

NEW STUDIES IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY 9

Series editor: D. A. Carson

Christ, our righteousness

PAUL'S THEOLOGY OF JUSTIFICATION

Mark A. Seifrid



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Therefore the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart
is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us
righteous and grants us eternal life.

Martin Luther, on Galatians 2:16, in *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan (vols. 1–30) and H.
Lehmann (vols. 31–55), vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535, chapters 1–4*, trans. J.
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Series preface

New Studies in Biblical Theology is a series of monographs that address key issues in the discipline of biblical theology. Contributions to the series focus on one or more of three areas: 1. the nature and status of biblical theology, including its relations with other disciplines (e.g., historical theology, exegesis, systematic theology, historical criticism, narrative theology); 2. the articulation and exposition of the structure of thought of a particular biblical writer or corpus; and 3. the delineation of a biblical theme across all or part of the biblical corpora.

Above all, these monographs are creative attempts to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better. The series aims simultaneously to instruct and to edify, to interact with the current literature, and to point the way ahead. In God's universe, mind and heart should not be divorced: in this series we will try not to separate what God has joined together. While the notes interact with the best of the scholarly literature, the text is uncluttered with untransliterated Greek and Hebrew, and tries to avoid too much technical jargon. The volumes are written within the framework of confessional evangelicalism, but there is always an attempt at thoughtful engagement with the sweep of the relevant literature.

Dr Mark Seifrid is no novice with respect to justification in the thinking of the apostle Paul. Quite apart from the 1992 publication of his doctoral dissertation, *Justification by Faith: The Origin and Development of a Central Pauline Theme* (Leiden: Brill), he has continued his work on this theme in constant study that has generated a series of careful essays. He is persuaded, rightly, that while the 'new perspective on Paul' has made some gains and overturned some errors, its diverse forms converge in several ill-judged errors that touch something central in Christian thought: how men and women may be right with God. Dr Seifrid not only expounds the place of justification in Paul's thought, but shows how the apostle fits into his own historical context, and how his writings on this theme fit into the Christian canon. For Dr Seifrid understands that the issues turn not only on

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minute exegesis, but on exegesis that is grounded in central biblical themes and terminology. But he is no slave to mere traditionalism. He does not hesitate to amend more traditional formulations that he judges inadequate. Everywhere in this volume there is a careful listening to texts.

Dr Seifrid would be the first to acknowledge that in some ways this is an introductory essay, a survey of the whole. Detailed exegesis and reflection belong to other volumes. But it is this holistic vision that makes this book so powerful. One may disagree here and there with minor exegetical points, while coming away with a much better grasp of what is at stake. We perceive in the welter of contemporary discussion on justification that there are some fundamental truths, truths bound up with the honour and glory of God, that must not be ignored or minimized. This book has a prophetic quality, and my earnest hope is that Dr Seifrid will not prove to be without honour in his own country.

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Chapter One

The conversion of Paul as the justification of the ungodly

According to his own testimony, Paul's coming to faith in Christ involved the surrender of the heritage and piety which he once treasured:

If anyone else supposes that they might boast in the flesh, I far more: circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, according to the law, a Pharisee, according to zeal, a persecutor of the church, according to the righteousness which is in the law, blameless (Phil. 3:4b–6).

We may therefore properly describe his encounter with the risen Christ as his 'conversion'. He clearly did not cease to be a Jew, to love his kinspeople, and to cherish the hope of their salvation (see e.g. Rom. 9:1–5; 11:1–2). Nor did he abandon his high view of the law – indeed, its holiness most probably rose in his estimation (Rom. 7:12). He did, however, decisively reject the ideals which had shaped and guided his life up to that point. That which had been his pride and honour became for him mere 'dung', in view of 'that surpassing thing of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord' (Phil. 3:8). He does not mince words concerning the revaluation of his values. If we are to interpret Paul and his gospel of God's justifying work in Christ, we must gain some understanding of the Judaism which he knew, and with which he broke. Quite naturally, therefore, Paul's conversion has been and undoubtedly shall continue to be the subject of scholarly interest.¹ Here we can give only a brief overview of this topic as a sort of prologue to our investigation of the message of justification in his letters.

¹ On this topic see, inter alia, Kim 1982; Hengel 1991; Seifrid 1992a: 136–181; Avemarie 1996a; Hengel & Schwemer 1997: 91–101; Longenecker 1997.

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Over the past twenty years or so, a significant change has taken place in the way most scholars assess first-century Judaism. From the beginnings of critical biblical study until well into the twentieth century, Protestant scholarship often was guided by a misleading image of Paul and his Jewish contemporaries.² Frequently, it was supposed that they regarded eternal life as based upon a weighing and recompense of deeds, and consequently could never be assured of acquiring sufficient 'merit' to relieve the burden of sin. In coming to faith in Christ Paul found relief for his guilty conscience, or so it was thought. Although various studies of early Judaism challenged this view, it was a provocative article on Paul which especially caught the attention of more recent scholarship, and marked the changing perspective which was to emerge in years to come. The author of that article, Krister Stendahl, claimed that there is no evidence in Paul's letters that he ever suffered from an 'introspective conscience', burdened by the pangs of guilt. This image, he argued, is largely a projection of western culture.³ Following Stendahl's article, E. P. Sanders' (1977) comparison of Paul's thought with the understanding of salvation found in a broad range of early Jewish materials appeared.⁴ With this study a 'new perspective on Paul' emerged among biblical scholars (Dunn 1983: 95–122).

In place of the older misconceptions, Sanders found in early Jewish thought a 'pattern of religion', which he summarized as follows:

(1) God has chosen Israel and (2) given the law. The law implies both (3) God's promise to maintain the election and (4) the requirement to obey. (5) God rewards obedience and punishes transgression. (6) The law provides for means of atonement,

² See the history of research in Avemarie 1996a.

