

PAUL AND GOD'S VICTORY

Saul of Tarsus has been a fascinating and controversial figure since he lived in the first century of the common era. This intense genius of a Pharisee-turned-Christian apostle has not ceased to be the subject of study, admiration and sometimes even hatred. Few would disagree with Machen's assessment that he is Christianity's first theologian and "one of the moving factors of the world's history".¹

But how are we to understand Paul's mind and writings? Many have been the theories seeking to unlock the sources of his thinking and the essential core of his message. Was Paul more a product of Greek thinking or of Second Temple Judaism? Is the key to understanding Paul his Christology? Is it justification by faith? Is it ecclesiology and covenant? Is it pneumatology and mysticism?²

In this paper I will try to show that the theme of God's victory evidenced in Jesus Christ's death, resurrection and ascension is Paul's fundamental concern, one which in his letters⁴ is intertwined with several crucial themes including redemption, justification by faith, the relationship between Jew and Gentile, ecclesiology, the tension between the law and the new covenant, the Spirit and new life as well as eschatology. While each of these themes is very important, God's victory over His and our enemies in the crucified and exalted Jesus Christ is, I believe, the overarching theme that unifies the whole and gives each major topic its place. Were we to choose one of the other great Pauline themes like justification or ecclesiology to be the central core of the

apostle's preaching, we would do a disservice to these themes and to our understanding of how they come together in the exaltation of the Messiah and what that means in the divine plan.

It is undoubtedly a risky venture to attempt to identify the organizing concept in the thought of such a profound writer like Paul. To do so, it is essential that we allow Paul to speak for himself and to understand him in his context and not in the context of later times. It is also crucial to allow his life and epistles to speak to us without approaching the subject through the lens of *a priori* systematic or philosophical biases. In other words, we should study Paul to understand Paul and his gospel, not to justify our theological or ecclesiastical commitments.

First, it is important to recognize that Paul is convinced that Jesus Christ and the events narrated in the gospel about him did, in fact, occur in the apostle's generation. He sees them as the culmination of earlier events revealed in the *Tanakh*. Christ's redemptive work and the outpouring of the Spirit were inevitable events foreordained by God Himself and foretold, in part, by the Israelite prophets (Rom. 1.2, 16.24, 25). We say "in part" since Paul insists in more than one place that what happened in Christ in his time was, on the one hand, foretold and, on the other, a "mystery" hidden heretofore (see the Rom. 16 passage cited above, Eph. 1.9, 3.3-6, 1 Tim. 3.15, etc.). The Old Testament foresaw "the gospel" (Gal. 3.8) though it did not anticipate the full reality of what happened. Paul considers his generation to be living in

“the fullness of time” (Gal. 4.4), the time in which God has begun to fulfill His end time prophecies and in which He reveals the hidden mystery of Christ. Moreover, what God has done in Christ not only brings liberation to those who are of the faith of Christ, both Jews and Gentiles, but has real and cosmic consequences, the unfolding of which will bring about the final consummation at the Parousia.

It is this saving liberation which brings us to the theme of God’s victory. *God liberates His children by defeating His enemies* just as He did when He subdued Pharaoh to redeem the children of Israel to make them His people (Ex. 6.3-7). In fact, as others have argued elsewhere³, Paul sees the exodus as a type of the redemption in Christ. The word “redemption” in Romans 3.24 is from the same root used of the exodus in the LXX of Exodus 6.6. Likewise, the word “deliver” in Galatians 1.4 is the same as in the LXX of Exodus 3.8. In 1 Corinthians 5.7 the apostle calls Christ “our Passover lamb” and in 10.2-4 he compares Christian baptism and the Lord’s Supper to the Israelites’ “baptism in Moses” and their drinking of water from the rock and eating of the manna. In fact, he says that the rock that followed them in the wilderness was Christ!

