

Paul the Missionary: Negotiating the Maze of Competing Spiritualities

by

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PREFACE:

What is “spirituality?” Clearly in the pluralistic climate of American society, it is in vogue to use the term “spirituality” to refer generically to a limitless range of religious experience. Is it a universal dimension of human life; i.e., is it some inherent aspect of human existence, or is it specific to humans within a given socio-religious context? Can an atheist be thought of as “spiritual,” or is the term only properly applied to believers in God? In the latter case, does the theist have to understand God in any certain way, or will any or every conceptualization suffice? How can we talk meaningfully about the spirituality of human beings apart from any reference to God or a Supreme Being?

It is instructive to note that a secular view of human “spirituality” does not require theistic belief. For example, one team of social scientists responding to a call for “scientific conceptualization and measures of spirituality” developed a “spiritual transcendence index” to analyze the “perceived experience of the sacred that affects one’s self-perception, feelings, goals, and ability to transcend one’s difficulties.”<sup>1</sup> If this description sounds non-religious, it is. This same team acknowledged that spirituality has been traditionally viewed as a component of religion, but cited recent studies to show that this perspective is changing for one that distinguishes spirituality from “religiousness.” They cite a 1997 study by Zinnbauer et al., which pointed out, “. . . whereas historically religiousness included both individual and institutional components, spirituality is now commonly regarded to be concerned with individual phenomena such as personal experiences of the transcendent, and religiousness is often more narrowly identified with religious institutions and prescribed theology and rituals.”<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in secular studies of human spirituality the traditional notion of God is replaced with a universal perception or search for some transcendent reality.<sup>3</sup> Ironically, Owen C. Thomas, an Episcopal priest, provides a decisively secular definition of spirituality, “as the sum of all the uniquely human capacities and functions: self-awareness, self-transcendence, memory, anticipation, rationality (in the broadest sense), creativity, plus the moral, intellectual, social, political, aesthetic, and religious capacities, all understood as embodied.”<sup>4</sup> This highly functional definition of spirituality is not only broader and inclusive of religion, it is *non-religious*. As he later admits, “The upshot of this definition is that spirituality is universal among humans and not optional. All people are spiritual. Hitler is just as spiritual as Mother Teresa.”<sup>5</sup>

Can the Christian talk about his/her spirituality divorced from any reference to God, Christ and redemption, and if so, will that discourse be consonant with the teachings of the New Testament? These questions confronted the author of this article who determined to address them by investigating the narrower focus of Pauline spirituality.

## INTRODUCTION: *Spirituality and the Apostle Paul*

Some topics are by nature so complex and multifaceted that the prospect of dealing with them is at the outset overwhelming.<sup>6</sup> One would think that New Testament spirituality, and the Pauline variety in particular, would be a far more manageable focus. Such naiveté is quickly shattered upon encountering Gordon Fee's magnum opus, *God's Empowering Presence*.<sup>7</sup> Fee cogently and persuasively argues that God's salvation in Christ is "eschatological" in that while awaiting a final consummation, it is a present reality experienced by God's people through the work of the Spirit. Thus, the Spirit plays a vital role in Pauline eschatology, soteriology and ecclesiology.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, in his discussion of "the Spirit as God's personal presence," Fee demonstrates that the Spirit is not only vital but inseparably linked to Pauline Christology.<sup>1</sup> Thus, although not identifying a single doctrine or motif as the "center" of Pauline thought, there is no doubt that Fee sees the Spirit as vital to the whole of Pauline theology. However, when Paul speaks of something or someone as "spiritual," he is not at all speaking the same language as the secularists. This becomes apparent when we consider some foundational elements of Pauline spirituality.

### *Foundations of Pauline Spirituality*

Pauline spirituality is multifaceted, pervasive and embedded in the foundation of the apostle's theology. It is also comprehensive in that it encompasses the totality of a believer's life in Christ. Essentially, Paul understands the term "spiritual" to be descriptive of the new covenant people of God who are "people of the Spirit."<sup>2</sup> As Fee remarks concerning the early church, "the Spirit is absolutely presuppositional to their entire experience and understanding of their present life in Christ."<sup>3</sup> This leads us to ask why this is so. The answer begins with Paul's understanding of salvation as an eschatological reality. That is, in the death and resurrection of Christ God has offered his salvation to humanity, a salvation that while consummated in the age to come, has reality in this present age, which (along with the world, its wisdom and rulers) is passing away (1Cor 1:20-2:6; cf. 7:31).

That Paul views salvation as eschatological is beyond debate.<sup>4</sup> Fee's contribution to Pauline theology has been to articulate and underscore his pneumatology in defining the believer's participation in this eschatological salvation.<sup>5</sup> Such participation is

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. See chapters 13-14, esp. pp. 831-38.

