

PRESENTATION AT ST. MARGARET MARY'S PARISH, PARKERSBURG

ST. PAUL AND HIS LETTERS: PART 1

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Paul in history

Luke in the Acts is favorably of Paul. He views him as God's instrument, that God has chosen to bring the gospel to the gentiles. Some other Christians of the first century did not view him so favorably. They felt Paul was a false apostle and his teaching was apostate. In **2Tim 1:15 see 4:16**), we see how fellow Christians in Asia turned against him. In the 2nd Century, Marcion viewed Paul as the only true apostle. His reason was that Paul was anti-Jewish since he himself was. When the Acts was written, it seemed to have revived interest in Paul. Some anonymous Christians at the end of the first century had collected a codex or a book of the Pauline letters so that other Christians could read them.

The letter to the Hebrews have always been disputed: most of the members of the early church did not think Paul wrote the letter to the Hebrew. At the end of the 2nd century, Paul's letters were now viewed as Sacred letters, thanks to Luke. In the middle of the 2nd Century, a presbyter in Asia made a collection on the Acts of Paul. Some Christians disputed this Acts and most especially as it concerned a woman Thecla. Thecla was about to be married but when she heard Paul's preaching, she abandoned marriage and took a vow of virginity. This work is important because it gives us a physical description of Paul and this has influenced letter arts.

During the Patristic period, Paul was venerated as the divine apostle, an apostle who witnessed to the same faith as the 12 apostles did. Throughout the history of the Church, Paul's letters have affected people. E.g. Augustine before his conversion heard a young child singing "Pick up and read, pick up and read" and he took a bible and opened to Romans 13. At that moment marks the beginning of Augustine's conversion. Around the same time, Chrysostom fell in love with Paul. Chrysostom wrote commentaries on all of

the Pauline's letters. He preached these sermons on Paul's letters at the great cathedral at Constantinople. Chrysostom was an interesting person, he spent three years in the wilderness where he memorized the whole NT to become a walking concordance.

A thousand years after Augustine, Martin Luther made Paul's doctrine of justification the basis of the Protestant reformation. He was afraid of being condemned by God. When he read Paul, he discovered that the justice of God is God's righteousness and mercy.

Paul has had friends and foes throughout history. Frederick Nietzsche did not like Paul at all. He coined a word to describe him. He calls him the Great dysangelist. He calls him thus, because he preaches bad news. George Bernard Shaw sees Paul as a reverse of what Jesus does. People are usually not neutral in their view of Paul. Paul's personality engages people. Either you are attracted by what he has to say or you are repulsed.

Preliminary Questions?

What is the relationship between Acts and Pauline letters? Are they both equally valuable in drawing up the life of Jesus? The relationship between the Acts and the Pauline letters? How do we use the Pauline letters to reconstruct a life of Paul? Do all of the letters attributed to Paul belong to him?

Arrangement of Paul's letters

The letters attributed to him are arranged on 2 principles: first of all the letters addressed to churches come first – to the Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians, 1&2 Thessalonians; and then we have letters written to people – 1&2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon. The second principle in which they are arranged is length. The longest letter comes first and the shortest last. The longest letters written to the churches come first.

Classification of Paul's letters

The undisputed letters of Paul are Romans, 1&2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Philemon, 1 Thessalonians. 2 Thessalonians and Colossians are regarded by most scholars as being written by Paul. Ephesians is regarded by most scholars as not written by Paul. The other letters are called disputed. Disputed whether Paul wrote them or somebody familiar with him and his style wrote them and attributed them to him. 1&2 Timothy and Titus are called pastoral letters and most scholars think they were written by

another person. Four of the Pauline letters are called Captivity letters: Philippians, Colossians, Ephesians and Philemon. These are called so because Paul wrote them from prison.

Relationship of the Letters of Paul to the Acts of the Apostles

The letters are the primary source and the Acts of the Apostles is a secondary source.

