city or region. Examples of this usage are in 1Cor 1:2 and 2Cor 1:1 where he employs an identical wording in the Greek for both verses -

ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν Κόρινθῳ (the church of God [existing] in Corinth).¹⁷

As Paul's missionary journeys¹⁸ unfolded into the extended Greco-Roman world of his time, new assemblies, comprised of new converts to 'the Way' (cf. Acts 9:2) of Jesus Christ, were established. Paul refers to these assemblies in the different cities, regions and private homes as

ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν οἴκῳ (the church of God [existing] in a house). He thus also used the term as equally applicable to small assemblies or companies of believers in specific homes of individual believers. Paul's usage does not indicate a lesser regard for small *house churches*. He viewed large *regional* churches and smaller *house* churches as being 'church' equally.

The common denominator in Paul's usage of ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ is undoubtedly assembled social groupings of people that he identified as followers of Christ. This new 'church of God' transcended all social, cultural and gender barriers.

¹⁷ See also 1Thes 1:1; 2Thes 2:1; Gal 1:2

¹⁸ See Acts 13 – Acts 21 for Luke's account of Paul's *First, Second* and *Third Missionary Journeys*

¹⁹ Examples of:

Reference to *Cities* : ...church in Corinth ... (1Cor 1:2; 2Cor 1:1)

Reference to *Regions*: ...churches in Galatia. (Gal 1:3); ...churches of Asia ... (1Cor 16:19)

Reference to *home/house*: ...the church that meets in your home (Phm 1:2); ...the church in her house (Col 4:15). Note that ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ Θεοῦ is rendered as 'church' in all these examples.

The criteria for inclusion in the $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{z} \text{H} \diamond \text{E}$ was participation 'in Christ'.²⁰ Unlike the OT context of *qahal Jahweh*, where 'people of God' were primarily identified with Israel as a nation, here the new criteria for inclusion in 'the church of God' is whether one is 'in Christ'. Their 'in Christ' status and inclusion in the church was effected by their faith in Jesus Christ (cf. 1Cor 1:2; 1Cor 1:30; Gal 3:16). This is equally applicable to both Jew and Gentile. On this new order of salvation, Paul was faced with the paradox of two opposite extremes - 'empirical Israel' and 'unbelieving Judaism' – from which Paul emerged with a new perspective which Schnackenburg correctly summarized as follows:

But from this dialectic, however, there emerges, when Paul is judging calmly without regard to the empirical Israel, his positive conception of the true people of God, which equally comprises believers from Israel and the gentiles and has become "in Christ" a totally new unity. (1965:79).

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This 'new unity' in the church introduced counter cultural social norms that is best described in Gal 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one *in Christ Jesus*".

²⁰ The $\aleph \epsilon \blacksquare \text{H} \square \text{H} \diamond \text{E}$ (in Christ) motif is very prominent in the Pauline corpus. It is arguably a key phrase in understanding Paul's Ecclesiological and Soteriological perspectives. The prominence of the phrase suggests that Paul viewed individual believers and the church from the perspective of their positional standing 'in Christ'. The phrase is thus a succinct and precise description of the outcome of faith in Jesus Christ.

Some have mistakenly exaggerated the 'mystical' value of this phrase.

There are 90 occurrences of this phrase, and its equivalents, in 88 verses of the NIV translation (*Logos Research Systems, Inc. 1996*). Most of these are translated 'in Christ', but the equivalent phrases 'in Christ Jesus' and 'in Jesus Christ' are included. The number increases substantially if the other equivalents that use the pronouns 'in him' and 'in whom' are included. Outside the Pauline corpus, the phrase only appears 3 times in the first letter of Peter [3:16; 5:10; and 5:14], thus indicating that it's a distinctly Pauline motif. Its numerical frequency affirms its importance in Pauline theology.

2.3 Pauline Ecclesiological Images with a Social Dimension

A wide range of metaphorical biblical images is used to describe the church. Paul Minear lists 32 'minor' images (1960: 28ff), and an additional list of 64 'major and decisive' images of the church (1960: 67ff).²¹

Pauline theological development and adaptation of the NT church concept employs a number of these images. As in Erickson, three of these images are often highlighted as significant Pauline images of the church – 'people of God'; 'Body of Christ'; and 'Temple of the Holy Spirit' (1995:1035). He also draws our attention to the *Trinitarian* nature of these three images.

Our focus will be on two of these major Pauline images of the church – '*people of God*' and '*body of Christ*'. The former indicates a continuity with the concept of 'Israel' as the people of God, and the latter is a uniquely Pauline metaphorical description of the church.

2.3.1 The People of God

We have already examined 'people of God' in its OT context. We have also indicated the continuity of the 'people of God' concept with the NT

✠. To be sure, In Paul's thought, the OT 'people of God' is perpetuated in ✠. We can thus read the Pauline ✠ as 'the people of God'.

²¹ For a discussion on the full range of images see Minear, "*Images of the Church in the New Testament*" 28-65 and 66-220.

Nowhere in the Pauline corpus is the exact phrase ‘*people of God*’, used directly.²² But there are indirect references to people ‘*of God*’ and ‘*my people*’ – e.g., 2Cor 6:16b ... For we are the temple *of the living God*. As God has said: “I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be *my people* “. Another example is Paul’s quote from Hosea in his letter to the Roman $\mu\epsilon\rho\&\&\bullet\mu\&\&\ast\&\&\&$ “I will call them ‘*my people*’ who are not my people...” (Rom 9:25)²³.

Implicit in ‘my people’ is a communal aspect, which denotes a social dimension. Pauline ecclesiology is always defined from a communal perspective, with no room for self-centered individualism. Heyns summarized this communal aspect accurately:

In the Church the believer does not stand alone, nor are those who belong to it merely a loosely knit group of people. Through his integration with others the individual finds safety and the group its collective fellowship. With their common origin and purpose united by the same ties of faith, hope, and love, the believers may rightly be summoned to accept one another as Christ has accepted them, and to do so, not [*merely*] to strengthen themselves, but to glorify God . . . (1980: 49).

Further evidence of this communal aspect of ‘the people of God’ in Paul’s letters is seen in the application of *plural* personal pronouns like *us*; *we*; and *you*. The Greek plural form $\diamond\odot\circ\mu\&\&\times$ (second person *you* plural) is particularly significant in its frequent usage. An example is Rom 1:8 –15 where there are at least 10 occurrences of this plural pronoun, indicating the corporate

²² Dunn confirms the limited use of the term in Paul and reminds us that references are in scriptural quotations or echoes – pg. 536, n. 14.

aspect of the Roman church who “... are among those who are called to belong to Jesus Christ” (Rom 1:6)²⁴ . An additional example is Rom 8:11 where the dwelling place of the Holy Spirit is indicated to be in the corporate Roman $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e}$ e “through his Spirit who lives *in you*” ($\aleph \epsilon \blacksquare \blacklozenge \odot \text{h} \text{h} \blacksquare$).

Paul thus employs a constant communal sense in most of *his* ecclesial correspondence. His $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e}$ is therefore inherently a social community where individuals are relationally bound to each other for mutual benefit.

2.3.2 The Body of Christ

It is generally accepted that this is arguably the most dominant ecclesiological image in Pauline theology. Dunn affirms the significance of this image when he states that “This [*the body of Christ*] in fact is the dominant theological image in Pauline ecclesiology” (1998:548). Schnackenburg also acknowledges the importance of this image when he writes “the Pauline concept of the Body of Christ . . . forcefully suggests itself as the most mature result of New Testament thinking about the Church” (1965:165). He also reminds us that this theological concept of the church is proper to Paul alone since ‘Body of Christ’ only appears in the Pauline letters (pg.84).

²³ See Rom 9:26 as well.

²⁴ This communal aspect is evident throughout *Romans* and other letters. In Paul’s first Corinthian letter the corporate $\aleph \epsilon \& \& \bullet \text{m} \cdot \text{h} \diamond \text{e}$ e is portrayed as the temple of God [$\aleph \epsilon \blacksquare \blacklozenge \odot \text{h} \text{h} \blacksquare$: in you *pl*] e 1Cor.6:19). In 2Cor 6:16 we read “For *we* are the temple of the living God . . .”

The exact term '*the body of Christ*' occurs in at least four verses within the extended Pauline corpus (Rom 7:4; 1Cor 10:16; 1Cor 12:27; and Eph 4:12).²⁵

Paul's conception of ἡ ἐκκλησία as 'the body of Christ' is expounded very particularly in 1Cor 12:12-27. Our intention here is not give an exegetical outline of the relevant passages, but rather to highlight the communal reality of the church. Not only is the 'unity' of the ἡ ἐκκλησία emphasized, but also the inter-dependence of individual believers, within a communal environment.

Much has been written about the church as 'the body of Christ' and the mystical aspects of participation in the body of Christ (*cf.* 1Cor 10:17) through the sacrament, but our focus will once again be on the social aspect of the believing community. Not only is the ἡ ἐκκλησία in relationship with Christ, but also in communal relationship with every believer in the local congregation. The 'body of Christ' image is vital in this regard. It portrays the mutual inter-dependence within the believing community. Here we are heavily indebted to Schnackenburg in that he links the communal aspect of the church to both 'the people of God' and 'the body of Christ' (1965:166ff). Even though 'the body of Christ' image is more prevalent than 'the people of God' image, Pauline thought nevertheless draws our attention to an implicit communal aspect in both images. Schnackenburg best summarizes this:

The Church in the New Testament remains God's people but it is a people of God newly constituted in Christ and in relation to Christ. Its new and unique form is most appropriately designated as Body of Christ; totality of membership, foundation and Goal, life and growth of the church can best be described on that basis. Yet it would be a dangerous

²⁵ There are other occurrences of the term in variant forms, e.g., Rom 12:5 – "So we, being many, are *one body in Christ* . . ." (*cf.* 1Cor 6:15-17; 10:17)

limitation if for that reason the concept of people of God were abandoned, and the idea of the Body of Christ were treated as absolute . . . The Church is the people of God as the Body of Christ, in a sense which is determined by, or at least grounded on, the idea of the people of God (1965:166).

The communal and social dimension of the church is inherent in the nature of the church as ‘the people of God’ and ‘the body of Christ’.

$\epsilon\pi\iota\ \&\&\bullet\ \text{m}\ \diamond\ \text{H}\ \diamond\ \text{C}$ as an assembly of people, and as a corporate collective of inter-dependant people ‘in Christ’ demands a communal and social dimension. We once again concur with Schnackenburg’s apt summary of this aspect.

The new life of the individual ‘in Christ’ (*cf.* 2Cor 5:17) is at the same time life in a new society founded “in Christ Jesus”. A separation of the individual and **social aspects** [*emphasis is my own*] is not possible; the personal union with Christ also involves incorporation in the collective Christian society (1965:167).

To be sure, we can conclude that there is a distinct and inherent social dimension in these two Pauline ecclesiological images of the $\text{M}\epsilon\pi\iota\ \&\&\bullet\ \text{m}\ \diamond\ \text{H}\ \diamond\ \text{C}$. The church as ‘people of God’ and as ‘the body of Christ’ is implicitly communal.

We will now examine the social context of Pauline churches.

CHAPTER 3

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF PAUL'S WORLD

We can hardly dispute the fact that Paul's ministry and ecclesiastical correspondence was undertaken under the specific cultural and social setting of the first century Greco-Roman world. To neglect the relevance of the social context of Paul's world would be to the detriment of our understanding of the Pauline corpus. We will do well to remember Fee's assertion that the Pauline letters are occasional documents of the first century, conditioned by the language and culture of the first century, which spoke to specific situations in the first century church (1993:70). It's therefore safe to assume that the social norms that had a significant impact on everyday social interaction in the first century Greco-Roman world, also had a marked impact on the Pauline Christians that were drawn from that society. Paul had to challenge some of these social norms in the light of the Christian community's new lifestyle and identity in Christ. The Pauline texts thus address congregations and individuals within the context of their first century social and cultural settings, hence the need for a brief insight into the social context of Paul's first century world.