But it may be asked, why does God need to be victorious in the first place? If He is all powerful, why does He need to engage in conflict to secure a victory?! How can we make sense of a struggle between God and His creatures? In the case of the exodus, the Israelites had become enslaved to Pharaoh and faced serious persecution (Ex. 1.8-22). Moses’ request to the Pharaoh to let the people go went unheeded since their free labour was useful to the empire (Ex. 5.1-2). Clearly, it was necessary that God’s mighty hand interfere to secure His people’s safety and liberation (Ex. 3.19-20). God engages in conflict with those who stubbornly resist His will and stand in the way of His purposes. Going deeper, such conflict implies several things:

First, it implies that God has given humans the free agency to act even in contradiction of His commands.

Second, He holds people fully responsible for their actions and gives them ample time to reconsider their decisions.

Third, He undertakes judgment in a righteous and fair way when we refuse to obey.

Fourth, this judgment is never vindictive but has as its purpose the salvation of those who follow His ways as is clear in the story of the exodus.

Fifth, Scripture labels such judgment/salvation events as divine victories that, in addition to the purposes we have seen, lead to the glorification of His name. Paul clearly has this dynamic in mind when he reminds his readers in Romans 9.17 that Scripture (i.e., God!) says to Pharaoh, “For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.”

Paul was given to see that just as God was victorious in delivering His people from Egypt, so now He has accomplished a greater victory in delivering His new worldwide people from more pernicious enemies. It is not that events repeat in circular fashion. Rather, earlier events are types or shadows of later ones (see Rom. 5.14, 1 Cor. 10.11). But who are the enemies Paul has in mind? Has a new Pharaoh arisen, perhaps a Roman one, from which we need to be delivered? Rather than a human enemy, Paul looks behind visible political actors to spiritual forces that are holding all of humanity captive.

At a minimum we can discern sin, the law, death, and Satan as well as other evil spirit forces allied with him as the enemies that the apostle sees being vanquished by Christ. Christians have generally emphasized that Jesus Christ has saved them primarily from sin. They view the latter not so much as an enemy but as guilt. Post-Anselm Western theology has generally seen that the crisis the gospel addresses is one between a holy God and sinful humanity. Humanity has rebelled against God through sin and is subject to His wrath. While

not entirely dismissing this facet of the crisis, what we are arguing for here is that Paul sees the problem more broadly in terms of vicious enemies that have destroyed the relationship between God and people, enemies that God Himself vanquishes in Christ to reconcile us to Himself.⁴ Let us see how Paul deals with this matter.

Sin:

Sin (note the singular) is an anti-God force that Paul rather mysteriously personifies in Romans. Without minimizing the sinner's guilt (cp. 3.19), the apostle views sin almost as an independent force that deceived and subjugated humanity. In writing about what theologians will later call the "fall", Paul writes that through Adam "sin came into the world" (5.12), implying that somehow it existed beforehand. Many theologians and preachers would simply say, "Adam sinned." But Paul is much more nuanced. As any reader of Genesis 3 can easily see⁵, the events in the garden of Eden involved more than Adam, Eve and God. The serpent plays such a crucial role that we wonder how events would have transpired without the temptation it presents to Eve. Thus, sin is not simply "committed", it "enters" the scene and does so in a hostile manner which Paul describes as a "reign" over humanity (5.21). Here then is this "Pharaoh" that needs to be subdued!

In Romans chapter 7, the personification of sin is intensified and expanded. In a passage that has generated much controversy among commentators, the apostle writes that sin used God's commandment to deceive and kill him (verse 11). Regardless of his precise meaning, here sin appears, once again, as an aggressive force deceiving and destroying human beings. It is clearly acting as an enemy. Because Paul uses the verb "deceive" which he also uses in 2 Corinthians 11.3 in connection with the serpent's dealings with Eve, and because he says that "I was once alive apart from the law" (verse 9), many

commentators believe that Paul is somehow speaking of what happened in the garden of Eden.⁶ Thus, regardless of which view we take of the exegetical details in Romans 5 and 7, sin is said to act against humanity in close conjunction with the serpent and what it represents. Clearly, if humanity is to be saved, sin needs to be vanquished.

