

Pauline Discipleship

David Suryk, January 13, 2006

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Introduction

In thinking about the assigned topic of Pauline Discipleship, several thoughts immediately came to mind. The first was Paul's comment in 1 Corinthians 1:13-14:

11 For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. **12** What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ." **13** Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? (English Standard Version, here and throughout)

So is there such a thing as Apollonian discipleship? Or, Petrine discipleship? Or, even Pauline discipleship?

Another thing that came to mind is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:1—
"Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." And then there's Philippians 3:17— "Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us." *See also* 1 Cor 4:16; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 2 Thess 3:6, 9 for the other uses of the "imitation" language.

Things became further complicated when I looked to my bookshelf for guidance. I found one book titled, *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* edited by Richard Longenecker. There the contributors look at various books of the New Testament to see what they contribute to the topic of discipleship. But then again I found a book that seemed to militate against distinctives of schools of discipleship. That book is by Lee Camp and called *Mere Discipleship*.

It's also popular to pit Paul off against James, or John, and even against Jesus, as if Paul created a new religion, something that Jesus didn't intend at all. After all, when you read Paul's letters we find very little directly of the teachings of Jesus—Paul mentions no parables; he tells no stories about Jesus and his ministry with his disciples.

Given all these mixed signals, what's a speaker on Pauline discipleship to do? What's more, Paul never once used the word "disciple." Doesn't Paul care about discipleship?

Well, yes, Paul cares and cares deeply about discipleship. And yes there really is such a thing as Pauline discipleship. And I think it's not so different from Petrine or Johannine discipleship. I have to admit that I don't know about Apollonian discipleship! What I do know is that Paul is more explicit about the ground, nature, and goal of Christian discipleship than perhaps are the others.

The topic of Pauline discipleship is a very long discussion, and one talk certainly can't do it justice. So what I'd like to do this evening is develop a thesis about what Pauline discipleship is and if there's time probe a bit what that means for us today who profess faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that the apostle Paul preached and for whom he died.

What is discipleship?

Before looking at my thesis on what *Pauline* discipleship is, it's helpful to start by saying a bit about what *discipleship* is. Let's think of discipleship as *a way of being human in the world*. I think this is our best frame of reference for thinking about Pauline or true Christian discipleship.

In John 8 Jesus said “[E]veryone who commits sin is a slave to sin” (34) but “if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (36). Jesus spoke to Jews who claimed Abraham as their father (John 8:53), or who claimed to be disciples of Moses (John 9:28). They purported to be the Israel of God, the people of God; but Jesus exposed the reality that their father was the devil (John 8:44).

Paul picked up on that truth and wrote in Romans 6 about people being either slaves to sin or slaves to righteousness. And in Ephesians 2, in speaking to the Gentiles who had been dead in their trespasses and sins, Paul said they were at that time “following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” (2:2).

In Jesus's day and Paul's, there were competing ways of being Israel, competing patterns of discipleship for the people of God. There was the way of the Sadducees, the way of the Essenes, the way of the Pharisees, the way of the Zealots. Each of these ways of being Israel was a form of discipleship.

And then, of course, we have Jesus. Jesus taught and lived out yet a different way of being Israel, the way of self-denial and the cross. As we just saw, his way of life leads to life and freedom. Jesus called men and women to “repent and believe the good news” of the kingdom. That is, Jesus called men and women to give up their way of being Israel and to trust him, to follow him, to enter the Kingdom of God that he was bringing. Jesus called men and women of Israel *to a new way of being human in the world*, and this is life in him.

What's more, Jesus claimed throughout his ministry that he followed his heavenly Father. *Jesus's own life was a life of faithful discipleship.* He came as the one true human who always obeyed his Father, the Creator God. As he followed God, so he called and enabled believing humanity into that same sort of discipleship.

From Genesis chapter 12 on, the people of God were to model for the world what it meant to be truly human, to be God's true image bearers in the world. So I think we can get a brilliant handle on the meaning of discipleship by thinking of it *as the way of being the people of God in the world*, which was designed all along to be *the way of being truly human in the world*. God's plan is to redeem for himself a people who perfectly bear his image on earth as he had intended from before the creation of the world.

What is *Pauline* discipleship?

Here now in a nutshell is my thesis for what *Pauline* discipleship is, and I want to put it as three inter-connecting parts:

Part 1: *Pauline discipleship is living our new life in the Lord Jesus Christ in the time period between the resurrection of Christ Jesus and the resurrection of the Church, or, living in the Overlap of the Ages.*

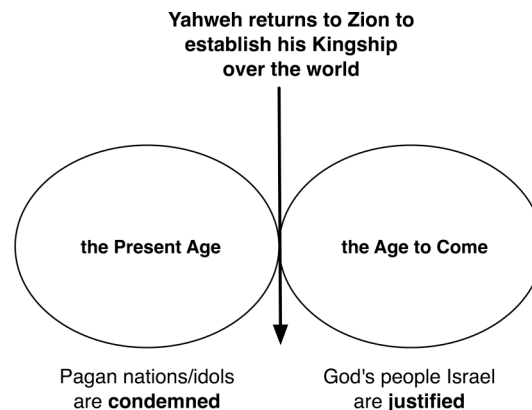
Part 2: *Pauline discipleship is living this new life in Christ as the One New Humanity that is made out of believing Jews and believing Gentiles together.*

Part 3: *Pauline discipleship is the One New Humanity in Christ living a life of obedience in light of Christ's resurrection, and in anticipation of the renewal of Earth.*

I could conjoin these three parts into one long sentence; the apostle Paul, after all, offers precedence for long sentences. But pulling them out into these three parts is, I trust, more useful for our exploration.

