

The Whole of Paul  
and  
the *Whole* in His Theology

Theological Interpretation in Relational Epistemic Process

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## Chapter 1     A Necessary Introduction to Paul

I discovered Paul on the Damascus road not long ago—that is, not my introduction to the apostle Paul but my discovery of his whole person. Ironically, I suggest that this was where Paul also discovered his whole person. The following study is an outworking of the process which constituted and defined Paul beyond what he could previously have imagined (cf. Eph 3:20).

Because Paul was firmly situated in Israel and Judaism, among Gentiles and in the church, as well as within the Greco-Roman and Mediterranean world, it is understandable that Pauline scholarship has defined Paul from one or more of these contexts—unfortunately, even while disregarding or at the expense of one or more of these contexts. And since Paul’s identity was certainly shaped or influenced by these contexts, it is reasonable that Pauline studies characterize his identity as multi-faceted or a hybrid identity. Certainly identity formation is neither static nor singular. Yet, I suggest, these contexts and their corresponding identities, though important and necessary, are in themselves (even when taken together) insufficient to wholly define Paul and inadequate to fully understand him.

James Dunn contends: “Unless the paradox [apostle of Israel or apostate from Israel] is taken fully into account, the heart of Paul’s theology and historical contribution, not to mention Paul himself, will remain an unresolved enigma.”<sup>1</sup> He may unintentionally be describing the unresolved state of current Pauline studies, to which this study hopes not to contribute but to help bring some resolve to what remains an enigma (acknowledged or not) in Paul’s theology and practice, thus about Paul himself.

The breadth of Paul may be constructed from the convergence of religious, sociocultural and sociopolitical factors. This, however, does not provide the framework necessary to grasp the depth of the Pauline corpus (whether inclusive of disputed letters or not). Breadth could be merely quantitative description but depth must by its nature also involve the qualitative significance of what is described. The depth or the heart of Paul (beyond merely his centrality) can be explored and mined yet not constructed. This process—which is combined with a constructed breadth of Paul, though without its interpretive framework—begins by engaging the deeper context which constituted Paul’s whole person and defined his primary identity. This context went further and deeper than Paul’s origin and background, his ostensible roles and functions, the sum of his situations and circumstances; that is, the significance of this context went beyond the above factors while still interacting with them. Though all of these contexts have some significance for Paul, the distinction between them involves what is primary or just secondary.

This deeper context for Paul was made explicit to him on the Damascus road. Of course, this was where Paul encountered his “the LORD is one” and thus heard from “the LORD our God,” as the Shema echoed in his mind however faintly (Dt 6:4)<sup>2</sup>—and as

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<sup>1</sup> James D.G. Dunn, “Introduction” in James D.G. Dunn, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Unless indicated, all Scripture references are taken from the NRSV.

confusion gripped him in this confrontation by the God of his rigorous faith and his intense service. In other words, Paul was “face to face” with his now “beyond imagined” triune God. Given Paul’s familiarity with theophanies in the Hebrew Scripture, and his most recent experience with Stephen’s theophany (Acts 7:55-58; 22:20), consider what Paul could have imagined that God wanted with him.

It was this Christophany which engaged the monotheist Paul further and deeper into the context of his triune God. This was more than an event for Paul’s observation. What Paul experienced went beyond finding himself located in the presence of the whole and holy God to being directly involved in the triune God’s relational context and process embodied by Jesus. This relational experience initially constituted Paul’s journey to wholeness. His subsequent ongoing involvement in God’s relational context and process established the qualitative depth of his perceptual-interpretive framework and lens for the whole of his life, practice, thought and theology. This is the wholeness that had eluded Paul until his direct encounter with the whole of God. And God’s relational whole only on God’s relational terms signified what the triune God wanted with Paul on that Damascus road and thus ongoingly constituted all that further emerged.

Therefore, I suggest that the qualitative lens from this same perceptual-interpretive framework is also necessary to understand the depth/heart of Paul’s person and the Pauline corpus in their full significance. This study seeks to illuminate their relational significance to the triune God and their functional significance for God’s people, both in the past and for the present, whether in the academy located on the fragments of the Damascus road or in churches on the wandering road to Emmaus.

## **Critical Underlying Problem to Address**

The whole of God, which had eluded Paul prior to the Damascus road, will remain elusive in Pauline studies as long as a pervasive condition is not addressed. Until the eschaton God’s whole ongoingly has positioned against it the workings of reductionism. The significance of reductionism is contingent on the presence of God’s relational whole because reductionism’s only function is to interpret, understand and effectively redefine the whole by its mere parts, thus fragmenting the whole—essentially parts which are apart from the whole.

Reductionism most notably redefines the human person by utilizing only a quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework for a level of knowledge and understanding of the person merely from the outer in; namely, the person is defined quantitatively by what one does or has without any accounting of the whole person from the inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart. Neuroscience today illustrates this reductionism in its limited knowledge and understanding of the human person gained by observations interpreted from brain activity.<sup>3</sup> Yet persons of faith throughout history, both in the church and in the theological academy notably since the Enlightenment, have also labored under the influence of reductionism in their interpretation, understanding and identity of the whole person, not to mention of God; this reductionism includes redefining the relationships together necessary to be whole,

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent discussion of these limits, see Hans Küng, *The Beginning of All Things: Science and Religion*, trans. by John Bowden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 179-91.



God's relational whole on God's relational terms. The latter reduction is a relational consequence directly from the counter-relational nature of the workings of reductionism.

This points to the underlying problem that has made interpreting, understanding or defining Paul difficult; it also points to what was underlying Paul's existing condition upon entering the Damascus road. Consequently, this nuanced discussion is necessarily important to any study of Paul and must be included in this study.

In my opinion the most urgent, if not most important, issue in engaging Pauline study starts with the human person (including both Paul and all his listener-readers) and theological anthropology. Our assumptions on this matter form the basic lens to determine what we pay attention to as well as what we ignore. Generally speaking, conventional Pauline scholarship is justly characterized as quantitative study. We need to recognize that the prevailing interpretive lens of such quantitative engagement can only provide a partial perception of Paul at best and a distorted or misleading view of Paul at worst. This lens is illustrated by a recent "Mutts" comic strip: Mooch, a main character acting like a sage, is asked "Oh, all-knowing Shphinx, which is farther, Hoboken or the sun?", to which he responded "Hoboken. I can see the sun from here", as he sits on the beach during a summer afternoon.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, such a quantitative framework has deeper implications which involve human ontology and the human condition—namely, an ontology created in the image and likeness of the triune God, and the condition relationally responded to by the whole of God. Ontology is generally considered a philosophical notion. Yet I am referring to the qualitative whole constitution of the human person(s) that in theological significance, not philosophical, is embodied to function relationally, the ontology of which has been subject to human shaping. A quantitative framework imposes an outer-in ontology of the person in contrast to an inner-out ontology involved in a qualitative framework. These deeper implications apply not only to the subject matter of study but also to those who engage such a course of study. In this sense, it can be suggested that there is a "provincial nature" to Pauline studies (as well as NT studies), the extent of which still embeds scholarship in a critical status quo analogous to what a Pauline axiom describes as "always learning [e.g., volumes of studies] but never able to come to specific knowledge of the truth" (2 Tim 3:7).

Awareness of problems caused by a quantitative framework is growing in NT studies. In Markus Bockmuehl's critical assessment of the current state of his field, NT studies, he states:

This extraordinary degree of isolation and fragmentation pertains not merely in matters of method, but in virtually every aspect of the discipline. By any standard it is now impossible to keep up with the sheer quantity of publications, increased exponentially by two and a half decades of word-processing technology.

He goes on to comment that anyone seeking to engage in "a mainstream topic of NT scholarship is thus soon trapped" in this library of information from human construction.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Thanks to the creator of "Mutts", Patrick McDonnell, *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 33, 35.

Any course of study of Paul, and thus Scripture, must by its nature involve a two-fold epistemological focus with a compatible hermeneutic: one, a focus on Paul, and, two, a focus on God, with the focus on Paul as only a means to further focus on God—that is, as an epistemic means to know God more deeply. Thus, a focused study of Paul should never become an end in itself; otherwise we enter into reductionism by functionally (not necessarily theologically) redefining the ontology of the person of both the subject matter and those engaging in such study. When the focus of knowing God more deeply is the primary purpose for engaging a focused study of Paul, then necessarily this interrelated process must not be disconnected or else the subject matter becomes mere quantitative information—fragmented information with no relational significance to God and without functional significance for God’s people.

The necessary shift away from only a quantitative framework must include a framework which is both qualitative and relational. This does not involve movement into subjectivism, for example, involving only a subjective hermeneutic pointing to mysticism or a form of Gnosticism—as Paul has been perceived to utilize by some—or even fideism. Such subjectivity includes a mere reader-oriented approach ‘in front of the text’, by which the reader defines meaning and determines understanding. In the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, Friedrich Schleiermacher attempted a shift toward a qualitative-relational framework by reopening the relational door to the Other. However, he tended to shift too far toward subjectivity by giving more determination to the human consciousness of subject-reader in his “art of understanding”.<sup>6</sup> Certainly a subjective hermeneutic must be adequately accounted for and given balance. Yet, the reality and fact of persons (notably Paul and God) involved in relationships still require more than a quantitative framework and rationalist hermeneutic. Contemporary readers as persons themselves need to go beyond functioning as observers of information in order to engage also the qualitative context and relational process irreducibly essential for deeper and more complete understanding.

This two-fold epistemological focus on Paul and on God thus necessitates both a chastened quantitative approach and a vulnerable qualitative engagement in an integrated perceptual-interpretive framework for a compatible hermeneutic. This is what Paul identified as qualitative wholeness of mind, a whole *phronema*<sup>7</sup> (see Rom 8:6; 12:2). This whole *phronema* provides the necessary qualitative lens and mindset, *phroneo* (Rom 8:5), for inner-out ontology in order to integrate parts into the whole for understanding, a process rendered by the term *synesis* (Col 2:2)—that is, whole understanding of God, God’s relational response to the human condition, and thus the gospel (Eph 3:4-6). The process of *synesis* is not the coherence of mere information but is understanding the

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<sup>6</sup> For a brief description of Schleiermacher’s position in modern hermeneutics, see Anthony C. Thiselton, “Biblical studies and theoretical hermeneutics” in John Barton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge Press, 1998), 95-113.

<sup>7</sup> Greek and Hebrew word studies used in this study are taken from the following sources: Horst Balz, Gerhard Schneider, eds., *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., Bruce Waitke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980); Gerhard Kittel, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1981); Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *Hebrew-Greek Key Word Study Bible* (Chattanooga: AMG Publ., 1996).

coherence of the relational dynamics of all Scripture and the whole of Paul's life and practice; therefore *synesis* conjoins Paul's gospel to the human relational condition enslaved in reduced human ontology and function.

This process of study for *synesis* of both Paul and God is therefore a relational epistemic process—a process which can neither be reduced to only the quantitative, nor function with assumptions of human ontology from outer in. Jens Zimmermann concludes also from his examination of our hermeneutical heritage:

Knowledge in general and knowledge of God in particular are existential and relational. Knowledge, in other words, is not defined according to a modern scientific model of detached, neutral observation, but knowing requires that the knower be involved with the thing known.<sup>8</sup>

A qualitative *phronesis* from a whole *phronema* by nature has to involve a relational epistemic process because *synesis* is not a human construction. God makes possible this whole understanding (cf. *synesis* in 2 Tim 2:7) as an outcome of revelation, namely self-disclosure, which God reveals not in a vacuum, nor posts on the bulletin board of humanity, but only in the context and process of relationship (cf. Lk 10:21). Therefore this whole understanding is only a relational outcome, which makes *synesis* a function only of relationship, not human effort. This is what Paul experienced as the basis for what is definitive in his letters, which thus is analogous to Moses' experience with God (see Num 12:6-8).

This relational outcome from *synesis* points to the further and deeper epistemology which, notably, engages the experiential truth and whole of the gospel. This is the gospel distinguished from the reductionism of “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6). In our study we need to examine this gospel in which both Paul and his triune God are relationally involved together, and thus functionally make definitive for *synesis*, in order for us (as readers and as church) also to be relationally involved in relationship together, whether as persons in biblical study or as the whole of God's covenant family.

It is problematic, therefore, to study Paul solely in his human contexts (either from his past or in his present) since those do not constitute his primary identity, and thus are not what defined him and determined his whole life and practice from inner out. A focused study of Paul cannot be separated from the interrelated relational process with God. To grasp the primacy of who Paul was we need to look further and deeper to his direct relational involvement with his triune God emerging from the Damascus road. While all his other contexts and involvements are not unimportant, they remain secondary. To examine Paul apart from the whole of God's relational context and process is to uproot Paul and detach him from the qualitative relational significance of what and who defined Paul, and what and who determined his practice, thought and theology. Such disconnection renders Paul to reductionism and to a partial, fragmented or distorted view of his whole person, thus diminishing his gospel and minimalizing his triune God. It would be analogous to our cartoon character Mooch dispensing knowledge based only on what he could see from the position of where he was—the logic or methodology of which only confused his inquirer.

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<sup>8</sup> Jens Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics: An Incarnational-Trinitarian Theory of Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 131.

Given the relational nature of this epistemic process for knowing both Paul and God, there are further issues of reductionism which need to be addressed. Our implied ontology of the person indicated in how we functionally define the person also directly influences and determines how we perceive and engage relationships. For example, a quantitative ontology based on outer in engages relationship from outer in, signified primarily by quantity of activities, time and space occupied together, or resources possessed together, all without the significance of deeper relational connection. In contrast, a qualitative ontology based on inner out is involved in relationship from inner out, signified by the primacy of intimate relational connection, with all else not necessarily unimportant nevertheless secondary to this qualitative involvement. In other words, qualitative involvement in relationships is not mere measured engagement but by its nature necessitates vulnerable involvement. In the above interrelated dynamic, we can expect our working ontology (knowingly or unknowingly) to determine how we function in relationships (intentionally or unintentionally). And this also speaks to how we will engage the relational epistemic process; without vulnerable qualitative engagement we are left to an unchastened quantitative approach.

How we come to know Paul, specifically in his letters, will be a function of engaging the relational epistemic process. Yet this is only half of the epistemological focus; the other half of course is God. The two are interrelated but the focus on Paul is not always compatible with the focus on God. Considerable knowledge has developed about Paul which is perhaps better characterized by the limits of human construction, and which has little if any significance to God. Knowledge of God (not mere information about God), on the other hand, cannot be similarly reduced and limited to human construction. To engage the relational epistemic process to know God in Scripture is contingent on God's self-revelation, that is, on God's communicative action in self-disclosure within God's relational context and process—as witnessed on the Damascus road. Our response as readers in study or as church requires not only vulnerable involvement to complete the communication connection but also necessarily involves ongoing *epistemic humility*. Epistemic humility is indispensable to signify that knowing the whole of God is contingent on the relational initiative of God's grace—and that any other constructed information about God is mere ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism (cf. Paul's polemic, 1 Cor 4:6-7; 14:36).

This points to the functional significance of Paul's epistemological experience on the Damascus road that relationally rendered him in epistemic humility, and thus initiated the relational epistemic process constituting his letters as the text of Scripture, the revealed Word from God (cf. Paul's relational responsibility, Col 1:25). And this further points to contingency in the relational epistemic process not on mere Christophany(-ies) but on the whole incarnation of the Word, moreover on the presence and involvement of the whole of God (notably the Spirit), and therefore on the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition.

## Related Issues in Hermeneutical Impasse, Flow and Outcomes

Essentially for us, if Hoboken (which is in New Jersey, USA) is indeed farther away than the sun, as Mooch determined, then we not only have a problem involving reductionism of human ontology, and thus of engaging relationships, but also an issue involving hermeneutics of what we see or read in a text. What we perceive or pay attention to is one issue; how we interpret what we perceive is a further issue. No one can question the clarity of Mooch's vision to see the sun, but his not paying attention to distance or his lack of depth perception raises the issue of the reliability of his lens. Furthermore, his interpretation of the sun being closer because that's all he could see raises concern about the validity of his hermeneutic. Mooch concluded about the sun's nearness without positioning it into full context; and he failed to consider Hoboken in the context of the whole, which he could not see either from his quantitative position or by his interpretive lens. Thus Mooch's conclusion was based on the limited information and partial knowledge from his reductionist process, which yielded distorted understanding—not to mention reconstructing the cosmos. Yet, this is the common outcome from any of our perceptions not seen (or read) in the context of the whole, notably for Pauline studies as well as in the sphere of biblical and theological studies.

In his concern for contemporary NT studies, Markus Bockmuehl makes a plea for returning to its own object of study, the text of Scripture, yet to read the text in a further and deeper way.<sup>9</sup> This points to a qualitative hermeneutic having relational significance to God. In recent years, Kevin Vanhoozer, among others, has been advocating theological interpretation for more coherent understanding from the convergence of biblical and theological studies. He defines such reading of Scripture simply as coming to hear God's Word and to know God better.<sup>10</sup> This process is rightly simple, yet to engage this process as relational is not the requisite involvement readily pursued, nor can that involvement be pursued readily. Such pursuit easily becomes misguided, particularly when assuming a reductionist ontology of the person. Nevertheless, these concerns are much-needed qualitative shifts for deeper understanding, which is further signified by the concern for wisdom in hermeneutics.

In a common concern by a group of biblical scholars and theologians for wisdom in the interpretation of Scripture, David Ford and Graham Stanton share their working view:

More widely, wisdom is about trying to integrate knowledge, understanding, critical questioning and good judgment with a view to the flourishing of human life and the whole of creation. Theological wisdom attempts all that before God, alert to God, and in line with the purpose of God.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 19-25. For an overview of theory of interpretation and its history from which a proposal for the recovery of theological hermeneutics is made, see Zimmermann, *Recovering Theological Hermeneutics*.

<sup>11</sup> David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom* (London: SCM Press, 2003), 2-3.

Kevin Vanhoozer takes us even further by defining wisdom as an understanding of the whole. He says contemporary epistemology needs to recover two notions that have been neglected: (1) understanding (a grasp of meaning) and (2) wisdom (an understanding of the whole).<sup>12</sup>

Daniel Hardy points also to the primacy of the Scripture for a ‘density of meaning’ in which the texts open a new depth of meaning beyond other focuses in biblical interpretation. This density of meaning for Hardy conveys more than simply a quantitative ‘extensity of meanings’ found in the Scripture but suggests a qualitative ‘intensity of meaning’ in which “both God and humanity are joined, both heaven and history, not simply by way of assertions about them, but as dynamically interwoven and mutually operative.”<sup>13</sup> For the intensity of meaning, Hardy recognizes the need for the academy to be freed from the constraints of a merely quantitative interpretive framework, as well as from the reductionism of both the text and in practices/projects which distract from the text.

Yet, the qualitative significance of understanding wisdom in Scripture needs to be distinctly addressed in the integrated relational context and epistemic process, which can only be engaged with epistemic humility. This is why Jesus jumped with joy when the Father’s self-revelation made relational connection with vulnerably engaged “children,” not with the detached or measured engagement of “the wise and intelligent” (Lk 10:21). We today are challenged by this same process. That is, Jesus points to the necessity of the “hermeneutic of a child” who is vulnerably engaged essentially in a relational epistemic process. This hermeneutic certainly does not eliminate reason but puts rational interpretation into its rightful whole created context of relationship; thus in doing so, it does not disembody the text (the revelation of the Other) from its subject matter (the communicator as Subject in relationship). Just as a child vulnerably engages this relational context by the relational process of trust (not to be confused with fideism), this relational involvement with epistemic humility opens up outcomes of learning, understanding and experiencing whom/what we can know, count on, and be defined and determined by—as well as provides ongoing feedback of the significance of these aspects.

Rational interpretation alone tends to disembody the object of the text from its relational context and process, ironically, for example, by a quantitative framework embedded only in history—which is analogous to our friend Mooch’s “objectivity” that was unable to see the whole. This reduces the ontology of the object of the text in effect by fragmenting the whole object into component parts without understanding the object-Other as communicator-Subject self-disclosed for relationship together. However, engaging the Object of the text also as Subject is a function only of relationship, the relational involvement of which is irreducible and essential in order to grasp meaning and the whole. The fragmentation by rationalistic thinking signifies the human shaping or construction of the text, knowledge of God and understanding the whole, by efforts essentially of self-autonomy, self-determination and even self-justification. This is the hermeneutic of “the wise and intelligent” exposed by Jesus, which still challenges us

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<sup>12</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God, Scripture and Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 340.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel W. Hardy, “Reason, Wisdom and the Interpretation of Scripture” in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, 72-76.

today. Paul also addressed this reductionist function in wisdom and its perceptual-interpretive framework when he echoed Psalm 94:11 to counter reductionism in the early church (1 Cor 3:20) and its relational consequence (1 Cor 4:6; 8:1; 14:36).

This critique does not extend the existing issue between reason and faith but deepens the issue in order to address the underlying problem for both faith and reason. Nor is this an attempt to traverse Lessing's "ugly, broad ditch" (the gap between reason and faith)<sup>14</sup> but to deepen the ditch by defining faith only as the relational involvement of trust—just as Jesus did above—and thus also to redefine the gap with God indeed existing even for many professing mere faith.

This points to the limits, if not impasse, in the hermeneutical process which prevent further flow to deeper outcomes beyond merely what we know, to more significantly whom we know. Understanding and wisdom involve more than acquiring knowledge (even as so-called truth and moral imperatives) and must involve a deeper epistemology to have a grasp of the meaning of God's self-revelation, and thus an understanding of the whole, the whole of God and God's created whole.

Our understanding can be provisional and subject to further clarification or correction in the hermeneutical process. This occurs as the whole is illuminated, which our cartoon friend Mooch ignored, avoided or simply precluded by his logic in modernist assumptions and his limited observation of the sun. Emerging with postmodernism is a deconstructionist hermeneutic in which meaning is elusive yet pursued in an ongoing exercise of inclusivity and likely futility. These hermeneutical dynamics are signified by the notion of a 'hermeneutical circle': back and forth, or round and round in what can easily become a vicious circle. Engagement, however, in the relational epistemic process involves the hermeneutical dynamics more accurately defined not as a circle but as a 'hermeneutical spiral', or what James Dunn correctly describes as a 'three-dimensional cone'.<sup>15</sup> In a 'hermeneutical cone', successive interactions, even if they appear to be repetitious, between reader and text, Paul and God in a nonlinear-reflexive dynamic have an outcome of further and deeper understanding of the integrated functional and relational significance (defining meaning) of the person (both human and divine, Paul and God) and persons in relationships together both in community and communion constituting God's whole. Moreover, this hermeneutical cone will be invaluable for seeing the development of Paul's theology through his letters.

Each successive step in the process of this two-fold epistemological focus with a compatible hermeneutic brings forth the further outcome of deeper involvement in the relational convergence of God's whole only on God's terms. And while our understanding and grasp of meaning may still be somewhat provisional in this relational epistemic process, each outcome is more conclusive for both our further understanding of the whole and, more importantly, also our deeper experience of being whole. These outcomes are more definitive in the relational epistemic process, because they involve the whole ontology of our person from inner out engaged in the relational context necessary to constitute both epistemic and relational outcomes from the experiential reality of

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<sup>14</sup> Gotthold Lessing, *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans. by Henry Chadwick (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), 55.

<sup>15</sup> James D. G. Dunn, "Criteria for a Wise Reading of a Biblical Text" in David F. Ford and Graham Stanton, eds., *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, 51.

God's whole—the definitive whole vulnerably disclosed by God in his relational process. For Paul, this comprehensive reality was the experiential truth and whole of the gospel.

The experiential truth of the gospel was what deeply affected Paul on the Damascus road, that is to say, the gospel of 'the embodied Truth for relationship'. The Truth cannot be reduced to mere propositional truth claims, for such reductionism would essentially disembodify the Word made flesh, and thus render the gospel devoid of its integrated functional and relational significance of the whole of God. Again, this Truth was vulnerably disclosed in order to constitute the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition in relationship together. Such reductionism then is not the gospel Paul encountered on the Damascus road. Paul experienced only the embodied Truth for relationship together because the Truth is only for relationship, nothing less and no substitutes. This relational outcome was the experiential truth of the whole gospel through which Paul's hermeneutical process flowed to understand the whole as God's relational whole only on God's relational terms.

Therefore, even for Paul, experiential truth must involve a relational epistemic process where truth is beyond oneself/ourselves as "subject" and is definitively found in the Other as "object" (notably in quantitative history); yet, and this is critical, this Object is also distinctly known (specifically, qualitatively experienced) as Subject in relationship together. This conjoined Object-Subject is nothing less than the embodied experiential Truth, who as Object authored the propositional content of the gospel, and who, most importantly, as Subject constitutes the inseparable functional and relational significance of the gospel—with nothing less, even for Paul's so-called gospel. This is the Truth of the gospel for whom Paul definitively witnessed that will unfold in this study of Paul's life, practice, thought and theology.

Reflecting on the flow and outcome of this hermeneutical process helps us to further formulate a working view of wisdom, which we can experience with Paul during the course of this study:

Wisdom signifies the relationally reciprocal *means* both to know the whole, that is, of God's intimate desires as disclosed to us, as well as to act on those desires only in the relational response desirable to God; wisdom ongoingly involves the relational means to both, for which it is accountable. Therefore, wisdom is not an *end* in itself which we can claim as an attribute in our possession; nor is wisdom a source of knowledge and behavior which, in effect, become self-determining or self-promoting, regardless of ethical and moral value. Rather, wisdom is a function in relational significance which witnesses to and highlights the whole of God, who initiates vulnerably disclosing himself relationally with us as the source of all wisdom constituting our wisdom by reciprocal relationship. Thus by its relational nature, unmistakable wisdom functions only with epistemic humility to illuminate the whole of God.

Any significant accounting of wisdom in the interpretation of Scripture must involve this function.

The function of wisdom to help us understand the whole leads us to the question: What is this whole, God's whole? First, we cannot think or describe in quantitative static terms that which is qualitatively dynamic, though not the same as being 'in process'. In



the whole's functional significance, being whole or wholeness is understood as involving necessarily the following:

Being whole, wholeness, constitutes the ongoing life and function of the whole of God (the Trinity), who created human life and function with the ontology of the person in the qualitative image of God, and thus the person was created whole signified by the qualitative function of the heart; this function of the person is integrated inseparably to the created design and purpose for relationships and the relational involvement necessary together to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity—nothing less and no substitutes (cf. Gen 1:27; 2:18; Col 3:10-11). Therefore, the individual person alone is never sufficient to complete being whole; to be whole by its created nature in the image and likeness of the whole of God involves also the relationships together necessary to be whole, God's relational whole. This also is signified by how each person in the Trinity is understood. No trinitarian person alone is the whole of God. That is, each trinitarian person is wholly God but is not complete in being the whole of God apart from the other trinitarian persons; necessarily by its nature only the three trinitarian persons together constitute the relational ontology of the Trinity—in whose likeness human persons have been created and thus must function by its nature to be whole, God's relational whole.

Anything less and any substitutes are reductions of the whole, thus can never reflect, experience or represent wholeness; at best they are only the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism and its counter-relational work. In Paul's journey to wholeness, he did not become a trinitarian in the later theological tradition. Yet, Paul fully grasped the whole of God, and all reference to the Trinity in this study is rendered by 'the whole of God'.

This is the promissory witness of Scripture and the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition since the primordial garden—that is, for all who receive and respond back. To constitute Abraham in covenant relationship together, God defined for him the following terms for relationship: "Walk before me and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). "Blameless" (*tamiym*) denotes to be complete, whole; that is, *tamiym* is not about mere moral and ethical purity but it involves the ontology of being whole. It is on the basis of this integrated functional and relational significance that those whose life and practice are *tamiym* are blessed along with Abraham (cf. Ps 119:1). Paul did not receive this blessing on the Damascus road for his rigorous faith as a Pharisee and intense service persecuting the church. On the contrary, *tamiym* signifies the *epistemological clarification* and *hermeneutical correction* he experienced instead. It is this definitive whole that redefined Paul's person from inner out and newly determined his life, practice, thought and theology.

Therefore what emerged from Paul's confrontation by the Light—unlike the misleading glare from Mooch's sun—was indeed the relational outcome of the definitive blessing by the whole of God who "made his face shine upon you and was gracious to you...turned his face toward you and gave you *shalom* [wholeness]" (Num 6:24-26).

## A Necessary Approach to Paul

As a Jew Paul knew the significance of having Yhwh “put my name on the Israelites and I will bless them” (Num 6:27). While rooted in ancient Israel and likely embedded in Second Temple Judaism from the exile, however, Paul had yet to grasp the relational significance of “give you peace.” Since the Jewish people were collectively redeemed earlier from slavery and later from exile, and presently constrained by Greco-Roman dominance, Paul’s likely perception of peace focused on the reductionist function of Israel more as nation-state rather than in the integrated functional and relational significance of covenant relationship together. Yet the latter is the only significance to the definitive blessing by the whole of God to “give peace” to those who bear his name. The term for “give” (*siym*) has various shades of meaning signifying to bring change and establish a new relationship together. That is, the blessing from God will bring redemptive change and establish a new relationship together in *wholeness*, just as God covenanted with Abraham.

As we talk about Paul emerging from the Damascus road, we are discussing a person who still remained a Jew and also became a follower of Christ. This suggests either a primary identity of Jew or follower of Christ, or a hybrid identity; yet either identity still defines Paul only by human contextualization. In Pauline studies this has involved comparing or contrasting Judaism and early Christianity as religious frameworks. These approaches have not been sufficient to fully understand Paul, no matter how nuanced or “fresh” the study. We need to go deeper to both see and understand Paul’s whole person. The defining issue underlying Paul’s life and practice—whether as a Jew in Judaism or even as a follower of Christ in Christianity—that he “discovered” and experienced on the Damascus road and subsequently grasped in relational progression, was the vital issue of reductionism versus God’s whole. This issue engages the functional dynamics of *reductionism as sin*, signifying the workings of the human relational condition to be apart from God’s whole. In spite of his rigorous faith and intense service, this is the condition in which Paul was not merely contextually embedded but functionally enslaved, and thus in need of redemption and reconciliation to God’s whole. I will contend that reductionism as sin and sin as reductionism became the heart of Paul’s polemic and the substance of his fight for the truth (read whole) of the gospel—God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms. This of course was the journey first of his own experience, and then his ongoing practice in ministry and forming theology.

Paul’s vital issue of reductionism versus God’s whole is not clearly perceived by examining only his human contexts, whether religious or sociocultural. Fragments of it are certainly present there, yet an interpretive lens that limits Paul to human contextualization is unable to piece together the various parts of Paul necessary for the understanding of the whole to go beyond reductionism—the workings of which notably influenced or shaped his human contexts, including the early church.

This issue only emerges clearly and becomes conclusive in the whole of God’s relational context and process, in which Paul became engaged and by whom he was ongoingly constituted. Thus, to examine Paul apart from God’s relational context and

process is to decontextualize him not only from the defining issue underlying his past life and practice, but also from the primary identity presently defining what and who his person is, as well as from who and what determined the whole of his practice, thought and theology. Such decontextualization leaves us with a fragmented Paul, the fragments of which are insufficient to understand the whole of Paul. The outcome is a Paul who will remain beyond our relational and theological grasp.

I suggest that the approaches (past and present) to Paul themselves have generated many of the Pauline issues (most notably the doctrine of justification) in contemporary studies (including the so-called new Paul perspective), and were not functional issues for Paul himself. Related to this, Markus Bockmuehl observes in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries NT scholar's archeological approach and assumption:

The earlier the sources, the closer we get to the truth; the later the sources, the more corrupted they have become by pious accretions and ecclesiastical impositions of conformity. But it also soon became clear that the more we deconstruct our sources, the taller our speculations become—and the more we end up unself-critically talking to ourselves about ourselves.<sup>16</sup>

Likewise, the more Paul has been fragmented, the further the speculation about him has developed. More than a few Pauline issues would have no significance today if the approach of modern readers perceived Paul in his involvement in God's relational context and process and not merely in his human contexts.

The issues of anything less and any substitutes of Paul's primary context were not functional issues for Paul, since they were not the source of defining and determining who he was and whose he was. In approaching Paul we can neither fully understand particular aspects nor find a unity in his thought and theology until we grasp where Paul is coming from—that is, what defined and determined his life and practice. The significant nature and function of who Paul was and whose he was were conjointly qualitative and relational involvement.

This of course points to the qualitative assumptions I have in my own perceptual-interpretive framework. Moreover, I suggest that this qualitative lens leads to the necessary understanding that does not stop at the whole of Paul and his relational witness, but, even more significantly, leads to understanding of the whole of Jesus and of God in both self-disclosure and relational response to us, and thus of the whole of Scripture. The fact and reality of persons in relationships require a hermeneutic for contemporary readers to go beyond the function as mere observers of information in order to engage the qualitative relational context and process necessary for deeper meaning and more complete understanding. This study takes this approach as the necessary basis to support the following outcomes.

The ongoing dynamic interaction of these two contexts (divine and human) is critical to our perception and understanding of reductionism. We need to realize that the context of the whole is necessary to expose the presence of reductionism and to understand its functional dynamics, most significantly in its counter-relational work. Paul was not only engaged by God's relational context on the Damascus road of human contextualization but he also reciprocally engaged God's relational context by his own

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<sup>16</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 162.

vulnerable involvement in God's relational process. His relational involvement with the whole of God was made functional even from within his human contexts by what can be defined as *the process of reciprocating contextualization*:

the ongoing relational involvement with God in the trinitarian relational context on God's terms for relationship together, by which engagement in human contexts is determined by God in order to be God's whole, live whole together, and thus to make whole in the world.<sup>17</sup>

Without the primacy of God's relational context for reciprocal contextualization, we are left with only the influence and shaping from human contextualization, which in itself has been influenced and shaped by reductionism. It is an insurmountable challenge to recognize the source of this influence and shaping unless we have God's whole (from top-down self-disclosure) for reference in the process of reciprocating contextualization. Reductionism in effect reverses this process from the bottom-up by giving primacy to human contextualization both to define and determine human ontology from outer in, as well as to construct knowledge of God in order to effectively counter God's whole.

This process of reciprocating contextualization functionally determined Paul's person, practice, thought and theology. Thus 'the historical Paul' seen within human contextualization in the canonical texts is also 'the relational Paul' in God's relational context and process constituting God's revealed Word, which further made definitive God's whole to him to additionally constitute the significance of 'the theological Paul'. The historical Paul, relational Paul and theological Paul converge in the text of God's Word by reciprocating contextualization to define and determine the whole of Paul's person, practice, thought and theology.

This, I suggest, is how Paul needs to be approached in order to grasp him. Modern readers cannot directly engage the historical Paul seen within past human contextualization, as if to be transported back into the past as direct participants. Yet, we can engage the relational Paul and theological Paul who converge with the historical Paul. This process of engagement requires our qualitative involvement from a non-reductionist lens to become essentially indirect participant readers—readers who do not construct, deconstruct, reconstruct or otherwise shape the text on one's own terms, which includes one's unchastened imagination (cf. Paul's lens in Eph 3:20). The latter human activities are precluded for indirect participant readers, because the text involves persons beyond mere objects of study who are *subjects* with their own integrity functioning in an identity only they have defined and determined, thus which are not reducible or negotiable to readers' terms and shaping. This not only redeems such readers of the responsibility to speak for the text, namely Paul, Jesus and God; of equal importance, it also reconciles all readers to the vulnerability necessary first to listen to the text for the whole of Paul, Jesus and God speaking for themselves, and then to further participate with our relational response. Our relational response to the past with Paul is as indirect participants but our relational response to the present with God can only be as direct

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<sup>17</sup> For further understanding of the function of reciprocating contextualization seen in the life of Jesus, see my study, *Sanctified Christology; A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008), online at <http://www.4X12.org>.

participants. The relational response of these readers is not virtual (as faith often becomes) but the vulnerable relational involvement of their whole persons.

Therefore, this engagement of Paul does not occur by reading the canonical texts as mere object for study but only by relational involvement in the *text as God's communicated Word* constituted by God's relational context and process (as noted earlier in Lk 10:21). The texts themselves are the same text of Scripture—quantitatively and qualitatively—but are only approached with different processes of engagement. Unlike Karl Barth's qualitative yet ambiguous engagement,<sup>18</sup> however, the above process of engagement with God's Word is distinguished by the relational involvement of reciprocal contextualization. Our relational involvement in the same text—in which the historical, relational, and theological Paul converge—is our connection with the whole of Paul, who was also relationally involved with the same God's revealed Word to him (communicated Word to us), which was constituted in the same relational context and process of God. The same text and same relational context and process signify our mutual participation in which we not only further know Paul but more deeply know the whole of God. This relational outcome is the intensity of meaning (noted earlier) experienced with the whole of Paul—the relational outcome which his whole person intensified throughout his letters, and which this study hopes to make clear.

The above convergence for the theological Paul in Scripture to constitute the significance of his theology, moreover, points to the interdependence between theology and Scripture. This interdependent relationship has been separated, treated as distant or casual in significance, and its function between biblical and theological studies essentially absent. Markus Bockmuehl further observes today: “Much theological and biblical scholarship does not now pay even lip service to the once universal conviction that Christian theology is at its heart an *exegetical* discipline. ...For its [early church] theologians, the study of Scripture was both source and destiny of their reason and wisdom.”<sup>19</sup>

If we are to understand both Paul and Paul's theology, then our biblical study and theological task must also converge in the text-as-God's-Word for understanding of the whole. Just as Paul implicitly understood the necessity of the irreducible relationship between his interpretation of God's revelation to him and his theology—the former being the basis constituting the significance of the latter—this is how we also need to approach Paul and indeed participate with him in the relational epistemic process to understand God's whole. This inseparable relationship points to the need for theological interpretation which is both qualitative and relational; this is necessary in order to be compatible for the relational epistemic process—a necessary approach to Paul in this study.

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<sup>18</sup> See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. III, eds., G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1958), 65-81.

<sup>19</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 88.

## Doing Theology

The previous discussion raises some issues about the conventional task of doing theology. In my opinion I do not think that Paul intentionally engaged in doing theology, much less imagined himself as a theologian. Paul was otherwise engaged in reciprocating contextualization between his involvement in God's relational context and process constituting God's vulnerable relational action, and his involvement in the human condition of human contextualization. Paul's ongoing involvement in the latter was always to make definitive, on the basis of his involvement in the former, God's relational response to make whole the human relational condition. This constituted, for example, his involvement with those to whom his letters were addressed. This making-definitive purpose necessarily included a form of theological discourse, yet in effect Paul was too involved mutually with God's life and human life to consider a separate task of doing theology. In this sense, Paul was involved in the dynamic relational process of *living* theology rather than in the static activity of merely "doing" theology.

Doing theology presents issues and can be more questionable than meaningful. In addition to the issues already noted earlier, we can further learn from Paul about theological engagement and process. As we will gain from Paul, engaging theology must not be done in isolation or in a "spiritual vacuum", even as one is reflecting. We should not be misled by such a perception of Paul, notably when he went off to Arabia following his Damascus road experience without consulting the other apostles (Gal 1:16-17). Such isolated or private theology likely becomes one's personal theology (which some have interpreted about Paul and his gospel), or more of a sense of theology on "my terms," perhaps even better described as "*egology*" not "*theology*." The implication of Peter's contrary behavior with Jesus points to such a theology formulated on his own terms (see Mt 16:21-22, Jn 13:6-8)—even after confessing a fundamental truth-claim of faith revealed to him by the Father (Mt 16:15-17). These efforts justify a postmodern hermeneutic of suspicion and deconstruction.

Likewise, engaging theology only in human contextualization, even as one is in conversation with the Word as Peter was, becomes theological discourse determined by human shaping (individual and/or collective). This also is theology on my/our terms, not God's terms, thus has more the sense of anthropological theology or sociocultural theology. This also can be seen in Peter's (also collective) theology about purity (Acts 10:13-14). The human shaping of Peter's theological discourse in this situation demonstrated that his theology was not determined by his dialogue with Jesus earlier, when Jesus emphatically declared what is unclean and defined the whole of human ontology from inner out signified by the heart (Mt 15:10-20). Even after this interaction with the embodied Word, Peter continued to shape his own theology based on a reductionist interpretive framework. Moreover, even after the above Christophany corrected his theology, Peter continued to be shaped by his human contextualization with the Jews, thus affecting his relationships with Gentiles.

This is neither to suggest that Paul was immune to such shaping nor without influence from some of the same sources, as we will discuss later in this study. Yet, for Peter this is the relational consequence of engaging reductionism in its counter-relational work, the repercussions of which directly conflicted with the truth of the whole gospel. Therefore, Paul's direct involvement with the experiential Truth of the gospel provided

the definitive theological basis by which he confronted Peter about his reductionism (see Gal 2:11-14); this was the relational outcome of Paul's reciprocating contextualization.

Paul and Peter did not simply have a difference of theological opinion, shaped by their respective so-called specialized missions in human contextualization. Their different interpretive frameworks and related lenses determined the extent to which the embodied Word (or text-as-God's-communicated-Word for us) was paid attention to or ignored, which applied also to the Jewish Scripture. Paul's primacy given to God's Word revealed to him was the basis which made conclusive his thought and theology. The absence of this primacy led to Peter's unfounded thought and tenuous theology. From the point of view of historic Christian thought and life from its inception, Markus Bockmuehl comments that "to read Scripture is never some jumping-off point from which to abstract or develop the 'real' intellectual or theological task."<sup>20</sup> Paul established the precedent needed for doing theology to be of significance to God, not to us, and to be defining God's Word, not ours.

In other words, theology which truly signifies a word from above is a function of relationship in God's relational context and process. For engaging theology to have this significance, it must, by the revealed nature of its Subject, always be engaged in relationship with this Subject, not with impersonal subject matter. This is the context and terms (process) of God's revelation—notably self-disclosed in the embodied Word and further constituted by the Spirit. Thus, unlike the static activity of merely "doing" theology, *doing-as-living* theology is first and foremost the personal engagement of God in relationship, not on my/our terms but only on God's relational terms—the only terms which constitute God's revelation/communication in the text of Scripture. Reciprocally, involvement with God in the whole of God's relational context and process also includes *doing-as-living* theology in relationship with God's people for wholeness in theology and practice. These functional relationships together provide the qualitative relational context and process for God's people to know God in communion wholly, and thus to grow in the relationships together necessary to be whole (one) in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God. This is the nature of Paul's theology that he made consummate in the ecclesiology of the whole, which will unfold in this study.

Moreover, this experiential truth from the relational involvement in *living* theology further extends theological discourse by reciprocating contextualization in relation to all humanity and creation. It is this relational context and process in which *living* theology becomes truly 'logos of God', that is, theology which speaks of God's whole on God's relational terms for the human relational condition—thus discourse more relational than theological. For Paul, this is the experiential truth and whole of the gospel—the only gospel his person ongoingly witnessed to and his theology increasingly made definitive in its functional and relational significance, as I will point out through the course of this study.

Paul's involvement in the dynamic relational process of *living* theology informs us of a further important matter to understand about his thought and theology. It would be unfounded to consider Paul's thought and theology as having emerged from the Damascus road essentially fully developed. This would imply that Paul's life and practice post-Damascus road neither experienced growth nor needed development but were fully mature. Such an assumption derives from a reduction of Paul's whole person that sees

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<sup>20</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 90.

and defines him on the basis of what he did and the role he served, notable as they were given his call and commission to assume leadership in the early church. Yet, as evidenced in the Pauline corpus, first and foremost for Paul was the experiential truth of relationship together with the whole of God emerging from the Damascus road, with further and deeper relational involvement together in relational progression since that pivotal relational encounter. Paul's person was indeed on a journey which unfolded in his letters distinctly as a relational journey. In a later letter Paul puts his whole life into this deeper relational context to testify to his own ongoing process of growth and development, albeit in God's eschatological trajectory (Phil 3:7-11).

Paul's relational journey with Christ together with the Spirit went deeper than as servant-apostle or only in his mission-role. His whole person ongoingly engaged them in the whole of God's relational context and process for involvement in the relational epistemic process. This relational involvement was necessary not only for "the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord," but also for the increasing *synesis* (understanding the whole) to make conclusive the theological basis for the relational and functional significance of the whole gospel, not a reduced gospel of human shaping. While the theological Paul germinated from the Damascus road, his theology was increasingly constituted as God's whole was made definitive to him in God's relational context and process, which included deeper theological reflection on the Jewish Scripture. Contrary to any perception of Paul as a ready-made theologian with an instant theology, I suggest in this study that in the process of *living* theology, Paul's thought and theology unfold and cohere in his letters. This view thus both points to his growth and development in the wholeness constituted 'in Christ', and further suggests a likely chronological order for his letters.

Challenged by the above discussion, we need to ask ourselves whether we are simply engaging the activity of "doing" theology, or are actually involved in *doing-as-living* theology. In terms of function, the latter is more accurately defined as simply the dynamic relational process of *living* theology. The theological task then is either engagement as an *end* in itself, or involvement as the *means* to something further and deeper.

*Living* theology by its nature necessitates an integrated functional and relational significance, which vulnerably involves the reciprocal relational process of mutually engaging God and being engaged by God, thus involvement in the process of receiving and responding to God's communicative action. This relational involvement is the necessary relational means, not mere method, to deeper outcomes. In this process the following working paradigm for these theological outcomes can be defined to provide focus for our theological engagement:

Theology emerges from the intimate reflection on the outcome of receiving and responding to God's communicative action. On this basis, theology needs to be understood beyond the task of formulating doctrines (even systematically) informing us about God to its deeper significance of making definitive the coherence of God's self-revelation vulnerably communicated to us as God's Word only for the primacy of relationship together: First, in order that we can vulnerably know the triune God and intimately experience the communion of life together in the ongoing function of transformed relationships as the whole of God's family. Second, so that we



relationally embody the interdependent relationships necessary to be God's whole in likeness of the Trinity, and thus relationally witness to the experiential truth and whole of the gospel for the human condition to be made whole—God's relational whole only on God's relational terms, with nothing less and no substitutes.

Therefore, *living* theology is only a relational outcome—relational outcome from and with God. In this reciprocal relational process, theological engagement never disconnects the significance of theology from the text of God's communicated Word, and always keeps inseparable the integrated relationship between theology and practice. Thus, this relational outcome for *living* theology is signified by 'wholeness in theology and practice', which is what Paul's person and theology make functional for us, as this study attempts to clarify. And what I hope we grasp also from Paul in the course of study is the experiential truth that anything less and any substitutes would be ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism.

## **The Basis for Certain Assumptions**

Along with the qualitative assumptions I have in my own perceptual-interpretive framework noted earlier, there are other working assumptions or presuppositions in this study which will be helpful to note.

Pauline studies has long entertained a wide range of speculation (or theory). The diversity of speculation is neither lacking nor likely to end; and the prevalence of speculation suggests that theorizing is the defining characteristic for all studies of Paul. Stephen Westerholm describes those who write about Paul:

Given a first-century apostle a few of whose letters we have read, we make bold to distinguish what he said from what he really thought, and even to pontificate on why he thought the way we think he did. Indeed, as the assumptions that governed Paul's thinking become more and more remote from our own, the assurance with which we pronounce on the direction and deficiencies of his reasoning seems only to increase.<sup>21</sup>

This seemingly endless process for speculation to prevail, on the one hand, is understandable in part given the need to make some assumptions about Paul. On the other, though speculation about Paul will always be necessary to some extent, speculations rise or fall with our perceptual-interpretive framework and our assumptions. Some assumptions have more of a basis than others. For the study of Paul, I suggest there is a basis to make certain assumptions.

Scholars have determined that the most undisputed letters in the Pauline corpus are limited to 1 & 2 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, Galatians, Romans, Philippians and Philemon, and not necessarily in this order. The other six letters traditionally attributed to Paul have various points of dispute which may or may not be sufficient for scholars to exclude them from the Pauline corpus. In this study, my working assumption is to include

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 214.

all thirteen letters in Paul's corpus partly on the basis of the following, with more said about specific letters later. Though disputed letters appear not to be congruent with, for example, Paul's writing style (the issue of dissimilarity), they still seem congruent with Paul's thought (the issue of similarity). The degree of dissimilarity-similarity is clearly an issue, yet it is not unreasonable to assume the following: On the basis of congruence of thought, it is not incompatible to include the disputed letters in Paul's corpus, even though who specifically penned them is unclear. Where there is some variation in Paul's thought (notably in Col and Eph) from undisputed letters, this difference emerged in later letters as the further development of his thought and theology—notably from Galatians and Romans, yet only as a further application and extension of them. This development did not signify dissimilarity, but rather constituted the further and deeper understanding of the whole in Paul's thought. Moreover, and in my opinion of greater significance, on the basis of the Spirit's influence/function—admittedly also overlapping into assumption—to develop these letters, notably their thought, as well as to have them included in the canon, I affirm without equivocation that they are wholly compatible as Paul's own thought and can be included in Paul's corpus.

Additionally related, the chronology of Paul's life and order of his letters are not definitive, which is further signified by various theories. These speculations make the issue of Paul's chronology tenuous and, in actuality, effectively detracting from the more primary significance of his life as a whole and of the substantive content developed in his letters—though development in his thought and theology suggests an order for his letters, to be discussed later. I will concentrate on the primary significance throughout this study and only touch on issues of chronology along the way, as it is necessary for the primary significance—for example, about whether Romans or Galatians was written first.

In this approach certain assumptions will definitely be made—for example, about dating the Pastorals later than Paul, discussed later—which I hope will not diminish the qualitative (though it limits the quantitative) focus necessary for the primary significance of Paul's life and letters. Paul's purpose most certainly was not to highlight his life, and thus to get embedded in the details about him—many of which are only of secondary significance compared to the primary significance of his purpose. I will assume that same purpose in order to not make Paul the highlight of this study; this allows greater attention to the second part of the two-fold epistemological focus, God. What we can expect then to emerge from such Pauline study are not variable fragments from the Pauline corpus, which often have been difficult to interrelate, much less unite. Rather what will emerge is Paul's coherence with the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition for relationship together as God's whole only on God's terms.

We should not look for a unity in Paul's thought and theology within his letters until we understand where Paul is coming from, that is, what primarily defines and determines his life and practice. Without this grasp of Paul, any apparent unity and coherence will either be imposed on Paul by his readers or remain elusive to them. The congruence in Paul's life and practice to his purpose and thus his coherence were constituted in cooperative relationship with the Spirit. This is the often-forgotten-trinitarian Person, whom Pauline scholarship has neglected or conveniently

minimalized,<sup>22</sup> yet whom Paul depended on to further unfold, develop and bring to completion the whole of God's relational response in the eschatological big picture—including the relational outcome 'already' constituted by the Spirit, which is at the heart of Paul. And it is by this same dependence on and cooperative relational involvement with the Spirit in which I also engage the Spirit for this study, along with Paul.

In doing so, I also bring with me into this study the related Christian confessions of faith and theological convictions not just about the Spirit but most notably about Jesus, the embodied Word from God the Father—who communicated for relational necessity, “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5)—and thus expressly about the whole of God, the Trinity. These personal convictions of the relational God bring a qualitative bias to my interpretation both of Paul's corpus and of the whole biblical text. Markus Bockmuehl reports that this would be contrary to some professional societies and departments of religious studies where assertions are made: that such convictions have no place in serious study of the Bible, and that such presuppositions must be set aside by biblical exegetes (without clarity of how or why one might achieve this), moreover that such theology must be erased from scholarly discourse.<sup>23</sup> Such a mindset begs the question: Who then of significance in relation to God can engage the text of God's Word and can participate in discourse which is indeed *theological*? Given that this so-called objective approach has illuminated little significance, if any, about the text and its subject matter, I do not consider it unreasonable to engage this study vulnerably with who I am, where I am, and, thankfully, whose I am, nor consider it meaningful any longer to engage this study other than with this approach.

While in ongoing reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, I enter this study with a lens that seeks not to highlight my view by eclipsing the text, nor to have my view validated. Rather, by the nature of my qualitative lens, I am responsible to engage the text and its subject(s) on their terms, and thus to interact with them in mutual function to “listen” first and then to respond from where I am. My response and involvement, however, always need to be compatible with the qualitative-relational terms of God's self-disclosure (review previous discussion of Lk 10:21). My engagement, therefore, needs to be with vulnerable involvement, not detached or measured observation, so that my “listening” is open to changing, even transforming, where I am and thus to further and more deeply (re)define and determine my interpretation and response. This is how Paul listened on the Damascus road and what emerged from him in the journey of his person.

For us as it was for Paul, in this dynamic relational epistemic process both knowledge of God is received and understanding of the whole of God is experienced—the relational outcome of which is the basis for *theology* and *living* theology. What follows in this study is a summary account of this experiential truth for Paul.

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<sup>22</sup> As one exception to this urgent discussion on pneumatology, see the exegetical study by Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

<sup>23</sup> Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word*, 76.



## Chapter 2 Paul's Journey Begins and Emerges

Since I discovered Paul on the Damascus road, it would seem logical to start discussing his journey from that time. Yet a larger context is important to frame the whole of Paul who emerged from the Damascus road. What happened to Paul on that road locates unequivocally the pivotal juncture of his journey, where he encounters the Light embodied in the Word from God and when his journey converges with the pivot of all human history, Jesus. Before his journey could shift forward from this axis, however, it first needed to swing back. For Paul, this essentially evoked a retrospective journey to give further context to his life and practice. That is, his journey (including both collective and shared) had to rewind not only through his life just prior to the Damascus road but also in fact rewind further back through Abraham all the way to creation. The whole of Paul's journey originated at creation, and this retrospective journey is necessary for further context to fill the gap in his journey. It is only from this point of origin that the journey of Paul's person has meaning and that the subsequent shaping of his person can be understood. Moreover, this retrospective journey is necessary to further understand what fully happened to Paul on the Damascus road, and to grasp what emerged, developed and matured as a result of this pivotal juncture.

These next three chapters in this section examine the whole of Paul's journey, with expanded discussion of specific aspects of his practice, thought and theology throughout this study.

### The Journey Begins

Details of Paul's biography are very sketchy and we have only general references to his life prior to the Damascus road. From a partial rewind of Paul's collective-journey, we do know from his roots back to Abraham the following: From childhood Paul was certainly foremost a part of Israel ("the tribe of Benjamin") and a Jew ("a Hebrew of Hebrews") to the core as signified by observance of torah ("a Pharisee," Phil 3:5), who was educated strictly according to the law of their fathers (Acts 22:3; 26:4-5), and perhaps advanced to the top of his class (Gal 1:14). Yet, to go even deeper than this primary identity for Paul, we need to rewind further back to creation to locate the origin where Paul was *first* a human person. This is the shared-journey which Paul shared in common with all human persons. It is the shared-journey of this person who—as the Paul subsequently shaped, defined and determined by the above details—needed to grasp the meaning of *what* was indeed foremost about his person, and as a result would be able to experience *who* was indeed primary of his person. This necessitated going deeper than his

collective identity to involve the roots of his *ontological identity*—the identity integrating both *what* as well as *who* Paul was.

As a student of the Jewish Scripture, Paul had access to Scripture and was aware of its content. It is likely then that Paul was familiar with the thoughtful—and no doubt discussion-provoking—question: “What are human beings [*enos*, persons] that you are mindful of [*zakar*, think, reflect upon] them, mortals [*ben adam*, offspring of persons] that you care for them [*paqad*, positive action of involvement by a superior]?” (Ps 8:4), which Psalm 144:3 echoes (also in Heb 2:6) with the variation “...that you know [*yada*] the person” and “think of them with esteem [*hasab*]?” In his cynicism or despair, Job initially had raised the same question from an opposite approach: “What are human persons that you make such a big deal [*gadal*] of them, that you even focus your heart [*leb*] on them and are involved [*paqad*] with them every day...all the time?” (Job 7:17-18, my paraphrase).

On the surface, this question may appear to be about humans but it is actually about God. Yet, though the question was raised in the above contexts with the primary focus pointing to what, who and how God is, it also points secondarily to what the human person is. Pointing to the whole and holy God, the answer rightly defines Yhwh as deeply involved with the human person for the purpose of relationship together, not merely to exercise sovereignty and authority over his creation; and this was Job’s eventual relational conclusion in spite of his debilitating situation and circumstance (Job 42:1-6). What, who and how Yhwh *is* wholly constitutes this relational involvement with the human person. At the same time, it also helps to know what the human person *is* to further understand the whole of God’s relational involvement. What each *is* is intrinsically interrelated. Though the human person does not constitute God’s relational involvement, the latter constitutes the former wholly in the qualitative image of God for relationship together to be whole in likeness of the whole of God—apart from whom is the human condition. Therefore, what each *is* is irreducible, and the reduction of either has implications for reducing the other—reducing functionally if not also theologically. Moreover, any such reductionism always includes relational consequences between them due to the counter-relational nature of how reductionism works.

Reflecting on this question swung Paul (as well as swings his readers) back to the origin of his person in order to grasp the meaning of the person in full created significance—as well as to understand how subsequently his own person had been reduced from that full significance. By rewinding his shared-journey to the beginning, Paul would recall from the creation narratives that the origin of his person was indeed: *the person created in the qualitative image of God*—the whole of God increasingly known as the triune God and later as the Trinity—and thus *the person constituted with a whole ontology from inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart; therefore this whole person was created with other whole persons in God’s design and purpose for the primacy of relationships together, in order to be whole in likeness of the relational ontology of the triune God* (Gen 1:27-28; 2:18). This is the theological anthropology made definitive for Paul that by its nature became the functional key for his whole person, and that for his readers becomes a hermeneutical key for understanding the depth of Paul (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).

This shared-journey of Paul’s person is in part the reason why it is inadequate to attempt to understand Paul only from human contexts such as Judaism (which in itself

was diverse, even for Pharisees) and the Greco-Roman world, or even in the early church. There is a deeper context defining and determining Paul only by which Paul's whole person can be understood.

This retrospective journey that focused Paul on the origin of his person must have been difficult for Paul the Jew to face because it gets to the heart of the matter, both theologically and functionally. On the basis of this reality from his own Scripture, he had to examine his life and practice and openly face the difficult reality of his person subsequently shaped, defined and determined by the reductionism in his collective-journey as well as personal-journey. He had invested his whole life to this perceptual-interpretive framework and in this quantitative system of religious practice, and now he had to account for what he profited from this investment (cf. Phil 3:7-8). Surely he recalled "Circumcise your heart" (Dt 10:16), and that "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendents, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live" (Dt 30:6). Did this describe him, wasn't he dedicated in his faith-practice? As a Pharisee, was he not blameless before God—rigorously observing purity law to the letter? Could he not then assume the same covenant as Abraham and claim his birthright as his descendent? Yes and no.

Given the theological basis for the gospel which Paul later makes conclusive in his Romans letter, he apparently questioned strongly the validity of his own participation in the collective-journey from Abraham (Rom 2:28-29, cf. Jn 8:39-40). This was not about the dedication or even sincerity of his faith-practice. Rather, where indeed was Paul's heart in his life and practice? The heart signifies the ontology of the person from inner out. Thus the heart signifies the qualitative function of the whole person, the qualitative nature of which has been created in the image of God. The heart's inner-out function of the whole person is what and who God seeks to be involved with for relationship together (see Ps 40:6-8; Isa 29:13, cf. Mt 15:7-9). David understood this and thus prayed for this inner-out function for God's people (1 Chron 29:16-18), of which Paul had to be aware. The Psalmist also asked the Lord to "judge me...according to the integrity that is in me" (Ps 7:8). 'Integrity' (*tom*) is an inner-out function denoting completeness, fullness, which Paul also had to examine in his life and practice.

In contrast, the person based on an ontology from outer in is signified by less substantive function measured primarily in quantitative terms, by which the person is defined by what one does and/or has—for example by circumcision, observing food laws and the Sabbath (Israel's identity markers), or by quantity of words and mere forms of worship without the substance of the heart (as Isaiah noted in the above prophesy). In such function the heart remains distant, detached or even closed, thus rendering the most significant aspect of the person uninvolved. A person defined and determined by this quantitative function becomes fragmented into these measured indicators or parts; these parts, even their sum, are insufficient to account for the whole person as created in the image of God. Therefore the ontology of the human person from outer in is always a reduction of the person God created. This reduced person is essentially, at best, an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the whole person; moreover, any attempt to construct the whole from outer in is analogous to the human effort to construct the whole from bottom-up demonstrated by the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-4). This is not the person God seeks for relationship together. And any such reduction of the person

must be understood as the sin of reductionism, not simply positioned against God's whole but countering the whole of God's relational involvement—for example by diminishing God's involvement only to situations and circumstances, and by minimalizing God's presence only to a particular place or time. This would emerge as the defining issue underlying Paul's life and practice.

The heart signifies the unmistakable function of what God seeks: the whole person, nothing less and no substitutes. When God made conclusive to Abraham the terms for covenant relationship together, the LORD appeared to him directly and said clearly in order to constitute Abraham's relational response: "Walk before me, and be blameless" (Gen 17:1). That is, "be involved with me in relationship together by being blameless (*tamiym*)." The tendency is to render "blameless" as moral purity and/or ethical perfection (cf. Gen 6:9), notably in Judaism by observance of the law (cf. 2 Sam 22:23-24). With this lens, even Paul perceived his righteousness as "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Yet *tamiym* denotes to be complete, whole, and is not about mere moral and ethical purity. Beyond this limited perception, *tamiym* involves the ontology of being whole, namely the whole person from inner out involved in the primacy of relationship together.

The focus on purity, however, was problematic. In Israel's history purity often was measured functionally by a code shaped by human contextualization, and thus focused more on what persons were responsible to do rather than on the primary function of being involved in relationship together (cf. 1 Sam 15:22; Jer 7:22-23; Hos 6:6; Mic 6:6-8). When such practice was in effect, this demonstrated a redefinition of human ontology from inner out to outer in, thereby reducing persons to the measured indicators of what they did and had. Moreover, in this reductionist process Israel became more about land and nation-state rather than about a people and covenant relationship together, more about religious culture (e.g. ethnocentrism with quantitative identity markers) and politics (e.g. nationalism) than about relational life and practice (both corporate and individual) in the image and likeness of God and having theological significance as God's relational whole on God's relational terms. In other words, Israel's history became the frequent narrative of God's people diminishing the covenant relationship and getting embedded, even enslaved, in the surrounding human context (cf. Jer 3:10; 12:2; Ez 33:31). This also applied to the tradition of Pharisees during Paul's time (see Jesus' penetrating analysis, Mt 15:1-20, cf. the Qumran Essenes' critique<sup>1</sup>).

These reductions all fragmented the integrated functional and relational significance of *tamiym* which God made conclusive to constitute Abraham in covenant relationship together. To be "blameless" by its nature must be fully integrated with *what* and *who* God seeks to be involved with. Therefore, "blameless" is both inseparable from the qualitative function of the heart and irreducible of the ontology of the whole person from inner out. As a Pharisee who rigorously observed the law, Paul had considered his righteousness to be "blameless" (Phil 3:6). Yet Jesus previously had exposed the reductionist practices of Pharisees of Paul's day and their underlying ontology of the person from outer in without the significance of the heart (Mt 15:1-20, cf. 5:20). The critical assessment of one's faith must account for the ontology of the whole person. That is to say, to be blameless is nothing less and no substitutes for being whole as created in the image and likeness of the whole of God. For Abraham, this was the integrated functional and relational significance of his involvement with God signifying his faith,

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<sup>1</sup> See 4QNah 1:2,7; 2:2-3; 3:3,8.



and therefore constituting the necessary relationship together of the covenant on God's relational terms.

For Paul, this retrospective journey was not about going back merely to his birthright as a descendent of Abraham but more importantly about reclaiming his "creation-right" as the person in full created significance. And what *tamiym* signified in Paul's Damascus road experience was indeed the needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction from his shared-journey—a journey also shared by all his readers. Any perception of his own blamelessness was an epistemological illusion since his practice only signified an ontological simulation from reductionism, that is, a person functioning only from outer in without accounting for the integrity of his heart. As Paul faced the reductionism in his life and practice, this turned him back to the pivotal juncture of his journey, confronted by Jesus on the Damascus road. From this axis he was now to be introduced to "a new song" emerging from having addressed the thoughtful question earlier (Ps 144:3,9). That is to say unmistakably, as Paul turned around from his reductionist life and practice he would be reconciled to God's whole only on God's terms, which would constitute the wholeness in his person, practice, thought and theology. This is the whole of and from God, who and which previously had eluded Paul—and have continued to elude many of his readers.

## **The Journey Emerges**

The whole of and from God would otherwise have continued to elude Paul if they were not based on what converged and emerged in his journey. What Paul "discovered" in his retrospective journey and now experiences upon returning to the pivotal juncture of his journey on the Damascus road is the defining issue underlying his life and practice: the vital issue of reductionism versus God's whole. This issue involves the functional dynamics of reductionism as sin signifying the workings of the human relational condition to be apart from God's whole, thus impacting all relationships.

Paying attention to or ignoring the presence of reductionism, its counter-relational work and its substitutes for the whole—even in the practice of faith prevailing in the faith-community—is directly correlated to the existing view of sin. A limited or weak view of sin, for example, connotes simply overt acts in terms of moral and ethical impurity, with a quantitative focus on the person from outer in. This suggests a perceptual-interpretive lens whose perceptions of sin are influenced or shaped by the very reductionism that it needs to pay attention to and cannot ignore. Part of *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction for Paul addressed his lens regarding sin which had limited his perception, perhaps distorted it. Faced with the reality of reductionism in his life and practice, Paul could not ignore his participation in the human relational condition of being apart from God's whole. In spite of his faith-practice, this is the condition which Paul unmistakably came to realize. Beyond simply being contextually embedded, Paul learned he was in the condition of being functionally enslaved. Paul therefore would pay attention to his need for redemptive change and reconciliation to God's whole.

## **Whom Paul Encountered**

How did this process emerge for Paul on the Damascus road? This was when he encountered the Light relationally embodied in the Word from God (Acts 9:1-19; 22:3-16; 26:9-18), which Paul later identified conclusively (2 Cor 4:6). It is important in this first encounter to distinguish between the embodied Word and the propositional-didactic Word. The embodied Word is vulnerably from God only for the primacy of relationship together, while the propositional-didactic Word becomes only about God for the primary purpose of doctrine and related teachings; the former is whole, the latter is fragmentary and thus a reduction. Whom Paul encountered on the Damascus road defined the Jesus he will focus on in his letters, as well as determined the Christology in his thought and theology. Likewise, whom Paul's readers perceive that he encountered on the Damascus road will also primarily define and determine for them Paul's Christ and his gospel. This points ahead to the issue in his letters of Paul's near lack of reference to Jesus' teaching, which we will discuss later.