The Law:

As we just remarked in the last paragraph, sin used God's own law to wreak havoc in humanity. "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" (Romans 7.5). It is this type of statement that alienated Paul from many of his Jewish contemporaries. Far from being an instrument for the attainment of righteousness, the law arouses our sinful passions and holds us in bondage! Moreover, sin uses it to kill us (Rom. 7.10-11). Of course, the apostle is very careful to state that the law in itself is holy (Rom. 7.12). He is not antinomian like Marcion in the second century⁹. But because of sin, the law is "against us" (Col. 2.14) and brings us into wrath and condemnation (Rom. 4.15, Gal. 3.10). The law is the power of sin (1 Cor. 15.56). It is ironic that God in Christ must deliver us from both sin (Rom. 6) and the law (Rom. 7).

Death:

Paul speaks of death as another hostile force that is closely correlated with sin, as it is in Genesis 2.17 and 3.19. Just as sin entered the world "through" (διὰ) one man, so death entered through (διὰ) sin (Rom. 5.12). Adam opened the door to sin which in turn opened the door to death. Death then spread to all people and began its awful reign over humanity (Rom. 5:14). One senses a personification of death in these passages though perhaps not quite in the same dramatic way in which sin is portrayed. In 1 Corinthians 15.56 death is personified as an animal that kills with a sting ("the sting of death is sin"). Earlier in the same

chapter (vss. 25-26) he calls death “the last enemy” clearly indicating that there are other enemies that Christ defeats according to a divine eschatological calendar. Significantly in 1 Corinthians 15.25 death is included as one of *Christ’s* enemies. In other words, death is both our enemy and the Lord’s! That adds a more complex perspective to death which many view simply as a punishment inflicted by God. In citing Psalm 110 in the Corinthians passage, Paul is declaring that death must be subdued under Christ’s feet!

Satan⁷:

It is easy for us to see how in Paul’s mind Satan is viewed as an enemy, both of God and of humanity. As a Jew, he knows well the crucial passage in Genesis 3 in which the serpent displays hostility both to God and to our ancestors in seeking to turn the latter away from the former. In fact, Paul explicitly refers to the serpent deceiving Eve in 2 Corinthians 11.3. Let it be noted that in verses 14, 15 of the same chapter he warns the church in Corinth that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light and his servants disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. In other words, Paul believes that Satan’s enmity is not merely a historical event but an on-going reality. Satan fights the family (1 Cor. 7.5) and the church (2 Cor. 2.11, 1 Thess. 2.18, etc.). As he explains in the Letter to the Ephesians, we are at war with the evil one and his spiritual allies (Eph. 6.10-20). Prior to the return of Christ in glory, Satan will be allowed to empower the man of lawlessness who will claim to be God Himself (2 Thess. 2.1-12).

Many of Paul’s interpreters have been strangely silent about his many references to our archenemy which he calls Satan, the devil, the evil one, the prince of the power of the air and about his references to his assistants which are the demons (1 Cor. 10.20), and about those he calls “the rulers, powers, world forces of this darkness, spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places” in Ephesians 6.12. Ignoring

or minimizing this enemy⁸, as well as failing to see sin and death as enemies, has almost certainly contributed to the inability of many scholars to see that the gospel is fundamentally about God’s victory over these enemies. Now we need to examine how this victory has been achieved and what its implications are.

The Victory of God in Jesus Christ

The Apostle Paul did not come up with the concept that God is victorious over His enemies. Nor did he borrow it from ancient east Mediterranean mythologies that spoke of the victory of the gods over the forces of evil. As can be shown repeatedly, Paul’s roots are clearly in the *Tanakh*. The holy scriptures that he was taught and believed told him that God created a world without evil and humanity without sin. The provocation to sin came from the serpent (2 Cor. 11.3) and therefore it becomes necessary for that serpent to be defeated. God said as much in the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3.15 which is addressed to the serpent,

I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.