Part 1: Living in the Overlap of the Ages

Paul's own personal world was turned upside down, or inside out, at his conversion when he met the risen Lord Jesus on his way to Damascus to arrest the followers of Jesus there. Before his conversion Paul as Saul actively persecuted the followers of Jesus who went around Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and other parts of the Roman Empire claiming that God had raised Jesus from the dead and made him Lord of the world. Saul's way of discipleship, his way of being the people of God, was that of a Pharisee. Thus he faithfully kept the works of the Law, the Torah, in the hope that Yahweh would return to Zion and redeem captive Israel. We can diagram this Jewish timeline and expectation as follows:



When Yahweh would return to Zion, he would justify (or, vindicate) only faithful Jews, those who are characterized by doing the works of the Law or Torah notably expressed in keeping circumcision, Jewish food laws, and the Sabbath. The Present Age, marked by unfaithful Jews on

the one hand, and pagan nations on the other, would come to an end at the Messiah's coming. With the Age to Come Yahweh would finally set the world to rights. Then the long-awaited eschatological promises of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and the others would finally be fulfilled. This was the story in which Paul as Saul the Pharisee was living.

But then Paul met the risen Lord. He came to understand that God's faithfulness to his Covenant promises had already begun in Christ (Rom 3:21). As Paul saw it, Christ is the end of the Law, the Torah (Rom 10:4), and that we now live at the end of the ages (1 Cor 10:11). This forced Paul to rethink the entire story of Israel in light of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and of the giving of the Holy Spirit. And that meant he had to rethink his understanding of God in light of King Jesus.

It's crucial to note that Paul did *not* abandon his Jewish core frames of reference. He could not abandon them *precisely because he was convinced that God had called Abraham and his descendents to put the world to rights*. God's promises to Abraham had not failed with the unfaithfulness of Israel; God remains faithful! What Israel and the Law could not do, God did through his Son Jesus Christ and the giving of the Holy Spirit. What's new then in Paul's thinking was that *God had begun to put the world to rights in and through the risen Jesus, and by his Church and his Spirit*. A classic expression of this is 1 Corinthians 15:20-28—

20 But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. **21** For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. **22** For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. **23** But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. **24** Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. **25** For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. **26** The last enemy to be destroyed is death. **27** For "God has put all things in subjection under his feet." But when it says, "all things are put in subjection," it is plain that he is excepted who put all things in subjection under him. **28** When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things in subjection under him, that God may be all in all. (*See also Rom 8:11, 23; 1 Cor 6:14; 2 Cor 4:14; etc.*)

Resurrection signals New Creation. With Jesus, God's future is pulled into the midst of the ongoing Present Age, but also anticipates the fulfillment of the New Creation at Christ's return.

Anglican Bishop Tom Wright wrote in a number of places that it's very useful to think of us humans as living in a Play with Five Acts. Acts 1 through 4 are the *Creation, Fall, Israel*, and *Jesus*. Act 5 is the *Church*. The opening scenes of Act 5 are about the early Church in the New Testament after Christ's resurrection, after he sent them into the world as his New Humanity, as his agents of world transformation. We read this in Luke's account in the book of Acts and in all the letters we have in the New Testament.

We are also given the Final Scene of Act 5, and that is about Christ's return, the

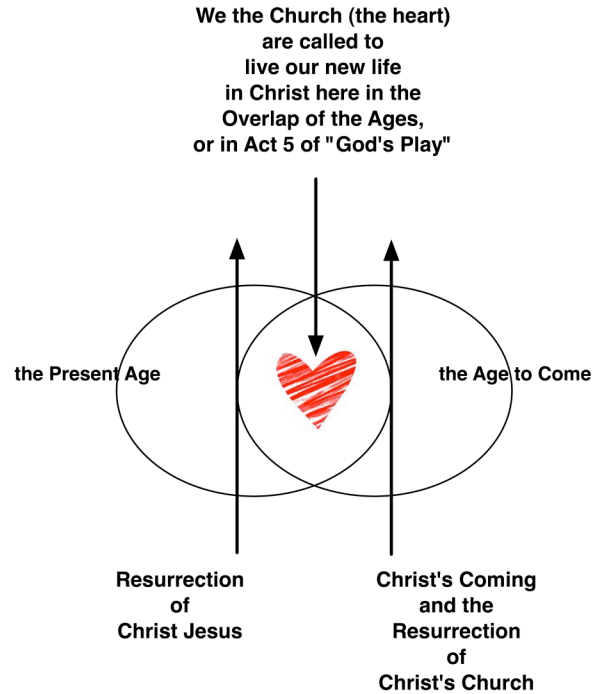
resurrection of all God's redeemed people, and the renewal of all Creation (See Romans 8, Ephesians 1, Rev 20-21, etc). With the conclusion of Act 5, a whole new Play then begins. But we humans today live in Act 5 between the First Scene, which is the early Church, and the Final Scene, which is about Christ's return and the redemption of our bodies. The Overlapping of the Ages is thus Act 5 of God's Play.

