

# "NO OTHER GOSPEL": PAUL BETWEEN SEMITIC REALITY AND GREEK DUALISM

## Introduction

Generally a theological treatise has the goal to abstract and systemize knowledge in order to communicate a certain result. Such a treatise in whichever form has to be carried out in a logical and systematic manner in order to achieve its goal. According to ancient Greek thought this logic may not experience any direct influence of an extraterrestrial God or any other deity, if it is not to be regarded as fictional drama. In logic, reason and intellect play the major role and need to be confirmed by empirical experience. What cannot be substantiated by logic and empirical experience would be "unreasonable" and is therefore speculative. These are the fundamentals of "Logical Dualism" which we have incorporated in our Western pattern of thought.

Now, if we compare this rational structure of logic with the letters of the Apostle Paul, we will get into conflict with his patterns of thought since they are often incompatible with Greek dualism. We could even say that the content of his letters literally "bust" this logical approach.

This issue is important if we want to understand what Paul actually wants to say in his letters. Since the age of enlightenment, one has the impression that anyone can interpret Paul as it suits

him. But what the Apostle really meant is often a different question. Also today opinions are rushed on how to interpret Paul. But who really listens to what Paul wrote and what he intended to say?

I would like to demonstrate this issue with the help of Romans 1:16 were Paul writes:

**16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.**

Within this verse we find at least three terms which do not fit into the pattern of logical dualism and which create significant problems:

1. *Power* (δύναμις): How does Paul understand the term power? Does he mean a power by which one can move something physically, for example moving a stone from one place to another? Or does Paul intend to express an allegorical power such as logic or wisdom? How else could we understand power?
2. *God* (θεός): Who or what is God? In ancient philosophy there is no God in a Biblical sense. The Creator-God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is a Biblical revelation which has no direct parallel in mythology. Greek dualism, which our thoughts in the West are

built on, only knows a so-called “first mover“ or a “*nous*” (νοῦς, Greek for intellect or mind). A personal God who acts, speaks and is concerned about man does not exist in logic. Thus Biblical understanding diametrically contradicts Western dualism.

3. *Gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον): What does the Gospel stand for in Paul’s writings? How can we understand the term Gospel in Paul’s letters? Is it a physical fact, a logical wisdom or a political power? How else can the message of the Gospel be “power”? It can be either a physical power or logical wisdom.

Another question that could also come up in this context is the following: Could it be that Paul is exaggerating in his “analogy” here? Or is he rather trying to express a new dimension of “perception” which is inexplicable, so to speak, a paradigm shift which has taken place between Biblical “reality” and Greek “logic”? For this Gospel appears to be a stumbling block for the Jews and a folly to the Greeks (1 Cor 1:23). Thus it is to be assumed that the Gospel neither fits into the one pattern of experience nor into the other pattern of thought.

So, as we can see, the problem with Paul’s writings already begins in the introduction of his letter to the Romans. We recognize here a rift that separates between the dualistic understanding in our Western pattern of thought and the message of Paul which surely originates from his Biblical-Semitic understanding of “reality”. This rift cannot be overcome easily by means of theology.

In our Western thought pattern we can hardly perceive the differences pertaining to this issue. We are so convinced of our dualistic logic that we do not even notice how Paul himself approaches the

issue, at times directly and at times indirectly, in order to communicate to us the “contents” of his Gospel which does not fit into the normal pattern of thought. For it is known to him that logical dualism has its limits in explaining the Biblical revelation. Whereas God’s revelations bear in themselves paradigms which fundamentally influence the events on earth and in our life and, to put in the words of our Lord, bring about a new creation<sup>1</sup>. As such, they can only be communicated in a limited way with human logic and worldly reason which is why also Jesus chose to speak in parables.

These are the extremes which we find in Pauline writing:

- a) The Biblical-Semitic understanding of reality on the one hand, and
- b) The methodological logic of dualism on the other hand.

This conflict constantly creates logical clashes in his writings, which in turn contain new logical riddles. These logical clashes can only be verified through further explanation<sup>2</sup>, in order to provide a useful outcome at the end. The reason for this is ultimately the fact that the history of salvation, which God has revealed step by step, has to be brought consistently into correlation between the *eternal* God and *mortal* mankind. Hence, this revelation is not always consistent with our logical understanding; for revelation is of divine nature whereas our knowledge is of human nature and as such is limited in its perception. Therefore, the Biblical-Semitic approach to the understanding of revelation which defines the supernatural patterns of revelation in Pauline writing should not be neglected or else one may be easily misled to wrong theological conclusions because of our Western dualism.