3.1 Political and Linguistic Setting of Paul's World

Before we take a brief look at the social setting of Paul's first century Greco-Roman world, we need to look at his own place and standing in that world. We have already indicated that his strong Jewish heritage cannot be denied. Luke's historical account of Paul's final visit to Jerusalem reminds us of Paul's own statement regarding his Jewish heritage: "I am a Jew born in Tarsus . . . Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers . . ." (Acts 22:3). Luke also refers Paul's Roman citizenship (*cf.* Acts 22: 25, 27). Paul was thus a product of his Jewish heritage and the Greco-Roman world of his time.

At the time of Paul's missionary travels (*cf.* Acts 13 – 21) and the consequent establishment of Pauline communities, the entire civilized world around the Mediterranean region was under *Roman Empire* rule.²⁶

Rome's imperial conquests had wrestled political control of the Mediterranean region from the Greeks. However, to a large extent, cultural and linguistic influence still came from the Greeks. Tenney states it most succinctly: "So thoroughly did the vanquished Greeks conquer their victors culturally that Rome itself became a Greek-speaking city" (1961: 15).

It is therefore not surprising that the Pauline corpus and the rest of the NT was written in *Koine* Greek, and that the early church also had a Greek version of the OT, the *Septuagint*, at their disposal.

Three languages were dominant in the *Roman Empire* – Latin, Greek, and Aramaic. It is generally accepted that Greek was the common language of the empire. Tenney asserts that Latin was the language of the law courts and of

the literature of Rome; Greek was the cultural language of the empire and was the *lingua franca* of the majority of the populace from Rome eastward; and Aramaic was the predominant tongue of the Near East (1961:54).²⁷

Paul used Greek extensively in his ecclesiastical correspondence and in his verbal communication (*cf.* Acts 21:37).

Furthermore, Acts 22:1-2 indicates that Paul was fully conversant in Aramaic as well. We can also safely assume that being a Jew, Paul was very familiar with the Hebrew language, especially since he had studied under a doctor of the law and a member of the *Sanhedrin*, Gamaliel.²⁸

3.2 Social Values of Paul's World

In order to understand the social context of Paul's world, we need to take a brief look at the prevailing social values and norms that informed his audiences and the recipients of his letters. These social norms and values, which were related to social status and daily social interaction, were commonly recognized and acknowledged across Paul's first century Greco-Roman world.

We will briefly examine the *Social Norms* of this period; the value system of *honour and shame*; and the system of *Patron-Client relations*.

²⁶ Ben Witherington III suggests that Paul's Roman citizenship ensured him free access to the whole Mediterranean region and beyond, and sometimes protected him from local injustices and prejudices (*cf.* Acts 16:37).

²⁷ See also Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* 15-16.

While Meeks acknowledges the dominance of the Greek language as the dominant universal urban language of the Eastern Roman provinces, he reminds us that this was not the case far beyond the city walls. He suggests that when Christianity, in its new urban forms, eventually penetrated village cultures, the Greek documents had to be translated into the indigenous languages, including Aramaic.

²⁸ So J.D. Douglas in *New Bible Dictionary*, 395-396.

3.2.1 Social Norms

It is generally agreed that the first century Greco-Roman population was divided into two broad categories. Different terms are used to describe these categories. Some of the simplistic descriptions are the *haves* and *have-nots*; *rich* and *poor*; *aristocracy* and *commoners*; *powerful* and *powerless* etc.

Bunson states that members of the wealthy upper class of the Empire came to be known as *honestiores* while the lower class, mainly composed of the majority Plebeians (freeborn persons); freedpersons; and slaves, became known as the *humiliores* (1994:392).

Daily social interaction between these two distinct sectors of first century Greco-Roman society was controlled by legal barriers²⁹ and was undertaken with due cognizance of acknowledged societal norms and values, i.e., *honour and shame* and *patron-client relations*. There were blatant material and social disparities between the two broad categories of Greco-Roman society. The inequalities in wealth, social standing, and privilege between what we would call 'socio-economic categories' of the Greco-Roman world were immense.³⁰ Access to wealth, property, material goods and improved social status was considered to be very limited.

Individuals had fixed places within the two broad social categories in the Greco-Roman world, with very little or limited possibility for social mobility between the

²⁹ See Meeks 1983, 22. He states that movement across social boundaries by individuals from the *Lower Classes* drew criticism from the elite. This criticism was mainly because their birth, origin and legal rank forbade the crossing of established social boundaries by lower class individuals.

Also Bunson 1994, 391. He asserts that the wealthy *Upper Class* of the Empire were given special rights, especially in terms of the law.

³⁰ So Boardman, Griffin, and Murray 1988, 355. In *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Roman World*.

two social categories. This also meant limited possibilities for socio-economic self-improvement, a direct consequence of what has been described as a society of perceived *limited good*.³¹ Joubert describes so-called limited-good cultures as those where there is a constant shortage of all of life's necessities, such a wealth, health, food, money, honour, and land (2001: 59). Malina gives additional insight about this societal perception of limited good in his descriptive summary:

[F]or the most part (with exceptions) the people presented in the pages of the New Testament would see their existence as determined and limited by the natural and social resources of their village, their preindustrial city, their immediate area and world . . . Such socially limited and determined existence could be verified by experience and lead to the perception that all goods available to a person are, in fact, limited. Thus extensive areas of behaviour are patterned in such a way as to suggest to one and all that is in society as well as in nature- the total environment- all the desired things in life . . . literally all goods in life exist in finite, limited quantity and are always in short supply (2001: 89).

However, despite the difficulties, legal barriers and societal perceptions, many individuals from the lower class, i.e., slaves; freed persons; and freeborn persons had occasion to enjoy upward social mobility. Meeks confirms this limited movement between classes when he states that “. . . the most fundamental change of status for a person of the lower classes was that from slavery to freedom” and also that “. . . slaves worked hard to obtain their

³¹ So Malina 2001, 89.

manumission and often did” (1983: 20). In some cases downward movement between the classes was restricted by imperial legislation.³²

Despite the limited upward social mobility that we have referred to, the prevailing general trend was one of little movement between the predominant groups in the lower classes, and the aristocratic upper classes.³³

We can therefore conclude that a distinct sharp division between the two broad sectors of society characterized social norms of Paul’s first century world.

It was from these broad social categories that Pauline Christians were recruited, though not in any balanced form. Converts in the Pauline churches would thus have been predisposed to these social norms.



3.2.2 Honour and Shame Value System

Malina regards *honour and shame* as the pivotal value system of the first century Mediterranean world (2001: 27). Daily social interaction between individuals and families, in public and private life, was largely controlled by the recognized honour and shame value system.

Unlike the prevalent individualistic orientation of some contemporary societies, first century Mediterranean societies observed and adhered to a strong group and family orientation. There was thus an accepted sensitivity to familial and societal opinions of an individual’s social behaviour in daily social interaction.

People were therefore duly concerned about their individual

³² Corry, in *Scriptura* 1999:3, 185, quotes Stambaugh and Balch’s apt summary “Legal barriers emphasized the gulf between the orders. These were informal but real. Members of the senatorial aristocracy were forbidden to marry former slaves . . . “

³³ So Corry, in *Scriptura* 1999:3, 182.

and group honour rating, and their need for a sense of shame. Malina states that:

One can speak of honour and shame of both males and females specifically as they pertain to those areas of social life covering common humanity, notably, natural groupings in which males and females share a common collective honor: the family, village, city, and their collective reputation (2001: 49).

Honour was about the value of a person in his/her own eyes plus the acknowledgement of that value by the person's social group. The shameless person was one with an evident dishonourable reputation who displayed disregard for the accepted societal norms. The value system thus revolved around a person's own perception of his/her reputation and the validation of the person's reputation by society. We are once again indebted to Malina's concise summary regarding the social value of honour and shame:

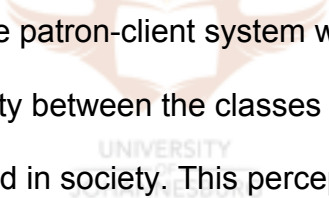
Honour assessments thus move from the inside (a person's claim) to the outside (public validation). Shame assessments move from the outside (public denial) to the inside (a person's recognition of the denial). To be shamed or get shamed, thus, is to be thwarted or obstructed in one's personal claim to worth or status, along with one's recognition of loss of status involved in this rejection (2001:50).

We can safely suggest that those who were drawn into the Pauline communities around the Mediterranean region were not only familiar with this prevalent value system of honour and shame, but were also active participants in the system. These values must be given due cognizance when we interpret New Testament accounts of social 'conflict' situations within the Pauline corpus.

3.2.3 Patron-Client Relationships

Patronage cannot be divorced from the value system of honour and shame. We suggest that the two can be likened to inseparable twins because in practice, they were interwoven into almost all daily social interactions. Both were pivotal in the social organization of the first century Greco-Roman world.

Prevailing perceptions of individual and group social status; power; and authority were informed by the patronage system and its corollary honour and shame value system.



The primary feature of the patron-client system was reciprocity.³⁴ We have already stated that mobility between the classes was minimal due to the perception of limited-good in society. This perception extended to land and other material goods. Those who had these 'limited goods' became patrons, and those who sought their [the patrons] favour became clients.

Patron-client relationships, across all aspects of social life, i.e., public and private; individual and group; family and community; household and institution – all social interactions - were controlled by the widespread social network of patron-client relations. Greco-Roman society was thus largely developed around a patron-client relational social structure. Dunn's summary gives us a descriptive view of how patronage was practiced:

³⁴ So Corry, in *Scriptura* 1999:3, 185.

In this relationship patron and client obligated themselves to each other, the patron providing financial resources, employment, protection, influences and so on, the client giving the patron his support, providing information and service, and acting on the patron's behalf [*and in his interest*]. The relationship was hierarchical, the patron providing access to resources (including power and influence) which otherwise would be unavailable to the client [*italics are my own*] (1997:51).

There were thus mutual obligations between patrons and clients. Joubert aptly refers to this mutuality as being between 'benefactors' and 'beneficiaries', which, in the context of the 'collection' for the Jerusalem church by the Corinthian church (2Cor 9:6-15), he describes as 'religious reciprocity' (1999:79). He proceeds to point out that religious reciprocity is inherent to and implied in the relationship between the respective role players, i.e., God, Paul, Jerusalem and the Pauline communities (1999:80). This is not far fetched in the light of pervasive patronage in the Greco-Roman world.

Reciprocal patronage thus permeated the entire Greco-Roman society, at all levels. Pauline congregations were therefore not left unaffected by the patronage system.

3.3 Social Stratification of Pauline Christians

While the public ministry of Jesus was mainly a *rural* ministry, Paul's ministry can be described as having been an *urban* ministry. His congregations and audiences were primarily from the towns and cities of the Greco-Roman world.

Since Paul's two elaborate letters to the Corinthian congregations gives us reasonable insight about them, our focus will be on the social setting of the Corinthian churches. While we acknowledge the distinctive characteristics of each Pauline urban community, we also venture to suggest that the basic elements of the Corinthian social setting would have been replicated in other Greco-Roman towns and cities. Regarding this aspect, Meeks notes that while the villages preserved their diversity, changes in the towns and cities were in the direction of a common Greco-Roman culture (1983:15). Hence our suggestion that the basic social strata of Corinth can generally be extended to the other cities as well.

3.3.1 Traditional view of Social Levels at Corinth

Our focus has been on the Social context of Paul's first century world. We now turn our attention to the *social strata* of individuals in the Pauline churches. Which social strata did they belong to?