I hope you're not put off by the Play metaphor. It seeks to capture the reality that the biblical view of history has a beginning and is heading somewhere, and further, that God is sovereign over creation and its history. Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4-5, "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons." And so at the appropriate time a new Act in God's Play, if you will, had begun, and begun in King Jesus. This would be Act 4 in Tom Wright's understanding of the Play.

Then in Ephesians 1:9-10 Paul wrote about "making known to us the mystery of [God's] will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth." Here Paul points to the Final Scene of the Final Act of the Play, and again, Christ is the central actor, but also with a large supporting cast. So I think Tom Wright is on to something in thinking of God's history as being worked out as a Play with Five Acts and I find it very helpful for us.

It's not a mere truism that the Church lives in Act 5, the time between Christ's resurrection and the day of our own resurrections. Just like it's not a mere truism that we live post-9/11. So too with the Church in its broader setting. We live post-Christ's resurrection. And that makes all the difference in the world, for the New Creation had begun in Christ and in us the Church.

This then is Part 1: Pauline discipleship is living our new life in the Lord Jesus Christ *in the Overlap of the Ages, which is Act 5 of God's Play*. The eschatological promises had begun in Christ and in the giving of his Spirit; the promises will come to their full completion at Christ's return and the renewal of all things. This diagram attempts to show Paul's re-thinking of the biblical worldview in light of the life, death and resurrection of King Jesus:



Part 2 unpacks who the People of God are that Paul wrote about. Part 3 then unpacks how this new People of God are to live in the Overlap of the Ages. I'll then conclude with some comments for us Christians living in 2006 and beyond.

Part 2: The One New Humanity in Christ

Part 2 says Pauline discipleship is living this new life in Christ *as the One New Humanity that is made out of believing Jews and believing Gentiles together*. Throughout Paul's writings we read of Jews and Gentiles, the circumcision and the uncircumcision. Paul saw that in Christ the promises of God that Israel would be the light to the Gentiles had come true in Jesus Christ and the Church. This theme, for example, is very important in his letter to the Romans. When he got to Romans chapter 15 Paul pulled together a series of Old Testament quotations. He wrote at verses 8-13 as follows:

8 For I tell you that Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs, **9** and in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written,

“Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles, and sing to your name.” [2 Sam 22:50; Ps 18:49]

10 And again it is said,

“Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” [Deut 32:43]

11 And again,

“Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples extol him.” [Ps 117:1]

12 And again Isaiah says,

“The root of Jesse will come, even he who arises to rule the Gentiles; in him will the Gentiles hope.” [Is 11:10]

13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the

power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.

When Paul spoke of hope in his letters, he almost always referred to *the hope of resurrection*. And by “hope,” Paul did not mean what we typically mean when we say, for example, “I hope it doesn’t rain on game day.” Biblical hope is always that in which we put our trust. It’s connected to the God who makes and keeps promises, and so Paul’s use of “hope” entails a guarantee. He is the “God of hope” (Rom 15:13). The one who promised is faithful and he will do it (1 Thess 5:23-24).

In many ways verse 8 here is a brilliant summary of Paul’s letter to the Romans. The first part of the verse speaks to themes that occur again and again in his letter. Despite Israel’s unfaithfulness, God remained faithful to his promise to Abraham to bless Israel. This he has now done in his Son. Paul’s comment here perhaps picked up on themes such as Matthew 15:24 where Jesus said that he was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. God’s first act of faithfulness or truthfulness was to do for Israel what he had promised to do—to bless Israel. Thus Christ came as a servant on behalf of Israel, and this meant he had to suffer, die and rise from the dead. Israel again had to go through a New Exodus.

But also we have in verse 8 the phrase, “in order that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy;” and so Paul gave us a nice list of Old Testament references climaxing with the Gentiles putting their hope in the One coming to rule the nations (*cf*, Gen 49:10).

You’ll remember in John 12:21 and verses following that some Greeks came to Philip saying they wanted to see Jesus. Philip—the disciple with a Greek name—went and told this to Andrew; and then Philip and Andrew went and told this to Jesus, who then said: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit” (23-24). He then goes on to say much more about his coming “hour”, but the coming of the Greeks to Jesus signaled in his mind the fact that the Gentiles were now coming in to the kingdom of God.

It’s very easy for us to read Paul’s letters and immediately leap to thinking in terms of *individual believers*, and also to individual believers *in the 21st Century*. For example, and to our point here, when Paul said in Romans 3:22 and 23 “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” etc. he does *not* mean at first instance each and every individual person. His thought categories in the opening chapters of Romans—and throughout the letter—are about Jews and Gentiles as two categories of peoples. Thus the “all” refers to the Jews and the Gentiles together.