In the following treatise we want to examine the major paradigms of Pauline

teaching in light of the issues outlined above.

## 1. The Risen Jesus and His Significance for Paul

In his prologue to the Romans Paul defines who Jesus is and in which relation he stands with God (Rom 1:1ff):

- 1 **Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God,**
- 2 **which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures,**
- 3 **concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh**
- 4 **and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord**

Paul shows us here three basic thoughts which define Jesus and his gospel:

### *1.1 According to the Flesh Jesus is a Descendant of David:*

Paul's first paradigm is the identification of Jesus as the descendant of David (V3). Without his physical affiliation to the messianic heritage of the house of David (κατὰ σάρκα) Jesus would not have been able to fulfill the second definition of the Biblical messiah. For according to the Biblical understanding of the prophets and holy Scriptures (V2) the messiah has to be a descendant of David<sup>3</sup>. Otherwise he would lack this prerequisite of salvation history.

Paul does not give proof to this fact anywhere in his writings. Thus we can only imagine that he already knew the genealogy of Jesus of Nazareth when he persecuted the Christians in Jerusalem on behalf of the Sanhedrin (Acts 9:1f)

or he was informed by the apostles and the mother of Jesus after his conversion (Acts 9:27). For Paul, who was a believing Jew and a Pharisee with detailed knowledge of Scriptures, it is important that this historical Jesus whom he encountered on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:5) be a direct descendant of David. Otherwise he could not be the expected "messiah" according to holy Scriptures. This is the first paradigm of his gospel.

But this paradigm is neither proven nor commented on by Paul. It is only an asserted statement.<sup>4</sup> This is a peculiarity for Paul, who otherwise strives to bring everything into complete and consistent correlation. Presumably the reason behind this peculiarity is the fact that Paul never accompanied Jesus personally as the disciples did. So, as a result, Paul cannot and does not want to enter a field which lay in the authority of the other apostles. However, from the viewpoint of salvation history the ancestry to the house of David is an indispensable prerequisite of Jesus and his soteriological approach to the gospel which Paul describes as "power of God".

### *1.2 Declared to be the Son of God by His Resurrection:*

The second paradigm of Paul consists in the authentication of Jesus, the descendant of David, by God in his messianic function as "son of God" (V4). Popular Judaism expected a messiah that would rebuild an earthly kingdom as once David did (cf. Acts 1:6). Possibly Paul also had similar expectations before his conversion, irrespective of who the messiah would be. But during his unexpected encounter near Damascus he had to realize that this Jesus whom the Sanhedrin had condemned and handed over to be crucified was alive and reigns in glory. This was the only explanation why Jesus had the authority to shine around Paul in the middle of nowhere

and question him (Acts 9:3-4). Through the glory of Jesus Paul turned blind for three days (Acts 9,9), and it only ended after a servant of the Lord, Ananias of Damascus, lay his hands on him in the name of Jesus to restore his eye-sight and allow the Holy Spirit to come upon him. Hence this Jesus is alive and can heal according to the will of God and his power. This is the “power” that Jesus holds and whose impact Paul confesses here. Paul does this without giving proof since he himself has experienced it in person.

The Greek term ὀρισθέντος, which is translated into English by the term “declare” actually means: “to determine, appoint, fix, set”. Through the revelation which Paul encountered on the way to Damascus he had to realize that this Jesus whom he persecuted was appointed son of God in glory. This fact stands beyond any proof since it can only be revealed but not proven objectively. That is why this revelation caused Paul shortly after his conversion to “confess” Jesus as the son of God (Acts 9:20) and later on to “prove” him as the messiah (Acts 9:22). This “chain of perception” shows us that Paul first based his knowledge on the fact of revelation which then led him to the realization that Jesus “must” be the son of God. Thus for Paul the “power of resurrection” is the basis of all other proofs concerning the person of Jesus. This resurrection is a physical fact which we can only believe, for it cannot be proven according to logic and human knowledge. Paul also could not accept this fact before his conversion, for it is rather appointed by God as a new physical paradigm. Through this revelation Paul became one of the few witnesses who had the privilege of a personal encounter with Jesus.