As the relationally-embodied Word from God, the first matter we need to understand about the Damascus Christophany is that it was an extension of the incarnation. That is, it was a synopsis of God's most vulnerable self-disclosure with the same relational significance, which Paul later conclusively clarified theologically (Col 1:15-23). Whether Paul encountered Jesus previously during his earthly ministry is not known, but this was Paul's confrontation by the embodied Jesus revealing the whole of God. Moreover, God's engagement was not through a vision or dream but, just as with Moses, was communication "face to face" (Nu 12:6-8, cf. Acts 22:14-15). Apparently Paul was not threatened by this embodiment of the Word as were some other Jews (notably fellow Pharisees) during Jesus' ministry. Though startled by the Light "from heaven, brighter than the sun" (Acts 26:13), as a student of Jewish Scripture Paul was certainly familiar with theophanies (epiphanies) to realize that this was a critical moment from the LORD. His recent experience with Stephen's theophany (Acts 7:55-58; 22:20) likely added to his suspense. Yet, no doubt, the monotheist Paul must have been confused by the triune God disclosed before him.

## **The Nature of the Interaction**

After *whom* Paul first encountered had been established, what next transpired in this interaction is critical for understanding what fully emerged from this pivotal juncture in Paul's journey. Up to that point Paul had made an extreme commitment (fueled by rage, *emmainomai*, Acts 26:11) to oppose, persecute and destroy everyone associated with the Way and the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 22:4-5; 26:9-11; Gal 1:13). When Paul asked then of his inquisitor "Who are you, Lord?," the response back likely shocked him: "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting" (Acts 9:5). Paul asked the correct question "Who?," not "What are you accusing me of?" Yet this was no inquisition by Jesus, it was a confrontation, a relational confrontation. What Paul would learn from his retrospective journey was that his opposition to Jesus had less to do with Judaism and was actually

rooted in reductionism. Thus what was about to happen to Paul was indeed fully compatible with the faith of Abraham and the covenant relationship.

Essentially, this relational confrontation by the embodied Word from God contextualized Paul in the incarnation, and thus in the relational context and process of God's thematic action for covenant relationship. As in the incarnation, this Christophany was not merely about Jesus as historical Object—formulated into teachings to follow, and formalized into propositional truths and doctrines—but more importantly was about Jesus as Subject to be reciprocally involved with for relationship together. The embodied Truth was only for the experiential truth of relationship, for which Jesus also had made himself vulnerably accessible to his disciples in the incarnation (Jn 14:6-9).

The incarnation was the fulfillment of the whole of God's communicative action in relational response to the human condition. This Christophany was the triune God's communicative action in relational response to Paul's condition. Jesus vulnerably expressed his "I am" statement to Paul only as relational communication (albeit confrontational) from God—just like his "I am" statements during the incarnation. Thus Jesus' "I am" statement must by its nature be understood as relational language. The embodied Word from God, both in the incarnation and this Christophany, communicates only in relational language, not in propositional terms.

The primary purpose of Jesus' language is always for relational significance, either in positive relational outcomes or negative relational consequences. This was the impact of Jesus' "I am" on Paul. When he heard "I am Jesus," Paul must have thought he was being held accountable and judgment was about to come down on him. Yet the significance of Jesus' relational language was not for a relational consequence but for a relational outcome beyond what Paul could have imagined (cf. 1 Tim 1:13-17).

Relational language is simply communication which includes two interrelated levels of meaning: (1) the content aspect of the words themselves, and (2) the relationship aspect which can be expressed verbally or nonverbally, directly or indirectly, usually implied by the words yet a distinct part of the communication.<sup>2</sup> Relational messages are always attached to the content of messages and help us understand its significance or any deeper meaning the content may have or its message includes. If just the content of messages is considered, the significance of the communication may not be fully understood—notably the relational significance conveying the further and deeper meaning of the communication. In the relational aspect level of meaning in communication, a person conveys messages about the following aspects:

1. What that person is saying about one's own self.
2. What that person is communicating about the other person(s), for example, how one sees them or feels about them.
3. What that person is saying about one's relationship with the other, how one sees it or feels about it.

These relational messages qualify the content aspect of the words and the meaning that is being communicated. Thus, understanding these relational messages from someone can

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the conceptual dynamics of human communication, see Paul Watzlawick, Janet Helmick Beavin and Don D. Jackson, *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1967).

mean the basis for truly knowing that person and also for grasping how to respond back to the person. Not understanding these messages is often the basis for misunderstanding that person and for insufficient, incompatible or inappropriate responses back.

Before the content of Jesus' other words to Paul can be considered, his "I am" communication must be understood. "I am Jesus" goes beyond just acknowledging his identity to Paul. *Who* he is cannot be separated or reduced from *what* and *how* he is. That is to say, Jesus' whole person was made vulnerable to be relationally involved in this interaction, and he directly shared that message about himself with Paul. This was the relational message about himself (message 1 above) that qualified the content of his words.

"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." Technically, Paul could argue that he never persecuted Jesus personally and directly. Jesus, however, communicated that he received Paul's action "personally and directly." His words alone indicated that and did not mean "symbolically and indirectly." Yet his relational message conveys the further and deeper meaning of his communication. This "I am" statement was qualified by the relational message in which Jesus communicated something ontological and relational about himself and his followers. They are God's whole in the irreducible interdependent relationships together necessary to be in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God. *What* Jesus is ontologically as one of the trinitarian persons constitutes *how* Jesus is relationally involved with the whole of God's people, just as Jesus defined in his prayer to the Father (Jn 17:23,26). To persecute any person in God's whole is to persecute the whole, thus to persecute Jesus personally and directly (cf. Jn 15:18-23). This is the who, what and how of Jesus' whole person "whom you are persecuting." This integrated functional and relational significance of Jesus' communication points ahead to the development of Paul's ecclesiology with the metaphor of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12).

There are further relational messages to understand. While Jesus was certainly not releasing Paul of responsibility for his actions, his confrontation of Paul was not as a heretic to be condemned—though Paul belonged to a sect of Judaism (*hairesis*, Acts 26:5). An isolated message Paul apparently attributed to Jesus, "It hurts you to kick against the goads" (Acts 26:14), suggests perhaps that Jesus defined Paul's actions as self-defeating, destroying the very significance which can fulfill his faith (cf. his teacher Gamaliel's conditional statement, Acts 5:39). This points to the further relational message in Jesus' "I am" statement of how he saw Paul's whole person (message 2 above), not a person reduced merely to what he did—even notably against Jesus. Thus this relational message communicates how deeply Jesus felt about him as a person, which included how his own person was affected relationally by Paul. Moreover, included in his communication, the additional relational message of what Jesus wanted for their relationship and how much he valued it was also implied (message 3 above). In other words, this relational confrontation by the embodied Word from God was truly the relational response of grace by the whole of God who pursued Paul's whole person for the only purpose of relationship together. This relational outcome indeed was the relational significance of Jesus' communication with Paul and the deep impact his "I am" statement had on Paul—which later became the basis for Paul's Christology.

The embodied Word from God communicated the relational messages constituting the integrated relational and functional significance of the gospel, both in this Christophany as in the incarnation. What Paul would experience from Jesus was indeed

an extension of the relational messages in the incarnation of the Word (cf. a Pauline description, 1 Tim 1:15-16). Only the embodied Word vulnerably communicated from the whole of God for the primacy of relationship together constitutes the full significance of the gospel. A propositional-didactic Word by its nature cannot communicate the relational messages essential to establish the gospel in its integrated relational and functional significance; it only establishes a doctrine of the gospel for propositional truth and certainty of faith, not for the experiential truth of ongoing relationship together. Paul did not encounter that Word, though many of his readers perceive him through that lens. Just as in the incarnation, Jesus' whole person came to Paul to be personally and directly involved only on a relational basis with relational language, not in propositional terms for a didactic task.

The Word from God whom Paul encountered vulnerably communicated "I am" with the full significance of relational messages to establish the qualitative basis required for Paul relationally both to truly know his triune God and to wholly grasp how to respond back for the ongoing involvement in covenant relationship together. And this same Word is whom Paul's readers need to encounter also, because the same epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction Paul experienced indeed are keys to what Paul wrote in his letters.

## **Paul's Response to the Embodied Word**

As Paul received and understood Jesus' "I am" communication (both content and relational aspects of meaning), what was his response back to Jesus, to his whole person, that is, to the whole of God? Along with *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction from Paul's shared-journey in retrospect, he experienced personally and directly Jesus' whole person from inner out made functional by Jesus vulnerably sharing his heart with Paul. There was a relational dynamic of vulnerability that Paul could not ignore, perhaps reject but not ignore. This went beyond the religious framework of his collective-journey and involved a deeper level than just a belief system. In a vital way this interaction paralleled the interaction Jesus had with another Pharisee, Nicodemus, a leader of the Jews (see Jn 3:1-15). Jesus made it imperative for Nicodemus, a strict practicing Jew and a teacher of Israel, to be born from above, born anew.

This is where epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction are needed, both for Nicodemus as well as for us today. Jesus was not pointing to a new belief system requiring Nicodemus' conversion. Nicodemus could not grasp the meaning of Jesus' words because his quantitative lens (*phroneo*) focused on the person from outer in ("How can anyone be born after...?"), and because his reductionist interpretive framework (*phronema*) was unable to piece together (*synesis*) his own Scripture (e.g. "The Lord your God will circumcise your heart," Dt 30:6). This evidenced that Nicodemus was too influenced by reductionism to understand—"How can these things be?"—even after Jesus said, "Do not be astonished..." which implied that a teacher of God's Word would comprehend God's whole if not fragmented by reductionism. Now the embodied Word from God (whom Nicodemus initially came to engage) made conclusive the epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction essential for

Nicodemus, Paul, Jews or Gentiles, for all persons: *be made whole from above or continue in reductionism.*

As in the incarnation with persons like Nicodemus, Paul's Christophany must be understood as face-to-face engagement (a relational dynamic of vulnerability) with the experiential Truth, not discourse of propositional truth. We can only speculate whether Paul ever heard about Nicodemus' interaction with Jesus. If he had received counsel from this leading Pharisee, it obviously did not make an impact on Paul; then again a seed could have been planted. Regardless, Paul's response would be to this same embodied Word for the relational outcome to be made whole in relationship together with the triune God. His response would not be a conversion to a new religion or doctrine. This needs more explanation.

Certainly the notion of being "born again" is rooted in Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus. And many of Paul's readers use the term conversion to describe this pivotal juncture in Paul's life. Yet born-again conversion is misleading. Conversion—notably as the notion has been variously defined and even more widely practiced—is insufficient to understand what happened to Paul's person, as well as to fully explain his practice, thought and theology. While parts of the text in John 3:1-21 have been used as an evangelistic paradigm for salvation, it would be misleading to apply the notion to Paul—not to mention reducing the full significance of Jesus' relational response to Nicodemus.

Most certainly, the embodied Word from God did not signify discontinuity with the Hebrew Scripture but rather constituted the continuity of God's communicative action in relational response to the human condition. Jesus, the embodied Word, was not incompatible with the faith of Abraham and the covenant relationship but in fact compatibly constituted their fulfillment. Jesus was incompatible, however, with reductionism, with the fragmenting of God's whole, and with substituting being whole (*tamiym*) with the human shaping and construction from below. Yet, indeed, the whole of "God so loved the world" was only to relationally respond to human persons in order to be "made whole from above" in relationship together, not to consign them to their reductionism (Jn 3:17). And Paul was in this vulnerability-dynamic face to face with who essentially became for Paul "the embodied paradox": He who was the continuity of Paul's Scripture and the compatibility of Paul's faith united with him who was the discontinuity of Paul's interpretive framework and the incompatibility of Paul's practice.

The Word's epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction essentially confined Paul to his reductionism, yet did not consign him to it. He would either continue in that reality of reductionism or respond to the experiential Truth to be made whole from above. As his response Paul neither converted to a new religion (as assumed by traditional Pauline studies) nor changed ("converted") to another variation of Judaism (as assumed by a new Paul perspective). This common perception of conversion is misleading but is even more distorted with its primary shaping by reductionism—namely by a quantitative framework with a human ontology from outer in. Moreover, on the basis of this epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction, it is incorrect to say that Paul was only called and commissioned on the Damascus road to fulfill the mission to all the nations. Paul could not serve as a light to the nations without *tamiym*; he could not work for *shalom* while engaging in reductionism. It is simply inadequate to explain Paul's Damascus road experience as a shift in beliefs, understanding and mission.

Paul could not ignore also the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionism present in his life and practice, which he later fully understood (cf. Phil 3:4-8). Though a later Pauline review of his pre-Damascus road actions appeared to absolve him of his responsibility (1 Tim 1:13), Paul did not deny his incompatibility, incongruity and conflict with the embodied Word from the God both of his forefather Abraham and of his created person. Paul knew he was not blameless and his sin was the sin of reductionism. This was the functional reality of Paul's condition, essentially the human condition apart from God's whole. Thus, the epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction penetrated Paul's interpretive lens and framework into his heart: *be made whole from above or continue in reductionism*.

The whole of God pursued only Paul's whole person from inner out, nothing less and no substitutes. Jesus was looking vulnerably face to face into Paul's heart (perhaps as Ps 139:1,23-24 echoed in Paul's mind, cf. Rom 8:27; Rev 2:23). Perhaps also, Paul was stunned by the flash realization from another Psalm that his practice had been "in vain" (*saw'*, Ps 127:1-2), that is, insubstantial, without significance to God, only a human construction from outer in, bottom-up. Assuming that, Paul could also have been convicted of Ezekiel's words from exile, which involved turning back to the point of departure (*sub*, Ez 18:30-31). Paul was not only engaged by the relational dynamic of vulnerability, he was now engaging it with his whole person. In response Paul did not convert, he turned around, that is, repented (which Paul later clarified theologically, Rom 2:4, cf. 2 Pet 3:9). The embodied Word used Ananias (a disciple and devout Jew, Acts 9:10-16; 22:12-16) to help Paul in this process, in what can be considered comparable to John the Baptist's "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Mk 1:4). Yet much more was involved than that—beyond what Nicodemus could grasp in quantitative terms and what even Abraham could have anticipated in qualitative terms (Acts 13:24-25; 19:4).

The relational dynamics are the key to understanding Paul's response. Paul turned from reductionism for the redemptive change necessary for the relationship together to be made whole from above. Just as his forefather Abraham responded, Paul's whole person here responded relationally to the same relational response of grace now embodied from God—responding with the same relational faith for the same covenant relationship together. While not a conversion, the relational significance of Paul's response did redefine his collective identity from 'majority Israel' to 'minority Israel' (as he later theologically clarified, Rom 2:28-29; 11:1-32).

In this relational process, what was happening in Paul's response was qualitative not quantitative. Paul was not converted from the outer in, he was transformed from inner out (cf. 2 Cor 3:18). This was a vital distinction between the quantitative *syschematizo/metaschematizo* and the qualitative *metamorphoo*, which Paul later made imperative for redemptive change (Rom 12:2). Paul's previous life and practice clearly signified outward conformity (*syschematizo*), and he turned around to go beyond mere outer-in change (*metaschematizo*) to experience only the qualitative change from inner out (*metamorphoo*) of his whole person. In other words, Damascus road was not about Paul's conversion; it was the experiential truth (not a doctrine) of Paul's reconciliation of his whole person with the whole of God to be made whole from above, thus only God's whole on God's relational terms. And *tamiym* had become both Paul's epistemological

clarification and hermeneutical correction as well as what also newly defined his person (whole ontology) and determined his practice (whole function).

Therefore, indeed, Paul received God's definitive blessing of wholeness (Num 6:24-26), the same as Abraham and all *tamiym* with him (cf. Ps 119:1). In the integrated relational and functional significance of this blessing, "by turning his face to you and giving you peace," the whole of God relationally responded in grace to Paul in order to "bring change and establish a new relationship [a meaning of *siym*, "give"] together in wholeness (*shalom*)." In its further significance, this was the experiential truth of *the relational progression* of God's thematic relational action of grace, the relational outcome of which also transformed Paul into "the new song" (pointed to earlier in Ps 144:9, cf. Ps 40:3; Rev 5:9-10): that is, the new creation made whole from above for further and deeper covenant relationship together (as Paul testified, 2 Cor 5:17-18; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4; Eph 4:22-25; Col 3:9-11).

This relational outcome of Paul's whole person is *who* emerges from his journey on the Damascus road. This experiential truth is the basis for *what* emerges and unfolds in Paul's life, practice, thought and theology. From this experiential truth, for example, in his Galatians letter Paul will establish the functional clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel from any alternatives of reductionism, and thus to be distinguished from any alternative gospels. In Romans, Paul will make definitive the theological basis for the truth and whole of the gospel, thus providing the theological clarity necessary to be integrated with the functional clarity in Galatians to constitute the truth and whole of the gospel only as the whole of God's relational context and process in response of grace to the human condition. All of this unfolds of course only because it was first Paul's experiential truth with the embodied whole of God.

Moreover, the relational significance of Paul's response constituted the functional significance of Paul's further response to the content of Jesus' other words on the Damascus road: obedience, in relational response to the embodied Word's call to be vulnerably involved with him also in relational response to the human condition of reductionism apart from God's whole (Acts 9:6; 22:10; 26:15-18). Obedience to God must by its nature be a function of relational involvement; otherwise obedience becomes rendered to some reductionist function defining what a person does, for example, merely from duty or obligation without any deeper relational significance in response to God (cf. Gal 5:3). That type of obedience could not signify the change Paul was experiencing. What emerged from Paul's obedience was only the outworking of his relational response to and ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God—namely to the embodied Word and notably with the Spirit.

The journey of Paul's whole person emerged on this basis and with this significance, and this person must be accounted for to wholly understand Paul. Anything less and any substitute of this person's life, practice, thought and theology by his readers can only be defined by Paul himself as reductionism.

We continue in the next two chapters to the development and maturity of Paul's journey on the basis and with the significance of what emerged in Paul's person.



## Chapter 3 Development in Paul's Journey

As Paul's journey continues beyond the Damascus road, it is critical that the further reading, interpretation and understanding of Paul (namely in his letters) deeply concern the growth and development of *who* and *what* emerged from the Damascus road. What unfolds in Paul's journey has the following distinctions: What unfolds is not religious though it includes religion; is not spirituality though it bears spiritual development; is not apostolic though it involves the apostle(s); is not missiological though it involves mission; is not ecclesiastical though it involves the church; and is not doctrinal though it involves theology.

Paul was vulnerably engaged by the whole of God and thus he vulnerably engaged God for ongoing involvement in the relational progression of God's whole relational context and process. Therefore, Paul's journey must not be reduced to these other aspects which appear to prominently occupy Paul's life and practice. Likewise, his whole person must not be reduced to the prominent roles and related functions he fulfilled in these aspects. Paul's readers, in other words, cannot redefine the whole of Paul by a quantitative lens diminishing him to fragmentary aspects, however important, and expect to understand his life, practice, thought and theology. Paul's journey develops only on the basis and with the significance of what emerged in his person from the Damascus road.

Paul's readers must not forget or be misled to ignore that Paul did not emerge from the Damascus road a fully developed apostle with ready-made theology. Yet, it is critical to grasp that, most importantly for Paul, the qualitative process of being whole, God's whole on God's relational terms, constituted the ongoing basis and significance of all that develops. This was the integrating theme for Paul, which we will discuss further.

As we examine this development, it will be helpful to understand the various antecedents and sources which influenced Paul's journey.

### Paul's Antecedents and Sources

Paul's Christophany could have made him wonder if he were experiencing what came to be known as Jewish mysticism, or Merkabah ("throne") mysticism—not a contemplation of God but a mystical vision of God on the throne.<sup>1</sup> Such epiphanies were not uncommon in Jewish history and Scripture. Later, Paul appeared to highlight his mystical visions (2 Cor 12:1-6) and had a series of other apparent mystical visions (Acts

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion on mysticism as background to the NT, see Jon C. Laansma, "Mysticism", in Craig A. Evans and Stanley E. Porter, eds., *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 725-37. For a discussion on mysticism in Paul, see Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 165-213.

9:12; 16:9-10; 18:9-10; 22:17-21; 23:11; 26:19; 27:23-24; Gal 1:12; 2:2). During the experience of these various visions, perhaps Paul was pointed to the process of visions introduced to Ezekiel (Ez 1:1ff). Furthermore, Paul may have interpreted his own call in part through the lens of the “Servant Songs” (Isa 42 & 49). Yet, while epiphanic influences were certainly present for Paul, these antecedents were insufficient to explain what Paul experienced and to understand his life, practice, thought and theology. Such mysteries involved the knowledge that was associated with revelation (cf. 1 Cor 13:2,8-9,12; Eph 3:3-5); and revelation was closely connected with prophecy (cf. Rom 16:25-26; 1 Cor 14:6,25,26,30). This was a relational dynamic which ongoingly involved Paul in the relational epistemic process.

What unfolded in Paul’s journey was no transition to a further (or even new) aspect of his previous service. What was developing was the transformation from old to new (2 Cor 5:17, cf. Col 3:9-10; Eph 4:22-24). The experience of Paul’s visions (mystical or prophetic) involved a word from God, not some unique vision of God or some hidden information about God. That is, these visions involved the communication of God’s revelation, as Paul made unmistakable (1 Cor 2:9-10; 2 Cor 12:1; Gal 1:12; 2:2; Eph 3:3,5; cf. Acts 26:16). Since this involved the self-revelation of the heart of God’s desires, the relational connection for this communication to be received necessitated engaging God only in God’s relational context and process—that is, received compatibly with how the revelation was given, as Paul further distinguished (2 Cor 4:2-6). Paul soon understood that any valid claim of prophetic utterance can only be based on the relational outcome of the Spirit’s presence and work with him (1 Cor 2:10)—the whole of God’s relational context and process.

Moreover, surely Paul considered this experience as some fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy (Joel 2:28-29), and likely recalled Moses’ desire for all the Lord’s people (Nu 11:29), which Paul further made operational for the church to function whole (1 Cor 14:31-33). This also pointed to the deeper relational process involved that went beyond the prophets’ experience of visions and dreams to Moses’ experience of direct relational communication with God “face to face, clearly and not in riddles,” and thus who saw “the form [*temunah*, image, appearance, manifestation] of the LORD” (Nu 12:6-8). This more conclusively defined Paul’s experience of visions (i.e., revelations), the qualitative significance of which constituted the further and deeper relational context and process he experienced directly with the whole of God. This signified that Paul was to go beyond these OT antecedents.

Though the continuity with the OT definitely existed, Paul’s journey also involved the transformation from old to new. Paul was not limited to these OT antecedents because foremost for him was God’s vulnerable self-revelation to him directly ‘in Christ’—“who is the image of God...in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4-6). To interpret this revelation in terms of epiphany or by Jewish mysticism is highly inadequate and can even result in reductionism. This self-revelation, constituting the heart of God’s desires, vulnerably communicated the embodied (neither propositional nor doctrinal) fulfillment of God’s promise for covenant relationship, which opened the relational progression to the Spirit’s presence fulfilling those OT promises and prophecies to the eschatological completion, as Paul made clearly unmistakable (2 Cor 1:18-22). In other words, God’s face shined on Paul in the relational response of grace; God’s face turned to him and made him whole only from above, all of which Jesus incarnated not for Paul’s

observation but only for the experiential truth of relationship together. This relational outcome determined the ongoing development of Paul's involvement with Jesus directly in relationship together, the experiential truth (neither propositional truth nor doctrinal certainty) of which also defined Paul's Christology and thus his soteriology. Paul's development would deepen the continuity with the words from God in the OT as well as widen the discontinuity with any of its reductionist faith-response and practice (discussed further in chap. 11, Question 1).

The continuity-discontinuity emerging from Paul's development certainly involves a hermeneutical issue. In the process of transformation to the new, I suggest that Paul's lens of Hebrew Scripture also changed. That is, Paul changed from a hermeneutic of the OT which reduced meaning to reference or representation of God—for example, by reducing God's desires and terms for covenant relationship together to a code of behavior to observe and perform, or simply to identity markers as God's people (Rom 2:29; 7:6; Col 2:14). This change was partly the result of *tamiym*'s hermeneutical correction and, of further importance, was more deeply a relational outcome. Paul was restored to whole meaning in the relational context and process of God's communicative action—the words from God's mouth (cf. Deut 8:3; Ps 119:13; Mt 4:4; Jn 6:63, 68-69). This changed his hermeneutic of the OT from situational content to the relational context and process of God's thematic action for covenant relationship together, of which Paul was a unique recipient of God's relational response of grace. This also took his hermeneutic beyond an apocalyptic interpretive framework.

Perhaps with his new lens Paul saw the key antecedent of his experiential truth signified in Psalm 33: "Rejoice in the LORD...sing to him a new song...for the word of the LORD is upright...by the word of the LORD—the purpose of his heart—he creates the hearts of all." The new song Paul was singing indeed was pointed to in the OT but was not made wholly functional until the embodied Word 'in Christ', who was the basis for Paul's experience and the truth of his gospel. Thus, though Paul's continuity with the OT precluded his conversion to a new religion, the development of his journey can neither be wholly understood from OT antecedents nor adequately explained from Judaism's practice. Paul's new song then raises one lingering question from the Damascus road that still needs our attention: Was Paul introduced to a new covenant relationship on the Damascus road? Yes and no. No, since the relationship still involved the same covenant relationship with Abraham. Yes, because the relationship necessitated the further and deeper involvement in it than was accessible as well as practiced in much of Israel's history, which signified the need to go beyond reductionism (as Paul clarified, 2 Cor 3:6-18, cf. Jer 24:7; Ez 11:19).

The continuity-discontinuity issue is compounded by reductionism, the function of which must be recognized as the source of discontinuity and thus distinguished from the new song. As Ezekiel pointed to (Ez 36:26-27), Paul's new song was only the transformation from old to new: a new creation of the heart of the person from inner out made whole from above for new covenant relationship together (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15), just as the embodied Word from God made conclusive for Nicodemus (a key antecedent for Paul noted earlier, Jn 3:1-15).

This transformation to wholeness was the heart of Paul's experience and ongoing development (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4), and thus the heart of his thought and theology. In order to fully understand Paul, he needs to be contextualized deeply into

God's relational context and process. Paul was being transformed from old to new to go beyond a prophetic call and function in order to take the lead of God's people, perhaps analogous to Moses' call yet beyond even that. In this sense Paul was neither an apostle of Israel nor an apostate from Israel—to respond to the paradox about Paul raised by James Dunn in the introduction. Moreover, by having his heart circumcised conclusively, Paul shifted essentially from 'majority Israel' to 'minority Israel', as he clarified theologically (Rom 2:28-29; 9:6-8; 11:1-10; texts discussed further in chap. 12). On this significant basis, Paul was neither an apostle of majority Israel nor an apostate of minority Israel.

What has continuity in Paul's development involves only God's whole and covenant relationship together only on God's relational terms. What has discontinuity is only about any reductionism of these. Paul's journey developed beyond those OT antecedents because the embodied Word from God directly spoke "face to face" with Paul, with the relational outcome that went beyond merely seeing mystical visions; Paul more deeply experienced the whole of God's vulnerably-involved-person, and thus understood God even more clearly than Moses (cf. *horaio*, Acts 26:16). In this ongoing relational process Paul also grasped the functional and relational significance of God's whole. It was on this developing basis that Paul spoke unequivocally, decisively, without compromise about the truth of the gospel (just as Peter experienced from him, Gal 2:11-14). And by its nature Paul increasingly made definitive the whole of the gospel's functional and relational significance for its experiential truth and reality for all persons (Col 1:19-23; Eph 2:19-22).

The whole of the gospel for Paul was always first this experiential truth, the reality of which relationally involved his whole person from inner out signified by the qualitative function of his heart. This deeper grasp of the person was in part from *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification by which Paul understood whole meaning, not a reductionist substitute. The functional significance of Paul's whole development was unmistakably his heart transforming from old to new with the Spirit, as Paul made theologically clear (Rom 8:5-11). It is critical then to account for the qualitative function of the heart (the whole person from inner out) in the study of Paul. To get to the heart of Paul's thought and theology, which has been elusive in Pauline studies, is in fact to grasp the *heart* and the experiential truth constituting Paul's own heart (cf. Rom 2:29; 8:27; 10:10; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:12; Gal 4:6; Eph 1:18; 3:17).

In this deeper qualitative process, the heart of his thought and theology, on the one hand, is not conclusively found at the level of their informational content (e.g. 2 Cor 3:2-3), thus its elusive definition. On the other hand, a solely quantitative interpretive framework fragments the whole of Paul—whether his life, practice, thought or theology—and its lens from outer in either ignores or is unable to perceive the experiential truth of the heart in his life, practice, thought and theology (cf. 2 Cor 5:12; 10:7). The heart is the only qualitative function which signifies the ontology of the whole person(s) created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24) for relationship together. Therefore, without this heart Paul's life, practice, thought and theology have no relational significance to God and functional significance to us, his readers (individually and as church, cf. Eph 4:22-25). Anything less than the heart and any substitute antecedents reduce the whole of Paul from the relational context and process of 'in Christ'. With only fragments of Paul remaining, this would preclude

getting to the heart of his thought and theology. Furthermore, any loss of this whole in Paul would preclude finding the essential unity and vital coherence signifying his thought and theology.

There are other important antecedents or sources influencing the development of Paul's thought and theology which need to be identified to understand Paul and his journey. While the process of his development is not clearly indicated in the Pauline corpus, the convergence of certain antecedents and assumptions help us define his developmental process.

The development of Paul's thought and theology was neither independent of nor inseparable from the development of his life and practice. This was the integrated functional and relational significance of who and what emerged from the Damascus road. Thus Paul's development cannot be perceived simply in fixed categories (e.g. his thought, teaching or theology) and static stages (e.g., of his life, practice or mission). Paul's development was engaged in a dynamic process—for example, of overlapping categories and interacting stages, and conversely, these categories interacted and stages overlapped both with each other and between themselves within the ontology of being whole in likeness of the whole of God. In other words, Paul's whole person was vulnerably involved in the dynamic process of redemptive change from the old and transformation to the new. Therefore, any discussion of Paul's thought and theology must be based on his life and practice. Moreover, any development of his thought and theology has to be understood initially as the experiential truth in his life and practice. Paul neither occupied the role of theologian (or biblical scholar) nor engaged separately in the task of doing theology. He was only involved in *living* theology (as distinguished in chap. 1) on the basis of his whole life and practice. As we discuss Paul's thought and theology, keep in focus that 'the theological Paul' is integrated with 'the relational Paul', and conjoined with 'the historical Paul', to involve irreducibly the whole of Paul's person—thus involving inseparably his life and practice.

In a dynamic developmental process, Paul's thought and theology were ongoingly exposed to various inputs. Each source could have affected (positively or negatively) Paul in one way or another. The most significant influence and shaping of his thought and theology had to be the defining impact of the following sources:

1. Judaism—namely from the Hebrew Scripture of the OT and not variants from this canonical text, which some forms of Judaism gave human shaping to and thus should not be assumed as OT Judaism (to which Paul later provided theological clarity, Rom 9-11).
2. Paul's Damascus road experience—which included all discussed above.
3. Jesus tradition—the existing Christian beliefs from the early church in Jerusalem during Paul's day, including narrative tradition of Jesus, his sayings and teachings which appear later in the written Gospels.
4. God's direct revelation to Paul—which also involves the ongoing teaching of the Spirit to disclose the experiential truth further and deeper to Paul (as Jesus promised, Jn 14:26; 16:13). The Spirit's influence was the significant source in

Paul's theological reflection and formations, which is rarely acknowledged in Pauline studies.

In Paul's dynamic development, the interaction process of the above antecedents and sources occurs conjointly in his life and practice as well as in his thought and theology. His theological reflection was not a separate task of doing theology but deeply integrated to living his life and practice in the context and process of relationship together with the whole of God. In this relational process, for example, Paul was able to critique variants of Judaism on the basis of sources 2, 3 and 4, along with the correct lens of source 1; yet he was also able to clarify the limits of an authentic Judaism (source 1) by sources 2, 3, 4, notably 4. Moreover, Paul was able to add critical assessment to the Jesus tradition (source 3) on the basis of the further understanding and deeper meaning he received from source 4, in order to establish the theological clarity and operationalize the functional clarity necessary for God's whole on God's terms—the respective clarity he made conclusive in his Romans letter and Galatians letter. This clarifying effort, for example, would be similar in principle to a so-called 'Lutheran view' of Paul (on justification) in reaction to a Roman Catholic view of works; yet such a reading of Paul has also limited, or even distorted, his views from source 1, Judaism.

Paul, himself, had clarified for God's people the definitive basis necessary for operation in epistemology, hermeneutics, and thus theology: "Nothing beyond what is written" (1 Cor 4:1-7). This was a key statement about the source defining Paul's purpose and determining his practice and theology, as well as his reciprocal relational responsibility determining his fight against human shaping and construction ("who makes you different," 4:7), which reduced ("went beyond") the truth of the whole gospel (cf. Paul's functional clarity and distinction of the gospel, Gal 1:6-12).

For Paul's readers after the early church period, "what is written" is defined by the canonical text of Scripture—neither in part (as a proof-text for human shaping) nor in fragmentation (as a biased selectivity for human construction) but only in its whole (discussed further in chap. 9). For Paul, "what is written" also involved what God directly revealed to him (source 4 conjoined with the embodied Word overlapping from source 2) for what was also to be written for inclusion in the canonical text of God's Word.

Paul's initial Damascus road experience extending into ongoing relationship with the embodied Word from God (source 2) and the subsequent direct revelations from the triune God (source 4) converged in Paul's theological reflection to suggest an unfolding of his thought to develop first the functional clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel (namely in Gal)—which was unmistakably distinguished from any alternative gospel (the ongoing tension and conflict not only in Gal). Then Paul integrated this functional clarity with the necessary theological clarity by developing the conclusive theological basis for this gospel (namely in Rom, the basis for my assumption of its order after Gal). The interrelated development of functional and theological clarity and their integrated definition constituted the truth and whole of the gospel beyond the limits of doctrine to the whole of God's relational context and process in response of grace to the human condition. This experiential truth always unfolded first in his life and practice and then was developed by Paul ongoingly with the Spirit in contrast and conflict with reductionism, which includes perceiving this as only propositional truth. His theology, for example, in his Colossians letter reflected further development from Galatians and

Romans, which Paul likely gained with the Spirit while in prison. The specific situation in Colosse represented a sort of test-case applying the functional and theological clarity from Galatians and Romans, which were needed to expose, challenge and negate reductionism in order to be the whole of God's family and to make God's whole on God's terms. Paul further developed this theological clarity in the general Ephesians letter to define its theological forest and the necessary ecclesiology for relationships together to be whole, that is, to make God's relational whole functional on God's relational terms. This dynamic developmental process in Paul's thought and theology needs further explanation.

When Paul talked about "what I had received" and thus "have handed on to you" (e.g. 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3, 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6), there are three extensions respectively for sources 2, 3, and 4, which need to be considered: (source 2a) from Jesus directly (Gal 1:11-12,16; 1 Cor 11:23); (source 3a) further from Jesus tradition (1 Cor 11:2; 2 Thes 2:15; 3:6, also as source 3 above); and (source 4a) directly from the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10, cf. Jn 14:26; 16:13). These three extensions were not mutually exclusive and must be understood as interrelated since they mutually involved the embodied Word from God. While Jesus tradition (source 3a), along with source 1 above (Judaism), tends to be the focus in Pauline studies, the extensions from Jesus directly (source 2a) and the Spirit (source 4a) have more significance. Thus, despite their mistaken association with mysticism, they must not be dismissed or minimized. To the contrary, they are critical to account for in Paul's thought and theology both in his letters in general and in his connection and continuity with Jesus in particular. This relational process will be identified in the course of this study.

What is critical about the Spirit as source 4a involves the relational epistemic process of *synesis* (grasping the whole from *syniemi*, e.g. which reductionists lacked, 2 Cor 10:12). The process of *synesis* helped Paul put the pieces of God's revelation together to grasp God's whole (Eph 3:3-5)—a process which Jesus scolded his disciples for not engaging (*syniemi*, Mk 8:17-21). Paul made this grasp of God's whole his purpose for the church in order to help them have this whole understanding (*synesis*) to specifically know (*epignosis*) Christ and God's revelation (Col 1:9; 2:2). In this process together with the Spirit, Paul struggled to counter the human shaping of the gospel by reductionist substitutes (e.g., in Colosse, apparent philosophical notions, Col 2:1,4).

If Paul's readers are to understand the depth of his thought, theology and practice, then we must go beyond the existing situations and conditions he addressed in his letters. In order to get to the depth-level of the whole constituting Paul's life and practice and thus his thought and theology, his readers have to engage deeper qualitative sources than those of Judaism and even Jesus tradition. This involves the further and deeper contextualization of Paul with Jesus directly (source 2a) together with the Spirit (source 4a) in the whole of God's relational context and process. In this dynamic developmental process, the whole of God ongoingly was relationally involved to redemptively change, transform and make whole Paul's person, additionally his practice, then his thought and theology. Paul's ongoing relational reciprocity involved the qualitative relational context and process basic to the faith of covenant relationship together—the faith which signifies the necessary relational response to the whole of God who constituted the relational context and process of grace embodied by Jesus and made functional by the Spirit.

If Paul cannot be grasped in this further and deeper qualitative relational context and process, then the whole of Paul is reduced to limited quantitative aspects and will remain elusive in fragmented understanding. It is only this same relational process with Jesus in ongoing relational involvement with the same Spirit, in which and by whom Paul's readers will have the same whole understanding (*synesis*) to specifically know (*epignosis*) the same Christ and God's whole as Paul did—nothing less and no substitutes.

## Knowing Christ and 'in Christ'

Most Pauline readers make the valid observation that quotations of sayings of Jesus are nearly absent in Paul's letters (notably present, 1 Cor 7:10-11; 9:14; 11:23-25). There may be allusions or echoes of Jesus' sayings depending on how they are perceived (e.g. 1 Thes 4:15-17; 5:1-7; Rom 8:15; 12:14; 13:8-10; 14:14). In this ongoing dispute about the extent of Paul's knowledge of Jesus, Seyoon Kim concludes that since Paul emphasized the Christ-event over Jesus' teachings, the significance of Jesus for Paul was not primarily as a teacher but what Christ did, namely in his death and resurrection. Thus, Kim suggests, Jesus' meaning for Paul was different from that of a rabbinic or a philosophic teacher for his pupil; and Paul would not refer to Jesus' teachings in his letters compared to that of a rabbi's or a philosopher's references to his teacher in the rabbinic or philosophical tractates.<sup>2</sup> This position, however, implies that Paul only defined Jesus by what he did, which would not be sufficient to explain Paul's perception of and involvement with Jesus' whole person.

This has raised the issue of how much Paul actually knew about Jesus, and even how interested he was in Jesus tradition or in the historical Jesus. I suggest that it is misleading to use the absence or presence of Jesus' sayings to define his knowledge of Christ or to determine Paul's interest in the person. Such a focus on Jesus defines him primarily by what he said, did or the resources he had. This definition reduces Jesus' whole person and commonly disembodies his person from his sayings, teachings and acts, even on the cross. The absence or presence of Jesus' sayings, then, does not unmistakably measure how little or much Paul actually knew the person of Jesus or was involved with his whole person. Such a measure does, however, point to a quantitative lens and assumptions about the ontology of the person from outer in. This critical issue of perceptual-interpretive framework was raised earlier by Jesus about "the wise and intelligent" (Lk 10:21). This was no longer Paul's lens and interpretive framework. He had received *tamiym*'s hermeneutical correction and epistemological clarification of the ontology of the person. Thus Paul neither disembodied Jesus from his sayings nor reduced Jesus to his teachings and acts. Moreover, Paul's discipleship was not about merely following Christ's teaching or example but only about following his person in relationship together (cf. Jn 12:26, and Jesus' last words to Peter, Jn 21:22).

On the Damascus road, Jesus connected with Paul in relationship, not by his teachings. Therefore, in compatible relational response, Paul's involvement was in the

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<sup>2</sup> Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 287.



primacy of relationship together with Jesus' whole person, in which he was a witness of Jesus throughout his letters. Anything less and any substitutes of this qualitative-relational process would be reductionism—of the incarnation of the Word from God, and of the whole of the gospel, including Paul's whole person. That would diminish both the relational basis for Paul's witness and the qualitative extent of his witness of Jesus.

The primacy of this relationship together was the experiential truth of the whole gospel in which Jesus constituted Paul and the Spirit deeply took him further. The full functional and relational significance of his experiential truth of Jesus as both Object and Subject was concentrated by Paul in his frequent use of the term 'in Christ'. His reference to 'in Christ' was never conceptual but a shorthand term. Paul centered the focus of 'in Christ' on the deep involvement of this relationship together and not on disembodied teachings or Christ-event. Relationship 'in Christ' became the basis and ongoing base for Paul's thought, the focus of which was first the experiential truth of his practice. To further understand Paul's thought 'in Christ' we need to more deeply grasp his practice, notably in relationship with Christ. Yet the functional dynamics of relationship 'in Christ' did not involve Paul in mysticism.<sup>3</sup>

In Jesus' formative family prayer during the incarnation just prior to his crucifixion, he said to the Father decisively: "I have revealed you to them" (Jn 17:6). The term Jesus used for "reveal" was not *apokalypto*, which refers only to exhibiting the Object revealed. Jesus used *phaneroo* to refer to those to whom the revelation was made. The incarnation of the Son went beyond only revealing the triune God to include the full functional and relational significance of vulnerably disclosing the Father directly to his disciples for the primary purpose of relationship together. By the nature of *phaneroo*, this relational process vulnerably involved the necessity of Jesus both as Object to engage and as Subject who engages for unmistakable relational connection. The relational outcome (both 'already' and 'not yet') of this qualitative-relational process (ongoing without end) is the intimate experience of knowing the Father and the Son in family love together (Jn 17:3,26). For Paul, the Damascus road was the extension of this incarnation and the integrated functional and relational significance of this gospel: the experiential truth of Jesus' vulnerable involvement with him only for relationship together.

As the ontology of Paul's person was redeemed from an outer-in practice of reductionism and transformed to the inner-out function of being whole, the covenant relationship together developed further qualitative meaning and deeper relational significance (as Paul made clear later, 2 Cor 2:14-3:18). In this developmental process, "being transformed [*metamorphoo*, not *metaschematizo*, outer change] into the same image" (as Christ, 3:18) has a qualitative significance that manifests to others (*phaneroo*, 2:14), the basis of which Paul defined as "the fragrance of knowing him" (2:14). Paul used the metaphor of "fragrance" (cf. Gen 8:21; Ez 20:41) to point to the qualitative significance of *being* in intimate relationship with Christ 'face to face' (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). Knowing Christ in intimate relationship together—hearts from inner out coming together—was Paul's deepest desire and personal concern (Phil 3:7-11).

Yet, knowing Christ should not be confused with informational content (e.g., disembodied teachings and examples), as Paul learned from *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification. Rather this was the deeper knowledge and whole meaning involved only in

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<sup>3</sup> James D. G. Dunn perceives Paul's 'in Christ' language through the lens of mysticism. *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 390-412.

the relational epistemic process. In other words, knowing Christ is only the relational outcome of deep involvement directly in relationship together by persons from inner out functioning at the level of the heart, just as functionally and relationally constituted by Jesus in the incarnation.

When the Christ-event dominates the incarnation, then Christology is incomplete. An incomplete Christology signifies the reduction of Jesus' whole person, which diminishes the functional significance of the Christ-event and minimalizes the relational significance of the embodied Word from God vulnerably disclosed for the purpose only of relationship together. The relational consequence (not outcome) of this reduction is merely knowing Jesus' teachings and knowing about the historical Jesus—knowing information and things about Jesus—without essentially knowing Jesus' whole person directly in relationship together. The tendency to disembody the incarnate vulnerable person of Jesus (both as Subject and Object) from anything else about him (i.e., only as Object) is consequential of reductionism, which always further includes the relational consequence from reductionism's counter-relational work. Paul neither encountered a disembodied Jesus nor was his deepest desire to know anything less or any substitute than Jesus' whole person in the communion of vulnerably sharing in Christ's life together—as Paul made unequivocal in his biographical statement of personal accountability for past, present and future (Phil 3:4-16).

Paul's statement of personal accountability is a key text for more deeply grasping the process of growth and development in his life and practice, and thus for further understanding his thought 'in Christ'. Paul prefaced his statement by identifying further the reductionists in the church who function from an outer-in ontology defined by their human effort: "those who only cut away the flesh for outward circumcision [*katatome*]...put confidence in the quantitative efforts of what they do and have" (*sarx*, Phil 3:2-3, my paraphrase). In comparative analysis, Paul openly highlighted his own reductionist identity in which he previously functioned according to what he did and had (3:4-6). Some have misinterpreted Paul's identity here as the apostate from Israel and thus reinforced anti-Semitic views. But Paul was only identifying a type of practice of Judaism, not Judaism itself—a type of practice which also would be identified in Christianity (cf. Rev 2-3). By taking personal responsibility for his past and now being accountable in the present, Paul personally demonstrated the conflicting ontologies between outer in and inner out. Thus he pointed to the critical juncture of what persons are going to put faith in and base their life on (*pepoithesis*, 3:4a) and essentially entrust themselves and submit to (*peitho*, 4b).

The critical juncture in Paul's journey, of course, occurred initially on the Damascus road. Previous to then, Paul had put his faith in and submitted himself to a quantitative outer-in ontology, but since then he has been redemptively changed from that reductionist ontology and transformed to the qualitative inner-out ontology of the person made whole from above in the image of God in the face of Christ (cf. 2 Cor 4:4-6). While this was an ongoing process of growth and development for Paul, in the already-present he has a new perceptual-interpretive framework with the mindset (*hegeomai*, Phil 3:7, *phroneo*, 3:15-16, cf. *phronema* and *phroneo* in Rom 8:5-15) to understand what is reductionism: for example, "gains," "rubbish" of old ontology and "loss," lost for new ontology (3:7-8). At the same time, to grasp what is the whole of the new ontology constituted only in relationship together with Christ in the depths of intimacy ('in

Christ’): “knowing Christ...gain Christ and be found ‘in him’...through the relational response of trust (faith) ‘in Christ’...to qualitatively know him and be relationally involved with him together in intimate fellowship [*koinonia*]...and wholly involved together with my whole person in likeness [*symmorphizo*] of his whole embodied person” (3:8-11).

In this comparative analysis in Paul’s accountability statement, he appears to examine its consequence or outcome only in quantitative terms: “gain” (*kerdos*) and “loss” (*zemia*, vv.7-8), perhaps in the socio-economic terms of the Mediterranean world surrounding the church in Philippi. In fact, Paul shifts back and forth between the quantitative of reductionism and the qualitative of God’s whole, in which “gain” in the former is “loss” in the latter, conversely “gain” in the latter is “loss” in the former. This appears analogous to a zero-sum dynamic. Yet the latter (God’s whole) is never contingent on the former (reductionism), only in conflict with it. Rather what Paul clarified is that human practice from a quantitative outer-in ontology of reductionism is always incompatible with human function from a qualitative inner-out ontology of God’s whole—thus an either-or dynamic, not a zero-sum. Whatever its common form or normative practice, good intention or positive motivation, reductionism is always positioned against God’s whole and is ongoingly engaged in counter-relational work for diminishing or fragmenting God’s relational whole and the experience of relationship together ‘in Christ’.

Earlier Paul similarly fought against reductionism and for God’s whole in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 2:1-5; 2 Cor 2:17-3:1). He refused to engage in reductionist processes of human “classifying” (*enkrino*, categorize, 2 Cor 10:12) by essentially defining the person from outer in based on what one does or has—for which Paul established functional clarity in his Galatians letter. Such human classification invariably requires by its nature a comparative process: “they measure themselves by one another and compare themselves with one another.” The relational repercussions are to stratify persons, stereotype and confine them in human constructs of distinction-making (such as race, ethnicity and class, even gender, cf. Gal 3:28), thus distancing, separating and fragmenting relationships together necessary to be God’s whole—the stratified relations, for example, of racism, classism and sexism, which formalize into systems of inequality. Paul exposed this process in the church as the counter-relational work of reductionism (1 Cor 4:7; 12:12-13). Those who engaged in it failed to perceive the impact on God’s relational whole because they “did not put the pieces together to understand” (*syniemi*, 2 Cor 10:12, cf. *synesis*). That is, with a quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework and reductionist lens (cf. 2 Cor 5:12), they did not put the pieces together of God’s revelation notably in Christ, therefore they were unable both to know Christ and to grasp God’s whole—just as Jesus earlier exposed the disciples lack of *syniemi* to truly know him (Mk 8:17-21).

When Paul acknowledged to the Corinthian church his personal lack of “lofty words and wisdom” (1 Cor 2:1) and others’ opinions that “his bodily presence is weak and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor 10:10), he did so to contrast what is important to reductionist perception with what is important to God: “to know nothing...except Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 2:2). This then calls for the antecedent question of “how Paul classified, categorized or rather defined Jesus”, and on this basis engaged the epistemic process to know Christ. For his measure, and in opposition to “the measure” of the reductionists

(*metron*, 2 Cor 10:12), Paul would not go “beyond the measure of the sphere” (*kanon*, 10:13) essentially of God’s whole. That is, the whole of God necessarily provided a standard, limits and terms for Paul’s engagement in the epistemic process to know Christ. And this *kanon* defined Jesus in conclusive terms as both qualitative and relational, therefore the only basis Paul can truly know Christ had to be compatibly both qualitative and relational (as Paul defined elsewhere, 2 Cor 4:2-6; Col 1:15, 19-20; 2:2-4; Eph 4:13).

Unlike Paul’s previous practices, this necessarily involved for Paul to perceive Jesus qualitatively and to engage him relationally, which then necessitated perceiving his own person in qualitative terms and his involvement to converge only in the relational context and process of Jesus. Yet, the nature of this involvement was a process of Paul’s growth and development. Paul also acknowledged “a thorn in the flesh” (2 Cor 12:7-10), which pointed to his own tension with reductionism and struggle to define himself by what he did or had (“my weakness”). Paul shared how his own condition and circumstance were used by the Lord specifically to keep him from the lure of such reductionist self-definition, in order for him to more deeply experience the Lord’s qualitative involvement and relational response (“my grace”). This experiential truth was “sufficient for you” as well as necessary for Paul’s person to be in his weakness (not defined by it) in order for his growth and development to be made further whole in relationship together—the *telos* of the whole of God’s relational response of grace which constituted the functional and relational significance of the gospel (“my power is made perfect,” i.e., my relational means and its effect to make whole in relationship together).

This was the ongoing experiential truth ‘in Christ’ of Paul’s growth and development in relationship with Christ. Thus, when Paul went on record in his accountability statement for the present and future, his focus on the Christ-event must not be misinterpreted: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death” (Phil 3:10). Paul was not redefining Jesus merely back to what he did, and to his example and his resources. In other words, Paul’s deep desire should not be reduced to some aspiration in sacrificial servanthood and an ultimate attainment in discipleship to be like Jesus. His desire was only the depth of Paul’s heart to be *with* Christ (cf. Jn 12:26) and for his relational involvement to vulnerably participate in Christ’s whole life—not indirectly in mutual activity but only directly in intimate relationship together. This was limited only to the terms (*kanon*) of the relationship together in which Christ would make him whole ‘in Christ’ (as Paul theologically clarified, Rom 6:3-11), and being whole ‘in Christ’ to live whole together and to make whole in the world (2 Cor 5:17-21; Col 1:19-23; Eph 2:13-22; Gal 3:26-29).

Paul clearly grasped the experiential truth of what constitutes relationship with the triune God and the qualitative-relational involvement necessary to function in relationship together on God’s terms (cf. Eph 3:16-19). Despite any confusion about Paul’s Christ-event allusions or athletic metaphor (Phil 3:14, cf. 1 Cor 9:24ff), Paul understood that to know Christ was never about achievement in human effort, however rigorous and well-intentioned his self-discipline or self-determination (as his previous practice attested). To truly know the qualitative and relational Christ could be neither by mutual activities together nor from gaining informational knowledge about him. This was only the relational outcome from qualitative-relational involvement directly in vulnerable relationship together. The principal barrier to this relational process is the contrary

function of a reductionist outer-in ontology and its counter-relational work, which Paul quantified by measures of “gain” in a comparative human context defined by such ontology. This pervasive function in faith-practice, however, constituted the human terms which attempt to shape relationship with God and the gospel (“righteousness of my own,” Phil 3:9). Paul would not trust in (*pepoithesis*) and submit to (*peitho*, 3:4) human terms. He refused to go beyond the *kanon* of God’s terms to define and determine the qualitative-relational process to know Christ.

For Paul, to know Christ only had meaning in the qualitative-relational terms revealed by the whole of God. God’s terms for relationship together, in conflict with human terms, by its nature necessitates “the righteousness from God based on faith” (Phil 3:9). That is, this is the righteousness of the whole person (in inner-out ontology) from the relational outcome of Paul’s relational response of trust (“faith”) to the relational response of grace by Christ. This dynamic signified Paul’s reciprocal relational involvement together with Christ in the whole of God’s relational context and process constituted by Christ (both in the incarnation and on the Damascus road) and brought to full completion by his Spirit in God’s eschatological plan (Phil 3:12-16; 2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:5). The relational progression of this relational outcome (the already) and eschatological conclusion (the not yet) is the ongoing dynamic of the experiential truth ‘in Christ’, which, as Jesus prayed decisively, grows and matures “to know the Father and the Son...in God’s family love together” (Jn 17:3,26) in order to be and live whole in likeness of the Trinity and thus to make whole in the world (Jn 17:20-23). This was the growth and maturity (*teleios*) Paul was experiencing to lead the church to be God’s whole “with such a mindset” (the qualitative *phroneo* from the whole *phronema*, Phil 3:15); and regarding anything less and any substitutes which are qualitatively different (*heteros*), the Spirit will give them feedback (*apokalypto*, 3:15, cf. 1 Cor 3:16-22; 2 Cor 5:5). This qualitative-relational process involved “the fragrance of knowing Christ” which developed the further qualitative meaning and deeper relational significance of covenant relationship together made functional by Paul with the Spirit for the inner-out ontology of a new covenant (2 Cor 2:14-3:18).

Paul’s life, practice, thought and theology grew, developed and matured in the experiential truth: To know Christ decisively is to be qualitatively and relationally ‘in Christ’, and the experiential truth of being ‘in Christ’ is unequivocally to know the qualitative and relational Christ in the integrated qualitative-relational process of only God’s terms. Paul’s readers likewise cannot go beyond the *kanon* of God’s terms if they are to have *syniemi* of the whole of Paul’s integrated life, practice, thought and theology, and thus *synesis* of the whole of God (as Paul made unmistakable for the church, 1 Cor 4:6; 2 Cor 10:12-13; Col 2:2-4).

## **Paul’s Transition to Apostle (for the Whole of Humanity)**

Paul’s growth and development in the relational progression with Christ for ongoing involvement in the whole of God’s relational context and process ‘in Christ’ must not be reduced to the prominent roles and related functions he fulfilled—notably as an apostle. What continued to unfold in Paul’s journey was the functional reality that a former persecutor of the church was increasingly put into the lead of the church (cf. 1 Cor

15:9-10). This irony was not lost on some who challenged Paul's position (cf. Acts 9:26; 22:19-20; 1 Cor 9:1-2), or even ignored him well into the second century.<sup>4</sup> The fact that Paul the Jew led the church raises further the issue of continuity-discontinuity.

On the Damascus road Paul never converted to a new religion in rejection of Judaism. He repented of his reductionist faith-practice in Judaism while still remaining a Jew of Judaism's covenant faith. Later, for example, Paul practiced a Nazirite vow despite his conflict with Jews in Corinth (Acts 18:18; cf. 21:23-26; Num 6:2,5,13-20). His rejection of reductionism in variants of Judaism can even be considered to make Paul an orthodox Jew. From the Damascus road there is only further discontinuity with any reductionism in Judaism but there is even deeper continuity with the faith and covenant relationship constituted by Yhwh's grace (cf. Acts 26:6-7).

God's thematic action in relational response to the human condition—a condition of which Israel was even a part and a relational response of which Israel was only part of the recipients—became direct experiential truth for Paul's person. The continuity of God's thematic relational response was extended 'in Christ' and was fulfilled in the incarnation by Jesus (as well as on the Damascus road) to constitute the functional and relational significance of the gospel for Paul (cf. Gal 1:11-12, 15-16)—whose continuity Paul developed theologically (notably in Rom) from his experiential truth still as a Jew, perhaps an orthodox Jew. Moreover, Paul ongoingly experienced the triune God and increasingly grasped the whole of God, who were illuminated directly by the Light (2 Cor 4:6) and directly from Paul's introduction to and involvement with the trinitarian persons (e.g. 1 Cor 2:9-10; Eph 3:4-5). Yet, there is no evidence that Paul ever shifted from being an OT monotheist, though Marcion's two gods and Valentinus' Gnostic Pleroma certainly misinterpreted Paul to support their views in the second century. While also no trinitarian in the later sense (notably of the Cappadocians), Paul was taken further and deeper into the experiential truth and understanding of God than Judaism had experienced or understood. This did not create discontinuity with Judaism's God but fulfilled the covenant promise from the whole of God in God's whole relational context and process. And though Paul never formally put together a trinitarian theology, he integrated the functional and relational significance of the trinitarian persons constituting the whole of God which further laid the definitive groundwork in anticipation of such theology.

In the transition to apostle in Paul's journey, his identity as a Jew remained. This identity, however, was modified and no longer was the primary identity either defining who and what Paul was, or determining how he functioned. Before becoming an apostle, Paul became a disciple of Jesus on the Damascus road. Based on the relational experience, his discipleship was not primarily about adhering to Jesus' teaching or serving according to his example. Rather Paul was involved in following Jesus' whole person in relationship together (see Jesus' paradigm for serving for his disciples, Jn 12:26; Lk 10:41-42). Jesus constituted the monotheist Paul in the whole of God's relational context and process, which signified God's thematic relational response of grace. Paul's Jewish identity had been formed mainly from human contextualization, but Jesus contextualized Paul further and deeper into his own full identity with God (and as God) as an extension of the incarnation. This became Paul's primary identity defining

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<sup>4</sup> For a brief discussion of Paul in the second century, see Calvin J. Roetzel, "Paul in the second century" in James D.G. Dunn ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 227-41.

who and what he was. Moreover, in the incarnation Jesus' full identity conjoined functionally with his minority identity in the world to form what can be considered Jesus' sanctified identity, which Jesus prayed for his followers to have (Jn 17:18-19).<sup>5</sup> The conjoint function of Jesus' sanctified identity became formative of Paul's primary identity 'in Christ' both defining who and what he was as well as determining how he was in Jesus' unique call to him into the world. This is the full significance of Paul's identity declaration: 'By the [relational response of] grace of God I am what I am' (1 Cor 15:8-10).

In one sense, Jesus' connection with Paul on the Damascus road had more relational clarity (cf. Acts 22:14) than his disciples had perceived with him in the incarnation, even after three years together (cf. Jesus' disappointment, Jn 14:9). The relational outcome or consequence for each of them respectively was the extent of functional clarity they had for their discipleship. This was demonstrated when Jesus' last words to Peter were emphatically once again: "You, follow *me*" (Jn 21:22, emphasis added). Discipleship for Paul involved his whole person in relationship together with Jesus' whole person in relational progression with the Spirit to be the whole of God's family by God's family love. In other words, what distinguished discipleship for Paul involved only being whole, God's relational whole on God's relational terms. This signifies the already-fulfilled portion of Jesus' formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26), which Paul would make conclusive theologically and functionally in the ecclesiology necessary to be God's whole (Eph 2:19-22; 3:14-19).

Starting from *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction, Paul's journey was distinguished by the experiential truth of being whole—made whole from above, living whole in relationship together and making whole in the world. This was the relational outcome of the gospel of wholeness (Eph 2:14-17; 6:15). Wholeness was Paul's theme, an integrating theme of his life, practice, thought and theology. Therefore, any continuity in Paul always involves coherence with God's thematic relational response to the human relational condition "to be apart" from God's whole since creation (cf. Gen 2:18), and also involves congruity with the whole from God embodied by Jesus (cf. Col 1:19-20; 2:9-12). Any discontinuity always involves Paul addressing the reduction of God's whole (cf. Gal 2:5,14; Rom 2:28-29). Paul was an apostle of Israel only to the extent of this continuity. He can be considered an apostate from Israel only to the degree of this discontinuity signifying his fight against reductionism.

Paul's readers (in his time and today) cannot adequately understand Paul without knowing his primary identity and thus without a grasp of the wholeness of his life and practice, the whole constituting his discipleship. This whole is what integrates Paul's thought and theology, and what underlies his role and function as an apostle. It is premature to assume that Paul undertook serving as an apostle right off the Damascus road without deeper transformation of his person and further transition in his discipleship. There are no narrative details or biographical notes to support this transition, though Paul's time in Arabia and the three years before going to Jerusalem to connect with the other apostles (Gal 1:15-19) suggest some type of transition. Ananias pointed Paul to a specific process by involving him in "calling on the Lord's name" (Acts 22:16), which Paul later clarified theologically in a full soteriology not only of deliverance in 'saved

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<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on Jesus' sanctified identity, see my study *Sanctified Christology*.

from' but also being 'saved to' (cf. Rom 10:8-13). It seems unreasonable, however, to assume that Paul was merely engaging in discourse about becoming/being a new creature 'in Christ' reconciled in new covenant relationship together without that being first the growth and development of his own experience together both with Christ and also with the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor 3:4-6,18; Rom 8:29).

When Jesus called Paul, he called him foremost to be whole which involved the discipleship of "Follow me" in relationship together. This transitional process in Paul's calling was then conjoined with Jesus' commission of Paul to be sent into the world (Acts 9:15; 13:2; 22:14-15,21; 26:16-18). While Paul's commission emerged from the Damascus road, his growth-and-developmental process does not preclude a transition to apostle but strongly suggests it. Moreover, in Jesus' paradigm of serving for his disciples (Jn 12:26), Paul's commission (or any others') was contingent on his call to be whole because he was sent only in coherence with God's thematic relational response and with congruence with the embodied whole from God, just as Jesus prayed for all his followers (Jn 17:15-26). That is to say, Paul was sent to "make whole" in the world, the functional significance of which necessitates by its nature (neither by obligation nor reductionist service) being whole and living whole.

This conjoint call and commission provided Paul with the understanding (grasp of meaning) and wisdom (grasp of the whole) needed for his role and function as an apostle. To separate the commission from the call to be whole is fragmentary; to perceive Paul's call only from the notion of a commission to be sent lacks understanding not only of the whole of Paul but more importantly the whole of Jesus, and thus the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Therefore the inseparable and irreducible conjoint call-commission of Jesus must define and determine the apostle who Paul is.

Paul's identity as an apostle did not define the sum of who, what and how Paul was. This is a critical distinction to grasp because his primary identity in the whole of God's relational context and process 'in Christ' defined and determined this apostle, as Paul's identity declaration made unmistakable (1 Cor 15:9-10). As an apostle, Paul is commonly known as "the apostle to the Gentiles"—even in Paul's own words (Rom 11:13) implied from Jesus' apparent commission (Act 9:15). This title or identity can be misleading as well as divisive. It separates Paul's ministry from the whole of God's mission (thematic relational action to the human condition), thus fragments God's whole action into separate parts along with Peter's ministry as "an apostle to the Jews" (Gal 2:7-8). These titles certainly reinforce a tension and conflict between Paul and Peter, that is, if the gospel is shaped by their human contexts. Even though Peter's theology of the gospel was corrected in a Christophany and made whole (Acts 10:9-16, 34-36), he still functioned inconsistently with a nuanced gospel shaped according to his context with the circumcised. Thus Peter practiced with a perceptual lens from what he essentially considered his primary identity as a Jew, not 'in Christ'. Paul confronted Peter, and others including Barnabas, "in his hypocrisy" with the truth of the whole gospel not reduced by their human contexts (Gal 2:11-14).

While Paul's own words (different titles, different ministries) also appear to suggest a nuanced gospel, Paul was not making this distinction with their respective titles and ministries. He only pointed to a secondary division of labor (cf. his body metaphor, 1 Cor 12:12-20), the fulfillment of which did not partition their ministries but overlapped in



both the functional and relational significance constituting the whole gospel—just as Paul clarified when he added to his words earlier: “I glorify my ministry [to Gentiles] in order to make my own people [Jews] jealous and thus save some of them” (Rom 11:13-14). For Paul, this was the function of his whole person in his primary identity ‘in Christ’, not his identity as apostle to the Gentiles.

We need to grasp the deeper meaning of Paul’s words and grasp the whole of God and God’s whole defining and determining this apostle. Beyond apostle to the Gentiles, Paul is more accurately understood as a person who was made whole by Christ and thus was commissioned/sent to make whole the human condition by relationally extending God’s relational response of grace. Paul extended the same relational response of grace from God that he necessarily first experienced himself in order to provide relational witness to this experiential truth, not merely to give discourse about it. This was the functional meaning of the Damascus road that Ananias provided for Paul: “The God of our ancestors [both as Jews and as humanity] has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice [in God’s relational context and process]; for you will be his witness to all the world [all humanity] of what you have seen and heard” (Acts 22:14-15, cf. 26:16). Paul’s witness was no mere theological discourse about the gospel but his ongoing relational involvement in the experiential truth and whole of the gospel, nothing less and no substitutes namely from reductionism.

