

Appendix: Human Needs in the New Testament	4
The Gospels and Acts	5
Preliminary Concerns	5
The Synoptic Gospels	8
Physical needs	8
Spiritual needs	10
Forgiveness	11
A right relationship with God	14
A right relationship with others	16
The Gospel of John	17
Physical needs	17
Spiritual needs	18
The Book of Acts	21
Physical needs	21
Spiritual needs	22
The Pauline Corpus	22
Preliminary Concerns	22
Physical needs	27
Spiritual needs	28
The General Epistles, Hebrews, and Revelation	36
Conclusions	39
The Need for Forgiveness and Grace	39
The Need for Love and Community	41
The Need for Purpose and Hope	43

A Summary of Human Needs in the New Testament

The New Testament teaches that God is the source of all biological and spiritual life, and that humans, as God's offspring, must ultimately look to him for the satisfaction of their physical and spiritual needs. While physical needs like food, drink, clothing, and shelter are matters of genuine concern and are not to be minimized, the gospels and epistles stress that the deepest human needs are not material but spiritual; the claims of the kingdom of God must take precedence over all other claims. Those who enjoy the benefits of a salvific relationship with God should pursue him above all other concerns,

knowing that during the time they are pilgrims and sojourners on the earth, they can look to him for the provision of their temporal needs. Those who are in Christ have nothing and yet possess all things; they recognize their stewardship, not ownership, of the time, abilities, and material goods with which they have been entrusted, and trust in God rather than their own abilities or resources to meet their needs on all levels.

Of the three fundamental spiritual or relational needs that emerged from the study of human needs in the New Testament [**in Chapter 1**], the first is the need for forgiveness and grace. In his preaching on the kingdom of God, Jesus addressed the need for repentance and salvation to individuals and to the nation of Israel as a whole. Religious externalism led to the false belief that ritual observance creates a condition of righteousness before God, but Jesus went deeper than outward action and applied the Torah to the thoughts and motives of the human heart. Arguing that the source of defilement is not external but internal, he spoke of the need of forgiveness from the guilt of sin and the creation of a new heart through the blood of the new covenant which he offered in his sacrificial death for the sin of the world. It is only through the grace and forgiveness of God that a person can be delivered from the bondage of sin, slavery, and death and transferred into the kingdom of light. There is no middle ground between sin and righteousness, slavery and freedom, death and life; apart from the grace of God, people are in a condition of spiritual death in which they are "children of wrath" who are alienated from God because of their transgression of his ordinances and

enslavement to the power of sin. The universality of sin leads to a condition of condemnation of both Jews and Gentiles before a God of holiness. The solution to this human plight is the forgiveness and restoration available in Christ, but this necessitates an acknowledgement that the quality of life acceptable to God cannot be attained through human merit or good works, but only through divine grace. Christ's offer of newness of life and freedom from the dominion of sin requires the response of repentance; people must acknowledge their need to be forgiven and act on Jesus' words by receiving his gift of eternal life. This spiritual healing is available to those who admit that they are sinners and are in need of the mercy and grace which is available through the redemptive work of the Son of God. This appropriation of Jesus' person and work cleanses believers from the defilement of sin and brings them into the family of God as sharers of his life.

The second human need in the New Testament is the need for love and community. Those who accept the apostolic testimony concerning Jesus Christ and enter by faith into the benefits of the new covenant discover the satisfaction of restored shalom with God. By putting him above the quest for temporal gain and recognition, they find their lives by losing them for God's sake. On the other hand, those who pursue self-satisfaction become entangled in the manifold concerns of temporal affairs and fail to understand that love, joy, and peace are the overflow of the pursuit of God and cannot be fully attained as ends in themselves.

As bearers of God's image, people are relational beings who need not only a restored relationship with their Creator, but also a restored relationship with one another. Those who are recipients of the mercy and grace of God in Christ enjoy his unconditional love and acceptance, and this is the basis on which they are called to love others even as they have been loved by their Lord. The clearest expression of their love for God is the love they manifest toward each other, and in this way, sacrificial love and compassion becomes the central element of Christian living. Because they have been forgiven, they are commanded to forgive those who have sinned against them and to seek the forgiveness of those against whom they have sinned. Their new identity in Christ is the foundation for a loving and holy communal life expressed in the metaphors of a family and a body. This community of Christ's followers is exhorted to pursue a unity of mutual love, service, encouragement, kindness, forgiveness, giving, and compassion. Where there is unity of fellowship in a covenant community of believers, there is a joy and love that demonstrates the mercy and grace of God and transcends socio-economic barriers because of the equality each member has in Christ.

The third human need in the New Testament is the need for purpose and hope. The gospels and epistles consistently emphasize that the things which are unseen are more fundamental than those which are visible, since the former are temporal while the latter are eternal. The afflictions and adversities of this world cannot be compared with the glory that is to be

revealed, because the inheritance of those who are in Christ is imperishable and incorruptible. As members of God's household, they have embraced a transcendent source of identity and security that assures them that their lives have purpose and significance. They are ambassadors of the new creation in Christ and they anticipate their resurrection at his advent and unending life in his presence. Their hope is not founded on the vacillating and uncertain circumstances of earthly existence, but on the unchanging character and promises of God. The hope of those who have been reconciled to God reaches beyond the boundaries of this world to everlasting life.

APPENDIX

HUMAN NEEDS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This chapter is a study in biblical anthropology that particularly focuses on the New Testament accounts of what human beings need in order to be whole and fully functioning persons.

Before proceeding, six points are necessary to delineate the boundaries of this survey of human needs in the New Testament:

1. This study will not deal with the problem of ascription regarding the authorship of the gospels and epistles. "The Pauline corpus," for example, will include all the epistles traditionally ascribed to Paul.

2. A survey of human needs in the Old Testament is beyond the scope of this study.

3. An attempt will be made to avoid the kind of psychological exegesis that inserts modern categories related to individual and group psychology into the New Testament text.¹

4. Recognizing that Post-Augustinian and post-Lutheran psychological analyses of needs may be anachronistic with regard to the first-century concerns that underlie the writing of the New Testament, a brief description of the primary historical issues that form the background to the gospels and epistles will be included.

5. The scope of this chapter requires it to be hermeneutically and theologically oriented. While it is not primary exegesis, an effort has been made to make it compatible with the historical context while concurrently considering what the text renders possible to someone for whom the history of the church has happened.

6. This study does not seek to read an atomistic list of human needs from the text of the New Testament, but rather to discern overlapping areas of emphasis that are relevant to human maturity and fulfillment.

The Gospels and Acts

Preliminary Concerns

The last decade has seen the rapid development of what has been called the "third quest" for the historical Jesus of first-century Palestine.² Working as historians with the growing knowledge of second-temple Judaism, Scholars like Meyer, Sanders, Theissen, Borg, and Wright have gained new insights into the religious, social, and political implications of the

¹Compare Gerd Theissen's warning against this kind of exegesis in Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology, trans. John P. Galvin (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1987), pp. 1-2.

²The first quest was chronicled and concluded by Schweitzer, and the second or "New Quest" flourished in the 1950s and 1960s (N. T. Wright, "The Vindication of the Son of Man," Oxford-Bonn Seminar, 1988, p. 1; Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, The Interpretation of the New Testament, 1861-1986, 2nd ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988], pp. 379-403).

life and teaching of Jesus.³ In this way, the actions and teachings of Jesus have been increasingly related to the Jewish social and political concerns of his time, and not limited, as they have traditionally been, solely to moral and spiritual issues.⁴

Although there are areas of disagreement among the historians of the third quest, the growing consensus is that Jesus sought to renew Israel, and that his message was addressed to Jewish and Palestinian society.⁵ Jesus "regarded his own teaching, not just as religion for the individual or for a church within the nation, but as a national way of life which the nation could disregard only at its mortal peril."⁶ The predominant Jewish expectation of his time was nationalistic and temple-centered; the hope was that God would enable Israel to defeat the Romans so that righteous Israel would be

³B. F. Meyer, The Aims of Jesus (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1979); E. P. Sanders, Jesus and Judaism (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1985); Gerd Theissen, The Shadow of the Galilean, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1987); Marcus J. Borg, Conflict, Holiness & Politics in the Teachings of Jesus (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984).

⁴"Jesus was not just a moralist whose teachings had some political implications; he was not primarily a teacher of spirituality whose public ministry unfortunately was seen in a political light; he was not just a sacrificial lamb preparing for his immolation, or a God-Man whose divine status calls us to disregard his humanity. Jesus was, in his divinely mandated (i.e. promised, anointed, messianic) prophethood, priesthood, and kingship, the bearer of a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships" (John H. Yoder, The Politics of Jesus [Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1972], pp. 62-63).

⁵Theissen, The Shadow of the Galilean, p. 95.