Based on the twofold structure of this knowledge – through revelation which

Jesus gave him, and by logical conclusion from the Holy Scriptures, Paul builds up his testimony of the “risen” Jesus (Rom 1:4; Gal 1:12) and makes it the second paradigm of his Gospel, which he is charged to proclaim (Rom 1:1). The power and reality of the Risen Lord threw Saul from his horse, made him blind and restored him afterwards – or to say it with the words of Paul: a new creation<sup>5</sup>. As the Risen and the Living, Jesus now stands in the authority of the son of God, which allows him to carry out the will of God in heaven on earth. This is the Gospel of the “power” of God that stands behind the person of Jesus. It is a power which creates new paradigms in this life but which cannot be proven according to logic and human perception, since the power of the risen Lord exceeds all human and logical perception.

A far fetching Problem of the proclaimed sonship of Jesus, which is completely ignored in theology, concerns the being of God himself. When considering the messianic promise to the descendant of David in 2 Sam 7:14ff we face a basic problem. While the descendant of David is “mortal” he will rule an “eternal” kingdom and his dominion will have no end. But how can a *mortal* human take up an *eternal* rule? This is a “logical” paradox in itself. Only after the descendant of David has become an eternal being can this promise be fulfilled. But only God has eternal life in himself. Hence eternal life and eternal dominion which are promised to the descendant of David are characteristic traits of God. Therefore, for a human being to have a share in this eternal dominion he must have first acquired the ESSENCE of God in order to be able to become “like” GOD.

Through the physical resurrection, Paul and the earliest church with him, see that Jesus has become partaker of this eternal life<sup>6</sup>, which only God has in him.

Hence Jesus has become like God, the “Son” like the “Father”. For no one can be “Son of God” if the power of resurrection and eternal life does not exist in him as in God himself.<sup>7</sup> Through the resurrection of Jesus from the dead God has proven him to be his legitimate son and heir.

Thereby the sonship of Jesus in relation to God is built on two foundations which are regarded as fulfilled according to the prophets of the Old Testament (διὰ τῶν προφητῶν):

1. Jesus is the Son (of God) in the flesh (κατὰ σάρκα) because he is a biological descendant of David to whom alone according to the Holy Scriptures (of the Jews) this relation of sonship of God was promised.
2. Jesus is the Son of God in Spirit (κατὰ πνεῦμα) because he has physically risen from the dead, now executes God’s dominion on earth with power (ἐν δυνάμει) (fulfillment of messianic salvation) and therefore has assumed eternal rule which was promised to the house of David (cf. 2 Sam 7:16).

### 1.3 ... According to the Spirit of Holiness

The power of resurrection by which Jesus was raised from the dead and appointed as the Son of God is not of natural or physical origin as his descent from David. It rather has a different origin than all physical and logical knowledge, which a human usually has. This power, Paul says, is of “spiritual” origin (κατὰ πνεῦμα) and therefore stands above all physics and logic of this world. This power cannot be equated with intellect or wisdom for it made Paul blind and restored his eye-sight afterwards.<sup>8</sup>

But what is an even more fundamental experience for Paul is the fact that when Ananias laid his hands on him not only was his sight restored but also the Holy

Spirit came upon him. This power creates now in Saul the new Paul, a new sanctified creation. This Paul is from now on a servant (δοῦλος) of Jesus Christ which makes him the greatest advocate of the Gospel. This is the power of the Spirit of Holiness that sanctifies. “Intellectual” or logical powers may broaden our understanding but it requires a “spiritual” power (κατὰ πνεῦμα) to heal and sanctify a person. A Spirit that sanctifies man is a “spiritual” power that changes the entire person and not only a part of him e.g. his intellect. This power of sanctification brings forth a new creation which exceeds our physical dimension.<sup>9</sup> Hence there can be no salvation, new creation or eternal life without the Spirit of God that sanctifies. More on this later on.