In the opening chapters of Romans Paul argued that Gentiles have sinned and that Jews also have sinned, and therefore both—Jews and Gentiles alike—are accountable to God. He went on to argue that both alike are justified by faith in Christ. We must be careful *to first hear Paul in the contexts in which he made his arguments and revealed the mystery concerning Christ*, if we

are to get a proper handle on Pauline discipleship. And right now that is all his talk about Jews and Gentiles as thought categories.

And now we must come to Ephesians chapter 2 where the Jew and Gentile categories come together in a crucial way. Paul wrote beginning at verse 11 the following:

11 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— **12** remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. **13** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off [i.e., you Gentiles] have been brought near by the blood of Christ. **14** For he himself is our peace, who has made us both [Jews and Gentiles] one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility **15** by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, **16** and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. **17** And he came and preached peace to you who were far off [you Gentiles] and peace to those who were near [we Jews]. **18** For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. **19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, **20** built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, **21** in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. **22** In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

In chapter Ephesians 3:6 Paul wrote that the mystery is “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.” And in chapter 4 Paul said that now

4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— **5** one Lord, one faith, one baptism, **6** one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

In Christ then there is now One New Flesh, made out of the Jewish flesh and the Gentile flesh. There is now One New Man, *One New Humanity*.

And so Pauline discipleship is the new life of the One New Humanity in Christ. It’s created by Christ’s death and resurrection, and composed of all—Jews and Gentiles alike—who have faith in Christ. This One New Humanity in Christ is, of course, the Church, a temple of the Lord, the dwelling place for God by the Spirit (e.g. Eph 2:19-22).

Part 3: Living Obediently as the New Humanity in Christ

According to Part 3 of my understanding, Pauline discipleship is the One New Humanity in Christ *living a life of obedience in light of Christ’s resurrection, and in anticipation of the renewal of the Earth, or the renewal of all things*.

I said earlier that we must not ignore the Jewish-Gentile context of Paul’s letters. That will again prove a helpful reminder, even as we add the new categories of thought that we saw in 1 Corinthians 15:22—being “in Adam” and being “in Christ.”

The argument Paul developed in his letter to the Romans is that the Jews and Gentiles alike are in sin and death, that is, they are both *in Adam*. A crucial part of Paul's argument is that the Jews *sinned under the Law*, under Torah. The Jews had the Law by nature; that is, the Jews but not the Gentiles were entrusted with the Law (Rom 3:2). Thus it was the *Jews* who had broken the Law; it was *they* who were unfaithful to the Covenant and to their Covenant God. *They* had thus failed to be God's light to the Gentiles. What's worse, Israel had profaned God's name among the nations (*see eg*, Ezek 20).

On the other hand, the Gentiles *sinned apart from the Law, or without the Law*. They did not have the Law by nature. See Romans 2:12 and the verses following on that. All humanity—Jews and Gentiles alike—are therefore in sin, in Adam. But through Christ, all who believe—Jews and Gentiles alike—will be justified by faith (Rom 3:21ff); this One New Humanity is made alive in Christ.

Now here's the kicker, here's the Pauline discipleship question: *How then should this One New Humanity in Christ live?* And in particular, *Should the One New Humanity do the works of the Law?* Remember again, by "the works of the Law" Paul meant in particular being circumcised, adhering to Jewish food laws, and keeping the Sabbath. In other words, *should the One New Humanity in Christ look and act Jewish? Should the One New Humanity in Christ seek to obey the Old Testament law?*

I remember sitting in a church service where there is a section for the confession of sin. The bulletin had an Old Testament passage that dealt with how the Israelites were to live. Next the bulletin had a time for confessing that we had broken that law. Then there was the assurance of pardon. I had just taken over a dozen graduate students through a manuscript study of Paul's letter to the Romans. It took us a year and it was outstanding. There were students from seven countries and five continents. One thing that impressed the Australian graduate student in the study was that all of us in the room were Gentiles. In the context of studying Romans that was a profound and suddenly very relevant observation.

So there I was sitting in the confession-of-sins part of the service and then suddenly the thought came to me: "Wait a minute! *I didn't break that law! I'm a Gentile! I sinned apart from the Law but not under the Law.*" But Sunday after Sunday the Old Testament Law was exhibited before me, I was told that I had broken it and needed to confess that before God. I hasten to add that as a Gentile in Christ I still need to confess my sins. But the Old Testament Law does not apply to me as a Gentile *the way it did for Jews of Israel's day or of Jesus's day.*

But that precisely was the question for the early Church. *Did the Old Testament Law apply to believing Gentiles?* Luke tells us in Acts 15 how the Jerusalem council struggled to sort out those issues on the ground in the lives of Christians in the Gentile churches. But more shocking still, did the Old Testament Law *apply to believing Jews who are now in Christ?* Paul's

answer to both questions was—and had to be—a resounding No! This is a crucial part of what his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians is about. And we just saw in Ephesians 2:15 that at the cross Jesus abolished “the law of commandments and ordinances,” the very thing that was the dividing wall of hostility between Jews and Gentiles.