First, it is essential for us to realize that God is not being vindictive here. Rather, He reveals His purpose to restore humanity by inflicting judgment on the serpent! Adam and Eve had fallen under Satan’s authority because they followed his suggestion to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were defeated by this enemy because of their disobedience and unfaithfulness to God. It is important to note this connection between their unfaithfulness and their defeat. Nevertheless, God mercifully vows to destroy their enemy and end his authority over them. We see that first in the declaration that He will put enmity between the serpent and Eve. What happened in the temptation and fall essentially created a bond between the two parties which God sees as illegitimate and detrimental to humanity’s

welfare. Then He vows that the seed⁹ of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent though in the process the seed's heel will also be bruised. In essence, God foretells a victory He will accomplish through the woman's seed which will involve a complete defeat of the serpent (the crushing of its head) though the battle will be costly (crushing the seed's heel). In these mysterious but clearly significant words, there is the implication that this coming seed of the woman will be able to defeat the serpent through his faithfulness. In a nutshell, here is the whole rest of the Bible's story!

It is our contention that the gospel of Christ as preached by Paul and as presented in the New Testament in general is a fulfilment of these dramatic words of Genesis 3.15. The seed of the woman, taken in the *plural* sense, are the whole people of God that has been in conflict since the fall with the evil one and the wicked people he dominates.¹⁰ In the *singular* sense, the seed is Jesus Christ, born particularly and uniquely of a woman and who won a costly battle with the serpent. Why would Paul write that Christ was "born of a woman" unless he had Genesis 3 and the virgin birth in mind (Gal. 4.4)? Without doubt he had Genesis 3.15 in mind when he wrote the words of Romans 16.20 and had the larger context of Genesis 1-5 in mind in writing at least Romans 5.12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15.21,22, 45 as well as 2 Corinthians 11.3 and 1 Timothy 2.13-14.

In addition to these explicit and direct references to Adam and Eve, Paul also incorporates other Old Testament themes that stem from the story of creation, fall, and the *protoevangelium*. The Genesis record clearly and deliberately traces the seed of Eve through Seth to Noah, Shem, and Abraham. Genesis 3.15 is not an isolated pronouncement; it is woven into the fabric of Genesis and the remainder of the Bible.¹⁴

Thus, we see the promise of the seed expanding through time so that in Genesis 22.17 at the

offering of Isaac on Mt. Moriah God promises Abraham,

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.

It is not hard to see the connections between Genesis 3.15 and these words to Abraham, Eve's special descendant who is chosen by God to play a major role in His unfolding plan. The word "seed" is the same Hebrew word in both passages (though translated "offspring" in the ESV).

The word "enemies" in Genesis 22.17 comes from the same root as "enmity" in Genesis 3.15. In other words, Abraham's seed is promised victory over its/their enemies, just as the seed of the woman is promised victory over the serpent. The outcome will be worldwide blessing which is clearly a restoration of God's original blessing on humanity involving fruitfulness and dominion (Gen. 1.28).

God's promises and dealings with Abraham are a crucial key to understanding Paul's theology. In Galatians 3.8 he connects the justification of the gentiles directly to the promise that "in you shall all the nations be blessed." He sees that in speaking these words to Abraham, God was preaching the gospel beforehand to him! He goes on to explain that Christ is the seed of Abraham (verse 16) and therefore the seed of the woman. But in contrast to the unfaithfulness of Adam, of Eve and of those under the law (verse 10), Christ was faithful and obedient. His obedience is clearly contrasted with Adam's disobedience in Romans 5.19. Here in Galatians 3, Paul speaks of the faith of Jesus Christ which I argue elsewhere¹¹ should be understood as the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. This translation of the Greek genitive construction πιστεως

Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ is justified by the wording of Galatians 3.22 quoted here from the King James version which in this instance is more accurate than modern versions:

But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

There is no convincing reason why Paul would speak of our faith twice in the same sentence if in fact the construction is an objective genitive as most writers have until recently assumed. Why would he say that “the promise by faith in Jesus Christ would be given to them that believe”? Is it not more reasonable that he would say that “the promise by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ would be given to them that believe?”¹⁶ Our conviction that the phrase should be understood as a subjective genitive is borne out by the rest of the context in Galatians 3.23-25:

Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

What does he mean “before faith came”?! Abraham already had faith in God’s promise (3.9) so it is hard to conceive that Paul would say that before Christ there was no faith. What in fact he is saying is that until Christ came (verse 24), His faithfulness was not revealed. During that time, the people of God were under the law as a guardian. Once Christ has come, we are no longer under the law but have become sons of God (verse 26). We, Jews and Gentiles, are now Abraham’s seed as well because we are united to Christ; as such we are heirs of God’s promises to Abraham (verse 29).