The apostle Paul can only be understood accurately as being whole, which means beyond the constraints of reductionism which tends to be implied in the title ‘apostle to the Gentiles’. Therefore, I suggest, Paul as apostle is more accurately described as apostle to the whole person and for the whole of humanity. That is, as ‘apostle for the whole of humanity’ Paul’s relational function only served to make whole the human condition in God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms. All of his relational actions involved coherence with the whole of God’s thematic relational action, which ‘in Christ’ was the unmistakable continuity and conclusive fulfillment of God’s relational response of grace both for covenant relationship with Abraham and for original creation to be whole in God’s qualitative image and relational likeness—as Paul made definitive theologically (Col 1:15-20). It was with congruence only to this whole gospel that Paul’s whole person “became a minister” (*diakonos*, Col 1:23) according to God’s family administration (*oikonomia*) given to him for the church in order “to complete God’s word” (*pleroo*), that is, to make God’s relational communication whole for his family (Col 1:25), “so that we may present everyone mature” (complete, whole, *teleios*) ‘in Christ’ (Col 1:28; 2:9-10).

The growth and development of Paul’s whole person ‘in Christ’ indeed defined and determined this apostle, apostle for the whole of humanity. Moreover, as partly indicated in the above discussion of this process, being whole with God ‘in Christ’ also defined and determined his thought as well as his gospel.

## **Paul’s Thought**

Paul’s wholeness, being whole, must be accounted for if his readers are to get to the heart of Paul’s thought and his gospel. For Paul, wholeness involved an ontology of the person from inner out made whole from above, just as Jesus made conclusive to Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-15). By its nature nothing less constitutes this new creation, nor can

anything less and any substitutes define and determine Paul or the significance of his life, practice, thought and theology. Any grasp of Paul remains elusive when based on a reduced Paul fragmented by an interpretive lens paying attention to some aspects (notably quantitative) while ignoring others (namely qualitative). Such a perception neither sees the breadth nor comprehends the depth of the journey of Paul's person—the ongoing qualitative-relational process of being whole with God 'in Christ' both 'already' and 'not yet' (cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:19-24,29).

Paul made operational the functional and relational significance of the whole gospel for the Gentiles (and also the Jews) on the basis of God's revelation to his whole person, not for just his role as an apostle (Col 1:25-27; Eph 3:2-6; Rom 16:25). His ongoing relational involvement with the Spirit was the basis for further theological reflection in Paul's thought (1 Cor 2:12-13), thus demonstrating the fulfillment of Jesus' promise of the Spirit as his relational replacement (Jn 15:26; 16:7,12-15). Paul's thought reflected the outcome of the relational epistemic process in which he was directly involved by God's whole relational context and process. This required (*dei*) by its nature the qualitative and relational involvement of Paul's whole person, not the obligation (*opheilo*) of a servant or even the duty of an apostle. The inner-out ontology of Paul's whole person made it difficult to understand his thought—that is, problematic to understand from any other perceptual-interpretive framework—for his readers back in his time through to today.

Peter himself found it necessary to comment on Paul's thought in his letters (2 Pet 3:14-16). While encouraging the challenged church to live whole with Christ ("blameless and in peace," cf. *tamiym* and *shalom* in our previous discussion), Peter noted that this was also Paul's concern even though "there are some things in his letters *difficult to understand*" (*dysnoetos*, emphasis added). The term *dysnoetos* is not used in the sense of something being obscure, imprecise, unclear or abstruse—though Pauline studies have perceived Paul in these ways—but rather of meaning not understood in a simple or immediate manner, not comprehended without careful study. Peter was not implying that Paul's thought was complex. Nor does *dysnoetos* here suggest that careful study was about scholarship—something certainly not lacking in contemporary Pauline studies. What *dysnoetos* does point to in Paul's thought is the deeper epistemology having the qualitative meaning and relational significance constituted by the whole of God. This deeper epistemology involved the epistemological clarification Paul received from *tamiym*, which also necessarily included his hermeneutical correction from a quantitative interpretive lens focused on reductionist ontology from outer in.

Earlier in his discipleship Peter struggled with his own reductionism, apparently even until Paul confronted him (Gal 2:11-14). Now he demonstrated having grasped the deeper epistemology of God's whole ("blameless and in peace") signified in Paul's letters, which Paul directly engaged in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit for the relational outcome of experiential truth. The qualitative-relational significance of this experiential truth provided the grasp of meaning and the understanding of the whole of "what is truly God's" (1 Cor 2:11-12). Neither Paul nor Peter could have had this outcome merely from scholarship in a conventional epistemic process (cf. Paul's operating basis, 1 Cor 2:4,13, and Jesus' hermeneutic lesson and definitive epistemic process, Lk 10:21). Likewise, as Peter correctly pointed out to Paul's readers, Paul's thought will remain difficult to understand apart from the deeper epistemology of God's

whole made evident in the relational epistemic process—which cannot be substituted for by any level of scholarship however reformulated or fresh.

Paul’s thought was based on an epistemology that was both qualitative and relational. Moreover, beyond mere intellectual expression his thought was rooted in the conjoint function of wisdom and love. We need to discuss this further for deeper understanding of Paul’s thought.

There are two basic approaches in an epistemic process, which Paul also addressed in his first Corinthian letter. The two basic approaches, a conventional and a relational epistemic process, can be described as follows:

1. Conventional epistemic process. The quantitative observations of creation and human life to distill provisional information and facts, from which views and conclusions are made more or less likely as seen through the interpretive lens of the observer’s presuppositions rooted in their sociocultural context, ideology and philosophy (cf. Ps 19:1-6; Rom 1:20; 1 Cor 1:20-22; 2:8,14). Though the field of interest is the surrounding quantitative context, the main determinant for what is paid attention to or ignored is a human lens. Thus any knowledge and understanding from this process essentially have been by human shaping or construction. This conventional epistemic process can also be applied even to the approach of God’s Word (cf. Col 2:8; Gal 1:6-7, 11).
2. Relational epistemic process. The qualitative engagement (which includes some quantitative) of listening to God’s communicative action for what God has revealed (even beyond creation) in a qualitatively significant relational context and process in order to make known the whole of knowledge (still somewhat provisional given God’s transcendence) directly from the Creator, thus distinguished from quantitative fragments of knowledge as seen indirectly in God’s creation. This relational epistemic process is initiated by the whole of God’s relational response of grace and must (*dei*) by its nature be engaged compatibly within the relational context and process by which God disclosed this whole knowledge namely in the Word, and then in the embodied Word and through the Spirit (cf. 1 Cor 2:4-13; 2 Cor 12:1; Gal 1:12; Eph 3:2-5). The knowledge received from the relational epistemic process is not determined by the recipient but only by the primary source, God (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7). Thus knowledge from God is definitive whole knowledge, nothing less and no substitutes, and is always defined without any reduction by something less qualitative or by some indirect process shifting determinacy to human shaping and construction (cf. 1 Cor 2:16). Jesus made conclusive this relational epistemic process (Lk 10:21), which was the functional purpose for the Father to impress upon his followers “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5). And to grow in this relational epistemic process, Jesus made it requisite for his witnesses, “Then pay attention to [*blepo*, carefully examine and be aware of] how you listen” (Lk 8:18).

Paul addressed these basic epistemic processes as an either-or issue. This does not mean that they are mutually exclusive. Participation in one does not preclude participating in the other, yet engagement in a conventional epistemic process has a

tendency to limit or bias how the relational epistemic process is engaged. On the other hand, full involvement in the relational epistemic process always chastens (hermeneutically clarifies, refines or corrects) any engagement in the other. The issue Paul addressed was which epistemic process is going to be the primary (or only) determinant for knowledge, understanding and meaning of human life. He framed the issue as between “the wisdom of the world/this age” (1 Cor 1:20; 2:6; 3:19) and “the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:21,24,30).

Wisdom commonly is an attempt to integrate knowledge, understanding and meaning to formulate some basic principles for optimal human life (cf. Col 2:8,20; Gal 4:3). The human shaping and construction of wisdom competes with God’s wisdom for this determinant position to guide, lead or otherwise inform human life (cf. 1 Cor 1:18-25; 2:4-8,14). Both cannot be primary (cf. 1 Cor 3:18-20; 8:2). Moreover, God’s wisdom (“secret and hidden”) is not attainable through human intellect and effort (“None...understood this...nor the human heart conceived...they are unable to understand,” 1 Cor 2:7-9,14). It can only be received as the relational outcome from full involvement in God’s relational context and process by which God discloses the whole knowledge for God’s wisdom (cf. 1 Cor 2:9-13,16). God’s wisdom then is experiential truth from relationship together, not a reasoned truth from human reflection. Therefore, having God’s wisdom signifies the relational outcome from reciprocal relationship together in which God has given the *means* both to grasp God’s whole (God’s intimate desires as disclosed) as well as to act in wholeness (be whole, live whole and make whole) only on the basis of God’s terms, thus the means only in relational response desirable to God. Having God’s wisdom is accountable for both of these means.

Paul’s thought was rooted deeper than in mere wisdom and fully into only God’s wisdom. When he claimed to “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16), this was not about mysticism or about esoteric knowledge forming the roots for later Gnosticism. Paul’s thought was not a noetic infusion of absolute conventional knowledge by God. Having the mind of Christ was having the whole knowledge for God’s wisdom, which was the relational outcome of Paul’s full involvement in the relational epistemic process. In other words, Paul’s thought was infused with the whole knowledge of the vulnerable presence and intimate involvement of the whole of God. Thus having the mind of Christ was the experiential truth of the embodied Word, who was both Object to grasp and Subject to be relationally involved with.

The relational outcome of this whole knowledge for God’s wisdom is never an end in itself or for oneself. Paul later clarified that all knowledge implies a social process affecting others, and whole knowledge comes with even greater responsibility for how it affects others. Paul was accountable for the reciprocal relational *means* which is constituted by God’s wisdom. Therefore, along with being based on a qualitative-relational epistemology, Paul’s thought was rooted in the conjoint function of God’s wisdom and love. Wisdom and love are inseparable in God’s whole. Wisdom as the relational means to live whole and make whole by its nature (not by obligation) necessitates relational involvement with others by love, God’s family love (cf. 1 Cor 13:2; Gal 5:6; Eph 3:19; 4:15-16; Col 2:2-3). Paul put this into context for us.

Building on the discussion of the two basic epistemic approaches he initiated in the earlier part of his first Corinthian letter, Paul made clear his epistemology and its functional and relational significance (1 Cor 8). Though the situation was about food

sacrificed to idols, the underlying issue was about knowledge and its use. In this situation Paul addressed the two basic approaches to human knowledge to get to the source of all knowledge and understanding, as well as to identify each approach's distinguishing character and the functional significance of their difference. He did this in order to clarify the implications for negative consequences or positive outcomes which the use of that knowledge can have.

Interestingly, Paul put conventional knowledge into juxtaposition with love (*agape*)—"Knowledge puffs up but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1, cf. 14:4)—and identified for each two vital matters to grasp for human living. The first vital matter is the distinguishing character of conventional knowledge and of love. Knowledge tends to revolve around the knower and thus becomes an end for oneself to be better defined—that is, "puffs *me* up"; love rightly engaged (not about *what* the lover does but about *how* to be involved with others) focuses beyond the lover and the lover's action to the persons with whom the lover is involved for their sake, not the lover's—that is, "builds *others* up." The difference in the character distinguishing conventional knowledge and love creates both tension and conflict in human life and relationships; 'me versus others' is a human problem that affects us all.

The other vital matter Paul identified is the functional significance of their difference in character. With the attention (even unintentional) on 'me' (even unknowingly), whatever the human context is, the knower assumes the primacy of the individual over the whole in human life, and thus assumes the freedom for such pursuit. That the individual's interest and concern are the priority is the knower's position by functional implication, despite any contrary intentions or beliefs—that is, "puffs *me* up" because the individual is more important than the whole, or "puffs *me* up first," even "puffs *me* up only". Love functions in clear distinction from conventional knowledge since the lover assumes the primacy of the whole over the individual, yet neither at the expense of the individual nor by reducing the importance of the whole person created in the image of God. Moreover, the lover affirms persons created in the likeness of the relational ontology of the triune God, therefore also affirming the primacy of the relationships necessary for the person and persons together to be whole—that is, love "builds *others* up" in these relationships which then will also build the lover's person up to "build us up together to be whole," God's whole on God's terms. The functional significance of the difference between knowledge and love not only creates tension and conflict in human life and relationships but also with God; 'the individual versus the whole' signifies the human relational condition which involves us all.

Paul used this juxtaposition of knowledge and love to expose illusions about the epistemic process and to chasten the working assumptions and simulations of human ontology. Additionally, I suggest, in his polemic Paul necessarily implied that the ontology of the human person was created whole conclusively for two interdependent functions: (1) the person was created whole from inner out to constitute *the qualitative function* of the person (signified by the importance of the heart), who cannot be reduced to outer-in definition and function and still be whole; (2) and interrelated, those whole persons also were created for *the relational function* not "to be apart" essentially from one another in qualitative function but only in the qualitative relationships together necessary to be whole. That is to say, God's created whole on only God's terms—not by human shaping or construction—is the integrated qualitative-relational function of both

person and interdependent relationship together to constitute wholeness. And Paul was confronting the epistemological illusions and ontological simulations from reductionism which had influenced life and practice in the church—the necessity of which certainly continues to be relevant for the church today.

Part of the epistemological illusion involved failing to acknowledge the quantitative limits of one's knowledge ("Anyone who claims to know something," 1 Cor 8:2, cf. 13:8,9,12). Such knowledge must not be used to define the person and determine human life and practice because it "does not yet have the necessary knowledge" (*dei*, by its nature) to go beyond ontological simulation. Knowledge and human ontology cannot be reduced to mere quantitative information, facts and practice. The necessary wholeness of knowledge and human ontology is by its nature always in the context of relationship with God, the creator of all life and the source of its knowledge, which Paul clarified theologically and functionally by affirming monotheism in a pluralistic context as the conclusive source of whole knowledge "through whom we exist" (8:4-6).

As the determinative source, God is the only one who, on the one hand, reveals conventional knowledge within the quantitative limits of creation and, on the other, reveals further and deeper whole knowledge in its qualitative significance of relationship. Without engaging this relationship to receive the whole knowledge from God, the epistemic process is limited to conventional knowledge from creation (essentially knowledge without understanding). From this limited basis human persons can only make assumptions or speculations at best to shape and construct human life, even ideas of God. Paul addressed the liberties taken with such limited knowledge as well as how all knowledge affects others. Yet there is often a thin line between God's whole and the human efforts amounting to epistemological illusion and ontological simulation. For this purpose in his polemic, Paul put knowledge into juxtaposition with love to expose the dynamics of reductionism in clear distinction from the qualitative-relational function of God's whole.

To understand Paul's thought in his corpus, Paul needs to be kept in the deeper relational context with God, which then always locates the existing situation into further and deeper context. Knowledge from God did not come to Paul in informational form, nor did the truth come to him in propositional form. The embodied Truth was always for relationship to be involved in together (cf. Jesus' definitive disclosure to his disciples, Jn 14:6), thus always functioned qualitatively and relationally for experiential truth. This was what emerged, and progressively continued, for Paul from the Damascus road. Therefore, for Paul, knowing something (even whole knowledge as truth) which God revealed (e.g. 1 Cor 8:7-8) must by its nature be understood as the relational outcome of God's relational response of grace for relationship together. This knowledge (notably as truth) then was given in love (*agape* family love), because the Truth is always for relationship and any truth given is only about relationship together, not mere information. Thus, this knowledge-as-truth, or wisdom-as-experiential-truth, comes with the reciprocal relational responsibility to use this knowledge in the qualitative-relational way it was given by God—and not, as in the context of the situation (8:9-13), for one's individual use ("this liberty of yours") or gain ("puffs me up"). If not used in the way given, its use will have relational consequences: "others see you who have this knowledge" and influenced by that a "brother is destroyed by your knowledge." Such use of knowledge, even if unintentional, is sin, the sin of reductionism.

Paul was making unmistakable the relational reality that we know by the saying: “A little knowledge can be dangerous,” which Paul would add “and its use can be deadly,” thus reducing God’s relational whole and fragmenting the relationships together necessary to be whole. The above situation about food only highlights the issue about knowledge and its use, for which only the further and deeper relational context and process of God can provide understanding. Paul’s thought and polemic then applies to any use of knowledge in any situation, notably in the church and the academy, where knowledge is used to puff up individuals at the expense of or substitute for building up in love the whole of God’s family.

In Paul’s thought and polemic he made conclusive two vital matters about epistemology:

1. The epistemic process for acquiring knowledge is never done in a vacuum, that is, in isolation from the presence or influence of others; the contextual source of one’s interpretive lens (what is paid attention to or ignored) exerts defining influence on the extent of the knowledge acquired.
2. Moreover, what happens to that acquired knowledge, and its implied use, remains in the context of others; any acquired knowledge always engages either a negative dynamic (e.g., comparative to others signifying more or less, cf. 1 Cor 1:12; 3:3-4; 2 Cor 10:12) or a positive dynamic (e.g., edifying of others to build wholeness, cf. 1 Cor 13:1-2,8), that exerts determining influence further involving others (including God) and how others will be affected (intentionally or unintentionally) simply by the knower assuming possession of that knowledge.

In other words, Paul made it a functional reality for any epistemology and epistemic approach: *Knowledge involves a social process with relational implications which affect all of us in one way or another.* And Paul held the church accountable for these relational implications.

There are other aspects of Paul’s thought along with epistemology which are integrated to define and determine the whole of Paul. The development of Paul’s thought was the deeper epistemology of whole knowledge from God, which was the theological basis for the experiential truth of his gospel. His thought functionally overlapped with his gospel such that to understand his gospel necessitated more deeply understanding his thought; and conversely, to understand his thought involved further understanding his gospel.

## **Paul’s Gospel**

What was Paul’s role and function to develop this new faith in Christ? Did he serve to develop Christianity beyond its roots in Judaism and transform it from a Jewish messianic renewal movement into essentially a new religion which influenced the Greco-Roman world and beyond? Did Paul engage in effect in the reification (human authorship and enterprise seen as objectified fact) of Christianity and the church, thus promoting a belief system and institution of his own construction; or was he in fact responding in

many of his letters to the reification of Christianity and the church by false or reductionist practices of many associated with the church, in order for him to clearly distinguish their human constructs from the whole of God's thematic relational action and creative involvement making whole from above? What indeed was the significance of Paul's gospel and how did his gospel differ from Jesus' gospel? These interrelated questions have been issues for Paul's readers, to which I have partially related and will continue to relate throughout this study.

To sufficiently understand what Paul is saying in his letters—as illustrated by our initial discussion above of his thought in 1 Corinthians—his readers need to be aware of and thus account for the following three hermeneutical factors in their interpretation:

1. Paul is not speaking in a vacuum. His words are framed in human contexts which must be accounted for in interpretation. Thus what he says should not be taken out of context in order to form normative positions, timeless truths or doctrinal certainty. For example, in his letters Paul is not writing a textbook summary on Judaism and its faith. He is referring only to those aspects which are involved in reductionism in those human contexts he is addressing. Thus his polemics should not be used to characterize Judaism or as a caricature of all Jewish practice in order to support stereotypes, propositional truths or doctrine. At the same time, this is not to preclude that Paul's theology constitutes the irreducible and nonnegotiable terms of God for the ongoing life of God's people.
2. Paul always speaks *in* a human context, clearly speaking *to* a human context; yet, in order to understand Paul, his readers need to realize that Paul is not speaking *from* a human context. His critiques, prescriptions and theology formed in his letters are contextualized beyond those human contexts to his involvement directly in God's relational context and process. Paul's corpus emerged *in* human contexts but was constituted *from* the further and deeper context of the whole of God through full involvement in the process of relationship together with Christ. This is the primary context that defined and determined the whole of Paul's life, practice, thought and theology. This is signified by Paul's frequent use of 'in Christ', which is neither a concept nor mysticism in Paul but only signifies the qualitative function of the whole person in relationship together. Therefore, it is insufficient to understand Paul solely from human contextualization. This is the key issue for understanding Paul's gospel. Moreover, I suggest that the limits, shortcomings or distortions of both a so-called Lutheran Paul and a new perspective of Paul (more accurately of Judaism) are problematic consequences of this hermeneutical absence. They essentially contextualize Paul in human contexts (sixteenth-century Reformation or first-century Judaism) and do not see Paul in his primary context by using a deeper lens. This leaves them merely with a Paul determined by those human contexts, thus effectively reduced from the full qualitative-relational significance of 'in Christ' to a Paul of human shaping.
3. Until Paul's readers "listen to" (see, read) Paul from the qualitative framework into which Paul was relationally contextualized and constituted *with* and 'in Christ'—God's relational context and process *from* which Paul was speaking to



extend and give further clarity to God's voice—we will not have the interpretive lens necessary to go beyond human shaping of the gospel in order to grasp the experiential truth of the whole gospel constituted, fulfilled and made whole by Jesus. Jesus' gospel was the experiential truth of Paul's gospel, by whom Paul was made whole. Without this lens of Paul's corpus, God's whole on God's terms (the relational good news) gets ignored, fragmented and reduced to the shape of human terms constructing epistemological illusions of the gospel and ontological simulations of God's whole family, the church. If we do not account for this whole in his letters, we have no clear understanding of Paul's purpose and what he is fighting for and against. Furthermore, we have no unequivocal basis by which to resolve an apparent paradox of Paul that was raised earlier: apostle of Israel or apostate from Israel.

Contrary to the perception that Paul's corpus is filled with inconsistency, contradiction and enigma and has no unity or coherence, there is a common thread and developmental flow for his readers to understand. This involves the functional overlapping of his thought and his gospel in the above three hermeneutical factors.

As Paul addressed in his letters various situations and conditions involving tension, distress, fragmented relationships and a lack of harmony in the church, he emphasized certain themes which were vital to his thought and gospel. Paul began each of his letters with a simple address (with the likely exception of Ephesians whose title was apparently added later): "grace and peace" (both letters to Timothy add "mercy"). Furthermore, he closed most of his letters with a greeting containing these terms. It would be an error to read this as a mere formulaic greeting. The significance of his address is critical to Paul's thought and basic to his gospel, which his closing greeting pointed to or summarized.

Paul consistently combined "grace and peace," which indicates they are inseparable. They are not joined as mere concepts but converge in function as interdependent relational action and outcome directly from God the Father and Christ—whom Paul identified as "the God of peace" and "the Lord of peace" (1Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:16; 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9). Paul began his letters with peace in conjoint function with grace and ended his letters with peace contingent on grace in order to illuminate the functional and relational significance of the gospel.

Grace was not some mere notion of favor or a spiritual gift (commodity) dispensed by God for human possession (or consumption). Grace only signified God's relational response to the human condition on the basis of God's terms, thus relational response without contingency to human terms. The definitive relational outcome of God's relational response of grace is the peace of God (cf. Phil 4:7), the peace of Christ (cf. Col 3:15), from the God of peace, the Lord of peace. This was the integrating theme of Paul's thought throughout his letters, which pointed first to Paul's own experiential truth of this peace with Jesus on the Damascus road. Though Paul had been in conflict with Christ and Christians (the Way), God's relational response of grace extended peace to Paul; yet this peace was not a mere "olive branch" to address their disharmony. Jesus did not pursue Paul just for the absence of conflict. Such a conventional peace signified human construction, as Jesus distinguished from his relational response (Jn 14:27). Jesus relationally responded in family love to reconcile Paul to his family to make Paul whole.

This relational outcome of wholeness is the qualitative depth of the peace of Christ (thus the peace of God) that Paul directly experienced from the Lord of peace (thus the God of peace). Therefore, this is the wholeness which constituted *shalom* further and deeper than Israel and Judaism had experienced.

While Paul addressed the various situations lacking peace, Paul's emphatic theme of peace went well beyond the ancient Greek notion of peace simply as the absence of conflict. For Paul, peace was rooted in a Hebrew understanding, which 'in Christ' had become the irreducible well-being constituted only by the wholeness of God and the relationships together necessary to be whole, God's relational whole on God's relational terms. This is further understood in his letters by another ongoing theme interrelated to "grace and peace": "blameless and holy" or a variation ( 1Thes 3:13; 5:23; 1 Cor 1:8; Col 1:22; Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; 1 Tim 6:14). Responding to the church at Thessalonica's eschatological concerns, Paul did not emphasize "blameless and holy" merely for the sake of purity when Christ returns. Paul builds on "blameless" (*amemptos*) from the covenant relationship in the OT and God's relational terms to Abraham to be *tamiym* ("blameless," Gen 17:1-2). As discussed earlier, *tamiym* is clearly about persons being *whole* in relationship together with God, the holy God, thus constituting relationship only on God's terms.

In Paul's thought, "holy and blameless" converged with "grace and peace" to signify being whole in relationship together (peace and blameless) only on the ongoing basis of God's relational response and terms for the relationship (grace and holy). Furthermore, Paul's own experience and thought made clear that this relational outcome is not about relationship together only in the future but necessarily 'already' in the present, just as Jesus relationally embodied in the incarnation and 'already' constituted for his followers—the experiential truth and whole of the gospel.

For Paul, his gospel was clearly the experiential truth of "the gospel of peace" from the Lord of peace (Eph 6:15). It is this wholeness 'in Christ' (both 'already' and 'not yet') which Paul unequivocally made nonnegotiable to human terms and irreducible to human shaping and construction in order to clearly distinguish: (1) the qualitative significance of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15), just as Jesus made whole from above (Jn 3:3-7); and (2) the relational significance of new covenant relationship together in the ecclesiology of the whole (2 Cor 5:18; 13:11; Eph 2:14-15; Col 3:15; Rom 8:6), that is, in likeness of the relational ontology of the Trinity as Jesus prayed in his formative family prayer (Jn 17:20-26). Nothing less than and no substitutes for this peace integrated Paul's journey, practice, thought and theology. And nothing less than and no substitutes for the relational response of God's grace constituted the basis and ongoing base for the whole of Paul. Therefore, for Paul, this relational outcome of wholeness (peace contingent on grace) is "the distinguishing purpose [*semeion*] in every letter of mine" (2 Thes 3:17), which Paul's readers need to understand qualitatively as critical to his thought and need to grasp relationally as basic to his gospel.

From his experience with Jesus on the Damascus road and his subsequent involvement in relationship together, Paul's gospel emerged directly from the gospel relationally embodied by Jesus. Thus, Paul's thought is better understood as a qualitative extension of the incarnation, even though in quantitative terms he rarely quoted from Jesus' teaching. Paul understood that the embodied Truth was only for relationship, and that his witness was to the experiential truth of Jesus' whole person—neither reduced to

his teachings nor fragmented by his deeds but only for the relationship together necessary to be God's whole. Moreover, from his previous practice in Judaism and *tamiym*'s epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction, Paul understood that anything less than and any substitutes for this gospel of peace are incompatible and in conflict with the truth of the whole gospel relationally embodied by Jesus. In other words, Paul clearly understood that reductionism is always positioned against the wholeness 'in Christ', seeking to formulate alternatives ("a different gospel," Gal 1:6-9) by human terms, shaping and construction.

Human terms, shaping or construction occur when the gospel is contextualized within the primary influence of human contexts. Jesus takes his followers further and deeper than this, as he did Paul. Paul declared unequivocally that the origin of his gospel cannot be explained by human contextualization and the influence of surrounding contexts (Gal 1:11-12), which also includes by Paul's own shaping or construction. To the contrary, his gospel was contextualized only in Jesus' whole relational context and thus can be understood only by Jesus' whole relational process, which for Paul was first his direct experience with Jesus to be transformed and made whole in the experiential truth of the whole gospel relationally embodied by Jesus. As a person vitally concerned about this whole gospel, Paul turned first to the gospel of peace he experienced directly from the Lord of peace to make definitive the theological basis for his gospel. Paul did not engage in reification, that is, essentially construct his own gospel and belief system to support an institutional order of his shaping, in which he lived as if this were the nature of God's truth and the reality of peace 'in Christ'.<sup>6</sup> He did, however, expose those who did.

Therefore, though Paul's letters delineate specific human contexts, he was always contextualizing the gospel further and deeper in the whole of God's relational context and process embodied by Christ. Paul never spoke in a vacuum but always spoke *in* human contexts and *to* those contexts, yet he never spoke *from* human contexts, including of his own shaping and construction (except to illustrate reductionism in comparative relations, e.g., 2 Cor 11:16-12:13). Paul's readers then should not look for a unity in Paul's thought and theology in his corpus until they understand where he is speaking from. This is what defined and determined Paul, and thus what constitutes how he was involved with those to whom a letter was addressed. This is how Paul's thought and his gospel functionally overlapped, the conjoint function of which is vital for his readers to understand his thought and to grasp his gospel. From this understanding emerges any sense of coherence and wholeness in Paul's thought and theology. Without it, all that his readers have is fragmentary, parts of which appear disjointed and contradictory or even in conflict (cf. Peter's commentary, 2 Pet 3:16).

Given the deeper context defining and determining the whole of Paul and the wholeness 'in Christ' integrating his thought throughout his corpus, there emerged two distinct depths in Paul's development. On the one hand, there was his compassionate, sensitive and loving relational involvement with God's family for the purpose of being God's whole and living whole on God's terms, thus making unmistakable the functional and relational significance of the gospel. On the other hand, there was his passionate, rigorous and uncompromising response to anything less and any substitutes among those related to God's family for the purpose of exposing and confronting reductionism to

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<sup>6</sup> For a helpful discussion of the dynamic of reification and its implications in human life, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: the History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 177-20.

make them whole, thus making irreducible and nonnegotiable the experiential truth of the whole gospel. In these ongoing depths of action Paul made his own person vulnerable to any relational outcomes or consequences resulting from those he addressed. It would be inaccurate to perceive Paul's passion as a mere expression of his personality transferred from his previous passion to persecute the church (cf. Acts 26:11). His previous passion came from an outer-in ontology and his new passion emerged from the depths of an inner-out ontology made whole. This process of transformation to wholeness was the gospel of peace Paul deeply felt so strongly about. And the only alternative to this whole gospel was one reduced by human terms, shaping or construction. And such alternative for Paul, experientially, epistemologically and ontologically, had no basis and qualitative-relational significance beyond human design to be defined as a gospel (Gal 1:6-7).

What this delineates about Paul was his strength of position on the ongoing issue of the gospel. The issue is ongoing because reductionism is always positioned against the whole of the gospel, and the gospel of wholeness, always seeking to redefine it with something less or some substitute. The strength of Paul's position was clearly expressed in his polemic about the issue, which is always twofold: It is an inseparable fight *for* the truth of the whole gospel, on the one hand, and *against* reductionism, on the other. Paul's corpus unfolds in his growth and developmental process. And this is what his readers with the proper lens (cf. 2 Cor 5:12; 10:7a; Gal 2:6) can see maturing as they understand the qualitative significance of his thought and grasp the relational significance of his gospel.

## Chapter 4 Paul's Journey Matures

With the development of Paul's practice and thought, his ministry and mission were firmly established. Maturity in Paul's journey, however, involves less about what he did in ministry and mission and more about what unfolded of the *whole of Paul* and grasping the *whole in Paul* (cf. Phil 3:15-16). More deeply understanding the whole of Paul involves Paul's witness (cf. Acts 26:16). More deeply grasping the whole in Paul involves Paul's theology (cf. Col 1:25). Both functioned interdependently because both were outgrowths of Paul's whole person in qualitative relationship with the whole of God, which constituted the ongoing relational basis and integrated the qualitative significance of his witness and his theology. On this relational basis and with this qualitative significance, neither the whole of Paul's witness nor the whole in his theology is reducible; that is, they are inseparable from each other and from the development of Paul's journey as a necessity to be whole. Any separation fragments them and thus renders only reductionist understanding and meaning.

### The Whole of Paul and His Witness

If Paul's call or commission from the Damascus road had not been enacted on the basis and with the significance of his developmental process, then on what basis and with what significance could Paul's witness be expected to function? Can we simply assume that Paul was able to be a witness for Jesus based on that one encounter? Unless Paul emerged from the Damascus road a fully-developed apostle with a ready-made theology, without development his witness would struggle with inconsistency, contradiction, limitations or deficiencies, which points to difficulties some of Paul's readers have with him.

Paul was appointed by Jesus to be his witness of "the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you" (Acts 26:16), "what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:15). "Witness" (*martys*) is a term for a person who possesses knowledge of someone (or something) and thus can confirm that one (or thing). The epistemic process engaged by the witness determines the level of knowledge the witness possesses, and thus the extent of confirmation that witness can make about someone. That is, a full witness of Jesus of "what you have seen and heard" has to, as Jesus made requisite earlier, "Then pay attention to [*blepo*, carefully examine and be aware of] how

you listen” (Lk 8:18). Carefully examining and ongoingly being aware of how one listens to the Word from God characterizes the development of Paul’s witness. It is curious, then, why Jesus did not simply count on his first disciples to be the integral witnesses of “what you have seen and heard.” What, if anything, distinguished Paul’s witness from theirs?

A witness with only quantitative knowledge about Jesus from a conventional epistemology can only confirm limited information about the historical Jesus as Object-for-observation. To witness to the whole of Jesus’ person also as Subject-for-relationship involves a deeper epistemology engaging the relational epistemic process with the relational outcome of whole knowledge, not merely quantitative knowledge about informational fragments. This requires a perceptual-interpretive lens which pays attention to the qualitative and relational significance of Jesus. A true and full witness of Jesus, therefore, must be involved as a direct participant in relationship together with Jesus, not a mere observer, in order to confirm the whole of who, what and how Jesus is. Paul was this participant-witness of Jesus not by mere appointment but from his relational involvement constituted by the whole of God’s relational response of grace to him—the whole of whom he continued to experience further and deeper in relationship together “to know Christ” (Phil 3:10-11). Thus Paul’s whole knowledge of Jesus, the embodied Truth only for relationship, was the experiential truth of the whole gospel for whom he was a witness.

*Who* and *what* Paul ongoingly was a witness to is critical to understanding the whole of Paul and how he matures. Paul had no illusions about the basis for his life and the necessary ongoing base for his practice: the whole of God’s relational response and involvement of grace. He witnessed only to this grace embodied by the relational response and involvement from Jesus’ whole person—which further speaks to why Paul rarely quoted from fragments of Jesus’ teaching. By this relational function of grace Paul was ‘in Christ’, the whole of Jesus, and nothing less and no substitutes constituted Paul’s witness.

In his witness of Jesus, Paul’s polemic and fight emerged as a joint fight for the gospel and against reductionism. This conjoint dynamic always qualified the strength of his position, and more importantly it nurtured his witness to maturity. For example, Paul clearly distinguished that his joint fight was not by his own means (1 Cor 2:4,13; 2 Cor 10:2-5). Paul ongoingly navigated the thin line between the whole gospel and reductionism in order for his witness not to function by reductionism, even though he was in the context of reductionism. Therefore, his witness in fighting for the gospel necessitated (*dei*) by the nature of the gospel a fight only by the means of God’s grace, which is not compatible with the use of any of Paul’s own means. That is, Paul’s witness would only be true by the means of the ongoing relationship together embodied by Jesus as well as the further relational work fulfilled in reciprocal relationship by the Spirit. Anything less or any substitute of these relational means of God’s grace is not the truth of the whole gospel, because rather than based on the function of grace (though the theology of grace may be there) such a witness functions on the basis of human effort and some type of shaping from self-determination. This crosses the line into reductionism which Paul’s witness was fighting against. In other words, a true witness of Jesus cannot fight for the gospel while engaging in reductionism. And Paul’s witness matured as it remained true to the whole of Jesus’ person and thus his whole gospel.

The maturing of Paul's witness in his polemic and fight conjointly for the gospel and against reductionism was neither the passion of a religious zealot nor the wisdom of this age, the aged or any other human source (cf. 1 Cor 2:6-7,9; 2 Cor 1:12). Paul was confident ("the testimony of our conscience") that his witness in the world and especially toward those in the church was clearly in inner-out congruence with God's whole on God's terms ("in holiness and sincerity of God," i.e., without the outer-in shaping from reductionism), thus "not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God" (2 Cor 1:12).

God's grace was not new to Paul since as a Jew educated in Hebrew Scripture he knew of God's grace constituting the covenant relationship with Abraham and the people of God. God's grace, however, emerged new for Paul in the experiential truth of the whole of God's relational response of grace embodied in Jesus vulnerably to him. For Paul, God's relational response of grace took him beyond the echo from his *past* to constitute God's relational involvement of grace in its relational effects and ongoing function in the *present*—the relational outcome of God's whole on God's terms of grace. Moreover, for Paul God's grace was not just the hope for the *future* but also the necessary experiential truth for the present (notably in his witness)—the absence or reduction of which make the significant past more faint and the warranted future more vague.

In Paul's experience, grace was God's relational response to him with the relational outcome of being made whole. His wholeness had only one source, which Paul always signified in the greetings of his letters with the inseparable function of "grace and peace." Grace then for Paul also became new in his thought development changing from a theological idea rooted in his heritage or cultural belief and value. Yet his thought on grace did not shift to a propositional truth and doctrinal norm, or even to a spiritual gift (to be discussed later), but developed and matured conclusively as only the whole of God's thematic relational response and ongoing relational involvement with him, God's people and the human condition. This was the only grace to be the basis for Paul's witness; any other means was reductionism.

Maturity is an outcome of the process of growth and development, which involves the process of transformation (sanctification) from old to new. Maturity does not signify the completion (*teleioo*) of this transformation process 'not yet', only a fullness (*teleios*) of being made whole and thus living whole 'already' (Phil 3:12-16), God's relational whole on God's relational terms. Paul witnessed to God's wholeness 'in Christ' (as signified in "the gospel of peace," Eph 6:15, from "the God and the Lord of peace," 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:16). Therefore, Paul's witness matured not only as a confirmation of the whole of Jesus but also as a confirmation of the whole of Paul, his wholeness 'in Christ'. Paul's witness of Jesus was essentially contingent on Paul's wholeness and was inseparable from the ongoing function of being whole and living whole for making whole. In other words, Paul's witness was true (read whole) as long as he did not cross over that thin line into reductionism to compromise his function 'in Christ'. He was influenced, challenged and even tested to do so by the lure of reductionism ongoingly in his journey.

Paul shared how his own condition and circumstance were used by God specifically to help him deal with the lure of reductionism and from crossing that line (2 Cor 12:7-10). This involved "a thorn in my flesh" that served to nurture his development of wholeness in God's relational context and process and to help him avoid functioning in reductionism by defining himself from outer in by what he had. This included both the

thorn to define him as *less*, and “the exceptional character of the revelations” from God which he boasted of having in his possession to define him as *more* (12:1-6). The dynamic involved in what Paul shared about himself is important to grasp in Paul’s development to maturity.

Whatever Paul’s apparent physical condition and its related circumstances were, its presence indicated Paul’s own tension (or even struggle) with reductionism and defining himself from outer in by what he had and did over against his identity ‘in Christ’ as a whole person from inner out. Moreover, its effect involved the subtlety of Paul’s attempt to include the Lord in his engagement with reductionism: “Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me.” This may appear as a simple request for healing. Yet, the Lord’s response reveals a deeper issue for Paul’s person and witness.

To help Paul in this deeper issue, the Lord was involved with him directly about this thorn, even though his response to Paul was contrary to the treble frequency of Paul’s plea. The Lord did not ignore Paul’s pleas about his physical condition, which implied the relational message of what Paul was saying about himself: a person from outer in defined by what he had—notably his thorn perceived to make him less. The Lord responded to the treble strength of Paul’s relational message by penetrating to the inner out of Paul’s whole person: “My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is made perfect in weakness.” The content level of this message by itself is insufficient either to grasp the depth of the Lord’s communicative action or to understand the deeper issue involved in the content level of Paul’s plea. The Lord’s communication is relational language to Paul which involved a treble strength of relational messages of his own.

Consider what was implied in the Lord’s words:

“My grace”—That is, not a propositional truth, doctrinal norm or gift but my vulnerable relational action, intimate relational response and ongoing relational involvement (implying the relational message of what the Lord is saying about himself and how he is);

“is sufficient for you”—that is, is intimately involved with you for your person to be whole from inner out, not reduced to outer in, thus for your witness to be whole and true (implying the relational message of what the Lord is saying about Paul and what is primary about Paul’s person);

“for [my] power is made perfect in [your] weakness”—that is, my (*dynamis*, ability) relational means and its effect are the only means to complete (*teleo*, bring to perfection or its destined goal) not my power (which already is) but to complete and bring to its destination our relationship together as the whole of God’s family only on God’s terms, which necessarily includes your condition of weakness (*astheneia*, a condition in which one is limited), thus a vital ontological reality for you to embrace about your humanity without redefining your person from outer in in order to counter any ontological simulations from subtle reductionist efforts of self-autonomy and self-determination, even self-justification (all of which implied the relational message of what the Lord is saying about their relationship together and the importance of it even over what Paul does as a witness).



Earlier, Paul had received *tamiym*'s clarification for any epistemological illusion from reductionism. Here he was chastened for any ontological simulation from reductionism. The Lord's communicative action was not to keep his people weak and dependent on his power (as many rulers and even church leaders do); God does not engage in power relations. Rather his response, as implied in his relational messages, was further relational involvement to deepen their relationship together to be whole, not to be distant or fragmented as outer-in function signifies. That is, the Lord acted to help Paul's person and their relationship not to be reduced by human terms and shaping, which is the relational consequence of reductionism's counter-relational work based on reducing human persons to outer-in definition by what they have (weakness) and do (witness).

The issue of ontological simulation was critical to Paul's person and thus to his witness. If Paul defined his person and determined his witness on the basis of what he did in his ministry and mission (including of what he had in his possession of God's revelation), then he was breaching (even unintentionally or unknowingly) the line to reductionism and susceptible to human terms and shaping (cf. 2 Cor 10:2,7a,12). This is signified clearly when one's witness functions more from an outer-in ontology in which the behavioral forms and expressions are there but lack qualitative significance and substance—a mere form without substance (cf. 2 Cor 5:12). The appearance of such a witness only signifies an outer change of that person (cf. Gal 6:12), not the transformation from inner out (cf. Gal 6:15; 2 Cor 5:17), thus any function from that person becomes merely an ontological simulation. Paul used *metaschematizo* (outward change and appearance) to accurately distinguish this ontological simulation from the substantive function of ontological transformation from inner out (*metamorphoo*, cf. Rom 12:2; 2 Cor 3:18). Yet such simulation (or forms) can easily have the appearance of substantive function if only perceived by a quantitative lens (*phroneo*) from a reductionist interpretive framework (*phronema*, cf. Rom 8:5-6). Paul, therefore, exposed the ontological simulation of *metaschematizo* as nothing but a masquerade—a simulation ultimately in which Satan also functions as “an angel of light” and his ministers as “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15), the source of forms without substance (cf. Jesus exposing the ontological simulation along with the epistemological illusion of some Jews, Jn 8:42-44).

Paul was able to make definitive the sin of reductionism and its ontological simulation and epistemological illusion (2 Cor 11:1-30) because of the wholeness developing in his person and witness. And his weakness was a key factor in this maturing process for the whole of Paul and his witness, because in his condition Paul learned that God's relational response and involvement of grace is not only sufficient but ongoingly necessary for him to be whole and live whole. Thus it is vital for Paul's readers to understand about him and with him: The function of ontological simulation (and related epistemological illusion) creates barriers (even unintentionally and unknowingly) in relationship together necessary to be whole. The reduction of relationship together, namely covenant relationship with God, can only be addressed, confronted, redefined, transformed and brought to wholeness through the condition of one's “weakness” (*astheneia*, 2 Cor 12:9, cf. *ptochos*, Mt 5:3). That is, when the true condition of one's person is openly and honestly made vulnerable in involvement in relationship together with God—which Paul only partially engages by his above pleading in his circumstance

yet fully engages in his ongoing relationship—then the relational outcome is necessarily deeper maturing (*teleios*) relationship together and its relational progression concludes in the eschatological completion (*teleioo, teleo*) of this relationship together with the whole and holy God in the whole of God’s family. The above cognates of *telos* (in Phil 3:12-16 and 2 Cor 12:9) are critical to distinguish in the process of maturity, namely for the present function and experience of whole relationship together. The maturing of relationship together is unequivocally contrary to any ontological simulation and is only the full effect (both already and not yet) of God’s relational means of grace, which the Lord made conclusive as “both necessary and sufficient for the whole of you and your witness” (12:9).

Therefore, in the whole of God’s relational context and process of this dynamic, Paul “boasted more gladly” (*hedeos*) and even “took pleasure” (*eudokeo*) in his weakness and his limitations in related situations, because this was what faced him with the truth about himself so that he could be face to face with the whole of God in the experiential truth of vulnerable involvement in relationship together (“that the power of Christ may dwell in me...for Christ’s sake”). Not surprisingly, the relational outcome in this dynamic was for Paul beyond what he could have imagined from his treble pleading: “whenever I am weak, then I am strong” (12:10).

In Paul’s ironic assertion, he was not playing with words in the Greek subjunctive mood—suggesting merely a possible scenario with doubt or uncertainty and having no functional significance. Also, Paul was not throwing out a sophism to mislead or even deceive the Corinthian believers, who lived in a Mediterranean world where weakness and power were very consequential. Weakness for Paul was not about bearing a distinction in comparative relations from human contextualization which defined and determined him as *less* (“insults, hardships, persecutions and calamities,” 12:10). Nor was being strong the notion of having power in stratified relations to secure a higher human distinction defining and determining him as *more*. The purpose of Paul’s irony was to shift their primary focus away from human contextualization and the influence of reductionism, notably to define human persons and determine human relations from outer in, as he exposed earlier (2 Cor 10:12). Yet this was not a device Paul used to try to strengthen their focus or position solely for the eschatological last days.

Rather Paul’s meaning was immediate, neither isolated from human contextualization nor consigned to the last days. Paul learned firsthand and directly in God’s whole relational context and process the experiential truth of the gospel of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6); and in his growth and development he gained *syniemi* (in contrast to the reductionists, 2 Cor 10:12, cf. Col 2:2) to grasp the relational significance of the whole gospel. The function of this gospel necessarily involved the whole of Paul’s person (i.e., unreduced, with his sin, limits, weaknesses and all) in order to receive the whole of God’s (unreduced, with full vulnerability) relational response to him for relationship together in God’s whole. Therefore, for Paul, “to be strong” was not a quantitative reductionist function measured by human terms in comparative-stratified human relations. Paul only signified a person from inner out “made whole in relationship together with the whole of God,” whose “relational means brings to completion my wholeness in God’s relational whole only on God’s relational terms, thus through my weakness.”

This is the relational significance of the whole gospel which the whole of Paul (without reduction) vulnerably witnessed to and made uncomfortably functional for all

believers, not only at Corinth. Was Paul's witness at Corinth compatible with Jesus and congruent with Jesus' gospel? Many believers there challenged the validity of his witness and message (2 Cor 13:3). Paul pointed them to Jesus' whole person vulnerably embodied, with whom he was wholly involved in relationship together: "For [Christ] was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power [relational means] of God. For we are weak in him, but [in relation to, *eis*] you we will live with him by the [relational means] of God" (13:4). This was the experiential truth of the whole gospel which Jesus both embodied and engaged in relationship together by family love to constitute persons in the relationships necessary to be God's whole family. The whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love constituted the whole of Paul, and thus defined and determined the relational means of his witness to be true in its whole confirmation. Anything less or any substitutes would be incompatible with Jesus and incongruent with his gospel because that would signify reductionism. Paul's witness to the church at Corinth matured in God's family love (cf. 2 Cor 11:11; 12:15) because the whole of Paul (weak and all) was vulnerably "in him" and ongoingly relationally involved to "live with him"—nothing less and no substitutes.

In his developmental process to maturity the whole of Paul was clearly 'already' and unmistakably 'not yet'. That is, though maturity did not mean perfection (complete transformation or sanctification), such that growth and development ended, maturing did involve fullness, wholeness in the already (cf. Col 1:28-2:2; 2:9-10; Phil 3:15-16). Therefore, Paul witnessed necessarily both to the whole of Jesus and by implication also to the whole of Paul 'in Christ', the latter also an integral witness for the church's development as God's whole family. Though the first disciples/apostles all had relational clarity of Jesus in the incarnation, I suggest that Paul had even further relational clarity and, more important, experienced the relational significance of Jesus more deeply (cf. Jn 14:7,9) to be the integral witness of "what you have seen and heard."

For Paul, to function as an integral witness further involved the maturity process of his identity formation. His witness to the whole of Paul 'in Christ' was contingent on his ongoing vulnerable relational involvement with the whole of Jesus, not on anything less from Paul and on any substitutes for Jesus. Therefore, the maturing of his witness involved by necessity the following process of identity formation: Paul's identity 'in Christ' to be wholly defined by Jesus' full identity only in God's relational context and process, and for Paul's identity conjointly to be primarily determined in human contexts by Jesus' minority identity used in relation to the world. Jesus functioned in the incarnation in his full identity together with assuming a minority identity to constitute his sanctified identity (noted in the previous chapter), which he prayed for his followers to have (Jn 17:18-19).<sup>1</sup> This integrated identity is what became formative of Paul's primary identity 'in Christ' both to define the whole of who and what Paul was as well as to determine his integral witness, call and commission.

As an integral witness notably for the church's development, Paul had increasing conviction that was expressed in his thought. His maturing was the basis for him to point to the whole of his person and witness beyond just as an example to the depth increasingly as a model for following Jesus the person, not only his teachings and tradition. I suggest that in Paul's thought he presented his person as more than a mere example of Christian life and practice but also as a definitive model to emulate, replicate

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of the dynamics of Jesus' sanctified identity, see my study *Sanctified Christology*.

and to use as the experiential truth of the gospel and as a true follower of Christ in the new creation. This distinction of model from the notion of an example (which is less compelling and optional) is significant in Paul's thought, because he appeared decisive in considering his model (*typos*) as the nonnegotiable standard by which to measure life and practice in the new covenant relationship with the whole of God on God's terms. Various references in his letters point to him in this way at the risk of appearing arrogant or even holier-than-thou (1 Thes 1:6; 1 Cor 4:16; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thes 3:7,9). Yet, Paul was able to be decisive in his thought with epistemic humility on the unequivocal basis that the whole of his person and witness was only the relational outcome of vulnerably receiving (paying attention to, listening, trusting) God's relational response of grace 'in Christ'.

The development to maturity did not preclude the clarity of Paul's thought and gospel from the challenge of reductionism. Paul's polemic and fight always remained conjoined for the experiential truth of the whole gospel as well as against reductionism. This delineated the existing reality for the whole of Paul and his witness to function by its nature ongoingly in order to live whole and make whole in the world. To facilitate his ministry and mission Paul easily could have turned to shaping the gospel and the Word from God to better fit (be relevant or conform to) this situation or that circumstance in order to make his ministry more compatible with it and less troublesome or problematic. Such nuances apparently were the norm in many churches, at least in the Achaia region, which Paul described as "peddlers of God's word like so many" (2 Cor 2:17) that "distort the word of God" (2 Cor 4:2, cf. 1 Thes 2:4-5). The term for "peddle" (*kapeleuo*) means to merchandise the Word from God, treat it like a commodity and utilize it for one's own ends (even to facilitate one's role and function in ministry). The term for "distort" (*doloo*) means to adulterate, dilute, water down and cheapen—for example, as merchants in Paul's time used to do with wine for more profit. These scenarios of reductionism basically serve to popularize the Word and make it more palatable for a prevailing mindset and perceptual-interpretive framework—similar to what is seen in Western Christian culture and church practice today, notably in the U.S.

This was the climate in which Paul witnessed. His purpose (*oikonomia*) relationally from God was to communicate the Word of God in its fullness (*pleroo*, Col 1:25), that is, whole with nothing less and no substitutes. That meant Paul's whole person and witness functioned to fight conjointly for the experiential truth of the whole gospel and ongoingly against reductionism. The fight against reductionism was not optional but integral to being, living and making whole in the human context, in which Paul also grew and developed to constitute his integral witness for the church. Despite his development, the whole of Paul was subject to the ongoing challenge and influence from reductionism and its counter-relational work (cf. 2 Cor 2:11). And the maturity of his witness demonstrated the decisive wholeness in his polemic and thought, the depth of which was signified further by the whole in Paul and his theology.

## The Whole in Paul and His Theology

More deeply understanding the whole of Paul and his witness is critical to more deeply grasping the whole in Paul and his theology. Since Paul did not emerge from the Damascus road a fully developed apostle with a ready-made theology, what further unfolds in Paul's journey is his maturing in wholeness notably signified in his deeper thought and his theology. This was the outgrowth of Paul's whole person in qualitative relationship with the whole of God, which constituted the ongoing relational basis and integrated the qualitative significance of both his witness and then his theology.

If the whole of Paul indeed developed ('already' and 'not yet'), this wholeness can and must be accounted for in Paul's thought and theology. This is necessary to more deeply grasp his views. Paul's readers cannot adequately define a distinct continuity, an internal unity and thus overall coherence in his thought and theology within his letters until they more deeply understand what defined and determined the whole of Paul. His wholeness emerged from the ontology of the person only from inner out and thus emerged by the qualitative function of his heart in vulnerable relational involvement together 'in Christ'. This qualitative function and relational involvement are not observed or paid attention to by a conventional epistemic process (noted in the previous chapter), the perception of which is necessary to explain and understand the qualitative significance and relational basis of Paul's thought and theology (cf. Paul's *phroneo* of the mature, Phil 3:15).

Any gap in explanation and understanding in Pauline studies is the result, I suggest, of using the lens (*phroneo*) from a conventional epistemic process. The use of such a lens and consequent gap in understanding is further illustrated today in the field of neuroscience, which engages a conventional epistemic process to explain and understand the human person. Their quantitative observations define the person from outer in with the brain as the center of the person; the conclusions they draw from these observations are assumed to explain human behavior and thus understand human function. This reduces the whole person from any qualitative function based on inner-out ontology, which a quantitative lens would ignore as unfounded—a process engaged in much Pauline scholarship. The person assumed from neuroscience can never be whole for two vital reasons: (1) it is a reduced person fragmented from outer in without the integrating qualitative function from inner out, thus does not go deep enough to account for the whole person; and (2) the qualitative function of the whole person is irreducible and thus irreplaceable for the relationships necessary to constitute the created function for persons to be whole together. This is the created whole in likeness of God necessitating the combined function of persons and relationships together in order to be whole.

The whole in Paul is nothing less and no substitutes than the conjoint function of the whole person, from inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart, vulnerably involved in the relationships together necessary to be whole. Paul would make operational this wholeness for the church in the vulnerable involvement of transformed relationships which are both equalized and intimate (specifically in Eph, to be discussed in chaps. 9 and 10). This whole in Paul points directly to the heart of his theology, which has been elusive in Pauline studies. At the heart of Paul's theology is in fact the *heart* and the experiential truth constituting his own heart (cf. Rom 2:29; 2 Cor 4:6; 5:12; continuity

with Ps 33:11,15). The experiential truth of the heart is a qualitative function in relationship (cf. 2 Cor 3:2-3), which signifies the ontology of the whole person(s) created in the image and likeness of God (cf. Col 3:10) only for the created design and purpose to be whole in relationship together (cf. Gen 2:18; 2 Cor 5:5). This dynamic created reality is both underlying and requisite for Paul's theology.

For understanding Paul's thought, it is inadequate to contextualize him only in Judaism. His Damascus road experience indeed took his journey back to the LORD's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26), which took him back to the covenant relationship with Abraham (notably *tamiym*, Gen 17:1-2). Yet, a deeper grasp of Paul's theology goes even further back than Abraham; to stop there would be incomplete and thus leave the depth of his thought and theology elusive for his readers to grasp. The depth of his thought and the heart of his theology went all the way back to the created person in the primordial garden, and the image and likeness of God, for the wholeness in life. This was who and what Christ first restored Paul to, which Paul then put together (*syniemi* for *synesis*) with the Spirit for the whole in his theology (Eph 3:3-5; 1 Cor 2:11b-12; Col 2:2).

Just as in the qualitative significance and relational basis of Paul's witness (cf. 1 Cor 2:1-5), his theology does not formulate the quantitative knowledge of the truth (in propositional form), though it involves the truth (cf. 1 Cor 2:13). Furthermore, the content of his theology does not have the format of a systematic theology; yet it does have a systemic framework inherent to creation in the image of God (Col 3:10-11), which Christ vulnerably embodied (Col 1:15-20, cf. 2 Cor 4:4,6) and which Paul made definitive in relational function for this whole 'in Christ' (2 Cor 3:18; 5:5; Eph 4:12-13). This systemic framework (discussed in chap. 6) involves the relational dynamic between Creator and creation, the interaction of which was rooted in the image of God. This goes further relationally and deeper qualitatively than a conventional epistemic process and subsequent theological formulation can. Seen in God's systemic framework, Paul's theology deeply involves whole knowledge of the whole of God, who embodied the Truth for relationship together to be whole, God's relational whole only on God's relational terms (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:19-20). The truth in Paul's theology was the whole of whom his whole person experienced, thus Paul's theology was foremost what he lived—*living* theology, not “doing” theology. This is the whole in Paul making definitive the depth of his thought and the heart of his theology (Col 1:25-26; Eph 3:3-6).

This further and deeper contextualization is necessary if Paul's thought and theology, and his practice, are to be understood beyond the situations and circumstances he addresses in his letters. Without the defining significance of this contextualization, Paul's readers do not get past the presenting scenarios to grasp the whole, the whole in Paul, which provides the basis for his thought and theology. This suggests for his readers to take a canonical approach to the thought in his letters and to see his theology as biblical theology. More importantly, this involves the qualitative relational context and process basic to covenant faith; this is definitive for the necessary relational response to the whole of God, who constitutes the integral relational context and process of grace embodied by Jesus and made functional by the Spirit in response to the human condition to make it whole. Nothing less than this experiential truth constituting the whole of Paul emerged from the Damascus road, and no substitutes for this whole from God can constitute the whole in Paul developed in his thought and theology. If Paul cannot be seen in this further and deeper qualitative relational context and process of God, then the

whole of Paul is reduced and the whole in Paul and his theology has no significance to be grasped.

The significance of the experiential truth in Paul's thought and theology was that this gospel Jesus embodied and fulfilled was neither about propositional truths in a new belief system nor about doctrine. If it were, this would either fragment Paul's thought or reduce his theology—which speaks to an existing condition in Pauline studies. In continuity, for example, with what Moses desired (Num 11:29) and Joel prophesied (Joel 2:28-29) for all God's people, Paul's thought extended even further and deeper than they expressed for prophecy and messianic hope. Paul was certainly prophetic but his thought expressed the experiential truth of intimately knowing the whole of God in relationship together (as Jesus made definitive, Jn 17:3) in the ongoing involvement necessary to be God's whole (as Jesus prayed, Jn 17:23-26). While having continuity with prophecy, Paul's thought and gospel went deeper than the significance of prophecy to the very heart of God's desires and thematic communicative action for relationship together (cf. Num 12:6-8). Therefore, the experiential truth of Paul's thought and gospel were unmistakably a function only of "face to face" relational involvement with the whole of God. The relational outcome was the whole knowledge constituting the quality of his witness, the further action of which interdependently established Paul deeper in his thought and theology.

The relational outcome of this face-to-face involvement in Paul's thought was the whole in his theology. I suggest that Paul did not intentionally engage in the theological task as a theologian during his developmental process. Nor did his maturity signify he emerged as a theologian. Yet in actual function he fulfilled such a role and task. This does not mean that Paul's readers can grasp the whole in his theology by using prevailing theological methods which lack qualitative-relational significance—including such canonical approaches and biblical theologies. The whole in Paul is the relational outcome only from the whole of Paul, thus the whole in his theology is contingent on his experiential truth and not any theological discourse. This distinction, on the one hand, seems to reinforce some assumed theology from the Jesus tradition shared throughout the Christian community (notably persons addressed in Paul's letters). Yet, more importantly, it points to the deeper development in his theology for which Paul was given responsibility to make definitive for the church (cf. Col 1:25-26).

The experiential truth in Paul's theology included the various revelations beyond the Damascus road which he received directly from God (source 4 noted in chap. 3). This was the basis for his theological reflection developing in the thought in his letters, which suggests an order of their writing as well as his growth and development 'in Christ'. For example, Paul first developed the functional clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel in Galatians. This unmistakably distinguished the whole gospel from any alternative gospels to decisively address the ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism, an existing problem not only in Galatia (as evidenced in our earlier discussion about Corinth). Moreover, this functional clarity of the gospel was also vital for other apostles and church leaders (notably Peter and Barnabas) to help them distinguish their own practices which essentially shaped a nuanced gospel from reductionism (Gal 2:11-14). How can this latecomer (and former contrarian) be so presumptuous about the gospel before even the core of Jesus' first disciples?

First, Paul distinguished his commission not by embedding it in human agency (“neither by human commission nor from human authorities”) but rather by embodying it in the whole of God’s relational context and process (“through Jesus Christ and God the Father,” Gal 1:1, which appears binitarian and not trinitarian, but the Spirit was ongoingly involved, e.g. 1 Cor 2:10-13). That is, the whole of Paul’s person, apostleship and function were constituted by the Father’s relational “grace and peace” vulnerably embodied by Jesus (1:3-5). Beyond a mere greeting, Paul presented the prologue that makes definitive the basis for the truth of the gospel and the ongoing base for the whole of the gospel. Secondly, on this basis and base, Paul functionally clarified the truth of this whole gospel and delineated its conflict with any gospel of human contextualization and shaping from reductionism.

The ongoing issue of the gospel goes beyond a mere secondary variation or minor adjustment which has no basic effect of changing its primary significance. When Paul exposed “a different gospel” (*heteros*, not *allos*, Gal 1:6), he was making a critical distinction between “another of similar variation” (*allos*) and “different in qualitative distinction” (*heteros*, though the term can be synonymous with *allos*). This difference, with its nuances, can be confusing (“confusing you,” 1:7), yet it was of significant consequence. The difference in gospels was not a minor adjustment but essentially a fundamental deconstruction of the relational source “to pervert the gospel of Christ”—thus changing its primary significance to no gospel at all. Paul clarified conclusively the source of his gospel: It is neither a product of human contextualization nor, therefore, of human shaping or construction but only a relational outcome of involvement together with Jesus Christ (1:11-12). This was a pivotal declaration by Paul which made definitive the relational Source who wholly constituted his gospel as a direct experiential truth. The nature of Paul’s gospel was neither of human origin nor, therefore, amenable to deconstruction, negotiation and any other reduction even with good intentions. It was only on the basis of this qualitative-relational difference that in this letter Paul established the functional clarity of the truth of the whole gospel.

On this same basis, including further involvement with the Spirit, Paul then integrated this functional clarity with the necessary theological clarity by developing the conclusive theological basis for the whole gospel in his Romans letter. I suggest that Romans came after Galatians because of its primary theological emphasis, which Paul developed later (not as a theologian) to provide the necessary basis to support his primary functional emphasis in Galatians. This is not to suggest that Galatians excludes theology, or that Romans is without functional focus. It does, however, point to Paul’s priorities and the whole in his theology: That his initial purpose was function not theology, and that his ongoing concern was for wholeness in both theology and practice without separating them from their inherent integration. For Paul, theology and practice were inseparable because by their nature they are necessary together to be whole. Otherwise they are subject to reductionism we see in the false separation between academic theology and practical theology in theological education today.

Paul’s interrelated development of functional and theological clarity, and their integrated distinctness, constituted the truth and whole of the gospel beyond the limits of doctrine and mere doctrinal certainty. It was necessary to include the theological basis for this gospel with its functional clarity to make the relational significance of the gospel unmistakable in the already and conclusive in the not yet. Its relational significance is the



relationships together needed to be God's whole on God's terms—the whole of God's family in relational progression to the eschatological completion of the new creation (cf. Gal 6:15). Paul builds on Galatians to further distinguish “the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1) by taking his readers on what can be described as a canonical tour through biblical theology, starting with creation and the human condition and getting into the heart of the gospel and its significant roots both historically and, most important, relationally. This outlines the systemic framework of Paul's theology (discussed in chap. 6) and points to his theological forest (discussed in chaps. 7-9).

To further distinguish the gospel from any shaping from human contextualization, Paul turned to “the gospel of God” (cf. Rom 15:16). This is the gospel of the *triune* God, whose thematic relational action (“promised beforehand...in the holy scriptures,” 1:2) initiated the incarnation and embodied his Son through the Spirit (1:2-4). This relational dynamic constituted the gospel in the whole of God's relational context and process for the singular purpose and outcome of relationship together with the whole of God (1:5-6). This dynamic is unique to the gospel of God, whose relational response of grace vulnerably embodied in the peerless ‘trinitarian’ relational context of family by the incomparable ‘trinitarian’ relational process of family love made “the loved ones of God” whole together—the peace (wholeness) of the gospel contingent only on the grace from the God of peace (1:7). Paul continued in Romans to clearly establish the theological basis for the gospel. Any so-called gospel found “to be apart” (both in source and function) from this integral relational context and process is “a qualitatively different gospel” shaped by human terms from human contextualization, thus a reduction of the whole of the gospel of God—just as Paul exposed in Galatians. And for Paul even in Romans, the gospel was not in effect reduced to a doctrinal proposition but always involved the relational dynamic constituting the whole of God's relational response of grace to the human condition.

Since Paul spoke from the relational experience of his heart, his thought and theology cannot be grasped by reduction to mere noetic terms and process. This points to the further intellectual challenges Paul addressed in Colosse and Laodicea (Col 2:8, cf. previous discussion about Corinth). In his Colossians letter, I suggest, Paul expressed his further theological development from Galatians and Romans, which likely points to his theological reflection with the Spirit while in prison. His theological development in Colossians accounts for the theological differences with his undisputed letters which causes doubt about Paul's authorship. More significantly, however, his theological development demonstrated Paul's involvement in his relational journey ‘in Christ’ together with the Spirit to engage them in the relational epistemic process for the ongoing *synesis* (whole understanding, cf. Col 1:9; 2:2; Eph 3:4) of God's revelation in order to make definitive: (1) “*pleroo* [to complete, make full or whole] the word of God, the mystery...now relationally disclosed [*phaneroo*]” (Col 1:25-26), and thus, (2) the integrated theological basis and functional significance of the experiential truth of the whole gospel (Col 1:9-23).