These are the discipleship questions that Paul dealt with concerning the early church. The Old Testament had climaxed with Christ. And the Old Testament—including the Law—looked forward to the giving of the Spirit. When he spoke in Romans 2:29, “But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter [that is, not by the command of the Law],” Paul borrowed directly from Moses’s yearning in Deuteronomy 30:6 which said, “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.”

The yearning of the Old Testament prophets was for the day when the people of God would obey the Law from a new heart, and when the Spirit of God would dwell in them. Listen for example to God’s promise to the Israelites in Exile in Ezekiel 36:24-28—

24 I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. **25** I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. **26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. **27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. **28** You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

When Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3 that unless one is born of water and the Spirit one could not see the kingdom God, he was saying nothing less than that these eschatological promises were coming true in himself, and doing so right under the noses of the Jewish leaders.

And then there’s Jeremiah 31:31-32—

31 “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, **32** not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. **33** But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people.”

The New Humanity in Christ *now* has the promised Holy Spirit and *now* is to live by the Spirit, to obey the law written on their hearts. We are not to live by the works of the Law. This is what Paul’s doctrine of justification by faith is all about. When Paul wrote about Jews and Gentiles together as God’s One New Humanity being justified by faith and not by the works of the Law, *he was not asking the question how individual sinners become right with a holy God. One*

becomes a Christian of course by responding to the Gospel of Christ in faith, by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. That's why Paul said in Romans 1:16 that he's not ashamed of the Gospel; the gospel is "the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek." See also Romans chapter 10 on that.

But Paul's arguments concerning justification by faith were to explain how God's New Humanity is to live in the Spirit in the world that he *now* is making new and *will* make new at Christ's return. And so Paul goes right on in Romans 1:17 to say, "For in [the Gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'" quoting the prophet Habakkuk. God's justified people are those whom God will vindicate at the Day of Judgment and will raise to bodily everlasting life.

We must now look afresh at the New Humanity, with all these Pauline categories of thought in view. If God's New Humanity is freed from the Old Testament Law, then obvious questions quickly arise. Paul dealt with these squarely again and again in his many letters. Take Romans 6, for example, because it appears in an argument concerning the Law and speaks to how the New Humanity in Christ must now live.

6:1 What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? **2** By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? **3** Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.

5 For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. **7** For one who has died has been set free from sin. **8** Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. **9** We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. **11** So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. **13** Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness. **14** For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

15 What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! **16** Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? **17** But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, **18** and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. **19** I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.

20 When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. **21** But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. **22** But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul's whole argument here and elsewhere in his letters trades on the fact that *what is true of Christ is also true of the New Humanity which is in Christ Jesus*. Died with Christ, we died to sin; alive with Christ we are alive to God to walk in the newness of life. As Christ received a transformed body at his resurrection, so too will all those who are in Christ Jesus receive transformed bodies fit for the transformed reality of the New Earth.

If we look at some of the letters Paul wrote, say to the Galatians, to the Ephesians and to the Colossians, we see Pauline discipleship moving at full sprint. These letters were written primarily to Gentile churches but who probably also had some Jewish Christians in their midst.

Let's say that you were a *Gentile Christian who was maybe first attracted to the monotheism and the ethical way of life of Judaism, but who later became a Christian*. Let's say also that some Jewish Christians told you that you needed to, say, be circumcised, and avoid certain foods, and keep special days to "really" be the people of God, the true Christians. And further that you should separate yourselves from Gentile Christians who don't think and act like that.

Well, Paul would then write to you letters and say some of the things he did to the Galatians in chapter 2 telling you not to do the works of the law. Paul did not teach that way of living in Christ. He said, "For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:18).

And in Galatians 5:1 Paul wrote: "For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery." And then later in 5:13-14, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

And if you were a *Gentile who came out of paganism*, Paul had a strikingly similar message. In Ephesians 2:1-3 Paul told the Gentiles that they used to be dead in their trespasses and sins in the way they used to walk following the prince of the power of the air, living disobedient lives. But God made them alive with Christ and seated them with him in the heavenly realms. Then in Ephesians 4:17 he said, "Now this I say and testify in the Lord, that *you must no longer live as the Gentiles do*, in the futility of their minds." And beginning at verse 22 Paul called them to "put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created

after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.”

The same themes appear in Paul’s letter to the Colossians in chapter 3. In Christ we have put off our old self and put on the new self, “which is being renewed in the knowledge after the image of its creator” (10). This “putting off” is both a past and a continuing activity. This “putting on” likewise is both a past and a continuing activity. We are to live out the new realities that are true of us who are in King Jesus, as we anticipate the day of our own resurrection from the dead, and the renewal of creation.

Thus *to the Jewish Christians* who were tempted to revert to Judaism, and to Gentiles Christians who were tempted to adopt Jewish practices, Paul said, “Don’t go back to the slavery of the Law.”