This amazing justification and adoption into God’s family has come about because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Paul’s Jewish contemporaries, particularly his former party

of the Pharisees, were teaching that Israel had to be faithful to the law for deliverance to come and the kingdom of David to be restored. But Paul preached and wrote that Israel has sinned and that only through the faithfulness of Abraham’s true seed, Jesus Christ, that deliverance has come (see Romans 2-3, 7). The law is not the solution since it only aggravates sin. Sin itself had to be judged and defeated. That is what God did in the death of Jesus Christ who, being faithful, did not die because of his sin but because of ours (1 Cor. 15.3). In the crucial statement of Romans 8.3, the apostle writes that God sent His Son in the flesh to be a sacrifice for sin¹² so that God might “condemn sin in the flesh,” i.e., in his humanity.

Let us recall what he has said previously about sin. Sin invaded humanity (the “flesh”) through Adam (5.12). Acting as an enemy, it had the audacity to use God’s command to deceive Adam and by it killed him (7.11)! Therefore, it was necessary for God to judge sin which is precisely what He did through the sinless and true humanity of the Last Adam. This condemnation of sin that occurred in the death of Christ was God’s victory over sin. It showed that God is entirely opposed to sin and that He must have the last word in destroying it. Though Christ showed ultimate obedience and faithfulness in his death (Phil. 2.9), he, mysteriously, became sin, or a sacrifice of sin, for us. “For our sake He made him who knew no sin to be sin for us” (2 Cor. 5.21). Paul’s imagery almost certainly comes from the sacrificial system in the Law of Moses. The animals that were sin offerings literally bore the sins of the people since the sins were transferred to the animal by the laying on of hands (Lev. 4, 16:2, 21). On the day of Atonement, one goat bearing the people’s sin was slaughtered and the other goat, also bearing the people’s sin, was dismissed into the wilderness (Lev. 16.21, 22). The first goat appears to refer to the condemnation of sin, the other, the consequent removal of sin from the people.

Thus, we see that in the death of His Son God achieved a victory over sin by condemning it and thereby saving us from condemnation (Rom. 8.1). It reminds us of God's judgment on Pharaoh that led to the liberation of the Israelites. Paul likely has the exodus in mind when he says in Romans 6 that we died and rose again with Christ in baptism. We were baptized into Christ just like the Israelites were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea (1 Cor. 10.2). In both events water is involved. In the crossing of the sea, Pharaoh was judged. In the death of Christ, sin was judged¹³. In both events God's people emerge victorious out of the water of judgment.

Let us also emphasize that the condemnation of sin in the flesh of Christ eventually leads to its total elimination from the life of those in Christ and from creation as well! The context of Romans 8.3 makes that amazingly clear. In verses 4-17 the apostle explains that those who have been liberated in Christ have an obligation to live in the Spirit. We are to put to death the deeds of the body (v. 13). Eventually, the Father will give life to our mortal bodies by His Spirit who dwells in us (v. 11). That will be the revelation of the glory that not only we long for, but creation does as well (vss. 18-25). That is because creation itself has for long suffered corruption because of humanity's sin and, along with us, is groaning as it awaits final redemption (v. 20-23)!

That redemption will only come when the archenemy has been destroyed. Let us recall that Satan is the one who provoked Adam and Eve to sin. By sinning, humanity put itself under "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2.2). What God did in Christ not only brought about the condemnation of sin, it also was the downfall of the devil and his angels. Using military language, Paul writes in Colossians 2.15 that Christ "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him" (or "in it", the reference more likely being to the

cross mentioned in v. 14). As we look at verses 14 and 15, we can see that in the apostle's mind the elimination of sin and the triumph over the evil powers are most closely related. Again, it is because Satan initiated the "sin project" to begin with.

That is why Paul writes at the end of Romans that, "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet" (16.20). In this clear reference to Genesis 3.15, Paul reminds the Roman believers that the process begun in the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ will culminate in the crushing of their enemy under their feet. If we recall what we said earlier that the Hebrew word "seed" is both singular and plural and that believers are "in Christ", then we should not be surprised that Satan will be crushed under Christ's feet and ours!