⁶G. B. Caird, Jesus and the Jewish Nation (London: Athlone Press, 1965), p. 11.

vindicated before the pagan nations. The Old Testament imagery that God would rule the world through Israel (e.g., Zech. 14; Isa. 11; 60-62) had become distorted into a rationale for a narrow nationalism and a religious exclusivism. It was because of this that Jesus warned his contemporaries of the divine judgment that would come upon them if they continued on their nation-centered path. Paradoxically, Israel's quest for political deliverance through a separatist understanding of holiness was leading directly to their demise at the hands of Rome as God's instrument of judgment. Jesus offered to fulfill the Jewish hope, but he radically redefined the content of that hope. In place of the exclusivistic "holiness code" which stressed separation and preservation of revelation, Jesus sought to explode the boundaries of Israel's self-centered understanding with an inclusive "mercy code" which related true holiness to the paradigm of divine mercy and compassion (e.g., Luke 6:27-36; Matt. 5:38-48).⁷

Because of this redefinition, Jesus was perceived as a threat to the established order (cf. Luke 4:16-30); he was not meeting the needs the Jews wanted their Messiah to meet. In spite of this rejection and his warnings of judgment upon the nation, Jesus identified himself with Israel including her outcasts with whom he had table-fellowship. In his crucifixion he took the judgment he had pronounced against Israel upon himself "so that, in his vindication, Israel may find herself brought through the judgment and into

⁷Borg, Conflict, Holiness & Politics, pp. 123, 199; Wright, "The Vindication of the Son of Man," p. 10.

the true Kingdom, may see at last the way to life and follow it while there is yet time."⁸ In this way, he inaugurated the kingdom of God that was promised in the prophecies of the Old Testament even though he was rejected by the nation to whom the promises were made.⁹ The people who responded to Jesus and his message had become the nucleus of the Israel of the new age,¹⁰ and as foreseen by Isaiah and Zechariah (e.g., Isa. 2:2-3; Zech. 8:23) and fulfilled in Acts (1:8; 10:1-11:18), this kingdom would soon expand to include the Gentiles. This new order would coexist with the old until the consummation and it would consist of people whose restoration to a normal relationship to God is reflected in individual transformation and collective embodiment of the mercy they have received. This community is the heir of Israel, having grown out of that people and having responded to their call.¹¹

⁸N. T. Wright, "Jesus, Israel and the Cross," in K. M. Richards, ed., Proceedings of the SBL (Atlanta: Scholastic Press, 1985), p. 90.

⁹Norman Perrin argues that the tension between present and future in Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God is "a tension between that which began as God manifested himself as King in the ministry of Jesus, and that which he will consummate in a manner and at a time of his choosing. But the teaching of Jesus gives us no guidance as to this manner and this time; rather it directs attention to what will be involved in the consummation: judgment, the vindication of Jesus himself, the establishment of the values of God, and the enjoyment of all the blessings to be associated with a perfect relationship with God" (The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus [London: SCM Press Ltd., 1963], pp. 198-99).

¹⁰Caird, Jesus and the Jewish Nation, pp. 16-17; N. T. Wright, "'Constraints' and the Jesus of History," Scottish Journal of Theology 39 (1986):201.

¹¹Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, p. 191; Borg, Conflict, Holiness & Politics, pp. 256, 260.

On this account of the message of Jesus, it is clear that his teaching went beyond individual morality and piety, and extended to the corporate problems and needs of Israel. As Yoder observes, "The personhood which he proclaims as a healing, forgiving call to all is integrated into the social novelty of the healing community."¹² This has often been overlooked because of the "tendency to reinterpret the national in terms of the individual" as the church moved away from its original Palestinian setting.¹³ But there is a danger of overreacting to the excessive individualism that has characterized some Protestant interpreters and moving to the opposite extreme of denying that Jesus addressed individual as well as corporate needs. The preaching of Jesus concerning the kingdom of God addressed human needs at all levels, and in different contexts, Jesus applied the need for repentance and salvation to individuals (John 3:3-21; 5:24) and to the nation (Matt. 4:17; 11:20-24). Jesus was concerned with both the transformation of the heart and the transformation of Israel. His teaching about purity of heart had definite social and political implications, and his summons to the people of God to manifest mercy as a historical community required the response of the individuals within that community.¹⁴ This interweaving of individual and corporate needs is the perspective taken in the survey that follows.

¹²Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, p. 113.

¹³Caird, Jesus and the Jewish Nation, p. 19.

¹⁴Borg, Conflict, Holiness & Politics, pp. 247, 249-50; Gerd Theissen, Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,

The Synoptic Gospels

Physical needs

The writers of the Synoptic gospels recognized both physical and spiritual needs. In the Synoptic accounts of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus assured the multitude that God is the sovereign sustainer of his creation and knows that his earthly children need food, clothing, and shelter.¹⁵ He is able to provide for their physical needs, and even more than an earthly father, he is willing to give what is good to those who ask him.¹⁶ Thus, people need not be anxious about these physical needs when they depend upon God as their sustainer who knows what they need before he is asked.¹⁷ The Lord's prayer appropriately includes petitions for both physical and spiritual needs, since God is the source of all physical and spiritual life.¹⁸

The miraculous signs recorded in the Synoptic gospels authenticated the preaching of Jesus and demonstrated the breadth of his authority and his ability to satisfy every human need. These powers were signs of the new age and evidences that the kingdom of God had come among those who beheld

1978), pp. 104-105. "[N]othing but the thoroughgoing change of heart which Jesus demanded and made possible could in the end keep the nation out of disastrous conflict with Rome" (Caird, Jesus and the Jewish Nation, p. 22).

¹⁵Matthew (Mt.) 6:19-34; Luke (Lk.) 12:22-34. All Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (New York: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1946, 1952).

¹⁶Mt. 7:7-11; Lk. 11:9-13.

¹⁷Mt. 6:8.

them.¹⁹ They were acts of restoration that portrayed the healing of the whole person in the kingdom of God.²⁰

Jesus manifested his ability to provide for the physical needs of his followers in the feedings of the five thousand and the four thousand with baskets of broken pieces left over after the crowds had been satisfied.²¹ He can therefore provide for those who look to him to meet these needs, and this is illustrated in his commendation of the attitude of the poor widow who contributed everything she had to the temple treasury and thus had to look to God to meet her physical needs.²²

Beyond the basic physical needs for food, shelter, and clothing, Jesus particularly focused on the need for physical healing. He declared in his Nazareth manifesto that he came to provide release from physical and spiritual bondage.²³ When the imprisoned John the Baptist sent disciples to ask Jesus if he was the Messiah whose coming he had announced, Jesus responded by pointing to the diseases he cured, including leprosy and

¹⁸Mt. 6:11-13; Lk. 11:3-4.

¹⁹Mt. 12:28.

²⁰Stephen Neill, Jesus through Many Eyes (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), p. 85.

²¹Mt. 14:13-21; Mark (Mk.) 6:31-44; Lk. 9:11-17; Mt. 15:32-38; Mk. 8:1-9.

²²Mk. 12:41-44; Lk. 21:1-4.

²³Lk. 4:18-19.

paralysis, and to his restoration of hearing to the deaf and sight to the blind.²⁴ The breadth of Jesus' healing ministry is illustrated in the Synoptic accounts of his curing a diversity of afflictions ranging from pains, fever, hemorrhages, and epilepsy, to the restoration of those who were dumb, lame, and maimed, as well as liberation from physical and mental illnesses ascribed to demonic bondage.²⁵ Even the physical resurrection from the dead is adumbrated in the narratives of Jesus' resuscitation of individuals who had died.²⁶

Spiritual needs

While Jesus ministered in these ways to the physical needs of those who came to him, his compassion and pity was even more deeply moved by the spiritual ignorance and destitution of the multitudes who were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."²⁷ Physical concerns were important in his ministry, but spiritual needs were more fundamental. He made this clear in the way he used the physical healing of the paralytic as a means of demonstrating his more significant spiritual authority to forgive

²⁴Mt. 11:2-6; Lk. 7:20-23.

²⁵Mt. 4:23-24; 8:1-17; 12:22-28; 14:34-36; 15:30-31; Mk. 1:21-34; 2:1-12; 5:24-34; 6:53-56; 7:31-37; 8:22-26; Lk. 4:31-41; 5:12-15, 17-26; 7:1-10; 8:26-39, 43-48; 11:14-20.

²⁶Mk. 5:35-43; Lk. 7:11-17; 8:41-42, 49-56.

²⁷Mt. 9:36; Benjamin B. Warfield, The Person and Work of Christ (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1950), pp. 98-99.

sins.²⁸ The same principle is evident in Jesus' call to Peter and Andrew to leave their fishing nets and become fishers of men, and also in the temptation narratives in which Jesus overcame the seduction to place the appetite for food, power, and wealth above the desire to do the will of his Father.²⁹

Jesus frequently exhorted his hearers to place a higher priority on their spiritual well-being than on their material prosperity. Declaring that a person's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions, he used the parable of the rich fool to illustrate the futility of the one "who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."³⁰ The parable of the rich man and Lazarus and the Synoptic accounts of the rich young ruler develop the same theme.³¹ One cannot simultaneously serve God and earthly wealth.³²

The spiritual needs for forgiveness and a right relationship with God and others were focal points in the teaching and ministry of Jesus.

Forgiveness

Unlike other renewal movements that intensified the Torah in the direction of a separatist understanding of holiness, Jesus characteristically

²⁸Mt. 9:1-8; Lk. 5:17-26.

²⁹Mt. 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-12; Mt. 4:19; Mk. 1:17; Lk. 5:10.

³⁰Lk. 12:13-21.

³¹Lk. 16:19-31; Mt. 19:16-26; Mk. 10:17-27; Lk. 18:18-27.

³²Mt. 6:24; Lk. 16:13.

applied the Torah to the thoughts and intentions of the human heart.³³ He argued that a person is not defiled by external things, but that the source of sin and defilement is internal. Corrupt thoughts and practices such as envy, slander, pride, murder, adultery, coveting, and deceit do not arise from foods and practices which are ritually unclean, but from within the human heart.³⁴ This perception of the human condition is consistent with Jesus' emphasis on the need for repentance and forgiveness. The creation of a new heart, the basic theme of the Jeremiah 31:31-34 promise of a new covenant (cf. Ps. 51:10), is necessary because of the problem of inner defilement.