The traditional view has been that they were from the lower social ranks of Greco-Roman society. Proponents of this view assert that the constituency of primitive Christianity [including Pauline Christianity] was exclusively drawn from the poor and marginalized of Greco-Roman society. This view was popularized by Deissmann's conclusion that the New Testament was a product that came from the *lower class* (1995:144). He concluded that: "The New Testament was not a product of the colourless refinement of an upper class that had nothing left to hope for . . . it was, humanly speaking, a product of the force that came

unimpaired, and strengthened by the Divine Presence, from the lower class [Math 11:25f; 1Cor 1:26-31] (1995:144). His thesis was not that primitive Christianity was predominantly composed of individuals from the lower class, but that it was *exclusively* from the lower social strata of Greco-Roman society.

3.3.2 New Social Perspectives on the Corinthian Church

More recent scholarship points to a new 'emerging consensus' regarding the social strata of first century Pauline congregations. Malherbe assessed the diverse viewpoints on alternatives to Deissmann's traditional view and consequently spearheaded the 'new emerging consensus'.³⁵

This new emerging view held that the social strata of the early Pauline congregations was not exclusively from the poor and marginalized, but rather reflected a broader cross section of first century Greco-Roman society. Malina suggests that there were four social categories in the first century Mediterranean world – the elites; the city non-elites; the villagers; and the lowest non-elites (2001:87).

New insights regarding the social level of first century Pauline congregations was best articulated, and promoted, by Gerd Theissen.³⁶ His thesis was that

³⁵ See Malherbe, *Social Aspects of Early Christianity* 1983, 77f.

³⁶ See *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* 1982.

This work elaborates on sociological insights regarding the social level of Corinthian congregations.

the primitive church was stratified like the larger Greco-Roman society. The new perspective is that the composition of the Pauline congregations at Corinth included individuals from both extremes of Greco-Roman society, i.e., the lower and the upper class.

The critical passage that substantiates this new insight is 1Cor 1:26-29.

Witherington suggests that the social level of the Pauline churches at Corinth usually begins and frequently ends with this critical passage (1995:22):

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things - and the things that are not - to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him (1Cor 1: 26-29).

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Theissen, like Deissmann, also draws his conclusions from this passage.

Deissmann focused on the *majority*, while Theissen's primary focus was on the *minority* in the same passage, the 'not many', i.e., "those who are wise, those who are powerful, and those who are of noble birth" (1982:70).

The traditional view has always focused on the majority that were 'not wise'; 'not powerful [influential]'; and 'not of noble birth' i.e., those that are from the lower social strata of Greco-Roman society. Theissen acknowledged this majority from the lower class within the Corinthian church, but he also

Though Theissen focussed on the social setting of Roman Corinth, we agree with his suggestion that his

acknowledged the unmistakable sociological significance, and presence, of the 'few' from the upper class. He concluded that "The majority of the members, who came from the lower classes, stand in contrast to a few influential members who came from the upper class (1982:69). This refutes Deissmann's traditional view of a constituency that was exclusively from the lower social strata.

Evidence from Paul's Corinthian letters and *Acts* indicates that there was a mixture of social levels in the Pauline congregations.³⁷ We concur with Meek's conclusion that the biblical evidence draws a "picture in which people of several social levels are brought together" (1983:72).³⁸

Theissen substantiated this new insight regarding social stratification within the Pauline congregations at Corinth, with a detailed sociological assessment of evidence. The evidence relates to statements about the community as a whole; statements about individual members of the congregation [regarding offices; houses; service rendered; and travelling]; and statements about divisions within the church (1982:70-99). In doing so, he may have over emphasized the two extremities of the social strata, especially the upper class, at the expense of those who were in between the two extremes of Greco-Roman society. Hence the justified critique from Meeks regarding Theissen's neglect of those that were in between. Meeks correctly states that biblical evidence indicates that the

observations could be extended to Pauline Christians in other Greco-Roman cities (1982:69).

³⁷ See n 38 below.

³⁸ See the survey of prosopographic evidence by Meeks 1983, 55-63. Also the social level summary of Corinthian Christians by Theissen, 1982, 94-96.

social levels in between were well represented by slaves³⁹; free artisans; small traders; and those that were sufficiently wealthy to provide accommodation and meeting places for the congregations (1982:73).

Opinion regarding the social stratification of Pauline Christianity has developed from the traditional view of Diessmann to the illuminating insight of Theissen, followed by the refinement of Meek's monumental work⁴⁰ on the subject. It is not within the scope of this paper to give a detailed analysis of all the internal and external evidence regarding the social stratification of Pauline Christianity. Our purpose here is to present a brief insight into the social strata of first century Pauline congregations. This insight should go a long way in giving due credence to the social setting of Pauline Christianity during the first century.

Our endeavour to understand the Pauline corpus should therefore not only be focussed on the theological and literary aspects, but the social setting as well. Paul was not indifferent about the social setting of his time, neither was he complacent about the social dynamic between his congregations and the social realities of their world. He addressed his first century Corinthian audiences with due regard for their felt tension of being *'in the Church'* and *'in the World'* simultaneously.

3.3.3 Common meal Problems in the Corinthian Church

New perspectives on the social setting of the Corinthian church sheds new light on the common meal conflicts in the Corinthian congregation. Paul deals with

³⁹ Meeks 1983, 73, indicates that urban slaves were not at the bottom of the social strata. The hired menial workers; dependent handworkers; the poorest of the poor; peasants; agricultural slaves; and hired agricultural day labourers were among the destitute of the first century Greco-Roman world

⁴⁰ *The First Urban Christians*, 1983

these conflicts in 1Cor 11:17ff. Traditionally, conflicts around common meal practice and the ordinance of the Lord's Supper has simply been attributed to mere difficulties between the rich and poor. But the conflicts were the consequence of a more complex situation. The complexities were the result of adherence to generally accepted and practiced social norms and values. These social norms and values, which were prevalent at the time, informed all social aspects of first century Greco – Roman society, including the common meal practice of the Corinthian congregation.

Our focus here is not a detailed analysis of how the common meal was practiced at the time, neither do we wish to broaden the debate on the distinction between the common meal and the Lord's Table. We merely wish to draw attention to the social realities that were relevant at the time of Paul's Corinthian correspondence. We once again hasten to acknowledge the theological significance of 1Cor 11:17ff, but we also recognize that we would lessen our understanding of Paul's instruction to the Corinthian congregation if we disregard the *social norms and values* of the time.

The social stratification within the Pauline community at Corinth, and the prevalence of Greco-Roman social norms, meant that many individuals from the different social strata within the Corinthian church would have expected a perpetuation of these social norms. Hence Theissen's assertion that "For some Corinthians it would not be at all strange to think that common meals, involving people of varied social status, should include food of varying quality" (1982:156). They had merely become accustomed to the social norms of their

day.⁴¹ The prevalence of the common meal in first century Roman Corinth suggests that most people would have been aware of the social norms regarding common meal practice.

Our suggestion is that these social norms were imported into the Pauline community at Corinth. Individuals from the upper social strata within the Corinthian congregation continued to draw distinctions between themselves and other Christians according to their social strata. These social strata distinctions were extended onto their common meal practice as a Christian community, resulting in many quarrels and conflicts. We thus concur with Theissen's suggestion that the possibility cannot be excluded that even in the theological quarrels, the inner social stratification is a factor which needs to be taken into consideration because various conflicts within the Corinthian church were socially conditioned (1982:146). Here we are heavily indebted to Theissen for his incisive elucidation on the social aspects of the Corinthian conflicts around the common meal:

The core of the problem was that the wealthier Christians made it plain to all just how much the rest were dependent on them, dependent on the generosity of those who were better off. Differences in menu are a relatively timeless symbol of status and wealth, and those not so well off came face to face with their own social inferiority at a most basic level. It is made plain to them that they stand on the lower rungs of the social ladder. This in turn elicits a feeling of rejection, which threatens the sense of community (1982:160).

⁴¹ So Corry, in *Scriptura* 1999:3, 186

The Corinthian congregations were therefore influenced by secular social norms of common meal practice, and Paul had to challenge these norms for the sake of continued unity within the *ekklesia*. Dunn correctly states that the conflicts within the Corinthian congregation were not caused by theological disagreement, but by social status and convention which were contrary to the more egalitarian ethos of Pauline Christianity (1997:79).

Importation of secular social norms into the Corinthian congregations elicited strong criticism from Paul. Since he was an 'urban missionary', and consequently well exposed to the social norms within first century Greco-Roman urban centers, he challenged and refuted these social norms as having no place in the *ekklesia*. This raised new social challenges which we shall now turn to.




3.3.4 New Social Challenges for the Corinthian Church

As stated previously, Pauline congregations were not immune to the social system and values of their time. They were familiar with, and active participants in the social setting of their time, and therefore imported this 'social baggage' into the Corinthian *ekklesia*. The paradox before them was the convergence of their social function as members of their broader social setting, and their communal function as members of the new

ekklesia. How were they to bring the two together? How were they to remain active participants in their familial and societal roles, and

community. In addressing the conflict situations, he was not indifferent about their '*sitz-im-leben*'. He applied theological truth about the unity of the $\aleph_{er\&\&\bullet\aleph\ast\ast\ast}$ in Christ, to the socially embedded conflicts of the Corinthian congregations.

Paul thus addressed the conflict situation in the Corinthian congregations with a keen awareness of the customary norms that were prevalent in their own social environment. He knew that their previous exposure to cultural and societal influence remained a factor after they were incorporated into the $\aleph_{er\&\&\bullet\aleph\ast\ast\ast}$  This is mainly because converted individuals are incorporated into the $\aleph_{er\&\&\bullet\aleph\ast\ast\ast}$ from the secular world, and the consequent expansion of the church can only be sustained if the church functions effectively within the context of this broader secular environment.

Paul was thus aware that ordinarily, converts to the Christian faith are incorporated into the $\aleph_{er\&\&\bullet\aleph\ast\ast\ast}$ from their specific social environment with its particular social norms and values. The $\aleph_{er\&\&\bullet\aleph\ast\ast\ast}$ was therefore not operating in an isolated 'social vacuum'. The Corinthian congregations, and other Pauline congregations, operated and functioned as $\aleph_{er\&\&\bullet\aleph\ast\ast\ast}$ within the social milieu of the broader Greco-Roman culture.

It is in the context of this social dimension that we now need to look at the Pauline gospel.



CHAPTER 4

PAULINE PERSPECTIVES ON THE GOSPEL

In order to maintain our particular focus in this paper, we will not attempt to give a full exegetical analysis of the Pauline gospel, neither will we elaborate extensively on its origin and relation to Judeo-Christian tradition. Instead, we will give a brief overview of the Pauline gospel, followed by a brief examination of Paul's own thematic statement about his gospel. Our intention here is to

highlight the significance of the Pauline gospel where the ጢጥር ዕውቀት functions and operates within its broader social environment.

4.1 The Pauline Gospel

Reference to the ‘Pauline gospel’ seems to imply Paul’s own gospel. The implication could be that he developed his own gospel, which stands opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. But this is definitely not the case, even though Paul sometimes refers to ሰጠኛ ጢጥር ዕውቀት ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳስ (Rom 2:16; 16:25), which is translated as ‘my gospel’.⁴² When Paul refers to ‘my gospel’, he is still pointing to the original gospel of Jesus Christ. It must be noted that in both the above references he establishes a clear link to Jesus Christ. In 16:25 he states very directly

ጢጥር ዕውቀት ሰጠኛ ጢጥር ዕውቀት ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳስ ጢጥር ዕውቀት ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳስ -according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ.