Therefore, the phrase “according to the Spirit that sanctifies” (κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης) shapes the third paradigm of Paul’s Gospel. While the first paradigm “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα) and the second “declared ... with power” (ὀρισθέντος ... ἐν δυνάμει) mainly represent factual reports of revelation which still can be followed by various logical argumentations, the third paradigm “according to the Spirit” (κατὰ πνεῦμα) is very difficult to prove and communicate. The dispute between Paul and the Corinthians or the Galatians concerning their spiritual life (cf. 1 Cor 3:1 or Gal 4:6) points out the difficulty which Paul had in his missionary outreach to communicate this Spirit of new creation by means of “logic”.

Paul closes the prologue of his letter to the Romans with the apodosis:

**[...] Jesus Christ our LORD.**

These three names represent the three paradigms of his Gospel which we have to understand as the summary of his Gospel:

1. **Jesus**, who according to the flesh is the “promised” descendant of David and Son (of God) according to the prophets.
2. **Christ**, declared through the power of resurrection as the Son of God and eternal king on the throne of David.
3. **Our LORD**, who according to the Spirit (of God) that sanctifies was appointed eternal and just ruler over „all“ peoples and nations and thus established the reign of God on earth.

As the representative of God only the Son of Man deserves the glory to be worshiped by all peoples and nations, willingly or unwillingly, according to Daniel 7:13-14. Therefore he is LORD of us “all” (all human beings). This “dignity” is not dependent on individual faith but it is an institution which God has set up for his Son. Hence, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is LORD to the honor of God the father.<sup>10</sup>

This understanding which stems from salvation history is a prerequisite for Paul to understand his Gospel. He does not know any other theological or hermeneutical approach.

## 2. Justification of Sin and Death (General Justification)

The change of paradigm from Saul to Paul or rather from „flesh“ (κατὰ σάρκα) to „Spirit“ (κατὰ πνεῦμα) raises the consideration: What consequences does it have for an individual who followed the Old Covenant?

Paul does not talk about a „new“ history of salvation which came to replace the Old Covenant. On the contrary, with all effort he tries to show us that this Old Covenant, which God made with

Israel according to the Holy Scriptures (ἐν γραφαῖς ἁγίαις), is the basis for the Gospel which God fulfilled in Jesus. For what was revealed in the Old Covenant, or more precisely in the Torah, is nothing else than what has become *evident* (not proven!) through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In this context Paul explains two fundamental facts of the Old Testament which end in the substantiation of “his” Gospel:

### 2.1 Justification through the Law

In order to enter the Old Covenant a man needs to be circumcised on his foreskin. Without circumcision there can be no Jew or Israelite, since the covenant of God with Abraham came into existence only after he and his descendants were circumcised.<sup>11</sup> This covenant was again confirmed when the Sinai Covenant was introduced and formed the basis of the Mosaic law<sup>12</sup>. The obligation to keep these laws applied only to those who were circumcised.

Now for Paul the problem of keeping these laws is the major issue of the Old Covenant. He writes in Rom 2:25ff:

- 25 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision.**
- 26 So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision?**
- 27 Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law.**

Paul does not deny the good intention of the circumcised to keep the law but he questions the fact whether it is possible at all. What looks at first sight as a privilege can also, according to Paul,



turn into a liability. Paul does not want to discredit God's law for he still sees in it the guidelines which God has given to man. But Paul recognizes the principal difficulty of man when he writes (Rom 2:28f):

**28 For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical.**

**29 But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit (ἐν πνεύματι), not by the letter (οὐ γράμματι). His praise is not from man but from God.**

Thus for Paul the heart is the main problem that lies between the will of man and the failure of the flesh as he says in Rom 7:19:

**19 For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing.**

But if the law cannot be fulfilled then the circumcision of the foreskin is also useless. Therefore Paul claims the right of a better circumcision which is already rooted in the Mosaic law and which can render us to be truly devout persons. According to Deu 30:6 this circumcision cannot be carried out by man but only by God:

**6 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.**

Paul describes this circumcision of the heart as one that takes place „in Spirit“ (ἐν πνεύματι)<sup>13</sup> in contrast to the physical circumcision which takes place in the flesh and is labeled circumcision in “letter” (γράμματι) because it can only be executed physically.

Here again we see a collision between the physical form of circumcision in „let-

ter“ and the spiritual form of circumcision of the heart which can only take place „in Spirit“. Also, logical dualism comes here to an end. For who can circumcise a heart? With logic one might be able to circumcise the mind. Dualism offers here no answer which prompted Paul to choose the Biblical-Semitic solution for this matter.