In view of this, people must acknowledge their need to be forgiven. Forgiveness is spiritual healing, but "those who are well have no need of a physician."³⁵ Those who regard themselves as righteous, like the Pharisees Jesus accused of placing religious observance above the practice of mercy, will not discern their need for forgiveness. Only those who admit that they are sinners will seek spiritual healing. This is the point of Jesus' parable about the tax collector who, in contrast to the self-righteous Pharisee, said, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" and found the divine forgiveness he sought.³⁶ A

³³E.g., Mt. 5:21-32; Borg, Conflict, Holiness & Politics, p. 238.

³⁴Mk. 7:14-23; Mt. 12:33-37; 15:11, 17-20.

³⁵Mt. 9:10-13; Mk. 2:15-17; Lk. 5:29-32.

³⁶Lk. 18:9-14.

similar contrast is found in the Lukan account of the woman whom Jesus forgave in the Pharisee's house.³⁷

Jesus' mission is encapsulated in Matthew's birth narrative with the words, "he will save his people from their sins."³⁸ Luke's basic concern is also with "the salvation established by the work of Jesus as an experience available to man."³⁹ Jesus told his disciples that the purpose for which he came to earth was to seek and to save the lost and to give his life as a ransom for the forgiveness of sins.⁴⁰ His offer of spiritual healing was based on the sacrifice he anticipated with increasing frequency as the time drew near. Unlike those Pharisees whom he accused of imposing heavy burdens upon others, particularly in their tendency to place ritual integrity above humanity, Jesus offered the light yoke of forgiveness and mercy to those who would come to him.⁴¹ But his offer required a response; those who came to him had to recognize their need to be forgiven and turn to God in repentance. Both John the Baptist and Jesus spoke of the imminence of the kingdom of heaven and warned their listeners to repent of their sins, since repentance and forgiveness are necessary for deliverance from the bondage of sin and entrance into the

³⁷Lk. 7:36-50.

³⁸Mt. 1:21.

³⁹Howard Marshall, Lk.: Historian and Theologian (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1971), p. 19, quoted in Neill, Jesus through Many Eyes, p. 133, n. 17.

⁴⁰Lk. 19:10; Mt. 20:28; 26:26-28; Mk. 10:45; 14:22-25; Lk. 22:19-20.

kingdom of God.⁴² This response of repentance was required on both an individual and a corporate level.⁴³

Jesus repeatedly stressed the need to respond to his invitation, particularly in view of the mounting opposition to his message by the religious and political leaders of the nation during the course of his ministry. The builders were rejecting the chief corner stone and were seeking to enter the kingdom by the wide way that leads to destruction.⁴⁴ The parables of the marriage feast and the banquet made it clear that an invitation is not enough; a person must act on Jesus' words.⁴⁵ In the imagery of the parable of the sower, Jesus sowed the seed of the word, but the result depends upon the conditions and receptivity of the soil.⁴⁶ Consistent with his use of parables, Jesus affirmed that spiritual truth must be revealed; it is hidden from those who would reject it but revealed to those who would respond in faith.⁴⁷ One must receive the kingdom of God like a child or not enter it at all.⁴⁸

A right relationship with God

⁴¹Mt. 23:4; Mk. 3:1-6; Mt. 11:28-30.

⁴²Mt. 3:2; 4:17; Mk. 1:4, 14-15.

⁴³Lk. 7:36-50; 18:9-14; Mt. 11:20-24; Lk. 13:1-5; 10:13-15; 11:29-32.

⁴⁴Lk. 20:17-18; Mt. 7:13.

⁴⁵Mt. 22:1-14; Lk. 14:15-24; Mt. 7:24-27; Lk. 6:47-49.

⁴⁶Mt. 13:3-23; Mk. 4:3-20; Lk. 8:5-15.

⁴⁷Mt. 11:25-27; 16:17; Lk. 10:21-24; 19:42.

In addition to the need for forgiveness, the Synoptic gospels also communicate the need for an obedient and loving relationship with God. There are a number of facets to this relationship, including responsiveness to the spiritual direction and nourishment that is provided by the continuing presence of the shepherd.⁴⁹ This requires obedience to the demands of discipleship, particularly in following Jesus above all else.⁵⁰ He called his followers to a purity of heart that is centered on God rather than the multiplicity of finite concerns. He exhorted them to lose their lives for his sake in order to find them,⁵¹ to be more concerned with their relation to God than with human appearances and approval,⁵² to love him more than any earthly relationships,⁵³ to pursue him before anything else,⁵⁴ and to hunger and thirst for righteousness rather than worldly gain.⁵⁵ As in the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl of great value,⁵⁶ the one who is pure in heart chooses one thing and treasures it above all other goods. "[O]ne thing is

⁴⁸Lk. 18:17.

⁴⁹Mt. 9:36; 18:20; 28:20.

⁵⁰Mt. 8:18-22; Lk. 9:57-62; 14:26-33.

⁵¹Mt. 10:39; 16:24-26; Mk. 8:34-37.

⁵²Lk. 20:45-47.

⁵³Mt. 10:37.

⁵⁴Mt. 8:18-22; Lk. 9:57-62.

⁵⁵Mt. 5:6; Lk. 12:16-21.

⁵⁶Mt. 13:44-46.

needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her."⁵⁷ The one thing needful is to put the claims of the kingdom above all other claims. One must "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness"; those who pursue the spiritual above the material do not have to be anxious about physical needs like food, drink, clothing, and shelter, because "all these things shall be yours as well."⁵⁸

Jesus used the metaphor of stewardship to depict people's true relationship to earthly goods. A steward does not own but manages the property of another and is therefore accountable to the owner. He is responsible to be faithful in his use of the time, talent, and treasure that have been entrusted to him.⁵⁹ Maintaining this perspective of God's ownership of all things and looking to him rather than the world as the source of security requires a radical trust in God and a cessation of striving.⁶⁰ Jesus recognized the natural human tendency to be more concerned with pleasing men than with pleasing God.⁶¹ This problem is only overcome when a person lets go of finite centers and turns to God as the supreme object of faith and hope.⁶² The

⁵⁷Lk. 10:42.

⁵⁸Mt. 6:33; cf. 6:19-34; Lk. 12:22-34.

⁵⁹Mt. 24:45-25:30; Mk. 13:33-37; Lk. 12:35-48.

⁶⁰Borg, Conflict, Holiness & Politics, p. 245.

⁶¹Mt. 6:1-6, 16-18.

⁶²E.g., Mt. 14:28-33.

true reward for the follower of Jesus is not on earth but in heaven, and it is there that treasures should be laid up.⁶³

A right relationship with others

People need not only a restored relationship to God, but also a restored relationship to each other, and Jesus taught that the former provides the basis for the latter. In his summary of the law and the prophets, he said that one should love God completely and others compassionately.⁶⁴ He told his followers to "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. . . . And as you wish that men would do to you, do so to them."⁶⁵ Because they have been forgiven their sins against God, they in turn should forgive those who have sinned against them and seek the forgiveness of those against whom they have sinned.⁶⁶ Jesus viewed service to the needs of others as service to God and encouraged an attitude of humility rather than arrogance, selfish ambition, or competition.⁶⁷

The physical and spiritual needs listed above are interrelated in the Synoptic gospels since the claims of Jesus have a bearing on every human

⁶³Mt. 6:19-21; Lk. 18:28-30; cf. Lk. 10:20.

⁶⁴Mt. 22:36-40; Mk. 12:28-34; Lk. 10:25-28.

⁶⁵Lk. 6:27-28, 31; Mt. 5:43-44; 7:12.

⁶⁶Mt. 18:21-35; 5:23-24; Mk. 11:25-26.

⁶⁷Mt. 25:35-45; 18:1-4; 20:20-28; Mk. 10:35-45; Lk. 9:46-48; 22:24-27.

need.⁶⁸ Jesus' ministry of physical provision and healing is directly associated with his offer of spiritual healing, i.e., forgiveness of sins.⁶⁹ Forgiveness, in turn, provides the basis for entering into a right relationship with God, and a loving and obedient relationship with God is the foundation of a loving relationship with others.

The Gospel of John

Physical needs

While the physical needs for material sustenance and physical healing appear in John's gospel, they are given less emphasis here than in the Synoptics. The series of typical stories in John 1-12 generally stress spiritual over physical concerns, particularly the need for a response of belief in Jesus' testimony concerning himself as the means of regeneration into newness of life. Although the sign narratives in these chapters relate to material provision (changing the water to wine in chapter 2 and feeding the multitude in chapter 6), physical healing (the nobleman's son in chapter 4, the paralytic in chapter 5, and the man born blind in chapter 9), and overcoming death (the raising of Lazarus in chapter 11), these physical events are used in this gospel to authenticate the preaching and teaching of Jesus and to elicit the response of faith in his person and work. For example, after he fed the multitude, Jesus exhorted the people who followed him to other side of the sea to be more

⁶⁸Lk. 4:18-19; 7:20-23.

concerned about spiritual than physical nourishment.⁷⁰ He presented himself as the bread of life that came down from heaven to provide eternal life for those who partake of him.⁷¹ Similarly, he offered living water from the well of salvation to the Samaritan woman and to the crowds at the feast of Tabernacles, and told his disciples that his food is to do his Father's will.⁷² After claiming to be the light of the world, he healed the man who was blind from birth and offered him the greater light of believing in him.⁷³ The healings of the nobleman's son and the paralytic are also associated with exhortations to believe, Jesus' works bearing witness that the Father had sent him.⁷⁴ The accounts of the raising of Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus are used to substantiate Jesus' claim to provide both biological and spiritual life to those who believe in him.⁷⁵

Thus, the fourth gospel acknowledges human needs on the physical level but uses them to point to the dominical offer to satisfy spiritual needs.