With regards to death, it will be recalled that it entered the world "through sin" (Rom. 5.12, cp. Gen. 2.15).¹⁴ Adam and Eve's unfaithfulness to God led to the dissolution of their physical life and that of their progeny (Gen. 5) even after they repented of their sin. Since the fall, death has reigned over all people (Rom. 5.17) and has become an essential and sad part of the human experience with a broad spectrum of customs which different cultures developed to deal with old age, sickness, death and burial. The Good News of the message of Jesus Christ is that God is delivering all those who believe from this awful enemy called death. "For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead" (I Cor. 15.21). That is because not only did Christ die for our sins, but he was also raised by the Father on the third day according to the prophecies of the *Tanakh*, a fact Paul mentions in I Corinthians 15.4 and which permeates all his writings. Paul's even states that without the resurrection of Christ, the entire Christian message and its hope collapses (I Corinthians 15.12-19).

That is why the apostle writes to the Corinthian church of the evidence of Christ's resurrection¹⁵. After reminding them that the Messiah's resurrection was promised in the Old Testament, he assures them that those closest to him saw him individually and collectively after he arose. He also tells them that he appeared to over 500 brothers at once, most of whom were still alive twenty years later as he writes this epistle to them. In other words, the resurrection is not a fable but a verifiable event. Paul finally adds his own experience with the risen Lord (I Cor. 15.4-8), an experience that radically changed his life and religious convictions.

Paul is so keen to make sure the Corinthians do not doubt their own resurrection or that of their Lord. He does so since a dead Christ is a defeated Christ. A defeated Christ means that death will forever reign victorious. But Christ has been raised from the dead and that means that death, our last enemy, will be destroyed (I Cor. 15.26). We experience an aspect of this victory now since God has "made us alive together with Christ" (Eph. 2.5). But at his coming, we will experience the full benefit of his resurrection when he "will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body" (Phil. 3.21). To the Corinthians he adds these words of triumph using words from the Old Testament prophets,

When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

"Death is swallowed up in victory."

"O death, where is your victory?"

O death, where is your sting?"

To fully understand Paul's teaching on the resurrection, it is essential for us to realize that he sees in it far more significance than a mere coming back to life. For Paul and the rest of the New Testament writers, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is beginning of his exaltation and glorification. The implications are vast and the references to it in Paul's epistles numerous. To

begin with, Christ's resurrection means that he will never die again (Rom. 6.9-10). He entered a new phase of existence hitherto unknown to humanity. This mode of existence is a new physicality suited for the eternal kingdom.¹⁶ In I Corinthians 15.42-44 Paul describes the new body as imperishable, glorious, powerful, and spiritual. It is the resurrection body of the last Adam whose image we will bear (I Cor. 15.45-49).

But much more happened because of the resurrection of Christ. God the Father exalted him to his right hand, a position of authority over the church, and also above all creatures now and in the future (Eph. 1.20-23). In this Ephesians passage, Paul includes imagery from Psalm 8:6 which in turn seems to harken back to Adam's original authority (Gen. 1.26-28). The clear implication is that there is now a restoration of Adam's kingdom in the new rule of Jesus Christ. Paul is also alluding in Ephesians 1.20 to Psalm 110.1,

The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool."

No other Old Testament verse is quoted and alluded to in the New Testament more frequently than Psalm 110.1. It proclaims the exaltation of the Messiah and the subjugation of his enemies. Another Pauline allusion to it is in 1 Corinthians 15 which we have cited several times before:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³ But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. ²⁴ Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Paul's language is clear: the risen Christ will reign until all his enemies are under his feet. In other words, his victory will be seen to be complete. In Philippians 2.8-11 the apostle tells us that Christ's exaltation is specifically due to his obedience unto death. Because of his faithfulness, God will see to it that every tongue confesses that he, Jesus, is Lord and that every knee bow to him, a clear allusion to another Old Testament passage in which God is clearly the speaker (Isa. 45.22-23). Rather than detracting from God's glory, the exaltation of Jesus Christ brings more glory to God (Phil. 2.11, I Cor. 15.28).