There has been disagreement of how to use Acts in the letters. We have three approaches:

- there are a number of passages in the Acts where Luke who normally writes in the 3rd person entered into the first person plural. These passages are called the “we” passages. They are found in Chapter 16:5-27, 21:1-18, 27:1-28. The implication here is that we have an eye witness. This thus increases the value.
- Acts has a number of biographical details about Paul that are not found in Paul’s own writing. It is from Acts and only Acts that we learn that Paul was born in Tarsus of Cilicia. It is in modern day Turkey. Acts tells us Paul has Roman citizenship. He was a Jew of diaspora. Acts tells us that Paul also has a Rabbinic education, he was educated in Jerusalem by the Rabbi Gamaliel. Acts tell us Paul persecuted the Church. It is only Acts that tell us that Paul made an appeal to Caesar when he was arrested. Is this biographical information accurate or not?
- The speeches of Acts. There are a series of speeches in Acts, most of them given by Peter or Paul. Then, there is a very long speech by Stephen in chapter 7 of the Acts. The question is, how reliable is Luke here? Is Luke reporting the speeches accurately or is it he Luke who has created this speeches and put them in the mouth of Peter, Luke and Stephen.

There are three approaches scholars can be classified:

1. **Conservative Approach:** they have virtually complete trust in the Acts of the Apostles. They fit information from the letters into the framework of the Acts of the Apostles. They will argue that the portrait of Paul in Acts and what Paul gives us about himself are not in conflict, they can be fitted in. They will say Luke was an eye witness and knew much about Paul; They will say there is no reason not to trust the autobiographical account of Luke because he was a companion of Paul

and he knew him personally. About the speeches of Acts, they will say Luke was faithful to what Paul says in his own speeches. You can trust what the speeches say as Paul's theology.

2. **Moderate Approach:** Here you have scholars who see Paul's letters as the primary source but they don't want to dismiss the Acts. They feel it has important information to supplement what is already in Paul's letters. The differences are not necessarily contradictory. There is no divergence between the Paul of Acts and the Paul who reveals himself in his letters. They will say it is not sufficient to take just what is in the Acts or what is in Paul's own letters. The two need to come together and supplement each other. They will say Luke was a companion of Paul and he knew Paul; they will see no reason to doubt the biographical information in the Acts. About the speeches, they will say there contained some facts about what Paul may have said but they are heavily edited by Luke and as much as they communicate Paul's theology, they also communicate Luke's theology.

3. **Liberal approach:** This approach is skeptical about the historical information found in the Acts. What they do is to construct Paul's criteria solely on the basis of what you can learn from the letters. They tend to view differences between what Paul says in the Letters and Luke in the Acts and they say they are contradicting themselves. They will say the Paul portrayed by Luke is a legendary figure while the Paul of the letters reveal himself. Acts misrepresent Paul's teaching and present a new teaching of Paul. As far as the "we" passages are concerned, they will say Luke uses a literary device to say he was a companion of Paul, but that in the real sense he wasn't. since Paul did not mention the biography in his letters, they cannot accept what Luke says about Paul. They say about the speeches, Luke puts them in the mouth of Paul or Peter. That these speeches represent Lukan theology and are similar between Peter and Paul's speeches.

There are different portraits of Paul found in his letters and in the Acts. This is not contradictory but is on approach. What Luke is doing is defending Paul from accusation

that he was an apostate from Judaism. Luke is portraying Paul as a very faithful Jew. Paul in his own letters doesn't have to fight this battle because he is defending the rights of the gentiles.

Luke's portrayal of Paul

Luke portrays Paul as:

- Someone who persecutes the church.
- Someone who was called by the Lord on his way to Damascus to persecute Christians.
- Luke went to Jerusalem the first time as a Christian to meet the Christians there and Paul went his own way to his own native land to Cilicia in Turkey there he stayed till he was brought to Antioch.
- A member of the church in Antioch for many years.
- He and Barnabas were sent by the Church of Antioch on their first missionary journey.
- When they come back from the missionary journey, they represent the Church in Antioch at the conference in Jerusalem, whether gentile converts have to be circumcised.
- After this, Paul undertakes the first and second missionary journey which leads him to Greece.
- He is held as a prisoner in Greece and then led to Rome.

According to Luke, it is not Paul that inaugurates the gentile mission but Peter. Paul makes his first appearance after Stephen's death. There are accusations against Stephen: He speaks against the temple and the law of Moses. These accusations will lead to the martyrdom of Stephen and Paul will approve of this. In chapter 7:58, Paul makes his first appearance in the Acts. Paul is not participating in the actual stoning of Stephen but he approves of it. Our first introduction to Paul is as a young man whose name is Saul who consents to and approves of the martyrdom of Stephen. He consents because he believes Stephen has spoken against the temple and the law. Stephen's martyrdom leads to the persecution of the church in Jerusalem. Everybody scattered except the apostles. They

scattered to Judea and Samaria. This persecution strengthens the Church. Paul begins to persecute people.