<sup>2</sup> Thus, Gordon Fee devotes a monograph to establish and expound this vital perspective. See Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit, and the People of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), which is a restatement and expansion of portions of his *God's Empowering Presence*, 2-9; 870-895.

<sup>3</sup> Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Gerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press., 1930, reprint ed. Baker, 1979), 1-61. Fee acknowledges Vos' work in establishing the eschatological framework of Paul's theology, in *Empowering Presence*, 803. See also G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), esp. pp. 550-568; Pate, C. Marvin, *The End of the Age Has Come: The Theology of Paul* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), esp. pp. 217-35.

<sup>5</sup> Fee, *Empowering Presence*, 805-95.

grounded in a radical new ontology. Believers are those who are not only “in Christ” but also “in the Spirit.”<sup>6</sup> Because the Spirit has baptized them into the body of Christ, making them a member (1Cor 12:13), believers have entered into a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). They have been delivered from “this present evil age (Gal 1:4) and transferred into a new kingdom, where they reside under new authority (Col 1:13). Consequently, the new covenant Christian has entered an entirely new sphere of existence variously described by Pauline metaphors and expressions, not the least of which is “in the Spirit.” This existence offers every believer access to the vital and dynamic presence of God Himself (Eph 2:18). Thus, Paul makes much of temple imagery and sacrificial language to describe this redemptive ontology.<sup>7</sup>

Transference into God’s eschatological salvation means that the new covenant people of God are “Spirit-people” who possess the Spirit and therefore can be described as “spiritual.”<sup>8</sup> Thus, in the redemptive sense, Pauline spirituality is uniquely “life in the Spirit.” This spirituality, aside from its eschatological and ontological grounding possesses three broad dimensions, each describing an aspect of Spirit-life. It can be discussed existentially (experience), ethically (values and morals) and conceptually (thoughts and beliefs). Such an analysis is, of course, worthy of a book-length treatment. For the moment, it is worth noting that Paul’s notion of spirituality is comprehensive and encompasses the totality of Christ faith, life, worship and service. It cannot be marginalized as some subset of Christian experience.<sup>9</sup> Therefore when Paul, in the course

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<sup>6</sup> To make this point is not to deny or diminish the obvious fact that Paul’s notion of spirituality is foundationally “Christocentric,” a fact made obvious by the ubiquitous “in Christ” (or variants – 150 plus times) that Paul uses to describe himself, other believers or his service and experience as an apostle of Christ. Thus, George M. Soares-Pradhu rightly points out that for Paul spirituality in Christ-centered growing out of union with Christ, in “The Spirituality of Paul the Apostle,” (Indore, India: Divine Word Publications, 1975), 41-43. See also Thomas Smith, “Pauline Missionary Spirituality,” AFER 9, 2 (ATLA Serials, 2001), 144-45. However, it should be noted that from the vantage point of soteriology, Pauline Christology and pneumatology are inseparably linked and sometimes conflated. E.g., Paul tells the Roman Christians they are “in the Spirit (*en pneumati*), if the Spirit of God indwells them. He then refers to the Spirit as the “Spirit of Christ” (Rm 8:9). He then continues, “And if Christ be in you” (v. 10). Cf. Cor 3:17-18. Other passages link the work of the Spirit to the Church’s preaching of Christ: Rm 9:1; 15:19, or with Jesus’ and the believer’s resurrection (Rm 8:11), deliverance from the law of sin and death (Rm 8:2), the salvific work of sanctification and justification (1Co 6:11), etc. My point is to underscore that all that accrues from the redemptive work of Christ to the life of the Christian is mediated and effected by the Spirit.

<sup>7</sup> See Eph 2:19-22; 1Cor 3:9-17, esp. vv 16-17; 6:19; 18; 2Cor 6:16; Cf. Rom 6:16-19; 8:9; 12:1; Phil 2:17; 4:18; 2Tm 4:6.

<sup>8</sup> Fee is undoubtedly correct in his analysis of Paul use of *pneumatikos* to refer primarily to life in the Spirit. See *Empowering Presence*, 15-32.

<sup>9</sup> David Dockery concludes an article on Pauline spirituality with the observation that for Paul Christianity is essentially “pneumatic.” He further comments, “In this essay we have seen that there is hardly any aspect of the Christian experience that is not influenced by the Spirit’s activities.” See David S. Dockery, “An Outline of Paul’s View of the Spiritual Life: Foundation For An Evangelical Spirituality” *Criswell Theological Review* 3. 2 (1989), 338-39.

of his missionary career, encounters and responds to various forms of spirituality, he does not restrict his concerns to only one aspect of Christian life “in the Spirit,” as will become evident in the remainder of the paper.