³ Stendahl 1963. Often this older image of Paul is attributed to Luther, a comparison which fits neither Paul nor Luther. It is overlooked that Luther knew a lenient penitential tradition as well as a strict one. Although he was given assurance that God's anger against sin was satisfied with a 'mere sigh' of repentance, he simply could not persuade himself that such comfort was valid: 'For I used to ask myself, "Who knows whether such consolations are to be believed?"' (WA 40.II.411.14, cited and translated by Steinmetz 1995: 8). Having found the answer to his questions in the word of promise fulfilled in Christ, it was the 'cheap grace' of the sale of indulgences which stirred him out of his more or less personal concerns into public action (see Brecht 1985: 183–202). Luther did not regard the conscience which torments itself with guilt as something positive, but as a tool of the devil. It is the last resort of the fallen human being in which we seek to escape God. On Luther's anguished conscience, see Steinmetz 1995: 1–11 and Rupp 1953: 102–120.

⁴ See also Sanders 1982; 1983; 1991 and 1992.

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and atonement results in (7) maintenance or re-establishment of the covenantal relationship. (8) All those who are maintained in the covenant by obedience, atonement and God's mercy belong to the group which will be saved. An important interpretation of the first and last points is that election and ultimately salvation are considered to be by God's mercy rather than human achievement (Sanders 1977: 422).

This 'covenantal nomism' was characteristic of Paul and most Jews of his day. In place of the priority given to judgment and recompense in older Protestant scholarship, Sanders lays emphasis upon God's election of Israel. One was 'in the covenant', i.e. elected to salvation, unless by a heinous transgression (without repentance) one chose to remove oneself from it (1977: 136–137). All one needed to do to enjoy forgiveness was to 'intend' to remain within the covenant which God had established with his people (1977: 182).

As Philippians 3:4–6 indicates, there is something that rings true in this criticism of the older portrait of Paul. When Paul speaks of his past life in Judaism, he speaks of that of which he was proud and in which he regarded himself as successful. There is no good indication in Paul's letters that he once was burdened with a sense of guilt. Not even Romans 7 reveals much in this regard, since in this chapter Paul does not describe his psychological state, but his condition as seen from the perspective of faith.

It must be said, however, that Sanders' own work is subject to one of the criticisms that he directed against the older treatments of early Judaism. Just as earlier Protestant works interpreted the rabbinic materials solely in terms of their expressions of expectation of recompense at the final judgment, Sanders reconstructs the early Jewish understanding of salvation through the lens of God's election of Israel.⁵ In a very thorough and careful study, Friedrich Avemarie

⁵ 'Rabbinic' Judaism refers to the Judaism which developed in the second century AD, and was represented especially by the Mishna, Tosephta and narrative writings (*haggadoth*), and the (later) forms of the Talmud. Traditions which appear in these materials, and authorities which they cite, extend back into the second century BC, and in some measure represent the Judaism which Paul knew. Other materials, such as the so-called 'apocrypha' and pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament (transmitted primarily through Christians), which were actually composed in the first century or earlier, provide a more direct image of the agitation and diversity within Judaism of this period. Here we may also think of Jewish contemporaries such as Philo and Josephus. To these we must also add the writings which have been discovered at Qumran for a proper understanding of early Judaism.

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(1996a) has shown that rabbinic Judaism tolerated a certain tension between affirmations of Israel's unconditioned election and God's demand for righteous conduct.⁶ Although Sanders' paradigm for understanding early Judaism enjoys broader support in the materials than the older view, it is also quite clear that the rabbis also could speak of salvation as being contingent upon obedience. In fact, they could even speak of the salvation of Gentiles (those outside 'the covenant') on the basis of good deeds.⁷ Rather than striving to produce a system in which all apparent contradictions were eliminated, the rabbis viewed salvation from at least two independent perspectives.⁸ In other words, in the rabbinic materials, 'covenantalism' stands alongside 'nomism' without the overarching synthesis which Sanders has proposed.

When we shift our attention to the pseudepigrapha and the Qumran writings, which provide a more vivid and direct picture of first-century Judaism, it becomes clear that first-century Jews could indeed regard salvation as contingent upon obedience.⁹ Of course, this belief does not at all mean that they felt uncertain about their salvation. Indeed, the evidence from Paul's letters suggests just the opposite. Israel's possession of the law and conformity to its demands set it apart from

⁶ See also Avemarie 1996b and 1999.

⁷ See Avemarie 1996a: 575–584; 1999: 108–126: Israel's salvation at Sinai depended on its obedience, as did its future deliverance from hell (Midr. Deut. 33:2; *Lev. Rab.* 1:11). Likewise, the salvation of certain individuals is said to result from their obedience (*v. Pe'a* 1:1). The reward for keeping the law is eternal life (*'Abot R. Natan* B 10). Righteous Gentiles may inherit the world to come (*t. Sanh.* 13:2; *b. 'Abod. Zar.* 10b). Avemarie (1996b) has further shown that while Sanders associates Israel's election with the Sinai covenant, in the rabbinic materials it is connected to the promises to the fathers.

⁸ Correspondingly, while the rabbis at times speak of God's gracious forgiveness of Israel or of sinners within it, they also provide a variety of grounds for this divine action: notions of the sacrificial system might be operative, or the Israelites might atone for one another, or God acts on behalf of his name or promises (see *Lev. Rab.* 27:3; 30:12, to which Dr Avemarie called my attention).

⁹ A number of factors may account for the differences between these writings and the rabbinic materials. Rabbinic Judaism represents a consolidation of Jewish thought over a long period, following two wars with Rome, and the destruction of the temple. It was therefore inherently broader and more inclusive in outlook, less directed to specific situations, and more oriented toward ongoing Jewish life in the wake of these events. The pseudepigraphal writings and those from Qumran were intended to preserve and extend particular forms of piety in competition with other groups which made up the variety of Jewish life prior to the first Jewish revolt. Generally they have a polemical edge, and not infrequently draw boundaries which exclude other Jews from salvation. Cf. Seifrid 1992a: 78–135.