Spiritual needs

⁶⁹Mt. 9:1-8; Lk. 5:17-26.

⁷⁰John (Jn.) 6:27.

⁷¹Jn. 6:35, 50-51.

⁷²Jn. 4:9-14; 7:37-39; 4:31-34.

⁷³Jn. 9:1-7, 35-39.

⁷⁴Jn. 4:48-54; 5:20, 36, 44-47.

⁷⁵Jn. 11:25-26; 8:51; 5:25-29.

Like the Synoptics, John's gospel underscores the need for a right relationship with God, but it puts this on a more global level, stating that in order to enter into such a relationship, one must become a new person. This theme is most clearly developed in the dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus in chapter 3 in which Jesus argued that without the new birth of the Spirit, one cannot enter the kingdom of God.⁷⁶ People stand condemned because of their sin, and in this state they will face the judgment of God and perish.⁷⁷ As the Son of God and the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, Jesus came to provide salvation from this peril and the way of entrance into a living relationship with God in which one enters into the Father's family as a spiritual child.⁷⁸

The Synoptic gospels speak of the need for forgiveness, but John is more inclined to use the positive and negative imagery of sharing the life of Jesus and his Father and deliverance from the bondage of sin. This bondage is described in terms of slavery, darkness, and death.⁷⁹ There is thus no greater need than to gain freedom from this condition of spiritual judgment and death and to enter into eternal life.⁸⁰

⁷⁶Jn. 3:3-8; 6:63.

⁷⁷Jn. 3:18-19, 36; 5:25-29.

⁷⁸Jn. 1:12, 29; 3:16-17.

⁷⁹Jn. 8:12, 34, 51; 9:39-41; 12:46.

⁸⁰Jn. 5:24; 8:31-36.

The seven "I am" statements in this gospel not only emphasize the divine nature of Jesus and the need to respond to him, but also portray the meaning of being born anew. As the bread of life, Jesus provides physical and spiritual nourishment.⁸¹ As the light of the world, he offers enlightenment to those who are in darkness and calls people to respond to the light of his words by following him.⁸² As the door and as the good shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, he is the means of entry as well as the provider of the identity, security, and sustenance needed by his flock.⁸³ As "the resurrection and the life" and "the way, and the truth, and the life," Jesus guides his people out of falsehood into the truth and is the source of life who offers to overcome both spiritual death and (in the resurrection) physical death.⁸⁴ And as the true vine, he provides rootedness, vitality, and spiritual fruit to those who abide in him and become conduits of his life in the same way that a branch draws its life from the vine.⁸⁵

John's gospel is permeated with the opposing motifs of light and darkness, love and hate, life and death, truth and lies, righteousness and sin, freedom and slavery, and belief and disbelief. These stark contrasts between

⁸¹Jn. 6:35, 48. Just as his food was to do the will of his Father (Jn. 4:34), so Jesus by accomplishing this will became the nourishment of those who partake of him (Jn. 6:50-58).

⁸²Jn. 8:12; 9:5; 12:36, 46.

⁸³Jn. 10:1-18, 25-29.

⁸⁴Jn. 1:4; 5:25-29; 8:51; 10:10; 11:25-26.

the forces of good and evil stress the lack of middle ground and are consistent with the gospel's stated purpose of bringing the reader to the point of acceptance of the apostolic testimony concerning the person and work of Jesus ("these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name").⁸⁶ The new birth takes place when a person responds to Jesus by believing that he is the Christ. This concept of belief or appropriation of Jesus' person and message runs throughout John's gospel. As in the eucharistic discourse in chapter 6, one must either accept or reject Jesus' offer to find life by partaking of his body and blood.⁸⁷ This is done by receiving him, an act which John equates with believing in his name.⁸⁸ The importance of recognizing that Jesus is the Christ and responding in faith is communicated through the series of signs and responses to the signs (acceptance and rejection) in John 2-12 and in Jesus' recorded interactions with people and groups (e.g., the woman at the well and the Samaritans).⁸⁹ The fourth gospel repeatedly stresses that belief in Jesus as the Christ leads to eternal life and failure to receive his sayings leads to spiritual death.⁹⁰

⁸⁵Jn. 15:1-8.

⁸⁶Jn. 20:31; 21:24.

⁸⁷Jn. 6:35-65.

⁸⁸Jn. 1:12.

⁸⁹Jn. 4:10-29, 39-42; cf. 11:27.

⁹⁰Jn. 3:16, 36; 5:24, 38, 40; 6:29, 36, 40, 47, 64; 8:24; 12:48; 14:11; 20:29.

In his meditation on being in him, Jesus told his disciples to look to him as the source of comfort, provision, peace, friendship, truth, joy, love, life, and protection.⁹¹ In this way, by becoming a new person in Christ, one discovers that the need for a right relationship with God is satisfied. The fulfillment of this need, in turn, provides the basis for the fulfillment of the need for restored relationships with others. Those who find identity, purpose, and hope in Christ are secure enough to serve and love others. Jesus' new commandment to his followers to love one another as he loved them makes self-sacrificing love and compassion the essence of the Christian life.⁹² When this kind of love is manifested it produces a unity in the community of believers that bears witness to the world.⁹³

The destiny of human beings is to be where Jesus is--in the bosom of the Father. Jesus' high priestly prayer in John 17 expressed his desire that those who believe in him may be in the Father just as Jesus is in the Father, and that the unity that this relationship produces would so display the Father's life that it would have a missionary dimension to a watching world.

The Book of Acts

As a continuation of the narrative of the gospel of Luke, Acts provides an account of the transitional period during which the gospel spread from

⁹¹Jn. 14:1-3, 16-20, 27; 15:15; 16:13-15, 22-24, 27, 33; 17:3, 12.

⁹²Jn. 13:34-35; 14:15, 21; 15:9-12, 17.

⁹³Jn. 17:21-26.

Jerusalem to a substantial portion of the Roman Empire. Like the gospels, Acts relates the salvific work of Jesus to both physical and spiritual needs.

Physical needs

In his sermon in the Areopagus, Paul argued that the creator of the world has no needs since he is the source of all life. Since all humans are his offspring, they must look to him for biological and spiritual life.⁹⁴

The apostolic preaching of the gospel of Christ in Acts was often accompanied by signs and wonders, including physical healings of the sick, the lame, and the paralyzed, and liberation from demonic bondage.⁹⁵ In the early Christian church, physical needs for nourishment and shelter were being cared for by the community of believers, at first by selling possessions and goods and distribution of the proceeds by the leadership to those who had need, and later by organized collections for the poor and needy.⁹⁶

Spiritual needs

As in the gospels, the spiritual need for a right relationship with God is given greater significance in Acts than physical concerns, although the latter are not minimized. Thus, the apostles manifested a willingness to suffer physical punishment and death if necessary in order to continue teaching and

⁹⁴Acts 17:24-31.

⁹⁵Acts 3:2-16; 5:12-16; 8:7, 13; 9:33-42; 14:3, 8-10; 16:16-18; 19:11-12; 28:8-9.

⁹⁶Acts 2:44-46; 4:34-35; 6:1-4; 11:27-30; 20:33-35.

preaching Jesus as the Christ.⁹⁷ The theme of salvation through the person and work of the crucified and resurrected Jesus is the predominant theme in the apostolic kerygma in Acts.⁹⁸ Associated with this theme is the need for a response of recognition of Jesus as the Christ and repentance for the forgiveness of sins.⁹⁹

The Pauline Corpus

Preliminary Concerns

Just as there has been a growing awareness in recent years of the relationship between Jesus' preaching concerning the kingdom of God and Jewish literature and socio-political concerns, a similar development has taken place with regard to the influence of Jewish thought-forms on the Pauline corpus. The majority view had long been that Paul was opposed to Jewish ideas and influences because of the "legalism" with which they were associated. This view began to be challenged when an increasing understanding of first-century Rabbinic Judaism began to be applied to Pauline studies.¹⁰⁰ Some scholars have swung to the opposite extreme by

⁹⁷Acts 5:40-41; 20:22-24; 21:10-13.

⁹⁸Acts 2:21, 47; 4:11-12; 13:22-39; 16:30-31; 26:22-23.

⁹⁹Acts 2:36-40; 3:17-19; 5:42; 7:51-53; 8:34-37; 10:1-4, 22-48; 13:40-41, 46-48; 16:30-31; 17:2-3; 18:5-6, 28; 26:17-18, 20; 28:23-28.