The Pauline usage of the genitive in phrases like

ጢጥር ዕውቀት ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳስ ሰጠኛ ጳጳስ (Rom 1:1; 15:16);
 ጢጥር ዕውቀት ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳስ ሰጠኛ ጳጳስ ጳጳስ 1Cor 9:12; 2Cor 2:12);
 and ጢጥር ዕውቀት ጊዮርጊስ ጳጳስ ሰጠኛ ጳጳስ (Rom 1:9) – gospel of God; gospel of Christ; and gospel of the Son - is an indication that Paul’s gospel was focused on the salvific work of God as revealed through Jesus

⁴² As in *New International Version* and *King James Version*

Christ. Friedrich correctly asserts that if Paul calls the Gospel his own, it is because Paul as an apostle, was entrusted with its declaration (1964:733). The term ‘Pauline gospel’ is thus all about the saving work of God through the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

4.1.1 The ἄγγελμα in Paul

The term ἄγγελμα means ‘good news’ or ‘glad tidings’ and is mostly translated as ‘gospel’ in the Pauline corpus. Strecker states that most of the 76 occurrences of ἄγγελμα in the NT are in the Pauline letters (1991:70). He goes on to state that there are 48 occurrences in the undisputed Pauline letters and 8 occurrences in the disputed letters.⁴³

Becker is more precise regarding statistical information in the disputed letters with his observation that there are 4 in Eph. and another 4 in the Pastoral letters (1976:110).

Pauline usage of the noun is complimented by a frequent usage of the cognate verb forms e.g., ἄγγελλω and ἄγγελλον.

This prevalence of the term in the Pauline letters has prompted Becker to conclude that there is good reason to believe that it was Paul who established the term ἄγγελμα in the vocabulary of the NT (1976:110).

⁴³ For a list of occurrences in the NT see J.D.G. Dunn , *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 164.

See also G. Strecker, “ἄγγελμα” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament 2* (1991) 72-73, for a full survey of ἄγγελμα in the Pauline letters.

⁴⁴ Again Strecker asserts that there are 21 occurrences in Paul , including 2 in Ephesians.

However, Becker also states that this does not mean Paul was the first to use the term because he often used the term in an absolute sense, without any additional explanation (1976:110f). This implies that there was probably a known pre-Pauline usage of the term.

While it is not our intention to focus on the pre-Pauline usage of

ἄγγελμα, we have to acknowledge that it is reasonable to conclude that there was an OT-Jewish⁴⁶ usage of the term and a secular⁴⁷ and religious Hellenistic usage. According to Becker it is not difficult to trace the connection between the religious use of the term ἄγγελμα in the Hellenistic world, especially in the imperial cult, and its use in the NT (1976:108). He also states that it was mainly in the imperial cult that

ἄγγελμα was used in the religious sense (1976:108).⁴⁸

Strecker concurs when he writes:

“the primary basis of NT use of ἄγγελμα is possibly to be found in the circle of the Hellenistic ruler cult. Although the NT does not explicitly distance itself from terminology of the Hellenistic ruler cult or the Roman Caesar cult, this separation is made in content for the singular ἄγγελμα distinguishes the Christ-event as a

So also Becker, “Gospel, Evangelize, Evangelist” in *The New International Dictionary of the New Testament Vol 2*, (1976) 110.

⁴⁵ Fitzmyer, (1998) 150, also indicates that there are 21 occurrences, with none in the Pastoral letters

⁴⁶ The term had been used in the Greek version of the OT, the *Septuagint* [LXX]. In 2 Sam 4:10 it is used to denote oral reporting of ‘good news’.

Again G. Strecker asserts that the secular usage of the equivalent Hebrew noun *besôrâh* was “compensation for a message of victory” (2 Sam 4:10; 18:22) or a “message of victory” (2 Sam 18:20; 25,27; 2 Kings 7:9)

⁴⁷ We should note that Paul also used the term generally regarding a ‘good news’ report in 1 Thes 3:6.

⁴⁸ On further pre-Pauline usage of ἄγγελμα see J.A. Fitzmyer, *To Advance the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 158.

Strecker concurs when he writes “the primary basis of NT use of ἄγγελμα is possibly to be found in the circle of the Hellenistic ruler cult”. He goes on to state that though the NT does not explicitly distance itself from terminology of the Hellenistic ruler cult or the Roman Caesar cult, this separation is made in context for the singular ἄγγελμα distinguishes the Christ-event as a unique eschatological fact from all the ἄγγελμα in the non-Christian world.

unique eschatological fact from all the ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ in the non-Christian world” (1991:71).

Paul’s frequent usage of both the *noun* and its cognate *verb* forms indicates the prominence and significance of the Gospel in Pauline theology.

ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ is thus a central aspect of Pauline theology and its frequent usage is therefore not merely cosmetic.

Paul’s usage in most of the ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ passages indicates a reference to the content of his gospel. This points us to the content of what he proclaimed in his missionary preaching.

He also often used ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ to indicate his preaching activity. An example of this usage is in 1 Thes 1:5 where he links

ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ with his actual proclamation activity that resulted in the formation of the Thessalonian ጢጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ. Becker correctly asserts that the action of proclamation is not only denoted by the verb

ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ as in 1Cor 1:17, but also by

ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ used as a noun of action (1976:111). This is also evident in 2Cor 8:18 where the noun is linked to the ‘action’ of proclaiming the gospel. Other examples of this usage are in Gal 2:7; Phil 4:3, 15; 1Cor 9:14b, 18b; 2Cor 2:12.

We can thus conclude that for Paul, ጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ◆ጭጮጮጢ is more than a mere technical term for his message to the world of his day. It denotes the content of his message and the actual proclamation of his message.

4.1.2 Essence of the Pauline Gospel

Unlike the synoptic authors and the author of the fourth gospel, where the focus is primarily on historical events in Jesus' earthly life and his teachings, Paul's writings do not focus on the historical details of Jesus' life and public ministry. Paul is primarily concerned with the soteriological effect of the Christ event and the eschatological impact of the death and resurrection of Jesus.



Jesus' death and resurrection are pivotal in the Pauline gospel. He does not dwell on the historical specifics of these events but rather magnifies the significance and effects of the atoning death and resurrection of Jesus.

But what was at the heart of the Pauline gospel? What was the content of his evangelistic proclamation? There is much to be said about the Pauline gospel but we will limit ourselves to the two broad essential components of Paul's gospel – the *atoning death* and *resurrection* of Jesus. Barrett asserts that the life, death and resurrection of Jesus were significant to Paul from an eschatological point of view, rather than the historical (1994:110). It must be noted that the Pauline gospel revolves around the death and resurrection of *Jesus Christ*. This is once again an indication of the centrality of Jesus in the Pauline gospel.

Evidence from the undisputed Pauline letters indicates that the Pauline gospel is 'the gospel of Christ' -


 (1Thes 3:2; 1Cor 9:12;

Rom15:19). This is so because in Pauline thought, the gospel is all about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We will now turn to these two events as seen through Paul's perspective.

A key passage in this regard is 1Cor 15:1-8. This is Paul's own statement regarding his  the content of his evangelistic proclamation. This passage also gives a clear indication of the focus in the Pauline gospel. Following Dunn, the following can be observed regarding the  of Paul's gospel as given in 1Cor 15:1-8 (1997:103):

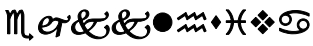
That Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures
and that he was buried
and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures
and that he appeared to Peter
and then to the Twelve
then he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers.

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The above breakdown of our key passage clearly draws our attention to the death and resurrection of Jesus. Both aspects are critical in the Pauline gospel. Barrett refers to the above passage as the content of Paul's proclamation, and describes the historical event of Jesus Christ [i.e., the death and resurrection of Jesus] as the ground of Christian existence (1994:103). The centrality of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is affirmed by Dunn's conclusion that the evidence of 1Cor 15:1-8 clearly indicates that the death and resurrection of Jesus was *at the heart* of the Pauline gospel (1997:103).

We misrepresent Paul if we merely emphasize the death of Jesus and devalue his resurrection. It may be true that much of Paul's preaching was primarily

the cross' or 'the message of the cross', i.e., the message of the death of Jesus.

For Paul the death of Jesus was much more than a mere historical event. It was God's intervening initiative for the salvation of humanity, i.e., God taking action to save humanity from sin. In the thematic statement of his letter to the  at Rome, Paul states that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes (Rom 1:16). This is followed by an equally important statement that in the gospel 'a righteousness of God is revealed' (Rom 1:17).

If Paul's seemingly interchangeable use of references to '*the gospel*' (1Cor 1:17) and '*the word of the cross*' (1Cor 1:18) is noted, and we then add the complimentary Pauline usage of '*the power of God*' in Rom 1:16 [the *power of God* for the salvation of everyone who believes] and 1Cor 1:18 [to those who are being saved it is the *power of God*]. We can then see that the gospel is all about the salvation of humanity through the atoning death of Jesus Christ on the cross.

As stated previously, in affirming the significance and centrality of Jesus' death in Pauline thought, we must guard against a devaluation of the resurrection of Jesus. Paul proclaimed a crucified Jesus who was 'raised on the third day according to the Scriptures' (1Cor 15: 4b). The gospel that Paul proclaimed to the Corinthians (cf 1Cor 15:1) included the resurrection of Jesus. To confirm the veracity of Jesus' resurrection from the dead, Paul draws our attention to the eyewitnesses of Jesus resurrection. He [Jesus] appeared to Peter; to the twelve; to more than five hundred brothers; to James; to all the apostles; and to

Paul (1Cor 15:5-8). This Pauline confirmation of eyewitnesses who saw the 'Risen Lord', not only verifies the resurrection but it also highlights the significance of Jesus' resurrection in the Pauline gospel. He made this clear when he wrote "if Christ has not been raised [i.e., resurrected], our preaching is useless" (1Cor 15:14).

It is thus clear that the relevance and significance of Jesus' resurrection should not be discounted. With the atoning death of Jesus, the resurrection is a critical part of the Pauline gospel. Fitzmyer has summarized Paul's perspective of the gospel succinctly:

He [Paul] views the gospel not merely as an abstract message of salvation or as a series of propositions about Christ . . . which human beings are expected to apprehend and give assent to, but rather as a salvific force unleashed by God himself in human history through the person, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, bringing with it effects that human beings can appropriate by faith in Him (1998:153).

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We can thus conclude that in Pauline thought, the death and resurrection of Jesus are pivotal, life changing components of the 'gospel of Christ'.

4.1.3 Origin of the Pauline Gospel

The *origin* of Paul's Gospel continues to be the subject of intense debate.

Some have even ventured to point at what seems to be an outright contradiction in Paul's own writing regarding the origin of his Gospel. This *seeming* contradiction is explained along the following lines. In 1Cor 15:3 Paul indicates that he was proclaiming a gospel that he had '*received*'. We can safely accept that this would have been from the 'tradition' before him because

Paul acknowledged an already established Christian tradition (cf. 1 Cor 11:23ff.; Rom 1:3-4). This is also confirmed by his usage of what is usually accepted as a pre-Pauline hymn in Phil 2:6-11.

However, in Gal 1:1 Paul affirms that he was not sent from men, or by man. He then states very directly “I did *not receive* it [the gospel] from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:12). This seems to stand in some tension to what he states to the Corinthians. On the one hand he appears to affirm reception of the gospel tradition before him, and on the other hand it appears as though he is denying any human involvement in the origin of his gospel.

It can't be denied that Paul acknowledged and accepted the 'traditions' before him. He cited fragments of these traditions and in some cases he alludes to them (cf. 1Cor 11:23ff; 15:1ff; 9:14; Phil 2:6-11; Rom 12:14). Furthermore, the definite link between 'tradition' and Paul's gospel is strengthened by Luke's affirmation that Paul spent several days with the disciples in Damascus after the revelation of Jesus Christ to him (Acts 9:19). It is very likely that some of the traditions were discussed during this period. The above Pauline references indicate that he did indeed '*receive*' the traditions before him and these certainly informed his gospel.