Given Paul's ongoing involvement, the relational epistemic process is indispensable to understanding Paul's theological development. “*Pleroo* the word of God” rightly points to what would be known today as biblical theology. Yet making definitive the whole of God's word more importantly points to a specific canonical approach focused more on *phaneroo*, not *apokalypto*. That is, *phaneroo* is God's

revelation as communicative action relationally directed to persons, not to reveal something for information but only to disclose the whole of God for relationship together. Biblical theology based only on *apokalypso* is insufficient to define the process of “*pleroo* the word of God, the mystery...now *phaneroo*.” Thus, the process of *pleroo* from God cannot be understood without *phaneroo*, that is, apart from the relational epistemic process by which God discloses himself to persons. *Phaneroo* engaged Paul in the relational epistemic process necessary for the *synesis* to be conclusive in “*pleroo* the word of God.” Paul’s *synesis* of “the mystery” (also declared in Eph 3:4) was biblical theology from the qualitative-relational interpretive framework of *phaneroo*. While his *synesis* from *syniemi* (understanding the whole by putting parts together) was the theological link (cf. Eph 5:17) between *phaneroo* and *pleroo*, *phaneroo* was the hermeneutical key in this theological process without which *pleroo* would have remained a mystery. In other words, “*pleroo* the word of God” was conclusively the whole of God and the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace for the human condition to be made whole in relationship together as the whole of God’s family—the experiential truth of the whole gospel.

In Colossians, Paul apparently was responding to a theological crisis in the churches both in Colosse and Laodicea (Col 4:16, cf. Rev 3:14-18), in which their identity was affected by the influence of philosophical notions from mere human reasoning and construction (Col 2:4,8, cf. 20). This condition reduced the truth of the whole gospel and thus needed the theological and functional clarity for the churches there to be and live the whole of God’s family—beyond the mere Christian ethics to which Colossians is often reduced. The extended length of Paul’s opening remarks (1:1-2:5) was uncharacteristic of his undisputed letters, which raises the style issue of his authorship. Yet the situation and development there required a further and deeper response from Paul than he had usually expressed in his previous letters—though in those letters he always responded in part to the ongoing issue of the gospel posed by reductionism. This necessitated establishing this further framework (including Paul’s most detailed cosmology, Col 1:15-20, discussed in chap. 6) and deeper context to address the issues in Colosse and Laodicea. In this process, Paul also had opportunity to clearly establish his further theological reflections and deeper theological development in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit for *synesis* of God’s whole.

Colossians can be considered somewhat of a test case applying the functional clarity from Galatians and the theological clarity from Romans needed to expose, challenge and negate reductionism for the sake of the whole gospel—the precedent of which the church in Laodicea failed to take to heart, and thus whose heart Jesus pursued (Rev 3:19-20). Paul was entrusted with the administration (*oikonomia*) of “*pleroo* the word of God,” that is, the management (*oikonomia* involves a household) of the whole of God’s family (Col 1:25). This was the summary key Paul came to understand which defined decisively his purpose (*oikonomia*) and ministry (*diakonos*) of God’s whole. Yet, as a Jew who became a follower of Christ, Paul was doing more than defining the continuity of the NT word of God with the OT word of God for his readers. More important, as a person made whole from reductionism, Paul made conclusive the experiential truth of the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to make whole the human condition (Col 1:26-27; Eph 3:2-6). Therefore, Paul’s *synesis* of God’s relational disclosures constituted his development essentially of biblical theology, that is,

theology which *pleroo* (to complete, make full or whole) the relational word from God, the gospel of peace (wholeness) from the God of peace.

This biblical theology was developed further in the general letter later entitled Ephesians (without personal greeting or specific situation and circumstance), extending the theological clarity of Romans. His further theological reflection in his general letter, likely also while in prison, defined the theological ‘forest’ and added aspects not included in Romans. The added theology developed in Ephesians notably involved the ecclesiology necessary to be whole—the theology of God’s whole functioning in relationship together on God’s relational terms, his *oikonomia* (administration, management oversight, Eph 3:2) of God’s whole new creation family (Eph 2:14-22).

Living together in the experiential truth of God’s whole is the relational reality and functional significance of the ecclesiology of the whole which Paul made definitive in Ephesians. Yet, ecclesiology by itself is only a theological ‘tree’ which must be relationally embodied within the theological ‘forest’ for its relational reality and functional significance. In his introduction Paul outlined this theological forest (Eph 1:3-14) with a condensed summary of the complex theological dynamics constituting the whole of God’s thematic action in response to the human relational condition “to be apart” from God’s whole for the salvific purpose to be made whole in relationship together with the whole and holy God. Paul’s further *synesis*, more deeply understanding God’s whole, can be considered the integrating epistemic process, the integrating hermeneutical framework and the integrating theological framework for the various theological trees in Paul’s previous letters (notably in Romans) to make definitive their theological forest necessary for them to be whole and not for aspects of Paul’s theology to remain fragmentary. It is within this theological forest that Paul’s ecclesiology was relationally embodied to be the ecclesiology of the whole (discussed in chaps. 9-10). As an introduction to the theological forest Paul defines this quite simply as the qualitative-inner-out (*pneumatikos*) relational blessing (*eulogia* 1:3) ‘in Christ’.

The developmental flow of Paul’s theology is critical for grasping the whole in Paul and his theology, and what emerges as his *pleroma* theology. It would be incorrect to perceive his *synesis* as a mere spiritual gift from the Spirit which Paul simply used optimally in the theological task. His *synesis* was only the relational outcome of his ongoing involvement with the Spirit in the relational epistemic process of God’s relational context and process. Therefore, this relational process of theological development also has critical implications for Paul’s corpus. Paul’s letters are not random, isolated or even relative statements made just to respond to various situations. They articulate key aspects of the whole of God’s revelation—namely aspects of God’s self-disclosure to Paul, whether by Christophany or through the Spirit, supplemented by and supplemental to Hebrew Scripture and the Jesus tradition. This relational process implies three vital matters:

1. The purposeful development of Paul’s thought and theology denoting the *synesis* of God’s relational response of grace that constituted him further and deeper in the experiential truth of the whole gospel.
2. That this relational process was demonstrated in the qualitative significance of his letters, which is distinctly apparent in all his letters (undisputed and disputed) and

thus necessarily includes all thirteen attributed to Paul and strongly suggests their chronological order.

3. That God's direct relational involvement with Paul throughout this process conjointly constituted his *oikonomia* to be definitive in "*pleroo* the word of God," and furthermore was directly involved in the process even beyond this in order for the whole in Paul's corpus to be included in the biblical canon.

That is to say, Paul's letters decisively expressing his thought and theology were not random or a mere human construction. They together made conclusive and they themselves were made definitive as the whole of God's communicative word.

Given the definitive place of Paul's corpus in the canon of Scripture, it is a common error by Paul's readers to examine his thought and theology in his letters as mere texts apart from the relational process constituting them. Doing so is a hermeneutical error which essentially circumvents Paul's hermeneutical imperative "Do not go beyond what is written" (1 Cor 4:6; cf. what Jesus made requisite, "pay attention to how you listen," Lk 8:18). This was Paul's qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework, which emerged from the Damascus road and which further signified his ongoing involvement in the relational epistemic process that made conclusive his whole knowledge and whole understanding. Thus the whole in Paul and his theology is epistemologically contingent on and functionally inseparable from this relational process. A hermeneutical error goes beyond what Paul wrote in his letters by using some form of the alternative that Paul confronted in Corinth with his polemic: reductionism (cf. 1 Cor 3:18-20). This reduction of Paul occurs when the context, process and thus source constituting what and how he wrote is either ignored or not wholly accounted for in his life, practice, thought and theology. The consequence is to neither understand the whole of Paul nor grasp the whole in Paul. Rather what gets defined and determined about Paul comes from some human wisdom shaping his thought and amounts to some conventional human construction of his theology. The elusiveness of the whole in Paul's thought and theology is a direct result of the presence and influence of reductionism, which is found both in a traditional view of Paul and in a new perspective of Paul.

The hermeneutic and epistemic processes face ongoing tension with alternatives from reductionism. This is the nature of Paul's combined fight for the gospel and against reductionism, the interrelated dynamic pervading his thought and permeating his corpus; hence it must be accounted for in his theology. One critical implication this has for grasping the whole in Paul and his theology is to distinguish his primary purpose (his *oikonomia*) as that of function and not theology. That is to say, the intention of Paul's theology was not to establish doctrine and its certainty but only to make definitive the theological basis for function. His theology was never an end in itself but always the means for function to be God's relational whole on God's relational terms. In his fight for the gospel, the truth of the gospel for Paul was neither about propositional truth nor about doctrine, though it certainly involved theology, that is, as the basis for the experiential truth of the gospel and as the means for the function of the whole gospel. The interrelated dynamic of Paul's fight for the gospel would not allow the gospel to be embedded in doctrine because his fight against reductionism would not allow the gospel to be reduced from God's relational whole. In Paul's theology, the gospel was only embodied by Jesus

for the function of relationship together. And the theological clarity of this gospel was not about the task of theology Paul was “doing” but involved the depth of theology Paul was *living*.

Paul’s gospel never varied from the function of the relational embodiment of Jesus vulnerably involved throughout the incarnation. Paul’s theology of the gospel necessarily involved a theology of Jesus (Christology). Yet not any Christology would be both compatible for the whole gospel and sufficient against reductionism. That is, the interrelated dynamic pervading Paul’s thought had to be accounted for in his theology, which thus required from Paul by necessity a Christology of the whole of Jesus without human shaping or construction from reductionism. Paul’s Christology, then, involved the need to go further than the limits of the Jesus tradition and even deeper than the early perceptions of the first disciples-apostles (cf. Gal 2:6-9; 2 Pet 3:15-16). Such a Christology developed along with Paul’s witness as he was made whole to fulfill his purpose (*oikonomia*) to definitively *pleroo* the embodied Word from God. This distinguished *the complete Christology* from an incomplete Christology lacking the whole of Jesus. For Paul, this involved the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology (Col 1:19-2:9, discussed in chap. 7)

Though Paul apparently assumes some common knowledge of Jesus with his original readers, his account of Christ appears to draw minimally from both the Jesus tradition and even from the other apostles (cf. Gal 1:15-17). Paul’s main source for the development of his witness came from his direct experience with Jesus in relationship and in the relational epistemic process. In Paul’s account of his Damascus road experience, Jesus told him of his witness both of seeing Jesus then and of Jesus further appearing to Paul (*horao*, Acts 26:16). This points to the ongoing relational involvement Paul had with Jesus, in which *horao* means not merely seeing (*blepo*, cf. 2 Cor 10:7a) Jesus but further encountering Jesus’ whole person (cf. 2 Cor 5:16) and more deeply experiencing him, thus grasping the significance of the whole of Jesus. This ongoing experiential truth of Jesus’ whole person in relationship together defined the whole of Paul and determined the whole of his witness. Integrated directly with this process, this experiential truth of the whole of Jesus defined also the whole in Paul and determined the whole in his theology—notably the whole of Paul’s Christology to constitute conclusively the complete Christology, *pleroma* Christology. Therefore, Paul’s Christology was partly theological and wholly relational, that is, not a conventional theology but the theological function for relationship together to be God’s whole by God’s terms. It is deficient to examine Paul’s theology only in part and thus essentially apart from the relational process constituting it, because doing so ignores the interrelated dynamic that would neither allow Paul’s gospel to be reduced to doctrine nor allow his theology to be reduced from the whole—his function of *pleroo* the embodied Word from God.

The purpose of Paul’s oversight (*oikonomia*) of *pleroo* the word of God (Col 1:25) was directly integrated with the longstanding mystery about Christ (Rom 16:25; Col 1:26), for which his *oikonomia* was responsible (Eph 3:2-3, 9; Col 2:2). Christ was not mysterious to Paul, even though his knowledge of Christ was limited and thus epistemologically provisional (cf. Phil 3:10; 1 Cor 13:12). It was the ongoing experiential truth of Jesus’ whole person in relationship together, involving Paul also in the relational epistemic process along with the Spirit, which was the source of Paul’s whole knowledge

of Christ to define his *pleroma* Christology. Paul's *synesis* of "the mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4) was not about some mystery of Jesus' person (though the incarnation is a mystery), but a mystery about God's thematic relational action which Jesus embodied (Eph 1:9; 3:6). As a functional extension of the incarnation, Paul relationally experienced the whole of Jesus and thus had no equivocation in declaring his inner-out understanding "I know [*oida*] the one in whom I have put my trust" (2 Tim 1:12).

Paul's experiential truth of Jesus was relational, not propositional, that is, with the embodied Truth who was only for relationship together with the whole of God (Jn 14:6). The Truth made this experiential truth the basis for knowing the whole of God (Jn 14:7). For Paul, moreover, to be 'in Christ' was less mystical and wholly relational. Paul had further relational clarity of the Truth than the first disciples appeared to have, and thus Paul clearly grasped more deeply the relational significance of the whole of Jesus (cf. Jn 14:7,9). His whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of Jesus made conclusive his *pleroma* Christology. This is signified by Paul's definitive designation of Christ as "the *pleroma* of God" (fullness, complete, that is, whole, Col 1:19, cf. *pleroo*, 1:25).

"The *pleroma* of God" was not a concept signifying some esoteric knowledge about or vague sphere of the mystery of God, as Valentinus misinterpreted from Paul to develop the Pleroma for Gnostics in the second century. Nor was "the *pleroma* of God" a conceptual-theological person. Rather this *pleroma* personally residing (*katoikeo*) in the embodied Jesus was the whole God person who functioned only to reconcile for relationship together in wholeness with God (Col 1:19-22). Nothing less and no substitutes than the relational ontology of the whole of God could constitute this *pleroma*, nor could anything less and any substitute constitute Jesus as "the image of God" (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4) to disclose this relational function—which Marcion erred in doing by also misinterpreting Paul in the second century to support his docetic view that Jesus only appeared to be in bodily flesh. This was the One and Only who exegetes God (Jn 1:18) with his whole person in vulnerable face-to-face involvement in relationship: "God... who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). This was in continuity with God's disclosure "face to face" with Moses (Num 12:6-8), yet now with complete self-disclosure of the whole of God vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ.

This was not about mysticism to Paul. His thought and theology were based on God's relational action and its functional significance in Christ. Paul's whole person experienced the whole of Christ in face-to-face involvement together. The relational outcome was *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) not only of the whole of Christ but by his nature also the *pleroma* of God. Therefore, this was the relational outcome of the whole of God's family in intimate relationship together, just as the embodied Truth vulnerably revealed (Jn 14:7) and the Son intimately prayed (Jn 17:26). Paul's Christology then was based on what he lived, not on what he formulated in a theological task. And based on his experiential truth of the whole of Jesus in God's whole relational context of family by the integral relational process of family love, Paul echoed and extended Jesus' formative family prayer to the Father (Jn 17:20-26). Whether or not Paul was familiar with Jesus' prayer, he certainly grasped the full desires of the Son with the Father in their oneness. Though not clearly a trinitarian in the later sense, the maturing monotheist Paul came humbly before the Father to pray for the necessary ecclesiology, in which the church as God's family may be made whole (*pleroo*) from

inner out, not by theology but by the relational involvement of the family love and the qualitative functional depth of “the *pleroma* of God” (Eph 3:14-19). Indeed, for Paul, the whole of God relationally responded “abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine” (Eph 3:20, with his experience in his weakness a notable example, 2 Cor 12:7-10, as discussed earlier).

In Paul’s thought and theology, his fight for the experiential truth of the whole gospel—both in the church as well as for the whole of humanity—can only be fully understood in relational terms and as relational language. These relational terms and language were constituted in the integral relational context and process embodied by Jesus and completed by the Spirit. Paul’s ongoing experiential truth of Jesus’ whole person in relationship together along with the Spirit did not stop with defining his *pleroma* Christology since the relational outcome necessarily involved salvation, thus also defining Paul’s soteriology (theology of salvation).

As a learned Jew, Paul was well versed in God’s history of deliverance of Israel. This history of Israel was frequently about God’s people getting embedded in the surrounding contexts rather than sojourning to eschatological covenant relationship together. Thus OT soteriology tends to focus primarily (though not completely) on the concern for deliverance and national identity more in relation to immediate situations and surrounding contexts rather than focusing on the primacy of covenant relationship together. Paul’s experience from the Damascus road went beyond this limited, if not truncated, view of salvation. He came to understand that he was not simply delivered, redeemed from his reductionism. There was something totally new transpiring ‘in Christ’ which he was saved *to* (2 Cor 5:17), and in which he deeply shared from inner out (cf. 2 Cor 3:6). Just as Paul’s involvement in the relational process made conclusive his *pleroma* Christology, he subsequently needed to articulate a *full soteriology* congruent with the relational outcome from the complete Christology. That is, salvation is not only deliverance or redemption *from* (e.g. some enslavement, condition or sin), but by the nature of its relational outcome necessarily includes in function what Christ also redeemed *for* and thus saved *to* (both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’). Soteriology is truncated without what Christ saves *to*. While a truncated soteriology is congruent with Judaism and much OT thinking, it is not the fullness of the covenant relationship together at the heart of God’s promise for his people. This was fulfilled and made whole by Christ, the *pleroma* of God, in God’s thematic action to complete the relational response of grace to the human condition. God’s thematic action, then, is more than redemption history that just frees humanity from any condition of enslavement. God’s action is even more than salvation history if limited to deliverance and salvation from sin. Soteriology becomes truncated by anything less than the whole gospel, and by any substitutes for the gospel of peace (wholeness). And though the God of salvation is certainly the God of deliverance (cf. Ps 68:20) who saves (*yasa*, cf. Isa 35:4), the God of peace did not stop there for Paul but acted only to make whole.

In Paul’s transformed perspective, the *pleroma* of God embodied the relational progression of God’s thematic relational response of grace beyond mere deliverance to complete the salvific work necessary for being saved both *from* and *to*. As with his Christology, Paul’s thought and theology on salvation were congruent with what was first the experiential truth in his life and practice ‘in Christ’, both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ (Phil 3:12-16). In his developmental process, Paul definitively provides the theological clarity

for this full soteriology (Rom 5:6-11; Col 1:19-22; Eph 2:11-22), in congruence by necessity with the relational outcome from the complete Christology. While his theology may appear imbalanced toward what Christ saved from, nevertheless his focus was not theology but always function. For example, in recounting his past (Phil 3:4-11) and what he was saved from, Paul's emphasis on Christ's death and resurrection (as in his other letters) can easily eclipse what he was saved to. He includes this, however, within the dynamic of Christ's death and resurrection for the functional purpose of the relational involvement to know Christ, that is, not in a mere cognitive way but only through intimacy of involvement in relationship together—the qualitative significance of *koinonia* (3:10). For theological clarity of what Christ saved to (to balance saved from, Rom 5:9), Paul made definitive: “much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved [in] his life” (Rom 5:10). The preposition “in” (*en*) is more conclusive than “by his life” (NRSV) or “through his life” (NIV). What Paul defined is not simply the means for salvation but equally important, inseparable and irreducible he made definitive the relational outcome of being saved to reconciled relationship together ‘in Christ’, that is, with the whole of Christ. This is implied in the significance of the preposition *en* which means remaining in place, for example compared to the preposition *eis* (implies motion into). Thus, *en* relates to those with whom someone is in intimate union, not in mere association or in outer-in identification. In other words, *en* decisively involves what Christ saved to and being in the experiential truth of the relational outcome of Christ's salvific work only for relationship together (cf. Col 1:19-20; 2 Cor 5:17-19).

Paul made theologically clear: In the relational progression of God's thematic relational response of grace, Jesus embodied (“at the right time,” Rom 5:6) the salvific work necessary (“died for the ungodly”) to constitute God's relational context of family by God's relational process of family love (“God proves his love for us...”, 5:8)—not just love but “his own” (*eautou*) unique family love. This is the family love Paul later prayed for the church to experience to be whole (*pleroo*) for what they are saved to in “the *pleroma* of God” (Eph 3:14-19).

The term for “saved” (*sozo*) means to deliver and to make whole. *Sozo* can denote either saved from (delivered) or saved to (made whole), yet both are necessary to be made whole in an inner-out ontology. “To be made whole (*sozo*) *en* his life” (Rom 5:10) involves both the necessary redemption (saved from) and transformation for reconciliation in relationship together (saved to) with the whole of Jesus, the *pleroma* of God—that is, saved to relationship together with the whole of God in God's family. For Paul, *sozo* in full soteriology can only be congruent with being made whole, and therefore by its nature must always involve this qualitative-relational function of what Christ saved to. In the whole of Paul's soteriology, for salvation to be full and ‘to be saved’ made whole, the relational outcome of Jesus' salvific work of grace can only be conclusively effected and experienced in the qualitative functional involvement of relationally being the whole of God's family together (cf. Rom 8:15-16). Anything less or any substitutes is a truncated soteriology, or a different gospel from reductionism (cf. 2 Cor 11:4; Gal 1:6). This is the only functional and relational significance of Paul's definitive assertion that through and *en* the whole of Jesus “we have now (*nun*, i.e. already) received reconciliation” (Rom 5:11)—the experiential truth of the whole gospel of what Christ necessarily also saved *to*, both in the already and for the not yet. In the integrated dynamics of Paul's theology, it is only *pleroma* soteriology which emerges from *pleroma*



Christology (to be discussed in chap. 8). Thus, *tamiym*, *sozo* and peace (only as *shalom*) involve a reciprocal relational dynamic, all of which converge in only one relational outcome ‘already’ and relational conclusion ‘not yet’: whole relationship together in God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms.

This theologically clarified what Paul earlier shared of his deep desire to grow in knowing Christ in intimate relationship together (Phil 3:10). This also points to Jesus’ formative family prayer (Jn 17) and the reason Paul echoed that prayer for the church to function in the ecclesiology necessary to be whole (Eph 3:14-19). Jesus’ prayer is commonly known as his high priestly prayer, which tends to focus on his high priestly function as the sacrifice for and the intercessor of what he saved from. Jesus’ prayer, however, was focused on what he saved to, hence, I suggest, it is more deeply defined as his formative family prayer. In his prayer, he gives the theological and functional basis for what he saved to. First, it involves the relationship together in eternal life which Jesus vulnerably embodied for his followers to experience the truth of in order to relationally know the Father and the Son (Jn 17:2-3); this confirmed what Paul was saved to and his reciprocal function necessary to know Christ. Yet, what Jesus saved to should not be reduced for just the individual and to some individual spiritual formation of knowing God. Further and deeper, the fullness of what Jesus saved to also involves the relationships together necessary to be whole. What are these relationships together which constitute being made whole?

Jesus’ prayer defines conclusively the nature and function of these relationships together to be whole. He continued, “that they may all be one” (17:21). To “all be one” should not be reduced to some conventional unity, an outer-in harmony or a semblance of peace. Jesus clearly qualified “all be one” with *kathos* (“just as...”), which signifies to be in congruence with. That is, Jesus defined conclusively that “all be one” is nothing less than relationships together in congruence with his relationship with the Father: “just as you, Father, are in me and I am in you.” “*En* me” and “*en* you,” as noted earlier about *en*, defines the relational ontology of the trinitarian persons in intimate union, that is, their unique unity and oneness. Jesus saved to nothing less and no substitutes, “so that they may be one [in congruence] just as we are one, I *en* them and you *en* me, that they may become completely one” (22-23), “so that the love with which you loved me may be *en* them, and I *en* them” (26).

Jesus did not pray for the deification of his followers *en* God’s ontology. What Jesus saves to, however, does involve being made whole in the relationships together which must by its nature be in congruence with (*kathos*) the very likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God, the Father *en* the Son and the Son *en* the Father along with the Spirit. This whole of relationships together by family love in likeness of the Trinity is the definitive witness to the world of the experiential truth of the whole of God’s relational response of grace to the human condition (17:21,23); and this was the experiential truth for Paul’s integral witness and why he echoed Jesus’ prayer for the church. Moreover, on the basis of the experiential truth of what Jesus saved to, Paul further made functional the relationships together in likeness of the whole of God in the definitive ecclesiology for God’s family to be and live whole and thus to make whole in the world, just as Jesus prayed. Thus for Paul, the witness constituted only in the qualitative function of these intimate relationships together of persons transformed from inner out (Col 2:9-12; Eph 2:14-22; 3:14-19) will decisively change the relational order

of human relations (Gal 3:28; Col 3:9-11, cf. 2 Cor 5:16), even the created order (Rom 8:19-21; Col 1:20)—to be discussed in chapters nine and ten.

The *pleroma* of God ‘in Christ’ defined the *pleroma* Christology and determined the *pleroma* soteriology in Paul’s thought and theology—nothing less and no substitutes than the whole of God and God’s relational response of grace with its full relational outcome. Therefore, Paul’s purpose and oversight (*oikonomia*) of *pleroo* the Word of God always functioned in intimate relational involvement with the *pleroma* of God to define the heart of his gospel and to determine the nature of Paul’s inseparable fight for the gospel and against reductionism. For the whole of Paul and his integral witness, the truth of the gospel is the whole of the gospel only for relationship together, both decisively ‘already’ and clearly ‘not yet’. For the whole in Paul and his theology, nothing less and no substitutes constituted the gospel, that is, the only gospel relationally embodied by the whole of Jesus and relationally completed by the Spirit for God’s family to be whole and live whole in relational progression to God’s eschatological completion, as well as to make whole in the world—God’s relational whole only on, by and in God’s relational terms.

In his ongoing journey, the whole of and in Paul matured ‘already’, though he was clearly on an eschatological trajectory to ‘not yet’ (Phil 3:12-16). This process needs to be understood in its function as the relational progression to the Father embodied by Jesus (Jn 14:6) and unfolded by the Spirit (2 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 1:13-14; Rom 8:14-17) for the ultimate relational conclusion to be the whole of God’s family in intimate relationship together. This relational progression constituted ‘in Christ’ already has essentially the eschatological trajectory which both fully engages the relational context and process with God further into eternity, and wholly involves this relational context and process deeper into the depths of the whole of God. ‘Not yet’ does not preclude the experiential truth of ‘already’ but clearly takes the qualitative and relational significance of the already further and deeper to its relational conclusion.

In Paul’s thought and theology, there appear to be two worlds: the world of darkness in an evil age which is coming to a close (cf. 1 Cor 7:29a, 31b; Rom 13:11-12), and the world of light in a new creation to come ushered in the already by Christ (cf. 1 Thes 5:4-11,23; 2 Cor 5:16-17). His thought should not, however, be considered a dualism of the opposing spheres of evil and good; rather, he points to two defining and determining contexts. Paul’s polemic was emphatic that the church lives still in the world but must not be contextualized by it (cf. 2 Cor 10:2-3; Eph 5:8,15-16). The only context that defines the church as God’s family is the further and deeper relational context ‘in Christ’ (cf. Eph 3:14-15; 5:8), and thus the sole process which determines the church family is the integral relational process of God’s family love (cf. Eph 3:16-19; Jn 17:26). The whole of God’s relational context and process must by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo* in obligation or duty) constitute who, what and how the church is. Yet the church’s posture while still in the world cannot be passive in the object-position, simply waiting for the completion of the new creation. Rather, more urgently, church involvement as God’s family signifies the relational dynamic of living in cooperative relationship with the Spirit to be whole ‘already’ and to make whole in the world (cf. Col 3:9-17; Eph 5:18-21), just as Paul’s prayer echoed Jesus’ prayer.

This takes Paul’s thought beyond Jewish apocalypticism. J. Louis Martyn affirms the approach that apocalyptic constitutes the heart of Paul’s gospel, and that only a

consistent apocalyptic interpretation of Paul's thought is able to demonstrate its fundamental coherence.<sup>2</sup> Though there is continuity in Paul's thought with apocalyptic, his thought was taken further and deeper to constitute it in the whole of God's eschatological plan (Eph 1:9; cf. Ps 33:11) as well as thematic relational action vulnerably embodied by Christ and functionally completed by the Spirit. That is, Paul's thought was constituted in the experiential truth of the whole relational context of God's family by the integral relational process of God's family love, for which Paul made definitive the theological forest (Eph 1:3-14). This constituted Paul's eschatology, not in a doctrine of events but more significantly in relationship, namely the relational conclusion of ongoing involvement with the embodied Truth together with the Spirit in the relational progression to the Father. Paul's thought was never fixated on the last days but was involved only in this progression of this relational process to be God's relational whole by God's relational terms. In Paul's theological flow, the not yet will always emerge from the already. Therefore, the whole in Paul, and thus in his thought and theology, involved his fight both against reductionism and for the whole gospel in order to make functional the new creation 'already' in the church with the ecclesiology of the whole.

For Paul, the two contexts in the world are in ongoing tension for the church. This tension, on the one hand, has a negative effect influenced by reductionism which must be accounted for (negated or redeemed). On the other hand, this tension has a positive affect of making whole which ongoingly needs to be acted on in reciprocal response to the whole of God. If Paul's readers do not grasp the functional significance of these two contexts and contextualize Paul in the correct one, they will not understand Paul's journey and the whole of his person, practice, thought and theology. Clarity of the already-not-yet wholeness together (cf. 1 Thes 5:10-11, 23-24) was Paul's purpose (*oikonomia*) of *pleroo* the word of God to make functional the truth of the whole gospel of the *pleroma* of God, the whole of Jesus, for whom the whole of Paul matured to be a whole witness, and the whole in Paul developed into a whole theology, *pleroma* theology, nothing less and no substitutes.

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<sup>2</sup> J. Louis Martyn. *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (London: T & T Clark, 1997), 177-78.



## Chapter 5                      The Theological Paul

### *Who has known the mind of the Lord?*

1 Cor 2:16

Consider the following statement on human nature:

Health and well-being for a member of our species requires, among other things, being satisfied and secure in our bonds with other people, a condition of “not being lonely” that, for want of a better word, we call social connection.

This statement made about human nature could be a commentary on the creation narrative when God declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18). Yet its source is not theological. To support this statement, the author points to a definitive basis to make this claim about human nature.

Looking more deeply at the invisible forces that link one human being to another helps us to see something even more profound: Our brains and bodies are designed to function in aggregates, not in isolation. That is the essence of an obligatorily gregarious species. The attempt to function in denial of our need for others, whether that need is great or small in any given individual, violates our design specifications. ...Social connection is a fundamental part of the human operating (and organizing) system itself.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, the author is not engaged in biblical commentary. Surprisingly, his view of human nature is based on quantifying the human person by neuroscientific research. While tracing the evolutionary roots of natural selection combined with current brain function, John Cacioppo and his colleagues define a human person both in function and in need. The person in neuroscience is defined, better described, in quantitative terms from the outer in. While this research unequivocally associated human function with brain activity, association should not be confused with and must be distinguished from cause. Even with this association, the understanding of human need, notably for relational connection, cannot be adequately gained from an outer-in person in quantitative terms. Cacioppo, himself, concludes about the human problem of loneliness: “What individuals need is meaningful connection, not superficial glad-handing.”<sup>2</sup> This certainly raises the critical question of “what is meaningful connection?” Moreover, the vital corollary question is “what is good news for this inherent human need and problem?”

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<sup>1</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick. *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 8, 127.

<sup>2</sup> Cacioppo. *loneliness*, 269.

This points to deeper roots of the human person than neuroscience uncovers—ancient roots more than biological, though the latter are never reduced from the whole human person defined from inner out. Specifically, this points us to theological roots—the theological roots through which Paul himself journeyed. This is what constituted Paul’s person, practice and thought, thus enabling him to make definitive the theology necessary for meaningful connection and for the experiential truth of good news for the human relational condition.

## **The *Subject* of Theology**

The above research from neuroscience is introduced for more than illustrating a point. It is a compelling statement of what is inherent for all human persons (ancient and modern), and urgently speaks of what is the intrinsic need to the human condition (past and present). The ongoing condition of the human person is indeed a relational condition. Human efforts at theological discourse down through history (particularly since the Enlightenment) have often tended to assume, take for granted, to ignore or even to be unaware of this basic relational aspect of humankind in their reflections about God. Such theological reflections have reduced the primary function of both the human person as well as God. Yet, God’s own discourse revealed, notably to Paul, only God’s thematic relational response to and relational involvement with the human relational condition, thus providing the definitive answers to the above questions.

This relational concern was not lost on the historical Paul, who experienced the relational outcome of God’s concern only in the relational context and process of the whole of God to constitute the relational Paul. And the lens of this relational framework cannot be lost on those wanting to understand the theological Paul. Thus, this chapter (and the whole section) builds on our earlier discussion, notably from the previous chapter, and extends Paul’s epistemology. I begin our discussion of Paul’s theology focused necessarily on human nature and the human relational condition because the relational concern of this lens is central to Paul’s theological concern and should be the sustaining function for all theological discourse. That is to say, paying primary attention to the inherent human relational condition is the central function of theology simply because this is what concerns God and involves God’s purpose of self-revelation to constitute theology. Valid theological discourse, by Paul, his readers or any after him, does not signify a monologue but involvement with God in the relational epistemic process. God’s self-revelation is what the historical Paul was confronted by on the Damascus road; and God’s concern for Paul’s and the human condition is what the relational Paul experienced in relationship together with the whole of God to constitute the theological Paul.

The hermeneutical key to theology, and thus to the theological Paul, is the interaction of the human relational condition “to be alone”—that is, “to be apart” from God’s whole—with God’s thematic relational response to this human condition. The sum total of God’s actions revealed post-creation were initiated and enacted to fulfill God’s concern to restore human persons to be whole in relationship together—the good news for the human need and problem. No other theological discourse speaks of God and thus can define God, nor speaks for God’s presence and involvement—beyond, that is, the

speculation of a theological monologue. If theology is considered truly discourse or talk of God, then the essential question becomes: does theology involve a word ‘from above’ directly from God’s self-revelation by communicative action in the relational context and process of God’s terms, or does theology just engage words ‘from below’ in human contextualization shaped or constructed by human terms. The former is definitive, the latter is speculative.

For Paul, the definitive emergence of his theology (e.g., his ecclesiology in Eph) was not the result of a theological exercise (even when isolated in prison). Though his *synesis* (whole understanding) of the theological “forest” of God’s thematic relational action (Eph 1:3-14) certainly involved his reflection with the Spirit (likely while in prison, cf. 1 Cor 2:10), this was only a relational outcome for Paul (Eph 3:3-5). Moreover, Paul’s “*synesis* of the mystery of Christ” (3:4) was never shaped by his own theological effort but only by God’s communicative action “revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (3:5). This relational process of involvement with the Spirit precludes the need for words ‘from below’ of human speculation, shaping or construction. In other words, the theological Paul emerged definitively only from the relational Paul, who was wholly involved with the Spirit in the relational epistemic process.

For theology to be truly *theology* and not the human shape or construction of *egology*, then *theos* must be a separate entity from *ego* (individual or collective). Certainly, it is problematic if there are more than one *theos*. That was not a theological issue for Judaism in general and Paul in particular where monotheism prevailed, if not always in practice. Yet, monotheism did not preclude the function of *egology* which limited or distorted their understanding of the one God—namely, the God of covenant relationship whose thematic relational action was only for relationship together in God’s whole on God’s terms. Prior to the Damascus road Paul was embedded in the kind of monotheism reduced by human terms, in which Paul became an admitted extremist (cf. Acts 26:11).

For *theology* to be clearly distinguished, *theos* must be defined by the terms of God’s communicative action in self-revelation. The most definitive of God’s communicative action has been when “I speak face to face—clearly, not in riddles,” just as he did with Moses (Num 12:6-8). Yet, even this relational interaction had its limitation, notably in its transitory effect (as Paul noted, 2 Cor 3:13). The most unequivocal and conclusive way for *theology* to ongoingly be functionally distinct is for *theos* to be embodied, that is, a distinct Object set apart from any human subject. Moreover, for this *theology* to be understood and have meaning, the object-*theos* must go beyond only being embodied (as if just to be observed) but also relationally engaged and vulnerably involved as Subject, nothing less and no substitutes. Only in the dynamic nature of relationship can the subject-*theos* be known qualitatively, experienced relationally and thus be wholly understood and have whole meaning. Any other theological cognition is fragmentary or speculative. This is the qualitative-relational significance of the incarnation, the relational response of which embodied the whole of God in face-to-face communicative action to constitute *theology*—the very response extended to Paul on the Damascus road, the experiential truth of which constituted his *theology* (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15,19; 2:9).

The embodied Word of God's communicative action was revealed to Paul neither in propositional terms nor even in conventional theological language. It was only in relational language and terms for relationship together. For Paul, the incarnation became the functional meaning of good news for his and the human relational condition—the meaningful relationship to fulfill the inherent human need that even neuroscience identifies. No other theological discourse constituted the good news for the inherent human need and problem. Therefore, for Paul nothing less and no substitutes than the experiential truth of the gospel of the embodied Word from God had relational significance. And the theological Paul emerging from the relational Paul witnessed in terms of function, not in doctrine. Thus, all of Paul's theological concern converged in his focus on the gospel. Likewise, all of Paul's theological discourse cohered in his integrated fight for the experiential truth of the whole gospel and against reductionism. Anything less or any substitutes for Paul were what he clearly defined as “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6-7) and would not have been *theology* but *egology* (Gal 1:11-12, cf. 1 Cor 2:10-13; Col 2:8-9).

For theology to be of significance, both relationally and functionally, it must by its nature be within the context of its subject matter, namely subject-*theos*. It is thus insufficient for theology (and the gospel) to be placed just within human context; for example, it is inadequate to grasp Paul's theology from the lens of the historical Paul. To be contextualized with God, as the whole of Paul was, is to be in God's relational context and process of God's communicative action. This is the relational nature of God's terms, in contrast to and in conflict with a dynamic shift to human terms which increasingly obscures the line of distinction between *theology* (defined on God's terms) and *egology* (defined by human terms).

In the relational context and process of God's terms, theology emerges in the intimate reflection on the outcome of vulnerably receiving and responding to God's communicative action. This outcome then can only be a relational outcome of a person(s) who is involved reciprocally in God's relational context and process, not an observer (e.g., only as an exegete) or a collator of information (e.g., only as a systematic theologian). Therefore, theology is essentially a vulnerable conversation—that is, a dialogue with the vulnerably revealed God, not a monologue with oneself or even with others about God. Conventional theology, and thus what prevails as theology, is inclined not to be involved in this relational context and process, at least in terms of actual function.

Paul was vulnerably confronted by his God on the Damascus road and given the qualitative relational (not mystical) opportunity to “be still [*raph*, i.e., cease his human effort] and know that I am God” (Ps 46:10) in the “face to face” relational context and process of the one yet whole God. By ceasing from his human effort, even in the name of Judaism's God, Paul made himself vulnerable to receive and respond to *theos* as Subject. In this relational process the theological Paul emerged from the relational Paul, who was now wholly involved in relationship together with the whole of God. Thus, I contend that we cannot grasp Paul's theology apart from this relational context and process for the following factors: (1) this was his definitive basis for his thought and theology (1 Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12), (2) this was the only process by which his thought and theology developed (1 Cor 2:4-5; 2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:25-26; Eph 3:2-5), and (3) this is how the theological Paul emerged definitively from the relational Paul and why these aspects of



Paul are inseparable to the whole of Paul's person and must be integrated without reduction in order to grasp the whole in Paul's thought and theology. Anything less or any substitute for this relational context and process results in either deconstructing or reconstructing, or both, Paul's theology to something less or some substitute of the whole in his theology. In other words, Paul is disconnected from subject-*theos* and his *theology* is elusive or lost.

If the *subject* of theology is not functionally distinct (*theos* or *ego*) and the context of the subject matter is not functionally delineated (God's terms or human), then theological cognition becomes a fragmentary adventure (at best), mysterious, esoteric or an illusion (at worst). Paul's theological cognition has been described with all of these by his readers mainly because they have not fully perceived both the subject and context of his theology. Essentially, theological cognition either involves intentional reflection with the Spirit in a relational epistemic process, or it is simply engagement in intentional or unintentional self-reflection shaped just by human terms. The latter cognition is not of God in God's terms but of only human contextualization without the definitive presence and involvement of God, just speculative thought about God.

We need to learn from Paul about what constitutes significant theological engagement and process on God's terms. To the penetrating question first raised in Isaiah, "who has known the mind of the Lord?" (1 Cor 2:16; cf. Isa 40:3, *ruah*, "the spirit of the Lord"), Paul claims theological cognition from his involvement with the Spirit in the relational epistemic process (1 Cor 2:9-13). Moreover, Paul is unequivocal in the agency of the Spirit as the basis for his theology, for all *theology* (cf. Eph 1:17; 3:3-5). His polemic here is between human contextualization and the Spirit's reciprocal relational work (not unilateral) to constitute us further and deeper in the relational context and process conclusive of *theos* as Subject.

While in relational involvement with the Spirit, Paul's theological reflection was not done in isolation or in a spiritual vacuum—despite, for example, his time in Arabia following the Damascus road without consulting the other apostles (Gal 1:16-17). Paul was set apart with God but he was not apart from human contexts. Ironically, an isolated or private theology easily crosses the line of distinction into self-reflection and cognition based on human contextualization. How Paul maintained the integrity of his theological engagement and the process necessary for his *theology*, even while in human contexts, was only by the process of reciprocating contextualization—using the primacy of contextualization with God to determine his engagement in human contexts (discussed in chap. 1). To make reciprocal contextualization functional required Paul's primary involvement to be with God in the whole of God's relational context and process made vulnerable to him by the embodied Word and the Spirit. It was in this ongoing relational process of his reciprocal vulnerable involvement in conversation (reflection) with God that Paul established the definitive paradigm needed for theological discourse (dialogue) to be of significance to God as well as of God, not to us (in monologue), and to be defining the Word of God's communicative action, not ours (in self-reflection).

Theology, therefore, which truly signifies a word from above, as Paul's does, is a function of relationship only in God's relational context and process. For theological discourse to speak definitively of God, it must, by the revealed nature of its Subject, always be involved in relationship with this Subject, not as if this Subject were impersonal subject matter such as a mere text, propositional truths and doctrine. This is a

vital distinction for Paul's readers to maintain. In Paul's face-to-face experience, this is the context and terms (process) of God's revelation—conclusively self-disclosed in the embodied Word and further constituted by the Spirit. And what did this monotheist Jew do with the embodied Word from God? He *rapah*, ceased his human effort in order to be vulnerable to know his God, and thus his heart was opened further and deeper to the whole of subject-*theos*. Prior to then, Saul had experienced and known only one God. Yet, his God from Judaism was further revealed to him “face to face”—that is, only now a relational experience beyond and deeper than any theological limits, even bias, of the monotheism of Judaism (as Paul noted, 2 Cor 4:2-6). As I have assumed in Paul's journey, this also involved *tamiym*'s (whole) epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction. **How was this revelation of the whole of God reconciled for Paul without refuting monotheism—a theological issue in one form or another addressed later in the early church?**

In Moses' summary account of Yhwh's involvement with Israel, God's thematic action with them “was shown so that you would acknowledge that the LORD is God; there is no other” (Deut 4:32-35)—monotheism, neither polytheism nor anything less like pantheism or monism. Yet this only established the sole identity of God, whose presence and involvement were deepening and becoming more vulnerable. Israel's view of the sole identity of God was corroborated by God's evidential actions, thus was rightly monotheistic. Nevertheless, given the deepening presence and the increasingly vulnerable involvement of this one God, Israel's monotheism was not complete but preliminary and partial, that is, not whole. Paul's God indeed remained the only one God, it was not a deconstruction of monotheism. But his monotheism was clearly taken beyond a provisional definition and made further definitive by the deeper presence and more vulnerable involvement of the whole of God. This does not imply that Paul became a trinitarian theologically. Yet his experiential truth of the whole of God made whole the theological discourse necessary for later trinitarian theology.

Damascus road was the “Psalm 46:10” relational opportunity for Paul to vulnerably go further and deeper in his monotheism to the experiential truth of the one yet whole God. Not only had this Jew received the name of God, the embodied face of God was vulnerably involved with his whole person for relationship together (which Paul defined theologically, 2 Cor 4:2-6). Whom the psalmist of Israel longed for (Ps 42:2), Paul has experienced in the relational connection necessary with the face of God in order to be made whole (embodying Num 6:24-26), God's relational whole on God's relational terms for the human relational condition (which Paul made definitive theologically, Eph 3:2-6).

The whole of Paul and the whole in Paul were constituted by this experiential truth. Therefore, because this is the whole and holy God, of whom the relational Paul can be unequivocal, the theological Paul can be conclusive of subject-*theos* for his *theology* to be whole—nothing less and no substitutes, just as was evidenced in the incarnation and constituted by the vulnerably embodied Word from God.

## The Purpose of Theology

What Paul's readers need to keep in focus about Paul's theology is that it was always first his experiential truth. The theological truth for Paul was not about a monotheistic Object. Truth did not come to Paul in propositional form. The Truth was *theos* as embodied Subject, who was vulnerably revealed only for relationship to be involved in together, thus unmistakably experiential truth for the human condition. This was what Paul experienced and his subsequent theological dialogue communicated in his letters; and its content should be neither confused with propositions nor reduced to mere doctrine (i.e., not mere *didache* but *didaskalia*, pointing to the relational process of its source, cf. 2 Tim 3:10, 14-17).

Thus, Paul's readers can justifiably assume what Paul would have focused on and been concerned for was to articulate a theology which signified his experiential truth from and subsequent to the Damascus road. Paul's relational experience was distinguished from the visions and dreams of prophets, to build on Moses' direct "face to face" with God (Num 12:6-8) in an extension of the incarnation. Paul's theological dialogue was contingent on this relational process and needed to articulate his face-to-face experience with the whole of God—that is, that which constituted nothing less and no substitutes of the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the human condition. While Paul's letters likely represented only a portion of all he shared during his ministry, their content is the sum of his thought and theology which communicated his further and deeper knowledge and understanding of God, and thus expressed his grasp of God's relational whole for the human condition and the terms of God's thematic relational response necessary for relationship together to be whole.

The theological Paul integrated with the relational Paul was restored to whole knowledge and understanding in the relational context and process of God's communicative action, namely in the relational response of grace embodied by the Word and Truth "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). The relational outcome for Paul was both understanding signified as a grasp of meaning and wisdom signified as an understanding of the whole (cf. Eph 3:2-4). Both this understanding and wisdom were not normative in human contexts or even in Judaism. His polemic on epistemology in 1 Corinthians demonstrated Paul's source of knowledge and understanding, meaning and wisdom, and the contrast with prevailing knowledge and understanding. Paul went from partial knowledge and understanding to whole knowledge and understanding—the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym*. This was not a simple transition because what was partial had always been perceived as whole. As a revealed source of knowledge, Judaism had a basis for its knowledge and understanding to be whole. Yet, this would be true only to the extent of its qualitative-relational significance determined by the one God, nothing less and no substitutes even for the elect of Israel. Outside God's relational context and process, theological cognition and understanding are reduced to human shaping and construction. And any theological discourse, monotheistic or not, apart from God's relational context and process remains functionally distant from God's self-revelation, thus relationally uninvolved with God's communicative action for covenant relationship together on God's terms (cf. the terms for Abraham of *tamiym*).

The extended-incarnation experience not only constituted Paul's *theology* but, more importantly, it transformed his whole person, and thus his practice and thought. This transitioned the relational Paul beyond the limits of his shared-monotheism with Judaism and deeper into the whole of God, clarifying monotheism more definitively in the qualitative-relational significance of God. This had theological and functional implications for Second Temple Judaism and its other major beliefs (along with monotheism) on election, the law and the temple. While monotheism was not deconstructed, aspects of the other beliefs needed to be deconstructed and redefined, about which Paul was decisive (notably in Rom 9-11): for example, to realign the election of Israel with the covenant relationship necessary for God's family and not for nation-building, to make congruent the law with God's terms for covenant relationship together and not as identity markers for nation-state, to make compatible the temple with the relational function of God's presence for the involvement necessary for relationship together to meet the inherent human relational need of all nations and not as the provincial place for a select few determined by human terms constructing a system of inequality, nationalism and ethnocentrism (Eph 2:19-22, cf. Mk 11:17). Paul's further and deeper understanding of God compared to Judaism evidenced his grasp of God's whole, the meaning of which he made definitive theologically in order to function qualitatively and relationally on God's terms. This was always incompatible to human shaping and construction—whether in Judaism or in any other worldview from reductionism—which pervaded the ongoing situations and circumstances Paul confronted in his inseparable fight both for the whole gospel and against reductionism.

Since Paul's theology was first his experiential truth, theology for Paul was inseparable from function and can never be reduced to conventional theological discourse engaged in simply a theological task. It likely never occurred to Paul to engage in the latter. For this reason, the discourse in his letters often does not appear clearly theological, at least through a conventional lens, which leaves his theology elusive to many of his readers. Paul's functional concerns may be apparent to readers but are often perceived without his theological basis necessary to understand the functional significance of his concerns and their theological coherence (e.g., his prescriptions for women and slaves). This has further left Paul an enigma to such readers. Nevertheless, Paul's discourse, jointly theological and functional, put together (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the theological basis for the truth of the whole gospel (Eph 3:4) integrated with the deconstruction of ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of reductionism (cf. Gal 1:6-7, 11-12; Col 2:2-4, 8-10) and, when possible, their reconstruction into the whole gospel (e.g., in his confrontation with Peter, Gal 2:11-14).

Paul's theological discourse in human contexts was based primarily on the whole of God's discourse to him in the relational context and process initiated by Jesus and deepened by the Spirit. This is the paradigm for theological engagement in human contexts on God's terms which the whole of Paul witnessed to deeply with the Spirit—and critically speaks to us today. Whether the issue is construction, deconstruction or reconstruction, as a quintessential premodernist Paul puts both modernism and postmodernism into the full perspective of the whole of God, just as he himself was by the embodied Word from God, the *pleroma* (fullness, whole) of God (Col 1:19; 2:9). Past and present, this was Paul's relational responsibility for God's family (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* (complete, make whole) the word of God (Col 1:25)—that is, which was

vulnerably embodied by the *pleroma* of God in relational response to the human condition (Col 1:15-20). The relational outcome of this process for Paul is what signified his theology (e.g., Eph 3:2-12). Contrary to conventional theology, Paul was only involved in *living* theology (discussed in chap. 1).

The Subject of Paul's *theology* went beyond the monotheism he had in common with Judaism. Moreover, in my opinion, it also went further and deeper than the views of the Jesus tradition, which Paul indeed shared together with the existing Christian community of his time. This is contrary to Larry Hurtado and Gordon Fee who consider Paul's Christology primarily as discourse already in acquaintance and assumed by earlier Christians from the Jesus tradition.<sup>3</sup> Given the existence of these shared christological convictions, this does not adequately explain the apparent absence or brevity of Paul's explanatory discourse about Jesus Christ. I suggest that in the theological discourse of Paul's letters there are various shorthand terms used by Paul. The full significance of this shorthand terminology is not adequately explained by presupposed beliefs or assumed understanding which Paul apparently shared with his readers.

For example, grace is the primary shorthand term, the relational dynamic of which needs to be distinguished from the limited notion of a mere gift and contextualized in the terms of the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition (cf. Rom 5:15). The full significance of grace is understood only in its relational function, which Paul grasped first in the experiential truth of Jesus Christ in relationship together. The relational outcome for Paul was implicit in his most significant shorthand term, 'in Christ'. While often elusive to his readers, for Paul 'in Christ' was the summary shorthand term in which the full qualitative and relational significance of his theological discourse is condensed and/or implicit. Paul's theology 'in Christ' functionally involved both his integral witness of the *pleroma* of God and his specific *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the word of God; and its qualitative and relational significance went further and deeper than the Jesus tradition. Thus, the theological language of Paul's shorthand terms is fully understood only in the deeper relational context and process of the whole of God. This was what and who constituted the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology.

Essentially, Hurtado (with his "*presuppose* acquaintance") and Fee (with his "*assumed* Christology") either do not see Paul beyond human contextualization (albeit the Christian community) or do not appear to get beyond merely observing the text as an exegete. This vantage point becomes constrained in an incomplete Christology that neither relationally perceives the face of Christ as the *pleroma* of God for a complete Christology, nor understands the whole of Paul constituted by the experiential truth of the *pleroma* of God to signify the whole in Paul's thought and theology. Even though the Jesus tradition and Judaism were primary antecedents for Paul, he was not limited by them to define and determine the extent of his identity and the depth of his theology. The whole of Paul matured indeed and thus the whole in his theology developed further and deeper.

The functional purpose of Paul's theological dialogue, just like that of the embodied Word from God, was to illuminate the qualitative function of relationship together to be God's whole, as defined and determined by the terms vulnerably revealed

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<sup>3</sup> Larry W. Hurtado. *Lord Jesus Christ: Devotion to Jesus in Earliest Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 98-133. Gordon D. Fee. *Pauline Christology: An Exegetical-Theological Study* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 2-6.

by God in relational response of grace to the human condition (cf. Col 2:2-3; Eph 1:18-23). Since the theological Paul was the relational outcome of involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit, Paul's Christology was a direct expression of the relational Paul's witness of the *pleroma* of God, and is thus expressed in more functional terms than theological (cf. Acts 22:14-15). And his witness was a direct relational outcome from the experiential truth of relationship together 'in Christ' (cf. Acts 26:16)—the extent and depth of which was directly proportional to his reciprocal vulnerable involvement in the relationship. Though Paul did not introduce Christ to most of his original readers, he did take them all further and deeper into the qualitative-relational significance of Christ (cf. Gal 1:11-12, 15-17; Eph 3:2-6). I think it is an error to assume: that the common knowledge of Jesus shared by those readers was of a significance that involved deep understanding of the whole of Jesus; and that the *pleroma* Christology uniquely constituting Paul's theological dialogue was already commonly shared by his readers.

When Paul's readers see the whole of Paul, not just the historical Paul, they are in a position to understand the whole in his theology. This whole, however, did not emerge from human contextualization, nor was it grasped in the Jesus tradition, as evidenced by Peter's reductionism discussed previously. Moreover, Paul's letter to the church in Corinth further evidences the gap in the Jesus tradition (1 Cor 1:12-13; 3:4-7, 21-25; 4:6-7). The issue involved the practice of the gospel shaped by human terms (cf. 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2). Along with human shaping, this raises the issue of reification and the human/social construction of the gospel, all of which the Jesus tradition was not conclusively sufficient to wholly confirm, critique or make whole. I suggest that was because the beliefs of the Jesus tradition were fragmentary at that stage and required the further and deeper work of the Spirit in reciprocal relationship with Paul to make definitive its theological whole. It was the relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) of the relational Paul integrated with the theological Paul to take the experiential truth of *theos* as Subject beyond monotheism and further and deeper than the Jesus tradition. Therefore, the only purpose of Paul's discourse, jointly theological and functional, was to *pleroo* the word of God: the word of God's communicative action vulnerably embodied by the Word to make conclusive the good news of the whole of God's relational response of grace for the human condition to be made whole, God's relational whole on God's relational terms.

The functional purpose and relational responsibility of *theology* is discourse to illuminate God's communicative relational action in terms which are not conceptual, esoteric, about mysticism, or reduced from qualitative function and relational involvement in human life, notably disengaged from the inherent human relational need and problem. Though our knowledge and understanding of the whole and holy God are never complete, our conversation of God can be whole based on the whole knowledge and understanding received from God (cf. Paul's *synesis*, Eph 3:4-5) in the relational epistemic promise fulfilled by the Spirit (Jn 15:26-27; 16:13-15) and the relational epistemic process engaged with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-10,16; Eph 1:17). Theology therefore is a relational word received from God self-disclosed in communicative action and the relational outcome of responding back to God. By its relational reception and response, theology involves the relational function of simply telling God's self-disclosed story, not propositional truths and systematic information about God. This is the relational story God disclosed (*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypso*, discussed in the

previous chap.) only in thematic relational response to the human condition for the relationships together necessary to be God's whole. Anything less or any substitute revises God's story, historically and/or relationally, by reshaping or reconstructing it on human terms.

Paul's theological discourse is telling God's relational story, the good news of which he directly experienced first from the whole of God to transform his own story to only God's relational terms. This explains why various aspects of Paul's theology converge in his focus on the gospel, and why much of his theological discourse is implicit in his illumination of and polemic for the gospel. Moreover, this is why the theological Paul is inseparable from and integrated with the relational Paul to signify the whole of Paul and thus the whole in his thought and theology. The dynamic flow of this developmental-reflexive process in his theology can be outlined in the following:

1. Experiencing Christ: the experiential presence of Jesus initially on the Damascus road (the historical Paul) and the emerging experiential truth of the embodied Word and Truth from God (the relational Paul).
2. Following Christ in relationship: discipleship defined not by service but by vulnerable involvement in relationship together to know Christ, the *pleroma* of God to constitute the whole of Paul (the relational Paul, cf. Phil 3:7-10).
3. Witnessing 'in Christ' and thus for Christ: the experiential truth in relational function by the whole of Paul in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (cf. Acts 26:16; 1 Cor 2:1-5).
4. Theologizing 'in Christ' and thus with the Spirit for the whole of God: the theological Paul emerging from and integrated with the relational Paul to articulate the whole in Paul for the *theology* illuminating God's whole story in relational response to the human condition (Eph 1:17-18; 3:2-6; Col 1:25; 2:2-3).

This developmental process has both a linear flow as well as a reflexive dynamic which indicates the extent of reciprocal involvement together in relationship. This further delineates the relational epistemic process which, by the nature of *theology*, integrates the *reception* to know God and the *response* to make God known. Without relationally experiencing Christ (1) and following Christ in relational progression (2), witnessing for Christ (3) has no qualitative substance to confirm the whole of Jesus, nor does theologizing (4) have any functional basis and relational significance to illuminate the definitive good news of God's whole for the human condition. Paul's whole gospel and theology involved only the ontological reality of this experiential truth, nothing less and no substitutes, and thus functioned always in contrast and conflict with ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism.

## Interpreting Paul's Theology

Interpreting Paul's theology necessarily involves interpreting the theological Paul, who was integrated with the relational Paul. By telling God's relational story Paul was also telling his own story—the whole of Paul who experienced first the truth of the whole in his theology. Thus, the dynamic flow outlined above must be accounted for in order to understand Paul's theological dialogue. Essentially, interpreting Paul's theology is not a matter of getting into Paul's mind but, more vulnerably, involves a process of “walking in his sandals.” While both focus on his epistemology, the latter necessitates the relational epistemic process which Paul engaged. Therefore, the interpretation of his theology is less about our theological discourse of Paul's thought and terminology and involves more the interpretation of Paul's whole person, thus his relational involvement with the experiential truth of the whole of God, namely embodied by Christ and completed by the Spirit (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 2:10,13).

When Paul's readers get beyond the historical Paul and go deeper than the mere content of his theology, they are faced with the whole of Paul. To understand this whole in Paul's theological dialogue, his readers need to account for three hermeneutical factors in their interpretation (discussed previously in chap. 3).

1. Paul is not speaking in a vacuum. His words are framed in human contexts which must be accounted for in interpretation. Thus what he says should not be taken out of context in order to form normative positions, timeless truths or doctrinal certainty.
2. Paul always speaks *in* a human context, clearly speaking *to* a human context; yet in order to understand Paul, his readers need to realize that Paul is not speaking *from* a human context. His critiques, prescriptions and theology formed in his letters are contextualized beyond those human contexts to his involvement directly in God's relational context and process. Paul's corpus emerged *in* human contexts but was constituted *from* the further and deeper context of the whole of God through vulnerable involvement in the process of relationship with Christ.
3. Until Paul's readers “listen to” (see, read) Paul from the qualitative framework into which Paul was relationally contextualized and constituted *with* and ‘in Christ’—God's relational context and process *from* which Paul was speaking to extend and give further clarity to God's voice—we will not have the interpretive lens to go beyond human shaping of the gospel in order to grasp the experiential truth of the whole gospel constituted, fulfilled and made whole by Jesus for the human condition. Jesus' gospel was the experiential truth of Paul's gospel, by which Paul was made whole.

Therefore, to read Paul is to read his words from God, to hear Paul is to listen to God's communicative action—taking us further and deeper into the whole of God. To grasp God's relational story, and thus interpreting Paul's theology, we have to listen to God's communicative action: notably the Father declaring “Listen to my Son” (Mt 17:5), and the Son warning about his revelation “Then pay careful attention to how you listen”



(Lk 8:18). This raises some critical issues which Paul's readers need to address—issues of which Paul's theology requires resolution to be fully understood.

The notion that “what one looks for in Paul, one tends to find” has ironic validity, given the biases of Paul's readers.<sup>4</sup> At the same time, without the irony, what one does not look for in Paul, one certainly will not find. The interpretive framework—determining the lens for what is paid attention to and what is ignored—is vital for grasping Paul, and it is critical to the epistemic process engaged. For example, a quantitative framework may be sufficient to see the historical Paul but a qualitative framework is necessary to see the relational Paul. (This would also apply to neuroscience's view of the person from outer in and what is needed to see the whole person from inner out.) The issue here involves how the human person is defined and what lens is used to determine a person's function. Since the relational Paul is inseparable from the theological Paul, grasping the theological Paul involves a contingency to understand the relational Paul which involves his whole person. Yet Paul's readers cannot understand what they don't see or are predisposed to ignore. This challenges our interpretive framework necessary to see the whole of Paul—necessarily also challenging our theological anthropology—and it addresses the relational epistemic process basic to the whole in his theology.

To grasp Paul's theology, then, necessitates for his readers to engage the relational epistemic process in likeness to Paul's ongoing involvement in the whole of God's relational context and process. By its nature, this involvement is compatible with God's whole and terms which are both qualitative and relational. To be involved with God in the relational context and process of God's terms clearly distinguishes the function necessary for our hermeneutical lens to have the qualitative-relational significance to know the whole of God—that is, paying careful attention to “listen to my Son.” This function is not an obligatory method but, by the nature of the embodied Word from God, must be involvement compatible to God's relational communication and revelation (*phaneroo*, not *apokalypto*). The Word from God was vulnerably embodied to make known and accessible the whole of God for relationship together (cf. Eph 3:9-12; Col 1:19-20; 2:9). As Morna Hooker describes it, “Vulnerability is built into God's revelation.”<sup>5</sup> In the incarnation God makes the whole of God vulnerable—vulnerable also to misinterpretation, to not really be listened to, even ignored, not to mention to be persecuted. Paul was guilty of all these functions until he made himself vulnerable to the incarnation further extended to him by the vulnerably embodied Word from God. Being

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<sup>4</sup> Take to heart the statement by Stephen Westerholm noted previously in chap. 1: “Perhaps a corner in the chutzpah hall of fame should be reserved for those of us who write about Paul. We are, after all, hardly less liable than other mortals to misconstrue the thinking of our spouses; that of our teenage offspring we have long since despaired of divining. We too contend daily with the impenetrable *otherness* of our contemporaries: any forgetfulness of our limitations incurs prompt and painful refutation. The study of the ancients, on the other hand, allows a good deal of scope for our pretensions and, best of all, immunity from instant rebuttal—and we have certainly milked its potential to the fullest. Given a first-century apostle a few of whose letters we have read, we make bold to distinguish what he said from what he really thought, and even to pontificate n why he thought the way we think he did. Indeed, as the assumptions that governed Paul's thinking become more and more remote from our own, the assurance with which we pronounce on the direction and deficiencies of his reasoning seems only to increase.” *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 214.

<sup>5</sup> Morna D. Hooker. “Where is Wisdom to be Found? Colossians 1:15-20 (I)” in *Reading Texts, Seeking Wisdom*, edited by David F. Ford and Graham Stanton (London: SCM, 2003), 127.

vulnerable, both for Paul and his readers, is the only response compatible for involvement in reciprocal relationship together with the Word of God's communicative action, whether for the relational epistemic process or for the relationship necessary to be God's whole family.

This vulnerable involvement signified the relational Paul who qualitatively determined the theological Paul. The historical Paul came to be only the relational Paul, and the theological Paul functioned always as the relational Paul. Therefore his theology cannot be grasped apart from or reduced from the relational Paul. In function, the relational Paul is the hermeneutical key to Paul's theology—notably his Christology and pneumatology, making functional his ecclesiology to be whole. Yet the vulnerable involvement of the relational Paul was not a quantitative function of the person from outer in (e.g., of how much, cf. Phil 3:7-10). It was the qualitative function of the person from inner out, that is, the whole person signifying the vulnerability of relational involvement only by the heart (i.e., of how deep, cf. 2 Cor 5:12; 12:7-10, as discussed in the previous chap.). This pointed to the theological anthropology implicit to Paul, which then also points us back to the opening discussion on human nature and the inherent human need, and their necessary theological roots made definitive by Paul. This involves the wholeness of both persons and their relationships, which are inseparable to be whole and are irreducible to be God's whole.

Thus, for Paul's readers this necessitates examining how we functionally define the human person; moreover, this further necessitates addressing the pervasive reduction (theological, philosophical or social) of the human person and relationships in our human contexts which, for Paul, constitute sin. Our interpretive lens certainly determines what we pay attention to or ignore first in ourselves, then in others including Paul and the whole of God. The theological Paul will not allow his readers to avoid these issues and remain less than vulnerable—that is, if they want to grasp the whole in his theology. Nor can his readers ignore that Paul's theology is vitally integrated to the relational function of the whole gospel, for which his fight by necessity was jointly his fight against reductionism, reductionism as sin, sin as reductionism, and reductionism's counter-relational work—that is, anything less or any substitutes for God's whole on God's terms.

Interpreting Paul's *theology* contextualized by God, not by human contextualization, is inseparable from interpreting the theological Paul, the whole in Paul signified by the whole of Paul. Interpreting his theology is confounding by trying to get into Paul's mind, even though Paul unequivocally asserted: "But we have the mind of Christ" in response to the penetrating question "Who has known the mind of the Lord?" (1 Cor 2:16). What, I suggest, Paul meant by this clear declaration was not about an intellectual assimilation or absorption of Christ's mind. While his assertion certainly includes the reasoning of his theological cognition, having the mind of Christ is less about mental cognition (cf. the qualitative *ruah*, "spirit", Isa 40:13) and involves more the depth of knowing the whole person as the relational outcome from vulnerability in relationship together (Eph 3:19; 4:13, cf. Jesus' lesson on the epistemic process discussed in chap. 1, Lk 10:21). Moreover, what Paul makes definitive here is the new perceptual-interpretive framework which can only emerge as a relational outcome of vulnerable involvement with Christ in relationship together with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-13, fulfilling Jn 16:12-15; cf. *phronema*, Rom 8:6). In other words, vulnerable involvement with Christ transformed Paul's framework and how he saw things, that is, the person, relationships,

life and, most importantly, God, through the lens (eyes, mind) of Christ (cf. Rom 12:2; Eph 4:23-24; Col 3:10-11). It is only by this same lens that Paul's readers can understand his views—a viewpoint not from getting into Paul's mind but from vulnerably walking in the sandals of the whole of Paul.