In Chapter 9, Luke narrates the first call experience of Paul. This is the first of the three accounts of the call of Paul. The accounts in chapters 22 and chapters 26 are narrated by Paul himself as defense speeches. The major turning point in Acts begins in chapter 10 which is preaching the gospel to the gentiles. What is interesting is that, it is not Paul who is the first to bring the gospel to the gentiles but Peter. Peter did not do this out of free will but was forced by the Spirit. The first gentiles to be brought to the church were these God Fearers and we see it here in Cornelius. Paul goes now to preach to the gentiles because Peter has cleared the way. The church has made one big decision that the gentiles too can become Christians.

Acts 11 has two important points: the first is that Saul now becomes a loyal member of the church in Antioch, him and Barnabas became very loyal members of that church; the second point is that the believers at Antioch are now given the name Christians for the first time. The church wanted to send relieve to the brothers in Judea because of the famine there and they entrusted the ministry to Saul and Barnabas. This visit is called the famine visit. In verse 25, Barnabas and Paul complete their relieve mission and take with them John who is called Mark back to Jerusalem.

In chapter 13-14, we see the first missionary journey. They left Antioch in Syria to Cyprus, and from here went to Antioch in Prisidia and then to Iconium, then to Lystra, and finally to Derbe .

GOING: Antioch, Syria ---Cyprus --- Antioch in Prisidia --- Iconium ---Lystra --- Derbe

RETURNING: Lystra --- Iconium --- Antioch

It is not the church at Antioch nor Paul and Barnabas that decided to go on mission to the gentiles but it was the Holy Spirit. Paul begins his preaching at the synagogues because there are these God fearers there and a ready audience of the Jewish people. At Antioch in Pisidia some of the Jews and God fearers became believers. Paul preached the second

week at the synagogue but this time he received some hostility. He now said that since they rejected the word, he will now turn to the gentiles but he did not, he continued to preach at the synagogues.

From here he went to Iconium. He goes to the Jews synagogue again. This time, he got a better listening. There are some disbelieving Jews who chased them out of the city. From here they went to Lystra. There is no mention of temple in Lystra. The people there think they are gods. From Lystra, they go into the city of Derbe, but Luke doesn't tell us what happened. Then they retrace their footsteps. When they returned, they reported the success of the mission. This is the first missionary journey. It is successful because they opened the doors for the gentiles.

One of the major disputes in the early church was the question whether you have to become a Jew before you can become a Christian. This is the reason why Paul developed his Justification by Faith. In Chapter 15, we see the council called to settle this dispute. Many Jewish Christians argued circumcision was necessary. Some told Paul and Barnabas at Antioch that they did a good job, but that those people are not saved until they go back and circumcised them. It became a theological dispute, so the church in Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles and brothers there. James the head of the church in Jerusalem gives an authoritative speech which outlines that the gentiles should avoid four things: stay away from idols, from unlawful marriages, from meat and blood. The church agrees on this and send an apostolic decree together with representatives, Silas, Judas, Paul and Barnabas. In this apostolic decree, they repeated what James said. The decision is that gentiles do not need to be circumcised in order to become Christians. They are only to observe the minimal amount of the Mosaic prescription and that is the four abstentions James mentioned above.

Paul then proposes that they go back and retrace the steps of the first and second journey. Barnabas said they should take with them John Mark, but Paul refused because John Mark had abandoned them. John Mark was Barnabas' cousin. Paul and Barnabas disagreed and separated.

Paul has no problem with Jewish people continuing circumcision and thus he had Timothy circumcised. He and Timothy continued on a missionary journey and Barnabas and John Mark went their own way.

Paul took Silas with him to continue on his second missionary journey. Paul wanted to go towards the black sea area but the spirit of God turned them around towards Philippians. Philippians is the first European area to receive the gospel. The secondary missionary journey begins by revisiting the churches of the first missionary journey, then they go to Philippi, from there to Thessalonica, then to Beroea, and to Athens, then to Corinth, Ephesus, back to Jerusalem and then to Antioch.