But what about the *seeming* contradiction? We suggest that what only seems to be a contradiction can only be resolved by Paul's own statement in Gal 1:15-17. “I did not consult any man” (v16b) refers to the proclamation of the 'revelation from Jesus Christ' (Gal 1:12) among the Gentiles (v16b). It is

regarding the revelation of the risen Jesus Christ and Paul's commission to the Gentiles that he did not consult with the apostles in Jerusalem (v17). We therefore concur with Dunn (1998:177f), that what Paul received and proclaimed was indeed the common Christian tradition – that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures . . . (1Cor 15:3-4). The decisive aspect of Paul's christophany was not only that he encountered God's power and glory in Jesus Christ as the risen and exalted 'Son of God', who was the $\blacklozenge \blacktriangledown \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge$ of the law as a way of salvation (Rom 10:4).⁴⁹ But rather that he was also commissioned to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. It is regarding this revelation and commission that Paul did not consult with any man.



The origin and authority of Paul's gospel comes from God the Father (Rom 1:1; 2Cor 11:7; 1Thes 2:2; 8, 9). This is indicated by the genitive

$\blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge$ His gospel was thus from God as revealed to him by $\blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge \blacklozenge$ from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11f).

4.2 The Pauline Gospel and Jesus

Many Christians accept Paul's status as an extraordinary follower of Jesus Christ as an undisputed reality. Yet biblical scholars continue to debate Paul's relationship to Jesus, with different views being propounded. Some hold to the

⁴⁹ So Stuhlmacher, "Pauline Gospel" in *The Gospel and the Gospels*, 154f (1991)

traditional view, which elevates Paul as arguably the most significant disciple and follower of Jesus Christ.⁵⁰ Others purport an opposing view, which not only questions the traditional view, but also suggests that Paul was a wayward disciple who paid little attention to the historical Jesus, and became the actual founder of his own of Christianity.⁵¹ The implication is that Paul's gospel was of his own making, with little regard for Jesus Christ and his teachings. In view of these opposing positions regarding Paul's connection to Jesus, we will now briefly consider whether Paul had indeed changed the gospel of Jesus Christ to start his own gospel.

4.2.1 Christianity or Paulianity?

The question before us is whether the Pauline gospel is an adulteration and a distortion of the Jesus tradition, making it a *different* gospel, or whether Jesus Christ is indeed at the heart of the Pauline gospel, i.e., in its content and proclamation. Hence our question, *Christianity or Paulianity ?*

Those who argue for *Paulianity* object to the general acceptance of Paul as a disciple that understood and continued the work of Jesus. He is rather viewed as one who initiated his own theological ideas, which were different to that of Jesus. Lüdemann states the following objection in support of this view:

Of decisive importance . . . is the fact that Paul's theology proper, with its theological, anthropological, and soteriological ideas, is in no way either

⁵⁰ So David Wenham in *Paul and Jesus-The true story*; and in *Paul-Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?*

⁵¹ So Gerd Lüdemann in *Paul-The Founder of Christianity*.

a recapitulation of Jesus' own preaching or a further development of it (2002: 193).

These objections are drawn from the apparent lack of direct historical references to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ in Paul's letters. One of the key arguments in this regard is the evident centrality of the '*Kingdom of God*' concept in Jesus' teaching and the seeming marginalisation thereof in Paul's letters. Lüdemann describes this as 'doctrinal dissonance' which demands critical scrutiny (2002:194), but he neglects to take cognizance of the fact that this 'doctrinal dissonance' is not uniquely a Pauline issue. He would have to ascribe it to other NT writers as well. This seeming marginalisation is therefore hardly a valid disqualification of Paul as one that adhered to the teachings of Jesus Christ since it is not unique to Paul.

A survey of the exact phrase '*Kingdom of God*' , in the *King James Version*, reveals 52 occurrences in the Synoptic Gospels. The irony is that while there is a definite prevalence of the phrase in the Synoptics, there are only 5 occurrences in Mathew of the exact phrase -

✠✠✠✠✠✠ ✠✠✠✠ ✠✠✠✠✠✠. ⁵² This must be contrasted against the 8 occurrences in the Pauline letters,⁵³ even though at least four of these references are used in the eschatological sense of '*inheriting the Kingdom of God*' (1 Cor 6:9,10; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 5:21). While we have to acknowledge

⁵² Of the 52 occurrences in the *King James Version*, 32 are in Luke; 15 in Mark; and only 5 Mathew. The 5 references in Mathew are 6:33; 12:28; 19:24; 21:31; and 21:43.

However, it must be pointed out that there are at least 32 references to

✠✠✠✠✠✠ ✠✠✠ ✠✠✠✠✠✠ (Kingdom of Heaven) in Mathew.

⁵³ Of the 8 '*Kingdom of God*' references in the Pauline corpus, 6 are in his undisputed letters (Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20; 1 Cor 6:9, 10; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 5:21), with the other 2 in Col 4:11 and 2 Thess 1:5.

Matthew's preference for the complimentary phrase '*Kingdom of Heaven*', the fact is that his references to the exact phrase '*Kingdom of God*' is comparable to that of Paul. Furthermore, in John's Gospel, there are only two occurrences of '*Kingdom of God*' (John 3:3 and 3:5). But as noted by du Rand, regarding the Apocalypse of John, the 46 occurrences of the term 'throne' emphasize the prominence of God's kingship and transcendency, even though not all the occurrences refer to God (1997:69). In the Petrine letters there are no references to the '*Kingdom of God*' concept. Yet it is hardly argued that either John or Peter disregarded an essential aspect of Jesus' teaching.⁵⁴

Our conclusion is therefore that as much as we consider John and Peter to have been true adherents to the teachings of Jesus, despite the apparent lack of emphasis on the '*Kingdom of God*', the same can be said of Paul. Initial impressions may suggest that Paul marginalized the '*Kingdom of God*' concept, but as already pointed out, the concept is in fact present in Paul's letters. Dunn states that some scholars suggest that Paul deliberately replaced Jesus' emphasis on the *Kingdom of God* with his own parallel emphasis on *righteousness* (1998:190).⁵⁵ Wenham broadens this replacement aspect in suggesting that Paul's infrequent use of Jesus' kingdom teaching has to do with Paul's particular context, in which he preferred to use other ways of conveying the gospel (1995:97).

⁵⁴ P. Stuhlmacher, *Gospel and the Gospels* (1991) 18, indicates that interestingly, all the apostolic and deuterio-apostolic letters are characterized by an absence of extensive quotations from the Jesus tradition. There are none in the letters of Peter, John and James.

⁵⁵ According to Dunn, this is due to the inverse ratio between *kingdom* and *righteousness* in Paul, when compared with usage in the Jesus tradition. More significantly Dunn notes that this inverse ratio is more striking in the usage of *Kingdom* and *Spirit* as seen in his tables (1998) 190-191:

	<i>Jesus-Synoptics</i>	<i>Pauline corpus</i>
Kingdom	105	14
Righteousness	7	57
Spirit	13	110+

Confirmation of Paul's awareness of the concept as a Jesus tradition, is strengthened by his parallel additional usage of '*Kingdom*' sayings as seen in 1Cor 15:24; 1Thes 2:12 and in the extended Pauline corpus (Eph 5:5; Col 1:13, 4:11; 2Thes 1:4, 5; 2Tim 4:1, 4:18).⁵⁶

Another argument that is used extensively by those who hold the view that Paul was a maverick disciple that started his own Christianity, draws our attention to the apparent lack of direct references to the life and broader traditions of Jesus in Paul's letters. But yet again, this argument does not warrant a conclusion that Paul started his own gospel, with scant regard for Jesus. We have to acknowledge that, comparatively, Paul used Jesus' teachings and sayings to a much lesser degree. Pauline scholars are generally in agreement on this. Furnish, for example, states that it is striking how little use Paul actually makes of Jesus' teachings (1993:40)⁵⁷ However, a closer reading of the Pauline letters reveals that it is very probable that there is much of Jesus in Paul's gospel.

4.2.2 Jesus in Paul's Gospel

The central issue here is whether Paul developed his gospel independent of the Jesus sayings and tradition, or whether these were given due cognizance in the content of his letters and proclamation. More importantly, the implications hinge on whether Paul's gospel was the formulation of one that was either a

⁵⁶ See D. Wenham, *Paul-Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity* (1995) 71-80 for an extensive discussion on the *Kingdom* sayings.

⁵⁷ P. Stuhlmacher, *The Gospel and the Gospels* (1991) 17-19, states that this infrequent direct usage of the Jesus tradition in Paul, is often viewed as Paul opting to ignore the Jesus tradition.

follower of Jesus, or a founder of Christianity. We will limit ourselves to the undisputed Pauline letters to see if there is indeed any evidence of Jesus' sayings and teachings in them, which would portray Paul as one who continued what Jesus had initiated. Such evidences would thus point to Paul as a *follower of Jesus*. These probable evidences might be in the form of allusions, echoes or even direct quotations from Jesus' teachings.

A superficial scan of the Pauline corpus may reveal many allusions and echoes of the Jesus tradition, but we need to be critical in order to filter out those that are most probable.⁵⁸ Wenham draws our attention to three clues that we need to take cognizance of in identifying allusions and echoes with a high probability of Pauline connection to Jesus (1995:26).

Firstly, a good clue is where there is a *specific indication* that he is drawing on Jesus' words. A good example is 1 Cor 7:10, where Paul states specifically "To the married I give this command . . . not I but the Lord . . ." Even though this is not a direct quotation, he is indicating that his source is Jesus and this a significant indicator of Pauline connection to Jesus.

The second clue refers to instances where there are *verbal and formal similarities* between a Jesus tradition and Pauline thought. This can be seen in Paul's discussion on divorce in 1 Cor 7:10-11, where he is possibly alluding to Jesus' sayings on divorce as recorded in Math 19:3-9 and Mark 10:2-12. There is once again a high probability of connections to the Jesus tradition here.

A third clue in determining highly probable allusions or echoes of the Jesus tradition in Paul is *similarity of thought* that reveals Paul's dependence on

⁵⁸ D. Wenham states that allusion-spotting is a highly subjective business. In referring to parallels between Jesus and Paul he warns against *parallelomania* and *parallelophobia* (1995:25).

Jesus. Once again 1 Cor 7 is a good example of how Paul's views on marriage and divorce show similarity to the Jesus tradition. Another example is the thought that a labourer of the gospel is worthy of his hire (Luke 10:7; 1 Cor 9:14). These three clues are indeed very useful in identifying highly probable allusions and echoes of Jesus in Paul.⁵⁹

Furnish reminds us that there are only three citations in the undisputed Pauline letters where '*the Lord*' is directly identified as the source of words which are also attributed to the Jesus tradition in the Synoptics – 1 Cor 7:10, 9:14, and 11:23-25 (1993: 40). Superficially, this may be viewed as confirmation that Paul had very limited insight about the Jesus tradition, but a closer examination will reveal the opposite. As we shall see, there are numerous highly probable allusions and echoes of the Jesus tradition in Paul. Despite the lack of absolute certainty, this points to an awareness of, and a developed insight about the Jesus tradition. Wenham suggests that when the different pieces of evidence are taken together, it adds weight to the case for seeing particular parallels between Paul and Jesus as Pauline echoes of Jesus traditions (1995:385).

We have already mentioned the crucial evidence of Paul's explicit citation from the Jesus tradition on three occasions – 1 Cor 7: 10-11; 9:14 and 11:23-25 – notwithstanding the fact that it is a rather limited usage of direct attribution to Jesus. However, the evidence of Jesus in the Pauline gospel is strengthened by *all*⁶⁰ the possible allusions and echoes to the Jesus tradition. However, our purpose here is not to give a complete survey and discussion of all the possible

⁵⁹ See D. Wenham (1995) 26-31, for a broader elaboration of these clues.