¹⁰⁰W. D. Davies, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism (London: S.P.C.K., 1948) was particularly important in setting the stage for later developments in this area.

claiming that Paul had virtually no negative critique of Judaism,¹⁰¹ but almost all are agreed that the Pauline corpus has been influenced by Palestinian Judaism to a greater extent than had previously been thought. In light of this, it is important to avoid the kind of hermeneutical anachronisms that occur when the original meaning of the text in its first-century context is overlooked. While the epistles have implications that reach far beyond their original settings, the initial occasions and meanings must be taken into account to avoid the problem of reading twentieth-century views into first-century material.¹⁰²

The increased recognition in current scholarship of the ideological impact of the Old Testament and Jewish apocalyptic materials upon Pauline theology does not mean that the latter can be comprehensively reduced to the former. In his Christology, soteriology, and eschatology, Paul frequently alludes to the traditional imagery and concepts of Jewish theology, but these are adapted to serve and illuminate the redemptive work of God in Christ.¹⁰³ Paul's encounter with the risen and exalted Jesus on the road to Damascus¹⁰⁴ profoundly shaped his gospel of reconciliation. Kim argues that this

¹⁰¹E.g., Krister Stendahl, Paul Among Jews and Gentiles (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977).

¹⁰²"Seek ye first the original meanings--and all these things shall be yours as well" (ibid., p. 36).

¹⁰³Herman Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, trans. John Richard De witt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), pp. 51-52.

revelatory experience, combined with Jewish theology and the Christian kerygma, provided the basic content of Pauline theology.

[T]he revelation of the crucified Jesus of Nazareth as enthroned at God's right hand proved to Paul that through the cross he has superseded the Torah as the medium of the divine revelation and salvation and therefore that he is the one who had formerly been described as Wisdom. So, the Son of God who was revealed to Paul on the Damascus road is the content of his gospel¹⁰⁵

Associated with this revelatory encounter was the commission to carry the name of Jesus "before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel."¹⁰⁶ The message that Jesus is the Christ has significant implications for the relationship between Jewish and Gentile believers that are developed in a number of the Pauline epistles. Paul sought to expose the error of those Jewish believers in Jesus who failed to see that the new covenant inaugurated since the coming of the Messiah included not only Jews but also Gentiles in a single new community.¹⁰⁷

There has been a growing recognition among New Testament scholars that this issue is the real context out of which the doctrine of justification by faith emerged in the epistles of Paul. Since both Jews and Gentiles are justified by the same faith in Christ, the Gentiles are full heirs to God's promises to Israel; in the kingdom of God, the place of Gentile believers is just

¹⁰⁴Acts 9:1-22.

¹⁰⁵Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 2nd rev. ed. (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1984), p. 136 (italics deleted); cf. pp. 104, 329.

¹⁰⁶Acts 9:15.

as secure as that of Jewish believers. This is an important corrective to the centuries-old approach to Pauline interpretation that limits the discussion to how individuals are to be saved and ignores the first-century issues and questions. However, in view of the richness of the thematic development of salvation and the cognate concepts of redemption, propitiation, justification, reconciliation, and sanctification in the New Testament epistles, it would be just as erroneous to attempt to reduce all this material to the single dimension of the Jewish-Gentile relationship in the body of Christ.¹⁰⁸

The Pauline corpus is the primary source material for gaining an understanding of the nature and constituency of the earliest church.¹⁰⁹ Meeks, Theissen, and Malherbe agree that the congregations to which Paul addressed his epistles "generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society."¹¹⁰ The social structure of Hellenistic primitive Christianity

¹⁰⁷Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, p. 220.

¹⁰⁸Stendahl, for example, argues that Romans 1-8 was written as a preface to Romans 9-11, "in which Paul argues that since justification is by faith it is equally possible for both Jews and Gentiles to come to Christ. In that preface he does not deal with the question of how man is to be saved--be it by works or law or by something else" (Stendahl, Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, p. 29; cf. pp. 1-4, 26-27).

¹⁰⁹Neill and Wright, The Interpretation of the New Testament, p. 362; Robert Banks, Paul's Idea of Community (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), pp. 13-32.

¹¹⁰Wayne A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 73; Gerd Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity, ed. and trans. John H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982); Abraham J. Malherbe, Social Aspects of Early Christianity, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

encompassed an unusual diversity of strata, interests, and customs. Those who embraced the apostolic kerygma experienced profound social change as they found a new source of identity and a new basis for cohesiveness and fellowship in the Christian community.¹¹¹ The early church was a corporate movement that often transcended socio-economic barriers by according equal membership to Jews and Gentiles, slaves and freemen, males and females.¹¹² The basis for this equality is their common participation in the body of Christ into which they have all been incorporated by divine grace through faith in Christ and in which they share the same hope.¹¹³ In spite of this, there has been a tendency, particularly among Protestant biblical interpreters, to minimize this corporate dimension when the discussion turns to the issue of righteousness. The assumption that justification, the establishment of a right relationship between God and men, has its primary referent on the individual level, has been challenged in recent years by scholars who wish to relate righteousness to the larger social and cosmic dimensions.¹¹⁴ Blame for the excessive emphasis on individualism with respect to salvation has centered

¹¹¹Meeks, The First Urban Christians, pp. 183-84; Theissen, The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity, p. 106; Malherbe, Social Aspects of Early Christianity, pp. 71, 84.

¹¹²Galatians 3:28.

¹¹³1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:4-7.

¹¹⁴Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, pp. 63-64; Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, pp. 217-18.

on Augustine and Luther because of their application of the Pauline doctrine of justification to the problem of the introspective and penitential conscience.¹¹⁵ By contrast, Ridderbos relates the transition from the "old" to the "new man" to the history of the redeemed community; "it is a matter here not of a change that comes about in the way of faith and conversion in the life of the individual Christian, but of that which once took place in Christ and in which his people had part in him in the corporate sense"¹¹⁶

While Christian truth is arguably a corporate expression that is distorted when limited to a purely individualistic setting,¹¹⁷ it would be just as erroneous to restrict the Pauline doctrine of justification to the corporate context. As Yoder acknowledges,

We are objecting to a particular polemical application of the traditional doctrine, which used it to exclude the ethical and social dimensions. By echoing scholars who have rediscovered the missing dimensions we are not denying the personal. We are denying that it can most adequately be spoken about in abstraction from the rest, as certain recent Western traditions have assumed.¹¹⁸

The doctrines of justification and sanctification in the epistles were relevant in their initial context both to the needs of individual believers and to the needs of the church as a corporate historical community. Provided that their first-century meanings are not overlooked, they also have a relevance to the

¹¹⁵Stendahl, Paul Among Jews and Gentiles, p. 16.

¹¹⁶Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, p. 63.

¹¹⁷N. T. Wright, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), p. 40.

varying concerns of later cultural contexts, e.g., the longing for incorruption in the ancient world, the quest for forgiveness and freedom in the Middle Ages, and the search for meaning and purpose in life in the contemporary context.¹¹⁹

Physical Needs

The Pauline epistles, unlike the gospels and Acts, do not record incidents of physical healing, although reference is made in 1 Corinthians to the spiritual gift of healing in the body of Christ.¹²⁰ In the realm of physical concerns, the epistles emphasize the active role of the community of faith in providing for those who are in need. This includes the practice of service and hospitality, regular provision for widows, financial support of those who preach and teach, and collections for "the needs of the saints."¹²¹ Citing the example of the churches of Macedonia, Paul encouraged sacrificial giving in the churches for those who needed relief and assured his readers that in doing so, they could confidently look to God to provide for their needs.¹²² When the Philippian church sent a gift to him when he was in prison, he thanked them for their sacrifice and told them that "God will supply every

¹¹⁸Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, pp. 218-19, n. 2.

¹¹⁹Neill, *Jesus through Many Eyes*, p. 72.

¹²⁰1 Corinthians 12:9, 28, 30; cf. Philippians 2:25-30.

¹²¹Romans 12:7-8, 13; 1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 11:8-9; 1 Timothy 5:5-11, 17-18.

¹²²2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:1-15.

need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."¹²³ Paul commended the practice of contentment and thanksgiving to his readers in the wavering circumstances of abundance and abasement.¹²⁴

Spiritual Needs

Paul frequently stressed that spiritual concerns, and particularly the progress of the gospel, were of far greater significance to him than physical concerns. He expressed his willingness to suffer hunger and thirst, inadequate clothing and shelter, physical danger and persecution, and social slander and disrepute for the sake of the advancement of the gospel of Christ.¹²⁵ The suffering and deprivation he and his collaborators endured did not lead them to despair because they regarded them as a vehicle by which the grace of God would be extended to the lives of others.¹²⁶ He perceived the afflictions endured by those who sought to propagate the gospel as momentary and slight in comparison with the "eternal weight of glory

¹²³Philippians 4:14-19.

¹²⁴Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

¹²⁵1 Corinthians 4:11-13.

¹²⁶2 Corinthians 4:7-15; 11:23-28; 12:9-10. "Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which in Christ Jesus goes with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10).

beyond all comparison."¹²⁷ In spite of the sensory evidence of the physical world, the unseen spiritual reality anticipated by those whose hope embraces the promise of a new mode of existence in the presence of God is more substantial because it is eternal, not transient. While acknowledging the needs associated with bodily existence, the apostle places a greater stress on the immortality and quality of life that will characterize those who are "at home with the Lord."¹²⁸ Paul's assurance of the transformation from humility to glory in the resurrection of the body was a motivating force in his thinking and behavior, and caused him to regard temporal attainments as inconsequential in comparison with the possibility of enduring rewards at the judgment seat of Christ.¹²⁹ Those who enjoy the "in Christ" relationship have nothing and yet possess everything; they are stewards, not owners of the world's goods, but possess "every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places"

¹²⁷2 Corinthians 4:17.