Paul addresses himself to those whose existential experience of “the Spirit-life” raise concerns about the integrity of that experience, or problems within the Church stemming from that experience. This is evident in 1 Corinthians and is illustrated by Paul’s instruction regarding *pneumatika* and *charismata* (chapters 12-14). Experience and behavior are inseparable. The existential dimension of life “in the Spirit” can become problematic requiring paraenesis – exhortation to proper conduct. Thus, there is a morality to Pauline spirituality.

Eschatological life “in the Spirit” brings a unique ethos (Rm 14:17) all its own, which is referred to as walking “by/in” or “according to the Spirit.”<sup>10</sup> Examination of such language in Paul leads to paraenetic passages dealing with conduct being either encouraged or censured. Those who have made this eschatological transference into life “in the Spirit” (Rm 8:9) are expected to walk in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:25), producing the fruit of the Spirit. They are in no way (5:16)<sup>11</sup> to walk according to flesh, fulfilling its desires. Such a walk belongs to the present evil age from which the believer has been delivered (Gal 1:4; cf 4:23, 29). Moreover, to do so is a formula for spiritual disaster. The Galatian error was not only doctrinal, involving circumcision and the Law - the denial of the eschatological salvation provide by God in Christ, it was also the rejection of the new life effected by the Spirit. It was a return life under law with its concomitant bondage of the flesh (Gal 5:12-17), and its moral issuance – “the deeds of the flesh” (5:19-21).

In fulfilling his missionary or apostolic calling, Paul interfaced with a wide spectrum of divergent spiritualities. These spirituality-types came with divergent values, beliefs and practices. Some he accommodated in his contextualization of the Gospel. Others he confronted as aberrant and destructive to the unity and well-being of the faith. Our purpose here is to begin a more focused study of the types of spirituality Paul encountered during his missionary travels and how he responded to them.

### ***I. Spirituality in Dissonance –***

The first category of spirituality to be examined is in fact quite rare somewhat difficult to determine. It involves a spirituality that is at dissonance with Pauline instruction and example, but one which he does not harshly condemn or rebuke. Instead the problematic spirituality is described somewhat matter-of-factly, and any censure of those involved is implicit, inferred by the context and tenor of what Paul *does* say.

The most noteworthy example of the above category is found in Phil 1:12-18 which begins with a statement of divine providence in Paul’s circumstances. Instead of hindering or preventing the spread of the Gospel, Paul’s imprisonment has become

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<sup>10</sup> See Rm 8:4, 5, 13; 1Cor 12:8; Gal 4:29 et al.

<sup>11</sup> Note Paul’s use of the subjunctive of emphatic negation - οὐ μὴ τελέσητε.

advantageous, resulting in its advancement (ἡ ἀνακομιδή - v.12). This has taken place in two ways: 1) The whole Praetorian Guard has learned of Paul's imprisonment for the cause of Christ and presumably of the gospel as well.<sup>12</sup> 2) Paul's imprisonment, instead of paralyzing the Christians in Rome out of fear, has emboldened them. While some may have been intimidated in their witness, "most of the brethren" were inspired by Paul's sacrifice and fearlessly proclaimed the word of God (v.14).

At this point the narrative breaks off into a strange commentary (vv. 15-18). In chiasmic structure, Paul depicts two camps of those preaching the gospel of Christ<sup>13</sup>. One camp preaches "from good will" and "love," having demonstrably "pure motives" (v.15), i.e., "knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel." Conversely, another camp is clearly adversarial to Paul and preaches with questionable motives (to say the least): envy and strife (ἔρις καὶ φθόνος), selfish ambition (ἑγωγεῖα) and with the goal of adding distress or affliction (ἰσχυρὰ) to Paul while in prison. It is indeed difficult to imagine who these "brethren" are and how they could be so motivated.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, one thing is clear. Paul does not denounce these "brethren," however misguided and improperly motivated. Nor does he denounce the gospel they preach as aberrant or heretical.<sup>15</sup> What he does do is remarkable! He states his resolve to rejoice that Christ is being preached. Implicitly he counsels loving toleration of those who are preaching the gospel with less than perfect motives to be sure, but those who are preaching the gospel nonetheless.