To the Gentile Christians who came out of paganism but who were then tempted to revert to pagan ways of thinking and living, Paul said, “Don’t go back to the slavery of pagan ways.”

God’s New Humanity had been set free from slavery to sin and death. God’s New Humanity is being recreated into the image and likeness of God, as God had intended all along. Paul could say in Romans 8:29 something that has the same end, that God has predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son. In Adam, humanity was in sin and death. In Christ, the New Humanity is being recreated in the image and likeness of God. The Church is to grow up into him who is the Head of the Church (Eph 4:15).

Living as God’s New Humanity in Act 5 of God’s Great Play, we are to “walk in the newness of life” (Rom 6:4), not letting sin have dominion over us since we have been freed from it, but being obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching of the “apostles and prophets.” That phrase “apostles and prophets” in Ephesians 2:20 refers to the New Testament apostles and prophets, who, said Paul in Ephesians 4:11, are Christ’s gifts to the Church. The Church is built on the teachings of the apostles and prophets, with Christ the cornerstone (Eph 2:20).

The Church has been sent into the world as God’s New Humanity, as God’s Light to the nations. This is the whole bit in John 20 where Jesus appeared to his disciples on the first day of his resurrection, that is, on the first day of the New Creation. Jesus appeared to his disciples in the locked room and bade them peace. He then said, “As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you.’ And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’” (John 20:21-22). As God breathed into the first Adam the breath of life, so the risen Lord breathed into his New Humanity the breath of new life in him. We are the people of God for the sake of the world.

The Church has been sent into the world to be God’s New Humanity *in all that it does.* Here is where all the stuff Paul had to say about *obedience of the faith* and *doing good works* rightly comes in. Paul said in Romans 1:5 and something almost identical to it in 16:26, that he had been called as an apostle “to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name

among all the nations.”

And of course most of us have memorized Ephesians 2:10—“For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” The idea in Ephesians is that we are not justified by the works of the Law, but are justified by faith to walk the new life in Christ doing the good works that are appropriate for God’s renewed people. In his letter to Titus, Paul told him: “The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people” (3:8).

Well, what often happens when God’s New Humanity lives by faith doing good works in the Present Age? Inevitably the Church at some point will *clash with powers and authorities of this world*. This clash is inevitable as the Age to Come breaks into the Present Age announcing the fact that there’s a new King in the Land. We must not think that the early disciples went around the Roman Empire announcing merely a new way to be religious, or offering a new private religion to help people get through the difficulties of life. That’s not the Gospel Paul preached and for which he was persecuted. That’s not the Gospel that got Jesus crucified. The present dark earthly powers and authorities will resist the arrival of the Kingdom of God. The Church embodies the life of Christ *and so* will be persecuted even as he was persecuted. Pauline discipleship is *discipleship with eyes wide open* to these realities. Much of the Church in the world today is living in persecution for the sake of Christ. We must not forget that part of Christ’s body suffers today, we must not close our eyes to their sufferings.

Paul also warned that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12). Pauline discipleship with eyes wide open sees that *there is spiritual warfare*. With C. S. Lewis, we must not see the Devil under every bed. One of my favorite cartoons is of a god-like figure in his heavenly realms with a menacing lightening bolt in his right hand. He says, “Metaphor! I’ll show you metaphor!” We thus agree with Lewis too when he said we must never assume the Devil is only a metaphor, or merely personified human evil. Pauline discipleship calls the New Humanity to put on the full armor of God and resist at the very places where the Age to Come inevitably creates conflict with the dark powers of this Present Age. The defeated powers of the world—heavenly and earthly—will resist the people of God as they embody and extend his kingdom. We must therefore be a people who pray with our eyes wide open.

We are all familiar with the language of the “already but not yet.” Living in the “already but not yet” necessarily entails living in a world broken by sin, disease, decay and death. Paul urged us to live by the Spirit as we await the redemption of our bodies and the renewal of all creation. Our current sufferings, Paul said, “are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be

revealed” (Rom 8:18). That glory is the resurrection glory of the New Creation and the appearing of our wonderful Savior.

A little over year ago now, Catherine, a University of Illinois alumna who had served on our Grad IV Exec, died of breast cancer in her thirties. She and a friend named MaryAnn sent out many emails asking for prayer and giving us reports on Catherine’s progress. One thing that struck us all was her looking forward to the day of her resurrection. The final email from MaryAnn expressed well Catherine’s faith:

So even while we grieve Catherine's death, we know that the parting is only temporary. Jesus promises eternal life to all who believe in Him. Not some dreamy existence floating around on a cloud and playing a harp, but a real life with a living breathing resurrection body that can sing and dance and play scrabble. (*January 11, 2005 email*)

That is the resurrection hope Paul spoke about and which sustained Catherine who died in faith.

The Church must be faithful to love God in this broken world, and faithful to love one another in the unity of the faith. We are to walk in the Spirit, finding out what pleases God, looking forward to the day of Christ and the redemption of our bodies. We are to be God’s agents of reconciliation calling men and women—Jews and Gentiles alike—to be reconciled to God, even as we are to be reconciled to one another. We must increasingly submit to Christ’s lordship over all aspects of our lives. As Paul wrote in Colossians 2:6 and 7—“Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.”