**Philippi --- Thessalonica --- Beroea --- Athens --- Corinth --- Ephesus --- Jerusalem -
-- Antioch.**

At Philippi he met this woman who was selling. Here, he was put into prison discouraging the magicians but Silas and him were miraculously delivered from prison. From Philippi, he then goes to Thessalonica, a very important church. He goes to the synagogue and preached as always that Jesus is the messiah. The Jews became jealous of him and he was expelled from the city of Thessalonica. From Thessalonica he then goes to Boroa where the Jews people were more fair minded. Some of the Jews hostile to Paul in Thessalonica, came to Boroa and stirred up the situation and he was expelled from here again. He then goes to Athens where he rested a while. Here he preaches a speech that is solely directed to gentiles. In this midst, there are few people who are convinced by him and a vast majority are not. Then he comes to Corinth. When he came to Corinth, he met two Jews, Aquila and Pricilla. These two were in Corinth because the Roman emperor had expelled all the Jews from Rome. They became faithful co-workers of Paul. Paul goes to the synagogue testifying that Jesus is the messiah. The people reviled against him and he said he would now go to the gentiles. He will continue to go to the temples. He then left to go to Antioch. He went with Pricilla and Aquila. They stopped over at the church in Ephesus. He promised coming back to the church at Ephesus because the church wanted him to remain there. During his second missionary journey, he established three churches: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.

Paul met Apollos and they instructed him in the way. Apollos went to the church in Achaia, in Corinth while Paul went to Ephesus. Ephesus was the base of operation for the third missionary journey. Ephesus is also a place where he writes a number of letters to Corinth and to Galatians as well. Most of his preaching takes place here in this hall but it reaches the whole of Asia. Paul decided to make his journey back to Jerusalem, before he does, he decided to visit the churches in Macedonia and Achaia and the many churches he has established in Asia. He said farewell to different churches. He gave a long sermon at Troas and a young boy Eutychus fell from a window while sleeping and died, and Paul restored him to life. When he came to Jerusalem, he met James the brother of the Lord he gets a very good welcome. James tell him the church here is a thriving Jewish Christian church. They have heard rumors about Paul that he is telling people not to have their children circumcised and that he is speaking against the temple. These are the same accusations leveled against Stephen.

Nearly one fourth of the Acts deals with Paul as the prisoner of the Lord. Why will Luke have spent so much time talking about this? About the time that Luke is writing, there are probably rumors circulating about Paul. Rumors that Paul is an apostate from Judaism: he speaks against the law and the temple. This is devastating to the Christians. If Paul was truly an apostate, then the faith of the Pauline Christian churches, is an apostate faith. So, Luke portrays Paul as one who is not against Moses and the prophets but as one who defends the hope of Israel. The hope of Israel is the general resurrection of the dead. Paul will say there is only one difference from him and the Pharisees: they both believe that there is going to be a general resurrection of the dead, but he believes that that resurrection has already begun. Paul will give four speeches and these are called defense speeches. Paul is a prisoner, first in the city of Jerusalem and then he will be transferred to the governors of palace in Caesaria. In the first and second speech he will show that he is not an apostate, he is doing what he is called to do. In the second and third, he will say he is defending the resurrection of the dead.

The purpose of his first speech is to show his credentials and to do what the Lord asked him to do. He is trying to make a point that this is not something he decided to do but he was sent by the God. In the second speech, he is now standing before the Sanhedrin, the high priest is there too. He discovers that it is made up of 2 parties, first, the Pharisees who believe there is a general resurrection of the dead and there are angels, and the Sadducees who do not believe in the resurrection and angels. He was smart, he stood up and said he was a Pharisee, he is standing here because of his belief on the resurrection of the dead. The Sanhedrin became divided among them. In the third speech, Paul shows his loyalty to the law and the prophets and said the real issue is the question of the resurrection of the dead. Felix did not know what to do with him, so he put him in prison for 2 years till when the new governor came. Paul appeals to Caesar, and the new governor, Festus asked Agrippa and Bernice what to do with Paul. Agrippa and his sister Bernice said they wanted to listen to Paul. Paul is going to defend himself for the last time. Festus, Agrippa and Bernice accepted his innocence and said he should have been set free if he (Paul) had not appeal to Caesar. He was taken to Rome where he remained for 2 full years in prison in his lodgings and many came to him.