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the nations as God's chosen people.¹⁰ And within Israel, there were those like Paul who excelled in their understanding and practice of the law, and therefore stood out as particularly pious members of the nation.¹¹

Philippians 3:4–6 again shows that Paul's view of his standing before God was shaped both by Israel's election and by his own obedience to the law. Although we shall have more to say about this matter in the course of this study, we may suggest here that Paul's conversion involved two dimensions. On the one hand, he came to understand that God's judgment rests upon the entire human race, including Israel itself. In his own terms, he would say that he came to see that God has subjected all human beings to the power of sin (e.g. Rom. 3:9; see Laato 1995). No longer did mere membership in the nation of Israel hold the promise of salvation for him. The promises given to Israel had been fulfilled in the risen Christ, and were to be possessed by faith. No longer did he regard conformity to the law as attainable by his efforts. Right and true though that demand is, Paul recognized that he was unable to fulfil it. He was a prisoner to 'the law of sin' in his 'members' (Rom. 7:23). Concomitantly, the mercy of God thereby became the mercy of *God* for Paul, that is, the free act of the Creator, dependent on neither the national heritage nor the piety of its recipients. 'He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all' (Rom. 8:32). Once, for Paul, as for his contemporaries, Israel's election and the demand of the law stood side by side in unresolved tension. Now he found their resolution, not in some synthesis or new idea, but in an event: the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of the Son of God. In Christ the demand of the law and the fulfilment of promise meet.

The pre-Christian Paul and the nation of Israel

The wide acceptance of Sanders' interpretation of Paul and early Judaism has led many to look for new ways to understand Paul's conversion and subsequent theology.¹² Two current approaches attempt

¹⁰ See e.g. Rom. 2:17–19; 9:30 – 10:4; Gal. 2:11–21.

¹¹ In addition to Phil. 3:4–6, see Gal. 1:14.

¹² Sanders himself was content to describe Paul's conversion as an inexplicable break with his past. In his view, we can know only that Paul had a revelation in which he came to believe that Christ is the Saviour of Jew and Gentile alike (1977: 441–442; 1982: 432–433; 1983: 208). Yet most scholars have been dissatisfied with this appeal to ignorance. Paul's continued regard for the law of Moses, his affirmation of the election of Israel, and his arguments from the Hebrew Scriptures call for some explanation of his

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to explain Paul by focusing upon his beliefs regarding the nation of Israel apart from questions of his personal piety. From the very start, we may be suspicious of the exclusion of the latter topic, which runs through early Judaism and Paul's letters. Nevertheless, we must consider the details of these proposals on their own merits. One of these more recent interpretations of Paul argues that his conversion had to do with his rejection of claims to Jewish national privilege. In this reading, Paul was converted from an insistence upon circumcision and other 'works of the law' as boundary markers which signalled Israel's exclusive possession of the promise of salvation. He later took up this teaching in the controversy over Gentile circumcision, arguing that God's grace applies to all nations (see esp. Dunn 1990: 183–241; 1997). Or, in a variation on this theme, Paul is supposed to have understood Christ to replace the law as the boundary marker of a redefined Israel (Donaldson 1997a). Another approach claims that Paul and most Jews of his day regarded themselves as still enduring the experience of the exile to Babylon. According to this paradigm (at least in some of its representations) one need not suppose that Paul was conscious of any personal guilt: the cross supplies the answer to his plight as a member of the nation. This understanding of Paul appears to integrate his post-conversion thought very nicely with the Judaism he once practised. The theology of his letters is a continuation of that for which he had always hoped, to which the new insight is added that the hour of salvation had arrived in Christ.

These new ways of interpreting Paul in terms of 'ethnicity' and 'exile' are not mutually exclusive, of course. One might suppose that the pre-Christian Paul was confident of God's promises to Israel and that at the same time he regarded the nation as currently experiencing the exile. Moreover, as we have suggested, both readings depend on a problematic distinction between Paul's national consciousness and his personal piety (cf. Gal. 1:14; Phil. 3:4–6). In the end, Sanders' theory and these newer 'national' interpretations of Paul's conversion represent complementary caricatures. Whereas Sanders supposes that Paul made a more or less irrational break with his Jewish beliefs, the 'national' portrayals of Paul's conversion seek to establish a continuity that Paul would never have accepted. They overlook Paul's understanding of the new creation which has come about in Christ (2 Cor. 5:16–17). In his view, his conversion was the gift of sight to a blind person, the opening of his eyes to see the glory of Christ (2 Cor.

conversion against his Jewish background.

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4:1–6). In that vision of Christ, and only there, he saw the truth about himself. His conversion involved a conscious turning away from his past. Yet it cannot be explained in mere intellectual, psychological or ethical terms.¹³

Paul and ethnicity

The claim that Paul's rejection of symbols of ethnic privilege stood at the centre of his conversion and subsequent theology has led to considerable discussion over the meaning of the expression 'the works of the law' in the letters of Paul. Although we shall reserve our discussion of this expression for a later chapter, a number of preliminary comments are appropriate here.

In large measure, the new 'ethnic' reading of 'the works of the law' comes as a reaction to the once influential 'existential' interpretation of Paul. In the mid-twentieth century, the New Testament scholar Rudolf Bultmann interpreted the pursuit of 'works of the law' as a self-striving to gain God's approval. Paul regarded such works as wrong because they represented an assertion of the ego, a failure to trust in God. One wins life not by self-effort, but by yielding oneself to God. There is some truth to this analysis of Paul's thought, but it is only a half-truth. Bultmann and his pupils elevated the formal aspect of faith, utter reliance upon God, to the status of an absolute in their appropriation of Paul's thought (although, we must point out, not always in their description of it).¹⁴ In so doing they turned 'faith' into an insight at which in theory any reflective human being might arrive. The cross thereby becomes a mere symbol for an enduring reality and in principle is dispensable.¹⁵

The 'new perspective' on Paul sets aside this existential paradigm and argues instead that Paul abandoned a 'nationalistic' pride at his conversion. Although this change in perspective seems dramatic, the portrait of Paul it presents is not essentially different from that of Bultmann. Both readings understand Paul to have arrived at an insight which is essentially accessible to every human being. His coming to faith cannot legitimately be reduced to the embrace of an ethical stance

¹³ For a brief survey of Christian understanding of conversion in the light of Paul's conversion, see Corley 1997.

¹⁴ See Bultmann 1951: 270–274, 314–324, where the emphasis on the 'existential' aspect of faith is clear.

¹⁵ Here, again, we must acknowledge that Bultmann somewhat inconsistently never regarded it so.

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any more than it can be described as the gaining of an existential insight. Did Paul need the ‘word of the cross’ to tell him that a selfish nationalism was wrong? Could he not gather that much from the Scriptures themselves? Indeed, it is not at all clear that a Jewish nationalism in itself is wrong. Don’t the Scriptures speak of the streaming of the nations to Zion (Is. 2:1–4; Mic. 4:1–5)? Why would it have been evil for Paul to embrace an ‘ethnocentric’ interpretation of the promise of salvation? What was so terribly wrong about seeking to gather the Gentiles into Judaism as his opponents in Galatia did? As we shall see, despite a decisive difference between Paul and his opponents, his gospel ‘to the Jew first’ is no less nationalistic than was theirs.