### *2.2 Justification as Gift of God's Grace*

Abraham was not justified by God through circumcision but beforehand. This in turn led to the covenant (Rom 4:3-5.10ff):

**3 For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”**

[...]

**10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.**

**11 He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,**

**12 and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.**

The basis for Abraham's justification therefore is “faith” which does not stem from deeds but from the trust that man bears in his “heart” towards his creator.<sup>14</sup> This is a spiritual matter which has to do with the heart, and it is on Paul's heart to make his hearers understand this. Justification by “faith” in the living God which began with Abraham and became

a universal law through the resurrection of Jesus Christ has now become the foundation of Paul's preaching as we read in Rom 3:21ff:

- 19 Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. 20 For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.**
- 21 But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—**
- 22 the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction:**
- 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,**
- 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,**
- 25 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.**
- 26 It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.**

Paul explains here that justification which was achieved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the work of God which has been manifested "apart from the (Mosaic) law", namely by God himself (V21). This act of justification, which is accepted by God, however, was already *revealed* in the Old Covenant (law and prophets). But it was only *accomplished* through the "blood" of Jesus Christ when he was sacrificed on the cross of Calvary. Only faith in the blood that was shed serves as forgiveness for

sins. This is now the "new" propitiation which God has put forward.

Two patterns of law appear here and which we have already become familiar with:

*a) The Law as Work, which man has to fulfill (V19-20)*

This law is not enough for the justification of man before God, for no one can fulfill it without blemish. Thus all human beings remain sinners and fall short of the glory of God. Also physical circumcision is of no avail.

*b) The Law that God has fulfilled (V24-26)*

This law cannot be fulfilled by man himself, although it has been revealed through the law of God (the torah) and the prophets (V21). As a matter of fact it can only be *acquired* by faith (V22) since it cannot be *performed* physically like circumcision. But this kind of justification creates a problem for man who is more oriented towards physical and material things. Therefore, this justification cannot be *carried out* physically by man but can only be *acquired* by faith.

Here again we see how Paul tries with logical steps to explain something which is in fact unverifiable and according to the dualistic pattern illogical, to be logic. For who can conceive the propitiation which was accomplished through the blood of Jesus on the cross and which God has made the center point of his righteousness?

As we can see, the universal justification which God has accomplished through Jesus Christ cannot be verified by means of logic. However, Paul claims that this was proclaimed by the torah and the prophets. Now, that faith can justify without blood, he has proven by the example of Abraham. But where is it written that the blood of a human be-



ing like Jesus Christ can forgive sins? We know that in a limited way clean animals could expiate sins in the cult of the Old Covenant. But we cannot find a direct reference in the Old Testament which claims that the blood of a man is righteous and can sanctify others.

We recognize here that the revelation which Paul experienced on the verge of Damascus becomes a major pillar of his Gospel. When Paul was still Saul, even he himself did not have any knowledge of this justification, though he was a very literate man when it comes to the Old Testament. Hardly anyone was putting so much effort in studying the Torah and the traditions of the fathers as he did. Thus he formed the spearhead of persecution against the early church out of conviction that he could fulfill God's law this way. But it was only through the resurrection of Jesus Christ that the message of the Old Testament was *fully* unlocked. This is what Paul understood when he encountered Jesus.

By rising from the dead Jesus was proven as the righteous one whom God did not abandon to Sheol (Ps 16:10). By sending the Holy Spirit after his ascension he was proven as the Son of God whose enemies the LORD makes footstool of his feet (Ps 110,1). These are the facts which the Gospel has revealed to us. But they are not directly verifiable in a logical sense. God's revelation which can only be conceived by faith is therefore regarded as subjective in dualistic thought, since it cannot be proven empirically.

According to dualistic logic God belongs to the realm of metaphysics. Hence, his acts cannot be verified by means of logic or physics although they may affect our natural life. Therefore, also the understanding of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that followed can only be

accessed in the way Paul has outlined it in his letters.<sup>15</sup> Paul calls the access to these metaphysical acts of God: „in Spirit“ (ἐν πνεύματι).

This is the Gospel of grace for Paul: not justification which is achieved by our own deeds, but justification as God's gift of grace which is bestowed unto us through the risen Lord, Jesus Christ, - through HIS Spirit.