Paul's portrayal of himself in Galatians 1-2

Paul was the founder of the churches at Galatia. There were series of communities in Galatia. These churches were gentile Christians. A problem arose after Paul left these churches. Other Christian missionaries came to Galatia, most likely they were Jewish Christian missionaries. They tried to persuade the Galatians that in addition to believing in Christ, they must be circumcised and observe all of Mosaic law. Paul when he preached the gospel to the Galatians did not require them to get circumcised or follow all the prescriptions of the law. These agitators argue that Jesus was the Jewish messiah and he came to Israel. Gentiles can share in this salvation that the Messiah has brought to the people of Israel, and to do that, they must attach themselves to the people of Israel, and to do that, they need to be circumcised and to be circumcised means you must observe the whole of Mosaic law. This position may even sound more logical than that of Paul.

However, Paul in the light of the Damascus Event had a different and significant view of Jesus' salvation. For him, the way Jesus presents, is faith. He then developed what is then called his teaching on justification. This refers to being put into the right relationship with God. Paul says we stand in a proper relationship with God in the basis of our faith in Christ. Paul says what we do cannot acquit or justify us. Only God can justify us. Paul now understands that God has done this not on the basis of the law but what he has done in Christ.

The letter to the Galatians has a very long greeting. In Galatians, Paul is breaking the form because this is an extensive greeting. He immediately identifies himself as an apostle because his apostleship has been called to questions by the agitators who came to Galatia. An apostle is simply someone who has been called. Paul insists that nobody makes him or ordains him as an apostle; his apostleship comes directly from God and Jesus Christ. He does not associate himself with a particular coworker as he did in some other letters, "all the brothers that are with me." He is not writing to the church in Galatia but the churches in Galatia. He makes a strong soteriological statement. Jesus Christ gave himself for our sins. Jesus is a sin offering and His purpose is to rescue us from the present evil age. We are justified not by doing the Mosaic law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

In Galatians, there is no thanksgiving, you rather have the statement of astonishment. He is astonished because they have abandoned the faith they received. It is visible he is angry and the Galatians are amazed because there is no thanksgiving. Paul uses the phrase "one who called you," this is Paul's election theology. The Galatians are like soldiers who have deserted the army. They are deserting the Gospel. By the Gospel here, he refers to an event, the event is the death and resurrection of Christ. The problem is that the Galatians have forsaken the one who calls them for a different gospel. He immediately corrects himself because he understands that they can be only one Gospel. The agitators are pervading the gospel of Christ. He curses anyone who should preach a gospel that is different from the one he had preached to them earlier. Paul refers to himself so often as a slave of Jesus Christ. Within his theology, he says that we are always a slave to someone

or something. He sees himself as a slave of Christ. This alteration of the letter must have affected the Galatians.

In the Damascus experience, God revealed to Paul Jesus Christ. It was at that moment that God and Jesus Christ called Paul to be an apostle and it was at that time that the inner meaning of the gospel was revealed to Paul. Paul however still learnt things from the Christian communities. What he is saying is that the truth of the gospel was immediately apparent to him at the moment of his call and conversion. Nobody had to explain it to him; he now understood that people are justified on the basis of their faith in Jesus Christ. Both his gospel and apostleship comes from Jesus.

It must be understood from the very onset that Paul wanted to make the point in Galatians 1-2 that the gospel that he preached was not one that he had received from human beings. This was a gospel he had received through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul made this point throughout the first two chapters of Galatians.

He began by making the point that he was a lover of the law and the tradition of his ancestors. His passion for the law led him to persecute the church of Judea. In fact, while he was on his way to Damascus to persecute the believers, God revealed his son to him and commissioned him to be the Apostle to the gentiles. Paul made it clear that after he received the revelation, he did not go to Jerusalem to consult with the “Pillars of the Church.” This was not necessary because the meaning of the revelation and the contents were made clear to him by the revealer. To have gone to Jerusalem to seek clarification from the Apostles may have been misunderstood as Paul being commissioned by them.

To further demonstrate that he is an apostle in his own right and that the gospel that he preached was of divine origin, Paul went to Arabia to preach. After being in Arabia for a while he returned to Damascus. Three years after his call he went up to Jerusalem for fifteen days. On that occasion he met with Peter and James. Paul makes it clear that he did not meet with any other apostle on that occasion. From Jerusalem Paul went to Syria and Beroea. After fourteen years, moved by a revelation, he went up to Jerusalem and

presented to the “Pillars of the church” the gospel that he has been preaching to the uncircumcised. The apostles acknowledged his gospel and offered their hand of friendship. It must be noted that in Galatians 2, Paul pointed to the fact that his reason for going to Jerusalem the second time was based on a revelation that he had. He was not sent there by the church in Antioch as Luke mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles. This was important because as far as Paul was concerned, he is an apostle on equal footing with the pillars of Jerusalem, because he had seen the Lord and the gospel which he had preached was not of human origin.