Therefore, in order to be compatible with Paul's theology, it is inadequate to use just descriptive theological categories. To describe his theological discourse (dialogue, not monologue) in such quantitative or static terms may fit conveniently into conventional doctrinal categories, but this would only be fragmentary without the qualitative-relational significance of the whole in Paul's theology. For the whole of Paul's focused thought, we need experiential levels which account for both the qualitative and relational involvement *of* God and *with* God as Subject as well as Object. Additionally, for the whole in his theology, we need to have some focus on Paul's dynamic theological forest—that is, the whole of God's thematic action in relational response to the human relational condition (e.g., Eph 1:3-14; Col 1:15-20)—in which to piece together (*syniemi*) his theological trees for their whole understanding (*synesis*). This indeed was the experiential truth of Paul's transformed interpretive framework and lens—a new *phronema* and *phroneo* by the Spirit (Rom 8:5-6). Thus, his theological dialogue cannot be measured and his theology cannot be interpreted by anything less or any substitutes and still be a word from above of the whole of God, and also account for Paul's relational responsibility to *pleroo* God's word (Col 1:25).

The whole of God's thematic communicative action converged for Paul in the experiential truth of the vulnerably embodied Word. The relational outcome constituted his new perceptual-interpretive framework and lens, the hermeneutic function of which was relationally signified in the maxim “Nothing [not to go] beyond what is written” (1 Cor 4:6). For us today, what is written is limited to the corpus of the biblical text. What was written for Paul seems to point back to the limits of the OT corpus for Judaism and of the Jesus tradition (if any texts existed), both of which Paul went beyond. **What, then, was definitive for Paul that his interpretive framework would not go beyond?**

The specific situation and circumstances Paul faced at Corinth provide the stimulus for his polemic and thought. This context and Paul's response also help his readers understand his theological discourse (explicit and implicit) on the human person and the relationships necessary to function as the church. The existing condition in that church was fragmented relationships created by the misguided competition of each person's claim to be either of Paul or of Apollos or of Peter or of Christ (1 Cor 1:12). The underlying dynamic of these divisive relationships (3:3,21) reduced the persons involved to being defined from outer in (1:13) based on fragmentary knowledge (3:1-5). What Paul addressed in the church at Corinth—and continues needing to be addressed in the church today—exposed the human shaping of the gospel and the human construction of theological cognition from human contextualization. Both this human shaping and construction went “beyond what is written”—that is, beyond the definitive source of subject-*theos* in God's communicative action (1:19,31; 3:19-23). Paul only used what was previously written (e.g., Isa 29:14; Jer 9:24; Job 5:13; Ps 94:11) to illuminate the communicative action of God's revelation on God's terms—which Paul himself continued to receive further and deeper—as well as to expose anything less and any substitutes.

In other words, for Paul the only conclusive theological discourse is limited to vulnerable involvement in the relational epistemic process of God’s revelation, namely embodied by the Word who makes definitive the whole knowledge and understanding of God’s whole only on God’s terms, and thus “nothing beyond what is [conclusive revelation from God].” God’s terms are irreducibly qualitative and nonnegotiable relational involving the whole person in reciprocally vulnerable relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes, including of persons and relationships, are from reductionism and its counter-relational work. This was at the heart of what Paul fought against in the church at Corinth and at large: “so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you [from inner out, not outer in]? What do you have that you did not receive [from God’s initiative]? And if you received it, why do you boast [of human reasoning, shaping and construction]?” (4:6b-7).

Paul’s qualitative interpretive framework renders the meaning of the whole gospel, and his relational interpretive lens provides understanding for the theological anthropology of the whole person and the relationships together necessary to be whole—that is, the good news of the definitive relationship that conclusively fulfills the inherent human need and problem to have meaningful relationships together. This is the same inherent need and problem that even neuroscience identifies in the human person from outer in. Both this qualitative and relational significance in Paul are critical for his readers to interpret the whole in his theology. Wholeness for Paul was an experiential truth, the relational reality of which constituted the ontological identity of who Paul was and whose he was. These are the experiential levels of Paul’s theology which conventional theological categories do not account for, and thus are inadequate to understand this wholeness of Paul and are incompatible to explain the wholeness in his theology. What the continued use of these categories does help indirectly to understand, however, is how in any practice the presence of God’s whole is needed to expose the influence and workings of reductionism.

The experiential levels of Paul’s theology can be accounted for by integrated discourse focused on the following suggested theological dynamics:

- Theology of wholeness: theology only from above, which constitutes God’s whole on God’s terms for the human condition (Col 2:9-10; Eph 2:14-15).
- Theology of belonging: the theological function of *pleroma* Christology and *pleroma* soteriology in *pleroma* ecclesiology (Col 1:19-20; Eph 1:4-14; 2:11-22; Rom 8:15-17; 12:3-13).
- Theology of ontological identity: the qualitative and relational significance of theological anthropology ‘in Christ’ and its relational outcome in the whole of Christian ontology (2 Cor 5:5,16-17; Col 2:10-3:17; Eph 1:5,13-14; 2:1-22; 5:3-14).

These are not fixed or static categories filled with exegetical data. These overlapping and interacting theological dynamics involve exegetically the theological outworking (discourse or story) of the following: the whole of God’s creative and communicative action in relational response to the human relational condition, and human persons’ relational reception of and response to God’s family love, and the relational outcome

‘already’ and the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ in this integral relational context and process vulnerably embodied by the Son and ongoingly being completed by the Spirit, indeed by the whole of God for relationship together in God’s whole family.

Paul was definitive, bold, uncompromising, yet loving, in his theological dialogue because his theology was unmistakably first his experiential truth of *theos* as Subject in relational response to his own relational condition. When Paul answered the penetrating question “Who has known the mind of the Lord?,” his answer was not just epistemological. His answer confirmed the vulnerable involvement of his person from the inner out in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to relationally know the mind of Christ, more deeply that is, to relationally experience the heart of Christ and thus the whole of God in reciprocal relationship together to be made whole and to live whole, nothing less and no substitutes. This relational outcome ‘already’ for Paul was jointly his relational responsibility to integrally witness of the *pleroma* of God and his family relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* (complete, make whole) the word of God. These were basic, nonnegotiable functions for who Paul was and whose he was, and therefore by their nature, irreducibly at the heart of his theological dialogue.

And Paul’s readers can neither interpret the whole of Paul’s person and the whole in his theology with anything less or any substitute, nor can they even engage in interpreting his *theology* with anything less or any substitute of their own person. His readers can only find the theological Paul in the relational epistemic process with their own vulnerable involvement in likeness of the relational Paul, who *lived* his theology in the definitive relationships together in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God—the very wholeness for which Jesus prayed for his family (Jn 17:20-26), and Paul prayed after him for the church to be God’s whole family (Eph 3:14-19).



## Chapter 6 Paul's Theological Systemic Framework

**It is God who has made us for this very purpose....**

2 Cor 5:5, NIV

As a supplement to the statement about human nature from neuroscience introducing Paul's theology, I turn to physics for the following statement on the current state of human knowledge:

Despite all we have learned in physics—from properties of faraway galaxies to the deep internal structure of the protons and neutrons that make up an atomic nucleus—we still face vexing mysteries.... We know, for example, that all the types of matter we see, that constitute our ordinary existence, are a mere fraction—20%—of the matter in the universe. The remaining 80% apparently is mysterious “dark matter”; though it is all around us, its existence is inferred only via its gravitational pull on visible matter.<sup>1</sup>

Written in response to the successful test run at the end of 2009 of the Large Hadron Collider near Geneva, physicist Steve Giddings is optimistic about the prospects of human knowledge being illuminated by the LHC. He adds rather hopefully:

We should ponder what the value of the LHC could be to the human race. If it performs as anticipated, it will be the cutting edge for years to come in a quest that dates to the ancient Greeks and beyond—to understand what our world is made of, how it came to be and what will become of it. This grand odyssey gives us a chance to rise above the mundane aspects of our lives, and our differences, conflicts and crises, and try to understand where we, as a species, fit in a wondrous universe that seems beyond comprehension, yet is remarkably comprehensible.

Giddings is hopeful that the vexing mysteries facing human knowledge will be explained if the LHC performs the following: to produce dark-matter particles whose properties can be studied directly and thereby unveil a totally new face of the universe; to shed light on the more prominent “dark energy”, which is causing the universe's expansion to accelerate, ultimately resulting in fragmenting the universe; to lead to the discovery of the Higgs particle—that others have called the God particle—whose existence is postulated to explain why some matter (notably our bodies) has mass, that is, without which our bodies would not be held together to exist; to reveal extra dimensions of space beyond the three which we see; and to possible discoveries of new forces of nature.

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<sup>1</sup> Steve Giddings, “The physics we don't know”, op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, Jan 5, 2010.

If Paul were walking in this context today, he would seize the opportunity to enter this conversation—just as he did in Athens when he addressed the vexing mystery of human knowledge facing the Athenians at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34). And the light Paul shared to illuminate the gap (dark matter) of human knowledge for the Epicurean (a likely forerunner to physics, tending at best, if at all, to deism) and Stoic (religious materialism which was pantheistic) philosophers would not be an anachronism in the halls of modern science because Paul was addressing the same epistemological and hermeneutic issues. Giddings’ estimate of “20%” of the matter known to humans, of course, is part of his optimism, which is inferred at best by an educated guess. Yet this guesstimate is based on perceiving the universe through the lens of a quantitative interpretive framework from modernism; and this also perceives the same human species in enlarged context yet still from outer in (jointly with neuroscience), and likewise constructs human knowledge from the bottom up (comparable to the tower of Babel, Gen 11:1-4). All of this engages in a process of reductionism, the bias of which is ignored apart from the presence of the whole and thus without the benefit of its illumination. This is a critical process to grasp. The biases of reductionism unify into our mindsets (*phroneo*), which formalize into worldviews (*phronema*). At this level of development, these perspectives dominate or control our perceptions and thinking, just as a modernist framework has since the Enlightenment. Thomas Kuhn demonstrated how these form paradigms to shape our perceptions, the influence and bias of which direct even those who formulate scientific theories and models.<sup>2</sup>

Paul would have felt right at home today in these critical issues of cosmology, anthropology and epistemology. No doubt he would be saddened by how little has changed in these issues and by how much reductionism prevails. Nevertheless, this was the whole of Paul’s relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) and the functional purpose of the whole in his theology, which urgently continues in compelling relevance for today: to *pleroo* the word of God’s revelation and to illuminate the mystery of the *pleroma* of God—God’s whole only from top down. This is the definitive whole in Paul’s theology which sheds light on the mysterious “dark matter” necessary to meet the same inherent human need and problem, both defined from outer in and hoped for from bottom up by neuroscience and physics.

When Paul highlighted the Athenians’ “unknown god” (Acts 17:23), he went beyond contextualizing the gospel in their culture. This opened the door to their worldview to address their epistemological gap (*agnostos*) and the related hermeneutic blind spot (*agnoeo*) in their perceptual-interpretive lens. Paul challenged the framework of their worldview with the whole (top down, inner out, 17:24-30) necessary for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction—just as *tamiym* functioned and the *pleroma* of God revealed for Paul. Moreover, in this decisive challenge Paul points to the implied yet definitive framework of his theological discourse.

Paul’s theology did not have a systematic quantity that could be collated for systematic information about God. Likewise, a systematic format to his theological discourse is nonexistent in his letters. I will assert, however, there is a *systemic* quality to his theology which signifies the systemic framework for the whole in his theology. It is

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).



this systemic framework that is necessary in order to understand the coherence of Paul's thought in his letters and to grasp this whole at the heart of his theology.

His theological systemic framework is rooted in revelation initiated by God and thus based on whole knowledge from top down in the relational epistemic process, not on fragmented knowledge constructed from bottom up in, at best, a limited epistemic process. It was from this systemic framework that Paul addressed the Athenians definitively about epistemology, cosmology, theological cognition and anthropology, their nature and qualitative-relational significance, and the good news which sheds the Light on their unknown—which otherwise would remain mysterious dark matter without it. The outcome from this systemic framework in Paul's theological discourse made conclusive the theology of wholeness, without which the human species will remain reduced and fragmented, unable to realize their ontology in God's relational whole from top down, inner out.

## Cosmology and God

Paul's address in the midst of the Areopagus challenged the assumptions of the Athenians' epistemology and their view of the *kosmos*. He also affirmed part of their knowledge (acknowledging an unknown god), yet Paul strongly implied the insufficiency of their epistemic process in not pursuing this course of knowledge further in the *kosmos*. This implication is understood by the theological clarity Paul made definitive elsewhere.

Paul provided the theological clarity for the gospel in Romans to be integrated with the gospel's functional clarity he made definitive in Galatians. In the beginning of this theological dialogue Paul focuses on the physical world and the knowledge to be gained from it. That is, beyond limited observation there is an epistemic dynamic to the universe which involves a communication dimension that observers need to interact with for further understanding (Rom 1:19-20, cf. Ps 19:1-6). The communication dimension is signified in the use of *phaneroo* ("God had shown..." Rom 1:19) to focus not just on what is revealed (*apokalypto*) but also to whom it is revealed. Yet, in spite of the communicative dimension of *phaneroo*, this epistemic process cannot be engaged with a limited quantitative lens, which by its nature limits how much or far can be grasped. These are limits both to the very quantitative matter observed and in the quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework assumed by the observer to interpret the matter observed. Going beyond these limits, deeper in this epistemic process, must also include the qualitative aspect of the physical world and natural forces—engaging even beyond the new forces of nature that Giddings hopes for.

The epistemic dynamic to the universe reveals also its *systemic quality*, as it links the communicative dimension to the source intrinsic to and integral for the quantitative with all else that exists (cf. Paul's address, Acts 17:27-28). It is this source's qualitative systemic framework by which all things hold together (cf. Col 1:17). The qualitative communicative dimension of the epistemic dynamic to the universe can be responded to, ignored, rejected or denied—which has less to do with what can be observed than how it is observed, namely by the predisposed or biased lens of the observer embedded in a

quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework.<sup>3</sup> The implications directly affect the extent and depth of human knowledge, ranging from the universe to the human person, including theological cognition. Paul deeply explained what those implications were.

The primary implication involves the source intrinsic to and integral for the universe and nature. For Paul, discourse on the *kosmos* is neither an end in itself merely to expand human knowledge nor a means to feed human interests. To Giddings' credit as a physicist in anticipation of new discoveries, he points beyond the scientific enterprise to a bigger picture for the meaning and purpose of humankind in the whole of life. In Paul's systemic framework the big picture is a qualitative issue involving the communicative dimension of the *kosmos*, which by necessity must be engaged for further knowledge and deeper understanding, that is, whole knowledge and understanding. As noted previously, Paul's cosmology illuminates the epistemic dynamic to the universe as distinctly relational, in which the intrinsic and integral source is revealed. Thus, his discourse on the *kosmos* is only a theological function both of the relational epistemic process to this source and of the relational means made accessible by the creator: "what can be known about God is plain...invisible [qualities] though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made" (Rom 1:19-20). This was not a basic revelation (*apokalypso*) of informational knowledge *about* God, but only the relational disclosure (*phaneroo*) for knowing God in the primacy of relationship together. That is to say, God is revealed in this relational process only for the purpose of relationship together—the relational outcome which is irreducible and nonnegotiable (1:21,25, cf. Acts 17:27). Moreover, since relationship together is not unilateral but reciprocal, not responding is inexcusable (1:20, cf. Acts 17:30) and the relational consequence is inescapable (1:24,26,28; Acts 17:31).

What Paul clearly placed in juxtaposition, and thus in dynamic tension and conflict, signified the critical distinction between an anthropocentric model of the universe and a theocentric model. Paul's cosmology was unmistakably not of his own shaping or construction, nor defined by surrounding worldviews and mythology in his day. Distinguished from these sources, his cosmology was theological discourse from top down, thus based on God's revelation with early roots in Judaism (e.g., Ps 19:1-6). Yet his cosmological reflection went further and deeper than Judaism's theology to involve the whole of God and the systemic framework of God's thematic relational action. The universe was the work of the Creator alone, who is not the God of deism. God's creative work is always relational work, which signifies the relational ontology of the whole of the Creator. It is this relational God who is revealed to creation only for relationship together, and whose likeness is created in the human person for relationships together to be whole. The relational work of the whole of the Creator was the functional purpose of Paul's cosmology; this was how he made known the unknown for the Athenians. Thus, his cosmology also was not about natural theology.

In his most detailed cosmology, signifying Paul's further theological development (Col 1:15-20), Paul definitively identified the presence of Christ both before and during creation, directly involved as Creator. This was not just to establish Christ's preexistence but to constitute the whole of the Creator, and, moreover, to illuminate the whole knowledge and understanding of the deepening relational involvement of God (cf. Eph

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<sup>3</sup> For an indispensable discussion on this process and development in modern science's perceptual-interpretive framework, see Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

4:9-10). Paul's definitive discourse about the *pleroma* of God indicated his whole knowledge and understanding based on God's relational involvement with him by both further revelation from Jesus (Acts 26:16) and the mind of Christ from the Spirit (1 Cor 2:16). This whole knowledge and understanding constituted his theological discourse on the systemic quality and the relational epistemic dynamic in the *kosmos*, that is, conclusive discourse on the qualitative being and relational nature of Creator-God; this is the whole of God whom Christ vulnerably embodied to also make known and accessible for direct involvement in relationship together. In Paul's theological discourse God's being and nature together is signified by "the glory of God," initially in creation (Rom 1:23) and ultimately in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). In creation a quantitative breadth of God's glory is revealed within the systemic framework of the qualitative whole of God's being and nature. In the incarnation the qualitative depth of God's glory is revealed by the relationally embodied whole of God—embodying, that is, the qualitative heart of God's being from inner out and the relational nature of God's vulnerable involvement from top down. This is the qualitative being and relational nature of God that Paul revealed to the Athenians (Acts 17:24-25, 29).

Paul's cosmology is based on these revelations and thus relationally rooted deeply in the whole of God. Therefore, his cosmology is simply theological discourse for the sole purpose to definitively illuminate: the systemic framework of God's qualitative whole from top down constituting all life and function only on God's relational terms, that is, for the relationships together necessary to be whole in the image and likeness of the *pleroma* of God (cf. Acts 17:28-31; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 2:9-10; 3:10-11).

A corollary implication to the knowledge of God involves how God is perceived and his function is interpreted. Paul not only challenged the theological cognition of the Athenians and his readers but also their epistemic process used to that end. As this was addressed by Paul, his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism becomes even more decisive. Moreover, by its nature this implication interacted with the counterpart implication for how the human person is perceived and human function is interpreted.

Knowledge about God shaped or constructed by human contextualization is no longer excusable, even with the best of intentions (Rom 1:20; Acts 17:30). Paul was unequivocal about the communicative dimension in the *kosmos*: "For what can be known about God is plain [*phaneros*, manifest, open, public] to them, because God has shown them [*phaneroo*, not merely *apokalypto*]" (Rom 1:19). What God has revealed is irreducible and thus not subject to reshaping, reconstruction (or deconstruction), any other revision or substitute from bottom up as well as outer in. Yet this was how the Athenians perceived God and interpreted how God functioned evidenced in Paul's critique of their practice: "God...does not live in shrines made by human hands, nor is served by human hands...an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals" (Acts 17:24-25, 29). These were reductions and substitutes of God which fragmented the whole of God, thus keeping God in the mysterious unknown and embedding them in the human relational condition disconnected from God's whole. Likewise, human persons in general functioned in this reductionism with their substitutes: "for though they *had knowledge about* God, they did not *relationally respond* to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their senseless minds were darkened. Claiming to be wise...they *reduced and substituted* the glory [qualitative being and relational nature] of the *irreducible* God

for images *shaped or constructed* by a mortal human being...they *substituted* the truth about God for a *reductionism based on human terms functioning in the bottom up and outer in of the creature rather than the top down, inner out of the whole of the Creator*” (Rom 1:21-24, 25, italics inserted<sup>4</sup>).

The truth referenced here by Paul was not about propositional truths to give certainty to knowledge but about the truth which constitutes reality (the *kosmos*)—that is, truth having significance and meaning. For this truth of reality to have significance and meaning to humankind, it ultimately must be about more than knowledge, which is limited to its cognition, becomes just an end in itself without further significance and meaning (cf. Paul’s polemic in 1 Cor 8:1, discussed previously in chap. 3). Most importantly, the truth of reality involves being deeply about relationships and life together, thus it is experiential truth (cf. Eph 3:19). God’s revelations within the systemic framework of the whole of God’s creative and communicative action are about this truth constituting the whole of life and function—that is, the relational truth to experience together to be whole. This whole of life and function also signify the function of wisdom (*hokmah, sophia*), which is the relational means to understand the whole and to illuminate its source, the whole of God (as discussed in chap. 1). The integrity of this wisdom was established by the Creator antecedent to the *kosmos* (personified in Prov 8:22-26); and on the basis of its validity wisdom’s function with the Creator crafted (*‘amon*) the intrinsic qualitative wholeness of the world and of humankind (Prov 8:27-31, cf. 3:19-20). Paul would have been aware from Judaism of this revelation about wisdom, and gives further theological clarity to its function to understand God and God’s whole (cf. Eph 1:17). Wisdom and truth—which the above persons claimed to have (“to be *sophos*,” Rom 1:22), and for which they substituted (1:25)—are integral to God and thus inseparably integrated in the systemic quality of God’s relational whole. While implicitly interacting with wisdom, then, it is this relational truth of God and God’s relational whole which Paul illuminated in his cosmology to expose human function: (1) that prevented (suppressed, interfered, delayed, *katecho*, 1:18) seeing, hearing, receiving and responding to this truth for relationship together; and (2) that substituted (exchanged, converted, *metallasso*, 1:25) the relational significance and qualitative meaning of the whole of this truth from God with mere quantitative alternatives from bottom up and outer in. There was no function of wisdom that could be claimed by these human efforts, that is, neither understanding of the whole nor meaning to be whole.

Paul exposed the underlying issue of these persons described above with the clarity of his theological discourse fighting for the whole gospel, which then necessarily also amplified his fight to confront how they indeed functioned as inexcusable (1:20) and inescapable of accountability (1:24a, 26a, 28; Acts 17:30-31). In other words, these human persons engaged the reductionism of sin, functioning in the sin of reductionism by reshaping, reconstructing or redefining the qualitative whole of Creator-God, as well as the whole of human persons from inner out created in God’s likeness. Thus, they made substitutes by human shaping, construction and terms from bottom up which function in counter-relational work/practices from outer in—often signifying the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of prevailing alternatives from reductionism, as Paul theologially clarified in the rest of Romans.

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<sup>4</sup> The italicized insertions in the following pages are used to facilitate the further understanding and deeper meaning of Paul’s words.

The *kosmos* communicates the knowledge and truth of God only for relationship in life together. Therefore, Paul's cosmology also integrates the gospel in the qualitative systemic framework of the whole of God's creative and communicative action, which is always in relational response to the inherent human need and problem. His theological discourse is also unequivocal about the relational outcome in response to God's terms from top down and the relational consequence of acting on human terms from bottom up, and unequivocal about their implications directly affecting the extent and depth of human knowledge and understanding. How God is perceived and how God's function is interpreted are critical to this epistemic process. Is God seen (if at all) in quantitative terms from outer in, thus only with a fragmented perception and function, then further conceived from bottom up? Or is God seen qualitatively from inner out, thus who is perceived whole and whose function is whole, based only on revelation from top down? The functional implication for the latter is the Creator-God who is relationally involved, or for the former, a vague deity (if only) without relational significance and an unexplained human origin without relational meaning; either creation inherently rooted in relationship, or unknown existence and mysterious dark matter in need of relational connection. Its outcome or consequence is both epistemological and relational.

Just as Paul demonstrated to the Athenians, the process to deeper knowledge and understanding necessitates first confronting the influence of reductionism in a secondary epistemic dynamic of deconstruction and reconstruction. This secondary epistemic dynamic is conjoined with its counterpart, the primary epistemic dynamic of the universe, in order to vulnerably engage the relational epistemic process for whole knowledge and understanding. As Paul did this for them, and continues to do this for his readers, his theological discourse made definitive the systemic framework within which the relational dynamic of all life is enacted, engaged and thus makes whole, nothing less and no substitutes.

This also directly involves and ongoingly interacts with the major implication for how the human person is perceived and human function is interpreted, which include the epistemic-hermeneutic issues affecting knowledge and understanding of human life.

## **Anthropology and God**

Neuroscience has further uncovered that the human species was never self-autonomous or self-determined. What this research, along with many other sources, also reinforces is a human self-consciousness that throughout human history has overestimated its *self*, and thus that has both misplaced the inherent human need in the scope of self-interests and misguided human efforts to meet this need with the priority of self-concerns. The *self* (present in individual-oriented settings and collective-oriented contexts) at the center of this process is based on a limited perception of the human person and a secondary interpretation of human function. These reductionist-based assumptions were challenged by Paul, whose theological anthropology continues to challenge such assumptions of the human condition today—not to mention challenging the assumptions of all his readers.

Perception of the human person is contingent epistemologically on the extent and depth of knowledge about God. Interpretation of human function involves a hermeneutic

dependence on how God is perceived and God's function is interpreted. These epistemic and hermeneutic interactions need to be accounted for both in the perception and interpretation of human life, whether on the macro level (e.g., in physics) or on the micro level (e.g., in neuroscience), and most notably in theological anthropology. This all converges in the systemic framework of Paul's theology, thus his theological systemic framework is critically necessary for whole knowledge and understanding of anthropology. This makes definitive in Paul's theological anthropology the roots, the heart and the function of all persons of humankind, both individually and collectively.

## The Roots

When Paul revealed the unknown God to the Athenians, he challenged the assumptions of their theological cognition and their interpretation of how God functions (Acts 17:24-27, 29). This also involved challenging their assumptions about the human person. Their quantitative perception of God in outer-in terms reflected their perception of the human person defined from the outer in by what they do: "God...does not live in shrines made by human hands," nor "that the deity is like...an [quantitative] image formed by the [outer-in doings] of mortals." Furthermore, God does not function on the basis of outer-in doings merely on quantitative terms for a quantitative purpose, which thus should not determine how humans function: the qualitative God is not "served by human hands, as though he needed anything" (perhaps Paul had Psalms 40:6 and 50:8-12 in the back of his mind). The term "serve" (*therapeuo*, 17:25) means to wait upon, minister to, or to serve as a *therapon* (servant, attendant, minister). Yet, a *therapon* needs to be distinguished from a common or domestic servant (*oiketes*) and a servant-slave (*doulos*). *Therapon* denotes a faithful friend to a superior, thus one who is relationally involved with the superior and responds to the desires and concerns of that person. Yet Paul is revealing that God is not *therapeuo* by a human person defined from the outer in of what one does or has. This exposes the influence of reductionism defining persons by their outer-in doing, which, for Paul, was not the function of a *therapon*, no matter how dedicated in *therapeuo*. In this, Paul critically revealed the qualitative God functioning from inner out who, therefore, is *therapeuo* by only a *therapon* whose relational involvement as a faithful friend defines a qualitative person functioning from inner out.

Paul was making the connections in his theological systemic framework which interact to make definitive the whole person in the relationships necessary to be whole. In this process he also necessarily exposed that which reduces and fragments God, the *kosmos* and the human person, and also redefines, reconfigures or simply disconnects their relationships with each other. Paul's theological systemic framework illuminated the whole, the presence of which is needed to expose reductionism.

The roots of the human person go back into the *kosmos*, and the source of both of them originated with the creative work of God. These connections interact in an integrated process: the relational action of the qualitative God constituted the systemic framework only from which all life and function in general emerged, and only within which all human life and function in particular have understanding and meaning. Human roots, then, only unfolded in the *kosmos* and must go back beyond the *kosmos* for the qualitative depth of understanding and meaning of the human person. These are the roots necessary to grasp Paul's theological anthropology.

In the process of making known the unknown for the Athenians, Paul made the above connections to provide the basic perception of the human person and the hermeneutic key to human function: In Creator-God “we have our being” (human ontology) and “we live and move” (human function, Acts 17:28). Yet, human ontology and function more than originate from God; they are also “in God,” that is, in God’s image and likeness as “God’s offspring” (*genos*, kind, family, 17:29). Paul used a metaphor likely taken from their ancient mythology (“your own poets,” 17:28), but not merely to illustrate a point. Being and function as God’s offspring are the integral roots conjointly defining who/what the human person is and determining how the person functions, which are contingent on how God and God’s function are perceived. This emerges from the whole of God’s systemic framework, within which the *kosmos* and the human person are integrated with God’s whole (cf. Rom 8:19).

Paul expands his discourse to make more definitive these integral roots for the human person, function and relationships necessary to be God’s whole. In later theological reflection on the redemptive dynamics of the human person from reductionism (Col 3:1-10), Paul defined the ongoing functional tension between the outer-in person in reduced ontology of “the old self” (3:9), and the inner-out person in whole ontology of “the new self” (3:10). This new person being restored to one’s original condition (*anakainoo*) of ontology and function—defined into (*eis*) the specific knowledge (*epignosis*) of and determined by (*kata*) the image of one’s Creator (3:10). The human person’s ontology and function in the image of the Creator interacts directly with Paul’s cosmology revealing that Christ the Creator “is the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15). This connection within Paul’s theological systemic framework makes definitive two vital matters:

1. It sets in motion Paul’s complete Christology of the embodied “*pleroma* of God” (Col 1:19) “who is the image of God” vulnerably revealing the whole of God “in the face of Jesus Christ” for relationship together (2 Cor 4:4b-6; Col 1:20).
2. The face of Christ embodying the image of God also vulnerably demonstrates in his whole person throughout the incarnation the qualitative and relational significance of human ontology and function necessary to be God’s whole family—which Paul clarified theologically (Rom 8:29) and also prayed for (Eph 3:14-19), both congruent with Jesus’ prayer (Jn 17:16-26).

**What, then, was the original human ontology and function, what of its roots unfolded in the *kosmos*, and what is being restored to its original condition?** Human roots were the creative work of the whole of the Creator, the unknown face of whom is constituted by Christ as Creator (Col 1:16), by Christ as God (Col 1:19; 2 Cor 4:6) and by Christ as Son (Rom 4:4, cf. Jn 1:18). The whole of the Creator is vital to human roots because: (1) the human person was created in the qualitative image of the whole Creator, that is, *whole* from inner out, neither fragmenting the quantitative from the qualitative nor minimalizing the quantitative; and (2) human function was created in the likeness signified by the relational ontology of the whole of God (defined in the creation narrative, Gen 1:26-27), that is, in the relationships together necessary to be God’s whole—namely, as Jesus vulnerably revealed with the Father (Jn 5:19-20; 14:9-11), and for which he

intimately prayed to the Father (Jn 17:21-23). Therefore, *imago Dei* was at the heart of Paul's theological anthropology, which he illuminated in its original condition, its renegotiated condition to human terms, and its restored condition in Christ. Yet, for Paul, *imago Dei* was not a theological concept or construction but, by its nature, only the experiential truth of the whole of God's ontology and function in its full relational significance, without renegotiation and reduction.

The creation narrative was a familiar antecedent from Judaism for Paul. Creation of human life was integrated with Paul's cosmology within his systemic framework constituted by God. The relational roots, inherent in *imago Dei*, constituting human ontology and function were signified further in this creation account from God (Gen 2:18). In this last account, God said "It is not good that man should be alone." The Hebrew term (*bad*) rendered "to be alone" can also be rendered "to be apart." The latter rendering more closely involves being detached from some whole, giving a greater sense of relationship and not being connected to others to be whole. This nuance is significant because for Adam the issue was not just the secondary matter of having no one to share space with, no one to keep him company or to do the work. "To be apart" is not just a situational condition, as "to be alone" tends to be perceived, but most importantly a relational condition. Therefore, the significance of Eve was neither for the importance of male-female relationships nor for the primacy of marriage relationship. This relationship was created by the whole of the Creator only for all human function in likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God. With the creation of whole persons in the image of the whole Creator integrated with this relationship together necessary to be God's whole, the roots of the original human ontology and function were completed for all human persons to be the offspring of God.

Then, reductionism challenged the whole: reducing the whole person (from inner out signified by the qualitative function of the heart) to a "self-autonomous-and-determined" person defined from outer in by the quantitative function of what one does and has, and thus fragmenting human persons and function "to be apart" from the whole constituting the original condition of ontology and function (Gen 3:1-7, cf. 2 Cor 11:3). These are the "human roots unfolded in the *kosmos*".

Paul gave theological clarity to these roots of human ontology and function for the qualitative image and relational likeness necessary for wholeness in theological anthropology and its practice with God, within the church and in the world. By the nature of his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism, Paul's theological discourse characteristically illuminates the whole in tension or conflict with reductionism. He put into juxtaposition "the earthly tent we live in" with "a building from God" (2 Cor 5:1-4). Paul used this imagery and metaphor to describe the human person and function in whole or reductionist terms; and this has direct implications for the inherent human condition and the good news to meet this human need. The interrelated dynamics are important to understand for human roots.

"The tent" (*skenon*, or shelter, dwelling) the human person "lives in" (*oikia*, a house without its contents, 5:1) is just the outer structure built from bottom up; this signifies a quantitative definition of the person reduced to outer in (without one's inner significance), who functions essentially self-determined in the quantitative course of life (*bios*). In contrast is "a building from God, not a house made with hands" (i.e., human hands from bottom up, *acheiropoietos*, 5:1), for a full qualitative dwelling from top down



(“eternal in the heavens,” 5:1). While Paul’s imagery has an eschatological sense of ‘not yet’, this ‘already’ signifies the qualitative definition of the person from inner out, that is, “from God” constituting the whole person “from out of” (*ek*) the image and likeness of God, and thus who functions immersed (*katapino*, “swallowed up) in the qualitative significance of life (*zoe*, 5:4). The tension between quantitative *bios* and qualitative *zoe* frames the conflict of the reduced human person of outer in versus the whole person of inner out. When Paul applied his theological anthropology to the present context of his own life, he was unmistakably clear that this conflict is between the quantity of human ontology from outer in (“those who boast in outward appearance,” 5:12) and the quality of human ontology from inner out (“in the heart”).

The relational consequence, on the one hand, is the human relational condition “to be apart,” and thus to be further reduced, fragmented—“to be found naked...to be unclothed” (5:3,4, cf. Gen 3:7) as persons without qualitative meaning and relational significance. On the other hand, the relational outcome is the relational connection together to be whole (“clothed with our heavenly dwelling,” 5:4) in human ontology “from out of” the qualitative image of the whole Creator and in human function “from out of” the relational likeness of the whole of God (cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). For Paul’s life ‘already’ in the present, this involved the ongoing function in the qualitative significance of relationship (“we walk by faith,” 5:7) as opposed to a reductionist function with a quantitative lens (“not by sight”).

Paul’s theological anthropology makes transparent that all human persons with roots unfolded in the *kosmos* “groan” (sigh, grumble, *stenazo*, 5:2,4) in the inherent human need and condition—a groan which neuroscience also identifies in human brain activity—and they “long for” (desire earnestly, crave, *epipotheo*) to be whole in the relationships together constituting the qualitative *zoe* of God’s whole family. Moreover, in God’s systemic framework all of creation groans to be whole with God’s offspring, family (Rom 8:19-22). Longing for wholeness and fulfillment of the inherent human relational need are ontological-functional givens for Paul and intuitive for human persons in his theological anthropology. His basis was that the whole of Creator-God has made (*katergazomai*, to bring about) human persons for this very wholeness in *zoe* together, which includes the Spirit’s involvement (2 Cor 5:5). This points to the good news for all human persons and for restoration of human ontology and function to their created condition in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (cf. 3:18). This whole gospel was the experiential truth ‘already’ for Paul, whose person and function were no longer defined in quantitative terms from outer in nor determined by what he did and had: “From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view (according to the flesh, reduced to outer in); even though we once knew (perceived) Christ from a human point of view (in quantitative terms only from outer in), we know him no longer in that way” (5:16, cf. 10:7, 10). Why, how? Because ‘in Christ’, who is the image of the whole Creator (2 Cor 4:4b; Col 1:15) and the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19), the original condition of human ontology and function have been recreated from reductionism and restored to wholeness (Col 2:9-10). Thus “in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old in *reductionism has been redemptively changed and made whole*; see, everything has become new” (2 Cor 5:17, italics inserted, cf. Col 3:10).

This qualitative new person from inner out, however, still has functional issues in the relational process to wholeness ‘in Christ’, as Paul clarified in his theological

anthropology (Col 3:1-11). While the redemptive change to whole ontology and function has begun unequivocally, the ongoing presence of reductionism and its counter-relational work also remain a competing substitute for the human person and function. What Paul clarifies for human ontology and function ‘in Christ’ is that this is not a static condition but rather a dynamic relational condition necessitating reciprocal relational involvement together in the relational context and process of the whole of God: “seek *from inner out, not outer in* the things that are above—the *qualitative of God’s relational context and process*, where Christ is *present for relational involvement together*]. “Set your minds, *the lens of your new mindset, [phroneo]* on things *qualitative from inner out...for your reduced person* has died, and the *zoe of you as a whole person* is hidden [*krypto*, i.e., intimately involved] with Christ *in relationship together participating in the zoe of the whole of God*” (3:1-3, italics inserted).

These functions of wholeness necessitate further relational actions to confront the substitutes from reductionism which diminish and minimalize the whole person and function necessary in the relationships together to be whole, God’s whole family: “*do not focus your lens on things reduced to outer in... Put to death, therefore, whatever parts [melos] in you are reductionist or engaging the sin of reductionism... These are the ways in human contextualization you also once followed, when you defined your person and function in relationships from outer in with the lens of quantitative bios* (3:2b, 5-7). ...But now you must get rid of all such *reductionism in how you define your person and functions in relationships* (3:8) Thus, do not lie *by presenting your person in reductionist terms from outer in to represent your whole person [pseudo]* to one another *keeping distance in your relationships together*, seeing that you have stripped off the old *reduced person with its fragmented ontology and counter-relational practices* and have *defined your persons and determined your function with the new whole person* who is being renewed—that is, *restored to the person’s original condition [anakainoo] and defined into (eis) the specific knowledge (epignosis) of and determined by (kata) the image of the whole and relational Creator* (3:9-10). Therefore, in that *restoration to whole ontology and function* there is no longer *persons defined from outer in embedded in stratified relationships based on what they do and have because Christ the whole Creator, the pleroma of God is all in the whole [pasin], that is, Christ defined the whole and determines the function to be whole* 3:11, italics inserted, cf. Gal 3:26-28). Moreover, the functions to be whole cannot be reduced to the mere practice of Christian ethics, as Paul’s readers tend to do with his interpretation of human function.

In clarifying these human roots, Paul was not advocating a dualistic ontology to function either in a moral spirituality and otherworldliness, or in the worldliness of the flesh (a misreading of Rom 8:1-15). Paul was only focused on the reciprocal process of redemptive change for human persons (both old and even new needing further change) to be restored to whole ontology and function—nothing less and no substitutes from reductionism (cf. Rom 12:1-2). The tension and conflict with reductionism are ongoing; and reductionism’s influence and counter-relational work prevail in the human roots unfolded in the *kosmos*—continuing its influence on defining human ontology and determining human function in one way or another (cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15), unless counteracted by God’s whole, “so that what is *reduced [mortal, thnetos]* may be swallowed up by *zoe*” (2 Cor 5:4). Without qualitative relational action on these functional issues, which Paul made unmistakable in his theological anthropology,

restoring human persons and function to God's whole is frustrated and an ongoing struggle with reductionism. This ongoing issue made theological anthropology critical in Paul's theology, the basis of which Paul never assumed for his readers and thus always addressed with them. Moreover, Paul ongoingly challenged their assumptions on theological anthropology in order for human ontology and function to be whole.

Paul made this further definitive for the church to be whole in its own ontology and function as God's family (Eph 4:11-16). As he described various functions in the church, Paul clearly defined them as a relational outcome from Christ ("he gave," 4:11). These functions, then, by their whole nature 'in Christ' must not be used to define those persons by what they have ("gifts") and do (roles as "apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers," etc.). If they defined themselves in those ways, they would enact two critical reductionist practices: (1) reduce their person to outer in, and (2) renegotiate to their terms the relational function and the whole purpose Christ gave them. These reductionist practices essentially render these persons less than whole, and thus they would be incapable of fulfilling their function for the church to be whole as the whole of God's family embodied by Christ (cf. 1:23)—no matter how gifted they were or how dedicated they performed their roles. What is that function and purpose?

Paul condensed their function and purpose in the phrase "to equip the saints" (4:12), the significance of which has been redefined by Paul's readers and renegotiated by church leaders ever since. The term for "equip" (*katartismos* from *katartizo*) is used only here and can mean either to restore to former condition, to put in order by making complete, or simply to equip, train, prepare. The latter has only secondary meaning, which to Paul had no significance without the former. For Paul, *katartismos* was only a function of *anakainos* (being restored to the human person's original condition, Col 3:9), and it is only this new whole person who can fulfill Christ's purpose to help restore God's children to be whole and to live whole "for building up the body of Christ, until all of us *function in the relationships together to be teleios* [complete, whole to the full extent] of the *pleroma* of Christ, *the whole of God, as God's whole family*" (4:12-13, italics inserted, cf. 1:23).

Nothing less and no substitutes of the whole ontology and function of both church leadership and church membership can be sufficient for his church to "grow up" (*auxano*, in Greek subjunctive mood to indicate contingency and merely potential, 4:15). This ontology and function are irreducible and nonnegotiable for any church to be whole, regardless of its situations and circumstances; and Paul challenged any other assumptions about the person and church. Therefore, only whole persons defined from inner out in the qualitative image of God, whose relational function in relationships together is in likeness of the whole of God, can meet this contingency and realize this potential: to "grow up in every way into him who is the head, into *the whole of Christ*, from whom the whole body [church family] *is relationally involved and bonded together by every person made whole from inner out*, that is, as each whole *person functions whole in the relationships necessary together for the church family's growth in building itself up in love*" (4:15-16, italics inserted). This is the only function and purpose that the whole of Christ gave for his family to be whole. Anything less and any substitutes in the church are ontological simulations and epistemological illusions of wholeness from reductionism.

These are the necessary roots of the ecclesiology of the whole of God's family, relationally embodied only by persons of whole ontology (in the image of God embodied

by Christ) who are vulnerably involved in the qualitative function of relationships together; that is to say, nonnegotiable function only in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God which Christ relationally embodied for his church to live whole together and to make whole in the world (discussed further in chaps. 9 and 10). These are the original human roots created by the whole Creator, whose thematic relational action constituted the qualitative systemic framework integrating the *kosmos* and all human life. This is the significance of Paul's systemic framework, by which he made definitive in his theological anthropology these roots as well as the heart and the function of all persons of humankind, both individually and collectively, old and new.

## The Heart

In Judaism, Paul had already been introduced to the importance of the heart (*leb*, e.g., Deut 6:4; 10:16; 11:13). Yet, Paul had not understood this importance for the ontology either of Israel as God's people or of his own person. He had not grasped the integrating function of the heart for the person (cf. Prov 4:23; 14:30; 27:19) until his own heart was exposed on the Damascus road, now vulnerable in relationship with the whole of God. I have assumed that this involved the retrospective journey of his person back to the human roots beyond his Jewish roots in Abraham. The original human roots, both for the individual and for the collective, define the heart as the center of human ontology, not the brain of neuroscience or the sub-atomic dynamics of physics. What is the difference of the heart and how is it significant?

The original human roots with Adam and Eve constituted each of them in their individual self, both with themselves in relationship together and with their Creator. Yet, Adam and Eve made two critical assumptions in the primordial garden: (1) that their ontology was reducible to human shaping, and (2) that their function was negotiable to human terms (Gen 3:6-10). In their ontology created in the image of God, the qualitative whole of their persons "were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). While "naked" denotes not wearing outer clothes, it involves the perception of the person from inner out. Perceiving the inner-out person (both self and other), which included the outer body, does not result in "shame" (*bos*, to be ashamed, confounded, disappointed, denoting embarrassment, confusion or dismay). *Bos* emerges from reducing the created human ontology of the whole person from inner out to a person just from outer in. This reduction reflects a shift from qualitative to quantitative without the integrating significance of the heart, thus fragmenting the whole of human ontology down to one's parts, for example, by perceiving the person (self and other) by their outer body parts resulting in *bos*. This shift took place in the primordial garden fragmenting the whole of Adam and Eve's ontology (3:6-7). These are the human roots of ontology and function unfolded in the *kosmos*.

Adam and Eve's assumptions were from reductionism, which Paul later had to face in his own person and in his own faith with Judaism. He grasped that this was unmistakably an issue of the reduction of human ontology from inner out, and thus unequivocally an issue of restoring the heart to his person, to all other persons, and to relationship together with their God. For Paul, this transformation was the relational outcome of having his heart exposed by the whole of Jesus on the Damascus road and being vulnerably involved from inner out with his heart coming together with Jesus' heart

in relationship (cf. 2 Cor 4:6). The experiential truth of having his heart restored to whole ontology and function was the wholeness of Paul's witness and the wholeness in his theology (cf. Col 2:9-10; 3:10), evidenced in his fight against the reductionist assumptions of human ontology and function, and ongoingly integrated in his fight for the gospel of wholeness.

From the outset of his corpus, Paul clearly defined his person and function neither on the basis of human contextualization nor determined by human terms, but rather only in God's relational context and process on God's terms "to please God who tests our hearts" (1 Thes 2:2b-6). God "tests" (*dokimazo*, prove, discern, distinguish)--that is, God perceives the human person and function, and determines our significance only from inner out on the qualitative basis of the heart, not in quantitative terms from outer in based on what we do and have (cf. Rom 8:26-27). Paul grasped that God's people are not distinguished from outer in, for example, by physical circumcision, but only from inner out, by circumcision of the heart (Rom 2:28-29). Faith and ongoing relationship with God, therefore, are nothing less and no substitutes of the qualitative function of our heart (Rom 10:10; Col 3:1, 15-16; Eph 5:19; 6:5-6). For Paul and Saul, this necessarily involved the human heart being restored to whole ontology and function, of which echoes from the past were likely recalled (viz. Ez 11:19; 18:31; 36:26).

The relational process to the heart (center) of human ontology was fulfilled by the embodied whole of Christ, who vulnerably illuminated the glory of God—the qualitative heart of God's being and God's intimate relational nature (2 Cor 4:6). As Paul deeply clarified for the fragmented church in Corinth, the relational outcome was constituted conclusively "by giving us his Spirit in our hearts" (2 Cor 1:22), and thus "being transformed [from inner out, *metamorphoo*] into the same image" (3:18), such that our ontological identity together is not based on outer-in terms, but "written on our hearts...not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts" (3:2-3). The qualitative significance of Paul's own heart was deeply manifest in his most heartfelt letter even beyond his words, for Paul made vulnerable his whole ontology both to share with them and to be affected by them (just as Jesus did in the incarnation and with Paul on the Damascus road). This is the nature and function of the heart. Paul's involvement with the Corinthians was thus consistently solely from the inner-out whole of his person signified by the qualitative function of his heart: "I wrote you out of much distress and anguish of heart and with many tears...to let you know the abundant love that I have for you" (2:4); "our heart is wide open to you" (6:11). Likewise, he further challenged their assumptions by calling on their whole persons to reciprocate: "There is no restriction in our affection *from our heart*. In return...open wide your hearts also" (6:12-13). "Make room in your hearts for us" (7:2). For them to be restored to whole ontology and function, they needed to confront the reductionism in their midst of "those who boast in outward appearance and not in the heart" (5:12), which reduced their qualitative involvement with Paul to quantitative outer-in terms (10:7,10,12).

Paul did not reduce his whole person (signified by his restored heart) and thus shift back to an ontology of human shaping—despite reductionism in surrounding situations (2 Cor 2:15-17), in prevailing circumstances, in ministry (4:1-2), or even in the quantitative aspects of the outer body (4:16). This did not mean that Paul was never tempted by reductionism to define his person from outer in by quantitative terms of what

he did—as evidenced in self-his defense (chap. 10:-12:)—and of what he had—most notably a physical weakness Paul even asked God to remove (12:6-12). Despite all of this, the only vital issue for Paul remained wholeness in ontology and function together: “I do not want what is yours, *your outer-in things* but you from *inner out, nothing less and no substitutes*” (12:14), *so the critical question for you becomes* “If I love you more, am I to be loved less *by persons of reduced ontology?*” (12:15, italics inserted).

Paul’s prayers for the churches were only to be whole with restored hearts of qualitative ontology from inner out: “I pray...you come to specifically know *the whole of God from inner out* so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know what is the hope to which he has called you” (Eph 1:17-18), and “I pray that...you may be strengthened in your inner *ontology* through his Spirit, and that *the whole of Christ* may dwell in your hearts...being rooted and grounded in love *from inner out*...to grasp, with all the saints, what is the *qualitative depth and experiential truth* of the love of Christ that surpasses *conventional epistemology*, so that you may be filled *from inner out* with all the *pleroma* of God” (Eph 3:16-19, italics inserted)

Nothing less than the wholeness of God defined Paul’s ontology, thus determined the wholeness of his witness and the wholeness in his theology. This was his only purpose (*oikonomia*, relational responsibility, Col 1:25) for God’s family: “I want their hearts to be *made whole* and united in love *in their relationships together*, so that they may have all the riches of *synesis* [whole understanding in] the *epignosis* [specific knowledge] *of the whole of God*, that is, Christ himself (Col 2:2). And in the systemic framework of Paul’s theological anthropology, the relational outcome is illuminated: “For in him all the *pleroma* of the *theotes* [the wholeness of the Godhead] dwells bodily, and you [your ontology] have come to wholeness in him” (Col 2:9-10). For Paul, therefore, and all together ‘in Christ’ of whole ontology, “Let the peace [wholeness] of Christ rule in, that is, *be the only determinant* for your hearts, *the wholeness* to which indeed you were called in the one body *in relationship together only in likeness of the whole of God*” (Col 3:15, italics inserted). Anything less or any substitutes reduces their ontology, the assumptions of which Paul always fought against in his theological anthropology.

Paul learned from his earlier life in Judaism that when a person(s) shifts to being defined by outer in, then the practice of faith also shifts to outer in. This outer-in definition is also imposed on God by a quantitative interpretive lens which perceives God and God’s function from outer in. This dynamic from reductionism invariably is set in motion by a deficient theological anthropology, as demonstrated in the primordial garden. In his functional fight for wholeness and against reductionism, Paul illuminates for his readers the theological anthropology necessary to make definitive the heart of human ontology and its function in relational significance.

## **The Function**

Though the heart of human ontology is irreducible, it is not a static condition or attribute in Paul’s theological anthropology that God’s offspring and family can assume to be in operation merely by its presence. The heart is the dynamic quality of human ontology in the image of God that, by its nature, is both irreducible and inseparable from human function. In Paul’s theological anthropology, the whole person from inner out is

signified only by the qualitative function of the heart. To assume the operation of the heart without this function is another assumption from reductionism that has essentially renegotiated human function with human terms, even in the church and as the church—just as Paul vulnerably demonstrated to the church at Corinth. What is this function integrated with the heart and constituted by human ontology?

There is a direct correlation from human ontology to human function in what Paul considered a causal connection (cf. 2 Cor 5:5a; Rom 1:28). Yet there is also a reflexive dynamic between them that is influential, which Paul also noted (cf. Col 3:9-10; Rom 1:21)—and which also neuroscience research indicates in its association between relational connection, brain activity and inherent human need. What defines the human person unmistakably determines human function, though how a person functions can have some secondary influence or further reinforcement on defining the person. In whichever direction human ontology and human function are seen, Paul addressed their irreducible and inseparable relationship, notably challenging assumptions which renegotiate human function.

In Paul's theological anthropology there is the ongoing juxtaposition of the whole person's ontology and function with the reduced person's ontology and function. This is not a dualistic construct for his anthropology but simply the only two experiential alternatives available for human life. Moreover, while whole ontology is irreducible and whole function is nonnegotiable, neither of them is interchangeable with reduced ontology or function. That is, whole ontology is incompatible with reduced function, and whole function cannot emerge from reduced ontology—distinctions which Paul made definitive (Col 3:9-11; 2 Cor 5:16-17). Reduced ontology may give the appearance of whole function but only from the outer in ("disguises," *metaschematizo*) to construct just ontological simulation or epistemological illusion of wholeness (as Paul exposed, 2 Cor 11:13-15). The reality for the human person is either the experiential truth of wholeness or some form of reductionism.

Human shaping of human ontology and human terms for human function speculate about other alternatives for human life. These were the critical assumptions made by Adam and Eve in the primordial garden: "When [they] saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes *thus reshaping their ontology to outer in*, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she...and he ate, *consequently using their terms for human function*. Then the *perceptual lens* of both was *changed to a quantitative interpretive framework*, and they knew that *their ontology was reduced to outer in*, and *their function was reduced to quantitative terms of what they did and had outer only from in...*" (Gen 3:6-7, italics inserted). Their function emerged clearly from their reduced ontology, inseparably connected. Whether they speculated that whole ontology would be compatible with reduced function, or that whole function could emerge from reduced ontology, their assumptions were based on reductionism and thus only signified reductionist substitutes for whole ontology and function. These are the human roots unfolded in the *kosmos* constituting the only alternative for human ontology and function—more importantly, constituting the inherent human need and problem. In response to these human antecedents and the precedent of Adam and Eve's assumptions, Paul challenged the same assumptions in his theological anthropology to restore the heart of human ontology integrated with function to its wholeness.

What Paul saw in the face of Christ was the glory of the whole of God (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:19; 2:9). What the face of Christ illuminated was God's glory jointly in qualitative being, revealing the heart of God from inner out, which included also the nature of God's glory, revealing the relational nature of the whole of God in vulnerable involvement. God's glory in the face of Christ was not a static condition or attribute. Jesus vulnerably embodied the relational nature of the *pleroma* of God, whose relational involvement was the function of God's heart. Thus, knowing the glory of God in qualitative being and relational nature is to receive the relational function of God's heart. The functional significance of God's qualitative being and relational nature were what Paul experienced in the face of Christ—from inner out initially on the Damascus road and ongoingly in vulnerable relationship together to be transformed into the image and likeness of God's glory embodied by Christ (as Paul made definitive, 2 Cor 3:18). This experiential truth was the conclusive basis for the irreducible, inseparable and integrated connection between ontology and function in Paul's theological anthropology.

Experiencing the functional significance of God's glory in the face of Christ was only relationship between the hearts of persons in qualitative involvement together to be whole (Col 1:20; 2:9-10). This is the function of God's heart in relationship together with the function of the human heart. Whole function for God and for human persons, therefore, is both qualitative and relational, which can be constituted only from inner out by whole ontology. Reduced function in the human person, then, is anything less than qualitative and relational—the function of which always signifies the shift to outer in by reduced ontology, as witnessed in the primordial garden and in Paul's life prior to the Damascus road.

Wholeness and reductionism are by their nature mutually exclusive, yet in function the tension and conflict between them are ongoing. This process will continue unabated in human function to the extent that the false assumption is in practice that human function is negotiable to human terms. Paul confronted this issue notably in Galatians, in which he made definitive the functional clarity for the truth of the whole gospel. In this letter, he quickly distinguished the whole gospel from reductionist substitutes based on human terms (Gal 1:6-12). Then he recounted his confrontation of the latitude Peter exercised to renegotiate the functional significance of the gospel to biased human terms (2:11-14). He continued in Galatians to clarify qualitative whole function and the relationships necessary together to be whole and live whole. In the process he also confronts the Galatians for reducing their ontology by shifting to outer in and renegotiating their function to human terms (1:6; 3:1-5; 4:8-11). Two summary statements by Paul make definitive the qualitative and relational significance of human function which emerges from the whole of the gospel:

1. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love" (5:6, cf. 1 Cor 8:1b). "Counts" (*ischyo*) means to be effective, valid, have significance and thus to be whole. Nothing outer in has *ischyo* and means anything. Only the qualitative involvement in relationships together from inner out, the relational function of the qualitative human heart, is *ischyo*.



2. “For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything” (6:15, cf. 2 Cor 5:16-17). That is, nothing outer in is ontologically whole but exists in its only alternative, reductionism. The only whole ontology is the new creation—the human heart restored to wholeness ‘in Christ’ which is integrated with human function to constitute the person’s function to be whole and live whole in loving involvement together as God’s whole family. Nothing less and no substitutes *ischyo*.

Since whole function is both qualitative and relational in Paul’s theological anthropology, he defines it neither as a doctrinal truth nor as a propositional truth but only as experiential truth. This experiential truth is the relational outcome of the whole gospel relationally embodied by the whole of Jesus for qualitative involvement in relationship together to be God’s whole family. By confronting the critical assumptions which reduce human persons to outer in and negotiate human function only by quantitative outer-in terms, Paul also exposed the relational consequences from the counter-relational work intrinsic to reductionism and implicit in its workings: less significant persons in less significant relationships, fragmented persons in fragmented relationships, stereotyped persons in stratified relationships, constrained/enslaved persons in broken/oppressed relationships. His functional exposition of reductionism is put face to face with the functional clarity of the whole of the gospel. The good news for this human relational condition is the relational function of God’s heart in qualitative involvement to restore the human heart in the image and likeness of God for relational function together as family (Gal 4:4-7). The relational outcome of God’s whole function is not a doctrine or a proposition, but only the experiential truth of qualitative and relational function: “For in *the relational function of the qualitative whole of Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith—that is, your response from the qualitative and relational function of your heart. As many of you as were relationally involved deeply into Christ have defined yourselves from inner out with Christ, the wholeness of God. There is no longer Jew or Greek to separate you, there is no longer slave or free to stratify you, there is no longer male and female to fragment you; for all of you from inner out are whole together in Christ Jesus*” (3:26-29, italics inserted, cf. Col 3:10-11).

Therefore, Paul’s theological anthropology is definitive discourse entirely on the experiential truth of whole ontology and function, in which Paul’s own person first functioned for the whole of his witness and the whole in his theology.

The above functional exposition and clarity converge in Paul’s theological systemic framework for the whole knowledge and understanding made definitive in his theological anthropology. Paul’s perception of the human person and interpretation of human function were in direct correlation to how God is perceived and God’s function is interpreted. This perception and interpretation of God are based epistemologically and hermeneutically on the extent and depth of God’s self-revelation—from whom alone whole knowledge of God and whole understanding of God’s function are relationally received (2 Cor 4:6; Col 2:9). God’s vulnerable revelations were the experiential truth relationally received by Paul which he used to make definitive whole human ontology in the image of God and whole human function in the likeness of God (Col 2:10; 3:10). Paul

assumes that for his readers not to grasp this irreversible connection between God and the human person in his theological anthropology is not to understand the whole of God.

This integrating dynamic of the whole of God's systemic framework was the experiential truth constituting the whole for Paul's person, for his Creator-God, and for all God's offspring (as Paul illuminated for the Athenians, Acts 17:28). For the function of the heart to be whole, it must by its nature (*dei*, not the obligation of *opheilo*) be indeed qualitative and relational, both for God and for human persons. Likewise by its nature, whole function for both is constituted only by the qualitative being and relational nature of the whole of God—whom the *pleroma* of God relationally embodied in qualitative involvement to make whole all human persons in ontology irreducibly in the qualitative image of God, and in function nonnegotiable in the relational likeness of the Godhead (2 Cor 3:18). This was just as Paul exposed earlier for the Athenians to be whole (Acts 17:29-30), and integrated later for the church to be whole (Col 2:9-10; 3:9-11). From no other source in no other context except God's qualitative systemic framework (Paul's theological systemic framework) do the roots, the heart and the function of human persons emerge for the whole knowledge and understanding necessary for all persons, individually and collectively, to be whole. Paul decisively challenged all other assumptions.

This convergence to wholeness is what emerged in Paul's cosmology and is conclusive in his theological anthropology for both the only perception of whole human ontology and the necessary interpretation of whole human function. Paul holds his readers, past and present, accountable clearly for nothing less and no substitutes, notably in the church. And "...for those who will follow this *new creation*, peace as *wholeness* be upon them," which is the relational outcome only from the grace and "mercy [God's relational love]" that Paul functionally clarified for the whole gospel (Gal 6:15-16).

## Theology of Wholeness

A modern example of the human relational condition pervading human life on a global scale is found not only on the internet but *in* the internet itself, that is, according to Jaron Lanier, a computer scientist known as the father of virtual reality technology who has worked on the interface between computer science and medicine, physics, and neuroscience.

Something started to go wrong with the digital revolution around the turn of the twenty-first century. The World Wide Web was flooded by a torrent of petty designs sometimes called web 2.0....

Communication is now often experienced as a superhuman phenomenon that towers above individuals. A new generation has come of age with a reduced expectation of what a person can be, and of who each person might become.... We make up extensions of your being, like remote eyes and ears (webcams and mobile phones) and expanded memory (the world of details you can search for online). These become the structures by which you connect to the world and other people. These structures in turn can change how you conceive of yourself and the world.

How so?

The central mistake of recent digital culture is to chop up a network of individuals so finely that you end up with mush. You then start to care about the abstraction of the network more than the real people who are networked, even though the network by itself is meaningless. Only the people were ever meaningful....

The new designs on the verge of being locked in, the web 2.0 designs, actively demand that people define themselves downward.... The deep meaning of personhood is being reduced by illusions of bits [b(inary) (dig)its].<sup>5</sup>

Lanier hasn't given up on computers but wants the digital revolution to get back to its core "sweet faith in human nature"; and the approach to people he advocates is the perception of the human person and interpretation of human function based on a quantitative epistemic process from science, for example, engaged by neuroscience and physics. This evidences that despite Lanier's penetrating critique he himself remains locked in to the underlying framework of his digital world, and that he still operates from the reductionist assumptions of the human person and function. Even in its critique, the effort to expose reductionism fully is difficult and, at best, will be insufficient apart from the illumination of the whole. Illuminating the *pleroma* of God was the function of Paul's integral witness (Acts 26:16), and making *pleroo* the word of God was his relational responsibility in God's family (*oikonomia*, Col 1:25). These functions were at the heart of his theological discourse integrating the theological dynamics of wholeness, of belonging and of ontological identity for all life and function (cf. Col 2:9-10).

Discourse focused on the theology of wholeness was constituted "in the beginning" for Paul, just as Paul revealed the theological unknown and thus the mysteries of the *kosmos* and of human life and function to the Athenians (Acts 17:24-31). The theology of wholeness involves the relational dynamic of God's creative and communicative action which constitutes the whole knowledge and understanding necessary for the *kosmos* and the human person. In this theological discourse from above is revealed the systemic framework to all creation which defines and determines its wholeness. Within this systemic framework both the *kosmos* and human life are integrated to define wholeness for each, thus also establishing their need for this systemic framework in order to determine the function of their wholeness (cf. Col 1:17, *synistemi*, to consist together). Without this systemic framework there is nothing other than speculation to integrate the parts of creation—leaving the *kosmos* and human life fragmentary and thus limited only to their fragmented knowledge and understanding, unable to be whole. Left fragmentary and essentially on their own (as were the Athenians), cosmology and physics as well as anthropology and neuroscience can only speculate or, by its own misplaced faith, only hope for what its wholeness is. Moreover, they are confined within this limitation to determine their function just on the basis of human terms, fragmentary as they are.

In other words, definitive wholeness is constituted entirely within the whole of God's systemic framework. Paul's theological discourse on wholeness was unequivocal: Apart from God's whole is just some form of reductionism which for the human person constitutes the human condition ("to be apart")—the inherent human need and problem

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<sup>5</sup> Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget: A Manifesto* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 3-20.

correctly identified by neuroscience research (cf. the “groan” in 2 Cor 5:2,4; Rom 8:19-22). In this human condition there is undeniable (yet misplaced) longing for wholeness and motivated (yet misguided) pursuit for fulfillment of this relational need—both of which are ontological-functional givens for Paul and intuitive for human persons in his theological anthropology. Moreover, Paul can be definitive about the whole and decisive about reductionism because the dynamic of wholeness in his theology was exclusively from above, initiated by God only on God’s terms (cf. Col 2:9-10) and thus not subject to human terms, even Paul’s or Peter’s. Human terms can only, at best, redefine wholeness by epistemological illusion and reconstitute wholeness with ontological simulation from reductionism—which is evidenced in the digital world, not to mention in the globalization of human economy today.

In the theology of wholeness, Paul purposefully stressed the necessary epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction by which his own person was confronted to be whole (*tamiym*), and by which he confronted Peter to be whole. This epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction were critically signified with the simple address in the beginning of each of his letters: “grace and peace” (both of Timothy’s letters add “mercy”). He also closed most of his letters with a greeting containing these terms. The simplicity and frequency of this greeting should not define its significance as formulaic; these terms are critical to Paul’s thought and theology and basic to his gospel—aspects his closing greeting pointed to or summarized.

“Grace and peace” were not combined by Paul as mere theological concepts but as a theological paradigm. They are part of his shorthand theological discourse for the functional convergence of the interdependent relational action and relational outcome directly from God the Father and Christ—whom Paul identified as “the God of peace” and “the Lord of peace” (1 Thes 5:23; 2 Thes 3:16; 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 15:33; Phil 4:9). The relational dynamics involved between relational action and outcome was an interaction Paul never separated nor assumed to be in operation.

Grace is the relational dynamic which signifies the relational action initiated by God the Father and Christ exclusively on the basis of God’s terms, that is, entirely from top down, thus neither defined nor determined from bottom up by any human terms. Grace for Paul was the epistemological clarification of any illusions about human terms. Only on the basis of the relational dynamic of God’s grace did God’s relational response to the human condition emerge, and only on the ongoing base of God’s relational grace does God’s vulnerable involvement enable human persons to function whole (Eph 2:4-10).