One other key element in Christ's victory needs to be underscored. That element is his descent from David. Let us remember that God made a covenant with David that his seed would sit on his throne forever (II Sam. 7.12-16). Paul refers to the connection between David and his son's resurrection three times, once in the sermon Luke ascribes to him in Antioch (Acts 13.34-37), the second time in Romans 1.3, 4 and once in II Timothy 2.8.¹⁷ It is significant that in all three passages the context is the resurrection of Christ. That is because God's promise to David of an eternal heir can only be fulfilled in a descendant who will not die!

To summarize: God promised that He would save humanity by a righteous seed descended from Eve who would destroy Satan in a costly battle (Gen. 3.15). Then He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that this seed would come through them and bring blessing to the nations. He later promised one of their descendants, David, that this same seed would reign victoriously on His throne forever. To bring all this about, God's enemies and ours had to be judged and defeated. In the fullness of time, divine judgment did come upon sin and Satan, along with his forces, in the death of the Son of God. By rising from the dead, He emerged victorious over death and brought life and immortality to light through the gos-

pel (2 Tim. 1.10). He is exalted in heaven at the right hand of God until, as his father David spoke by the Spirit, all his enemies are totally subdued at his feet (Psalm 110.1).

What God's victory means now

The real-life implications of God's victory for the followers of Christ are vast and Paul sees them as necessary corollaries of the message he was entrusted with. His letters to churches and fellow ministers make it abundantly clear that he is not a mere theoretician interested primarily in the realm of ideas. The zealot persecutor of the church saw the risen Christ himself and was transformed into a follower and an evangelist, as well as a pastor and then a prisoner for the sake of the Good News! In fact, he sees the one who after his suffering "was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead", as the very source of his mission to bring the nations to faith (Romans 1.4-5). Among his last recorded words is a charge to Timothy to continue his ministry steadfastly because of the victorious Christ who will appear as King to judge all generations of humanity (2 Timothy 4.1-2).

But, according to Paul, the lives of *all* followers of Jesus Christ have been transformed because of his suffering and victory. In fact, Paul writes that we have been exalted with Christ even now before his return (Eph. 2.5-6), a fact that changes our perspective on all of life. Christ's exaltation has given us a heavenly and eschatological orientation in which we realize the futility and impermanence of this age. "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory" (Col. 3.1-4, cp. Rom. 8.20-25).

To be sure, while setting our mind on Christ and on what is above, we are not to despise or ignore what is on earth. Paul urges believers to live out the triumph of Christ our head in the here and now. Through his resurrection power brought to us by the Spirit, we are to put to death our sinful ways (Col. 3.5, Phil. 3.10, Rom. 8.13) and to stand strong against the assaults of evil spiritual forces (Eph. 6.10-20). Our new life is not a purely private life but one which is lived in unity with other believers in the one body of Christ where old racial, economic, and gender animosities have been, at least in principle, overcome (Rom. 12.4-5, Gal. 3.27-28).

With regards to non-believers, the ‘new self’ in Christ is called upon to do good to them (Gal. 6.10) and to pray for them (1 Tim. 2.1). We are to offer supplication for rulers so that we can live a peaceful and quiet life (1 Tim. 2.2). At the same time, the new people of God must expect persecution (2 Tim. 3.12). When that happens, the victorious Christ enables us to respond patiently and generously since we are called upon not to overcome evil with evil but with good, as he himself did (Rom. 12.17-21). We boast in our troubles knowing that they work for our good (Rom. 5.3-4), we who in Christ are more than conquerors (Rom. 8.37).

Sadly, we Christians do not live out our ‘new self’ consistently! But the victory of Christ continually gives us the enablement and incentive to strive to do so more fully. At times we are tempted to live as if Christ had neither died nor been raised again, to live as if meaninglessness and evil are triumphant. But as the Spirit relentlessly bears witness with our spirit, we are reassured time and again that we are heirs with Christ and that the glory we will share with him cannot be compared to our present sufferings (Rom. 8.16-18). Neither the Spirit, nor Paul, want us to forget that Christ, not evil, will have the final word in history (2 Thess. 1.5-10).