It is interesting to note that Paul included in this periscope his rebuke of Peter, the head of the apostles. Only one who was of equal authority and stature within the church could have dared to rebuke the head of the church. However, Paul rebuked Peter because of his double standard as it related to the dietary question. Paul accused him of acting contrary to the gospel that he, Paul had received.

On concluding, it is important to note that Paul’s rhetorical goal in narrating his call/conversion in Galatians 1-2 was to point out to the Galatians that he was an apostle on equal footing with the pillars of Jerusalem and that the gospel he preached was given to him by the Lord.

The council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 and Galatians 2

Acts 15 and Galatians 2 agree on the issue of circumcision. And they both say gentiles need not be circumcised to become Christian. The major difference is that while Acts develop an apostolic decree, Paul knows nothing about the apostolic decree either in Galatia or in any of his letters. Luke is most possibly telescoping two things together.

Bringing in a decision on circumcision from another conference to the Jerusalem conference.

Background and issues in 1&2 Thessalonians

We can determine the occasion from 1Thessalonians 2:17-3:18. He was ejected from Thessalonica. He had to live Thessalonica earlier but he had established a church there and that church has started thriving and now it is facing persecution, and the persecution is from the people in Thessalonica, not the Jews. Paul wanted to go back there to see if the church is persevering there. He tried to return once or twice but because of Satan, he couldn't go. This Satan must be human persons who prevented him. Since he couldn't go back, he sent Timothy to see how the church is faring during this period of persecution. Timothy has just brought Paul a report that the community is doing well and Paul is overfilled with joy and he wrote this letter. The immediate occasion for writing this letter is because of the good news brought by Timothy. It is most probable that Paul is writing from Corinth and if he was in Corinth, then it was written about 50, 51.

This letter is a paraenetic letter in as much as it provides the community with paraenesis. Paraenesis is moral exhortation and encouragement. A very frequent phrase in this letter is "as you know". He is not giving them a new moral teaching but he is only reminding them of what he has already taught them. Why must Paul give the Thessalonians this exhortation? He needs to give it to them because they are still suffering persecution and also from the social analysis, they are experiencing a social dislocation. They belong to what a greater number of the Thessalonians would term a deviant group. They belong to a deviant group. He needs to re-socialize them and show them that they belong to a new family. They now belong to a more important family which is the ecclesia. Again and again we can call this "Paul's election theology." He is going to tell the Thessalonians they have been chosen and belong to a new community, a new family. Paul addresses them as brothers and sisters. This new community, the church is a sanctifying community because God has consecrated them, elected them, and called them out of the larger society. God's will for them is their sanctification. What must they do? They must stand firm in hope and blameless waiting for the day of the Lord's parousia.

In Chapter 2:1-12, Paul presents himself as the model of apostolic authority, of imitation. Here he talks about the gospel of God. What he means here is that the gospel that comes from God. This is the only time Paul would refer to himself as an apostle in this letter.

In 2:19 there is a reference to the coming of the Lord. Paul uses the Greek word, Parousia. It means the return of the Lord in the end of the ages. Paul is very clear that Jesus is going to return at the end of time. He uses the crown as a metaphor for the community.

Paul does not have any major problem with their moral behavior. He wants them to conduct themselves even more faithful..” The heart of his instruction is in 3-8 where he reminds them of what God’s will for them is, and it is holiness, and that they free from immorality. Because they have been elected by God, they are holy. It doesn’t mean they are all already living a moral life, it does mean God has set them apart and consecrated them as his holy one. if they are to attend to this will, they are to flee from Porneia, immorality. The Thessalonians are gentiles but in a certain way, they are no longer gentiles because they have been called into a new family of God. They now belong to God’s people as Israel. In verse 8, he alludes to an important text in the OT, “I will give to you a new heart, a new spirit, I will take from you a heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I shall put my new spirit within you.” Paul in effect is saying, these are the last days, God has given you his spirit and that is why you can live the moral life.