Another example of such counsel and the same category of spirituality is found in Phil 4:1-4. The passage opens with an address that betokens, intimacy, warmth, pride and confidence of relationship – "Therefore, my beloved brethren whom I long *to see*, my joy and crown, so stand firm in the Lord, my beloved." Nevertheless, a problem has arisen that demands his attention. Two women, Euodia and Syntyche, have fallen into contention and are exhorted by Paul "to live in harmony in the Lord" (τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν

<sup>12</sup> F. J. Foakes Jackson and Kirsopp Lake state that prisoners awaiting trial before Caesar were placed in the custody of a *praefectus praetorio*. While the term Praetorium can refer to the place of residence of a provincial governor palace guard (Mt 27:27; Mk 15:16; Ac 23:35; Jn 18:28), or to the imperial guard in Rome. In that the term is parallel to the phrase "and to all the rest" suggests that the most probable meaning of ἡ ἀνακομιδή (v.13) is to the guard, whether the site of Paul's imprisonment be Rome or Caesarea.

<sup>13</sup> I take the "word of God" (v.14) to be equivalent to "the gospel" mentioned in v. 12, and "Christ" (vv. 15-17) to be a synecdoche for the gospel.

<sup>14</sup> Lightfoot identifies those preaching the gospel from impure motives with the Judaizers of Phil 3:1-6. However, as Kent points out, it is unlikely that Paul would commend his opponents for preaching the word and then denounce them as "dogs, evil workers" and the "mutilation" (ἰσχυρὰ) in 3:2. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that people so described would be referred to as "brethren" (1:14). See Homer A. Kent Jr. *Philippians*, vol. 11 in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 111.

<sup>15</sup> Contrary to those "Judaizers" mentioned in 3:2, whose lives and gospel are implicitly condemned by Paul's autobiographical sketch and commentary in 3:4-16, Paul does not personally address or denounce these opponents.

ἐν κυρίῳ).<sup>16</sup> From other Pauline letters, we know that disunity is a major concern to Paul and if left unchecked can develop into factions that can divide the body of Christ and dissolve the foundation of Christian unity (1Co 1:10-17; 3:1-11). In the face of that danger, Paul can speak quite forcefully and issue a sobering warning to anyone who would jeopardize the spiritual unity of the church.<sup>17</sup> But such does not appear to be the case here. These women are exhorted not rebuked, suggesting that Paul understands their dissension to be more of a personal squabble that is remediable. The danger to the church seems more potential than real. Possibly the discord has developed between two church leaders with competing or conflicting opinions. What is fascinating is how Paul deals with this situation. He seeks the intervention of a trusted associate of his and implores him<sup>18</sup> to intervene and help these women resolve their differences and live in harmony. When entreating this “true yokefellow” he commends these women in glowing terms. They have labored intensely (σπουδασάντων) in the work of the gospel alongside Paul and the rest of his fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (v. 3). Unlike “the brethren” in 1:15-18 who are preaching with impure motives, these women do not stand in opposition to Paul but as his trusted co-laborers in the gospel. While exhibiting a spirituality that is defective, it has not degenerated into a situation in need of sanction and rebuke.

## II. *Spirituality in Conflict*

Given the occasional nature of Paul’s epistles and the broad spectrum of conflicts and controversies addressed within, examples of this category of spirituality are pervasive. They involve a variety of situations which are clearly problematic and solicit Paul’s criticism, admonition and sometimes condemnation. However, these controversies do not always reveal an identifiable group of Paul’s opponents. Paul regards those involved as Christians, but believers practicing a spirituality which requires correction or censure. Such is the case because it is fundamentally at odds with the ethos of the gospel as taught and modeled by Paul in the churches. Consequently, Paul is called on to teach what R. P. Meye calls, “the practice of Spirit” or how to “walk in the Spirit,”-- the most popular metaphor for Pauline spirituality.<sup>19</sup>

Although examples of “spirituality in conflict” are pervasive in Paul’s writings, our present limitations permit us to examine only a representative sampling of this category. Passages representing diverse situations from two well-known Pauline letters

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<sup>16</sup> Literally, the phrase σπουδασάντων ἐν κυρίῳ says “to think the same in the Lord.” This seems to refer to being in agreement with one another by sharing the same ultimate goal of service to the Lord, or sphere of service in the Lord.

<sup>17</sup> Against such a threat Paul issues this warning: “Do you not know that you are a temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will destroy him, for the temple of God is holy, and that is what you are. (1Cor 3:16-17)

<sup>18</sup> I am assuming the masculine gender of this associate, but it is not demanded by the term γνήσιε σύζυγε. More likely, Paul would not ask another woman to mediate a dissension between two women.

<sup>19</sup> R. P. Meye, “Spirituality,” in *The Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. by G. F. Harthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 909.

(Romans and 1 Corinthians) have been chosen for their clarity in illustrating this category of spirituality.