The interpretation of human function is variable and fragmentary in human terms, the assumptions of which Paul always challenged. The conclusive relational outcome of God’s relational action of grace is the peace of God (cf. Phil 4:7), the peace of Christ (cf. Col 3:15), from the God of peace, the Lord of peace. This relational outcome of peace (i.e., as wholeness from a Hebrew understanding) constituted Paul himself to be whole in God’s whole family (cf. Eph 1:23). This then is the qualitative depth of the peace of Christ (thus the peace of God) that the whole of Paul vulnerably experienced from the vulnerable relational action of the Lord of peace (thus the God of peace). For Paul, this was nothing less than “the gospel of peace” (Eph 6:15). Peace, as highlighted by Paul, is the hermeneutic correction of any variable and fragmentary interpretation of human function, which can only be whole from inner out on the basis of the top-down relational

action initiated by God’s grace, the epistemological clarification about human terms. Paul began his letters with “wholeness” in conjoint function with “grace” and ended his letters with “wholeness” contingent on “grace” as the theological paradigm to illuminate the functional and relational significance of the gospel of the *pleroma* of God, the Lord of wholeness. This wholeness was the integrating theme of Paul’s thought and the integrating dynamic of his theology throughout his letters, which *pleroo* the word of God, the God of wholeness. Thus, Paul’s theology of wholeness from above also constituted *shalom* further and deeper than Israel and Judaism had experienced—the wholeness in which Paul more deeply constituted “the Israel of God” (Gal 6:16, cf. Rom 2:28-29). This is the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym* and “grace and peace”.

This unfolding relational dynamic of “grace and peace” establishes the distinct flow which outlines Paul’s theological framework to wholeness:

1. The relational context of the whole of God and God’s family, only from top down.
2. The relational process of the whole of God and God’s grace (family love), only from inner out.
3. The relational progression to the whole of God as God’s whole family, only on God’s qualitative-relational terms.

Paul’s theology of wholeness makes functional the qualitative and relational significance of this relational outcome.

After creation, *tamiym* reemerged with Noah (Gen 6:9) and was reestablished with Abram in covenant relationship together (Gen 17:1-2). “Blameless” is the common rendering of *tamiym* but “complete” and “whole” more significantly denote *tamiym* and its qualitative and relational significance to God. Blameless tends to be measured merely on the basis of adherence to the torah (which Abram didn’t have) or to a further Christian moral and ethical framework (as some perceive in Paul’s letters). Interrelated to “grace and peace” in Paul’s letters is “blameless and holy,” or a variation (1 Thes 3:13; 5:23; 1 Cor 1:8; Col 1:22; Eph 1:4; 5:27; Phil 2:15; 1 Tim 6:14). This is further shorthand discourse by Paul for a functional paradigm to supplement his theological paradigm above. Paul did not emphasize “blameless and holy,” for example, for the church at Thessalonica’s eschatological concerns, merely for the sake of purity when Christ returns. Paul builds on “blameless” (*amemptos*) only from *tamiym* and deepens it: (1) what it means for the person to be whole qualitatively from inner out (“holy,” *hagios*, uncommon function), and (2) what it means for whole persons to live in relationship with the holy (uncommon) God together to be whole, the relational whole of God’s family only on God’s relational terms. Thus, “holy and blameless” signify function only “uncommon and whole”.

In Paul’s thought and theology, the functional paradigm of “holy and blameless” converged with the theological paradigm of “grace and peace” to signify being whole in relationship together (peace and blameless) only on the ongoing basis of the whole of God’s relational response and terms for the relationship (grace and holy). This is the irreducible gospel of peace for which Paul so lovingly fought, while necessarily fighting against reductionism so rigorously (Col 2:8-10). Even though longing for wholeness was

a given and intuitive for the human person in Paul's theology, the function of wholeness was never a mere assumption by Paul nor left to the interpretation from human terms.

Paul made definitive this wholeness 'in Christ' (both already and not yet) as the integrated function of two inseparable and nonnegotiable aspects of life:

1. "Let the peace of Christ rule *to be the only determinant* in your hearts" (Col 3:15a). The first aspect of wholeness involves by necessity the whole person from inner out constituted by the qualitative function of the heart restored to the qualitative image of God (Col 3:10). This whole person is the qualitative function of the new creation (2 Cor 5:17), which Jesus made whole from above (Jn 3:3-7). Thus anything less and any substitutes defining the person and determining one's function are reductionism (Gal 6:15). Wholeness 'in Christ', however, is neither the whole person in isolation nor the whole person merely associated with other persons.
2. "...to which [peace] indeed you were called in the one body" (Col 3:15b). The second inseparable aspect of wholeness is the integrated function of whole persons from inner out vulnerably involved in the relationships together necessary to be whole. By its very nature, this relational dynamic necessitates the qualitative function of the restored heart opening to one another ("Do not lie to each other..." Col 3:9) and coming together in transformed relationship as one ("In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew..." Col 3:11, cf. Gal 3:26-29), thus constituting the integrated function of equalized persons from inner out in intimate relationships of "love which binds everything together [*syndeo*], *the inseparable and nonnegotiable relational bonds* in perfect harmony" (*teleitos*, completeness, Col 3:14) for definitive wholeness. This integrated function of whole persons in whole relationships together constitutes the qualitative-relational significance of new covenant relationship together, which Paul made further definitive for the ecclesiology necessary for the whole (2 Cor 5:18; 13:11; Eph 2:14-15; Col 2:10; Rom 8:6) in relational likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God (just as Jesus prayed for his family, Jn 17:20-26).

Wholeness 'in Christ', therefore, by its very nature necessitates the integrated function of both whole persons in the qualitative image of God and whole relationship together in the relational likeness of God in order to constitute being whole. This interdependent dynamic of wholeness also illuminates the interdependence between three crucial issues in human life and function:

1. The lens we use to perceive the person (from outer in or inner out) determines how we functionally (not ideally) define ourselves and others.
2. Then, how we function in relationships is generally determined by how we define ourselves and others; and in reflexive interdependence, how our relationships are can determine how we define ourselves.
3. And thus, how both of the above influence, define, even determine how we actually see church and function in relationships at church, in our gatherings together as church.

Each of these corresponds directly to each of the three relational aspects (the relational context, process and progression) which outline Paul's theological framework to wholeness, and they interact together by necessity in order to be whole. The main flow of these issues, from (1) how we define ourselves to (2) how we function in relationships, is the primary correlation of ontology as the determinant of function, definitive for both God and human persons. Paul ongoingly addressed these interdependent crucial issues throughout his corpus in order to be God's whole family, most notably addressed in the churches at Corinth and Galatia and with persons like Peter and Philemon.

Nothing less than and no substitutes for this wholeness integrated Paul's person, thought and theology, as well as his relationships and the function of the church. Therefore, for Paul, God's relational action and the relational outcome of wholeness (peace contingent on grace) is "the mark [*semeion*, distinguishing his purpose] in every letter of mine" (2 Thes 3:17). This was nonnegotiable and thus irreducible in the theology of wholeness basic to his systemic framework.

Those readers of Paul with a quantitative interpretive framework will have difficulty seeing or grasping the whole in Paul's thought and theology; thus they may merely interpret the qualitative aspect of Paul as his mysticism—without being able to go deeper (e.g., than the historical Paul) to understand the whole of Paul and the whole of his God (beyond Judaism and even the Jesus tradition). Other readers (notably postmodernists) may dismiss Paul's theology of wholeness and systemic framework as just a metanarrative and/or metacriticism that he imposes on human life and function.<sup>6</sup> This opinion, however, does not address the alternative for knowledge and understanding, which is merely fragmentary, and therefore does not account for what is the only nature of that alternative, which is no more than reductionism.

Perceiving reductionism is formidable apart from the operation of the whole. Furthermore, acknowledging reductionism—on any level of epistemology, ontology or relationships—essentially has more to do with human transparency, which does not pervade human life and function. What does prevail in human contextualization, however, is the sin of reductionism—that is, the unfolding human roots in the *kosmos* since the primordial garden. These efforts have not fulfilled the inherent human need and resolved the human problem clearly identified by neuroscience. One of the deepest repercussions of reductionism is diminishing the qualitative uniqueness of personhood from inner out and conforming persons to a minimalized quantitative form and expression from outer in which can only be fragmentary, thus fragmenting persons and relationships. Paul directly confronted the relational consequences of this reductionist dynamic and its underlying deficient theological anthropology in the issue of circumcision at Galatia; and Christian missionaries have historically been guilty of engaging this reductionist dynamic by forcing indigenous peoples to conform to a reductionist form and expression of Christianity. The process of diminishing the person of inner out to conform to outer-in life and function has an ancient history unfolded in the *kosmos*.

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<sup>6</sup> For a discussion on metacriticism, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publ. House, 1992), 48, 316-18, 612-19.

This reductionist dynamic involves the formation of quantitative templates within which human life is defined and human function is determined. This conforming process constrains the whole person and in practice enslaves persons to fragmentary life and function. These templates generated in the world of human contextualization continue today, which computer scientist Jaron Lanier urgently describes in the digital world.

Something like missionary reductionism has happened to the internet with the rise of web 2.0. [Uniqueness of persons] is being leached away by the mush-making process [of fragmentation]. Individual web pages as they first appeared in the early 1990s had the flavor of personhood. MySpace preserved some of that flavor, though a process of regularized formatting [i.e., a template] had begun. Facebook went further, organizing people into multiple-choice identities, while Wikipedia seeks to erase point of view entirely.

If a church or government were doing these things [to impose conformity], it would feel authoritarian, but when technologists are the culprits, we seem hip, fresh, and inventive. People will accept ideas presented in technological form that would be abhorrent in any other form. It is utterly strange to hear my many friends in the world of digital culture claim to be the true sons of the Renaissance without realizing that using computers to reduce individual expression is a primitive, retrograde activity, no matter how sophisticated your tools are.<sup>7</sup>

Paul fought against this reductionist dynamic and its quantitative templates (e.g., 2 Cor 10:3-6, 12), and their relational consequences on wholeness (Col 2:8-19). Paul's polemic should not be misconstrued as imposing a template for conformity of ideology, theological cognition and practice, for example, on the Athenians in their religious pluralism, or on the understanding of the gospel (Gal 1:6-9), or on function in the church (1 Cor 1:10-13). Nor was he imposing a constraint on self-autonomy and/or self-determination (e.g., with a doctrine of justification by grace) in order to bring conformity to human life and religious practice (cf. 2 Cor 3:6, 17-18). His polemic was only for wholeness and thus also against reductionism.

In the systemic framework of Paul's theology, God's creative and communicative actions are always relational actions only for whole relationship together. God's relational action does not impose a template on the human person to reduce human function. By God's relational nature, relationship is never unilateral but necessitates compatible reciprocal response and involvement. On this relational basis, Paul never assumed that the function of wholeness would simply emerge, nor did he leave wholeness' function to the interpretation of human terms. Therefore, as Paul made definitive the integrated function necessary for wholeness, he also made imperative the ongoing redemptive change vitally necessary to turn from reductionism to wholeness, and transition to be whole, live whole and make whole—God's irreducible relational whole on God's nonnegotiable relational terms (Rom 12:1-2).

In the first eleven chapters of Romans, Paul provided the theological clarity for the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. Paul now concentrates on the functional clarity (building on his Galatians letter) necessary to function whole. Based on his theological discourse in the previous chapters, "therefore"

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<sup>7</sup> Jaron Lanier, *You Are Not a Gadget*, 48.



(12:1), Paul issues to his family (“brothers and sisters”) a nonnegotiable call (*parakaleo*) “to present” (*paristemi*) their persons to God in the necessary reciprocal relational response to God’s relational response of grace (“by the mercies of God”). **What is this necessary reciprocal relational response?**

A variation of this call was first issued to Abram: “I am *El Shaddai*, walk before me and be *tamiym*” (Gen 17:1). Just as Abraham was not reduced to being defined by the perfection of what he did (“blameless”), *paristemi* (“to present,” stand before) also should not be reduced to ‘what to do’ (i.e. “sacrifice”) according to religious norms (e.g., *torah* or a reduced popular gospel). Rather Paul’s call to *paristemi* was only about ‘how to be involved in relationship’ according to the whole gospel constituted by God’s relational response of grace. Then, “to present, stand before” God in what necessary way? How?

This involves three basic interrelated issues crucial for determining all practice:

1. The integrity and significance of the person presented before others.
2. The quality of what that person communicates to those others in relationship.
3. The depth level of involvement that person engages with those others in those relationships.

These issues are implied in Paul’s discourse. In his nonnegotiable call, he is making definitive a further functional paradigm to extend his earlier functional paradigm of “holy and blameless.” This added paradigm is necessary both to be whole in reciprocal relationship with God and to live whole in transformed relationships together as God’s church family—which is a functional requisite to make whole in the world, just as Jesus prayed about relational wholeness together (Jn 17:21-23).

By defining the significance of the person presented with “your bodies as a living sacrifice,” Paul is expanding on his earlier discourse when he used a slave metaphor (Rom 6:13,16,19). Now he shifts to an offertory metaphor, yet the significance of human ontology from inner out is the same for the person presented, involving the whole person (“present yourselves,” 6:13,16) which includes all the outer parts of the body (“present your members,” 13,19). The relational dynamic is vital to understanding the integrity of the person presented and the quality of what that person communicates by the sacrifice (*thysia*). The act of sacrificing tends to be perceived as presenting some part of what we have or some aspect of what we do, thus communicating to God some fragmentary quantity from the presentation of our person, that is, whose integrity has been reduced. While this type of *thysia* is compatible with the conventional servant paradigm prevailing in Christian practice, it is not compatible with the relational paradigm to be whole in reciprocal relationship with God that Paul is making functional (cf. Jesus’ paradigm for serving, Jn 12:26). In Paul’s theology of wholeness, *thysia* is only a function of whole relationship together and this reciprocal relational act cannot be reduced to a secondary function like sacrifice.

The depth level of involvement with God in relationship is contingent on *who* is presented before him and *what* is communicated to him. Nothing less than the whole person and no substitutes for the qualitative function of the heart are significant to the whole of God or compatible with God’s whole function (“...holy and acceptable to God”). In Paul’s call, this relational dynamic is reasonable, rational and logical (*logikos*), not a template imposed unilaterally by God for adulation (“worship”). By its very nature,

only this dynamic constitutes what is involved and thus necessary in the function of wholeness (cf. Col 3:9-10). A reductionist interpretive framework (old *phronema*) with a quantitative mindset (old *phroneo*) turns this *thysia* into ‘what to do’, signifying the presentation of a person defined from outer in, rather than the call to ‘how to be involved in relationship together’ by the whole person uniquely from inner out, communicating and involved by the qualitative function of the heart. This is the ongoing tension and conflict reductionism generates with being whole and the function of wholeness in order to diminish its significance to fragmentary terms and to substitute ontological simulation and epistemological illusion. Paul also addressed this opposing dynamic in his call.

The quantitative ‘appearance of things’ (without qualitative substance) conforming to templates of the world is the norm in human contextualization shaped or constructed by human terms on the basis of human ontology from outer in; this essentially signifies the human condition. The limited knowledge and understanding gained from what only appears reasonable, rational and logical for further knowledge and understanding are the ongoing lure of reductionism pervading the epistemic process of theological cognition, the *kosmos*, and human life and function. By its nature, this reductionist process necessitates God’s whole to expose, deal with and make whole the influence of reductionism on God’s offspring and family (cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15). Paul thus provides the functional key to address reductionism by making it imperative to directly deal with the issue by a two-fold process in conjoint function.

1. On the one hand, “Do not *conform* any longer to the pattern of this world” (Rom 12: 2, NIV, emphasis added). The term *syschematizo* means to conform to the same pattern outwardly, directly linked with *metaschematizo* (outward change only), as Paul exposed in the primary source of reductionism (2 Cor 11:13-15). This points to the reductionist templates of the world which impose a definition of human ontology and determine human function to be conformed to. Paul is unequivocal that in human contextualization we are exposed to, influenced in and even shaped by the sin of reductionism, which is the essence of the human condition as Paul discussed earlier in Romans. Conforming to reductionist patterns/templates is a common function, determining even function in the church. Paul’s imperative in the Greek passive voice makes further unequivocal the need for the subject (God’s family, individually and collectively) to take action upon itself (the Gk reflexive passive as opposed to passively waiting) for the changes needed. That is, Paul holds God’s family accountable for the reciprocal relational responsibility of functioning in the qualitative significance of who they are (the *who* presented) and in the relational depth of whose they are (the deep level of involvement with God). This accountability is imperative in order for God’s family not to make choices to engage in the normative/common practice of reductionism by conforming (*syschematizo* and *metaschematizo*) intentionally or unintentionally to the patterns/templates of their surrounding human contexts. In cooperative work with the Spirit, this is God’s family’s shared-portion of the relational work necessary for reciprocal relationship together to be whole on the holy (uncommon) God’s terms—that is, relationally compatible to the whole of God’s ontology and function, thus irreducible and nonnegotiable as Paul’s call involved.

2. The above imperative is in conjoint function with Paul's second imperative, also in Greek passive voice. At the same time, on the other hand, "but be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind." The term *metamorphoo* means to transform, to alter fundamentally, which involves a change in one's very nature or an internal change implying the whole person from inner out. *Metamorphoo*'s change is in direct contrast to change just of appearance or outward forms/practices of a reduced person from outer in, as signified in *metaschematizo*. The change Paul makes imperative is being restored in human ontology to the qualitative image and in human function to the relational likeness of God's glory (qualitative being and relational nature) vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ (2 Cor 3:18; 4:6). The change of *metamorphoo*, however, is not a transformation human persons can enact on themselves (as in Gk reflexive passive); this change is the relational outcome entirely of further receiving God's ongoing relational action of grace—that is, the imperative in Greek regular passive necessitating deeper involvement with God to receive the change of *metamorphoo*, not the mere *metaschematizo* persons enact on themselves. Yet, this imperative necessitating deeper involvement with God is partially contingent on enacting the first imperative, which acts as a functional key to further open the relational door to deeper involvement with God. These imperatives, on the one hand and on the other, interact together always in cooperative reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (whom Paul clarified theologically in Rom 8).

Furthermore, this inner out change necessarily involves "the *renewing* of your minds." The term *anakainosis* (from *anakainoo*) involves the process and work of restoring something back to a new condition. This change needs to include the basic change of making new (*anakainoo*) their mindset (*phroneo*, i.e., their lens determining what they pay attention to or ignore) and its perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*, i.e., the basis for their lens)—changing from a quantitative *phroneo* and reduced *phronema* to the qualitative *phroneo* and whole *phronema* of God's qualitative-relational whole, the *phroneo* and *phronema* constituted exclusively by the Spirit (Rom 8:5-6). This signifies the ontological change which turns from the outer in of *syschematizo* and *metaschematizo* to the inner out of *metamorphoo*. In other words, *anakainoo* is nonnegotiable and cannot be partial, selective or some hybrid because "to make new" is to be made whole in human ontology restored to the qualitative image of God and in human function restored to the relational likeness of God (cf. Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:16-17; Eph 4:23-24).

Taking this process deeper for God's family, Paul provides this functional paradigm to engage the relational dynamic necessary for the process of redemptive change to wholeness, the change which he clarified theologically in Romans 6. This integrated functional-relational paradigm in conjoint function fully embodies the involvement of God's family from inner out to be compatible for the experiential truth of the whole of God's relational context and process for whole relationship together. One relational outcome of this experiential reality is the relational involvement necessary "to test, discern, distinguish and affirm" (*dokimazo*) the intimate ("good and well-pleasing") and complete (*teleios*) desires (*thelema*) of God. In no other context and by no other

process is the whole of God vulnerably disclosed; thus nothing less and no substitutes than the whole person presented at the depth level of vulnerable involvement in God's relational context and process can constitute God's family in the transformed relationships together necessary to be whole. As Paul illuminates this wholeness imperative clearly in relationship with God, he extends his dialogue for this wholeness to be definitive in relationship together in the church, "which is his body, the *pleroma* of him who completes all in *pasin* [the whole]" (Eph 1:23, which I will discuss in chap 9). The only existing alternative is reductionism.

Therefore, Paul's nonnegotiable call to his family was simply nothing other than the relational call to be whole, just as Jesus called his followers first and foremost to be whole. And just as Jesus prayed for this wholeness for his family (Jn 17:20-26), Paul prayed for the church family (Eph 3:14-19). This was the qualitative significance and relational nature of his theology of wholeness. This theology illuminated from inner out ("has shone in our hearts") the whole knowledge and understanding of the qualitative being and relational nature of the whole of God ("to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God") vulnerably revealed relationally "in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor 4:6), the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19), of whom were created human ontology in the qualitative image and human function in the relational likeness (Acts 17:28; Col 1:15-16), and by whom human persons are restored to whole ontology and function (Col 2: 9-10; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:17), nothing less and no substitutes (Gal 6:15; Col 3:9-11). Thus, what Jesus constituted *in* the incarnation of his own person and, likewise, constituted for our persons (both individually and collectively) *by* his incarnation is the irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of wholeness: *the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes* for all life and function.

Paul's paradigm, conjointly theological ("grace and peace") and functional ("holy and blameless" and "to present..."), make definitive the wholeness and its function for human life in the *kosmos*. In his systemic framework constituted by God's creative and communicative action, this theology of wholeness conclusively integrates all knowledge and understanding into the wisdom and experiential truth of the whole, that is, the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative-relational whole—the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the inherent human need and problem. This relational epistemic process and theological discourse do not stop here, however. While Paul's theological systemic framework always involves an eschatological trajectory, there is much more 'already' to unfold further and deeper on this adventure as sojourners to 'not yet'—as Paul shared intimately of his own journey (Phil 3:10-16, cf. Jn 17:3) and kept praying for the church (Eph 1:17-18; 3:19).

The dynamic of the theology of wholeness is by its nature also integrated with the theological dynamics of belonging and of ontological identity. This integration process further emerges in Paul's theological systemic framework, and is even more deeply integrated within his theological forest.

## Chapter 7 Paul's Theological Forest – Part 1

**For in him the whole fullness of the Godhead dwells bodily,  
and you have been made whole in him.**

Col 2: 9-10

The inherent human relational need and problem—also identified by modern means from neuroscience—were the basic focus in Paul's theology, fully emerging in Paul's theological forest for their resolution and fulfillment. Perhaps that may seem like a simple enough theological statement to make about the human condition in terms of doctrine, yet doctrine is a conceptual oversimplification (if not reduction) of the theological dynamics involved in the process to resolve and fulfill the inherent human relational need and problem, dynamics both for God and for human persons. Epistemologically, this process involved a greater paradigm shift than, for example, the shift from the heliocentric model of the universe by Ptolemy prevailing during Paul's time to the geocentric model by Copernicus centuries later. Paul's cosmology went deeper than this quantitative understanding epistemologically to illuminate in his systemic framework the underlying relational dynamics involved between that which is merely anthropocentric and that which can only be theocentric. The implications of these relational dynamics for the inherent human relational need and problem are beyond measure.

In God's qualitative systemic framework the human person is neither at the periphery of God's activity nor at the center, yet is always primary in God's concern and desires. This is the relational dynamic that wholly emerges in Paul's theological forest, which overlaps with and interacts within his theological systemic framework. Discourse on his theological forest deepens the focus on the relational whole of God distinctly beyond Judaism's monotheism. Furthermore, within his theological forest is deeply embodied the relational involvement of the whole of God and God's thematic relational response to the human condition—providing even further and deeper discourse than the Jesus tradition's theological knowledge and understanding for their wholeness (cf. 2 Pet 3:15b-16). Thus, Paul's theological forest is integral for the theological dynamics of wholeness, of belonging, and of ontological identity, in which they are fully integrated.

How does this theology unfold and what constitutes it? And what is its relational outcome that brings resolution and fulfillment to the inherent human relational need and problem?

### **Theological Forest Defined**

Paul's theological forest is not a construct he imposed by which to conform all theological knowledge and understanding. Nor is his theological forest a mere static

context with which to structure doctrines. Rather it is the dynamic relational context of God integrated with God's relational process in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. With interaction within God's systemic framework, Paul's theological forest is further defined:

The relational context and process of the qualitative being and relational nature of God's glory (cf. 2 Cor 4:6), that is, the relational context and process of the nothing-less-no-substitutes function of the whole of God's heart from inner out in thematic response relationally specific to the human condition, thus in deepening vulnerable involvement relationally with human persons for their ontology and function to be whole (cf. 2 Cor 3:18).

The unfolding of this relational dynamic outlines the distinct relational flow of Paul's theological framework to wholeness:

1. The relational context of the whole of God and God's family, only from top down.
2. The relational process of the whole of God and God's family love (by grace), only from inner out.
3. The relational progression to the whole of God as God's whole family, only on God's qualitative-relational terms.

Paul clearly summarized his theological forest in two key texts, Ephesians 1:3-14 and Colossians 1:13-22. Both Ephesians and Colossians are commonly regarded as disputed letters of Paul mainly because they did not follow the form, language and thought in his undisputed letters. I contend, however, that they reflected the further development of his thought and theology—though they may have been penned by another hand. In view of this, Ephesians closely followed Colossians and Philemon—most likely also written from prison around the same time period—with Philemon as a functional bridge to Ephesians (in the Pauline corpus), in which Paul makes definitive the theological basis for Philemon's relational function to be whole (discussed in chaps. 9 and 10). While the Colossian text included Paul's most detailed cosmology, it is a less detailed summary of Paul's theological forest compared to the Ephesian text. Ephesians reflects Paul's further development, suggesting his deeper theological reflection with the Spirit while in prison for conclusive *synesis*, the whole knowledge and understanding of God outlined above. Paul's unfolding relational function to *pleroo* the word of God (Col 1:25) for the church family to have *synesis* in its ontology and function (Col 2:2-3) is expressed in this development.

Therefore, what emerges from Ephesians in general and his summary discourse (1:3-14) in particular is not the outcome of theological reflection engaged solitarily by an individual; though I add that Ephesians further develops the theological clarity of Romans to define the theological forest. What emerges is the relational outcome of ongoing vulnerable involvement in the whole of God's relational context and process, which the Father initiated, the Son constitutes, and the Spirit concludes. This *synesis* of

God constitutes the integrating theme, framework and process needed for the various theological trees in Paul's other letters (notably in Romans) to converge wholly in their theological forest and not be fragmented or reduced without their qualitative-relational significance. In this text, Paul gives a condensed summary of the *complex theological dynamics* constituting the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition for the salvific purpose to be made whole in relationship together with the whole and holy God. Paul defines this quite simply as the qualitative inner-out "spiritual blessing [*eulogia*, bounty which is conferred as a gift] in Christ" (1:3).

The complex theological dynamics summarized in Ephesians 1 can include, but should never be limited to, doctrines that have come down to us as classical theological categories: Christology (1:3), election (1:4), predestination and adoption (v.5), grace (v.6), redemption, atonement and justification (v.7), mercy (v.8), revelation (v.9), eschatology (v.10), soteriology, faith, pneumatology and ecclesiology (vv.11-14). While for Paul these theological dynamics are all inseparably integrated in God's relational dynamic, they effectively have been reduced from their relational nature in order to formulate fundamental doctrines, whose theory has inadvertently diminished or fragmented the whole of God, namely, God's qualitative being and relational nature. These static doctrinal categories traditionally tend to be disparate conceptual oversimplifications of complex dynamics, thus signifying the influence of reductionism. God's relational dynamic is crucial to grasp in its wholeness, which necessitates theological engagement unconstrained by any limits from what serve as the templates of doctrine, even if doctrine compels conformity by its truth-claim.

This relational dynamic was set in motion by the initiation of God's relational response of grace even "before the foundation of the world" (v.4). First, antecedent to creation, God planned (*proorizo*, vv.5,11)—in contrast to the limits of a doctrine of election—to selectively engage ("chose," *eklegomai*, vv.4,11) those whom he knew (as foreknowledge, not the limits of predestination) would relationally respond in trust back to his relational response of grace. Then those persons are relationally engaged "according to the purpose (*prothesis*, v.11) of him who accomplishes (*energo*, set in motion) all things in congruence with (*kata*) his good will (*eudokia*, i.e., desires) making definitive ("counsel," *boule*) his willful action" (*thelema*, v.11). This distinct reciprocal relational process is not to suggest support in favor of the doctrine of free will over determinism (discussed shortly) but to get beyond the limits of such doctrine in order to perceive the whole of God's relational dynamic.

The relational dynamic constituting God's purpose to selectively engage their relational response of trust (v.13) wholly involved this vital relational outcome for them: "to be holy [*hagios*, set apart from common usage, i.e., from reduced ontology and function] and to be whole [*amomos*, unblemished, cf. *tamiym* for Abraham, Gen 17:1] before him in love [*agape*, Eph 1:4, i.e., not the limits of mere sacrificial love but family love]...for adoption as his children through Jesus Christ." This relational outcome emerged on the basis of God's preplanning (*proorizo*) for the purpose (*prothesis*) of his deep desires (*eudokia*) to have the wholeness of reciprocal relationship together as family (vv.4-5). In other words, God's preplanned purpose of the whole of God's (Father, Son, and Spirit) relational response of grace was solely to redeem them (vv.7-8) from the common function of reductionism in the human condition in order to be reconciled in God's uncommon (holy) relational context and to be made whole in the reciprocal

relationship necessary for God's family. This relational outcome necessitates the redemptive change in order for this relational process of redemptive reconciliation to have compatible relationship together which is whole in likeness of God, not fragmented and reduced to human terms negotiated by free will. That is, the issue of compatibility for Paul is not focused on persons having free will but on persons being able to function in reciprocal relationship together. The theological dynamics involved are complex yet should not be reduced by the limiting effects of doctrines which signify conformity to templates of human terms to diminish or minimize God's relational dynamic constituting Paul's theological forest.

Paul certainly did not claim knowledge of God that removes all mystery about God (cf. Rom 11:33; Eccl 3:11; Ps 139:6). Paul did claim, however, whole knowledge and understanding, "my *synesis* of the mystery of Christ" (Eph 3:4), from which emerged his discourse on the theological forest, making known "the mystery of his will..." (Eph 1:9ff, cf. Col 1:25-26; 2:2). Yet, the theological dynamics in his forest can and need to be clarified, specifically in their relational nature and significance in order to distinguish them from later interpretations that ignore relational dynamics. **Since God's sole desire and purpose from the beginning have been for whole relationship together, what is the nature of this relationship and God's action to constitute it?**

First, determinism, traditionally construed from the text as predestination or election, functions in effect as unilaterally imposed relationship, which is incongruent with God's relational nature and love (cf. Jn 15:9; 17:23,24,26), and thus is incompatible for the reciprocal relationship together in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God (cf. Jn 17:21-23). As the Creator of relationship, God alone determines its terms and function, which are neither reducible to human shaping nor negotiable to human terms. This creative action, however, should not be confused with any process of determinism. The desires of God's heart are only for reciprocal relationship together in God's likeness. If God had wanted to impose unilateral relationship together, the Creator could have determined that from the beginning without allowing the human condition to emerge; but then human ontology could not be in the qualitative image of God and human function could not act in the relational likeness of God. Moreover, such unilateral relational function would contradict the ontology of the holy God. Whole ontology is incompatible with reduced function, and reduced relational function cannot emerge from whole ontology, specifically for the whole and holy God. As the whole of God (Col 1:19; 2:9), Jesus demonstrated the depth of God's desires (*thelo*, "how often I have longed," Lk 13:34) to take persons into his family in family love (*episynago*, "to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings") for reciprocal relationship together to be God's whole family ("but you were not willing," *thelo*). By God's very relational nature, these relationships can only be the willful reciprocal involvement together in order to be whole in relational likeness to God and with God.

Secondly, this corporate dimension of family—the identity of those who belong to God by "adoption as his children," (Eph 1:5) and who are "marked with the seal of the Spirit...as God's own people," (vv.13-14)—is no mere metaphor. Family clearly is the relational outcome of God's deeply desired purpose in Christ (v.9) to fulfill the family responsibility (*oikonomia*, v.10) to bring together all as one 'in Christ' (*anakephalaioo*, v.10, cf. Col 1:19-22). The relational outcome of the whole of God's relational dynamic constituted the whole of their qualitative-relational ontology—which God originally



created whole in human persons in likeness of the relational ontology of God (cf. Gen 2:18). This ontological identity integrates the intimate relational involvement of God's family relationships together, which is constituted conjointly both in nonnegotiable function in the reciprocal relational response ("believed in him," v.13) to God's desires, and in irreducible function in the ontology of God's likeness. Thus, the ontological identity of family is irreducible for church ontology and nonnegotiable for church function, which Paul makes definitive in his ecclesiology unfolding in Ephesians.

Thirdly, the individual dimension of family identity "as his children" (v.5), that is, as God's very own sons and daughters are not mere titles which can be deterministically decreed without fully engaging the irreducible relational process of God's relational nature. The theological dynamics involved here include "adoption as his children." Adoption may appear to be a mere metaphor used by Paul to parallel a practice of adoption that was familiar in Greco-Roman context; but the dynamic of adoption was already familiar in Judaism's history, as Paul sadly reviewed earlier (Rom 9:2-4; cf. Ex 4:22; 6:6-7; 2 Sam 7:23-24). Beyond human contextualization (even Israel's), adoption involves the necessary relational functions (viz. redemption, reconciliation, transformation) to constitute any person in the human condition to belong to God's family. In other words, adoption is Paul's shorthand relational language in which the relational dynamic of the whole of God (Father, Son and Spirit) converges for relationship together.

Adoption involves by its nature this relational process: (1) By necessity, adoption first redeems a person from enslavement or constraint by the payment of a ransom ("in Christ we have redemption through his blood," v.7) to be freed from any debt or obligation to a master, benefactor or parent; atonement and justification are also involved yet they should not limit the full depth of God's relational dynamic (to be discussed in chap. 8). Then, (2) the person is not simply freed (redeemed, saved) *from* enslavement in a truncated soteriology, which is limited to deliverance from the struggles and evil of the world, or from one's own sin. Full soteriology conjointly entails saved *to* adoption, made official with the seal of ownership, "marked with the seal of the Spirit," (v.13, cf. Rom 8:16). Thus a person is reconciled into God's family as his very own family member by "the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace that he lavished on us," vv.7-8), now with all the rights and privileges of a full family member, "our inheritance...as God's own" (v.14, cf. Gal 4:5-7; Rom 8:17)—not restricted to merely as a family slave, servant or even guest. Therefore, completion of these necessary relational functions wholly constitutes, both forensically and relationally, any person in the human condition to belong ontologically to the whole of God's family "brought together as one in Christ" (v.10). For Paul, adoption was never a theological construct but the experiential truth constituting his ontological identity—not as a mere citizen of God's chosen nation or as a mere part of God's elect people, but only as God's very own son to be whole together.

Paul makes definitive this deeply involved relational process of the whole of God—from the Father to the Son to the Spirit—and God's thematic relational response to the inherent human relational need and problem. This was necessary to clearly illuminate for the human need and problem their complete fulfillment and resolution in the experiential truth and whole of the gospel: "the gospel of your salvation" both saved *from* and *to* (v.13), in order to be whole in ontology and function together in God's family

‘already’ as the church (vv.14,23; 4:30). These are the complex theological dynamics of God’s relational desires integrated in the whole of God’s relational context and process which emerge in Paul’s theological forest. Further constituting his theological forest is God’s relational dynamic deeply enacted and vulnerably embodied, discussed below. All these theological dynamics are always based on the primary dynamic putting them in motion and ongoingly keeping them in motion.

### **Sine Qua Non for the Forest**

Before this enactment and embodiment are discussed, it is vital to grasp the integral determinant of God’s relational dynamic in Paul’s forest: grace (*charis*). The term *charis* means bestowing a benefit, favor or gift even though unearned and unmerited, which Paul confirmed simply as “the good news of God’s grace” (Acts 20:24) and described as “his glorious grace that he freely bestowed on us...the riches of his grace that he lavished on us” (Eph 1:6-8). In his final farewell to the elders of Ephesus, though deeply concerned, he simply entrusted them “to God and to the message of his grace” essentially to take them through the theological dynamics in Paul’s forest (Acts 20:32)—which apparently did not determine their church’s function later (cf. Rev 2:1-5). Paul was simple in his discourse because grace was the key in his shorthand relational language. As shorthand language, grace needs further clarification, if not hermeneutical correction.

For Paul, the grace of God and the gift from God were not the same thing (cf. Rom 5:15); and grace should not be perceived as some static gift God “lavished on us” to claim in our possession. When Paul talks about God’s grace as a gift (Eph 2:8), it is helpful to understand his sociocultural context to distinguish the connotation of ‘gift’ from that of our times. In the modern West, we tend to detach a gift from the giver and the giver’s relational act, such that a gift becomes more of a disembodied possession or even commodity. In Paul’s ancient Mediterranean world, a gift was usually the act of a benefactor, thus always embodied in this relational act of a benefactor’s grace—signifying more how the benefactor functioned than what the benefactor gave.

How the benefactor functions rather than what the benefactor gives is a critical distinction for understanding the grace of God. Paul highlights grace as the unmerited and thus non-contingent relational function initiated by God that constitutes God’s relational dynamic in all the complex theological dynamics of Paul’s forest. Therefore, as relational function initiated by no one other than God, God’s relational dynamic is determined only by God’s being and nature, that is, God’s glory of qualitative being and relational nature—which is the who, what and how of God Paul entrusted the Ephesian elders to. Moreover, as God’s relational function of grace, throughout Paul’s theological forest God’s relational dynamic unequivocally is defined by grace before creation, emerged by grace at creation, is constituted by grace from creation, and is ongoingly determined by grace since creation.

The relational function of God’s grace is unprecedented relational action exercised in two ways:

1. As unilateral action in which God acts for a certain effect or outcome without having any apparent contingency, thus without needing a response back to God's act of grace. This was demonstrated in God's creation action and most notably witnessed in human situations demonstrating God's deeds (cf. Ps 66:5).
2. As reciprocal relational action in which God acts to engage others for only a relational outcome, yet which action is still uninitiated and unwarranted by others. These relational acts of favor signifying God's deepest desire are wholly for relationship together; and by the whole of God's relational nature, they are not unilateral action. Thus they necessitate a relational response back in order to receive and reciprocally engage God's initiated action for relationship together. This response back may appear to be a contingency but it is rooted in the reciprocal nature of relationship initiated by God, whose relational nature does not constitute relationship unilaterally.

The relational function of God's grace is primarily exercised in reciprocal relational action, the purpose of which defines, constitutes and ongoingly determines God's relational dynamic in thematic response to the human condition.

This distinction of grace is critical to make in Paul's theological forest to grasp its complex theological dynamics. Paul is focused only on God's reciprocal relational action of grace, which by its very nature necessarily involved compatible faith (i.e., the vulnerable involvement of relational trust, Eph 1:13) as reciprocal relational response (not as contingency) for relationship together (Eph 1:12, 17-19). Therefore, in Paul's theological forest, God's reciprocal relational action of grace is the functional key to all the unfolding complex theological dynamics:

1. Grace emerged before creation to plan God's purpose for relationship together.
2. Grace is enacted with creation in this design and purpose.
3. Grace is extended to Abraham and Israel only for this relationship together.
4. Grace is embodied by Jesus to be vulnerably involved wholly for relationship together.
5. Grace is fulfilled 'in Christ' to make whole God's family.
6. Grace is concluded by the Spirit for the whole of God's family to the eschatological conclusion.
7. Grace is unending with the whole of God (Father, Son and Spirit) in life together.

And by the qualitative being and relational nature of God, God's reciprocal relational action of grace functions only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, thus for Paul grace is always irreducible for God, indispensable for relationship, and nonnegotiable in relationship together. By its very nature, grace can only be whole and is integral for God's action and for relationship together to be whole.

In Paul's discourse, grace is his shorthand relational language for *how* the Benefactor, the whole and holy God, functions for and in relationship, determined by *who* and *what* God is in qualitative being and relational nature. For Paul, therefore, nothing happens in his theological forest without God's relational function of grace. God's relational dynamic exists only on the basis of grace, apart from which none of these

complex theological dynamics unfold in Paul's forest or have the qualitative meaning and relational significance for the gospel of God's grace, the gospel of peace, the gospel of wholeness from the God of peace for the wholeness of God.

Before proceeding to the further unfolding of these theological dynamics in his forest, it is vital to see how integral grace provides needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction for a problematic dynamic in these complex dynamics for its whole integration with God's relational dynamic. This involves the theological dynamic of election, which is inseparable from the predeterminism-dynamic. A traditional doctrine of election is problematic while the attendant issue of predestination is not resolved by free will, whose function itself is increasingly challenged by neuroscience. Our discussion will not attempt to resolve the matter but to understand the theological dynamic of election in the whole of God's relational dynamic, namely God's relational function of grace which determines election's meaning and function in the whole of the theological dynamics in Paul's forest. Paul magnifies God's grace in relational function, thus his focus is primarily on how God functions and less (though still important) on what favor or gift God gives. Moreover, God's grace as unprecedented relational action is exercised in either unilateral or reciprocal relational action, sometimes both, which provides further epistemological clarification and hermeneutical correction for this wholeness.

In Paul's theological discourse of his forest, God elected (*eklegomai*, to select, choose, Eph 1:4) and predetermined (*proorizo*, to determine beforehand, 1:5,13). This dynamic can be seen either as God's preplanned choice or as God's predetermined decision. Election can involve the expression of only God's choice or further include the act of God's decision. God's decision involves God's action, while God's choice indicates God's desire without necessarily acting on that desire (e.g., when Jesus lamented over Jerusalem and often "desired [*thelo*] to gather your children together..." Lk 13:34). Election as decision always involves action because when God decides, God acts—action which is irreducible, irreversible and nonnegotiable to human shaping, thus the notion of irresistible grace precluding the influence of free will or human terms. If election is perceived only as God's predetermined decision, then the human person has no say in the matter or part in this relational process. If election as only God's preplanned choice/desire is an option, then there is room to account for the human person's say and part, yet only in terms of the necessary reciprocal relational response of trust, not to determine the terms for relationship (e.g., as demonstrated by Jesus' desire for Jerusalem but "you were not willing").

What has to be integrated with the election dynamic in Paul's forest is the dynamic of God's will (*thelema*, Eph 1:5,9,11). *Thelema* (from *thelo*, demonstrated above by Jesus) means will, desire or choice, and gives prominence to will as desire and want, not demand, the choice of which results from the exercise of will, that is, God's will determined by the relational function of grace. Grace is integral for God's will exercising election. Yet, in Paul's theological forest, the relational function of God's grace is exercised only in reciprocal relational action, not unilateral action. In God's election of a people for himself (i.e., preplanned choice of his deepest desire), God's relational response of grace is for the only purpose of having whole relationship together as family, not to unilaterally possess a people for himself (Eph 1:13b-14; cf. Rom 8:16-17). Based on God's relational nature and the whole of God's relational ontology together as Father,

Son, Spirit, relationship together is never unilateral; and its preplanned purpose and created design necessitate the reciprocal involvement of relationship together in likeness of the relational ontology of the whole of God, nothing less and no substitutes. This is the wholeness of God's relational dynamic of grace in which the dynamic of election must function to have whole meaning and relational significance, both to God and his family. In Paul's theological forest, persons in God's family, including Paul, were not objects in the possession of God's hands but whole persons of God's love and delight (*eudokeo*, signifying the qualitative resolve of God's heart, Eph 1:4-5, 9), who live in the whole ontology of his qualitative image and function whole in his relational nature in relational response to God's relational function of grace for wholeness in relationship together only on God's relational terms.

Election apart from God's dynamic of wholeness is an epistemological illusion, and wholeness without grace is an ontological simulation. Both of these indicate the influence of reductionism which Paul addresses with the needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in his theological forest solely determined by God's relational dynamic of grace. Grace is integral and sine qua non for Paul's theological forest.

## **The Forest Enacted**

God's relational dynamic was first enacted by the creation of the *kosmos*, with its communicative dynamic pointing to and revealing its Creator only for God's purpose of anticipated relationship together in wholeness with God's offspring. When this wholeness was reduced by the actions of human persons, the dynamic of God's thematic relational response to this reduced human relational condition further enacted self-revelation to reestablish the relationship of wholeness together (i.e., *tamiym* and Abraham). God's presence and involvement in this covenant relationship together both converged in the quantitative context of the Temple, in which God dwelled (Dt 12:5; 1 Kgs 9:3). This focal point of the Temple was the nonnegotiable context (Dt 12:11,13-14) that God chose for the purpose of bringing his people intimately (*qarab*) into his presence, where they would be blessed and satisfied by his involvement with them (Ps 65:4).

Yet this relational process included ongoing struggles with reductionism in their reciprocal relational response—struggles within which the ontology and function of relationship together were reduced to outer in and fragmented by human terms that functionally renegotiated the covenant (i.e., the covenant of love, Dt 7:7-13). This involved how God was perceived and thus how human persons were perceived, how God's function was interpreted and thus how human function was interpreted. Despite knowledge of the qualitative and relational nature of God, they, in their perception and interpretation, reduced the qualitative function of God's heart in relationship together in the covenant of love, and in their own function substituted their quantitative terms from human contextualization (Jer 11:1-4, 6-8, cf. 1 Kgs 8:23-24). This was a shift signified in two prominent ways. One was the redefining and shifting of the *torah* from its significance as God's terms for relationship together to human terms without qualitative and relational significance to God (cf. 1 Sam 8:3-5; Isa 28:13; 55:8). Likewise, the Temple's significance was shifted away from being the context as the means of relational

involvement with God, to become an end in itself to symbolize their national identity as the people *from* God, yet without its qualitative and relational significance together *with* God (contrast Ps 26:8 and Isa 29:13).

These reductionist shifts signified the faith and practice of Paul before the Damascus road, along with many other Pharisees and practitioners of Judaism, but did not define or should not characterize the totality of Israel and Judaism (later clarified theologically by Paul, Rom 11:1-6). They all needed the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym*—the theological, hermeneutical and functional keys to God’s thematic relational response of wholeness for the human relational condition. All during the struggles of this reciprocal relational process since Abraham, God’s relational dynamic was pointing to the strategic shift of God’s preplanned purpose to unfold (cf. Jer 31:31-33). And it is vital to understand the increasing conflict with reductionism that the whole of God’s thematic relational action encountered as it emerged, and to grasp the repercussions of reductionism’s counter-relational work.

The ontology of the holy God is the qualitative being of God from inner out. Thus the nature of this whole and holy God is the relational nature of the whole of God. The Creator made human persons in this qualitative image and relational likeness for whole ontology and function, which humans reduced even within Israel. The qualitative being and relational nature of the whole and holy God functions relationally-specific in response to this human condition of reduced ontology and function just for relationship together as family, not as nation-state embedded in human terms from outer in with the relational consequence of the *common* incompatible with the Uncommon (holy God). By its very nature, reductionism redefines God’s ontology to human terms and renegotiates God’s function to human interpretation, consequently reducing human ontology and function even in its faith and practice. Therefore, in the preplanned purpose and relational dynamic of the whole and holy God, reciprocal relationship together was always unequivocally the qualitative function of the heart made in the qualitative image and the relational likeness of God in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (Ez 18:31; 36:26).

The epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym* was to be revealed in its depths beyond Abraham. In further enactment of God’s relational response of grace, God did not leave them in their reductionism (Eph 1:10). God’s initiative of grace went to the depths of self-revelation to enact the deepest desires of God’s planned purpose only for reciprocal relationship together (Gal 4:4; Rom 5:6). This is the whole of God’s relational dynamic which unfolds conclusively in Paul’s theological forest.

## **The Forest Embodied**

What is going to happen is much more than an event in quantitative time (*chronos*) in the sequence of human history. The mystery that unfolds is the qualitative opportunity (*kairos*) for God’s relational dynamic to enact the deepest level of God’s purpose for all life and function to be whole (Eph 1:9-11; Col 1:20). In the fullness of *kairos*, God’s relational dynamic went beyond human knowledge and understanding (cf. Eph 3:18-19) to enact a strategic shift in self-revelation for the relational purpose to be vulnerably embodied directly face to face to fulfill God’s only purpose and desire of

relationship together in wholeness (2 Cor 4:6; Col 2:9-10; Eph 3:4-6, cf. Ex 33:11). This, then, also involved the tactical shift and functional shift of the embodied whole of God from the quantitative Temple to the ultimate desire of God's purpose, that is, God's ongoing intimate presence and involvement directly with his children together, thus signifying the qualitative temple in whom the whole of God dwells for reciprocal relationship as family (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 6:16; Eph 2:21-22; cf. Jn 14:23).<sup>1</sup>

How do these complex theological dynamics continue to unfold in Paul's forest? As they do, what is definitive 'already' that by its nature needs to define human persons and determine human function, both individually and collectively as church?

God's relational dynamic continues to unfold within the outline of the relational flow of Paul's theological framework to wholeness: (1) the relational context of the whole of God and God's family, (2) the relational process of the whole of God and God's family love, and (3) the relational progression to the whole of God as God's family. If it has not been apparent in God's enactment up to now, God's relational dynamic is always constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. In Paul's theological systemic framework and theological forest, all the thematic creative and communicative actions of God's relational dynamic converge 'in Christ'—just as Paul repeatedly defines in his summary discourse (Eph 1:3-14; Col 1:13-22) and ongoingly determines as the basis for all life and function throughout his letters.

'In Christ' is Paul's major use of shorthand relational language for the complex theological dynamics continuing to unfold in his forest. This is neither a motif for theological discourse merely about Christ's death and its significance, nor a mere theological construct for the doctrine and events of Christ—both of which tend to perceive 'in Christ' with only a quantitative lens. For Paul, 'in Christ' is not a conceptual phrase with no functional significance. Moreover, it is insufficient to shift to a qualitative perception of 'in Christ' as Paul's mysticism devoid of his whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of the mystery of Christ embodying God's relational dynamic.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, this language should not be spiritualized for application only to the individual and thus reduce it from its relational function for relationship together in God's family. In Paul's shorthand, 'in Christ' is the relational action and outcome from God's relational dynamic embodying the deepest desire of God's purpose planned with the relational context and process necessary for whole relationship together in God's qualitative image and relational likeness.

These theological dynamics which converge 'in Christ' emerge in Paul's forest, wholly constituted by God's relational dynamic of grace, in order both to wholly constitute God's thematic relational response and to wholly fulfill God's relational purpose. That is, this is the whole and holy God's purpose 'in Christ' to redeem human persons (Eph 1:7-8) from the common function of reductionism in the human condition, to be set apart (*hagios*) in God's uncommon (holy) relational context to be made whole (*amomos*, blameless) in relationship together with God in love as God's family (1:4, cf. Ps 68:5). This definitive relational context of the whole of God's family and relational

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion of God's strategic, tactical and functional shifts, see *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008), online at [www.4X12.org](http://www.4X12.org), ch. 3 "The Person in Relational Progression."

<sup>2</sup> For such a perspective of his position on mysticism 'in Christ', see James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 390-412.

process of God's family love is whom and what are vulnerably embodied 'in Christ'. Paul's discourse is not making a doctrinal statement but is illuminating the theological dynamics constituting the relational basis for the experiential truth of the whole gospel (1:13) emerging in Paul's forest. 'In Christ' God's relational response of grace is relationally embodied ("his glorious grace..." 1:6, "...the riches of his grace," 1:7) to fulfill God's whole desire (1:5,9,11) for only one planned purpose and relational outcome: to be the whole and holy God's family in whole and uncommon relationship together (Col 1:20-22). Even with God's planned purpose 'in Christ', however, the process of embodiment does not emerge simply but is the relational enactment of theological dynamics both mysterious and problematic, which thereby witnesses to "the breadth and length and height and depth...[of] the love of Christ that surpasses [conventional] knowledge" (Eph 3:18-19).

### **Paul's *Pleroma* Christology**

Paul's Christology initially emerged in his cosmology to establish Christ as the Creator (Col 1:16-17), defined as the immortal, invisible, *mono* God (1 Tim 1:17). From his transcendence, Christ enacted God's complex relational dynamic from top down in the mysterious and difficult relational process of embodiment—the outcome of which made Christ vulnerable for intimate relationship with reduced persons, and the consequence of which made Christ vulnerable for the effects of the sin of reductionism—that Paul highlighted in a hymn most likely from the Jesus tradition (Phil 2:5-8).

In Paul's Christology the incarnation set in motion the relational dynamic embodying the *pleroma* (fullness, complete, whole) of God (Col 1:19), the *pleroma* of the Godhead (Col 2:9), who is the image of God (Col 1:15) vulnerably revealing the whole of God's glory (qualitative being and relational nature) in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) only for relationship together as God's family (Eph 1:5, 13-14; Col 1:20-22). God's relational action 'in Christ' involves these complex theological dynamics, which often need the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym* for their wholeness. The image of God combined with the glory of God and integrated in the face of Christ has been interpreted, for example, in terms of epiphany in the OT and Jewish mysticism (*Merkabah*-vision in Ez 1).<sup>3</sup> This lens perceives something qualitative with a hermeneutic taken from within the quantitative limits of terms defined or shaped by human contextualization, albeit primarily religious. Paul's Christology, however, is rooted beyond human contextualization and deeper than mysticism; and Paul's readers must keep in focus that his Christology was first his experiential truth of the incarnation relationally extended to him by the whole of Jesus. In this relational contrast with both human contextualization and mysticism, the image, glory and face of God are deeply understood only in the relational context of God's relational response of blessing of his people (i.e., Num 6:24-26)—the face of God illuminated on his children for wholeness in relationship together (cf. Ps 67:1-2). This is the face that the face of Christ, as the image of God, wholly embodied in the incarnation to relationally disclose the glory of the whole of God only for vulnerable involvement in relationship. Paul's Christology signified the

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<sup>3</sup> For an example of this interpretation, see Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 165-213.



fulfillment of this definitive relational blessing in which the whole of God's face intimately turned, shined and gave wholeness to all life and function, notably his own life and function.

As the *pleroma* of God embodying the whole of God's desires and purpose, the incarnation is constituted only by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (i.e., wholeness) and, conjointly, the incarnation constitutes the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for all life and function (Col 2:9-10). That is to say, the qualitative whole of God's heart functions only from top down and from inner out with nothing less and no substitutes in order to be embodied face to face with human persons for relationship together in wholeness. Human persons and function can thus function only by this same dynamic in order to be whole (cf. Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). Anything less or any substitutes of God's ontology and function could neither constitute the incarnation from inner out, nor constitute God's relational dynamic embodied 'in Christ' from top down. This was part of the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction that Paul experienced in his encounter with the whole of Jesus on the Damascus road.

This experiential truth was the basis for Paul's gospel, and its development in relationship together with Christ and the Spirit constituted his theology of the gospel and of Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12; 1 Cor 2:10,13). Paul's gospel never reduced God's relational dynamic embodied in the whole of Jesus throughout the incarnation, and simultaneously always fought against all human shaping of the gospel of Christ (Gal 1:6-13). In Paul's theology, the complex theological dynamics of God's relational response converge in the gospel of Christ; and in the reflexive dynamic of Paul's theology, the whole gospel converges in the incarnation, the whole of Jesus embodying the whole of God. Without converging and being contextualized in the incarnation, the gospel can only have a human shape. That is, any gospel contextualized apart from 'in Christ' has reduced the relational significance of the whole of God's thematic relational dynamic embodied by Jesus in response to the human condition, and thus has diminished, minimalized or precluded the wholeness of "the gospel of Christ" and substituted a gospel shaped or renegotiated by human terms (Gal 1:6-7; Col 2:4,8).

Thus, a theology of Jesus has to be both compatible with the whole gospel and sufficient against any human shaping or construction from reductionism. These were accounted for in Paul's Christology of the whole of Jesus, who was neither reduced by bottom-up shaping nor renegotiated by human terms. His Christology then went further than the limits of the Jesus tradition and even deeper than the early perceptions of the other apostles (cf. Gal 2:6-9; 2 Pet 3:15-16). The developing depth of experiential truth with Christ and the Spirit illuminated the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to constitute Paul's Christology (cf. Eph 3:4; Col 1:25-27). This dynamic flow to his theology is signified in the following framework:

1. Experiencing Christ: the embodied presence and experiential truth of Jesus, who is the qualitative Word and relational Truth from God.
2. Following Christ in relationship: discipleship of his person in relationship, not his disembodied teachings or example.

3. Witnessing ‘in Christ’ and thus for the whole of God: the experiential truth in function.
4. Theologizing ‘in Christ’ and thus with the Spirit to illuminate the whole of God.

This is not only a linear flow but a reflexive dynamic, which signifies the involvement in relationship together necessary for the relational epistemic process both to know God and to make God known (cf. Col 2:2; Eph 1:17-19; 3:16-19). The whole of Paul’s witness was substantive only because of experiencing Christ and following Christ in relationship, without which the whole in his theology has no basis and significance.

Paul’s *pleroma* Christology does not elaborate on the incarnation as event (cf. Gal 4:4-5), but assumes that knowledge with the Jesus tradition. His theological discourse on Christ did not follow the footsteps of Jesus’ deeds and example; nor did it follow the footprints about Jesus’ teachings for a christocentric doctrine. Paul concentrates instead on the complex theological dynamics of God’s relational dynamic embodied ‘in Christ’. His discourse on Christ was the experiential truth of following the whole of Jesus’ person embodying the relational context and process of God’s relational dynamic. This, I suggest, explains why Paul made little reference to Jesus’ sayings/teachings in his letters. Paul neither reduced Jesus to nor disembodied Jesus’ person from his teachings or example. Moreover, even though Paul gives major attention to Christ’s death and resurrection, he was not focused on this as event (the Christ-event), a focus which ironically reduces and disembodies the whole of Jesus from the cross. Paul’s focus was illuminating the qualitative function of Jesus’ whole person embodying from inner out God’s relational dynamic in whole response to the human condition—just as Jesus called Paul to illuminate and confirm (*martys*) “the *qualitative* things in which you have seen me *from inner out* and to those *relational dynamics* in which I will appear to you” (Acts 26:16, italics inserted). By the clear nature of the incarnation constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, Paul’s discourse on Christ did not define Jesus by the reductionist terms of what he did (death), even in reality, and of what he had (teachings), even in truth. Therefore, the emergence of Paul’s theological discourse on Jesus Christ was nothing less and no substitutes indeed of *pleroma* Christology.

**What distinguishes *pleroma* Christology from an incomplete Christology of anything less or any substitutes?** Wholeness—that is, the whole of God’s relational dynamic embodying the whole of God’s relational context and process in whole response to the human condition to fulfill God’s whole desire and purpose to be whole in relationship together as God’s whole family, nothing less and no substitutes. Incomplete Christologies may point to or address some aspect(s) of God’s relational dynamic, notably grace and love; yet they remain fragmentary and thus incomplete because God’s relational process or even relational context is not perceived with the qualitative lens necessary for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to grasp the irreducible and nonnegotiable experiential truth of this embodied wholeness of God’s whole. Paul’s *pleroma* Christology is inseparable from the experiential truth of the whole gospel, for which Paul relationally fought so lovingly in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes while conjointly fighting passionately against anything less and any substitutes from reductionism. It is within Paul’s functional purpose for the gospel that much of his theology in general and Christology in particular converge; thus they are

expressed in functional language, not in what has since become conventional theological discourse. 'In Christ' is the summary functional expression of Paul's relational language which signifies definitive discourse of the *pleroma* Christology unfolding in his theological forest.

Read from a quantitative interpretive framework, Paul's Christology appears to be both fragmentary in its lack of direct reference to Jesus' sayings/teachings, as well as incomplete or skewed due to his dominant focus on Jesus' death and resurrection. Yet, such a reduced framework using a quantitative lens (in contrast to *phronema* and *phroneo* by the Spirit, Rom 8:5-6) does not account for the whole of Paul's witness to which Jesus called him; nor can it account for the whole in his theology for which he was given relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* the word of God (Col 1:25). Not to grasp this whole of and in Paul is not to grasp the whole of God in the incarnation and thus 'in Christ', leaving in fact only an incomplete Christology which is fragmentary or distorted.

Paul's theology of wholeness is the underlying dynamic of his *pleroma* Christology. The irreducible and nonnegotiable dynamic of wholeness is what Jesus constituted *in* the incarnation of his own person and, likewise, constituted for human persons (both individually and collectively) *by* his incarnation in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for all life and function (both for his person and human persons, Col 2:9-10). Thus, Paul's *pleroma* Christology further emerges to make definitive 'in Christ' the functions for epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary for wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the *pleroma* of God. These functions 'in Christ' are the following:

1. Christ is *the epistemological-theological key* to whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God, the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature (2 Cor 4:6; Col 1:15,19; 2:9).
2. Christ is *the hermeneutical key* to whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's function in relational context and process (Col 1:20-22; 2:2-3; Eph 1:4-11; 3:4-6, 18-19).
3. Christ is *the functional key* to the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God for human ontology and function, both individually and collectively as God's family (Col 1:15; 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 2:21-22).

These qualitative and relational functions 'in Christ', both for his person and human persons in relationship together, function always by the nature of wholeness in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. This is the *pleroma* Christology unfolding in Paul's theological forest.

**How did Christ fulfill these functions to be the definitive keys for wholeness in Paul's Christology?** After establishing epistemological clarification of the incarnation as the whole of God 'in Christ', Paul appears to jump directly from the manger to the cross in his theological forest, since he does not provide any narrative account of Jesus throughout the incarnation to the cross (e.g., Gal 4:4-6). Quite the contrary, however. In the presence of the Jesus tradition, a narrative account was unnecessary for Paul's Christology. Rather, his purpose, *pleroma* Christology, magnified the epistemological

clarification of “the knowledge of the glory of the whole of God vulnerably revealed by the face of Christ as the image of God” (2 Cor 4:6), which is revealed in the whole of the incarnation. And, most importantly, Paul makes definitive these aspects' relational and functional significance 'in Christ'.

On the Damascus road, Paul was contextualized by Jesus essentially in the experiential truth of the incarnation, not contextualized in Jewish mysticism (cf. *merkibah*-vision in Ez 1). The incarnation was the embodiment of the whole of God's relational context and process, the extension in which Paul was contextualized both by Jesus and with Jesus to be made whole 'in Christ'. What Jesus embodied was vulnerably disclosed throughout the course of the incarnation; and this extension to Paul was the experiential truth for the basis of his Christology, which was integrated with further whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) from ongoing involvement with Christ and the Spirit in the relational epistemic process together to make conclusive Paul's *pleroma* Christology.

The glory and image of God in the face of Christ disclosed in the incarnation are primary to the complex theological dynamics constituting Paul's complete Christology. These dynamics illuminate the glory and image of God beyond their understanding in Judaism and further and deeper than in the Jesus tradition. In the OT, the image of God's glory is mainly characterized as strength and power (e.g., Ps 24:6-8; 29:1-3; 59:9,17). The incarnation, however, deepens this image and glory of God to illuminate the qualitative heart, relational nature and vulnerable presence of God relationally disclosed by the whole of Jesus only for involvement in relationship together. This strategic shift did not exclude God's strength and power (as demonstrated by the resurrection) but presupposes God's reign (notably over darkness and now over death); thus it fully focuses on God's relational response of grace wholly extended in the human condition—that is, not merely in its situations and circumstances but more importantly to the persons who are apart from the whole of God in order to reconcile them to the relationship necessary to be whole together. This relational outcome can only emerge from the function of relationship, and the incarnation constitutes only this function. As the function of relationship, nothing happens without the experiential truth from the incarnation of the relational dynamic of the image and glory of God, not the conceptual image or doctrinal glory of God. The Jesus tradition rightly understood this relational outcome as only from God's grace yet did not fully grasp the theological dynamics involved or the theological anthropology necessarily engaged. This gap was demonstrated at a church summit in Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-29) and by Peter's interpretive framework and lens prior (10:9-16, 34-36), for which Paul later still had to give hermeneutic correction to Peter's practice for the experiential truth of the whole gospel embodied by Jesus (Gal 2:14).

In the incarnation of God's relational dynamic determined only by the relational function of grace, Jesus fulfills the whole of God's thematic relational response to the inherent human relational need and problem (as neuroscience rightly identifies). Jesus fulfills God's relational response only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, that is, embodying the wholeness of the image of God (*eikon*). *Eikon* implies not merely a resemblance to but the total correspondence and likeness of its archetype, here the invisible God (Col 1:15)—just as Jesus claimed to his first disciples (Jn 14:9). The *eikon* of God is made definitive by the illumination (*photismos*) of the glory of God in the face

of Jesus Christ, whose vulnerable embodiment made God's qualitative being and relational nature functionally involved with persons for experiential truth in relationship together (2 Cor 4:4b,6). Beginning with his face-to-face encounter with Jesus on the Damascus road, Paul experienced directly this relational dynamic of Christ's illumination now extended also to him. In this relational process with Jesus, God's relational function of grace and its outcome of intimate relational connection together (not mysticism) provided Paul with his ongoing experiential truth of the glory of God 'in Christ', the image of God. All this was to definitively establish for the church at Corinth "by the open statement of truth" (*phanerosis* from *phaneroo*, 4:2) that the relational dynamic is from God and not from human shaping (4:1). For Paul, the image of God was unmistakable in the relational dynamic of Christ's illumination of God's glory, which Paul simply integrates in "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4b). This relational dynamic of the image and glory of God is essential for Paul's *pleroma* Christology because it signifies the whole of Jesus' person vulnerably embodied, illuminated and involved for relationship together:

1. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God and nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative being and relational nature (Christ the epistemological-theological key).
2. Whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God's function in the relational context and process only on God's relational terms of grace (Christ the hermeneutical key).

This "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" can be seen only directly "in the face of Christ," which is made problematic, however, if key epistemological, hermeneutic and functional distinctions and issues are not understood. Just as Paul did in his theological systemic framework, he continues in his theological forest to challenge assumptions of the *kosmos*, theological cognition and anthropology, and of the perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) used for this knowledge and understanding. Critical to Paul's *pleroma* Christology is the ongoing relational dynamic of wholeness from top down and inner out unique to the whole of God. By its nature from bottom up and outer in, reductionism is always positioned against God's whole to qualify it, redefine it, or shape it by human terms. "The face of Christ," not merely the concept of Christ, is crucial to which one of these dynamics is engaged, and thus who and what are illuminated and how they are received and responded to. Paul renounced reductionism's relational dynamic from outer in ("the shameful things that one hides"), which would reduce his whole person, and he did not engage in bottom-up practice which would compromise the whole of God's word ("falsify, distort," *doloo*, to dilute, water down, cheapen, as merchants did with wine to deceive consumers, 2 Cor 4:2). Paul's relational responsibility from God (*oikonomia*) functioned to present God's word in its fullness, complete, thus whole (*pleroo*, as Paul identified later, Col 1:25). The whole of God's word cannot be compromised without reducing what and who were embodied in the face of Christ, "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4), "the hope of glory" (Col 1:27).