I take this to be Pauline discipleship.

How then should we live today?

Paul lived in the First Scene of Act 5 where the Jewish-Gentile issues in the new churches loomed large. What about us Christians today?

I need to say a few things about *the Gospel* that Paul preached as opposed to what we American Christians often preach and call “the gospel.” For Paul, the Good News, the Gospel was the announcement that Jesus died for our sins, and was raised from the dead as the world’s true King and Lord. Paul’s Gospel was thus a *royal announcement*. And this royal announcement entails a summons to repentance and faith in the world’s true King. Paul’s Gospel entails bringing our lives into accord with this reality; as we have seen, that is Pauline discipleship. As mentioned earlier, Paul’s Gospel was the power of God for the salvation of all who believe, to the Jew first and also to the Greek (Rom 1:16). This Gospel announces the reign of Christ and summons all the peoples of the world to repent and believe, to enter the Kingdom of God, and so to become truly human.

Too often today the Gospel has been reduced to a mere plan of salvation. We are told, for example, that God loves us, that we are sinners, that we must confess our personal sins telling

God we're sorry, that we must pray to receive Jesus, etc. What's strangely odd is that the Bible never put it that way. Read through the book of Acts and examine the content of the evangelistic speeches by the early disciples as they preached the Gospel. And think in terms of discipleship. Paul's Gospel calls all humanity in Exile to give up their way of being human and believe in or on the Lord Jesus Christ, adopting his way of being human. Here at a stroke Paul's Gospel unites so-called evangelism and discipleship in a life-changing and life-orienting way for the Church. Paul's Gospel demands that we bring the lordship of Jesus Christ to bear on all aspects of our lives, and not least into our academic and professional lives.

I mention here an article by philosopher Paul Moser in the latest issue of *Faith and Philosophy*, the Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophy, which came just yesterday. His article is titled, "Jesus and Philosophy: On the Questions We Ask." He argues that philosophers and the philosophy they pursue are under the Lordship of Christ, and that this entails that they do philosophy in obedience to Jesus, in love for God and neighbor, and in light of Christ's greater mission of making disciples of all nations.

I urged us to frame discipleship as a way of being human in the world, and in particular as God's New Humanity in Christ. Now this is what I found interesting for us tonight in Moser's paper. He says there are *two ways of being human*: an *obedience* mode and—now get this, graduate students—a *discussion* mode. He explains these as follows:

An obedience mode responds to an authority by *submission of the will* to the authority's commands. A discussion mode responds with *talk* about questions, options, claims, and arguments. [Moses continues:] We undermine the authority of Jesus when we respond to him just with a discussion mode that does not include an obedience mode. We then treat him as something less than the Lord of heaven and earth. We reduce him to a philosophical interlocutor. We make him like us. So, he is no longer Jesus as Lord. (vol 22, no 3, p 273)

And in keeping with Pauline discipleship, Moser says this: "Exercising authority as Lord, Jesus calls (that is, *commands*) people away from old likes and dislikes for the sake of new loves suited to the biblical love commands and fellowship with God" (270). We might say that this is *putting off the old academic self* and *putting on the new academic self* being recreated into the likeness and image of the Lord Jesus Christ. Moser said also, "The reorientation of philosophy under Jesus does not fit with philosophy as practiced in a secular setting, and this is no surprise" (277). Indeed.

Your graduate Christian fellowship must think through together what it means to be human according to this university, to those in your department, in your academic discipline and profession, and what obedience to Christ looks like on the ground, in action.

Let's continue to work with Paul's Jewish and Gentiles categories of thought. A few years ago a Japanese student at the U of I became a Christian. His name is Ryo. Before he returned to Japan we met weekly to work our way through Paul's letter to the Ephesians. One of Ryo's

concerns was that he was returning to Japan with a Western religion. But as we worked through the Ephesian letter we made a list of what was true of the Gentiles before their faith in Christ. It was a dandy list that culminated in “and without hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12). We then rejoiced at what God had done for those who were “far away.”

After we examined our lists and diagrams that I had made, I said to Ryo, “You do realize don’t you that you and I are both Gentiles?” He looked at me with a non-comprehending look on his face. But after some further thought his face brightened, and he said, “We are *both* Gentiles!” He got the point. It was one of those “Aha!” moments. Ryo wasn’t returning with a Western religion, but with Good News for all Gentiles who believe in Christ. Japan and the United States are both in the same Gentile boat—and that boat is adrift at sea, to further the metaphor. I’m no missions sociologist, but I often wonder if one of the chief reasons why Japan is so resistant to the Gospel is because of their concern for racial purity. The Gospel brings the races together on an equal footing in Christ, and that message is resisted at every turn.

The Gospel also brings together people of very different social and economic classes. This is a struggle for so many churches and Christian fellowships. But in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Gal 3:28). How well does your grad Christian fellowship reflect that new reality?