The first example is from Romans 14:1-23. Ostensibly this passage deals with the question of Christian responsibility toward those who are “weak in faith” (v. 1) and the problem of censorious judgment upon them. The behavior in question involves eating or drinking certain kinds of food and drink (14:2, 6, 17, 21), and whether or not to observe a particular day above others. Whether these practices stem from Jewish or Gentile sensibilities is not certain, nor is it necessary to determine for our purposes. However, mention of the “clean” and “unclean” (vv. 14, 20) and “one day above another” (καθαροὶ ἢ ἀκαθαροὶ - v.5) seems to favor a conflict initiated from within the Jewish quarter of the church.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear from 15:10 and v. 14 that Paul is addressing both Jews and Gentiles. The behaviors under scrutiny and debate appear as religious ritual and tradition, but are tied to convictions with theological underpinnings – hence the devotion with which they are practiced.

Paul begins his corrective teaching by affirming that both parties in the debate: the eaters and non-eaters, the observers and non-observers are believers, i.e., Christians.<sup>21</sup> He invites both parties to extend Christian charity and tolerance to the other “brother” and allow each to exercise their conscience in faith without condemnation. But Paul’s stance in the matter is not entirely neutral. He himself identifies with the brother who has faith to eat (vv 2-3), being convinced that in the Lord Jesus, nothing is of itself unclean (v.14). Nevertheless, one’s enlightened faith must not result in judging the weaker brother, nor be exercised so as to cause him to stumble, i.e., to sin by violating his conscience before God (vv.12-16, 20-23).

Paul’s corrective and confrontational teaching responds to a culpable spirituality. Such attitudes and conduct are clearly out of character with the ethos of the kingdom, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteous and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (v. 17). Moreover, the consequences of such spirituality are severe: Roman Christians who judge their weak brother are guilty of usurping the Lord’s singular right to judge His servants (vv. 4-10). Those who exercise their faith and freedom without regard for the weaker brother are not walking in love. They risk having their good maligned, causing their brother to stumble (i.e., sin), and even destroying one for whom Christ died (vv.15-16).

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<sup>20</sup> Harrison presents a plausible *Sitz im Leben* behind this passage. “Possibly the weaker brethren at Rome should be identified with the Jewish element in the church, because believing Jews might easily carry over their avoidance of certain foods from their former observance of the dietary laws of the OT. It is possible that information had reached Paul to the effect that with the return of Jewish Christians to Rome after the death of Emperor Claudius in A.D. 54 tension had developed in the church with the Gentile element that had been able for several years to enjoy without challenge its freedom in the matter of foods.” See Everett F. Harrison, *Romans*, vol. 10 in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976 ), 144.

<sup>21</sup> This conclusion seems clear enough. Both have the same master/Lord (κύριος 14:4, 6); both give thanks to God (v.6); it was for both that Christ died and was raised (vv.9, 15), both are called to regard the other as “brother” (vv. 10, 13, 15); both will give account to God (v.12) for their stewardship of faith in the kingdom of God (vv. 17, 22, 23).

A similar situation to the one above is twice addressed in 1 Corinthians – 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1. Scholars argue over whether the situations in the two chapters are identical.<sup>22</sup> To be sure 1Cor 10:1-22 deals with conduct equated with “idolatry.” Such participation in pagan worship (vv. 7, 14-18) elicits a severe warning and condemnation from Paul. But the issue in the two passages at hand does not involve idolatry,<sup>23</sup> but the need to respect those whose weak consciences will not permit them to eat food offered to idols (*eidololutha*). Paul admits that eating (or abstaining from) such meat in and of itself has no moral or spiritual value before God (8:4-8; 10:23, 25-26). However, if the one who has such knowledge uses his freedom to eat without regard for his brother who lacks that knowledge, he stands condemned. He has failed to edify through love (8:1). His freedom has become a “stumbling block” (8:9) and has violated his brother’s conscience. What is worse, his freedom can encourage the weak brother to do the very thing his conscience forbids, i.e., eat meat offered to idols (8:10). He has used his knowledge to destroy (*apollumi*) his weak brother for whom Christ died (8:11; cf. Rm 14:15). Consequently, Paul states, he has “sinned against the brethren,”<sup>24</sup> by “wounding their conscience” and so has “sinned against Christ.”

Similarly, Paul concern in 10:23-11:1 is for one whose conscience is violated because someone wants to eat meat that is known to be sacrificed to idols (*hierothutos*-v.28). While such eating is permissible and lawful (vv 23-27), the freedom to do so should not be used if it sacrifices the edification and good of one’s neighbor (vv. 23-24). This would not only cause offense to one’s neighbor (v.32), but depart from the selfless example set by the apostle himself as he seeks to imitate Christ in his selfless sacrifice on our behalf (vv. 10:33-11:1). Ultimately it is freedom that betokens a spirituality that does not glorify God (v.31).