### 3. Personal Adoption of Justification (Personal Justification)

#### 3.1 Justification by Faith

This justification which is accepted by God can only be acquired personally by faith and not through works of the law as Paul outlines in Rom 1:17:

**17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”**

Through this personal acquisition of justification by faith a new legal relationship arises between man and his own life as well as between man and Jesus Christ, the author of our justification. This new legal relationship is obtained through the Holy Spirit who shapes a new law in our life - „the law of the Spirit“ (νόμος τοῦ πνεύματος) (Rom 8:1ff):

- 1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**
- 2 For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.**
- 3 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,**
- 4 in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be**

**fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.**

As faith in the physical resurrection of Jesus contradicts all logic, likewise the law of the Spirit contradicts any kind of human logic, experience or capability. This "law of the Spirit" therefore is in the same way supernatural in its character as the physical resurrection of Jesus, which does not correspond to the "natural" laws of our creation.

How the phenomena of the law of the Spirit takes shape in our life is explained by Paul as follows (Rom 8:12ff):

- 12 So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.**
- 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.**
- 14 For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.**
- 15 For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"**
- 16 The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,**
- 17 and if children, then heirs--heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.**

Thus the source for the law of the Spirit is the outpouring of the Spirit into our hearts through faith in Jesus Christ. The grace of the Gospel of Jesus is not only limited to forgive us our sins and to accomplish our "external" justification, but it also wants to create a new Spirit in us, a childlike spirit, which calls upon God and has the right to name Him "Abba,

father in heaven". For a human being to enter into a child-relationship with God with all its appertaining consequences is a new phenomena which contradicts the dualistic pattern of perception in which we live and think. But this new relationship between man and God exactly describes Paul's opinion of the consequence of justification which is accepted by God.

### *3.2 Faith and Confession*

The question is now: How can we acquire this justification personally which is accompanied by this phenomenon?

Paul expresses this very simply in Rom 10:9-10:

- 9 because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.**
- 10 For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.**

It cannot be made any easier to initiate a supernatural process in one's life that does away with all insecurity and creates an absolute clear standing concerning justification, forgiveness of sins and eternal life. This really is a compassionate God who has cut short the body of law so that we can enter his fellowship without any major effort. In this Gospel he truly has proven himself as the heavenly father who draws his children unto himself.

As we can see, Paul talks here about the heart (*καρδία*) which has become the center of this new „law of the Spirit“. The term heart, which is of Biblical-Semitic origin<sup>16</sup>, therefore stands in contrast to the intellect (*νοῦς*) which is known to be at the center of Greek dualism. This difference in paradigm between heart

(καρδία) and intellect (νοῦς) has led to great confusion and misunderstanding in the history of exegesis of Western theology and which continues on until today. While scholastic theology (which was predominant in Europe until the Middle Ages) emphasized the enlightenment of the intellect (νοῦς)<sup>17</sup>, Martin Luther in the third article of his catechism talked about a direct enlightenment of the heart (καρδία) through the Holy Spirit which changes the essence of man. During the period of enlightenment this paradigm unfortunately shifted again towards the intellect.

Paul talks about the heart by which a human is animated. Through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the heart the soul of a human is transformed into a new being. This however only happens on the basis of justification which Jesus accomplished on the cross of Calvary. This new creation of man begins in the heart and grows constantly until it has overcome the flesh on the day of resurrection.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. The New Creation of Man (Fruits of the Spirit)

Now what is the effect of this new Spirit in man so that one can say there is a difference between the life in the law of the word ([νόμος ἐν γράμματι) and the life in the law of the Spirit ([νόμος ἐν πνεύματι)?

##### 4.1 The Nature of the Spirit

First of all there is the basic dilemma of man that he cannot fulfill the law “[ἐν] γράμματι” because the flesh works against this law. In contrast, justification by grace creates a new balance of law and force in our lives that has a clear effect on the “old” law as Paul writes in Rom 6:12ff:

**12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its 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.**

Grace, which becomes effective in our lives through the Holy Spirit, creates a new legal relationship between God and man and comes with the obligation to fight against the nature of the flesh. This Spirit is poured out into our heart and gives us the power and the knowledge to overcome this weakness. This power is effective „in Spirit” (ἐν πνεύματι) according to Rom 8:9f:

**9 You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.**

**10 But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness.**

This power that springs from the Spirit of God drives us into the attitude of Jesus Christ which strives to regulate the relationship between man and God as well as between man and man according to the will of God (Rom 8:14). This, however, does not happen without battle (Rom 8:10) but it requires all our ability and all our personal effort to accomplish this victory in our lives (Rom 12:1f):

**1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**

**2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you**

**may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.**

But what is the difference between the willingness and the accomplishment in this spiritual warfare? While the new Spirit creates a new willingness in us to do the will of God the question remains how this Spirit can also accomplish this in our lives? *This problem can easily mislead to self-righteousness and eventually keep us trapped in the snare of justification by works* ([ἐν] γράμματι) *if it is not dealt with correctly.*

In this connection it is important to distinguish between the “new nature” of the Spirit (καινότητι πνεύματος) that becomes effective in our lives through faith and the “old nature” of the flesh (παλαιότητι γράμματος) which fights against this new Spirit (Rom 7:4-6):

- 4 Likewise, my brothers, you also have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that we may bear fruit for God.**
- 5 For 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.**
- 6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.**

Faith in Jesus causes that this new spiritual nature (the new way) which God has poured out into our hearts becomes effective against the old nature of the law (the old way). As long as we trust in our own power and abilities we will not be able to overcome our old and sinful passions (V5). Hence, the power of overcoming our old nature is directly proportional to our trust in Jesus. If we

believe that *his new nature* which now lives in us will overcome *our old nature*, even put it to death, then we can become free from the power of *our old nature* (V6). In other words: we cannot directly overcome our old nature. Only by faith in the grace of God through Jesus can *his new living Spirit* overcome *our old dead spirit*.

#### 4.2 The Fruit of the Spirit

The battle of the Spirit against our flesh and sinful nature makes the fruit of the Spirit grow in our life which consists of (Gal 5:22ff):

- 22 [...] love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,**
- 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.**
- 24 And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.**

This fruit is the result of the power of the Spirit which God pours out into his children, those who have accepted the grace in Jesus Christ (Rom 3,24-26). Hence, the fruit of the Spirit stands in opposition to our old being which cannot fight against the carnal and sinful nature of the flesh, whether with or without circumcision. Therefore one must understand this as a change of nature in man as Paul writes in his second letter to the Corinthians (5:17):

- 17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

The law of the Spirit causes that the battle against the law of the flesh which is attached to our fallen nature is nullified and the fruit of the Spirit is brought forth which approves the law of God.

Here again we see the dualistic approach of Paul reaching its limits because of the

Biblical-Semitic understanding of reality which is rooted in the term “power, though Paul keeps on using the methods of this logic in order to explain it further. This power does not stem from the world of physics but from God, who, according to the dualistic principle belongs to the realm of metaphysics and thereby is defined as unverifiable. Nevertheless the “impacts” of the metaphysical power of God become visible in our lives through the fruit of the Spirit. Thus the Gospel properly overrules the limits of physics and makes the “impossible” “possible”. This is the power of the Gospel which Paul preaches vehemently and this is the victory of Biblical-Semitic understanding of reality which originates from the revelation of God. This reality acts against Greek dualism which has radically separated our life and thought from God’s influence and makes us aware again of his presence. Thus this Gospel gives man a real hope for redemption and eternal life against all worldly logic.

Saul did not know all of this. On the contrary, he was subordinate to justification by his own works. Only after the revelation of Jesus Christ before Damascus did he receive the power of this new grace. He owes his transformation into Paul (transformation of being) as well as his radical and new knowledge (revelation) to this power of God.

This power, however, is not limited to this world only but it also induces eternal life which will take place in the future world as Paul outlines it in Rom 6:22f and 8:11:

- 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.**

**8:11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.**

As God raised Jesus Christ from the dead likewise also the power of grace will raise us to eternal life. For one thing has to become clear to us: If the Spirit which comes from God has been poured out on us, then this Spirit has to be like God himself, namely an “eternal” Spirit. Now if this eternal Spirit enters our life then it also must have the power to transform our heart and flesh into an eternal being. In the words of dualism: Metaphysics has the ability to radically change the physics of the world we live in. Through the epiphany of Jesus Christ on the verge of Damascus Paul could see, hear and experience this phenomenon. His treatise about this is a *logical conclusion* of the *metaphysical power* of God.