This may surprise you, or maybe not, but there’s a huge segment of American Christianity that has a love relationship with all things Jewish. They believe that when Israel was given land in the Middle East after World War 2 that some great prophesy of God had been fulfilled. Further, they look forward to the day when Christ returns to rule the world from Zion. Further, they believe that the Temple in Jerusalem one day should be rebuilt. They believe that God’s land is that piece of geography called “Israel.” What’s more, they believe that there are almost two tracks of salvation, one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles.

Think here of Rev. Pat Robertson’s comments on January 5 of this year where Robertson said that Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was punished by God for dividing up the land of Israel. Here’s what he said: “He was dividing God’s land. And I would say, ‘Woe unto any prime minister of Israel who takes a similar course to appease the E.U., the United Nations or the United States of America.’ God says, “This land belongs to me. You better leave it alone.” And a few years ago in a speech against a Palestinian state, Robertson applied those Ezekiel 36 promises we looked at not to Christ and his Church, but to the restored Israel in the Promised Land.

Think here too of Kay Arthur and her Precepts Ministry International. At the Israeli Ministry of Tourism Breakfast, which was held in conjunction with the 2005 National Religious Broadcasters conference, Kay Arthur told the audience, “If it came to a choice between Israel and America, I would stand with Israel.”

I trust that by now you know what Paul would say to this! No! There’s One Jewish-plus-

Gentile New Humanity in Christ. And Jesus was right all along: the meek will inherit the earth, not merely some strip of land in the Middle East. The *inheritance* that Paul spoke of in, for example, Ephesians 1:11, 14, and 18 is not that bit of land in the Middle East; neither is it heaven. The inheritance Paul spoke of is nothing less than the whole redeemed Earth. As Tom Wright has nicely said somewhere, that strip of land in the Middle East was always *an advance metaphor* of the whole redeemed earth, which is our New Inheritance. Pauline discipleship is a yearning for the renewal of all things in Christ, and this begins with Christ's church.

Recently I saw online that the sales of the original *Left Behind* book have reached 8 million copies, with a further 62 million copies of related books. This tells me that Christians must learn to read the Bible in light of living in Act 5, in light of a high view of Christ Jesus and what he has already accomplished in Act 4 of God's Play, not least of which was the *judging and closing* of the Temple by the Lord Jesus Christ himself, and not its cleansing. We must anticipate the renewal of all creation and live accordingly in all that we do.

Here's another example of how we need to learn to read the Bible in light of us living in Act 5. Take the issue of homosexual practice. What happens is that Christians who rightly say that homosexual practice is not a legitimate Christian lifestyle, mistakenly prooftext the Old Testament thinking that that settles the matter. But the Old Testament Law does not work that way for us in Act 5.

What happens then is that those who think homosexual practice is legitimate for Christians turn to Old Testament passages that Christians definitely do not think apply today, such as stoning adulterers or disobedient children to death. The two sides end up stalemated quoting Old Testament passages to and against one another. This was also true concerning slavery in the 19th-Century. Pointing to Old Testament Law and then saying it applies to us today the way it did for those in Act 3, or even Act 4, is not how we are to take Christ as authoritative.

We should turn to the Old Testament but we necessarily will locate *its authority differently this side of Christ's fulfillment of the Law*. And this will not, by the way, happen by dividing up the Law as Civil, Ceremonial, and Moral. The ancient Jews made no such distinctions and it's dangerous for us to do today. How, for example, do we label stoning disobedient children? It doesn't fit neatly into any of those three categories.

I recommend one of Tom Wright's latest books, *The Last Word*, in the bibliography. I'll be going through this book with my pastor and a group of graduate students at the U of I in the coming weeks. The short book helps us rethink how we are to read the Bible in light of living in Act 5. I mentioned the book to one of our PhD students in English and told him some of the issues he raised and he said those were exactly the issues that were gnawing at him. I think too if you look at how Paul handled Old Testament scripture in light of Christ's fulfilling of the Law, you will also get a glimpse of this "Act 5" reading in action. We must stop thinking of the Bible as the

rulebook, and then feeling chagrined when it doesn't speak directly or clearly to many of the crucial and thorny issues of our day. Treating the Bible as a rulebook leaves many today—believers and non-believers alike—wondering if the Bible is simply too outdated to take seriously.

The story is told of WC Fields, an early 20th-Century actor not known for his pious living, being caught on a movie set looking through the Bible. He was asked what he was doing and he exclaimed, "Loop holes. I'm looking for loopholes." Pauline discipleship calls us to be God's people shaped by his Word and by his Spirit as we work together to grow in righteousness and be and do for the world what Christ has called us to be and do, as we anticipate the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. May we all work to implement the victory of Christ's lordship.

You and your graduate Christian fellowship have the great opportunity this New Year to grow in your knowledge and love of Christ, and your love for one another. And you have the great privilege to model as a Christian fellowship what it means to be truly human in the Lord Jesus Christ.

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it" (1 Thess 5:23-24). "... [M]ay the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all" (2 Thess 3:16). Amen