⁶⁰ Here we include all the possible connections to Jesus. Following Wenham, *Paul* (381-384), this includes the 'highly probable'; the 'probable'; and the 'plausible'.

allusions and echoes of the Jesus tradition in Paul's letters. Instead, we will merely draw attention to some parallel passages that enjoy reasonable recognition as evidence of Paul's dependence on the Jesus tradition. Dunn suggests that there are eight or nine echoes in Paul's paraenesis that enjoy widespread recognition as echoes of the Jesus tradition (1998:650). The following is a list of parallel passages⁶¹ in Paul and the Synoptics, which are generally cited as possible evidence linking Paul's gospel to the Jesus tradition:

Rom 12:14 Bless those who persecute you . . .

Luke 6:28 Bless those who persecute you . . .

Math 5:44 . . . pray for those who persecute you.

Rom 12:20 If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

Math 5:44; Luke 6:27 . . . love your enemies . . .

Rom 13:8-10 . . . love one another . . . love your neighbour as yourself .

..

Math 22:39; Mark 12:31 . . . love your neighbour as yourself.

Rom 14:14 . . . I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself . . .

Mark 7:15 Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him . . .

Rom 15:1-3 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good . . . For even Christ did not please himself . . .

Mark 10: 42-45 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them . . .

⁶¹ This is certainly not an exhaustive list.

See V.P. Furnish, *Jesus According to Paul*, 40-65, for a more elaborate discussion on the 'The sayings of Jesus in Paul'.

Also J.D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (189-195), on 'Echoes of Jesus tradition in Paul'.

Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave to all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve.

1Cor 10:27 . . . eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience.

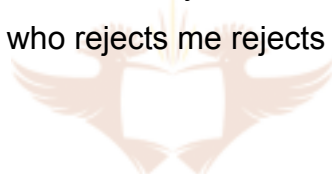
Luke 10:8 . . . eat what is set before you.

1Cor 13:2 . . . if I have faith that can move mountains . . .

Math 19:20 . . . if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move . . .

1Thes 4:8 . . . he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God . . .

Luke 10:16 "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me."



1Thes 5:2 For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Math 24:43 If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch . . .

Mark 9:50 . . . be at peace with each other.

1Thes 5:13 . . . Live at peace with each other.

These parallel passages between Paul and the Jesus tradition, points to Paul's dependence on the Jesus tradition. We can thus safely accept that Paul's gospel was developed from the common Jesus tradition. Jesus was thus at the core of the Pauline gospel, despite the fact that Paul's focus was on the effect of Jesus' death and resurrection and not on the historical details of Jesus' earthly life. Lüdemann states that "Paul never called himself a disciple or a

follower of Jesus, nor does he claim to follow the example or the teaching of Jesus in the same way . . .” (2002:193). But he fails to recognize that Paul himself appealed to the Corinthian church to be “. . . followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1Cor 11:1; KJV).⁶² We can safely conclude that Jesus was very central to the Pauline gospel, hence the parallel texts between Paul’s letters and the synoptics.

Despite the meager usage explicit quotations from the Jesus tradition, Paul’s gospel was not of his own making. It originates from Jesus, and it revolves around Jesus and the soteriological impact of his death and resurrection. The Pauline gospel is indeed

◆◻❖ 𐤀𐤃𐤅𐤆𐤇𐤈𐤉𐤐𐤑𐤒𐤓𐤔𐤕𐤖𐤗𐤘𐤙𐤚𐤛𐤜𐤝𐤞𐤟𐤠𐤡𐤢𐤣𐤤𐤥𐤦𐤧𐤨𐤩𐤰𐤱𐤲𐤳𐤴𐤵𐤶𐤷𐤸𐤹𐤺𐤻𐤼𐤽𐤾𐤿𐥀𐥁𐥂𐥃𐥄𐥅𐥆𐥇𐥈𐥉𐥐𐥑𐥒𐥓𐥔𐥕𐥖𐥗𐥘𐥙𐥚𐥛𐥜𐥝𐥞𐥟𐥠𐥡𐥢𐥣𐥤𐥥𐥦𐥧𐥨𐥩𐥰𐥱𐥲𐥳𐥴𐥵𐥶𐥷𐥸𐥹𐥺𐥻𐥼𐥽𐥾𐥿𐧀𐧁𐧂𐧃𐧄𐧅𐧆𐧇𐧈𐧉𐧐𐧑𐧒𐧓𐧔𐧕𐧖𐧗𐧘𐧙𐧚𐧛𐧜𐧝𐧞𐧟𐧠𐧡𐧢𐧣𐧤𐧥𐧦𐧧𐧨𐧩𐧰𐧱𐧲𐧳𐧴𐧵𐧶𐧷𐧸𐧹𐧺𐧻𐧼𐧽𐧾𐧿𐨀𐨁𐨂𐨃𐨄𐨅𐨆𐨇𐨈𐨉𐨐𐨑𐨒𐨓𐨔𐨕𐨖𐨗𐨘𐨙𐨚𐨛𐨜𐨝𐨞𐨟𐨠𐨡𐨢𐨣𐨤𐨥𐨦𐨧𐨨𐨩𐨰𐨱𐨲𐨳𐨴𐨵𐨶𐨷𐨹𐨺𐨸𐨻𐨼𐨽𐨾𐨿𐩀𐩁𐩂𐩃𐩄𐩅𐩆𐩇𐩈𐩉𐩐𐩑𐩒𐩓𐩔𐩕𐩖𐩗𐩘𐩙𐩚𐩛𐩜𐩝𐩞𐩟𐩠𐩡𐩢𐩣𐩤𐩥𐩦𐩧𐩨𐩩𐩰𐩱𐩲𐩳𐩴𐩵𐩶𐩷𐩸𐩹𐩺𐩻𐩼𐩽𐩾𐩿𐪀𐪁𐪂𐪃𐪄𐪅𐪆𐪇𐪈𐪉𐪐𐪑𐪒𐪓𐪔𐪕𐪖𐪗𐪘𐪙𐪚𐪛𐪜𐪝𐪞𐪟𐪠𐪡𐪢𐪣𐪤𐪥𐪦𐪧𐪨𐪩𐪰𐪱𐪲𐪳𐪴𐪵𐪶𐪷𐪸𐪹𐪺𐪻𐪼𐪽𐪾𐪿𐫀𐫁𐫂𐫃𐫄𐫅𐫆𐫇𐫈𐫉𐫐𐫑𐫒𐫓𐫔𐫕𐫖𐫗𐫘𐫙𐫚𐫛𐫜𐫝𐫞𐫟𐫠𐫡𐫢𐫣𐫤𐫦𐫥𐫧𐫨𐫩𐫰𐫱𐫲𐫳𐫴𐫵𐫶𐫷𐫸𐫹𐫺𐫻𐫼𐫽𐫾𐫿 - the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 4:4, 9:13; Phil 1:27; 1Thes 3:2). Regarding the distinction between ‘Jesus’ and ‘Christ’, this writer concurs with Dunn’s acknowledgement that ‘Christ’ has become more or less equivalent to a proper name in Paul’s letters (1998:196). The ‘gospel of Christ’ is therefore also ‘the gospel of Jesus’.

4.3 Thematic Statement of the Pauline Gospel

Any discussion on Pauline perspectives of the gospel must take cognizance of Paul’s statement regarding the gospel:

I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith” (Rom 1:16-17).

⁶² For Paul there seems to be no distinction between ‘the Lord Jesus’; Jesus Christ; and Christ Jesus.

These two verses are very important for a proper understanding of Paul's perspective of the gospel. The significance of this brief Pauline statement outweighs its brevity by far. Confirming the importance of these two verses, Morris suggests that it is not wrong to see in this statement a summary of Paul's theology as a whole (1988:66). Dunn refers to different foci in highlighting the importance of this statement - a thematic statement about Justification (1998:342); ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ as one of the keywords in this thematic statement (1998:165); 'righteousness of God', a phrase from the statement, is seen as a definition of the Pauline gospel (1998:340). Against this, other scholars view the whole of Romans as a statement of Paul's gospel.⁶³ Whether this thematic statement is seen as the theme for Paul's theology or as the theme for Romans in its entirety, we have to acknowledge that it encapsulates a broad perspective of the Pauline gospel. This includes various aspects of the Pauline gospel – as the *power of God*; as being *unto salvation*; the *universality* thereof; as revealing a *righteousness from God*; and the centrality of *faith* in it. We thus concur with Carson, Moo and Morris, that it is ἡ δικαιοσύνη τοῦ θεοῦ which has pride of place in the thematic statement of Rom 1:16-17 (1988:254). We will now look at the various aspects of the gospel from this thematic statement where 'the gospel' has pride of place.

4.3.1 The Power of God

⁶³ So Carson, Moo and Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (254).

The 'power of God' is a familiar feature in some of Paul's letters. Dunn asserts that 'for it is the power of God' is a regular concept⁶⁴ in Paul (1988:39). More significantly though, is the convergence of *gospel* and *power* in Paul as pointed out by Morris (1988:67).⁶⁵

Paul viewed the gospel as much more than mere words. The power of his gospel message was not embedded in his oratory skills; instead, he experienced and presented the gospel as the 'power of God'. He states this explicitly, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, so that your faith might not rest on men's wisdom but on *God's power*" (1 Cor 2:4-5). His preaching and his message revolved around 'Jesus Christ and him crucified' (cf. 1 Cor 2:2). He elaborates further on this gospel, which is the power of God, when he refers to 'the gospel I preached to you' (1 Cor 15:1) . . . that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:4). It is this gospel which is now described thematically as the 'power of God'. For Paul, it was essential that the proclamation of this gospel be accompanied and effected by the power of God. This ensured that ' . . . faith might not rest on men's wisdom, but on *God's power*' (1 Cor 2:5). It is thus the power of God, which is demonstrably at work where the gospel is proclaimed and received, effecting a visible impact and transformation in people. An example of the marked effect of this 'power of God' is the Thessalonians who ' . . . turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God' (1 Thes 5:9).

⁶⁴ As seen in Rom 1:20; 9:17; 1 Cor 1:18, 24; 2:5; 6:14; 2 Cor 4:7; 6:7; and 13:4

⁶⁵ This convergence is evident in 1 Thes 1:5; Rom 15:19 where Paul refers to 'power of the Spirit'; 1 Cor 1:18 where 'the message' is most likely synonymous with 'the gospel'; 1 Cor 2:4 where Paul's message and preaching can be equated with the gospel. Here Paul also refers to "the Spirit's power"

4.3.2 The Salvation of Believers

The objective of this gospel is but one - $\mu\lambda\eta\sigma\epsilon\varsigma$ $\diamond\diamond\text{⋈}\square\text{⋈}\diamond\text{⋈}\blacksquare$, 'unto salvation'; 'towards salvation'. This is rendered as 'for the salvation of . . . ' in the NIV.

We can thus safely deduce that Paul's perspective of the gospel is that it is the power of God for salvation, i.e., rescue from the predicament of our indictment as a result of sin, and restoration to a right standing before God.

Paul's readers would have been familiar this term as it had an extensive secular and theological usage, which generally referred to any kind of situation in which a person is delivered from some kind of danger or peril and restored to wholeness. In the OT the verb 'save' expresses particularly God's actions in delivering his people⁶⁶, but it is also used in the broader sense of the sum total of the effects of God's goodness on his people (cf. Ps. 53:6).⁶⁷

The 'rescue' or 'deliverance' from the consequences and effect of sin, and a restoration to wholeness before God, with the bestowal of all his goodness, is what Paul has in mind with the imagery of 'unto salvation' (cf. Rom 5:9-10; 1 Cor 3:15; Phil 2:12-13; 1Thes 5:9). This is effected in all that believe.

The gospel, i.e., that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners (Rom 5:8), with all its corollary components, effects our salvation through the power of God. Acknowledgment and acceptance of 'Jesus as Lord' effects salvation (Rom 10:9; 1Cor 1:21).

⁶⁶ Examples of this divine saving action in the OT are evident in the Exodus and the return from Exile

⁶⁷ So Marshall, in *New Dictionary of Theology*, "Salvation" (610).