Furthermore, Paul does not at all reject the emblems of Jewish identity. He always employs Jewish terminology such as ‘(the) circumcision’, ‘those of the circumcision’, or ‘those of the law’ and even ‘the person of the works of the law’ in a neutral sense, or even positively.¹⁶ He never speaks negatively of circumcision. As an ethnic symbol it is a matter of indifference for him.¹⁷ Nowhere in his letters does he attack Jewish observance of the law, and in fact he indicates that he himself returned to it (1 Cor. 9:20; cf. Acts 18:18; 21:15–26). It is therefore striking that he speaks of ‘those who are of the works of the law’ as being under ‘the curse of the law’ (Gal. 3:10). In view of his broader usage, it is altogether unlikely that he has the ‘ethnicity’ of such works in view.¹⁸ Indeed, despite the inclusion of the Gentiles in God’s promise to Abraham, the priority of the ‘Jew’ is fundamental to his gospel.¹⁹ It is not the particularity of the promise which he combats

¹⁶ See Rom. 2:25–28; 4:10–12, 14; 15:8; Gal. 2:16, and the discussion in chapter 4 below.

¹⁷ Gal. 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor. 7:18–19. Circumcision has prophetic-typological significance for Paul, as a prefiguration of the saving realities of faith and the work of the Spirit, and as such conveys no intrinsic saving advantage (Rom. 4:9–12; 2:25–29; Phil. 3:3; Eph. 2:11–13; Col. 2:11; 3:11). Only when this truth is violated and circumcision becomes a mark of piety does circumcision become a threat to the gospel for Paul (Rom. 2:25–29; 4:9–12; Gal. 5:2–6).

¹⁸ Dunn has come some distance toward recognizing this aspect of Paul’s thought, since he is willing to speak of the ‘works of the law’ as a test case for (Jewish) faithfulness (1990: 244–245; 1997: 151). Yet he still insists upon a disjunction between ‘corporate’ and ‘individual’ identity, and therefore downplays the saving significance of that ‘faithfulness’. He supposes that the issue lay simply in determining how far the blessing of the covenant extends: Paul opposes practices which separate Jew from Gentile, i.e., faithful from unfaithful (1990: 246; 1997: 151–152). Of course Paul did so, but one has not understood his gospel if one separates its social dimension from its individual dimension.

¹⁹ See the discussion in chapter 6 below of Rom. 11:15, 25–36, which speak of the

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in his letters, but the subsuming of the promise to Abraham into the law of Moses: 'if those of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise annulled' (Rom. 4:14).

The real cause for Paul's rejection of the 'works of the law' lies beyond both self-understanding and ethics. As we shall see, faith for Paul is the correlate to Christ's cross and resurrection. It is obedience to the promise of God fulfilled in that event (see e.g. Rom. 4:13–25). One is justified not because of a mere inward disposition, but because of Christ in whom God has atoned for sin and effected a new creation. The content and basis of faith are definitive, and not merely its form. For this reason both the existential and nationalistic readings of Paul fail. On the one hand, his rejection of the 'works of the law' proceeds from a judgment about a state of affairs, not from a 'decision' to which the human being is summoned.²⁰ On the other hand, faith excludes 'works of the law' not because of an ethical principle such as the evil of nationalism, but because of the cross in which all such 'works' have been judged.²¹ Likewise, Paul's conversion was far more than a 'paradigm shift' in which he merely adjusted his prior belief about the prerequisite for sharing in salvation.²² It is a mistake, then, to suppose that Paul was opposed to 'works of the law' because he saw them as emblems of an exclusive, national hope of salvation. As we shall see, these 'works' bore a 'religio-national' significance for Paul's Jewish contemporaries, and likewise for him prior to his conversion (Rom. 9:30–33). He rejected them because they represented a false claim to righteousness.

Paul and the exile

According to the other current interpretation of Paul, he along with

salvation of Israel. His thought on this matter is not essentially different from that of Jesus (e.g. Mark 7:24–30; Matt. 10:5–6; 15:24). Cf. Donaldson 1997b. See also Dunn 1998: 526–529, who himself recognizes that Paul expects the eschatological salvation of Israel.

²⁰ Furthermore, within the Judaism which Paul knew, self-confidence did not exclude dependence on God's assistance, especially that given through the gift of the law. See Avemarie 1996a: 376–445; Seifrid 1992a.

²¹ We may readily see this in Romans, where the contrast between the 'works of the law' and the cross (3:20–26) appears prior to that between the 'works of the law' and faith (3:27–31). In Galatians, too, Paul appeals to the cross as the basis for his rejection of the 'works of the law' (2:15–21; 3:10–14). Cf. Dunn 1992.

²² Against Donaldson 1997a: 1–49, 185. Paul's new 'conviction' about Christ brought a judgment on himself, his works, his sin. Donaldson's thesis comes out looking more like a change of mind than a change of heart.

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much of early Judaism regarded the nation as being in a continuing state of exile, despite the return to the land. The Deuteronomic pattern of events had yet to come to completion: the people awaited the removal of Israel's guilt and the promise of restoration (see esp. Deut. 28 – 30). Faith in Christ resolved Paul's deepest longing. In his encounter with the risen Christ, he came to believe that the exile had ended in the death of the Messiah, who bore the curse of the law for Israel on a Roman cross. Jesus' resurrection signalled the ushering in of the nations to share in the blessings of the covenant (see e.g. Wright 1992: 268–279; Thielman 1994: 46–48).

Despite its apparent novelty and current appeal, this reading of Paul is a mere variation on an older theme. To shift from speaking of the burden of personal guilt to that of the nation represents no real movement away from psychologism. If it is to provide an adequate explanation of Paul's thought, the exilic interpretation must suppose that generally Jews understood the nation to be in exile and that they regarded this condition to be a result of a corporate guilt in which they shared. Paul must have had this sense of malaise prior to his conversion. Afterwards it became the basis of his announcement of the gospel.