¹²⁸2 Corinthians 4:18-5:8.

¹²⁹Romans 8:18; 1 Corinthians 3:13-14; 15:35-56; 2 Corinthians 5:9-10.

"But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ" (Phil. 3:7-8; cf. 3:9-21).

and look to God for the provision of their temporal needs.¹³⁰ Rather than comparing themselves with others, they are called to contentment even during times when they have nothing more than food and clothing.¹³¹ The desire for material prosperity is inconsistent with the Pauline understanding of the believer's earthly purpose, particularly because no physical possessions can be brought into the next world. Those who are rich in good deeds are the only ones who are laying a good foundation for the future.¹³²

The Pauline corpus frequently underscores the problem of the universality of human sin and the consequent condemnation of both Jews and Gentiles before a perfect and holy God. This is the theme of Romans 1:18-3:20 in which moral and religious Jews are depicted as being in the same bondage to sin as Gentiles who do not have the law. The law brings the knowledge of sin, but does not enable one to overcome it, and actually underscores the futility of human works in the achievement of a state of righteousness before God.¹³³ Apart from the grace of God, people are spiritually dead through the trespasses and sins in which they walk, and are by nature children of

¹³⁰2 Corinthians 6:10; Ephesians 1:3.

¹³¹1 Timothy 6:8.

¹³²1 Timothy 6:7, 17-19.

¹³³"For no human being will be justified in his sight by works of the law since through the law comes knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20).

wrath.¹³⁴ In their natural state, they are not only helpless to do that which is pleasing to God, but manifest an estrangement and hostility of mind and are at enmity with God; in consequence, they are separated from Christ, "having no hope and without God in the world."¹³⁵ Hence, the greatest human need from a Pauline perspective is to overcome this state of alienation and spiritual death or separation from God. But his epistles stress that this need cannot be met through human efforts, even if one is religious and zealous to accomplish good works. The dilemma is that people fall short of the character of God in thought, word, and deed and are thus incapable of putting themselves back into a right relationship with God. At the same time, God cannot accept that which is contrary to his character, and this raises the problem of how a righteous God can accept sinners. Paul's answer is the doctrine of justification by faith, and it is most explicitly developed in Romans 3:21-5:21. God manifested his righteousness apart from the law in the person and work of Jesus Christ and offers the righteousness of Christ to all who receive this gift of grace.¹³⁶ It is through divine rather than human initiative that the

¹³⁴Ephesians 2:1-3; Colossians 2:13.

¹³⁵Romans 5:10; 8:7-8; Ephesians 2:11-13; Colossians 1:21.

¹³⁶"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21). ". . . when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not

means of reconciliation, propitiation, and redemption has been provided.¹³⁷

Those who have been reconciled to God in Christ are part of the new creation and fellow heirs with Christ in anticipation of the time when the whole creation will be "set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God."¹³⁸

In his book, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, Sanders takes issue with Bultmann, Conzelmann, and Bornkamm by arguing that Paul's thought in

because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which he poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that we might be justified by his grace and become heirs in hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:4-7).

¹³⁷Romans 5:6-8; 1 Timothy 2:5-6. "To believe is to see that God in Christ has moved toward the sinner before the sinner began to move toward God, to know oneself to be accepted in him without regard to any question of virtue or of compensation for the wrong done. Such knowledge must result in a deep and permanent sense of indebtedness and of gratitude for the immensity of the favor conferred. Great harm has been done by interpretations of the doctrine of justification that present it as an almost mechanical transaction unrelated to the dark and personal realities of the situation" (Neill, Jesus through Many Eyes , p. 60).

¹³⁸Romans 8:21; 2 Corinthians 5:17. Neill, Jesus through Many Eyes, p.

passages like Romans 7 and Philippians 3 "did not run from plight to solution, but rather from solution to plight."¹³⁹ The conclusion that Jews and Gentiles are all in need of a savior is not derived from a prior awareness of this need, but from the conviction that such a savior had actually been sent by God. Having embraced this conviction, Paul then deduced the inadequacy of all other approaches to salvation. According to Sanders, then, Paul's anthropology is the byproduct of his Christology and soteriology, and not the other way around. The Pauline message is not descriptive of man but prescriptive, in that it is intended to elicit the response of faith among those to whom Christ is preached.¹⁴⁰

Sanders is correct in saying that in Pauline thought, theology is more determinative of the fullness of human need than anthropology, but it would be going too far to contend that apart from a conviction concerning the divine solution, there could be no awareness of the human plight. In Romans 1:18-23, Paul argues that because of external revelation in nature and internal revelation in the human heart, the world is not characterized by ignorance of the true God, but rather by suppression of this truth in unrighteousness. Nor, according to Romans 2:12-16, are people ignorant of the problem of sin,

¹³⁹E. P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1977), pp. 443-44. Paul "did not start from man's need, but from God's deed" (ibid., p. 444).

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 446.

because their God-given conscience bears witness to their inability to live in conformity with their own standards, let alone God's.¹⁴¹ The problem, however, is the human tendency to disavow or suppress this knowledge and the consequent delusion that one can attain a quality of life that is acceptable before God solely through human merit. Paul repeatedly repudiates this perception in his epistles and stresses the universal need for the grace of God and the futility apart from this grace of overcoming the state of spiritual alienation caused by rebellion against the divine will. Justification before God cannot be achieved by performance or effort, but through faith in Jesus Christ, and Paul's gospel calls all people--Jews and Gentiles--to transfer their hope and trust from their own works to the work of Christ.¹⁴² It is in this way

¹⁴¹"When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness and their conflicting thoughts accuse or perhaps excuse them on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus" (Rom. 2:14-16).

¹⁴²Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-5:21; 10:9-10; Galatians 2:16; 3:1-14, 23-29; Ephesians 2:4-10; 2 Thess. 2:13-14; 1 Timothy 1:15.

that one enters into the benefits of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ and participates in the life of the Spirit with the people of God.¹⁴³

The epistles of Paul employ both juridical and participatory statements to develop the theme of righteousness by faith. The human condition without Christ is described in terms of transgression of the ordinances of God and enslavement to the power of sin. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God since they are under sin and condemned by the law of God.¹⁴⁴ Hence there is the need for a transfer from one lordship to another: from transgression to expiation, and from dominion to freedom.¹⁴⁵ Those who have been reconciled to God in Christ have entered into a new relationship characterized by peace rather than enmity with God, and enjoy the benefits of a new position of holiness and blamelessness by virtue of the life of Christ within them.¹⁴⁶ Their calling is now to manifest in their practice the new

¹⁴³1 Corinthians 1:9; Wright, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon, p. 29.

¹⁴⁴"While we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death" (Rom. 7:5; cf. 8:6-7).

¹⁴⁵Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism, p. 497.

¹⁴⁶1 Corinthians 6:11; Galatians 2:20; Colossians 1:20-22; 2 Timothy 1:9-10.

identity they have found in Christ, and this is the ongoing process of sanctification, or growth in the Spirit.¹⁴⁷ All who have participated in the benefits of Christ's death and resurrection have been delivered from the old aeon and have become ambassadors of the age to come whose mandate is to extend the invisible geography of the new creation.¹⁴⁸ Thus, for Paul, justification from the penalty of sin and deliverance from the power of sin are eschatological realities that presently manifest the powers of the age to come.¹⁴⁹

In Pauline thought, the gospel fulfills not only the need for reconciliation, but also the need for a hope that transcends the finite boundaries of this world. The believer's hope is fixed on an "eternal weight of glory" that is not worthy of comparison with the "slight momentary affliction" endured in the temporal state.¹⁵⁰ God has given "eternal comfort and good hope through grace" to those who have put their faith in "Christ Jesus our

¹⁴⁷Romans 6:12-19; 8:9-17; Galatians 5:13-25.

¹⁴⁸2 Corinthians 5:17-20; Galatians 1:4; Colossians 1:13-14.

¹⁴⁹Ridderbos, Paul: An Outline of His Theology, pp. 162-65, 205.

¹⁵⁰2 Corinthians 4:17. "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

hope."¹⁵¹ As they anticipate the second advent, their hope is in the character of God and the realization of his promises.¹⁵² Their identity and hope in Christ satisfies the need for security that cannot be met in earthbound circumstances and relationships. This is the theme of Romans 8:19-39; the intercessory work of the Spirit and the Son assures believers that nothing in heaven or earth will be able to separate them from the love of God. This hope and security extend to the redemption of the whole person: body, soul, and spirit.¹⁵³ Paul's expectation of the resurrection from the dead was an essential motivator that governed his life and ministry. The resurrection of Christ is the foundation for his hope in the resurrection of the dead and of the faithful who are alive at the parousia, and he uses this anticipation of triumph over mortality as a source of assurance and comfort to the Corinthians and Thessalonians.¹⁵⁴

The Pauline corpus consistently encourages the cultivation of an eternal rather than a temporal perspective as well as an awareness of human

¹⁵¹2 Thessalonians 2:16; 1 Timothy 1:1.

¹⁵²Galatians 5:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

¹⁵³1 Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Timothy 1:12.