For Paul there is a strong eschatological aspect to this salvation, in that its culmination is in the future (Rom 13:11; 1Cor 5:5) thus engendering hope for the future. But there is also an 'already' aspect to this salvation, which is experienced in the here and now (1Cor 1:18; 2Cor 2:15).

4.3.3 The Universality of the Gospel

Paul refers to two groups in his thematic statement, the Jew and the Greek. These references to Jew and Greek, and also Greek and non-Greek (Rom 1:14), are inclusive of everyone. It is especially the combination of Jew and Greek (Gentile) that features often in Paul (e.g., Rom 2:9-10; 3:9, 29). Usage of this combination denotes *everyone*.

The universality of the gospel is evident in the fact that Paul is not limited to his roots in Judaism. In using the combination of Jew and Greek he extends the gospel beyond cultural and national boundaries. However, he takes cognizance of the Jew's historical priority in God's salvation plan, hence his reference to 'first for the Jew'.⁶⁸

Here the importance of $\square\textcircled{S}\blacksquare\blacklozenge\text{X}\equiv$ should not be underestimated. It denotes a transcendence beyond all social; cultural; national and sociological boundaries (cf. Gal 3:28; Rom 10:12).

All that are saved, all who believe, do so through the same gospel of Christ.

While this gospel is available for *all* to receive, it is only those *who believe* to whom salvation will be appropriated.

⁶⁸ The priority of Jews in God's salvation purpose is elaborated extensively in Romans 9-11

4.3.4 The Righteousness of God

Paul goes on to state that ‘. . . in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed’ (Rom 1:17 NIV). This is rendered as ‘. . . therein is the righteousness of God is revealed . . .’ in the KJV. The phrase ‘righteousness of God’ is one of the key aspects in the ongoing debate around the new perspective on Paul.⁶⁹ In this new perspective ‘the righteousness of God’ is interpreted in the context of his covenantal relationship with his people.⁷⁰ This is equally applied to Israel and the Church as the new people of God.

The difficulty with this new perspective is that it has not been very convincing in terms of the strong ‘adversarial’ tension between *justification by faith* and *justification by works*. If the new perspective is indeed Paul’s understanding of ‘the righteousness of God’, why is the tension between righteousness through the law, and righteousness through justification by faith addressed in such strong polemical terms in Paul?

It would seem Paul was aware of a righteousness that was not from God.

Judging by his own zealousness for the law (*cf.* Phil 3:4-6), he knew of a self-righteousness obtained through works of the law. But he regarded this previous profit as loss for the sake of Christ (*cf.* Phil 3:8). He states very directly why he now disregarded his previous self-righteousness – “and be found in him, not

⁶⁹ The debate has intensified since the monograph of E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (1977). Sanders challenged the traditional understanding of Judaism, which has resulted in a strong demarcation between ‘justification by faith’ and its antithesis ‘justification by works of the law’ as evidenced in the Pauline letters. He refers to ‘covenantal nomism’ which he posits as the relational response of obedience or adherence to the law for those who are in covenant. His thesis is that second temple Judaism was not about obeying the law in order to obtain justification, or to be accepted into a covenant relationship with God, it was rather about adherence to the law in order to maintain one’s status in the covenant.

⁷⁰ So also Dunn, (1998), especially “A new perspective on Paul” (335-340).

having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ – the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith (Phil 3:9).

In Rom 10:3 he once again denounces the self-righteousness of Israel – ‘ they [Israelites] did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God’s righteousness’ (cf. Rom 3:28). He then concludes that ‘Christ is the $\diamond \mathcal{M} \blacklozenge \bullet \square \times$ of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes (Rom 10:4).

This is most likely the righteousness that he is referring to in his thematic statement. It is a righteousness that abandons all attempts towards a self-righteousness that seeks to win God’s favour. Instead, God’s favour is sought through justification *by faith*. Faith in God, through the atoning death of Jesus Christ, is *the* criterion for justification that imputes a righteousness from God – ‘This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. . . (Rom 3:22; cf. 3:26).

These thematic aspects of the Pauline gospel are indispensable for a proper understanding of Paul’s perspective of the Gospel. We will now consider the application of this gospel in the convergence of missiological convergence of the Church and our contemporary world.

CHAPTER 5

CONVERGENCE OF CHURCH, GOSPEL AND WORLD IN PAUL

We have already examined some Pauline perspectives on *Church* and *Gospel*, and the social context of *Paul's world*, we shall now turn to the convergence of these three aspects in Pauline thought. This convergence relates to how *Church*, *Gospel* and *World* ought to be brought together to form a platform for the missiologically engaging and penetrative task of the contemporary church. Of critical importance here, is the realization that in Pauline thought on the Church and the Gospel, he moved beyond a mere presentation of theological propositions, to individual and corporate praxis that involved him, and his communities, in a socially penetrative and engaging missiological task. We will argue that despite Paul's portrayal of the Church as the distinct people of God, they are not to be isolationists and withdrawn from the surrounding social world. Instead, in the convergence of Church, Gospel and World (Society), the Church is to function as the missiological agent that engages the social world through the 'instrument' of the Gospel. We will therefore examine Convergence of *Church and Gospel*; *Church and Society*; and *Gospel and Society* in Paul.

5.1 Convergence of Church and Gospel in Paul

The close affinity between Church and Gospel can hardly be disputed. This is so because the Church is birthed and grown as individuals turn to God through acceptance of the Gospel. We acknowledge the distinct and unique nature of the Church as the *'Body of Christ'* (1Cor 12:27; Eph 4:12), and the Gospel as *'the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ'* i.e., good news of salvation in and through Jesus Christ (Rom 1:16; Rom 15:19, 29; 1Cor 9:12). We also recognize that the convergence of the two is evident where salvation is effected in those who believe (Rom 1:16) and are baptized into the one body of Christ (1Cor 12:13). Acceptance of the gospel through the power of the Holy Spirit (*cf* 1Thes 1:15) is thus instrumental for incorporation into the body of Christ, i.e., the Church. It is thus through the perpetual proclamation and acceptance of the gospel that the church continues to grow. The gospel that Paul received is the same gospel that was proclaimed to the wider Greco-Roman world of his time. The kerygmatic content of Paul's proclamation was rooted in elements of a pre-Paul tradition as indicated by 1Cor 15:1-7. Paul made use of language that points to a prior kerygmatic tradition (1Cor 15:1-2). He passed on what he had also received. Establishment of the diverse Pauline communities was therefore through the proclamation of the gospel. It is therefore received and permeated through the church.

Fulfilment of the missiological task, as exemplified by Paul, is at the heart of the Church's social engagement and penetration of our world. It is all about communicating the same kerygmatic content of the gospel to our contemporary world. This is indeed the message of the church to the world.

5.1.1 The Gospel as ἄγγελμα of the Church

Our understanding of ἄγγελμα here is ‘that which is proclaimed’ by the Church as ‘the message’. It thus points to ‘the content’ of what is being proclaimed by the Church. Colwell states that ἄγγελμα is usually translated as ‘proclamation’, ‘preaching’ or ‘announcement’ (1988:364-365).

We concur with his suggestion that “the usage of the word within the NT makes no distinction between the act of proclamation and the content of that proclamation” (1988:364). This is also evident in Paul’s usage (*cf* 1Cor 1:21; 2:4; 15:14), where ἄγγελμα denotes both proclamation and content.

Convergence of Church and Gospel is strengthened by the Church’s recognition of the gospel as the pivotal content of her proclamation or preaching. This is evident from the Lucan account of Peter’s initial preaching on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), and the subsequent proclamation of the Jerusalem and Antiochian churches (Acts 8:4; 11:19-21). According to Luke, it was from the church at Antioch that Paul, with Barnabas, was set apart to ‘proclaim the word of God’ i.e., the Gospel (See Acts 13:5 ff).

The Pauline corpus reveals that Paul and his companions continued to have the gospel as the ἄγγελμα of their preaching. He confirmed that Christ sent him ‘to preach the gospel’ (1Cor 1:17). He also stated ‘we preach Christ crucified’ (1Cor 1:23) and ‘we preach not ourselves but Christ Jesus the Lord’ (2Cor 4:5). We can thus conclude that, indeed, there is a convergence of

'church' and 'gospel' in the ministerial praxis of the Church in relation to the world.

5.1.2 Gospel and Spirit in the Missiological Task of the Church

For Paul it was not a matter of merely presenting an abstract message about salvation in and through Jesus Christ. Neither was it a matter of merely presenting theological propositions about salvation. The Pauline gospel sought visible change and impact in those who accepted it. This aspect demanded more than mere cognitive acknowledgement of its claims. Fitzmyer states that "the gospel is understood to exercise a certain authority over human beings, playing a normative role linked to its kerygmatic character. It accosts them, challenging them to conform to its proclamation" (1981:155). Inherent in the proclamation of the gospel is a demand to listen to it (Eph 1:13), welcome it (2Cor 11:4), obey it (2 Thess 1:8; Rom 10:16); and to make a personal commitment to it.

The objective was thus to confront his hearers with the life changing power of the gospel. Hence his thematic statement that the gospel "is the power of God for the salvation of everyone that believes" (Rom 1:16).⁷¹ This dynamism of the gospel was not manifested in his oratory skills, but it came "with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction." (1Thes 1:5).

⁷¹ We must note the important Pauline qualification of "everyone that believes". He did not present an all-inclusive 'salvific universalism' that automatically included everyone.

Pauline Pneumatology ascribes a vital role to the Holy Spirit in the missiological task of the church. It is the Holy Spirit that effects the life-changing power of the gospel in individuals who come to believe in salvation through Jesus Christ. He effects acceptance of the gospel (1Cor 2:4-5); regeneration of the convert (2Cor 3:18); and incorporation into the body of Christ (1Cor 12:13; Eph 1:13). The Spirit equips the church for its mission and moves it to be God's eschatological people in their prophetic witness, thus enabling the church to fulfill its prophetic ministry to the world (du Rand, 1997:74).

5.2 Convergence of Church and Society in Paul

Even though the church functions within the framework of its broader social environment, it nonetheless still maintains its distinctive character. However, it's within the context of this distinctiveness, as the missiological people of God, that there is a measure of confluence between itself and society.

5.2.1 Not *Integration* but Missiological *Convergence*

Convergence implies a 'coming together' of two separate and distinct entities. Here the intention is not to extend the convergence to a level where the two entities –a church and world⁷² - are integrated at the cost of their distinctiveness. Convergence of church and society [world] is for the express

⁷² 'World' is not used in a cosmological sense, but rather in the sense of contemporary society.

purpose of fulfilling the missiological task of the church. Contact between church and world for evangelistic purposes, is realized at this convergence.

Luke's account of Paul's missionary journeys (Acts 13:2 – 21:8) serves as a good example of how Paul and his companions carried the gospel to their world. Since this missiological initiative into the Greco-Roman world was sanctioned by the Jerusalem church and commissioned by the Antiochian church, it can be viewed as a convergence of church and world for the sake of proclaiming the gospel and being an active witness to the message of Jesus Christ. Without this confluence of church and world the gospel would remain 'veiled' from "those who are perishing" without salvation (2Cor 4:3). Those without Christ in this world will remain blinded "so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ (2Cor 4:4; cf Eph 2:2-3). Furthermore, for Paul, the coming together of church and world is necessitated by the need "not to preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord" (2Cor 4:5). Preaching Jesus Christ points to a salvific force unleashed by God in human history through the person, ministry, passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, bringing with it effects that human beings can appropriate by faith in him (Fitzmyer, 1981:153). This is a message that must be carried to the world, instead of concealing it from the world because of an isolationist stance of the Church.

5.2.2 Church and Society

There appears to be a perpetual tension within the Church regarding the confluence of Church and Society [world]. Some take cognizance of the

Church's distinct character and call for the Church to be completely separated from the world. Others acknowledge the Church's missiological mandate and call for closer links with the unregenerate world. How are we to resolve this ongoing tension?