The theory implicitly assumes that the human being is capable of self-diagnosis. As with Job's sorry comforters, the problem of sin for Israel can supposedly be read off the outward course of events. In comparison with Paul's thought, this conception of sin is highly superficial, as we shall see in the following chapter. Here it is sufficient to indicate that the exilic interpretation runs into difficulties in Paul's letters themselves. The attraction which Judaism held for Paul's churches in Galatia is very difficult to understand if one assumes that Jews generally were lamenting their condition. The attractiveness of Judaism, and of Jerusalem as its centre, is felt throughout the letter to the Galatians (see Gal. 1:10 – 2:10; 2:11–21; 6:16). Paul's assertion that the heavenly Jerusalem, not the earthly, is the 'mother' of believers presupposes that the earthly city bore considerable influence in the minds of his converts (Gal. 4:21–31). He declares that the earthly Jerusalem 'is enslaved with her children', not because of Roman occupation (of which his converts already would have been aware), but because of its failure to believe the gospel (Gal. 5:25).

It is well beyond the scope of our study to investigate the complicated views of the exile which appear in early Jewish writings. Here we wish only to point out some texts which call into question the

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claim that many Jews in Paul's day understood Israel to be under the curse of exile.

Often in extrabiblical sources from this period, 'Israel' is divided into the pious and the wicked. Those who adhere to the demands of the law in the present will be prepared for the restoration which is yet to come. The rest will suffer punishment with the enemies of God's people (see Steck 1967: 189–192). The 'sin' of the people is no longer absolute, as the 'exilic' reading of Paul requires.²³ Those who are obedient may await the future with confidence, as for example in the book of Baruch, where the author claims, 'We praise you from our exile because we have turned away from our hearts all the unrighteousness of our fathers who sinned before you' (3:7).²⁴ This development is of considerable significance, since now the piety of some within the nation is decoupled from its outward condition.

The early Jewish materials often present the exile as having ended in some sense or another, even if they also regard it as continuing or recurring. The book of Judith speaks directly of the end of the exile (4:1–5; 5:17–19). The conclusion of the pseudepigraphal book of Baruch suggests that the return from exile is already in progress (4:36; 5:5–9). The Qumran community regarded itself as the remnant, delivered from the continuing guilt of the nation, even if they entered a new exile in their separation from Jerusalem.²⁵ The book of Tobit appears to envisage a two-stage conclusion to the exile: by God's mercy some return from the exile and rebuild the temple in an imperfect way; later all return from exile and rebuild Jerusalem in splendour. The exile has ended for some, but the 'times of fulfilment' are yet to come (Tobit 14:1–9).²⁶ Philo can speak of God himself as 'homeland, kinsfolk and inheritance' and regard the exile as the Jewish colonization of the world, even though he also expects an end of exile.²⁷ Josephus can treat the exile as having ended after seventy years, only to be followed by subsequent 'exiles', including the one he himself experienced.²⁸ For his own reasons, he regards exile positively and seems to lack an expectation of a return (Feldman 1997).

²³ Here the literature also varies from its biblical antecedents.

²⁴ See also the Prayer of Azariah 18. Among other early Jewish writings *1 Enoch*, Tobit, the *Psalms of Solomon*, 4 Ezra and the Qumran writings (despite their emphasis on unconditioned grace) display this sort of thinking.

²⁵ See, e.g., the Cairo Damascus Document 1:1–17; 3:10–21.

²⁶ Note that only the obedient will be saved; 14:7–9.

²⁷ See Philo, *Quis Rerum Divinarum Heres* 26–27. Philo's expectation of an end of exile appears in *De Praemiis et Poenis* 162–172.

²⁸ *Antiquities* 4:314; 10:112–113; 10:247–277; 11:1–4.

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Quite understandably, those in the land could regard themselves as not being in exile. The Mishnah contains a saying ascribed to Abtalion, who lived in Jerusalem under Herodian rule in the first century BC. He warns teachers of the law to guard their words so that they may not become guilty of the punishment of exile, and be exiled to the place of 'bad waters', i.e. bad teaching. Despite subjugation to Rome, he obviously did not regard himself to be in exile (*m. 'Aboth* 1:11).²⁹ The form of the Passover Seder recorded in the Mishnah is significant in this regard, since it may reflect something of the practice and thought of many Jews in this period. A father is to instruct the son concerning the redemption from Egypt from Deuteronomy 26, 'beginning with the disgrace and ending with the glory' (Deut. 26:5–9). No mention is made of the subsequent description of exile and return in Deuteronomy 28 – 32 (*m. Pesq* 10:4). This perspective is likewise apparent in the words concerning the Passover attributed to Gamaliel (just possibly the first-century Gamaliel I, although more likely his grandson):

In every generation a person is duty-bound to regard himself as if he has personally gone forth from Egypt ... Therefore we are duty-bound to thank, praise, glorify, honor, exalt, extol, and bless him who did for our forefathers and for us all these miracles. He brought us forth from slavery to freedom, anguish to joy, mourning to festival, darkness to great light, subjugation to redemption, so we should say before him, Hallelujah! (*m. Pesq* 10:5).³⁰

The celebration presupposes that contemporary Israel enjoys its initial redemption from Egypt, whatever its trials at the moment.

It is not at all clear, therefore, that there was a widespread sense among Jews of Paul's day that Israel remained in exile in the way that this theory demands.³¹ The pervasive sense of national guilt and lament

²⁹ Cf. the saying of Rabbi Nehorai in *m. 'Aboth* 4:18, who speaks positively of 'exile to a place of Torah', cited by Feldman 1997. See further Dunn 1997: 148–149.

³⁰ I have cited the translation by Neusner 1988. Even Rabbi Aqiba, who is said to include a petition for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and proper worship in the temple, concludes the Seder with the benediction, 'Blessed are you, Lord, who has redeemed Israel!' (*m. Pesq* 10:6).

³¹ Both Wright 1992: 268–279 and Thielman 1994: 48–68 operate with an ill-defined conception of 'exile', in which they suppose that any deficiency in Israel's condition (Diaspora, temple, Roman rule) signalled to all or most Jews that the 'nation' (as a whole!) was still in exile. Even at a glance, it is apparent that early Jewish sources are far more nuanced than this, as is apparent from the few texts cited above.