¹⁵⁴1 Corinthians 15:13-58; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain" (1 Cor. 15:58).

accountability before God. Since there is "no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus,"¹⁵⁵ this is not prompted by a fear of punishment, but by the desire for rewards. For Paul, this desire is a legitimate component of the believer's motivational structure.¹⁵⁶

One of the most prominent themes in the epistles of Paul is the need for spiritual growth and nurture. "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."¹⁵⁷ He frequently exhorts his readers to pursue those things that will lead to their sanctification, including setting their minds on the Spirit and on the things above, walking and living by the Spirit, being transformed by renewing their minds, clothing themselves with Christ, growing into maturity, cleansing themselves from defilement, acting in accordance with the new nature, putting on the whole armor of God, increasing in love, living by faith in Christ, putting to death the lusts of the old nature, and living in a way that is pleasing to God.¹⁵⁸ "The way to maturity for the people of God

¹⁵⁵Romans 8:1.

¹⁵⁶"What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9; cf. 3:10-15; 2 Cor. 5:9-10; 1 Thess. 2:19-20; 2 Tim. 4:7-8).

¹⁵⁷1 Thessalonians 4:3.

¹⁵⁸Romans 6:1-8:17; 12:1-2; 13:11-14; 1 Corinthians 2:12-3:3; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 4:22-24; 6:10-18; Philippians 1:9-

does not lie in their becoming Jews, but rather in their drawing out, and applying to personal and communal life, the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.¹⁵⁹ The process of growth in spiritual maturity is the path to the restoration of the image of the Creator. This restoration is made possible not by human attainment, but through the adequacy that comes from God.¹⁶⁰ The people of God have been given every resource necessary for their growth into conformity with the character of Christ through the expression of their new identity in him in their attitudes, actions, and relationships.¹⁶¹ This extends to a willingness to minister to the needs of

11; Colossians 2:6-7; 3:5, 8-10; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7; 5:23; 2 Thessalonians 3:5; Titus 2:11-14.

¹⁵⁹Wright, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon, p. 27.

¹⁶⁰"Such is the confidence that we have through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our sufficiency is from God" (2 Cor. 3:4-5).

¹⁶¹"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal. 2:20). "I can do all things in him who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13; cf. 1 Cor. 4:7-8; 2 Cor. 3:17-18; 4:7-14; 5:14-17; Gal. 4:4-7; 6:14; Eph. 1:3-23; 3:14-19; Phil. 1:21; 4:6-7, 19; Col.

others in the spiritual community. Paul uses the metaphors of a family and a body to communicate the dynamic of interdependence and mutual edification in the development of mature communities as well as mature individuals. He exhorts those who are in Christ to live in unity and to love one another, forgive one another, encourage one another, be kind to one another, do good to one another, build up one another, serve one another, look to the interests of one another, bear the burdens of one another, pray for one another, and live in peace with one another.¹⁶²

1:9, 13-14; 3:1-4). "We are not to be content to gaze upon him or to admire him: we must become imitators of him, until we are metamorphosed into the same image" (Warfield, The Person and Work of Christ, p. 143).

¹⁶²Romans 12:4-21; 13:8-10; 14:13, 19; 15:1-8; 1 Corinthians 1:10; 10:24, 33; 12:4-13:13; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:13-14; 6:2, 10; Ephesians 4:1-16, 25-32; 5:1-2; Philippians 2:1-4, 19-24; Colossians 3:12-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12; 5:11-15; 1 Timothy 2:1; Philemon 5-7.

The General Epistles, Hebrews, and Revelation

Like the Pauline corpus, the general epistles are far more concerned with spiritual than with physical needs. James, for instance, stresses the importance of viewing human existence from an eternal rather than a temporal perspective. "Let the lowly brother boast in his exaltation, and the rich in his humiliation, because like the flower of the grass he will pass away."¹⁶³ The quotation from Isaiah 40:6-9 in 1 Peter 1:24-25 illustrates the same perspective: "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord abides for ever." The epistle to the Hebrews likewise reminds the readers of their willingness to endure abuse, affliction, and the plundering of their property because they knew they "had a better possession and an abiding one."¹⁶⁴ Thus, those who suffer for the name of Christ can rejoice not only insofar as they share his sufferings, but also because they can anticipate the glory that is to be revealed.¹⁶⁵ Peter instructs his readers to cast their worldly anxieties on God because he will care for their needs and exalt his people at the proper

¹⁶³James 1:9-10.

¹⁶⁴Hebrews 10:34.

¹⁶⁵1 Peter 4:12-13.

time.¹⁶⁶ The deepest needs are spiritual, not material, because they pertain to that which will endure.

Each person will give account to God who is ready to judge the living and the dead, and in view of this judgment, there is a universal need for cleansing from the defilement of sin that renders all guilty before God.¹⁶⁷ The general epistles affirm that this is the purpose for which Christ came.¹⁶⁸ Hebrews teaches that Christ, whose once-for-all sacrifice provided the redemption that could not be obtained through the sacrificial system of the Mosaic covenant, is the mediator of a new and better covenant. Since his is an enduring priesthood, he continually delivers and intercedes for those who draw near to God through him.¹⁶⁹ Through his perfect sacrifice for the sins of his people, he became the source of salvation to all who obey him and

¹⁶⁶1 Peter 5:6-7. "And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, establish, and strengthen you" (1 Pet. 5:10).

¹⁶⁷Hebrews 9:27; 10:30-31; 1 Peter 4:6; Revelation 5:9.

¹⁶⁸"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9-10).

¹⁶⁹Hebrews 7:25.

purifies their conscience from dead works so that they can die to sin and live to righteousness.¹⁷⁰ Those who have become children of God through faith in Christ have a new source of identity in the one who partook of their nature, bore their sorrows, and understands their weaknesses and temptations.¹⁷¹ Such a high priest and mediator is fully capable of providing the mercy and grace to satisfy every human need. He has called his people out of darkness into light, made them a chosen race and a royal people, loved them unconditionally as his children, made them overcomers of the world, and has given them assurance of new and unending life in Christ.¹⁷²

This new identity in Christ provides a source of security and significance that transcends earthly felicity; God "is able to keep you from falling and to present you without blemish before the presence of his glory with rejoicing."¹⁷³ These epistles teach that a relationship with Christ satisfies

¹⁷⁰Hebrews 5:9; 9:14; 1 Peter 2:24-25. Cf. Hebrews 2:3-4; 7:26-27; 9:11-15, 28.

¹⁷¹Hebrews 2:14-18; 4:14-16; 1 John 5:1. Warfield, The Person and Work of Christ, pp. 143-44.

¹⁷²1 Peter 2:9-10; 1 John 3:1; 5:4-5, 11-13. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father" (Rev. 1:5-6).

¹⁷³Jude 24.

the human need for purpose and hope, because the Christian's inheritance in him will endure forever.¹⁷⁴ When this hope is fixed on the character and promises of God, it provides a source of stability, refuge, and encouragement during times of adversity and uncertainty. It is a "sure and steadfast anchor of the soul" and a source of assurance that believers will inherit the divine promises.¹⁷⁵ Those who have seized this living hope are purified by it and motivated to pursue lives of holiness and godliness as they wait for the promises to be fulfilled at the parousia.¹⁷⁶ These promises are associated with

¹⁷⁴"By his great mercy we have been born anew to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and to an inheritance which is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. . . . Without having seen him you love him; though you do not now see him you believe in him and rejoice with unutterable and exalted joy. As the outcome of your faith you obtain the salvation of your souls" (1 Pet. 1:3-5, 8-9).

¹⁷⁵Hebrews 6:11-20; 7:19. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Heb. 10:23).

¹⁷⁶"Beloved, we are God's children now; it does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. And every one who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he

the imagery of rewards for those who seek God, and those who are motivated to pursue the promises and rewards of God are willing to take the risks of faith and undergo temporal loss for eternal gain.¹⁷⁷ In the beatific vision, there will no longer be hunger, thirst, pain, or death, for "God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."¹⁷⁸

This transcendent hope is used by the writers of the general epistles to stimulate a willingness among the readers to pursue lives that are expressive of spiritual maturity and Christlike character.¹⁷⁹ These epistles frequently

is pure" (1 John 3:2-3; cf. 2 Pet. 3:11-13). "Therefore gird up your minds, be sober, set your hope fully upon the grace that is coming to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 1:13).

¹⁷⁷"All these died in faith, not having received what was promised, but having seen it and greeted it from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. . . . they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. . . . For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city which is to come" (Heb. 11:13, 16; 13:14; cf. 11:1, 6, 39-40; Jas. 1:12; 1 Pet. 5:4).

¹⁷⁸Revelation 7:16-17; 21:3-4; 22:3-5.

¹⁷⁹2 Peter 1:3-11. "And now, little children, abide in him, so that when he appears we may have confidence and not shrink from him in shame at his coming. If you know that he is righteous, you may be sure that every one who does right is born of him" (1 John 2:28-29).

stress holiness of conduct and growth in the truth,¹⁸⁰ and this is the foundation upon which ministering to the needs of others is based. Faith in Christ is best expressed in acts of love, service, encouragement, sacrificial giving, and hospitality to others.¹⁸¹

Conclusions

The Need for Forgiveness and Grace

The New Testament portrait of human nature recognizes and incorporates the twin pulls of the material and the transcendent. On the one hand, people are compared to "a mist that appears for a little time and then

¹⁸⁰Hebrews 5:12-6:1; James 4:7-8; 1 Peter 1:14-16; 2:1-2.