A superficial reading of Paul appears to compound the problem. He seems to be calling for both separation from the world, and engagement with the world.

The call for separation is evident in 2Cor 6:14-18 where he explicitly states "come out from them [unbelievers] and be separate" (2Cor 6:17). Paul likens the Corinthian church to 'light', and the unbelieving world to 'darkness'. He goes on to state that there is no affinity between 'righteousness' and 'wickedness' (2Cor 6:14), and no fellowship between them because there is nothing common between a 'believer' and an 'unbeliever'. Paul's usage of descriptive opposites – righteousness and wickedness; light and darkness; Christ and Belial; believer and unbeliever – brings a distinct delineation between Church and Society.

But is Paul calling for a complete separation from the world [unbelievers]? Paul corrects just such a misunderstanding in his first Corinthian correspondence, when he tells them that to effect a total separation "you would have to leave this world" (1Cor 5:10). In 1Cor 5:9 he reminded them of his instruction not to associate with sexually immoral people. He immediately makes it clear that he is not referring to the unbelieving world – "not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral" (1Cor 5:10). Paul is well aware that the Church functions within the broader framework of its social world. His call to "come out from them and be separate" more likely refers to close associations with

unbelievers that involve a partnership rather than a casual or occasional working relationship. Belleville correctly concludes that it is unequal partnerships⁷³ which believers form with secular society [unbelievers] that are a concern to Paul (1996:179). Contact with unbelievers was therefore not prohibited, instead, the door for contact between the Church and the unbelieving World is open. It is to the unbelieving world that the gospel must be carried. The missiological task of the Church is brought to fruition through contact between the Church and society, and the gospel is the proclaimed message that flows from the Church to society.

It is therefore a gross misrepresentation of Paul to suggest that the Church should have no contact with unbelievers. The passage in 2Cor 6:14-18 should not be read superficially and misconstrued to bar contact between Church and secular Society. The missiological task of the Church demands engagement and penetration of our secular world with the message of the gospel.

5.2.3 Biblical Mandate for Engagement

The biblical mandate for the Church's missiological task is at the heart of the Church's need to engage the world, and the *great commission*⁷⁴ is generally recognized as being pivotal in this regard. Our need to engage our secular world is rooted in this commission.

⁷³ Belleville also suggests that the Corinthians would have been well aware of the kind of partnerships that Paul was referring to. He had reprimanded them for allowing their legal disputes with one another to be arbitrated by their secular courts ("this in front of unbelievers," 1Cor 6:1-6). He had admonished them for participating with pagans in their cultic meals (1Cor10: 6-22). He had rebuked them for approving of sexual unions with prostitutes (1Cor 6:12-20) and for taking pride in the sexual liaison between a Christian and his stepmother (1Cor 5:1-13).

We have already seen that Paul *received* the gospel that he preached from those that were before him (1Cor 15:3-7), but that he also preached a gospel which he had received by revelation from Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12). He was commissioned to carry the gospel tradition that he had received, complimented by his revelation from Jesus Christ, to the Gentile world of his time (Gal 1:16). This commission motivated his missionary journeys. But do these commissions stand alone in constituting the biblical mandate for engaging our world with the gospel of Jesus Christ?

We venture to suggest that the biblical mandate for engaging our secular world goes back to God's promise to Abraham – “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). A careful reading of Rom 1 –11 indicates that God is being faithful in bringing this promise to fruition. It culminates with the Christ event. Israel's priority was intended to result in inclusivity that brought salvation to the nations. A substantial portion of Romans - chapters 1 to 11 – gives us insight to Pauline thought regarding the salvific plan of God for humanity, with a particular emphasis on the continuity between believing Israel and Gentile believers as the people of God. It is understandable that Campbell views Paul's forte as being the reinterpretation of the covenant from exclusivity to inclusivity – it was Paul's reinterpretation of Abraham as the model for all believers (1992:203). This view is strengthened by Paul's direct statement to the Galatian church – those who believe are children of Abraham . . . Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel

⁷⁴ As given in the different Gospel accounts - Math. 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:44-48 and John 20:19-23.

in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you”. . . those who have faith are blessed along with Abraham (Gal 3:7- 9). The mandate for engaging society is very explicit in Paul’s conclusion – “He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus“ (Gal 3:14).

Since it was always God’s plan to extend Abraham’s blessing to the *nations* through Christ Jesus, the Church must be proactive in engaging the nations with the ‘good news’ of salvation through Jesus Christ. Separation and an escapist stance from the world will betray God’s passion for the nations.

5.3 Convergence of the Gospel and World in Paul

The Church initiates contact with the world in order to present the gospel and to be witness of Jesus Christ. ‘Mission’ warrants that the gospel is taken beyond our church perimeters to the outside world. Proclamation of the gospel is thus targeted at the unregenerate world. Failure to go to the world with the gospel means the gospel is withheld from those that need it most - “If the gospel is hid, it is hid from them that are lost” (2Cor 4:13, AV).

5.3.1 The Gospel and Pluralist Societies

Global mission statistics reveal that progress has indeed been made in carrying the gospel to unreached people groups. But Christian believers as a percentage of total world population, at the end of the 20th century, stands at

only 11.2 percent.⁷⁵ Despite this progress our world is becoming increasingly secular and pluralist. Placher points to Søren Kierkegaard's Denmark that described itself as Christian but yet hardly grasped New Testament Christianity (1992:5). Believers find themselves increasingly out of step with post-Christian societies. Many countries have multicultural societies, with a diversity of religions and beliefs. What is the place of the gospel under these circumstances? How should the Church respond?

Paul's evangelistic mission was not without its difficulties either. Christianity did not begin its growth in a religious vacuum in which it found men blankly waiting for something to believe. On the contrary, the new faith in Christ had to fight its way against entrenched religious beliefs that had been in existence for centuries⁷⁶ (Tenney, 1961:65). Paul and his companions engaged their pagan world through proclamation of the gospel. He gives a general description of humanity's fallen state – "they worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator" (Rom 1:25). His Thessalonian converts turned to God from idols (1 Thess 1:9). It is clear that the gospel was proclaimed to them while they worshiped idols, and it is evident that the early Church engaged their unbelieving world with the Gospel, despite the prevailing idol worship and rejection of the truth of God.

From the Church's perspective, the gospel remains relevant under these circumstances, and as in the early Church, it must be proclaimed to the unbelieving world, despite the secularism and pluralism.

⁷⁵ So Winter and Koch, "Finishing the Task: The Unreached Peoples challenge" in *Mission Frontiers* 22:3, 22-33.

⁷⁶ Some of the beliefs were Animism; Graeco-Roman Pantheon; Emperor-Worship; Mystery religions and Worship of the occult. See Tenny, *New Testament Survey* 1961, 65-80 for an elaborate discussion.

5.3.2 Church as 'conduit' for the Gospel

Reconciliation to God comes through Jesus Christ (2Cor 5:18). Those who accept the message of salvation through Jesus Christ make this reconciliation with God their own, and become a new creation in Christ (2Cor 5:17). The corporate body of those who become new creations in Christ at a given locality become the church, e.g., at Corinth. Paul indicates that it is to the church that God has committed 'the message of reconciliation' (2Cor 5:19), and it is the church that has become Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through them (2Cor 5:20). Since the 'message of reconciliation' is all about God reconciling the world unto himself, not counting men's sin against them, we can safely assume that it is synonymous with the gospel. Therefore, the 'conduit' through which the gospel is carried to the world is the Church. Failure to do this undermines the primacy of the gospel in the missiological task of the Church. This primacy of the *gospel* is to be evident in the missiological task of the local church. The local church has a dual function as the *distinct people of God* and as the *missiological agency of God* in the world. The *gospel* is thus pivotal in the church's engaging and penetrating role in a world that is becoming increasingly secular and pluralistic. Stott aptly describes this dual function as a 'double identity' of the *church*, where the church is simultaneously the 'holy' people of God, called out of the world, but also 'worldly' people in the sense of renouncing 'otherworldliness' and being sent back into the world to witness and serve [*the gospel*] (1999: 30, *italics added*).

5.3.3 Gospel as solution for Humanity's Indictment

Paul's proclamation that Christ died for our sins; that he was buried; and that he was resurrected from the dead on the third day (1Cor15: 3-4), is all about saving humanity from the indictment that was brought about by 'sin' (Rom 1:18-32). In its essence, sin is a unilateral declaration of independence from God, that deceives humanity into supposing that they can live independent of God, with no regard for his word and counsel.

It is this sin which has left all of humanity indicted before God – “There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:22b – 23). But, by God's grace (Rom 5:6-8), there is salvation for all of humanity from this indictment, for all can be 'set right' [justified] freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus (Rom 3:24; *cf* 5:1-2; 8:1). Furnish has summarized this aptly:

Paul's understanding of salvation follows from his understanding of sin. The plight of humankind is to be tyrannized by sin's rule, and thereby alienated from God and one's own true humanity. Accordingly, salvation means deliverance from sin's power, being put right with God, and being restored to an authentically human experience (1993:72).

Proclamation of the gospel to the world of unbelievers is thus of critical importance, and the contemporary Church needs to recognize the significance of bringing the gospel to the world.

5.4 The social responsibility of the Church to Engage and Penetrate the World with the Gospel

Our examination of the *Church*, *Paul's World*, and the *Gospel* culminates in the interrelated convergence of these three components as presented in this final chapter. The convergence of *Church and Gospel*; *Church and World*; *Gospel and World* is for the express purpose of engaging and penetrating our contemporary world with the gospel of Jesus Christ. This confluence of the Church and its gospel, with the world, effects the perpetual missiological task of the Church. Without this engagement and penetration, from the Church to the world, with the gospel as 'vehicle' for engagement, the Church will have lost an essential aspect of its essence – the missiological agency of God in the world. In Pauline thought, a critical part of the Church's 'Mission' is taking the message of the gospel – salvation in and through Jesus Christ – to the unbelieving world. This is a continuation of Jesus' commission as recorded in the gospels. It demands social contact with the world in order to effect proclamation of the gospel. Stott states it succinctly: Mission is our [*the church*] human response to the divine commission. It is a whole Christian lifestyle, including both evangelism and social responsibility, dominated by the conviction that Christ sends us out into the world as the Father sent him into the world, and into the world we must therefore go (1999:18 *italics added*).

For Paul, the *gospel* is more than a mere theme in his theology; . . . it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Rom 1:16). Jew and Gentile encompassed everyone in Paul's *Greco-Roman world*. The *gospel* was the 'vehicle' for engaging his own world. While many scholars view Paul's letter to the Roman church as a summary of his theology, justifiably so, Campbell observes that this designation would have

more substance if the letter was regarded as a summary of Paul's *theology of mission* which in fact can be seen to occupy a substantial part of the letter when chapters 9-11 are included in the discussion (1992: 81). The primacy of the *gospel* was pivotal in Paul's engagement with his own world.

The Pauline perspective on the *church* and the *gospel* points the *church* towards a dual 'inward' and 'outward' function in its missiological task. Ministry must edify those that are *within*, and simultaneously, it must minister the gospel to those that are *without*, in the unregenerate world. Hence the culmination of this study in the convergence of *Church, Gospel* and *World* in Mission.



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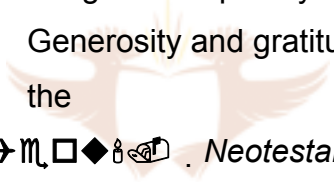
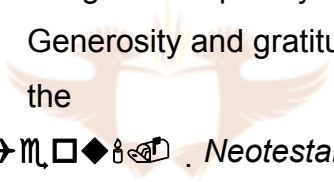
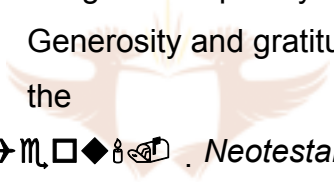
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