## 5. Results: Basic Principles for Understanding Paul (Theses)

Paul confronts the dualistic *thought* pattern of antiquity with EIGHT Biblical-Semitic *realities* which override the limits of dualism:

- (1) Because Jesus rose from the dead physically und lives (Paul saw and heard him – as did the other apostles before him) this bears witness to the fact that Jesus is the *Just* who has fulfilled the messianic promises of the Old Testament.
- (2) Justification of sin and death was accomplished by the new Adam, Jesus Christ, through his blood on the cross (general justification).
- (3) This justification can be acquired

personally only by faith in the risen person, Jesus Christ, (personal justification) and not by works of the law.

- (4) There is no justification by law or deeds, only by faith in God who can justify man (as for e.g. Abraham).
- (5) Through faith in Jesus Christ, God pours out his Holy Spirit into our hearts and makes us his children who may call upon Him: Abba, dear father.
- (6) This new Spirit creates a *new nature* in us which replaces our *old nature*. However, this new Spirit is only effective through faith in Jesus Christ and cannot be replaced by works.
- (7) This new Spirit brings forth the fruit of the Spirit in our life which can overcome the fruits of our old nature.
- (8) This new Spirit also creates a true and firm hope in physical resurrection and life eternal.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Compare John 3:3-13

<sup>2</sup> As for example in Rom 7:7 etc. After Paul first established the thesis that we are free from the Mosaic law, he now has to establish the anti-thesis in order to not discredit the law which was revealed by God when he says:

“What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!”

<sup>3</sup> Cf. 2 Sam 7:11-16.

<sup>4</sup> This fact has caused theological research to assume that the prologue of Romans is a creed of early Christianity which Paul took over, similar to Phil 2:5-11. But this assumption on the one hand could not be proven and on the other hand the prologue is a fundamental statement for understanding his letter to the Romans. To regard it only as a tradition which Paul took over without having any relevance to the content of Romans would underestimate the theological competence of Paul significantly.

<sup>5</sup> For this cf. 2 Cor 5:17: **Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

<sup>6</sup> One could argue whether the resurrection of Jesus from the dead equals eternal life. For the earliest church the resurrection of Jesus, his 40-day appearance to the disciples, his ascension and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit that followed certainly had more than a short-term impact. These events made them see the fulfillment of all messianic authorities in him. Thus they rightfully confessed that Jesus stands at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56), which was the actual reason for their persecution (Acts 7:57-60). Cf. also with Phil 2:6-12.

<sup>7</sup> This structure has to be treated independently from the question whether Jesus was pre-existent in the theology of Paul. The Gospels treat this question with the term “Son of Man” (cf. Joh 3:13).



Paul however never uses this sovereign title in any way. Thus it has to be assumed that in Rom 1:1-4 he had no ambitions to ask the question: Where was Jesus before his incarnation? Rather Paul wanted to describe the powerful and actual facts which Jesus brought that also made him a follower of Jesus.

<sup>8</sup> Maybe from a medical point of view one could argue today that this phenomenon only was temporary and lost its effect after several days. Yet during this encounter on the verge of Damascus there appeared not only a blinding light but also an audible voice which not only Paul heard but all those who were in his company. They however could not spot the origin of this appearance (Acts 9:7). Thus we cannot merely talk about a symptom or else it would not have affected the others.

<sup>9</sup> Whether an unjust and unholy person can perform miracles is the main discussion in the context of the healing of the blind man in John 9:31-33. This simple blind man that was healed instructs many theologians of his time by saying: **We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.**

<sup>10</sup> For more cf. Phil 2:9-11.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Gen 17:14: **Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.**

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Levit 12:2-3

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Rom 2:29.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ps 34:22: **The LORD redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.**

<sup>15</sup> As for example in 1 Cor 15:1-11 and

50-57.

<sup>16</sup> The Bible says that the seat of the soul is in the blood. Now since the heart is the main organ that transports blood it is valid to say that seat of the soul is in the heart from where the entire body is animated. On this cf. my article "The Influence of Scholasticism on the Development of Theology in Christianity and Islam", *Stuttgarter Theologische Themen (STT)* Vol. IV (2009), p. 95.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, p. 94.

<sup>18</sup> On this cf. 1 Cor 15:35-57.