¹⁸¹"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God. . . . Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere love of the brethren, love one another earnestly from the heart. . . . Above all hold unfailing your love for one another, since love covers a multitude of sins. Practice hospitality ungrudgingly to one another. . . . Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God" (Heb. 10:23-24; 13:16; 1 Pet. 1:22; 4:8-9; 1 John 4:7; cf. Heb. 3:13; 10:25; 13:1-3; Jas. 1:27; 2:1-9, 14-17; 1 Pet. 3:8-9; 1 John 2:9-11; 3:11, 16-19, 23; 4:11-12, 20-21; 2 John 5-6).

vanishes."¹⁸² In this respect, they resemble the lower animals and share the same physical needs. On the other hand, humans are reflexive moral agents and spiritual beings who have been made in the likeness of God.¹⁸³ Thus, they are both continuous and discontinuous with the rest of creation, and there is an ongoing tension between these two states.¹⁸⁴ The New Testament repudiates the opposite extremes of self-degradation and arrogance.¹⁸⁵ The former is inconsistent with its teaching that men and women have been called into a covenant relationship with God and have true dignity and purpose because of the image of Christ after which they are recreated and the destiny offered them. The latter overlooks their creaturely finitude and the tragedy of the moral distortion engendered by rebellion against the divine will. The peaceful ordering of the original creation has been broken, and the greatest human need is the restoration of this shalom with the Creator. But peace with God cannot be attained by human initiative; it can only be accomplished through the forgiveness and grace offered in the redemptive work of Christ.

¹⁸²James 4:14.

¹⁸³James 3:9.

¹⁸⁴Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen, The Person in Psychology (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1985), p. 48; cf. pp. 46-56.

¹⁸⁵Donald M. MacKay, Human Science & Human Dignity (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979), pp. 114-17.

"Therefore, since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in our hope of sharing the glory of God."¹⁸⁶ In their fallenness, humans are bent away from their Creator, and this spiritual alienation is manifested in intrapersonal and interpersonal alienation as well as estrangement from the natural order. These consequences could only be reversed by the grace and healing that proceeds from God. "In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."¹⁸⁷ Apart from divine grace, the resources of human nature would be incapable of overcoming the infinite abyss separating people from the attainment of beatitude in possessing God as object of perfect happiness.¹⁸⁸ In

¹⁸⁶Romans 5:1-2.

¹⁸⁷John 4:10-11. Wright refers to the "double truth of God's attitude towards sinful human beings. As sinners, they need to die to sin; as human beings made in God's image, they need to have their true humanity reaffirmed and recreated in the resurrection" (The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon, p. 117).

¹⁸⁸Jacques Maritain, Moral Philosophy (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1964), pp. 76-77. "The moral heroism to which we are in truth called [in Christianity] is attained neither by the athleticism of mystical concentration,

breaking the spell of the fall, Jesus opened the way to a restored relationship with God, whereby people are no longer slaves to the dehumanization of sin, but children of God and fellow heirs with Christ.

The Need for Love and Community

Ephesians 2:12 describes the plight of those who are without Christ in terms of relational alienation; they are "strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world." The New Testament solution to the human dilemma is not a quest for self-fulfillment, since this would in fact exacerbate the problem by encouraging the individual to disregard others or manipulate them by using them as a means to their end of attaining self-fulfillment. Instead, the writers of the New Testament stress the need for the

after the Hindu manner, which claims to draw us into inner solitude in the absolute, nor by the athleticism of virtue, after the manner of the Stoics, which pretends to render us incapable of sin. It is attained through the force of another who descends into us and fills us with His plenitude, and by a love for Him which even in the depths of our weakness removes all obstacles to His love. . . . The Christian saint is not a superman formed by human agency, a Hercules of moral virtue like the Stoic sage; he is a friend of God who draws his life from supernatural charity and is formed by the divine hand, and who throws human weakness open to the divine plenitude descending into him. The vainglory of Man is dethroned, and humility, wherein lives the force of God, is exalted" (ibid., pp. 74, 84).

realization of the love and community that reflects the divine attribute of a harmonious unity whose inmost being is the activity of loving relationships.¹⁸⁹ Since God is a relational being, the restoration of his image in fallen humanity through the redemptive work of Christ is manifested not only in the healing of the vertical relationship between God and sinners, but also in the dynamic of loving and being loved in the horizontal relationships of people in communion.¹⁹⁰ Thus, the encounter with Christ is not a matter of ego-enhancement, but of deriving a new basis for identity that gives one such a foundation for security, purpose, and hope that one is enabled to love and

¹⁸⁹John Cole, "Holy Trinity a Light amidst Darkness," The Times, 5 May 1988.

¹⁹⁰Jean Zizioulas, Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), pp. 17, 49-54, 56, 64. "The goal of salvation is that the personal life which is realized in God should also be realized on the level of human existence. Consequently salvation is identified with the realization of personhood in man" (ibid., p. 50). Cf. Robert L. Pavelsky, "The Commandment of Love and the Christian Clinical Psychologist," in Current Perspectives in the Psychology of Religion, ed. H. Newton Malony (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), pp. 414-18; Stanley Hauerwas, A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

serve others unconditionally.¹⁹¹ The enjoyment of a loving relationship with God produces right relationships with others, since human love at its best and most profound is a reflection of divine love. "It is by becoming a person, one who can respond to God and to his fellow men, that we rediscover our unity within the human race."¹⁹² The New Testament doctrine of the Trinity provides the foundation for personhood in created beings, and this personhood is expressed in relationships.¹⁹³ Macmurray observes that "It is only in relation to others that we exist as persons; we are invested with significance by others who have need of us; and borrow our reality from those who care for us. We live and move and have our being not in ourselves

¹⁹¹"Identification with Christ should result in a focus away from the egocentric concern with that 'self which we truly are' to a Christocentric emphasis on that which we can become in Christ (Galatians 2:20). Such an identification can form the basis for deep and meaningful relationships with others who have had a similar experience" (Gordon Stanley, "Sensitization Techniques and Interpersonal Relations," in Behavioural Sciences: A Christian Perspective, ed. Malcolm A. Jeeves [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984], p. 200).

¹⁹²E. W. Kemp, ed., Man: Fallen and Free (Hodder & Stoughton, 1969), p. 145.

¹⁹³Zizioulas, Being as Communion, pp. 15, 105-8.

but in one another"¹⁹⁴ In the gospels and epistles, wholeness is portrayed in terms of the restoration of relationships with God and others that liberates the person from individualism and egocentricity. The new identity in Christ is expressed within a context of community and fellowship united by a common source of life, a common purpose, and a common hope.¹⁹⁵ The realization of the self is not found as an end in itself, but as the byproduct of the pursuit of a right relationship with God and others. "For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."¹⁹⁶

¹⁹⁴John Macmurray, Persons in Relation (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1961), p. 211. "We need one another to be ourselves. This complete and unlimited dependence of each of us upon the others is the central and crucial fact of personal existence. Individual independence is an illusion; and the independent individual, the isolated self, is a nonentity" (ibid.; cf. p. 27).

¹⁹⁵2 Corinthians 5:17; Philippians 2:1-4; Zizioulas, Being as Communion, p. 64; Macmurray, Persons in Relation, pp. 157-59. ". . . the realisation that all men are one man in Christ, the new Adam, that our life is with our brother, and that it is in the intense realisation of the unity of all men that we shall discover the true uniqueness of our own personal being" (Kemp, Man: Fallen and Free, p. 151).

¹⁹⁶Matthew 16:25.

Life is found not in ego-enhancement, but in receiving Christ's life and expressing it in concern for the needs of others.¹⁹⁷

The Need for Purpose and Hope

Paul argues in 1 Corinthians 15 that the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the foundation for the Christian hope of redemption and resurrection. If the dead are not raised, earthly existence would have no ultimate meaning; "If in this life we who are in Christ have only hope, we are of all men most to be pitied. . . . Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."¹⁹⁸ It is because of their identification with Christ in his death and resurrection that believers participate in a transcendent hope and are already a part of the new order of creation.¹⁹⁹ Their life is "hid with Christ in God," and this life is Christ himself.²⁰⁰ This is what Paul calls "the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."²⁰¹ The New Testament portrays Christ not only as the foundation, but also as the actual fulfillment of the

¹⁹⁷1 Corinthians 13; Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17.

¹⁹⁸1 Corinthians 15:19, 32.

¹⁹⁹Romans 6:5-11; Philippians 3:20-21.

²⁰⁰Colossians 3:3-4.

²⁰¹Colossians 1:27. Wright, The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon, pp. 132-33.

Christian's hope. Even now the believer rejoices in hope of sharing his glory while anticipating all that will be associated with his second advent. This "now" but "not yet" of hoping in that which is not seen is "entirely superior to and distinct from the failing strength of man's natural hope."²⁰² It eclipses the travail, disappointments, and uncertainties of earthly existence and overcomes the futility, injustice, and despair of life rooted only in the soil of the temporal. As Kemp observes,

Man's need and hope is for a living sense of partnership with the Eternal, that the Eternal should wear a human face and admit man into his friendship here and now; and that from this partnership man should derive a positive value which crowds out the futility felt by him in his isolation, replacing it with deep and abiding satisfaction.²⁰³

The essence of beatitude in the New Testament is the possession of the vision of God in an enduring relationship with the Creator and Redeemer.²⁰⁴

²⁰²Josef Pieper, On Hope (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), p. 40; cf. pp. 34-35, 42-43.

²⁰³Kemp, Man: Fallen and Free, pp. 105-7, 109, 128-30.

²⁰⁴Revelation 4-5; 21-22; Maritain, Moral Philosophy, pp. 75-76, 80, 83.