### III. *Spirituality in Crisis*

In his missionary travels Paul encountered situations engendered by a type of spirituality that he regarded not only as aberrant, but imminently destructive to the unity and well-being of Christ’s body. The language and tone used to confront them indicate

<sup>22</sup> For an excellent discussion of the scholarly attempt to equate or distinguish the circumstances described by these two chapters, see Seyoon Kim, “Imitation Christi (1 Cor. 11:1),” an unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the Institute of Biblical Research. November, 2002, 14-25.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed this question of whether Paul contradicts himself by in condemning the eating of *eidololutha* in 8:10 and 10:1-22 in a pagan temple, but then permits such eating at a private home (10:23-11:1) is debated. Gordon Fee sees no contradiction. Paul opposes such eating on ethical grounds in 8:7-13 and 10:23-11:1 because of the deleterious impact it has on the weak brother. However, his objection to the same eating is based on the theological effrontery of idolatry. See Gordon D. Fee, 1 Corinthians (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1987, 357-60. This distinction does not solve the problem of how Paul can permit eating *eidololutha* so long as one has the appropriate knowledge (8:7) and so long as it does not become a stumbling block to the weak (8:9), and then condemn the same act in 10:14-22. It seems a better solution is offered in what S. Kim calls the “majority view,” i.e., that it is not a matter of whether food eaten was *eidololutha*, or where the *eidololutha* was eaten, but the purpose and occasion of the eating. Was the eating the occasion of a sacrifice to a pagan idol. See Kim, *Imitatio*,” 17-19.

<sup>24</sup> The switch to the plural in v. 12 can hardly be accidental and reveals the corporate solidarity all believers share within the body of Christ, making no sin without consequence to the body at large.

that Paul sees a Christianity in crisis, one where what is at stake is the spiritual life and survival of the church itself.

The most dramatic example of spirituality in this category is found in the Galatian epistle. The Galatians are being “troubled”<sup>25</sup> by false teachers, often referred to as “Judaizers” for their insistence on circumcision and the keeping of Mosaic law.<sup>26</sup> Even a cursory reading of the letter reveals that a spirituality is being promoted by doctrine that is not just controversial, but intolerable. The Galatians are being influenced to desert the One who called them by the grace of Christ (1:6). They are being seduced by a different (*heteros*) gospel, which Paul regards as no gospel at all (1:7). Any one preaching it is under the *anathema* of God.<sup>27</sup> Paul himself had twice resisted these errant teachings, once when Paul refused to circumcise Titus so that the “truth of the gospel might remain” with them (2:4), and again in his bold rebuke of Cephas, who was not walking in line (*orthopodeō*) with the truth of the gospel (2:14). Later in the epistle he identifies this insistence on circumcision with being again subject to a “yoke of slavery” (5:1). It would not only obligate the recipient to keep the whole Law (v. 3), but negate the value of receiving Christ (v.2). In fact, it would result in their union with Christ being severed and indicate that they had fallen from grace (v.5)! But doctrine inevitably impacts spirituality, and so it is with these “foolish Galatians” (3:1). With a tone of shock and incredulity he asks them, “Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (3:3). Regardless of the exact content of the doctrine precipitating their error, it is plain that Paul is taking issue with a spirituality that views the works of Law as instrumental to one’s spiritual perfection. Such spirituality is an appeal to mere human effort (*sarki* – “by the flesh”) to accomplish what only the Spirit (*pneumati* – “by the Spirit”) can do.<sup>28</sup>

As far as those teaching this error, Paul mentions them only three times. His description casts doubt on whether they are Christians at all.<sup>29</sup> In 1:6-8, they are identified with teaching that supplants and perverts the apostolic gospel. Their “persuasion” (*peismonē*) does not come from God, like leaven has a corrupting influence,

<sup>25</sup> See use of Greek verbs *tarassō*, and *anastatoō* in 1:7; 5:10, 12, 6:17.

<sup>26</sup> For references to circumcision, see 2:3-5, 12; 5:2-6; 6:12-15. References to the law-keeping as a form of aberrant spirituality in conflict with the gospel pervades much of the letter. See 2:11-21; 3:1-5, 10-14, 15-25; 4:1-6, 21-31; 5:1-10; 6:12-15.

<sup>27</sup> The severity of this threat and urgency to Paul is note in his repetition of the imprecation in vv. 8-9.

<sup>28</sup> In chapter 5 another problematic aspect of Galatian spirituality is alluded to, but this time precipitated by the inverse of legalism – a libertine use of Christian freedom from the Law(5:1), which Paul not only anticipates, in response to which he provides corrective teaching (5:13-18). What is interesting is that both legalism and libertinism have the same results – bondage to the desires (*epithumian*) of the flesh (5:13-17), generating the deeds of the flesh (vv. 19-21), requiring the same remedy – a life controlled and empowered by the Spirit (vv 16, 18, 25).