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which it requires is lacking in the sources. Undoubtedly many Jews in Paul's day regarded the exile as in some sense continuing. Yet many Jews also supposed that the exile had in some sense ended or that its effects had been ameliorated, even if it remained. The return to the land, the reconstruction of the temple, and the adjustment by many Jews to life in the Diaspora brought forth varied perspectives on Israel's experience.

There is no evidence that Paul, who returned from the Diaspora to Jerusalem in his youth, and who refers to his former practice of the law as 'blameless', considered himself part of a nation suffering in exile for its guilt. Furthermore, when Paul speaks of Israel's failure in his letters he treats the nation as a whole. We therefore cannot suppose that he regarded part of the nation as being in exile or as thinking itself to be in exile, as the early Jewish sources might allow. The judgment which he formed concerning his people was all-encompassing. It is derived not from an assessment of Israel's outward condition, but from its rejection of Jesus as Messiah. As we shall later see, when Israel's exile appears in Romans 9 – 11, it is in a form nearly the opposite of the 'exilic' interpretation. According to Paul, a new exile has begun in Israel's unbelief which will be ended only at the Messiah's return.

Paul's conversion

In addition to Paul's autobiographical statement in Galatians 1, several of Paul's self-references shed light on his conversion.³² We must also take into account his statements in Romans 9 – 11 concerning Israel as a whole. Supplementing these, we have Luke's extended narrative of Paul's conversion, which appears three times in the book of Acts (9:1–19; 22:1; 26:1–23).

Paul's pursuit of the law

Paul's account of his coming to faith in Galatians is remarkably succinct. Indeed the moment of 'conversion' does not really appear at all, only his activity before and after his encounter with Christ.³³ He

³² Rom. 7:7–25; 1 Cor. 15:8–10; 2 Cor. 4:1–6; Phil. 3:6; 1 Tim. 1:12–16.

³³ Fredriksen 1986, along with others, has argued that converts demonstrably remember their conversion through the lens of their (changing) experience: Paul's conversion therefore remains basically inaccessible to us. However, she fails to appreciate that Paul does not really give us an account of his *experience* of call or conversion, but only of his accompanying activities. Moreover, it is not at all clear that

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introduces his brief statement about his conversion in Galatians 1:13–14 by referring to his persecution of the church, with which he assumes Galatians already are familiar. With some irony he then adds: ‘And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many contemporaries in my nation, being exceedingly zealous for my ancestral traditions.’

Here, for the only time in his letters, Paul refers to his former religion as ‘Judaism’. Clearly we find here the language of an outsider, who looks back upon his past with detachment. As he writes this letter, his former life had become for him an ethnic and cultural heritage, but not in itself obedience to the living God. In this respect, Paul offers himself as a model for his Galatian readers, who are inclined to adopt circumcision and thereby embrace ‘Judaism’.

At the same time, the statement sheds light on Paul’s thinking prior to his faith in Christ. His ‘zeal’ for his ‘ancestral traditions’ clearly was religious zeal. Conversely, his religious identity was rooted in his ethnic and national heritage. The same sort of thinking is reflected in his rehearsal of his advantages in Philippians 3:4–6, which we cited at the outset of this chapter. It is implicitly present in his characterization of Israel in Romans 9 – 10. Obviously, Paul did not understand his piety in merely private terms, but as part of a people and a tradition. He was, first of all, a member of the people whom God had chosen; secondly, an heir of a particularly faithful heritage within that nation; thirdly, an adherent of a group which strictly observed the law; and finally, personally exemplary in zeal and righteousness.

It is not clear precisely how the tension between ‘election’ and ‘demand’ which characterized early Judaism played itself out in Paul’s life. We certainly cannot conclude from these statements that Paul thought that membership in Israel or the ‘covenant with the fathers’ ensured his salvation. As we have noted, the rabbinic materials attest the possibility of this stance, and in the Gospels we find John the Baptist preaching against a crass confidence of this sort.³⁴ Significantly, however, we never find Paul charging his contemporaries with harbouring the belief that they possessed a guarantee of salvation. When he does call into question a misplaced assurance on the part of Jews, it is the sufficiency of Israel’s obedience which he challenges (Rom. 9:30–33). This is the case even when he dismisses the

we should dismiss the testimony of Acts, which does provide an external confirmation of Paul’s statements.

³⁴ ‘Do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our Father.” For I tell you, God is able to raise up children for Abraham from these stones’ (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:9).

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assumption that Israel enjoyed a privileged knowledge of God's will through the law. He assumes that his rhetorical Jewish dialogue partner would agree with him that merely knowing God's will is insufficient apart from doing it (Rom. 2:17–29). Therefore Paul's consciousness of his ranking and progress in 'Judaism' (Gal. 1:14) in all likelihood means that he understood his standing with God as based not merely upon his ethnic and familial background, but also upon his own obedience to the law. He was not content to be a properly circumcised Israelite of the tribe of Benjamin. He adhered to the law as a Pharisee with a consciousness that it was an achievement which set him apart from other Jews.

A number of scholars have been quick to argue on the basis of Paul's claim to 'blamelessness with regard to the righteousness of the law' that he enjoyed a 'robust conscience' and did not suffer from guilt prior to his conversion (Phil. 3:6). To interpret Paul in this way, however, represents the same sort of psychologizing involved in the older image of Paul's anguished conscience, only in the reverse direction. We simply do not know how Paul dealt with guilt prior to his conversion. Furthermore, to interpret 'guilt' in subjective terms is to ignore the understanding of sin which appears in Paul's letters. It is not in the first instance a psychological state, but a state of affairs, a power over all human beings.³⁵ We do not find Paul retrospectively exploring his pre-Christian conscience, because it was irrelevant to him. Where he speaks of his preconversion life, he speaks not of what he thought or felt, but of what he did, particularly his persecution of the people of God.³⁶ In this he obviously regards himself as having been guilty of a fundamental sin. It is impossible to miss the irony in his final statements in Philippians 3:6. His zeal was such that he was a 'persecutor of the church', to which he adds, 'as to the righteousness which is in the law [I was] blameless'. In looking back upon his preconversion life, he sees that the law was capable of providing a righteousness according to human standards, but not before God and in the heart, where he now knows Christ as Saviour (Phil. 3:7–8).