In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, the face of Christ is the exact *eikon* of God which illuminates the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature in Christ's whole person and function, with the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. This dynamic of wholeness is critical for how the face of Christ is perceived and his function interpreted. In his whole-reductionism discourse, Paul pointed to the relational outcome or consequence of this issue of perceptual-interpretive framework as fundamental to the relational epistemic process necessary to "see [*augazo*, be illuminated by] the light" from top down ("God who...has shone") and from inner out ("in our hearts") "in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4,6). The term "face" (*prosopon*) can be understood in two contrary dynamics: (1) like a mask worn in early Greek theatre to take on a different identity in a role or as in a masquerade (*metaschematizo*, cf. 2 Cor 11:13-15); or (2) "face" can signify the whole person, whose identity of who, what and how the person is is not hidden but made fully vulnerable to be wholly perceived and involved with. The first dynamic functions from outer in (e.g., "that one hides," 4:2) while the second dynamic only functions from inner out (e.g., "by the open statement of the truth"). The interpretive framework of the first dynamic perceives only the outer face of Christ and thus interprets Christ's function in reductionist human terms. This outward approach is an incompatible interface with Christ's face of inner out, which creates distance and maintains barriers in relationship. The relational consequence is not seeing the light and thus unable to make relational connection with the qualitative being and relational nature of God.

Contrary to the first dynamic, in the second dynamic the face of Christ is nothing less and no substitute of the whole of who, what and how God is—just as Jesus conclusively revealed to his disciples (Jn 14:9) and fulfilled for the Father (Jn 17:4,6,26). This is the face embodying, illuminating and involving the whole of God's glory—nothing less and no substitutes of God's qualitative being and relational nature—for relationship together. It is the only face and function which constitute *pleroma* Christology—"the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). Moreover, then, this relational dynamic of the image and glory of God in Christ functions also to illuminate the whole knowledge and understanding of the face of Christ's function from inner out in God's relational context and process, thus to function congruent to only God's relational terms of grace from top down. Christ's face and function together are irreducible and therefore indispensable for Christology to be complete. In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, Christ's face and function constitute the whole person vulnerably involved in relationship. The relational outcome, in contrast to the relational consequence above, is the whole of God now accessible for intimate relationship face to face. The relational implication is that the function of this face is compatible only with the human face in qualitative image and relational likeness of his for the qualitative-relational connection and involvement necessary to be wholly face to face.

This relational outcome is the purpose and function of the unequivocal image and glory of God vulnerably embodied by the whole of Jesus only for relationship together. Indispensably throughout the incarnation, Christ's function illuminated the whole knowledge and understanding of the qualitative image and relational likeness of God in which the human person and function were created; and by his qualitative-relational function between the manger and the cross, Christ also vulnerably demonstrates the ontological image and functional likeness to which human persons need to be restored for whole relationship together face to face. Therefore, the relational dynamic of the image

and glory of God is essential in Paul's *pleroma* Christology for a third function fulfilled in the face of Christ necessary for relationship together:

3. The qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God necessary for human ontology and function, individually and collectively as God's family, in the same dynamic as Christ of nothing less and no substitutes (Christ the functional key).

Without Jesus' whole person and function throughout the incarnation, whole knowledge and understanding of the image and glory of God would neither be illuminated for vulnerable self-disclosure in experiential truth, nor be definitive for vulnerable human reciprocal response in the image and likeness necessary for whole relationship together (2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10).

In Paul's *pleroma* Christology, the above three qualitative-relational functions are vital for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to be whole. Jesus constituted this dynamic of wholeness *in* the incarnation of his own person, and thereby constituted this dynamic for wholeness *by* his incarnation for all human life and function (Col 2:9-10). Thus, this dynamic in the face of Christ was irreducible and nonnegotiable by the very nature of the *pleroma* of God. Anything less and any substitutes are reductionism of the *pleroma* of God, the image of God, the glory of God in the face of Christ, thus reductionism of the human person and function—shifting from the whole from top down to reductionism from bottom up, from the whole from inner out to reductionism from outer in. Paul's *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the word of God always fought jointly against this reductionism distorting, diluting it (*doloo*, 2 Cor 4:2) and for the whole gospel embodied by *pleroma* Christology.

The relational dynamic of the image and glory of God constitutes the heart of Paul's *pleroma* Christology, which emerges only as the function of relationship. From this integral function in the face of Christ unfold the remaining theological dynamics in Paul's forest, dynamics which always continue to be determined by God's relational function of grace. For Paul, this relational dynamic in "the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4) also constituted what is at the heart of the gospel: Christ's whole face and function. This is the indispensable gospel for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary in order for the whole of God to fully emerge, whole human persons and function to reciprocally emerge, and for wholeness to emerge in relationship together. When Christ embodied this top-down gospel, Christ's face and function from inner out constituted this good news in God's relational context and process. By the nature of the whole and holy God, God's relational context and process cannot be confused with, and thus must be distinguished from, any and all human context and process. The good news of the whole of God's qualitative being and relational nature, both vulnerably present and involved for relationship together, functions only in the relational context and process of God's terms.

To contextualize this gospel of the glory of Christ, the image of God, in anything less or any substitutes is to construct "a different gospel" shaped by human terms (Gal 1:6ff), not by Christ's face and function—which for Paul was simply not good news, "not that there is another gospel." Christ's face and function were certainly embodied in human context to illuminate the good news for human contextualization in relational

response to the human problem. The gospel of the glory of Christ, however, was neither defined nor determined by human contextualization. This is a critical distinction for the gospel, a distinction not clearly distinguished by the term itself, or even when qualified as the gospel of God, gospel of Christ, and gospel of peace (Rom 15:16, 1 Cor 9:12, Eph 6:15, respectively). This clear distinction of Christ's face and function provides the necessary epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction for any gospel shaped by human terms from human contextualization. The need is critical because all human shaping contextualizes the gospel in the limits and nature of human contexts and the difference can be quite nuanced, whether from culture, political or economic conditions, social situations and circumstances, and related worldviews, mindsets and perceptual-interpretive frameworks.

The gospel of the glory of Christ unequivocally illuminates the whole of God's qualitative being and relational nature in the full disclosure of Christ's face and function, the whole person in relationship. Christ's irreducible face (whole person) and nonnegotiable function (in relationship) constitute God's relational dynamic only in the whole of God's relational context and process, by which God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition is fulfilled (cf. Ps 68:5). This is the gospel clearly distinguished from human context and process, and thus indispensable for the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction necessary to wholly illuminate the whole of God and God's response in the top-down relational context and inner-out relational process constituted conclusively by Christ's face and function. This "light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" is by its nature both irreducible and indispensable. Though clearly undimmed, it is not always seen by Paul's readers (past and present), yet is at the heart of his *pleroma* Christology. It is not seen, understood, received or responded to because by its very nature these outcomes can take place only in God's relational context and process. The relational context and process of God were the means by which God's relational dynamic of grace was embodied by Christ's face and function. Paul himself was first contextualized beyond human contexts when God's face from top down turned and shined on him, even beyond the context of Judaism's definitive blessing (Num 6:24-26). On the Damascus road Paul was contextualized in the incarnation of Christ's face and function, the whole person in relationship, to constitute Paul from inner out into the whole of God's relational context and process. Only in God's relational context and process did Paul see in Christ's face and function the light of the gospel of the image and glory of Christ and thus relationally respond back (Acts 22:16) for the relationship together necessary to be whole.

This was the only gospel Paul knew and called his own. This was also his experiential truth of *pleroma* Christology, in which the whole of God's (from Father to Son to Spirit) relational dynamic emerges in fullness within only God's relational context and process—the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process made vulnerable by Christ's face and function for whole relationship together. Therefore, this gospel is contextualized by nothing less and no substitutes of Christ's relational context and process. It therefore cannot be shaped by any other context and process and still embody Christ's whole face and function, and still illuminate the whole of God's qualitative being and relational nature, and still fulfill God's thematic response to the human condition. Within the *pleroma* of God's relational context and process, the relational dynamic of the integral face and function of Christ (as the image and glory of



God) continues to deeply engage and to be vulnerably involved in fulfilling the other theological dynamics of Paul's forest. Apart from God's relational context and process, Christ's embodiment does not have the abiding relational framework to complete these complex theological dynamics for the fulfillment of God's thematic relational response of grace. This is how Christology becomes fragmentary and thus incomplete, and when soteriology is truncated without the qualitative and functional significance of whole relationship together—resulting in a gospel different from the image and glory of Christ.

Paul's relational responsibility (*oikonomia*) to *pleroo* the word of God has been an elusive function for Paul's readers because not grasping the whole in Paul is compounded when to what Paul is speaking and from where he speaks are not clearly understood. As noted earlier, Paul was always fighting conjointly for the gospel of Christ and against reductionism, and this either-or tension pervades Paul's thought and theology and often becomes blurred as to what Paul is saying. In Paul's thought and theology throughout his letters, issues of continuity and discontinuity (real or perceived) directly involve the following (discussed further in chap. 11): God's context and process or human context and process, thus top down or bottom up; the whole gospel or a human-shaped gospel, thus nothing less and no substitutes or anything less and any substitutes; wholeness of ontology and function or reductionism of ontology and function, thus inner out or outer in. Though Paul's letters address specific human contexts with various situations and circumstances (except for Eph), he is always contextualizing them in the further and deeper relational context and process of Christ's face and function. Paul always speaks to them from this relational dynamic to illuminate not any gospel but only the gospel of the image and glory of Christ. For Paul, the issue of continuity (or perceived discontinuity, e.g., regarding *torah*) is related solely to God's deep desire and thematic relational action for relationship together. When theology and the gospel, and their practice, are compatible and congruent with the outworking of God's relational dynamic in Christ's face and function, there is continuity in the thought and theology of Paul's letters. When these, along with human ontology and function, have been reduced from God's purpose for relationship in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, then this incompatibility/incongruence involves the discontinuity rightly seen in Paul. In these instances, Paul exposes and confronts substituting human terms and shaping, even as ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism in order to make them whole (e.g., 1 Cor 1:12; 3:4,22; 4:6-7; 2 Cor 10:12; 11:12-15).

In the discontinuity parts of his letters, Paul responds with the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of the *old* life and function (e.g. Rom 2:28-29) necessary for the *new* to emerge (e.g., Gal 6:15; Rom 6:5-10; Col 3:9-11). In these examples noted, as a Jew who is also a follower of Christ, Paul clarifies the continuity of the original covenant and the new covenant (the OT and the NT). To the extent that the incarnation of Christ's face and function is an extension of OT theology, Paul has continuity with the OT and Judaism faithfully practiced. Anything less or otherwise, there is discontinuity, the influence of which did not determine or give primary shape to Paul's gospel even as a Jew. Moreover, continuity should not be confused with conformity or determinism, or discontinuity mistaken with nonconformity or freedom. Discontinuity signifies anything less and any substitute of the whole according to reductionism. As computer scientist Jaron Lanier demonstrated about internet technology (noted at the beginning of Theology of Wholeness in chap. 6), reductionism indeed is the origination

of templates for human persons and practice to conform to. Human terms, shaping or construction from a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework and lens are in fact the determining templates for human ontology and function which unmistakably constrain and enslave human life in the human condition (which even neuroscience identifies). For Paul, this process is not nonconformity and freedom but discontinuity with wholeness and thus conformity and enslavement to reductionism (cf. Gal 4:8-10). Conversely, continuity reflects the relational dynamic of the whole of God's relational response to this human condition for God's purpose, not to conform human persons to function according to predetermined templates but to redeem them from such enslavement for the only purpose of being restored to wholeness of human ontology and function in whole relationship together (cf. Gal 4:3-7). Therefore, continuity in Paul unequivocally connotes fulfillment of the inherent human need and resolution for the human problem which neuroscience can only identify and describe in quantitative terms but has no qualitative solution and fulfillment for.

Critically, then, Paul's discontinuity-responses to some practice of a theology or a gospel, along with his challenges to the assumptions of human ontology and function, were necessary for the whole of God to fully emerge, for whole human persons and function to reciprocally emerge, and for wholeness to emerge in relationship together. Yet this discontinuity issue is not understood in Paul if his readers don't go further and deeper than human contextualization to vulnerably engage God's relational context and process necessary for the continuity of Christ's face and function, his whole person vulnerably involved in relationship. For Paul, discontinuity at best results only in an incomplete Christology, not *pleroma* Christology.

### ***Pleroma* Christology Completed**

The relational dynamic of the integral face and function of Christ continues to be enacted in God's relational context and process to fulfill God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition, and thus to complete the theological dynamics of Paul's forest. This relational dynamic does not unfold in a narrative account by Paul but in the experiential truth of the whole of Paul's witness and with the development of the whole in his theology. The theological development of God's relational dynamic flows from the gospel of the image and glory of Christ's face and function in 2 Corinthians to *pleroma* Christology in Colossians and the emergence of the ecclesiology of the whole in Ephesians. In this flow, Paul's theological forest makes definitive God's relational dynamic to its whole relational outcome 'already' and its eschatological relational conclusion 'not yet'. The process unfolds for Paul only within God's relational context and process in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, which Paul engaged by the nature of Christ's face and function for ongoing qualitative involvement in relationship with Christ and the Spirit.

In an integrated flow of Paul's letters, following groundbreaking discourse in his Corinthian letters, Galatians establishes the functional clarity of the truth of the whole gospel to clearly distinguish it from any alternative gospels. Romans follows to make definitive the theological basis for the truth of the whole gospel, thus providing the theological clarity necessary to be integrated with the above functional clarity to

constitute the whole gospel of the image and glory of Christ in the whole of God's relational context and process responding in grace to the human condition. These theological relational dynamics are unfolded by Paul in his forest, in ongoing contrast and conflict with reductionism.

Colossians, on the one hand, is perhaps a test-case application of both the functional clarity from Galatians and the theological clarity from Romans to an apparent context of philosophical notions (Col 2:8). On the other hand, Colossians reflects the further development of Paul's theology from Galatians and Romans. In Colossians, Paul's theology represents the further development which, in reflection with the Spirit, demonstrates his *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding, cf. 1:9; 2:2) of God's relational revelation to make definitive the *pleroma* of God and to *pleroo* (make complete, whole) the word of God (Col 1:19,25), most significantly, in *pleroma* Christology. In the theological dynamics unfolding in Paul's forest, God's communicative action (the word of God) is made complete, whole, and thus fulfilled, by the embodied word from God constituting the whole of Christ's face and function—that is, by the *pleroma* of God whom God delighted (*eudokeo*) in vulnerably disclosing for relationship together. Paul's *synesis* involved the continuity of God's relational dynamic in thematic response to the human condition, initiated even before creation (1:12-20). Continuing God's relational dynamic in Christ as the image of God, Christ's face and function (his whole person in relationship) as the *pleroma* of God completes the complex theological dynamics necessary to make whole the human condition (Col 1:21-22; 2:9-10; 3:9-11). Yet, *pleroma* Christology in Colossians only identifies the relational outcome 'in Christ'.

The whole of God's relational purpose and dynamic are certainly salvific (cf. Ps 68:19-20). Christ's whole person in relationship, however, redeemed persons from enslavement to not only save them *from* the human condition; conjointly and inseparably, persons were redeemed to be saved *to* reconciliation in God's family in whole relationships together (cf. Rom 5:9-11; Col 1:13). God's theological dynamic of saved from-to is inseparable from God's relational dynamic for the integrated outcome of *redemptive reconciliation* (to be discussed later). Ephesians takes over for Colossians to fully summarize God's complex theological relational dynamics unfolding in Paul's forest and highlights the relational outcome of what persons 'in Christ' are saved *to*.

In Ephesians, Paul also further develops the theological clarity from Romans, thus providing the theological forest for all the theological trees. Moreover, Paul added further theological discourse not included in Romans, most notably illuminating the relational outcome of 'saved to' by making definitive the ecclesiology necessary to be whole, God's whole family in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God—just as Christ's face and function constituted (Eph 1:22-23; 2:13-22), and Jesus prayed for his family's formation (Jn 17:20-26) that Paul's own prayer knowingly or unknowingly echoed (Eph 3:14-19).

Jesus' formative family prayer and Paul's prayer for the church signify the qualitative depth 'already' of the relational outcome of *pleroma* Christology. As a function of relationship, *pleroma* Christology defines the course of the continuing theological dynamics unfolding in Paul's forest and the coherence in his letters of God's relational dynamic, which Christ's whole person in relationship completes in whole

relational outcome and the Spirit brings to eschatological conclusion. **How is this relational process completed?**

The thematic answer is simply “the Lord made his face to shine on us and be gracious to us and gave us peace.” This, of course, involved complex theological dynamics which *pleroma* Christology completes in Paul’s forest on only God’s relational terms. Vulnerably disclosed throughout the incarnation was the embodied face of the *pleroma* of God’s qualitative being and relational nature illuminated in the face of Christ. With this clearly embodied in human context and witnessing to human context, yet from only God’s relational context and process, Christ’s face and function turn and head to the cross to complete the whole of the gospel of the glory of Christ—the gospel of peace that God’s face of grace shined on us and gave. The cross becomes the relational means to this relational outcome that is now the major focus of Paul’s *pleroma* Christology.

Why the cross? For Jews, the cross would appear as an unnecessary priestly sacrifice and was certainly incongruent for Messiah; for Greeks, it seemed only foolishness, as Paul noted for both (1 Cor 1:23). Yet for Paul, the cross was unequivocal good news for the convergence of the whole of God’s relational dynamic and the experiential truth of these theological dynamics (1 Cor 2:2; Gal 6:14). Thus, in Paul’s thought and theology the cross is no mere event that is vested with major significance he received from the Jesus tradition (1 Cor 15:3-4). The cross is only the relational extension of the incarnation and the relational outcome of the whole of God’s vulnerable involvement with human persons—which also signified the further relational extension of the incarnation Paul personally received from Jesus on the Damascus road for the experiential truth of the good news in the cross. Paul then never focused on the cross at the expense of discourse on the incarnation but only as the relational extension of it. Just as the incarnation was a function of relationship and not event, the cross signifies the same function of relationship that was embodied by Jesus’ whole person vulnerably involved in relationship.

Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, he disclosed to his disciples for their assurance that he was “the way and the truth and the life,” the relational means to the Father for whole relationship together as family (Jn 14:1-6). His declaration was also in response to Thomas’ claim made from a quantitative epistemic process using a reductionist interpretive lens: “Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?” In their distress over his pending death and departure, Jesus necessarily shifted their reductionist focus from the quantitative outer in to the qualitative whole of inner out. Jesus focused them on the relational way to the experiential truth of the whole life (*zoe* not *bios*) together with the whole of God illuminated in the face of Christ—that is, the *pleroma* of God—thus “know me, know my Father...seen me, seen the Father” (Jn 14:7,9). Whether or not Paul knew of Jesus’ disclosure to those disciples, Paul knew Jesus in the relational way to the experiential truth of whole *zoe* together to constitute his *pleroma* Christology, whose theological dynamics converge at the cross.

The major part of the complex dynamics converging at the cross involves the issue of election and determinism along with free will and freedom in the critical matter of sin. If God’s election was the decision to predetermine outcomes, then God had no basis to hold human persons accountable for their actions or even reason to do so. This view renders sin essentially as irrelevant. Yet, regarding free will and freedom, in the primordial garden God allowed for only functional self-autonomy (not total) that did not

include functional self-determination as the creature apart from the Creator. Nevertheless, human persons exercised their self-autonomy for self-determination, which then became their only functional means for self-justification (Gen 3:6-13; cf. Rom 1:21-25). This critical dynamic of self, with all its variations (both individually and collectively), is not predetermined by God but solely the consequence of human action extending beyond the allowed relational terms from the Creator for reciprocal relationship together, and thus is action rightly to be held accountable for. This dynamic of self-autonomy, -determination, -justification enacts the human condition embedded in and enslaved to the sin of reductionism, that in Paul's theological discourse clearly means to "fall short of the glory of God,"—for which all persons are accountable (Rom 3:23).

For Paul, sin is more than a static condition, and it goes beyond the burden of moral failure and the debt of ethical shortcomings. Sin fully involves a dynamic relational process directly engaging the specific relational context of God. Engagement by individuals and collectives in the dynamic of sin is to "fall short of the glory of God" (*hystereo*), that is, to come short of the defining created ontology in the qualitative image of God and the determining created function in the relational likeness of God—the glory of God revealed in creation (Rom 1:23) and vulnerably disclosed in Christ's face and function (2 Cor 4:6). Thus, the functional dynamic of sin—which includes on the contextual, structural and systemic levels—is to reduce human persons from their created qualitative-whole ontology and relational function constituted by the whole of God. This reduction of the human person and persons in relationship together engaged by Adam and Eve critically separated them from the definitive significance of the whole of God's relational context and process to then be defined and determined entirely by human terms from human context (cf. Rom 5:12). This human contextualization and agency, by its redefined nature, can only be reductionism of human ontology and function, thus to come short of the glory of God's qualitative image and relational likeness by which human persons were created (cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). Yet this *hystereo* should not be confused with not measuring up to some standard (moral, ethical, social, cultural, familial, etc) based on persons defined by what they do.

Such reductionism of the whole person and reductionism's counter-relational work on whole relationships together are consequential in function, which at best can signify only ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the whole of God's glory. This reductionism was demonstrated by Jesus' first disciples discussed above prior to the cross. Their statements, "How can we know the way" and "show us the Father," would rarely be interpreted as moral failure or ethical shortcoming. It was their reductionist perception, both of Jesus and themselves, that prevented wholeness of ontology and function from being seen and known in Jesus as well as being lived in themselves, and thus from experiencing together with Jesus, even after "all this time" (expressing Jesus' frustration, Jn 14:9). This was consequential of reductionism as the essential function of sin, the sin of reductionism, from which they needed redemptive change to be whole. Any and all reductions, whatever its variation, of God's whole on God's relational terms to human shaping on human terms engage the dynamic process of sin, all of which is consequential, accountable and in need of redemptive change (cf. Col 2:8-23).

In Paul's theological discourse, sin is a theological tree that can be fully understood only in its theological forest. Therefore, sin, by its functional nature, must

always be perceived and interpreted in the breadth of the relational context and depth of the relational process constituted by the whole of God's relational dynamic. Anything less and any substitutes are sin itself, the sin of reductionism, which, in all its variations is critically converging at the cross. This is the cross illuminated by the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:4), the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19-20), whose light Paul would not diminish by any reductionism of his own (1 Cor 1:10-17). Reductionism's presence and influence is pervasive and its practice is prevailing, often even in the church as Paul addressed at Corinth. This makes unequivocal the defining issue for the human condition converging at the cross:

All human life and function in self-autonomy, created with limits by God, are left with only two means to self-determination and thus self-justification: either the functional means of human terms, shaping and construction, or the relational means in the face and function of Christ (cf. Paul's personal either-or, Phil 3:4-9, and the functional constraints of the person, Rom 7:15-25).

The former remains the incorrigible means to reductionist ontology and function, and the latter is the redemptive means to whole ontology and function. The issue at the cross is whether the former means is relinquished and submitted to the latter means, so that it can be complete in relational response.

Beyond the event and its drama, the cross signifies the function of relationship embodied by the whole face and function of Christ, who constitutes this relational dynamic even beyond merely sacrificial death for atonement and justification. The theological dynamics converging at the cross cannot be grasped by the limits of these doctrines (theological trees), the theological discourse of which traditionally has been fragmentary without wholeness, if not reductionist (apart from their theological forest). The cross was fully embodied by the whole of Christ to be paradigmatic of the dynamic flow of interaction as follows:

The convergence of first, God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition fulfilled ("It is finished," Jn 19:30) by the qualitative being and relational nature of God's glory embodied in Christ's whole face and function ("I am thirsty," Jn 19:28), and second, the human responses of self-autonomy at efforts of self-determination and self-justification now submitted to God's response ("Jesus, remember me," Lk 23:42) in order to fully share in ("you will be with me," 23:43) the redemptive means to wholeness ("Father, forgive them," 23:34) embodied by Christ only in God's relational context and process ("Father into your hands," 23:46) for whole relationship together ("here is your son...here is your mother," Jn 19:26-27).

The submission of human reductionism to Christ's face and function is more than figurative because it entails the dynamic convergence and engagement by human persons in their sin of reductionism to participate in Christ's relational response—signifying the reciprocal, not unilateral, nature of relationship. This reciprocal dynamic is the necessary convergence in which Christ functionally assumes their reductionism to fulfill God's response to the human condition (2 Cor 5:21). The order of this interaction is not clearly linear and is distinctly not unilateral. The

interaction of Christ's relational response of taking on human sin of reductionism is a theological dynamic that can be sufficiently explained only in the whole of God's relational dynamic; this vulnerably emerged in the incarnation, whose face and function now paradoxically integrates his whole life with reductionist death, not in dialectic tension but in God's relational response of grace for whole human life to emerge together. Though this certainly involved sacrificing the whole of his life, it is not paradigmatic of sacrifice but more deeply paradigmatic of the whole of his relational involvement with persons in the death of their reductionism. The *pleroma* of Christ's assuming of sin, however, is paradoxical beyond physical death: resulting, on the one hand, necessarily in the relational consequence of the mystery of fragmenting the whole of God ("why have you forsaken me," Mt 27:46) for God's preplanned purpose, and, on the other hand, of the relational outcome of human redemption and reconciliation (Rom 5:6-11; Eph 1:4-10; Col 1:21-22). This is the dynamic paradigm of whole life relationally involved with reductionist life for the death of its reductionism so that whole life can emerge together in relationship.

Moreover, this reciprocal relational process is paradigmatic for the ongoing relational involvement—of reductionist life with whole life for reductionism's death for whole life together—necessary for the redemptive reconciliation as God's whole family (Col 2:8-14; 3:9-11; Gal 6:14-15; Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Eph 2:14-18). This ongoing relational dynamic by necessity converges at the cross for the old in human life and function to be redeemed in order for the new of wholeness to emerge. Therefore, the cross is the conclusive dynamic paradigm to wholeness, the relational means of which in Christ's face and function exposes, critiques, receives, redeems and makes whole all reductionism at the cross.

For Paul, though the cross is foolishness in human contextualization, it is irreducible and nonnegotiable, the unequivocal good news of the whole of God's continued relational involvement for wholeness. In *pleroma* Christology the cross is the only dynamic paradigm for the *old* sin of reductionism to die so that the *new* ontology and function can be raised whole, that is, in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God for reciprocal relationship together in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. In Paul's theological forest the cross is inseparable from the resurrection and their conjoint function is indispensable for God's relational dynamic to wholeness—the relational *way* to the experiential *truth* of the whole *life* in God's family together.

Thus, from the interpretive lens based on his *synesis* received from Christ and the Spirit (Gal 1:12; 1 Cor 2:13; Eph 3:3-4), Paul perceived the cross in the flow and relational dynamic of the incarnation. Christ's death was never reduced or separated from the qualitative being of Christ's face and the relational nature of his function, which jointly illuminated the glory of the *pleroma* of God. The cross signified the same function of relationship as the incarnation. This distinction is critical in Paul's *pleroma* Christology. Despite the major attention in his letters given to the cross, his theological focus is on the incarnation embodying the whole of God's relational dynamic in thematic response to the human condition. An imbalanced view of the cross becomes overly christocentric based on an incomplete Christology, whereas for Paul, the cross extends from nothing less and no substitutes of the incarnation of the *pleroma* of God and thus is

centered on the whole of God (from the Father to the Son by the Spirit) constituting *pleroma* Christology. This is who “the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ” illuminated and who was wholly embodied on the cross to illuminate further. This also is the face of the *pleroma* of God on the cross with whose function in death Paul resolved wholeheartedly to know face to face (1 Cor 2:2), to share intimately together in relationship (Phil 3:10) and to witness to nothing less and no substitutes (Gal 6:14).

Still missing from this discussion on Paul’s view of the cross through the whole of the incarnation is the principal dynamic of God’s thematic action, which I have purposely left out until now. **What is the principal dynamic of God's thematic action, inseparable from the primary dynamic?** In Paul’s theological forest, integral with the primary relational dynamic of God’s grace is the principal relational dynamic of God’s love, *agape* (Eph 1:4-10). *Agape* is the principal dynamic of God’s thematic action which ultimately is enacted in the incarnation and extended to the cross (Rom 5:6-8; Eph 2:4-5, cf. Jn 3:16). The cross, however, is perceived by many to be the ultimate expression of *agape*, thus eclipsing the incarnation in the whole of God’s relational dynamic. This is a distortion because it skews both our view of the cross as well as our understanding of *agape*.

When we think of love in terms of *agape*, the main thought to emerge is about sacrifice, sacrificial love (e.g., taking Paul out of context in Phil 2:1-2, 6-8; cf. 2 Cor 8:9). Then, of course, the ultimate example of *agape* and sacrifice is seen in Jesus on the cross. The doctrine of atonement reinforces this perception, which points to the limits this doctrine, apart from the whole, imposes on the qualitative depth and relational breadth of Christ’s involvement in fulfilling God’s relational purpose and thematic relational response for the inseparable dynamic of redemption from sin and reconciliation to God’s family (Eph 1:4-10; Rom 3:24-25; Col 1:13,22). Christ’s face and function certainly included sacrifice, yet sacrifice neither fully embodied his whole person on the cross nor wholly constituted his relational function at the cross. That is, fulfilling God’s relational purpose and response necessitated the whole of Christ’s relational involvement with human persons to jointly save them *from* the sin of reductionism and save them *to be* whole together in God’s family. This necessary qualitative depth and relational breadth of Christ’s involvement was not constituted by sacrifice but by only the principal dynamic of *agape*. How are they distinguished?

The functional significance of *agape* is not sacrifice, though it may involve sacrifice; much more important, it is about relationship. Sacrifice tends to have the underlying focus on that individual and what that person does (e.g., even in common discourse about Christ’s death), albeit explicitly intended for the sake of others. *Agape*, however, functions in the relational significance of *how* to be involved with others in relationship, not about *what* to do, even for others. The distinction between ‘how to be involved with others’ and ‘what to do for others’ may appear negligible to you, yet it is critical for understanding our actions in two vital issues: one, how we define our person and thus, secondly, how we do relationships.

1. ‘What to do’ is a quantitative focus on my behavior or action which may be needed for others but is even more important for defining my person from outer in by what I do/have. ‘How to be involved’ is a qualitative focus not primarily on what I do but rather on my person defined from inner out and functioning as



nothing less and no substitutes of that person. The former is a reduced person and the latter is whole.

2. Persons defined by what they do/have give to others what they do/have; that is, they do relationships also from the outer in, which is not the deeper level of involvement of their person, only what they do/have. This implies only seeing those others also from outer in, which indicates the focus of concern is not really those others as persons but, for example, only as “needs” to act on to better define oneself by ‘what I do’. In contrast, persons defined from inner out function with their whole person to be involved with others as persons, not just their needs for example. This determines the level of involvement they have in relationship with others and also defines the primacy of relationship they give to all interactions. The dynamics distinguished between these two approaches is the significance of Paul’s polemic in “Knowledge puffs up, but *agape* builds up” (1 Cor 8:1, discussed previously).

The nature of God’s *agape* is relationship. By its nature, then, the focus in *agape* must (*dei* not *opheilo*, out of duty, obligation) be involvement with others in relationship together—not on me and what I do, even intended for the sake of others. Thus *agape* qualifies the whole matter of serving, challenges our assumptions about service, and makes problematic servant models focused on sacrifice. So much of this is concentrated on ‘what to do’, which Jesus’ paradigm for serving critiques, chastens and makes whole (Jn 12:26).

When *agape* is grasped as not about ‘what to do’ (even notably with sacrifice and service) but ‘how to be involved in relationship’, then the incarnation is the ultimate enactment of *agape* constituting the breadth and depth of the whole of God’s vulnerable involvement with human persons. As Christ’s whole face and function embodied throughout the incarnation, *agape* relationships are signified by the extent of involvement in the relationship. Depth of involvement necessitates increasing vulnerability from inner out by the person enacting *agape*, of which John 3:16 is the ultimate enactment. Thus, the incarnation—and all other examples of “incarnational” popular today—must by its *agape* nature be both embodiment and engagement in the depth of relational involvement necessary to be whole; otherwise the incarnation is fragmentary. This depth of relational involvement continued to the cross as an extension of God’s *agape* relationally embodied and engaged in the incarnation. Without the whole of God’s relational dynamic of *agape* to constitute who is embodied and relationally involved on the cross, the cross becomes fragmented.

What the cross constitutes theologically in terms of atonement, as well as justification, needs to be understood in the whole of God’s thematic response in the principal dynamic of *agape*. It is the relational significance of *agape* which constitutes the depth of Christ’s relational involvement beyond the limits of doctrines to the experiential truth of the whole gospel. In this relational dynamic, Jesus’ whole person from inner out vulnerably involved himself with the whole human person(s), thus he involved his person with the person’s sin as well as the person in the image of God. His *agape* involvement with the person’s sin was fully vulnerable, to such depth that he took on and incurred the consequences of that sin, which also deeply involved the relational

consequence of separation/rejection from the Father. In other words, Jesus went beyond merely doing what was needed for atonement and justification (Col 1:19-22). Therefore, what the cross illuminates is the breadth and depth of *agape*'s relational involvement Jesus engaged wholly both with human persons and the whole of God (the Father along with the Spirit), not about the fragments of what Jesus did even though it involved sacrifice albeit for human atonement and justification. Indeed, the cross is only the relational extension of the incarnation and the relational outcome of God's *agape* involvement with human persons, nothing less and no substitutes.

Jesus' whole person is whom Paul saw on the cross—the whole of Jesus in qualitative being and relational nature in relationship, not what Jesus did. This whole Jesus in *agape* relational involvement had extended even to the contrarian Saul for the relational way to the experiential truth of whole life in God's family together. Thus, Jesus' whole person is *who*, not *what*, Paul increasingly knew face to face, shared intimately in whole relationship together, and witnessed for with the whole of his own person in *pleroma* Christology. This is the relational outcome of the principal dynamic of God's *agape* for which Paul prayed to the Father for his church family to experience from inner out (“in your inner being...in your hearts”) the *pleroma* of God's qualitative face and relational function (“his glory”) in the qualitative depth and relational breadth of Christ's *agape* involvement for the wholeness of reciprocal relationship together (Eph 3:14-19). Paul's prayer does not close in doxology to end his letter (to which was added a second letter) but as a transition in affirmation of the relational means (way) to the experiential truth of whole life together as church family in God's *agape* relational involvement and relational likeness (3:20-21)—which continues in Ephesians not as ethical exhortation (paraenesis) of ‘what to do’ but as the principal dynamic of *agape* of ‘how to be involved’ in relationship both in the church and in the world. Paul's emphasis on how to be relationally involved echoes Jesus' formative family prayer for his church family—not to function in fragmentary sacrifice and service, but to live whole in *agape* involvement together in relational likeness to the experiential truth of the relational ontology of the whole of God, also “so that the world may believe...so that the world may know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me” (Jn 17:20-26).

All the theological dynamics embodied in the incarnation of God's thematic relational response to the human condition and which converge at the cross are indeed the relational outcome of the principal dynamic of God's *agape* relational involvement. Paul thus gives his readers a new view of the cross and the Jesus on it. Anything less, even with doctrinal certainty, is fragmentary and does not grasp the *pleroma* of God relationally present and vulnerably involved for only the experiential truth of whole relationship together. The lens based on the relational significance of *agape* enacted by Jesus shifts the focus from Jesus (at the center of sacrifice and service) to his relational involvement with others, both humans and God—just as demonstrated in Jesus' ultimate salvific discourse on the cross, noted earlier. To only see Jesus on the cross in a christocentric focus is to reduce the Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, embodied on it, thereby assuming a view of the cross and of Jesus' *agape* as about only sacrifice, not relationship together. Such a diminished view reduces the salvific function of the cross and distorts Jesus' relational purpose. If the cross is not seen in its whole, and if who is seen on the cross is not wholly embodied by the *pleroma* of God, then the salvific outcome cannot be

whole. At best, the outcome would be fragmented and diminished to a truncated soteriology of only what Jesus saved *from*, though often this outcome becomes merely an ontological simulation or epistemological illusion from reductionism substituting for the whole salvific outcome. The whole salvific outcome is constituted by the *pleroma* of God only in full soteriology of what Jesus irreducibly and inseparably saves *from* and saves *to*.

Jesus himself did not in fact provide such a reductionist view of his person on the cross. His salvific discourse on the cross clearly illuminates the qualitative depth and relational breadth of his *agape* involvement in relationship with other humans and God. By his unequivocal face and function, the whole of Jesus allowed for little reflection on his self, but rather challenged the perceptual-interpretive framework of his viewers to go further and deeper to the relational dynamic of the *pleroma* of God vulnerably responding to them. This view of Jesus and the cross cannot be seen through a reductionist lens, however, regardless of the depth and breadth of his *agape* involvement. This was the lens used by the mocking criminal crucified with Jesus. With his quantitative focus, he only saw Jesus from outer in, embedded in their common circumstance, which was incongruent for the Messiah. Yet, in desperation he still said “Save yourself and us” (Lk 23:39); that is, he sought salvation (deliverance) only *from* his negative circumstance, disregarding what Jesus had just said about forgiveness. As Jesus enacted further relational involvement with his mother and John, he illuminated deeply what he also saves *to*, which this criminal still could not see and thus could not pay attention to because he was predisposed by his reductionist lens.

Reductionism may allow for a truncated soteriology, as demonstrated in the church situation at Corinth (1 Cor 1:12-17). In reality, the sin of reductionism is often seeking deliverance *from* only this or that without desiring any further involvement, specifically qualitative relationship together. Reductionism, however, will never allow for the full soteriology of *pleroma* Christology because what the *pleroma* of God saves *to* makes whole the human condition in relationship together as God’s family (cf. the contrasts in Corinth, 1 Cor 3:4-9, 21-22). This wholeness in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes is incompatible with reductionism, and thus reductionism’s counter-relational work is always seeking to diminish, minimalize, fragment or deny the primacy of relationships together necessary to be whole in relational likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God (cf. its basis, 1 Cor 4:6-7, and its implication, 8:1)—that is, countering the relational outcome of the full soteriology (11:25; 12:12-31).

Regardless of the extent of the sin of reductionism, the gospel of the glory of Christ’s face and function fulfilled God’s thematic relational response to make whole any persons in the human condition (Col 1:19-22; 2:9-10). Anything less functionally and any substitutes theologically of the *pleroma* of God could neither fulfill the whole of God’s relational dynamic, nor would such reductions even have all the complex theological dynamics converge at the cross to be completed. By its irreducible nature, the full soteriology can only emerge from and be constituted by *pleroma* Christology. Moreover, *pleroma* Christology cannot be reduced to or confused with mysticism and esoteric knowledge as developed in Gnosticism and its Pleroma, which Valentinus misinterpreted from Paul in the second century.

While the whole of Christ’s qualitative face and relational function has fulfilled God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition to complete *pleroma*

Christology, the *pleroma* of God's *agape* relational involvement continues further in qualitative depth and relational breadth. Just as the cross and death of Christ is inseparable in dynamic function from his resurrection, the irreducible theological dynamic of *pleroma* Christology coheres further in the nonnegotiable theological dynamic of the full soteriology. These are the complex theological dynamics which continue to unfold in Paul's theological forest. Their convergence and thus coherence in his forest are understood in the theological dynamic of wholeness from his theological systemic framework, which now further interacts with the emerging theological dynamics of belonging and ontological identity. By their nature, these dynamics unfold always in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, with the principal dynamic of *agape* relational involvement, and by the primary dynamic of God's relational grace.

## Chapter 8 Paul's Theological Forest – Part 2

**For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything;  
but a new creation is everything!**

Gal 6:15

A phenomenon has been developing in Western medicine, particularly in the U.S. Increasingly, the medical condition (both physical and mental) of persons from in the womb to their death bed is being overly diagnosed with subsequent unnecessary intervention and treatment, which may result in more harm than benefit. This has reduced the definition of what and who is normal, which concerns two medical experts in particular.

H. Gilbert Welch, an internist, addresses the issue of “How much medical care do we want in our lives?” starting with two life events, birth and death:

So the most fundamental life events—birth and death—increasingly involve more and more medical care. Why should you care about this increasing medicalization of birth and death?

Simple. Because it exemplifies the medicalization of life. Everyday experiences get turned into diseases, the definitions of what (and who) is normal get narrowed, and our ability to affect the course of normal aging gets exaggerated. And we doctors feel increasingly compelled to look hard for things to be wrong in those who feel well.

Medicalization is the process of turning more people into patients. It encourages more of us to be anxious about our health and undermines our confidence in our own bodies. It leads people to have too much treatment—and some of them are harmed by it....

There are many areas in which medical care has a great deal to offer. But it has now gone well beyond them. There may have been a time when the words “Do everything possible” were indeed the right approach to medical care. But today, with so many more possibilities for intervention, that’s a strategy that is increasingly incompatible with a good life.<sup>1</sup>

Extending that concern to mental health, Allen Frances, a psychiatrist who chaired the current edition of the Diagnostic & Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV), comments on the repercussions of his edition and the forthcoming edition:

The first draft of the next edition of the DSM...is filled with suggestions that would multiply our mistakes and extend the reach of psychiatry dramatically deeper into the ever-shrinking domain of the normal. This wholesale medical imperialism of

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<sup>1</sup> H. Gilbert Welch. “Life, medicalized,” op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 2010.

normality could potentially create tens of millions of innocent bystanders who would be mislabeled as having a mental disorder....

The manual, prepared by the American Psychiatric Assn., is psychiatry's only official way of deciding who has a "mental disorder" and who is "normal." The quotes are necessary because this distinction is very hard to make at the fuzzy boundary between the two.... Where the DSM-versus-normality boundary is drawn also influences...the individual's sense of personal control and responsibility....

Defining the elusive line between mental disorder and normality is not simply a scientific question that can be left in the hands of the experts. The scientific literature is usually limited, never easy to generalize to the real world and always subject to different interpretations.

Experts have an almost universal tendency to expand their own favorite disorders...from a genuine desire to avoid missing suitable patients who might benefit. Unfortunately, this therapeutic zeal creates an enormous blind spot to the great risks that come with overdiagnosis and unnecessary treatment.

This is a societal issue that transcends psychiatry. It is not too late to save normality from DSM-V if the greater public interest is factored into the necessary risk/benefit analyses.<sup>2</sup>

The implications of the medicalization of life go beyond overdiagnosis and too much intervention which reduce the normal range of human life and function. Based on advanced medical knowledge, this activity informs physicist Steve Giddings (noted in chap. 6) of a common result he can expect from advancement in mere quantitative knowledge and understanding of the universe. Moreover, this informs computer scientist Jaron Lanier that templates of conformity reducing the human person in function are not limited to computer technology. Most importantly, the medicalization of life underdiagnoses the inherent human relational need and insufficiently intervenes on the human problem—the very human relational need which, ironically, has been also correctly identified by advanced neuroscience.

This leaves human ontology and function more deeply embedded in the condition of reductionism. All the above human efforts merely attempt to save persons from this physical condition or that mental disorder, without any deeper knowledge and understanding of what human life and function need to be saved *to*. The deeper knowledge and understanding necessary to save persons beyond their human condition is not a function of quantitative knowledge and understanding, however advanced. Such a bottom-up and outer-in source remains fragmentary, unable to make human life and function whole no matter how much and how long modern medicine can control and sustain it. What is necessary to save human persons beyond these limits is the whole knowledge and understanding which is the unique function of *pleroma* Christology.

*Pleroma* Christology is not a religious statement but a relational dynamic that vitally connects all human life and function to its Creator in order for its condition to be fully restored from inner out and thus made whole. This relational dynamic cannot be a function of static doctrine because the limits imposed by a static position also do not go beyond merely saving *from* this condition or that disorder, similar to the medicalization of life. Such Christology is incomplete and any soteriology associated with it will only be

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<sup>2</sup> Allen Frances. "It's not too late to save 'normal'," op-ed, *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2010.

truncated. *Pleroma* Christology, however, is only a function of the whole of God's relational dynamic vitally responding to make whole the human condition. By its very nature, this relational response conjointly saves human life and function *from* its condition and *to* whole ontology and function in relationship together. Thus, the saving dynamic clearly emerging from and constituted by *pleroma* Christology can be only *pleroma* soteriology, whose function is also in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes.

### ***Pleroma Soteriology***

The reductionist perception of saving human life and function is limited at best to saving it from its condition. This has traditionally involved the doctrines of atonement and justification, which may have limited functional significance (Rom 3:23-26, cf. Heb 2:17) yet lack their relational significance as the means of being saved to the full relational outcome (Rom 5:9-11; Col 1:21-22). Atonement and justification remain fragmentary until integrated in *pleroma* Christology for their whole understanding in God's relational dynamic, from which emerges the relational outcome constituting *pleroma* soteriology (Col 2:9-10; Eph 1:22-23).

What constitutes the dynamic that salvation is the relational outcome of? And what is this relational outcome that by necessity is definitive for *pleroma* soteriology?

In Paul's theological forest, the human condition of reductionism is a given for all human life and function, both for Jews with the *torah*<sup>3</sup> and Gentiles without it, (Rom 3:9,23). For Paul, a Jew, to declare "there is no distinction" (*diastole*, 3:22b) between human persons was, on the one hand, incongruent with the prevailing practice of Judaism and, on the other, compatible to the nature of the covenant relationship established with Abraham (cf. Rom 4; Gal 3:8-9). These may appear as contradictory positions, as may his statements between "no human being will be justified in his sight by deeds prescribed by the law" (Rom 3:20) and "the doers of the law who will be justified" (Rom 2:13). In reality, in these two sets of statements Paul is exposing critical dynamics specific to the sin of reductionism and is illuminating the definitive relational dynamic necessary for human life and function to be whole. The above two positions/statements do not contradict each other; in each pair of statements, the former is about reductionist Jews whose *diastole* (distinction) was embedded in practices for national identity, and, in contrast and conflict for Paul, the latter is about whole Jews who obey the law in reciprocal relational response to God's terms only for covenant relationship together. Since the Damascus road, Paul had not shifted from being a contrarian of Christianity to a contrarian of Judaism. He had become vulnerably involved in the relational dynamic of fighting jointly for the experiential truth of the whole gospel and against reductionism in Judaism (which he himself had practiced) and in all human life and function, even in churches, to make them whole. His involvement included challenging theological assumptions, particularly about human ontology and function.

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<sup>3</sup> This *torah*, and Paul's use of *nomos*, is the sum of the commandments and nonnegotiable desires required of Israel at Mt. Sinai with the accompanying sanctions, and is to be distinguished from the Torah (the Pentateuch) which contains much more than law. See Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 335-40.

Just as Paul grasped for himself, he spoke to the reductionism in Judaism necessitating the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* (Gen 17:1-2; cf. Rom 4:16), from the covenant of peace (wholeness, Isa 54:10; Ez 37:26), and, most importantly, from the salvific relational work of the Messiah “that made us whole” (Isa 53:5; cf. Eph 2:14-17; 6:15; Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). Paul clearly shifted the definition of Jews from their human contextualization in Judaism to contextualization in the whole of God’s salvific response of grace as the only means for the human condition no longer “to be apart” from God’s whole—God’s thematic relational response initiated by the covenant relational promise to Abraham (Rom 4:13-17; Gal 3:17-18) and which now “is attested by the law and the prophets” (Rom 3:21, cf. 1:2; Gal 3:8-9).

Involved in the salvific process are various theological trees, which Paul integrates together in the whole of God’s relational dynamic so that salvation has the necessary relational outcome to be whole—*pleroma* soteriology. These theological trees included faith, the law, justification and righteousness. For reductionist Jews, the dynamics of these trees had become fragmented, misinterpreted and convoluted in practice for Israel’s self-determination as nation-state, or even for their self-justification before God. The OT attests to Israel’s recurring problem of getting embedded in the larger surrounding context rather than sojourning as God’s people in and to eschatological covenant relationship together. The consequence of their embedding was an immediate concern for deliverance to be saved from those surrounding contexts and related situations, yet just with the primary concern to restore their national identity. The relational consequence had deep repercussions: (1) it constituted a reductionist theology and practice of soteriology (*yesuah*) limited primarily to save them *from* (*yasa*) their immediate burdens, thus reducing the perception of God to only a deliverer whose function is defined by what *Yesua* does in quantitative terms from outer in; then (2) this reductionist perception of God and God’s function was consequential both for reducing the ontology of their person (individually and corporately) from inner out to outer in, and for reducing their function from qualitative terms to quantitative terms from outer in based merely on what they did without the qualitative function of their heart in the qualitative image of the holy God and without the qualitative involvement in the primacy of relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole and holy God (cf. Rom 2:28-29).

The dynamic interaction between this relational consequence from reductionism and the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology pervade Paul’s theological discourse as he makes the necessary epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction notably for faith, the law, justification and righteousness to be integrated in God’s relational dynamic of Paul’s theological forest. In contrast and conflict with human contextualization, what clearly emerges from the whole of God’s relational context and process is the fulfillment of God’s thematic salvific response embodied by Jesus Christ: “But now apart from the law, the righteousness of God as been disclosed” (Rom 3:21). God’s relational dynamic of grace vulnerably embodied in Christ is accessible to all persons equalized before him—whatever their sin of reductionism, “no distinction, since all...fall short of the glory of God” (3:22-23)—to be “justified...through the redemption *and reconciliation* that is in Christ, whom God *relationally* put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood” (3:24-25, italics inserted, cf. Eph 1:7-9; Col 1:22). Yet this relational outcome of Christ’s salvific work always includes by its nature the



epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of the relational consequence discussed above. This dynamic interaction involves the experiential truth of Christ's salvific relational work that "makes us whole" (Isa 53:5) in the covenant relationship together of wholeness (Ez 37:26; Rom 5:1; Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; Eph 2:14-18)—just as the prophets in Scripture attested (Rom 1:2; 3:21). In other words, this gospel of peace (cf. Eph 6:15) from the peace of Christ (Col 3:15) is the irreducible salvation constituted by *pleroma* Christology.

In the fulfillment of God's relational dynamic of grace in response to the human condition, the *pleroma* of God functioned in the dynamic of wholeness to conjointly save *from* and *to*. The term "to save" (*sozo*) means both to deliver and to make whole, together constituting the qualitative relational nature of *pleroma* soteriology. **How does this epistemologically clarify and hermeneutically correct the theological dynamics of faith, the law, justification and righteousness?**

Paul points to the experiential truth that "the righteousness of God has been disclosed" (Rom 3:21). Rather than a proposition about God framed in Scripture, this can be distinguished as the experiential truth of not only what has been disclosed but how it was disclosed—*phaneroo*, not *apokalypso*. *Apokalypso* tends to focus on just the object disclosed (as in Rom 1:17). *Phaneroo*, however, also engages a relational dynamic to focus on the person(s) to whom something is disclosed. That is to say, *phaneroo* illuminates God's relational dynamic that is involved in disclosing the righteousness of God for persons to experience the truth of in relationship together. What they can experience of God is not the truth of a static attribute called righteousness (*dikaioyne*) or the mere outcome of what God does—namely to receive the gift of righteousness as only something about or from God. The distinction of *phaneroo* is vital for grasping God's relational dynamic: to experience the righteousness of God is to experience the fullness (rightness) of *who* and *what* God is and to be able to count on this whole ontology in *how* God functions in relationship together, nothing less and no substitutes. *Dikaioyne*, therefore, is never enacted in isolation but is always a function of how one lives in relationship. English translations lose this relational clarity of *dikaioyne*, according to E. P. Sanders, by rendering *dikaioyne* with 'justification' and its cognate verb, *dikaioo*, with 'to justify'.<sup>4</sup> For example, God's salvific relational dynamic in response to the human condition was a demonstration, proof (*endeixis*) of "his righteousness...that he himself is righteous" (Rom 3:25-26, not in legal terms of "his justice" in NIV), which Abraham counted on God to be and thus to fulfill in relationship together (Rom 4:13, 19-20). God's righteousness goes beyond God's character to also be God's relational function.

On the basis of God's relational dynamic to clearly *phaneroo* the righteousness of God for human persons to experience in relationship together, the other theological dynamics also emerge to make whole the human condition. God's thematic relational response of grace disclosing his righteousness made definitive the relational context and unequivocally put in motion the relational process necessary for human persons to engage in reciprocal relational response to who, what and how God is in order to be made whole, and thus to live whole in relationship together. Abraham's relational response constitutes the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction needed for human response to be relationally congruent with God's relational context and relationally compatible to

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<sup>4</sup> E. P. Sanders. *Paul: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 52-58.

God's relational process. In Paul's theological forest, God's relational context is irreducible to human contextualization and God's relational process is nonnegotiable to human terms. This necessary distinction involves Paul's theological anthropology from his theological systemic framework that challenged prevailing assumptions of human ontology and function. In Paul's theological discourse, this distinction involving anthropology magnified the dynamic interaction of the relational consequence of reductionism (discussed earlier for Israel) with the relational outcome unfolding for *pleroma* soteriology. Given the clear relational disclosure of God's righteousness, Paul simply asks of all human ontology and function, "Then what becomes of boasting?" (or human pride, *kauchesis*, Rom 3:27). Paul's polemic is without equivocation: "It is excluded... a person is justified by faith apart from *all human efforts at self-autonomy from human contextualization and their human terms for self-determination and self-justification*" (3:27-28, italics inserted).

Moreover, "if Abraham was justified by *such human effort and terms*, he has something to boast about, but not *in relationship to God*" (Rom 4:2). Paul does not totally discount any benefit of human effort. Yet, this benefit only exists in human contextualization that Paul amplifies. When fair, human contextualization and its terms operate on a quantitative system of exchange (*quid pro quo*) resulting in benefits ("wages") commensurate with human effort (4:4). The results do not exceed the effort, nor can they be expected beyond an exchange process. God, however, does relationship neither on the basis of an exchange principle nor on any other human terms. Rather, "to one who without *human effort and terms* trusts him who justifies *those in the sin of reductionism*, such faith is reckoned as righteousness" (4:5; cf. Gal 2:16)—just as it truly was for Abraham (4:3, 20-22; cf. Gal 3:6-9). The former is a relational consequence of reductionism despite any secondary benefits, while the latter is the relational outcome to wholeness. Distinguishing the contextual source of these relational dynamics is critical to understanding the functional significance of the theological dynamics constituting the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

**In God's relational dynamic to wholeness, what are these dynamics of "trust...justifies...faith...righteousness" (Rom 4:5) for Paul?** God's communicative action and *phaneroo* of his righteousness are always initiated relational responses of grace to human persons for relationship together, which by their nature necessitate compatible reciprocal relational response to complete the relational connection. God's relational nature precludes unilateral relationship, yet God's qualitative being in whole and holy ontology cannot do relationship together reduced to human terms, even by well-meaning adherents of the law (Rom 4:13-16). The only compatible reciprocal relational response is faith (*pistis*, and its cognate verb, *pisteuo*). Yet, the perception of *pistis* as 'belief' and *pisteuo* as 'to believe' (e.g., in the common translation "Abraham believed," 4:3) often lacks the relational significance Paul is illuminating in this relational response. Belief and believing may connote acknowledgment of some fact or proposition about God, or may further imply a personal assent of God (even as monotheism, cf. Jas 2:19), neither of which involves the whole of the person believing nor are sufficient therefore to constitute the compatible relational response to God's righteousness—the whole of who, what and how God is in relationship (cf. Eph 3:17,19). In contrast to this relational process, N.T. Wright would propose "that we use the noun cognate with 'believer' [*pisteuo*] to express the status of this confession [i.e., the *Shema*] within the Pauline

communities: justification by *belief* [*pistis*], i.e. covenant membership demarcated by that which is believed.” For Wright, the nature of faith to Paul and the heart of his doctrine of justification by faith were about the things believed or believed in “because he is anxious about the boundary-markers of the communities he believes himself called upon to found and nurture.”<sup>5</sup>

A static view of *pistis* as belief, whatever the truth and conviction of its content, may signify status or membership but it does not constitute relationship—specifically, relationship together on God’s terms. Faith as relational trust is the only compatible response that constitutes the vulnerable involvement of the whole person necessary for relational connection with who, what and how God is. This reciprocal relational response from inner out is the depth of Paul’s polemic and desire for Jews to take them beyond merely what they believe to the qualitative-relational nature of faith to be made whole (Rom 10:1, 9-11). Moreover, Paul illuminated to the church at Corinth that even definitive knowledge of a correct belief in monotheism (or the Shema) is insufficient to constitute the relational function of *pistis*, both with God and in relation to others (1 Cor 8:1-6; cf. the critique of the church in Ephesus, Rev 2:2-4).

Paul’s epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction were ongoing to distinguish the *pistis* necessary to be *sozo*, that is, to be made whole beyond a truncated soteriology. Even *pistis* as faith, however, can be problematic because, though faith as trust is the necessary response for relational connection, it is not sufficient by itself for relationship together with the righteous whole of God. Other theological dynamics by necessity converge with the relational dynamic of faith for the relational outcome of wholeness in relationship together.

Faith, even with belief in the Shema, can become ambiguous in its relational significance or elusive in its relational function, just as Paul ongoingly exposed and confronted (e.g., Gal 3:1-5; 4:8-11; 5:1-6; Col 2:6-12, 16-22). In Paul’s thought and polemic, faith becomes ambiguous in its relational significance when its relational context shifts from God’s to human contextualization; faith becomes elusive in its relational function when its relational process renegotiates God’s terms with human terms. In the dynamics of *pleroma* soteriology, Paul never ignored the relational consequence of reductionism and its effects on the relational outcome to wholeness, since Paul himself had been embedded in it until his experiential truth of *pleroma* Christology turned him around on the Damascus road and redefined his faith only in God’s relational context and process. Therefore, it is critical to understand the interpretive lens by which Paul perceives faith and interprets its function.

Faith has been perceived in two ways, implying the source of its perspective which may appear complementary but in function are competing, thus important to distinguish.

1. *From God’s top-down perspective*: By the qualitative function of God’s relational nature, faith in functional likeness is a relational dynamic engaged by the relational trust of the whole person in response back to God’s relational initiative of grace from top down in order to constitute the vulnerable involvement necessary to be compatible for relationship together. This is a reciprocal relational

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<sup>5</sup> N.T. Wright. *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 2-3.

process enabled only by God from top down for qualitative function from inner out, therefore by its nature nonnegotiable on only God's relational terms. Jesus embodied this faith in his relationship with the Father, which was paradigmatic for his followers. In this sense *pisteos Christou* (Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16; 3:22; Phil 3:9) equally involves the faith embodied by Christ from top down ("faith of Christ") that his followers must also relationally exercise for the relational outcome constituted by Christ ("faith in Christ")—who fulfilled this by the faith he embodied from inner out (cf. Lk 23:46). In other words, from God's perspective Christ is not only the object of faith, the Other; the embodied whole of Christ is also the Subject of faith, with whom his followers need to be involved with relational trust for the experiential truth of relationship together 'in Christ'—the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology constituted by *pleroma* Christology. Therefore, the 'faith of Christ' is the functional key (the relational Way) definitive for the relational dynamic of faith that is necessary to constitute the response for this relational outcome. If Paul indeed had a double meaning of *pisteos Christou* ('faith of Christ' and 'faith in Christ'), it was by design for the relational purpose to integrate the two by necessity for the faith of those in Christ to be defined from top down and to function from inner out.

2. *From human bottom-up perspective:* Faith makes a functional shift (not necessarily theological) from the qualitative inner out to the quantitative outer in. The shift to less qualitative inner out and more quantitative outer in reduces the primacy of faith's relational dynamic and thus its relational involvement. This is the relational consequence of reductionism that diminishes both the function of relationship and the ontology of the persons involved. Using this lens, faith becomes more about what we have (e.g., beliefs) and/or do with respect to God (e.g., believe in, cf. Wright). While God is the object or goal of faith, this faith does not engage the embodied whole of Christ as Subject, thus is not defined by God from top down. This is a bottom-up substitute from human contextualization, which at best is an ontological simulation or epistemological illusion. This faith, then, is the human activity which in relation to God intentionally or unintentionally shifts the focus from God's terms by essentially renegotiating human terms as the determining factor shaping faith's function from outer in, along with shaping the gospel, its covenant relationship, promise and conclusion. The nature of faith from human bottom-up perspective cannot rise above reduced human ontology or function deeper than outer in, because it is embedded in the very human condition of reductionism that is made whole solely by God's relational action from top down. This relational outcome, of course, emerges only from a compatible reciprocal response of faith as relational trust, which cannot be wholly engaged while the relational consequence of reductionism prevails. The human alternative to this relational faith trusting God is the self-autonomy of human effort seeking to self-determine any meaning and result of faith—or, essentially, relationship with a disembodied God (e.g., a mere belief) shaped by human terms (e.g., merely believing in an Object, cf. Col 2:18-19). Since this faith is neither defined from top down nor functions from inner out, it is subject to ongoing variation of its identity and interpretation of its function (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7).

With these two perceptions of faith, Paul's readers need to understand what he means when he refers to faith, as well as the faith he implies even when he does not refer to it (e.g., about works, cf. 1 Cor 3:13; Phil 2:12). Paul actually uses both perspectives, notably in his polemics, to distinguish faith's determining source from God's terms or from human terms and shaping. For example, in general, all Jews had faith, including belief in the Shema. Paul's indictment of reductionist Jews was not about having no faith; at issue was their type of faith. His faith-works antithesis is between these two perspectives of faith, thus those engaged in works think they have faith, but do not have the relational significance of faith engaged only on God's terms. Moreover, many who subscribe to the doctrine of justification by faith may be expressing nothing more than a belief for a certainty of what they have or for security of what they do; or their initial faith-response may have been the relational trust from inner out but has since functioned merely from outer in. Faith is often perceived as a singular act, after which faith becomes what one has or does as a believer, who now has the legal status of being justified by faith. For Paul, this relational outcome was not a doctrine that could be simply claimed by a belief. Such an oversimplification actually obstructs the theological dynamics which are constituted only in the experiential truth of God's relational context by God's relational process in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. In fact, Paul clearly identified the relational outcome in Christ as the functional significance of only the relational dynamic of faith conjoined with work in its full relational significance: "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). That is, Paul defines the relational response of faith as ongoing participation in the work (*energeo* in Gk indirect middle voice) of entrusting one's whole person to be vulnerable in the relational involvement of *agape*, not about merely obedience or sacrifice (cf. 1 Thes 1:3).

The biblical norm for faith rooted in Abraham has always been the reciprocal relational response from inner out to God's top-down initiating grace in thematic relational response to the human condition (Gal 3:8-9; Rom 4:16). The response of those rooted in Abraham has to be compatible with the relational terms of the whole of God's relational nature—the definitive terms for relationship together. Anything less and any substitutes for this faith-response of relational trust by the whole person from inner out are incompatible responses from reductionism, which for Paul always needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction for wholeness. These two meanings of faith, therefore, are critical to distinguish in the ongoing tension and conflict between God's relational whole from top down on God's relational terms from inner out and reductionism of that whole from bottom up with terms from outer in. To confuse these faiths or to not distinguish them will give us inadequate, distorted or fragmented understanding of both the whole of Paul's own witness and the whole in his theology—whose personal faith was constituted in the experiential truth of God's relational context and process for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology (cf. Acts 22:14-15).

In the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, faith as relational trust is the reciprocal relational response compatible for relational connection with the relationally disclosed righteousness of God, the whole of who, what and how God is and can be counted on to be in relationship. As the relational process continues, other necessary theological dynamics converge with this relational dynamic of faith for the relational outcome of wholeness in relationship together.

## ***Pleroma Soteriology Completed***

Faith as relational trust is necessary but is not sufficient in itself for relationship together with the whole and holy God; other complex theological dynamics are needed to engage the relational process that completes the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

Faith in the Deliverer/Savior may be sufficient for a truncated soteriology of merely being delivered/saved *from*—as often demonstrated both in Israel’s history and an incomplete Christology. Yet, *pleroma* Christology constitutes only *pleroma* soteriology. Paul clarified in his theological forest that the *pleroma* of God relationally disclosed the righteousness of God (cf. Acts 22:14-15) for the gospel of salvation (*soteria*, Rom 1:16-17; 3:21; Eph 1:13). That is, the face of Jesus vulnerably embodied the gospel of the glory of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6), the gospel of wholeness/peace (Eph 6:15) basic to the whole of Jesus’ salvific work (Eph 2:14-18), to complete salvation with the relational outcome necessary for also being saved *to* (Rom 5:1-2, 10-11; Col 1:19-22; Eph 3:6).

If faith rooted in Abraham is insufficient for this completed relational outcome, what is the sufficient meaning of “Abraham believed and it was reckoned to him as righteousness” (Rom 4:3)? And what does it mean that he and his offspring were “justified by faith”?

Through his experience, what Abraham “gained” (*heurisko*, discovered, Rom 4:1) in a heuristic process of discovery was not about faith as something he merely possessed or exercised isolated to the individual, but about the relational significance of faith as only a function in dynamic relationship together with God. As our forefather, Abraham’s discovery, by its very nature, must apply to all of us in the same heuristic process. His discovery, however, seems to elude the theological process of some traditions. Since the Reformation, this relational dynamic of faith has been all but lost. Martin Luther has been influential in minimalizing the theological issue to a conflict between ‘justification by works’ or ‘justification by faith’, which are perceived often without an understanding of the sin of reductionism inherent in ‘works’, and very likely without the relational significance of the dynamics involved in either position. Proponents of a so-called Lutheran view of Paul follow their theological forefather, centralizing the doctrine of justification by faith as the heart of Paul’s thought and theology. This imposition on Paul reduces the issue to a question of doctrinal purity on this matter—a question raised which is not necessarily always pointing to the intent of Paul’s polemic about “works prescribed by the law” and “the law of faith” (Rom 3:27-28). Such a claim to this doctrinal purity about faith tends to signify the very *kauchesis* (boasting, pride) Paul challenges, that ironically also defines persons in the similar reductionist way as works by what one has/does. This claim is also in contrast to Abraham’s discovery, which was not self-discovery but the outcome of a relational process. The consequence of this reduction is to skew the issue to be more about the faith we have/do, and thus faith isolated to the individual, and less about our functional involvement (“faith working through *agape*,” Gal 5:6) in relationship together with God and others—thus reversing the heuristic process of Abraham. For Paul, the inseparable theological and functional issue is only between reductionism and wholeness in relationship with God. (For further discussion, see chap. 11, questions 2 and 5.)