<sup>29</sup> It is noteworthy that similarly false teachers in Jerusalem, presumably holding to the same aberrant doctrine, alluded to as “false brethren” (2:4-5).

and hinders obedience to the truth (5:7-9). Furthermore, those who propagate this error are bound for God's judgment (v.10). Paul is so incensed at their teaching regarding the necessity of circumcision, that he passionately issues a severe, if not somewhat sarcastic, imprecation (5:12).<sup>30</sup> The final mention of these "troublers" is an oblique one, yet with similar passion and sarcasm- "From now on let no one cause trouble for me, for I bear on my the body the brand-marks of Jesus."<sup>31</sup>

It is noteworthy that Paul exhibits similar bile and intolerance in other epistles where doctrinal error threatens the integrity of the gospel. For example, Paul calls the Philippian Judaizers "dogs", "evil workers," and the "false circumcision,"<sup>32</sup> whose confidence is in the flesh (3:3-5). Later in the chapter Paul makes reference to another group who do not walk after the example left by Paul and associates, and against whom Paul gave repeated warnings. The debate over whether this group refers to Judaizers or Gentiles cannot be resolved here.<sup>33</sup> What is relevant is how Paul regards them. Their entire spirituality described in v.19 shows them to be "enemies of the cross of Christ" (v. 18) and those destined for "destruction." It seems clear these individuals are not regarded by Paul as Christians, even if they are closely associated with the Philippian church.

Again in the second Corinthians letter Paul is facing opponents whose doctrinal error is multifaceted and gravely serious. He likens it to the primordial deception of Eve by Satan, the danger of which is to lead believers astray from their simplicity and purity *of devotion* to Christ (11:3). He further describes their error, which although not detailed, is nonetheless characterized as preaching "another Jesus," a "different spirit" (or Spirit)<sup>34</sup> and "a different gospel." Keep in mind that for Paul there is only *one* Jesus, *one* Spirit, and *one* gospel. The threat is imminent and real. The Corinthians are being offered a

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<sup>30</sup> Paul sarcastically tells them to proceed with their error and move to mutilation – the removal of the whole genital organ. What is ironic is that such mutilation was condemned by both pagans and Jews. The latter would disqualify the victim from service in the temple (Deut 23:1).

<sup>31</sup> What the Galatian "troublers" have to show for their devotion to circumcision is minuscule compared to the bodily scars of persecution Paul has earned through the preaching of the cross.

<sup>32</sup> *Katatomē* in a literal sense means mutilation or the cutting of the flesh. Hence, Paul's sarcasm here is parallel to Gal 5:12 where he calls for the Galatian opponents to mutilate themselves.

<sup>33</sup> If they are Gentiles practicing a libertine spirituality, then Phil 3 contains the same two-fold error as contained in Galatians 5.

<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere I have pointed out that it is possible that Paul's reference to *pneuma* is not to the Holy Spirit, but to a disposition alien to the spirit (cf. NIV) of Christ. That is, the spirituality of Paul's opponents failed to take on the weakness, self-sacrifice and humility of Christ exemplified in the cross. But that view may miss the big picture of what Paul is addressing here. Paul's opponents have come preaching an alien gospel. Thus, both Jesus, who provides for God's salvation, and the Holy Spirit, who brings the believer into the reality of salvation, are misrepresented." See James Hernando, *2 Corinthians*, in *Life in the Spirit New Testament Commentary*, ed. by F.L. Arrington and R.Stronstad (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 962. See Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 344.

counterfeit Christianity and to his dismay they are willing to accept it (v.4).<sup>35</sup> What does Paul think of those that perpetrate this fraud? He leaves little doubt. They are “false apostles, deceitful workers” who masquerade as apostles of Christ (v.13) and attempt to pass themselves off as “servants of righteousness” Moreover, their deception is of the order of Satan himself who disguises himself as “an angel of light” (v.14). Thus, these opponents are headed for a certain end – God’s judgment (v.15).<sup>36</sup>

**Concluding Observations:**

In our cursory look at Paul’s conception of spirituality we learned the following: 1) Pauline spirituality is exclusively Christian. That is, it is the adjective describing the new covenant people of God who are distinctively “people of the *Spirit*,” i.e., God’s Spirit who indwells them (Rm 8:9) and who empowers and effects all aspects of Christian life, experience and service. 2) Thus, Pauline spirituality is both comprehensive and multifaceted. It is an eschatological reality that is ontological and existential in its experiential grounding, and ethical and conceptual in its behavioral and doctrinal expression.