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ENDNOTES

1 J. Gresham Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1923, pages 20-21.

2 See Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975, pages 13-43 for a brief survey of Pauline studies roughly from the Enlightenment until the time of the author.

3 For example, see N. T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans*, The New Interpreter's Bible, vol. X, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002, pp. 510-513, 533-534.

I consider all the letters ascribed to Paul (Romans through Philemon) to be genuine.

4 Gustaf Aulen, *Christus Victor*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1969, pp. 66-73.

5 Genesis 3 was clearly on Paul's mind as he wrote Romans 5 as well as Romans 1 and probably Romans 7.8-11.

6 For example, see Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, p. 179 and Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans*, Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1949, p. 280. Also compare Wright, p. 553. ⁹ Aulen, p. 69.

7 Paul, and the Bible as a whole, expects us to believe in an actual creature that is opposed to God's will. This is not an absolute dualism as in Zoroastrian and Manichean teaching, nor is it mythological. Biblically speaking, the entity that came to be known as “Satan” or the “devil” was created by God as righteous but rebelled against his creator. See Gustaf Aulen, pp. 2-5.

8 Western theology since the Enlightenment has largely rejected dualism seeing it as primitive and demonological and therefore non-essential to our understanding of Christianity. As a result, the patristic view of the Atonement which prevailed prior to Anselm

and pictured salvation as a cosmic drama, was ignored (see Aulen, p. 11).

9 The Hebrew word for ‘seed’ is what Kaiser calls a “collective singular noun” which can refer to one person or to the many descendants of a family. See Walter Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978, p. 88. The very promise of a seed is a merciful indication that Adam and Eve have a future and will not immediately die.

10 The murder of Abel in the very next chapter illustrates the wider implications of the ‘seed of the woman’.

¹⁴ Kaiser, p. 88.

11 See my Arabic commentary on Romans 1-8, *al tabrir we amanit Yasou’ al Masih (Justification and the Faithfulness of Jesus Christ)*, Great Commission College (Egypt), 2021. See my comments on Rom. 1.17 and 3.22. It is well known that πιστις can mean “faithfulness” as well as “faith” (Arndt, W. F. and Gingrich, F. W., *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, University of Chicago Press, 1957, p. 668). See also Wright, p. 425 and for a history of understanding faith as faithfulness see Mark Reasoner, *Romans in Full Circle: A History of Interpretation*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005, pp. 5-7.

12 Literally “for sin” (περὶ ἁμαρτίας), a phrase which, as is well known, is used in the LXX to mean a sacrifice for sin (e.g., Lev. 4.3). It is almost certain that Paul intends his words to be understood in this sacrificial way. Leon Morris objects to this interpretation and asks if the Romans would be familiar with the wording (*The Epistle to the Romans*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988, p. 303). In response, it must be remembered that Paul already referred to the sacrificial system in using the word “propitiation” in Rom. 3.24, not to mention all his other references to the OT. After all, the Roman Christians were “filled with all knowledge” (15.14). The same use of “sin” to mean “sin offering” can probably be seen also in 2 Cor. 5.21 (“he became sin (or sin offering) for us”).

13 Paul’s phrase “dying to sin” and the crucifixion of the “old man” (Rom. 6.5-6) is another way of describing God’s victory over

sin. The result is our liberation from the reign of sin. In Christ’s death, we were also delivered from the law which was holding us in bondage (Rom. 7.4,6).

14 Hebrews 2.14 makes a direct connection between Satan and death, describing him as having “the power of death”. Even though Hebrews is not counted by most commentators as a Pauline epistle, it nevertheless reflects the Old Testament teaching in a way Paul would agree with.

15 These reminders are because some in the congregation, under the influence of Greek thought, were denying the whole possibility of resurrection (1 Cor. 15.12).

16 Notice the use of the word “body” in the phrase τῷ σώματι τῆς δόξης αὐτοῦ in Philipians 3.21.

17 Paul also mentions David in Romans 4.6-8 in connection with justification by faith.