We must therefore avoid the dead-end of a psychological interpretation of Paul's conversion. Paul himself excludes it when he declares that an act of God put an end to his pursuit of the law. Recalling the pattern of the calling of the prophets, he unmistakably

³⁵ Cf. Rom. 3:9; Gal. 3:22. We shall return to this view repeatedly in our following discussion.

³⁶ Gal. 1:13; Phil. 3:6; 1 Cor. 15:9.

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points to the sovereign working of God as the basis of his coming to faith: 'When it pleased God, who set me apart from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son to me, I did not immediately consult flesh and blood' (Gal. 1:15–16).³⁷

God's choice and calling were unconditioned by Paul's 'progress in Judaism' (verse 14). From birth God had set him apart, like the prophets before him, prior to any works or worthiness on his part.³⁸ His 'calling' came by the sheer grace of God. His coming to faith was a matter of divine revelation in which Paul himself played no role. It was a 'birth', indeed a premature one (1 Cor. 15:8). This perspective also appears in 2 Corinthians 4:6, where Paul describes his conversion as a creation *ex nihilo*. Just as God by his word alone created light out of darkness, he caused the knowledge of the glory of God in 'the face of Jesus Christ' to shine forth as light from Paul's own heart. Paul may well allude here to the appearance to him of the risen Christ, who is the very image of God (2 Cor. 4:4–6; see Kim 1982). He is certainly not claiming, however, that this 'experience' was his alone as an apostle. The glory of Christ is present within the gospel, which itself is 'light', and is given forth through the apostle himself as a bearer of that Good News (2 Cor. 4:4, 6). This contrast which Paul draws between the absolutes of darkness and light, and his interpretation of his conversion as a new creation, make it clear that he regards this change as purely and utterly an act of God. Paul's heart was the 'darkness' in which the light of the gospel now shines.³⁹ A psychological preparation for conversion has no place here.

Paul's persecution of the church

As we have noted, in both Galatians 1 and Philippians 3, Paul ironically juxtaposes his persecution of the church with his progress in Judaism. In retrospect, he regards this activity as a great transgression, in which his own ungodliness was exposed.⁴⁰

The objects of Paul's persecution, in all probability, were Jewish believers in Christ, not Gentiles.⁴¹ Although there has been a tendency

³⁷ See Is. 49:1; Jer. 1:5.

³⁸ Cf. Rom. 9:11–12; Jer. 1:4–12.

³⁹ He describes the minds of 'the sons of Israel' similarly in the preceding context. Only when one turns to the Lord (i.e. Christ) is Moses' veil, the hardening of the heart, removed (2 Cor. 3:12–18).

⁴⁰ In addition to Gal. 1:13–14 and Phil. 3:6, see 1 Cor. 15:9, 'I do not deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.' Cf. 1 Tim. 1:13.

⁴¹ A Gentile mission had not developed at the time of Paul's conversion. According to

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to suppose that Paul persecuted only one segment of the early believing community (Greek-speaking Jewish believers who were critical of the law) the evidence which can be mustered for this reconstruction from the book of Acts, particularly from Stephen's speech, is rather weak.⁴² Paul's own unqualified statements suggest that he persecuted the whole believing community without distinction, as for example, in Galatians 1:23–24, where Paul recounts that the churches of Judea rejoiced to hear that their former persecutor proclaimed the 'faith' he once persecuted. That 'faith' can be nothing other than the message of salvation through repentance and faith in Jesus as risen Messiah and Lord.

It is worth remembering that it was not simply a confession which Paul persecuted, but a confessing community. Their insistence that salvation was to be found through repentance and faith in Jesus alone represented a judgment on their society and a challenge to their contemporaries. This was not merely the case of a group within Judaism which maintained exclusive claims, like the Essenes, who could more or less be tolerated because of their isolation. The earliest believers openly announced that the decisive moment in Israel's history had arrived, that the Messiah had appeared. Obedience to this resurrected Lord, this 'prophet like Moses', could not be postponed (Acts 3:22–26; cf. 2:36; 4:12). Moreover, it was the *crucified* Jesus whom they proclaimed as the risen Messiah, a proclamation which, as Paul's own later statements indicate, was highly offensive (1 Cor. 1:23). The Messiah represented the hope of the nation for deliverance from all her foes, and the embodiment of the well-being of the people. The fate of this one represented the righteousness of the entire nation, its vindication by God over against its enemies. It was therefore unthinkable that God would allow this saviour to be crucified.⁴³ Indeed, in the minds of most Jews, the Scriptures themselves pronounced a curse on the crucified Jesus: Deuteronomy 21:23, which declares that 'cursed is the one who hangs on a tree', was interpreted in this period as referring to crucifixion.⁴⁴ Paul's

the account in Acts, which Paul's letters give no reason to doubt, Paul's persecution of believers took place in Jerusalem in the first place. And Paul's report of the churches of Judea indicates that *they* had been the objects of his persecution (Gal. 1:22).

⁴² The charges against Stephen, that he spoke against the temple and the law (Acts 6:11, 14), are unsubstantiated in his speech. He only points to the prophetic assertion that God transcends the temple and charges his adversaries with themselves failing to keep the law (Acts 7:48–53). On this topic see Hill 1992.

⁴³ As, in fact, the Gospels report Peter himself once saying to Jesus (Matt. 16:22).

⁴⁴ See especially the Qumran Temple Scroll 64:7–12.

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persecution of the church therefore appears as an attempt to suppress the confession of the crucified Jesus as Messiah, a confession which called into question his entire conception of God, of Israel, and of himself.

Paul's conversion according to Acts

While the testimony of Acts offers nothing to change the picture of Paul's conversion we gain from his letters, it adds a new perspective on the event. As in Paul's letters, it appears that he persecuted the entire believing community, not merely one wing of it. He attacked 'the disciples of the Lord', and thought that he had to oppose 'the name, "Jesus of Nazareth"' (Acts 9:1; 22:4; 26:9). According to Luke, the young man Saul guarded the robes of the witnesses to Stephen's 'blasphemy', and fully approved of putting him to death (Acts 7:54 – 8:1). Luke thereby implies that Paul was aware of the words of Stephen which brought the Sanhedrin to its action: 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!' (7:56). This is the only direct attribution of the title 'Son of Man' to Jesus outside the Gospels. Stephen here announces the exaltation of the suffering and rejected Jesus, whom he names as 'the Righteous One' (verse 52).