Next our preliminary investigation into the kinds of spirituality which confronted Paul during his missionary journeys has yielded some noteworthy, albeit somewhat obvious conclusions. In fulfilling his apostolic calling, Paul interfaced with a wide spectrum of divergent spiritualities. Perhaps we should say that he encountered spiritualities with divergent forms of expressions, containing diverse values, conceptions and practices. However inadequate or imprecise, we have offered the categories of *dissonance*, *conflict* and *crisis* to move toward appreciating the nuanced approach Paul took in responding to these divergent spiritualities. Some he seems to graciously endure without severe censure (e.g., Phil 1:12ff; 4:2-3). Context indicates he does not approve of what is recounted. However, there is a lack of severity indicated by the absence of strong rebuke or denunciation. Paul’s response is either to simply describe with little or no comment, or exhort to positive action. With others he is obviously disturbed and seeks to correct by instruction, exhortation and warning. These pose a threat to the spiritual well-being of individuals and of the church at large. Such is the case with those who exercise their Christian freedom without regard for the consciences of their weaker brothers (Cf. Rom 14:1-23; 1Co 8:1-13 and 10:23-11:1). Paul’s response to this situation often includes sharp criticism and sometimes rebuke, but it is laced with didactic exhortation aimed at correcting the situation. Then, there are those with whom he shows little tolerance or patience, and not a little anger. These he exposes and confronts headlong as aberrant, heretical and destructive to the unity, well-being and even spiritual life of the Church (e.g.s, Gal 1:6-9; 5:1-4). His vehement intolerance is directed at those who propagate this brand of spirituality and less at those affected by it (e.g., Gal 3:1-4),

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<sup>35</sup> The Greek verb *anechomai* means to “bear with” and in this context means something like “to put up with.”

<sup>36</sup> Verse 15 reads “whose end shall be *according to their deeds*.” This last phrase is nearly identical to Paul’s words in 2Tm 4:14, when he condemns Alexander, the metal worker, who did Paul “a great deal of harm.” Paul says that because of his opposition to the gospel, “the Lord will repay him *for what he has done*.”

although their involvement in the error is clearly or implicitly condemned. The tone of his response is clearly denunciatory, and he regards those who promote this spirituality as enemies of the gospel.

The perceived and practical value of this study is minimally twofold. First, it alerts us to the fluidity (and ambiguity) of religious terminology like “spiritual” and “spirituality” when used in a day and culture steeped in religious pluralism where all forms of religious expression are viewed as having equal worth and no religion as having any exclusive claim to absolute truth. Those who regard the Scripture as (in any real sense) theologically normative are going to find it difficult to press Pauline spirituality into that mold.

Second, this investigation reasserts what missionaries have no doubt intuitively known all along: that the missionary enterprise inevitably involves negotiating a maze of competing spiritualities shaped by prior experience, culture and conceptuality. It offers some potential instruction for the missionary who seeks to do so under the guidance of Scripture and the Apostle Paul, the New Testament’s preeminent missionary. This study is a long way from completion and needs to be tested by a comprehensive analysis of the Pauline corpus. Nevertheless, the central thesis appears validated by this initial investigation and awaits further refinement and elaboration.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Larry Abernathy, Alexis D. Seidlitz, Paul R.; Evinger, James S.Chang, Theresa H.; Lewis, Barbara L, "Development of the Spiritual Transcendence Index," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 41., 3 (Summer 2002): 439.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 440.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. The same team allude to a study by Larson, Swyers and McClullough which point out that studies of religion and spirituality share a common denominator: the sacred, i.e., "a socially influenced perception of the either some divine being, or some sense of ultimate reality or truth."

<sup>4</sup> Owen C. Thomas, "Some Problems in Contemporary Christian Spirituality," *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 2 (Spring 2000): 268. To illustrate he quotes Paul Tillich, 'Man's whole life, including the sensual life, is spiritual.'

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> T. A. Albin, noted the diversity of conceptions of "spirituality" in different Christian tradition is due in part to the fact that "the spiritual life is itself so complex." See "Spirituality," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Ferguson, S. B., and Wright, D. F (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 657. Albin's assessment is quickly confirmed when encountering works such as Michael Cox, *Handbook of Christian Spirituality*, (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); Louis Bouyer, *The Spirituality of the New Testament and the Fathers* (New York: Desclee, 1960), or Bouyer's, *Introduction to Spirituality* (Desclee, 1961); or Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life* (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity Press, 1979), or J. I. Packer and L. Wilkerson, ed.s, *Alive to God: Studies in Spirituality Presented to James Houston* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Gordon D. Fee , *God's Empowering Presence* (Peabody, MA: Henrickson Publishers, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 13.