In verse 9, he talks about brotherly love. This was the highest kind of love. Paul takes this virtue of brotherly love and give it a new meaning. The Thessalonians now belong to a new family of Christians, and there must love each other with this new love. Because Christians belong to this new family, there is a particular way in which they are being taught by God. We can have a scheme like this:

Gospel --- Elected and chosen --- Holiness --- Parousia

2 THESSALONIANS

This is a parenetic letter, a letter of exhortation. He is using this letter because he needs to strengthen this community in a period of severe persecution. The moral exhortation in this letter is related to the very specific crisis this community is experiencing. There is a letter circulating that the day of the Lord is at hand or the day of the Lord has come. There are two opinions going on in Thessalonica: the day of the Lord has come and they have missed it or that it is here already and it is taking place. He is going to deal on this with a different description of the Parousia from that in 1 Thessalonians. Why is he using two different descriptions? Because he is dealing with two different occasions.

Some months later, a new kind of problem arises in Thessalonica. That problem of the idle resurfaces. The persecution has intensified and people are saying the day of the Lord is here. The situation of increased affliction has made him to say something more he did not say in 1 Thessalonians. God is going to punish those who afflict the Thessalonians now. The Parousia would be a moment when Jesus is disclosed. Punishment would be inflicted on those who do not acknowledge God.

In verses 6-16, the idle (ataктоos) are becoming a very major problem. The problem with the disorderly is that they don't want to work. This people are causing problems in the community. There are two major problems going on in 2 Thessalonians: the problem of severe persecution and the second problem is that of the disorderly. These problems are closely united to the issue of parousia in the community. People think the day of the Lord is here because the persecution is severe and since they think the parousia is here why should I work. At the heart of Paul's theology is a firm conviction that Christ will come again to gather the elect into the kingdom of God and this is what is sometime called the second coming of Christ. This is central to our Christian faith today: Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again; in the creed, we say he will come to judge the living and the dead. It is one of the most difficult teachings to make sense of.

The majority of the recipients of Paul's letters were gentiles. He employs another kind of imagery to describe the day of the Lord. The imagery is the imperial visit or parousia. Since we have not experienced the second coming of the parousia, nobody comes to

know how it is like. He says when Christ returns, those who are in his favor would be gathered in the earth to worship the Lord and those not, will be gathered in hell.

The question that the Thessalonians have is that some members of their community are already dead and they think that you have to be alive at the time of the Parousia for the risen Lord to take you to heaven. There are fearfully that their dead members would not participate in the Parousia and so would not have salvation. He is going to reveal something to them. He is going to draw a distinction between them, the Thessalonians and those who have no hope. Hope for Paul is always focused on the Parousia. People who do not have hope in the Parousia, do not have hope in future life. There is an intimate relationship between the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the believer. The resurrection of Christ is not an isolated event but it has effects on all believers as well. It is the beginning of the general resurrection of the dead. The living are not going to have advantage over the dead. The Thessalonians had thought that if you are alive, you had more advantage over the dead. The parousia would be the beginning of the general resurrection of the dead. There is an intimate connection between the parousia and the general resurrection of the dead. The general resurrection would take place on the day of the parousia. He thought it would come very soon because the general resurrection of the dead has already started taking place.

Paul doesn't know when the parousia is going to occur. Jesus says in the gospel, that no one knows the time. Paul is convinced its going to happen soon but no one knows the time. The day will come suddenly when no one expect it. He doesn't tell them when is going to happen and he doesn't know when is going to happen. Paul says don't worry about the dead, if they believe in Christ, when Christ comes, he will raise them.

The question in 2Thessalonians is different. Now the question is, has the parousia already come? Some people at Thessalonica think that the day of the Lord is present. Why? Even Paul is not sure. He has a suspicion that there is a letter circulating around purportedly from him. Some people think because of the affliction that the day of the Lord is here. The whole notion of retribution plays an important role. The Parousia would be a

moment of salvation for those who have believed. A number of things must happen before the Parousia can take place. What are these signs? They must first of all be a great apostasy (this refers to believers falling from the church) and a lawless figure (an anti-Christ, an opposite of what the messiah is.) At the present time, this lawless figure cannot make his appearance. Why? Paul doesn't tell us what this restraining force is, he presupposes that the Thessalonians know what this restraining force is. He talks about the one who is restraining the lawless figure. He switches from some force which is holding this lawless figure back to some one restraining this lawless one. When the lawless figure is revealed, then he will become visible. He talks about the mystery of lawlessness already present. In verse 9 he talks about the parousia of this lawless one which is from Satan. When Christ comes, he will destroy the lawless figure with the breath of his mouth.

Those who do not believe, God will send them a spirit that would strengthen their disbelief.