Luke provides no explanation for Paul's hostility to Jesus, but his portrait fully corresponds with the conclusion that the idea of a crucified Messiah was blasphemous to him. In the report of Acts, he appears as an unusually well-connected young man, with access to the Sanhedrin and the high-priestly circle.⁴⁵ He opposed the faith of the earliest Christians because it pronounced judgment on his world and his position within that world.

According to Luke's report, Saul is blinded by the appearance of the risen Jesus, an event which clearly symbolizes his spiritual state (Acts 9:8–19; 22:11–13). When the glorified Christ addresses him with the question, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?', he responds with complete ignorance, 'Who are you, Lord?' He could draw no connection between the exalted figure who appeared, and 'Jesus the Nazarene' whom he opposed. His blindness was an expression of his prior condition, and was removed only through the testimony of the

⁴⁵ Acts 9:1–2; 22:5; 26:10. Likewise Paul's family seems to have been of high status and to have enjoyed such contact; see Acts 23:12–16. Robert Plummer has called my attention to Paul's unusual connection with the high-priestly circle in Acts.

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believing Ananias (9:17; 22:12–16).

Ananias' words to Saul, which are reported in 22:12–16, are in themselves of importance. God appointed Saul to know his will. This reminds us of Paul's own language in Galatians 1:15–16, where he indicates that God revealed Jesus Christ to him when it pleased God himself. Further, Saul was allowed to see 'the Righteous One'. This title, which believers apply to Jesus several times in Acts (3:14; 7:52; 22:14), is drawn from the description of the vindication of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 53:11:

The Righteous One, my Servant, shall justify the many.
And he shall bear their iniquities.

We may readily infer from Luke's presentation of his encounter with Ananias that Paul received instruction in which Jesus' death and resurrection were interpreted in precisely these terms. The crucified and exalted Messiah was the Suffering Servant of Isaiah, whose death was an atonement for sin, effecting justification. In the text of Acts Ananias continues his message to Paul by urging him to be baptized immediately, calling on Jesus' name for the forgiveness of his sins (22:17). It seems likely, therefore, that from his earliest days as a believer, Paul interpreted the cross and resurrection as the justifying work of God. Once his eyes had been opened to the glory of the resurrected Christ, he understood the crucifixion of the Messiah on the basis of the Scriptures, as he was instructed.⁴⁶ Paul himself later presupposes that Peter (and other Jewish Christians) understood the cross as the justifying act of God, even if they did not fully grasp the significance of this truth (Gal. 2:15–16).⁴⁷

In Luke's third account of Paul's conversion, an additional statement appears in the words of the risen Jesus: 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads' (Acts 26:14). This is a proverbial form, which expresses the futility and self-inflicted harm which come from resisting an overwhelming

⁴⁶ We need not suppose a conflict here between Ananias' words to Saul, and Paul's claim that he received his gospel through a revelation of the risen Christ (Gal. 1:12). Luke presents Ananias as only confirming and interpreting the revelation which had already taken place. Scripture was understood similarly, as a revelation which required interpretation by divine help.

⁴⁷ It is also possible that several concise but powerful statements of Paul regarding the justifying work of Christ reflect the confession of the earliest believers (Rom. 3:21–26; 4:25; 2 Cor. 5:21).

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power.⁴⁸ In context Paul narrates in considerable detail his harsh treatment of those who confessed the name 'Jesus of Nazareth'. All of it was to no avail in the face of the authority of the risen Lord, whose utterance recalls the advice of Gamaliel, 'If their counsel is of God, you shall not be able to resist them, and you may perhaps be found fighting against God' (Acts 5:39). Correspondingly, in this account Paul describes his emotions as he persecuted the church: 'I was out of my mind with rage at them [the saints], pursuing them up to and into other cities.'

As I have suggested in my translation, the word Luke uses to describe Paul's mental state conveys the idea of insanity. In the narrative Luke artfully uses a related term in Festus' protest against Paul's testimony of conversion: 'You are out of your mind, Paul!', to which Paul replies, 'I am speaking words of truth and sound thinking.' Contrary to what Festus thought, Paul was quite sane; his conversion had brought him to his senses.

Luke is not performing some sort of psychological analysis on Paul in his description of his 'madness' or in his reference to the words of the risen Jesus. Paul's 'madness' arose from his conclusion 'that it was necessary to do many things contrary to the name "Jesus of Nazareth"' (Acts 26:9). Prior to his conversion, Paul fought with heart and soul against the confession of a crucified Messiah. His rage corresponded to his blindness. The grace of God came to him like 'a plumb-line from above' without any preparation on his part, just as Paul himself indicates in his letters.

Conclusion

Both Paul and Luke interpret his conversion as an unconditioned act of God's mercy, to which Paul brought no preparation but his sins. All attempts to find a psychological basis for that conversion shatter against this foundational element of the New Testament witness. Neither anxiety over his guilt nor distress over the condition of his nation prepared him for his encounter with the risen Christ. Conversely, faith in Christ revealed something beyond a mere ethical or existential insight to Paul. His eyes were opened to see the glory of the crucified and risen Christ, who, he says, 'loved me and gave

⁴⁸ The earliest reference is found in a fragment of a poem by Pindar (in the Maehler edition, 2:94). See also Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* line 1624, Euripides, *Bacchanalia* 795; Aristophanes Gramm., *Historiae animalum epitome* 2.431.3; Aelius Aristides, *Pros Platōna peri rhētorikēs*, line 230.

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himself up for me' (Gal. 2:20). In this same faith, the reality of his own sin and guilt was exposed. Neither his good standing as a member of the nation of Israel, nor his energetic pursuit of the law, could change who he was: a fallen human being under the power of sin and death. His national origin and personal piety represented mere 'flesh', fallen and rebellious humanity. In retrospect, he came to regard his former pursuit of the law as a partial obedience, a cheap substitute for the absolute demand of love toward God and neighbour. All his false assumptions about his own standing and that of his nation came under challenge from the community of believers who bore witness to the crucified Jesus as the risen Messiah. In his persecution of this 'church of God', Paul's ungodliness was exposed in its ugliest form. Yet precisely in the midst of this transgression God chose to reveal his Son to Paul. Then he learned that the Righteous One, who in his death bore the sins of many, justifies the ungodly.

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