While Abraham could well have “discovered” such doctrine, Paul clarifies that “what was gained by Abraham” was the experiential truth: either persons can attempt to do relationship with God on human terms and be “justified by works,” or they can experience relationship with God on God’s relational terms, the relational dynamic of which is insufficiently explained by the doctrine of justification by faith. In human contextualization, human terms define human effort in a comparative process based on an exchange principle (law) of *quid pro quo*, which is imposed on God to renegotiate God’s relational terms. This reduces God’s relational context and process constituted by God’s relational dynamic of grace from top down in relational response from inner out, and substitutes human shaping from bottom up and human terms from outer in (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7). What Abraham essentially discovered then was that relationship with God is not by an exchange process of *quid pro quo*. Once again, this heuristic process has less theological focus on our faith and more functional concern with our relationship with God. I suggest, therefore, that justification by faith was not the heart of Paul’s thought and theology; rather, justification was one of the complex theological dynamics constituted by God’s relational response of grace to the human condition for the relationship necessary to be whole together.

**How was justification only partially the focus of Paul’s concern and theology, and what then was at the heart of his concern and central to his theology?** The heart of Paul’s concern was not for doctrinal purity; though theological purity was certainly needed in the religious pluralism of the ancient Mediterranean world, it was not sufficient in itself to fulfill Paul’s primary concern (nor Jesus’—cf. Rev 2:2-4). The central and integrating theme of Paul’s thought and theology always focuses on, revolves around and illuminates the experiential truth of intimately knowing the *pleroma* of God in relationship together (examine Paul’s prayers, Eph 1:17-23; 3:13-19). This is further evident in the understanding that the theological Paul emerged not from the historical Paul but from the relational Paul, as discussed previously in Paul’s journey.

The whole of relationship together was Paul’s experiential truth from the Damascus road and his ongoing relational progression since then (Phil 3:7-11). In this summary reflection shared in one of Paul’s last letters, he illuminates the necessity yet insufficiency of his relational response of faith, and he integrates it with the righteousness and implied justification both necessary and sufficient for relationship with the whole and holy God. Anything less and any substitutes of these theological dynamics would be reductionism of the relationship necessary to be whole together: “I regard everything *else* as loss...as rubbish in order that I may *grow together with [kerdaino]* Christ and be found [*heurisko*] *intimately* in him (3:8-9, italics inserted). This heuristic process for Paul, as for Abraham and his offspring, is contingent on the convergence of righteousness and justification with the relational means of faith, by which they are received for function sufficient to be whole in relationship together.

Justification (*dikaiosis*) is a difficult term to grasp in Paul that becomes more ambiguous when perceived as an isolated theological tree apart from the whole of God’s relational dynamic constituting Paul’s theological forest. On the one hand, justification has a clear judicial sense for Paul that declared persons guiltless from sin and thus right before God (Rom 4:25; 5:9,18), that is, free from any legal charge (*anenkletos*) and thus without defect or blame (*amomos*, Col 1:22). While this sense of justification may seem to be merely a static condition, for Paul justification must be understood as a relational

condition that also inseparably engages a relational dynamic. The dynamic of justification is also integrated with the dynamics of redemption and atonement for sin (Rom 3:24-26; 8:1-4; cf. Eph 1:7); their purpose together, however, if concluded here, would be incomplete in a truncated soteriology of only being saved *from* sin. For justification in particular, the judicial aspect to be saved from sin is not the determinative understanding of this dynamic that Paul focused on in his thought and theology. Based on his experiential truth of the whole gospel, justification is not merely about human persons (individually and collectively) becoming OK or right *before* God. For Paul, on the other hand, the significance of justification is further and more deeply understood only when this dynamic engages the relational process for human persons to be wholly involved in relationship together *with* God, not only *before* God. In other words, according to Paul, to be justified (*dikaioo*) is the relational condition inseparable from its counterpart to be righteous, which is the relational function engaging this relational condition entirely for relationship together; and the conjoint functional significance of *dikaioo* (both justified and righteous) is lost whenever the primacy of relationship is reduced.

The dynamic of justification integrated with redemption and atonement converge in Paul's theological forest for just one purpose. These dynamics point further and deeper to their relational purpose constituted by the whole of God's relational response of grace: reconciliation and wholeness (peace) in relationship together with the whole and holy God (Rom 5:1-2, 10-11; Col 1:19-22). Faith as relational trust in reciprocal response is the only relational means by which to receive and experience the relational outcome of these relational dynamics. In a complex process that Paul does not fully explain—likely because the details are secondary to his primary relational purpose, if not a mystery (cf. Ps 71:15)—the necessary relational response of faith is made sufficient by these theological dynamics for the outcome of another theological dynamic that is further necessary to make whole all relationship with God. This other theological dynamic is *dikaioosyne*, not justification but righteousness—the relational function distinct yet inseparable from the relational condition of justification (Rom 1:17; 3:21-22; 4:3-5; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21; Eph 4:24).

Paul always framed his theological discourse in the functional terms of the gospel, the whole gospel embodied by God's relational dynamic of grace solely for relationship together—thus signifying the primacy of relationship for the theological Paul gained from the relational Paul. For relationship with the whole and holy God to be indeed good news, specific theological dynamics need to be engaged; and these theological dynamics need to function with relational significance for their relational outcome to be the experiential truth of the whole gospel. As much as Paul theologically clarified and illuminated this gospel, he likewise exposed and confronted anything less and any substitutes from reductionism, thereby challenging theological assumptions in the process. The sin of reductionism, which is positioned against the whole gospel, diminishes, minimalizes or otherwise reduces these theological dynamics from their relational purpose to function, at best, in only a truncated soteriology of being saved *from* even sin, that is, other than sin of reductionism. The specific theological dynamic that negates reductionism and its counter-relational work is righteousness. In God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition, the righteousness of God (*sedaqah*) emerges as the definitive relational basis for the hopeful expectation of God's salvation, as the psalmist testifies (Ps 71:14-15). In Paul's theological forest of God's relational



dynamic, God's righteousness relationally embodied by Christ, "the Righteous One" (Acts 7:52; 22:14), is the functional key for the relational outcome of salvation to be complete—specifically to be saved *to* wholeness in relationship together.

Relationship with the whole and holy God must by God's relational nature (*dei*, not by the obligation of *opheilo*) be reciprocal; and the reciprocity should not be confused with or reduced to the moral-ethical deeds of *opheilo* as a substitute for the relational response and ongoing involvement of faith as relational trust ("faith working through *agape*," Gal 5:6). Yet, also by the very nature of God's qualitative being, the ontology and function of the persons involved must be likewise compatible for relationship together. Faith as relational trust is the necessary reciprocal response but not sufficient in itself for human ontology and function to be compatible with God's. Some means is necessary to eliminate the presence and effects of sin as reductionism so that human persons can be compatible with the whole and holy God. The dynamics of justification, redemption, and atonement make our relational dynamic of faith sufficient in ontology and function to be compatible to have relationship together. However, for our ontology and function to be directly involved in the relationship and to compatibly function with God's ontology and function, they must be also comparable to God's righteousness.

*Dikaiosyne* is not about justification and its *dikai*-cognates are not only about God's justice, being just and justified. That theological function has already been accounted for. Righteousness is a further theological dynamic of how God functions in relationship and can be counted on for that ontology and function. As relationally disclosed, God's righteousness involves interaction with the dynamic of God's glory illuminated in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). What the *pleroma* of God vulnerably embodied of God's glory was the qualitative being and relational nature of God for the qualitative presence and relational involvement of the whole of God in face-to-face relationship together; this defines "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ" (4:4). What God's glory signifies is the ontology and function of the whole of who, what and how God is, which is who, what and how God's righteousness enacts openly with his own face (not a mask) in relationship together and thus can be counted on for nothing less and no substitutes. In other words, God is righteous (*dikaios*) when God's involvement in relationship is congruent with the whole of God's ontology and function, which by God's very nature is congruent with the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature. This integral dynamic cannot be separated or the whole of God becomes fragmented into attributes without the depth of their relational function.

Therefore, the relational dynamic of God's righteousness-glory was embodied congruently by the face of Christ, the Righteous One, who not only relationally disclosed God's righteousness but enacted the means for transformation necessary for human ontology and function in relationship: first, to be fully compatible with God's ontology and function (God's face), then to be vulnerably congruent with our ontology and function (our face), and thus to be wholly comparable to God's righteousness to be face to face. When God experiences our involvement in relationship together as congruent with our ontology and function and thus can count on us to be that person in face-to-face relational involvement, then God can account for us to be righteous and our involvement will "be reckoned [*logizomai*] to us" as righteousness (Rom 4:23-24).

Yet, there are important distinctions to understand in the process to righteousness. Faith does not constitute us as righteous or justified; faith is only the relational means to

receive this relational outcome constituted by the theological dynamics of God's relational response of grace embodied in the face of the Righteous One (cf. Gal 3:14,18). In face-to-face relationship together, the face of our righteousness is not faith but the congruence of our ontology and function 'in Christ'. This face of righteousness, both Christ's and ours, must be the relational function of the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, thus by its very nature cannot be anything less or any substitute. The latter is only a mask, not the real *prosopon*, which just signifies playing a role in ancient Greek theatre different from one's whole person—which for Paul also involved not being transparent in relationship together, thus in effect presenting a pseudo image of oneself (Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:9). This is the functional significance of *hypokrisis* of the reductionists warned against by Jesus (Lk 12:1), the relational consequence of which was demonstrated in Peter's *hypokrisis* exposed by Paul (Gal 2:11-14). Moreover, this is the critical relational significance of Jesus' relational expectation for his followers' righteousness to be clearly distinct from the reductionists (Mt 5:20). The face of righteousness should neither be mistaken for faith nor confused with all who confess faith.

While *through* the relational means of faith, yet to be distinguished with being *from* faith, this righteousness is the dynamic outcome only of transformation in Christ (cf. 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 5:21). Just as God's righteousness is congruent with God's whole ontology and function and is congruent with the glory of God's qualitative being and relational nature, our ontology and function need to be transformed to be righteous. This necessitates transformation from inner out (*metamorphoo*, not *metaschematizo*) that involves the redemptive change of the old ontology and function reduced to outer in for the new ontology in the qualitative image of God and new function in the relational likeness of the whole of God (2 Cor 3:9-11,18; Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; cf. Jesus' prayer, Jn 17:22-24). This dynamic transformation process, which constitutes us compatible to be involved in relationship together by making us comparable to God in righteousness and congruent with whole ontology and function, is the gospel of wholeness (Eph 2:14-18; 6:15) and its antecedents (Isa 53:5; 54:10; Ez 37:26-27). This is the gospel of the glory of Christ congruently embodied in the face of Christ for face-to-face new covenant relationship together as the new creation (1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; cf. Jn 17:20-21).

Righteousness, both God's and ours, is not a static attribute of an individual as if in a vacuum, or the outcome of what one does (e.g., moral-ethical behavior) as if isolated only to that individual. Rather, righteousness is only how one lives in relationship. Even adherence to the *torah* was insufficient for righteousness, and why Jesus made it clear that his followers' righteousness exceed the righteousness of the reductionists (Mt 5:20). This is the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from wholeness (*tamiym*, Gen 17:1), which for Paul is critical in the heuristic process shared with Abraham (Rom 4:1; Gal 3:1-9; cf. Col 2:20-21). When the full function of righteousness prevails, theological perception and interpretation deepen and theological anthropology becomes whole. In its reciprocal dynamic, righteousness is always a function of persons in relationship. Therefore, by its nature it must be seen in its relational context, specifically, in relational context with God, which means to function in God's relational context and process. The righteous are not merely morally or ethically right (cf. *tamiym* rendered as "blameless") but those who can be counted on by God to function in

relationship together as God's relational terms expect. Righteousness then, both God's and ours, is the functional basis for hopeful expectation in relationship together, whether it be for salvation (Rom 1:16-17; cf. Ps 71:14-15), the fulfillment of its promise (Rom 4:20-24), or for simply reciprocal relationship together (Eph 4:24; cf. Jn 17:25-26), which includes Jesus praying to his "righteous Father" whom he counted on in relationship together with family love. This is how the dynamic of righteousness is necessary to make whole all reciprocal relationship with God, and why Christ is the functional key to this righteousness for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

The above complex theological dynamics converge in Paul's theological forest to be constituted together in *pleroma* Christology for the fulfillment of their relational purpose. The *pleroma* of God conclusively embodied the whole of God's thematic relational response to the human condition, thus completing the relational work necessary for these theological dynamics to constitute human persons solely for the experiential truth of relationship together with the whole and holy God—the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. Any of these theological dynamics apart from *pleroma* Christology becomes fragmented, unable to fulfill its relational purpose even though it may serve a doctrinal purpose. Theological trees can only be fragmentary without their theological forest.

Reflecting further on one theological dynamic in particular perhaps will be helpful. Whenever any theology of justification stops short in function (not necessarily in its theology) of the primacy of relationship in salvation and does not illuminate the relational involvement necessary for the qualitative function of salvation's relational outcome, it becomes a reductionist substitute of both *pleroma* Christology and *pleroma* soteriology. Such a theology of justification by faith invariably operates with a reduced human ontology and function, which effectively becomes a reduction of God's relational dynamic of grace, and, thus, a theology tending to fall into ontological simulation or epistemological illusion which is in need of the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of wholeness. We need to ask if a traditional (or Lutheran) reading of Paul centered on justification by faith should be included in these shortcomings. I think it does. The incarnation of Jesus was constituted not only by God's relational dynamic of grace but, equally important, was also constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, wholeness. For Paul, Jesus wholly embodied the *pleroma* of God (the whole of God's qualitative ontology and relational function) throughout the incarnation to the cross and the resurrection, therefore also constituting the dynamic of wholeness for all life and function (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). The *pleroma* of God's salvific work relationally involves the whole and holy ontology and qualitative-relational function of God, which vulnerably engages human persons in their reductionism with the theological dynamics necessary to make whole human ontology and function in qualitative-relational likeness of God for the sole purpose of relationship together with the whole and holy God. Such relationship is irreducible from the whole of God and is nonnegotiable to reduced terms and conditions for the holy God. Therefore, any theology engaging Christ without the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes is an incomplete Christology, and any theology involving salvation apart from the dynamic of wholeness is a truncated soteriology.

*Pleroma* Christology is a function of the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. By the irreducible and nonnegotiable nature of this dynamic, *pleroma*

soteriology emerges from *pleroma* Christology only in the dynamic of wholeness. However, this dynamic is opposed, both theologically and functionally, by reductionism trying to diminish, minimalize, distort, redefine, reconstruct, or otherwise discount or even ignore God's whole. Grasping this opposition profoundly deepens our understanding of sin and also broadens our perception of it as the sin of reductionism. Paul's thought and theology evidence this understanding, and his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism magnify this perception. Yet, Paul's readers will neither recognize nor have this tension and conflict with reductionism apart from the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. The consequence will always be to make theological assumptions which Paul ongoingly challenged. One influence of reductionism is the limitation of a traditional doctrine of justification. The traditional issue between justification by faith or by works does not adequately frame the problem because, depending on how faith is defined, both can be functions of reductionism. Moreover, the issues tend to be limited to human contextualization (e.g., the Reformation for a traditional view of Paul, or Second Temple Judaism for a new perspective) without engaging God's relational context and process—that which was primary for defining and determining the whole of Paul and the whole critical in his theology. Those issues need further epistemological clarification than conventional biblical theology tends to provide, and they need deeper hermeneutic correction than historical theology can identify. This need is fulfilled not by a systematic theology but rather by the relational whole in Paul's theological systemic framework and his theological forest.

For Paul, the issue of justification is a relational issue that needs to be framed, and thus understood for the relational implications one engages, as either justification in relational response to God's relational initiative, or justification ignoring or renegotiating the terms of God's relational initiative. This relational process implies either justification constituted by relational involvement with God on God's terms, or justification signifying reductionist involvement with God and thus a function of human terms shaped by human contextualization. While a traditional theology of justification by faith certainly implies a relational response to God's grace, that response can also function in reductionist involvement with God signifying the influence of human contextualization. This easily occurs without the understanding and perception of sin as reductionism, which is a relational consequence of function apart from the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes of God's whole. Thus, for Paul, the limitation, contradiction or consequence of a traditional theology of justification by faith is in need of the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction of *tamiym*, which he himself needed to be *sozo*, made whole in the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology.

It is the experiential truth of this relational outcome and its ongoing relational involvement together 'already' which is at the heart of Paul's concern and central to his theology (the relational Paul determining the theological Paul). Whole relationship together with the whole and holy God was not a theological construct to be realized in the future. It is the completion of God's thematic relational response of grace to *sozo* the human condition, the relational outcome of which 'already' functions by necessity in the relational progression to 'not yet'—just as the whole of Paul's witness continued to illuminate (Phil 3:12-16). For the whole in Paul's theology, *tamiym*, *sozo* and *shalom* involve a reciprocal relational dynamic, all of which converge entirely in one relational

outcome ‘already’ and relational conclusion ‘not yet’: whole relationship together in God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms.

The complex theological dynamics, which converged in Paul’s theological forest to be constituted in *pleroma* Christology, fulfill their relational purpose wholly in the theological dynamic of adoption. As discussed in the previous chapter, adoption was not a theological construct for Paul but the experiential truth of the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. Adoption is the relational function of the whole of God’s family love constituting persons ‘already’ into God’s family in whole relationship together (Rom 8:15-17; Eph 1:5, 13-14; 2:18-22)—just as Jesus prayed nearing his completion of God’s salvific action (Jn 17:21-23). If adoption is not the conclusive relational outcome of these complex theological dynamics, then these dynamics do not fulfill their relational purpose and any presumed salvation resulting from them is not by the *pleroma* of God.

Only *pleroma* soteriology emerges from *pleroma* Christology. Therefore, it is wholly completed by the righteous Son with family love in the relational dynamic of adoption in conjoint function with the Spirit—who is his relational extension of the *pleroma* of God, whom Jesus made definitive (Jn 15:26; 16:13-15) for Paul’s experiential truth (1 Cor 2:9-16) to *pleroo* the embodied word of God as the church (Eph 1:22-23; 3:16-19; 4:12-13).

All these theological dynamics were enacted by the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. By the definitive terms of wholeness, anything less and any substitutes for Paul were always subject to epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction; he had zero tolerance for reductionism. The theology of wholeness is a basic dynamic in Paul’s theological systemic framework and his theological forest. With *pleroma* soteriology completed, further emerging from its relational outcome to overlap and interact deeply with the theological dynamic of wholeness are the dynamics of the theology of belonging and the theology of ontological identity.

## Theology of Belonging

The medical efforts described at the beginning of this chapter attempt to save persons from their physical condition or mental disorder. Without any deeper knowledge and understanding of what human life and function need to be saved *to*, this so-called advanced medical activity has compounded the human condition by efforts to control human life and prolong it—alternatives which essentially amount to nothing more than ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism. The consequence of such advanced intervention and treatment has neither resolved the human problem nor apparently even attempted to fulfill the inherent human need identified by advancement in its own realm, neuroscience. For Paul, the only good news for this reductionism is for human life and function to be made whole in the relational outcome of what *pleroma* Christology saves *to*.

The illumination of this gospel, however, has had to endure attempts to overshadow it by the clouds of reductionism pervading human contextualization. These attempts involve the human shaping of the gospel which essentially reduces the whole of the gospel of Christ. That is, “the gospel of the glory of Christ” is reduced of its qualitative being and relational nature in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:4-6), and “the gospel

of peace/wholeness” is reduced of its whole ontology and function (Eph 6:15). These are critical reductions of the whole of Jesus embodying the *pleroma* of God, who vulnerably disclosed God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms for only relationship together in the very likeness of the relational whole of God. Any reductions of God’s relational ontology and function are consequential for the relationships together necessary to be whole, thus consequential for all relationships needing to be whole. Whole ontology and function and whole relationships together are the ongoing target of reductionism’s counter-relational work.

The influence of reductionism’s quantitative interpretive lens and its counter-relational work is evident both in modern medical efforts and in human shaping of the gospel during Paul’s time and since. The relational consequence is fragmentary solution for the human problem and thus fragmented fulfillment of the inherent human need. Paul fights decisively against this reductionism and conclusively for wholeness in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes—always challenging a different gospel and theological assumptions of less. The integrity of the gospel for Paul is less about the purity of its truth and more a function of its wholeness. In Paul’s *pleroma* Christology, the functional priority is always wholeness in ontology and function and in relationship together (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). Therefore, the gospel is never sufficient good news in just the truth of saved *from*; the gospel is complete only when it includes the experiential truth of saved *to* for *pleroma* soteriology. In Paul’s thought, theology and polemic, the experiential truth of the whole gospel is the only gospel there is—irreducible and nonnegotiable to human terms and shaping (Gal 1:6-7, 11-12). The relational consequence of anything less and any substitutes is at best a truncated soteriology that fragments the whole relationship together necessary to fulfill the created and thus inherent human relational need for belonging. This belonging for Paul is no longer “to be alone” and most importantly no longer “to be apart” from God’s relational whole (Eph 2:19-22; Col 3:10-11; cf. Gen 2:18).

In a summary statement both for the whole gospel and against reductionism, Paul made definitive that no form or amount of reductionism “counts for anything [*ischyo*, capable of producing results to be whole and healthy], the only thing that counts is faith working through *agape*” (Gal 5:6; cf. Mt 9:12-13). The relational response of faith functioning in *agape* signifies the whole ontology and function constituting relational involvement on the deepest level. For Paul, the depth of this relational involvement could only be the relational outcome of the experiential truth of Christ’s love, as he prayed (Eph 3:16-19). Thus this is relational involvement only in likeness to the relational nature of the whole of God, as Jesus embodied and prayed (Jn 17:20-26). The experiential truth of Christ’s relational involvement is the same *agape* that in reciprocal likeness relationally bonds (“binds together,” *syndesmos*) God’s holy and beloved chosen ones to completely fulfill (“perfect,” *teleiotes*) their relational function together necessary to be “the wholeness of Christ” (Col 3:12-15; cf. Eph 4:2-6). In Paul’s theological forest, the whole of God’s relational dynamic of *agape* is the irreducible relational involvement of family love, the extension of which by God’s relational nature constituted adoption.

The heart of adoption (*huiothesia*) goes beyond its counterpart in Roman law of the legal and social results of merely taking on the name and responsibilities of the new father and family. Adoption in the ancient Mediterranean world neither adequately defined the relational significance of adoption for Paul, nor determined the depth of its

relational function. Though the definitive blessing from God points to having the LORD's name put on them (Num 6:27), this cannot be reduced to the mere sociocultural significance of *name*, as significant as it was in terms of having honor, status and privilege. Having the name of the father/family provides just a limited sense of belonging, which is insufficient if not fragmentary for wholeness in relationship. The heart of adoption for Paul is the irreducible and inseparable bond of intimate relationship together in the whole of God's family (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:15-17). This fulfills the relational significance of God's definitive blessing with the face of his name to "give you peace," that is, bring change and establish a new relationship (*siym*) in wholeness together (*shalom*, Num 6:26), which Paul illuminated theologically as in Christ (Eph 2:14-22).

The relational outcome of adoption that Paul defined is the *relational belonging* of wholeness in God's family. Relational belonging is not to be confused with mere membership or collective identity, yet that is what became Israel's experience (Lev 25:55; Deut 7:6). Belonging can signify possession, relationship or ontology, or all three. However, whereas Israel had been redeemed to belong as God's treasured possession, circumcision and observance of other purification and ceremonial laws became the markers of membership and national identity over the primacy of covenant relationship (cf. Ex 19:5)—thus renegotiating the covenant of love by prioritizing the quantity of their population and land (Deut 7:7-8; Gen 17:7-8). Perhaps in a secondary sense this practice of identity markers can be considered necessary for both gaining and maintaining membership in God's people. Yet, this would not be sufficient to account for Paul's primary concern against reductionism of God's relational whole by human terms and shaping (cf. Rom 2:28-29) and for making conclusive the experiential truth of God's relational whole (cf. his polemics in Gal 2:15ff). It would also be insufficient for the depth and meaning that Paul had in mind for relational belonging as the relational outcome of being God's family in Christ (cf. Rom 7:4; 9:3-5). Their practice reduced the issue of belonging from the primacy of relationship in *being* God's own people to the human terms and shaping of human contextualization, albeit with the designation of God's name. Paul was decisive in differentiating their practice because previously he had had such membership and had claimed or achieved those identity markers for himself at the highest level, only to realize their reductionism compared to belonging in whole relationship together (Phil 3:4-8; Gal 1:13-16a).

Moreover, further illustrations of reductionism in human contextualization must be distinguished from Paul's meaning of belonging, whose intensity of meaning deepens in Paul's whole theology. What determines this relational belonging for Paul is neither the limited participation commonly found in voluntary associations during Paul's time, nor the measured engagement of family obligation (*opheilo*) characterizing kinship groups in the Mediterranean world. Human contextualization is unable to define or determine the relational function of belonging without losing wholeness in relationship together. This relational belonging is determined entirely by transformed relationships (cf. *siym* in God's blessing), the relationships necessary for wholeness together in likeness to the relational ontology of the whole of God (Gal 3:26-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11; Eph 4:24).

**What are these transformed relationships constituting the relational belonging in whole relationship, which would fulfill the inherent human need and resolve the human problem?**

Transformed relationships by necessity involve both redemptive change (Gal 4:5; Rom 6:4) and redemptive reconciliation (Eph 2:14-16). This directly engages the sin of reductionism of human ontology and function. In Paul's theological forest, the relational dynamic of God's ontology and function embodied by the face of Christ fully engages, redeems and transforms the reductionism of human ontology and function, whether in its individual or collective self-autonomy, self-determination, self-justification or in its repercussions on others (Eph 2:1-10). This dynamic is contrary to engaging in the exchange process (*quid pro quo*) of human contextualization, that measures human ontology and function on the merits of what persons do/have and ranks persons in a comparative process according to their more-or-less assets, with the consequence that persons are structured together in stratified relationships and embedded (if not enslaved) in systems of inequality. In this opposing process is the relational consequence of the sin of reductionism and its counter-relational work, which constitutes the human condition. In contrast to and conflict with human contextualization, the whole of God's relational context and process of grace relationally responds to the human condition with the relational involvement of (*agape*) family love necessary for the redemptive change and redemptive reconciliation constituting the transformed relationships to be God's whole family.

In these theological dynamics to wholeness, the relational involvement of God's relational response of grace can be described as irreplaceable engagement in the *process of equalization* for all human ontology and function. This equalizing process is basic to Paul's theological anthropology and crucial for the experiential truth of persons' relational belonging in whole relationship together. That is to say, the transformed relationships determining relational belonging are equalized persons relationally involved in equalized relationships—persons neither defined by more-less distinctions from human contextualization, nor determined by function in stratified relationships (Eph 2:11-13).

Transformed relationships, however, are not only equalized relationships. Equalized relationships by themselves are necessary but not sufficient to constitute wholeness in relationship together—specifically in relational likeness to the whole of God. The relationship of God within the Godhead, embodied and prayed for by Christ, that is constituted for us to “have access in one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18), is not for us to be equalized with God in relationship. The relational significance of “access” (*prosagoge*) is to bring near (*prosago*) in face-to-face relationship together (cf. Eph 3:12). Even though Moses had face-to-face interaction with God (Num 12:6-8), it was not sufficient for the sustained relational involvement signifying the depth of relational belonging from whole relationship together (2 Cor 3:7-18). The inner-out transformation (*metamorphoo*) critical to transform relationships involves by necessity this openness of whole ontology and function to each other face to face, which constitutes the relational process of hearts coming together in relationship to become “a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2:22; cf. 1 Cor 3:16). This inner-out relational process of hearts opening to each other and coming together is definitive of intimacy. Therefore, transformed relationships are both equalized relationships and intimate relationships, and their conjoint function is necessary and sufficient to constitute wholeness in relationship together. These are the



irreducible and nonnegotiable relationships which determine relational belonging in God's family as his very own daughters and sons. Nothing less and no substitutes defined and determined the relational outcome of adoption for Paul.

As adoption becomes a theological given for the whole in Paul's theology, this raises a functional issue about how far and deep his intensity of meaning for relational belonging must be taken and needs to be for congruence in our relationships together. Paul, himself, gave the appearance of inconsistency or even contradiction in the matter of equalized relationships. While, on the one hand, he clearly established equalized relationships between Jews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-16)—and redressed Peter for reinforcing this inequality in stratified relationships—on the other hand, Paul appeared ambiguous or even complicit, for example, about the inequality of women and slaves in stratified relationships, whether in the church or in the world. With the definitive relationship of belonging from adoption to define persons and determine their ontology and function, can women and slaves belong as full members, daughters and sons of God's family? The theological answer for Paul is clearly yes, and the functional answer is also affirmative but needs clarification.

When Paul provided the functional clarity for the gospel in Galatians, part of his clarity involved the relational outcome of adoption (Gal 3:26; 4:4-7). The function of God's children emerged in the transformed relationships from baptism in Christ, that is, dying to the old and rising in the new (3:27; 5:6; 6:15; cf. Rom 6:4). Their transformed relationships together was functionally clarified in what is commonly perceived as a baptismal formula (Gal 3:28). I suggest this is Paul's relational language for the necessary function of the transformed relationships together which is conclusive of the relational outcome from adoption into God's family, and therefore which is inclusive of any and all who "belong to Christ" (3:29). This notably includes those in the pairings highlighted (Jew-Gentile, slave-free, male-female), which go beyond merely pairs of opposites for Paul.<sup>6</sup>

These are a summary account (not exhaustive) of reduced human ontology and function which construct false human distinctions to stereotype persons for stratified human relations; Paul later stated a variation of this summary in Colossians 3:11 (though such differences are used to dispute his authorship). Whatever human distinctions are highlighted, the relational consequence is fragmented relationships, not whole relationships together. This was clearly exposed by Paul in Corinthians (e.g., 1 Cor 3:21-22; 4:6-7). Therefore, for Paul anything less and any substitutes for the conjoint function of equalized and intimate relationships would not be congruent with the transformed relationships together necessary to constitute relational belonging in God's family. Nor would human terms and shaping of relationships be compatible to wholeness together in likeness of the whole of God—to which Paul illuminated being restored in his variation of this summary (*anakainoo*, "being renewed to the original condition of the image of its creator," Col 3:10-11).

In the whole of Paul's practice and the whole in his theology, relational belonging is irreducible for any persons (regardless of human distinction) and is nonnegotiable to the prevailing aspects or surrounding influences of human contextualization. The false human distinctions are a product of human constructs which have displaced God's

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<sup>6</sup> J. Louis Martyn perceives these as pairs of opposites in the same way as the elements of the cosmos are pairs of opposites. *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (London: T & T Clark, 1997), 138-40.

created design and purpose for human ontology and function (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7; 2 Cor 5:5,16; Eph 2:10). These human constructs, terms and shaping are the dynamics involved in reductionism of the gospel. In Paul's fight against reductionism and for the whole gospel, his polemic includes his personal experience of being redeemed from his own reductionism and transformed in Christ to be made whole (*sozo*) for *pleroma* soteriology. It is this whole of Paul and his witness that is basic to his polemic (e.g., Gal 6:14). Thus, in Galatians, when his testimony prefaces his second summary statement both for the whole gospel and against reductionism (the first is Gal 5:6)—“For neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything; but a new creation is everything” (6:15)—this is not only theological discourse for Paul but equally important his experiential truth. In changing from reduced ontology and function to whole ontology and function, Paul's whole person grasped from inner out that relational belonging in God's family is neither partial to persons nor amenable to human contextualization. Thus, any form of reductionism cannot constitute God's relational whole for Paul; nor can it signify the whole gospel or represent the wholeness of Christ as his church family (cf. Eph 1:22-23).

Any other human distinction could have been inserted in his summary statements. By the very nature of God's relational whole, reductionism simply cannot define and determine relational belonging in God's family; and by the nature of reductionism's counter-relational work, it is always in conflict with whole relationship together. Therefore, Paul deeply understood in human relations that women most notably, followed by slaves, were most vulnerable to be subject to reduced ontology and function in subordinate relational positions. In the new creation, the whole of Paul could be in face-to-face relationship together with women and slaves, among others, only on the basis of transformed relationships both equalized and intimate. What defined and determined Paul's ontology and function also unequivocally defined and determined their ontology and function in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, regardless of their situations and circumstances in the surrounding context. While the latter conditions may still exist for them, Paul is emphatic that these do not and should not be the determinants for their ontology and function. This discussion will be extended and clarified in the next chapter.

The relational dynamic of adoption involves the integrated outcome of belonging as possession, relationship and ontology. Those adopted 'in Christ' now belong to God, who “put his seal on us” (2 Cor 1:22), that is, the identification of ownership as God's possession (*peripoiesis*, Eph 1:14). More importantly for Paul, in distinguishing God's relational whole from the human shaping of reductionism, those adopted into God's family also relationally “belong to Christ,” the *pleroma* of God, thus relationally belonging to the whole of God (belong rendered in the genitive case, 1 Cor 3:23; Gal 3:29; 4:4-7). Equally important in this relational dynamic, since “Christ belongs to God” both relationally and ontologically, by relationally belonging (not ontologically) to Christ those adopted also relationally belong to each other as well as belong ontologically to each other in wholeness together (1 Cor 3:22; 12:15-16; Rom 7:4; 12:5, belong also rendered by *ginomai*, verb of becoming, and *eimi*, verb to be).

What unfolds in this theological dynamic 'in Christ' is the integrated outcome of belonging. The emphasis of the theology of belonging for Paul in his theological forest is on relational belonging and ontological belonging to signify the new covenant relationship and the new creation. Relational belonging dynamically interacts with

ontological belonging in the new creation, and their interaction is the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology in being saved to wholeness in God's family together (2 Cor 3:18; 5:16-17; Col 3:10-11). Moreover, conjoined with the integrated outcome of belonging, the relational outcome of adoption in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes (the theological dynamic of wholeness) is the relational ontology and identity of the new creation of God's family as the church (Eph 1:22-23).

## Theology of Ontological Identity

In Paul's theological forest, *pleroma* Christology is God's relational dynamic of grace and *agape* relational involvement from which emerges conclusively *pleroma* soteriology. Paul's antecedents from the Jesus tradition—the new covenant in Christ's blood (1 Cor 11:2,25), being saved by Christ's death and resurrection (1 Cor 15:2-4)—are illuminated further and deeper by Paul with epistemic humility (cf. 1 Cor 11:23; Gal 1:12; Eph 3:3-4). Christ's death for Paul was less about the sacrifice for only saving from sin, as necessary as that was, and more about his relational involvement saving *to*. The miracle of the resurrection for Paul certainly involved the historical fact, physical reality and propositional truth of Christ rising from death, but even more significant deeply involved the new covenant relationship of wholeness together with God as his new creation family (1 Cor 15:17-19). To Paul, faith as trust functioning in reciprocal relational response to Christ is not futile because the face of Christ is wholly involved relationally for the redemptive means of being saved from reductionism to fulfill God's relational purpose of being saved to God's relational whole together. Those who belong to Christ have risen together with him to become "his body, the *pleroma* of him who *pleroo* [completes, fulfills] all in *pasin*, the whole" (Eph 1:23; cf. Rom 12:4-5).

This relational outcome is rooted in the fulfillment of Jesus' formative family prayer for those who belong to him: "I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one" (*teleioo* from *teleios*, i.e., whole, God's relational whole, Jn 17:23). Thus, the definitive relational outcome of relationally belonging to the *pleroma* of God is the ontology of God's new creation family. And the ontological identity of this new creation 'already' is the church family, "so that the world may believe...may know..." (17:21, 23; cf. Eph 3:5-12).

In congruence with the relational dynamic resulting in adoption, the ontology and function of the church family must always be in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes for whole relationship together, as Paul made unequivocal (Eph 4:1-6, 13-16, 22-24). As these theological dynamics of wholeness, belonging, and ontological identity converge in Paul's theological forest, however, the dynamic of reductionism and its counter-relational work are always seeking to redefine the qualitative-relational process constituting their theological interaction and to reshape, reconstruct or otherwise fragment the relational outcome emerging from their theological integration. This conflict for Paul necessitates distinguishing the truth of the whole gospel clearly from a different gospel (Gal 1:6-12). In his polemic for this conflict, Paul made definitive two critical and necessary conditions to constitute the only gospel, which he implies in Gal 3:28:

1. While the incarnation embodied the *pleroma* of God in human contextualization, the whole of Jesus and his gospel are incongruent and incompatible with any human shaping. Culture in some particular ways can give secondary human characteristics of form to the gospel but is unable to determine the substantive shape of the gospel itself. Human culture in general is always subject to the sin of reductionism, and thus can never be assumed to be neutral. In Paul's examples, reductionist distinctions, stratified contexts and systems of inequality are the primary functions of human constructs which impose human shaping on the gospel (cf. 1 Cor 4:6-7).
2. The only shape of the gospel is *whole*, which by its nature must be determined solely by the whole of Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, who by God's initiative (grace) alone relationally involved (*agape*) the whole of God for the irreducible and nonnegotiable whole relationship together of God's new creation family.

The reciprocal relational means for experiencing this definitive whole relationship together as God's family was also at the center of this conflict for Paul. He grasped that this issue is ongoing unless understood in its proper context. In Galatians, the conflict of relational means appears to be between "the law" and "faith" (Gal 3:1-26). Yet, this would not only be an oversimplification of Paul's polemic but also a reduction of the law as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship, as well as a reduction of faith as the necessary relational response to God's promise of covenant relationship together. Paul put the issue into its full perspective.

Galatians represents Paul sharing the functional clarity for the whole gospel to address their current issue, situation and related matters in order to take them beyond the human contextualization of reductionism (not only of Judaism) to the further and deeper contextualization of God—the whole of God's relational context and process embodied in the whole of Jesus. Within God's relational context and process, the law neither reduces nor renegotiates the covenant relationship. In fact, as God's terms for relationship together, the law is wholly compatible with the covenant and even is a vital key for the emergence of whole relationship together. That is, not as a functional key to fulfill the promise (3:21), the law serves rather as a heuristic framework (*paidegogos*) for both learning our human condition and discovering the source of its whole solution (3:10, 22-24; cf. Rom 3:19-20).

Paul's focus on the law addressed the condition of human ontology in two vital ways, both of which perceived the law as God's desires and terms for covenant relationship:

1. The law unequivocally exposes reduced human ontology and the insufficiency and relational consequence of all human effort, notably for self-determination and self-justification, which are critical to accept in any response to God for relationship.
2. Moreover, the law also clearly identifies the whole human ontology necessary for the relational involvement in reciprocal response to the whole of God, which is congruent with God's desires and compatible with God's terms for relationship

together (Gal 5:14; 6:2; cf. Jesus on the law, Mt 5:43-48, and James on faith, Jas 2:8).

When Paul refers to “the law of Christ,” this is God’s law/desires constituted by Jesus’ whole ontology and function in the incarnation (cf. 1 Cor 9:21b), who takes the law of Moses further and deeper into the whole of God’s relational context and process. By vulnerably embodying God’s relational ontology and function, the *pleroma* of God is the hermeneutical key to interpreting God’s law/desires and the functional key for its practice in relationship together (cf. Mt 5:21ff), which by necessity requires whole ontology and function (as Jesus implied about practice of the law in likeness of the Father, Mt 5:48).

This became the critical issue for Paul because human ontology is inexorably embedded in the sin of reductionism; and this enslavement needs to be redeemed for human ontology to be freed to become whole. Yet, whole human ontology is constituted only by the redemptive relational dynamic of adoption for relationship together in God’s family. Reduced human ontology is incapable of a response which would be compatible to Jesus for this relationship together. In Paul’s full perspective, the issue underlying the law is nothing less than the issue of human ontology. Therefore, his discourse on the law challenges existing assumptions on human ontology to expose reduced human ontology, while his discourse on faith assumes the definitive ontology which illuminates the whole human ontology and function needed for relationship together in God’s family—and which also fulfills the law of Christ (Gal 5:6; 6:2).

The reciprocal relational means both necessary to receive and compatible to respond to Jesus for whole relationship together is the issue for Paul, which then necessarily involves human ontology. When human effort is relinquished and replaced by the relational response of faith, Paul adds for functional clarity that we are no longer under the *paidagogos* of the law (3:25). Paul is only referring to the law’s *paidagogos* function. This does not mean that the law (as God’s desires and terms for covenant relationship) is finished and no longer functional for the practice of faith (5:14; 6:2; cf. Rom 3:31; 1 Cor 9:21). Paul in truth wants the law to be fulfilled by human persons, and he may confuse us by stating that the law cannot be fulfilled by human effort (Gal 3:10; 5:3). By focusing on the relational involvement of *agape* (5:14), however, he makes definitive how the law is or is not fulfilled. By necessity, this engages the two conditions of human ontology (whole or reduced), and Paul differentiates their respective involvement with the law (5:6; 6:15). Whole human ontology functions from inner out in the relational response of trust to be vulnerably involved with God and others in family love—just as Christ functioned (cf. Jn 15:9-12)—thus reciprocally responding to God’s desires and terms for relationship together. Reduced human ontology, in contrast, functions from outer in to try to fulfill the quantitative aspects of the law, thus renegotiating God’s terms for relationship by human terms shaped from human contextualization. This reductionism essentially redefined relationship with God to mere relationship with the law, which then disembodies the law from the whole of God and God’s desires for relationship together. For Paul, the underlying issue between function by law and function by faith is clearly between reduced ontology and function and whole ontology and function. The relational consequence of the former is not only the inability to fulfill the law but enslavement to the reductionist futility of human effort (Gal 5:3-4).

The relational outcome of the latter is to receive and respond to Christ for whole relationship together with nothing less and no substitutes.

**What functionally emerges in particular from whole relationship together with Christ?** As the relational connection with Christ is completed by the reciprocal means of relational trust, the following ontological and relational changes take effect. From relational involvement in the process of redemptive change in being “baptized into Christ” (*eis*, dynamic relational movement to the person of Christ), the relational outcome is the new identity of who we are and whose we are (Gal 3:26-27). For those who now relationally “belong to Christ” (3:29), Paul clarifies this new identity (4:1-7). The primary identity of who we are emerging from the relational outcome of adoption involves both of the following: (1) the ontological change from inner out essentially of a minor enslaved to reductionism (4:3) to the ontology of sons/daughters (4:6a; 3:26) by the redemptive relational work of the Son (4:4-5); moreover, the new identity involves (2) the relational change in God’s family from a mere place as minor/slave to the relational position of son/daughter and thus an heir (4:7; 3:29). These definitive changes together clearly constitute the new identity not only of *who* we are but conjointly *whose* we are.

Given the new identity of those relationally belonging to Christ—signifying the ontology and relational changes of who and whose we are—nothing less and no substitutes can define our ontology or determine our function. This new identity does not emerge from merely belonging to God’s family theologically, or by the mere certainty of any truth-claims. Nor does it emerge from merely having faith/belief(s), or by mere membership and participation in a church—both of which can be engaged by reduced ontology and function. As Paul made unequivocal, “so you are no longer...but are...”, that is, *eimi*, verb of existence here, not a mere copula, in second person singular, thus definitive for each person belonging to Christ.

Moreover, when Paul said “no longer” (*ouketi*), he also means no further, not any more and not again in reference to previous or other identities (Gal 4:8-9). This points to the reality in human life that there are multiple sources/inputs which go into the ongoing process of identity formation. Identity is not a static condition defining who persons are, or a singular signifier determining what and how persons are. Various influences, both past and present, shape human identity, making it fluid, transient, ambiguous, elusive or even amorphous. Therefore, what is necessary for identity not to be fragmented—which defines and determines persons by reductionism—is for the primary identity to be rooted and ongoingly involved in the definitive whole in order for the basic core of the person to be made whole from inner out. This inner-out core is the person’s ontology, whose function from inner out is signified only by the heart for the involvement necessary to live whole. It is this ongoing involvement of the person’s whole ontology and function from inner out that constitutes the ontological identity, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable to other sources/inputs/influences having secondary parts in a person’s identity formation. This process points to Jesus making definitive that those rooted in and ongoingly involved with him have wholeness despite facing the world’s reductionism (*thlipsis*, Jn 16:33).

For Paul, righteousness is the relational function of the heart which lives not merely by faith but in whole ontology and function in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Col 3:10; Eph 4:24). This inner-out function of the heart signifies ontological identity, the primary identity necessary to have wholeness despite the

presence of reductionism (Col 3:15). Thus ontological identity is definitive of who the person is and the determinant of what and how the person is. And the integrity of identity is rooted in a person's ontology, which needs to be whole or its integrity will be fragmented (cf. Paul's discourse about the church at Corinth). As Paul summarized in Galatians 6:15, any function of reductionism is without any ontological significance of existence (*eimi*); only the new creation exists in ontological wholeness. Also, the credibility of identity is rooted in a person's righteousness, which must not be fragmentary (cf. Peter's *hypokrisis*, Gal 2:14) or it will lose both its credibility and the integrity of wholeness in identity (cf. Jesus' expectation of righteousness as whole ontology and function, Mt 5:20). The whole of Jesus' identity in the incarnation was based on the integrity of his ontology and the credibility of his righteousness, which persons could count on and trust in relationship together. The image and likeness of his whole ontology and function is *what* we are transformed to (2 Cor 3:18) and *who* we become (Col 2:10; 3:10), and thus *how* we function (Eph 4:24; Col 3:15; cf. Ps 71:15). Therefore, anything less and any substitutes defining our ontology and determining our function are a reduction of our wholeness together, a fragmentation of the ontological and relational whole of who we are and whose we are in Christ.

Moreover, as our identity reveals the underlying roots or heart of how we define our ontology and determine our function, our primary identity also signifies the shape of our gospel—if it is whole or reduced. Paul's gospel and thus his own identity were not defined and determined by what he had and/or did (both past and present, cf. Phil 3:7-9) or even by his current weaknesses (2 Cor 12:7-9). In his polemic for the gospel and against reductionism, Paul made definitive both the ontological and relational changes which must by nature (*dei*) constitute the truth of the whole gospel and its relational outcome. It must by the nature of who and what Jesus embodied as “the image of God” and relationally involved of the whole of God's ontology and function “in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:4,6). Anything less or any substitute is not the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of wholeness, but a different gospel of reductionism.

Putting together these aspects of Paul's *synesis* (whole understanding, Eph 3:4, cf. Col 1:9; 2:2) makes clear that the whole of his witness and the whole in his theology were deeply rooted in *pleroma* Christology; this is how the relational Paul emerged from the historical Paul to constitute the theological Paul. The experiential truth of the *pleroma* of Christ's whole ontology and function by necessity involved *pleroma* soteriology making functional ‘already’ the relational outcome of being saved to God's new creation family. In the complex theological dynamics of Paul's theological forest, God's whole family in transformed relationships together is the gospel of the glory of Christ, the gospel of wholeness in the face of Christ's whole ontology and function, the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11)—all emerging for Paul in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, in Paul's forest the theology of ontological identity emerges only from the theological dynamic of belonging, which are inseparably integrated and rooted in the theology of wholeness.

This wholeness is the primary identity that defined Paul's ontology and determined his function (the historical Paul notwithstanding), and the identity by which all who relationally belong to Christ need to be contextualized to be whole, both as persons individually and collectively. The relational outcome of God's whole family

together is the ontological identity of conjointly who we are and whose we are. Whose we are is always the determinant of who we are, never the converse or there is reductionism. And *what* whose we are determines for who we are is always about family, not about the individual. Whole persons have been set free by Christ not for self-autonomy but are freed to be whole in whose we are, that is, in likeness of the whole of God (Gal 5:1, 13-14; Eph 4:24-25; Col 3:15; cf. 1 Cor 8:1). Wholeness for the person is contingent on wholeness in relationship together, thus the whole person is inseparable from and indispensable for God's new creation family—which in Paul's theological forest is the church, "the *pleroma* of Christ who makes all whole in the whole" (Eph 1:23; cf. Rom 12:4-5). This is the only relational outcome from the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15).

This whole ontological identity is Paul's prayer for the church (Eph 3:18-19) and his desires for the church (Col 2:2-3) and his purpose of the church (Eph 4:12-13)—all of which echoes and helps fulfill Jesus' formative family prayer for his family (Jn 17:20-26). Indeed, nothing less and no substitutes.



## Chapter 9 Paul's Theological Forest – Part 3

**All who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God.**

Rom 8:14

As Paul's theological forest is being completed, how these theological dynamics are completed and in what they are made complete become the central focus in Paul's theology. Moreover, the inherent human need and problem—as identified also by neuroscience to introduce this section on Paul's theology (chap. 5)—continues to be central in Paul's theological dialogue (discourse in relational context). It remains central because his theology was always first his experiential truth: his experiential truth from and subsequent to the Damascus road; the unmistakable experiential truth for the human condition, which was vulnerably revealed only for whole relationship together; thus that which constituted nothing less and no substitutes of the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the inherent human relational need and problem. Since the historical Paul became the relational Paul, despite his role as both a Jew and an apostle of Christ the theological Paul emerged focused on God's thematic relational response to make whole all human persons, of whom Paul considered himself to be "the least" (1 Cor 15:9; Eph 3:8).

Paul, therefore, has been focused on and concerned for communicating theology that illuminates the good news and constitutes the relational outcome of whole relationship together—perhaps also articulating their doctrinal clarity but not formulating a systematic theology. While these concerns involved the historical Paul, they emerged from the relational Paul who constituted the theological Paul in the relational epistemic process with the whole of God. This vulnerable involvement signified the relational Paul qualitatively determining the functional significance of the theological Paul, thus to grasp Paul's theology also implies a contingency to understand the relational Paul. In this relational epistemic process, what emerged was not his theological speculation and theory from bottom-up but God's vulnerable self-disclosure from top-down in the whole of God's relational context and process, distinct from human contextualization and terms. What unfolded in Paul's theological systemic framework and integrated his theological forest was the relational embodiment of the *pleroma* of God (Col 1:19; 2:9-10). In the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, the theological Paul (unified with the relational Paul) was restored to whole knowledge and understanding in the relational context and process of God's communicative action, specifically, as relationally embodied by the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6) and relationally extended by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-13). The relational outcome was the wholeness of Paul who was taken from partial knowledge and understanding to whole knowledge and understanding to constitute the whole in his theology. This included both understanding signified as the grasp of meaning (not its density but its intensity, cf. Eph 3:18-19) and wisdom signified as the understanding of the whole, God's relational whole (cf. *synesis*, Eph 3:2-4; Col 1:9).

Since Paul's theology was first his experiential truth of this good news, theology for Paul was always inseparable from function and can never be reduced to conventional

theological discourse. The relational discourse, jointly theological and functional, in Paul's letters put together (*syniemi* for *synesis*) the theological basis for the truth of the whole gospel (Eph 3:4-6; Col 2:2-3), by which he also engaged in the deconstruction of ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism (e.g., Gal 1:6-7, 11-12; 5:6; 6:15; Rom 2:28-29; Col 2:4,8-10; 3:10-11) and, when possible, their reconstruction/transformation to be made whole (e.g., 1 Cor 3:21-22; Gal 2:11-14; Phlm; cf. Eph 2:14-18). The relational outcome of Paul's theological engagement is the integrated dynamics of the theology of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity—the relational outcome 'already' and the relational conclusion 'not yet' in the whole of God's relational context and process vulnerably embodied by the Son in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology, and ongoingly being completed by the Spirit.

Paul's only concern, both theologically and functionally, is for the irreducible embodiment of the *pleroma* of God to be further relationally embodied and extended in nonnegotiable ontology and function for the inherent human need to be fulfilled and the human problem to be resolved. This further embodiment is the whole ontology and function of those who relationally belong to Christ. In the experiential truth of Paul's theology, how does the relational progression of God's relational dynamic of grace and *agape* involvement become embodied from the *pleroma* of God to the *pleroma* of Christ and continue in its eschatological trajectory for the relational conclusion of the gospel of wholeness? And according to the experiential truth of the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology, how do persons belonging to Christ—by necessity both as individual persons and as persons together in God's family—engage in this relational progression *with* God and thus participate *in* the whole of God's life to the relational completion of whole relationship together?

This qualitative process of embodiment and its relational process of participation deeply involve the theological dynamics which are wholly integrated in Paul's theological forest to *pleroo* the communicative word of God—thereby illuminating the embodied *pleroma* of God who is relationally from God, and now in relational extension for God (cf. Col 1:25; 2:9-10).

### ***Pleroma Pneumatology***

A prevailing presence in the systemic framework of Paul's theology which pervades his theological forest is *pneuma* (spirit). The presence of *pneuma* is in both ontology and function, both in God's ontology and function (1 Cor 2:10-11; 3:16; 2 Cor 3:6,17; Rom 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16) and for human ontology and function (1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:6,18; 7:1; Rom 8:11; Eph 2:18,22). What is *pneuma* for God and what is *pneuma* for human person?

In terms of God's ontology and function, *pneuma* is not *what* but *who*, though Paul does not specifically call the Spirit a person. Yet Paul implies personhood for the Spirit by identifying the Spirit as having a will to decide and using it (*boulomai*, 1 Cor 12:11), who also can be "grieved" (*lypeo*, afflicted with sorrow, distressed, mournful, Eph 4:30; cf. Heb 10:29), and, moreover, who bears witness to us of our family status (Rom 8:16). The Spirit's grief, for example, is over not being engaged in reciprocal

relationship together (cf. Eph 2:22), which is not an anthropomorphism but signifies the whole of God's being and relational nature. This identification is the *who* of a person, the person of the Spirit, who is also vulnerably present and relationally involved. This does not imply, however, that Paul was a trinitarian in the later sense, though his theology certainly provides definitive basis for trinitarian theology.

The doctrine of the Trinity emerged in the fourth century as a response to theological conflict and reductionism. Arius specifically taught that Jesus was subordinate to God in substance (*ousia*) and was created (begotten by the Father). The Council of Nicea (the Nicene Creed in 325) countered that Jesus was begotten (i.e., generated, not created) from the substance of the Father, of the same substance (*homoousios*) with God. In further response to another form of Arianism (from Eunomius: divine substance is unbegotten and belongs only to the Father), the Cappadocian fathers (Basil, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, between 358-380) formulated the distinction between the same substance of God and the different persons (*hypostasis*) of God, thus establishing the doctrine of the Trinity: one God existing in three persons.<sup>1</sup>

Essentially, from the fourth century into the twenty-first, we have observed one aspect of God emphasized over another (e.g., the oneness of God or the divine threeness), and some aspect of God reduced (e.g., God's substance [*ousia*] or the persons/personhood [*hypostasis*] of God), as well as redefined or ignored (e.g., as "begotten" or the relationality of the Trinity). If not in the theology most certainly in function, these perceptions and interpretations profoundly affect how we define God's ontology and function—notably in the relational nature of the whole of God. I suggest that much of this theological difficulty can be resolved or prevented if trinitarian theology emerged first and foremost from *pleroma* Christology, and thus could better grasp the whole in Paul's theology needed for the whole knowledge and understanding of any theology of the whole of God.

Since Paul was no trinitarian, his purpose and responsibility to *pleroo* the word of God was not to theologially clarify the Trinity or to develop theological concepts like *homoousios*, *hypostasis* and *perichoresis*. His purpose was more functional and distinctly relational in order to make definitive the gospel as whole without any reductionism. Within his purpose, Paul instead epistemologically clarified the whole of God and hermeneutically corrected human shaping and construction of theological cognition, challenging theological assumptions which were either limiting or reductionist. Thus Paul indeed took Judaism's monotheism beyond its limited knowledge and understanding, and he extended the Jesus tradition into the depths of the whole of God. In making relationally functional the *pleroma* of God, Paul focused also in making relationally definitive the whole of God in the relational presence and relational work of the Spirit.

In *pleroma* Christology of Paul's theological forest, salvation was constituted by Christ and completed in Christ for the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. *Pleroma* soteriology is the relational act solely by Christ and the relational outcome is the function solely of relationship with Christ (Rom 6:5-11); and both of these are constituted

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<sup>1</sup> J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 2004), 252-69. Catherine Mowry LaCugna, ed., *Freeing Theology: the Essentials of Theology in Feminist Perspective* (San Francisco: Harper, 1993) 85-87. Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), 7-8.

in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 6:11; 12:13; 2 Cor 1:22; 3:6,17; Eph 1:13; 2:18,22; 1 Tim 3:16; cf. Jn 1:32-33; Lk 4:1). In the whole of God's ontology and function, *pneuma* is person, the Holy Spirit, and not to be reduced to a power, also noted by Paul (1 Cor 2:4; Rom 15:13,19). There is a dynamic interaction for Paul between the embodied *pleroma* of God and the person of the Spirit—that is, the Spirit as the functional cohort of Jesus who shares in, even constitutes, and now completes the relational work of the Son, whose embodiment (prior to and after the cross) fulfills the relational response of grace from the Father (Gal 4:4-6; Rom 8:9b-11). This is the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* (body) of the *pleroma* of God, which is vital for understanding the whole of God's ontology in its depth, as Paul claimed for the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10-11) and Jesus promised about the Spirit (Jn 16:12-15). Paul understood that *soma* without *pneuma* can be confused with or reduced to *sarx* (“flesh,” cf. Paul's polemic about the resurrection, 1 Cor 15:35-44). In this sense, *pneuma* is also a *what*—distinguished from *who*—that signifies the qualitative depth of God's ontology which is irreducible for God to be God (cf. Phil 3:3 and Jn 4:23-24).

Moreover, the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* is critical for grasping the whole of God's function, as well as understanding God's ontology, in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. *Pneuma* will not allow for the embodied *pleroma* of God to be reduced or renegotiated to anything less than and any substitutes for whole ontology and function. There is indeed mystery involved in this interaction, but for Paul *pneuma* is unequivocally the person of the Spirit. Even though Paul had whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) from the Spirit, he did not claim to totally understand this dynamic (1 Tim 3:16).

This dynamic interaction with the Spirit likewise points to the embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23). *Pneuma* is the person who constitutes also those who belong to Christ (Rom 8:9). In cooperative reciprocal relationship as well with these human persons, the Spirit—who functions as the relational replacement of the Son, as Jesus promised (Jn 14:16-17, 26; 15:26; cf. Eph 1:13)—constitutes persons (both individually and together) in whole ontology and function, that is, the qualitative ontology and relational function from inner out in likeness of the *pneuma* of God's whole ontology and function (2 Cor 3:17-18; Rom 8:11, 14-17). For Paul, in other words, the Spirit is not a mere Object of theological discourse but the experiential truth of subject-*theos*, who is present in us and relationally involved with us for relationship together as God's whole family (“dwells,” *oikeo* from *oikos* and its cognates in reference to family, Rom 8:11, 14-16; 1 Cor 3:16; Eph 2:22). Paul goes beyond merely the Spirit's agency (e.g., power, instrumentality) to make definitive the depth of the Spirit as Subject's *agape* relational involvement as the whole of God (Rom 5:5). Importantly, Paul understands that the person of the Spirit is Jesus' relational replacement for the continued involvement necessary to complete the relational work Jesus constituted. When Paul speaks specifically of “the Spirit of Christ” (Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; cf. Acts 16:7), this is Paul's shorthand-relational language implying the Spirit's relational replacement and extension of Jesus, whose further involvement is indispensable for extending the qualitative process of embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ and making functional its relational process of participation in the whole of God's life and family together (cf. 1 Cor 6:14-15a; Rom 8:11; Eph 1:23).

**What emerges from this reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit?** Paul first addresses what does not emerge when relationship with the Spirit becomes incompatible. The issue of incompatibility, incongruity or discontinuity with the Spirit (as with Jesus and with the whole of God) hinges on theological anthropology and our assumptions about the human person. This specifically involves defining the person by what one does/has and, on this basis, engaging in relationships with both God and each other, individually and together as church. Paul exposed such reductionist assumptions of theological anthropology in the church at Corinth (1 Cor 3:1-4; 4:6-7). This reductionism directly fragments the person from the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma*, thus leaving *soma* without the quality of *pneuma* to then be confused with or reduced to *sarx*: “I could not speak to you as *pneuma* people but rather as people of *sarx*, as infants in Christ *without identity formation as whole persons*” (1 Cor 3:1, italics inserted). *Sarx* (and its cognates *sarkikos* and *sarkinos*) signifies reduced human ontology and function in Paul’s discourse, whereas *pneuma* is inseparable from *soma* in the whole ontology and function of the person.

This reduction of *soma* to *sarx* is the issue in Paul’s polemic when he made the ambiguous claim: “Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself” (1 Cor 6:18). Paul’s focus goes beyond sexual immorality and is not implying that all other sins are inconsequential for human ontology and function. He is focused on the sin of reductionism that fragments *soma* from *pneuma* to reduce a human person’s ontology and function to that signified by *sarx* (6:16-17). The consequence is reductionist embodiment diminishing the whole person, which further includes the relational consequence of fragmenting the embodiment of whole relationship together (6:14-15, 19-20). Essentially, Paul argues rather that every sin a person commits is the sin of reductionism, thus against the embodiment of wholeness. Whole human ontology and function is the inseparable embodiment of both *soma* and *pneuma* by the Spirit, which is irreducibly and nonnegotiable embodied together by and with the Spirit in God’s whole family (1 Cor 12:13).

In Paul’s theological systemic framework and theological forest, the Spirit functions to bridge the quantitative of *bios* (including all creation) with the qualitative of *zoe*. Even more than bridge, the Spirit integrates the quantitative into the qualitative to embody irreducible wholeness and the nonnegotiable embodiment of God’s whole (2 Cor 3:18; Col 1:20; 2:9-10; 3:10-11,15; Rom 8:18-23). This is why cosmology and theological anthropology converge in Paul’s theological systemic framework, and how they are integrated in the theological dynamic of wholeness. Therefore, the Spirit’s person is inseparable from both the whole of God and God’s whole, and the Spirit’s involvement is indispensable for the embodiment of wholeness. Anything less and any substitutes of this whole, either of the Spirit or of human persons, are reductionism for Paul, the sin of reductionism that must always be exposed and its counter-relational work confronted—whatever its form, conditions or assumptions.

In Galatians, Paul extended his polemic against these assumptions reducing theological anthropology and their broader relational consequence for human persons. While the situation in Galatians involved “false believers” (2:4) who were teaching “a different gospel” (1:6) and “confusing you” (1:7), and have “bewitched you” (3:1), the underlying dynamic involved assimilation into human contextualization (3:2-5; 4:8-31). Paul challenged their theological anthropology by framing the issue within the further

and deeper relational context and process embodied by Christ and extended by the Spirit. Here again, the dynamic interaction between the *soma* of the *pleroma* of God and the *pneuma* of the whole of God is inseparable. If fragmented, *soma* becomes confused with or reduced to definitions from human contextualization (“elemental spirits,” *stoicheion*, basic principles, 4:9; cf. Col 2:8,20) and thus shaped by the reduced ontology and function of *sarx* (3:3). Moreover, when fragmented, *pneuma* is reduced to mere Object, at best only in agency to do something or to help us to do something based on the reductionist self-definition of what one does: “Having started with *the person of the Spirit*, are you now *epiteleo* [fully completing your purpose] with *sarx*?”—that is, by human effort in reduced ontology and function (3:3). For Paul, this is incompatible, incongruent and discontinuous with the Spirit (5:16-17; 6:8; cf. 2 Cor 7:1).

The whole of the Spirit is received, experienced and ongoingly engaged in relationship together solely on the basis of our reciprocal relational response and involvement of trust, not on the basis of human effort shaped by human terms from human contextualization (Gal 3:5-14). The latter is consequential for the human person and persons together to be enslaved in a reductionist comparative system of human ontology and function based on quantitative human effort/possessions, thus constructing false human distinctions which relegate persons to stratified relationships together in systems of inequality (3:28; 4:3, 8-9)

This fragmentation can never be whole because the *who* of *Pneuma* is not engaged in relationship together within the whole of God’s relational context and process (5:16,25; Rom 8:5-6; cf. 1 Thes 4:7-8), and because the *what* of *pneuma* is divided from *soma* in dualistic ontology and function characteristic of shaping by *sarx* from human contextualization (cf. the wholeness in 1 Thes 5:23; 2 Cor 7:1). These are the consequences of assimilation into human contextualization and its defining and determining influence by reductionism. For Paul, the dynamic interaction between *pneuma* and *soma* precludes this fragmentation and duality (cf. his claim in Phil 3:3). Throughout his letters, Paul addressed various situations involving moral and ethical issues. Yet, Paul’s readers must understand what Paul is further speaking to and where he is speaking from. As Paul addresses these situations, he goes beyond moral and ethical behavior to speak directly to the underlying and more far-reaching issue in human contextualization: reductionism, exposing reductionism as sin and confronting the sin of reductionism, and its pervasive consequence on human ontology and function. Paul was definitive and decisive about this without being shaped, diminished or minimalized by human terms from human contextualization because with epistemic humility he spoke from God’s relational context in God’s relational process through reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, subject-*theos* (cf. 1 Cor 2:12-16).

### **What does Paul also make definitive as the outcome of reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit?**

What clearly emerges from ongoing relationship together with the Spirit is the functional wholeness that is incompatible, incongruent and discontinuous with reductionism pervading human contextualization, as Paul clarified functionally and theologically (Gal 6:14-16; Rom 8:6). When Paul boasts of the cross of Christ through whom he has been crucified to human contextualization (“to the world,” Gal 6:14), the *soma* of the *pleroma* of God and the *pneuma* of the whole of God are conjoined and resurrected for the embodiment of the new creation. That is, this is the embodiment in

qualitative *zoe* (not quantitative *bios*) and wholeness (“life and peace,” Rom 8:6), in which the *Pneuma* also inseparably dwells in mortal *soma* for whole relationship together as God’s family (Rom 8:11, 14-16; cf. Eph 2:22). The theological dynamics Paul illuminates have only functional significance for this relationship together (Eph 2:18). Apart from the function of relationship and its relational embodiment Paul’s theological clarity has no significance, both to God and to human persons for the fulfillment of the inherent human relational need and the resolution of its relational problem (Eph 2:14-16). The Spirit is present and relationally involved for the whole ontology and function necessary for the ongoing relationship together to be God’s whole—the embodiment as the *pleroma* of Christ ‘already’ in relational progression to its completion in the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Jn 7:37-39).

The Spirit’s relational involvement notably emerges in the resurrection, in which the Spirit’s dynamic interaction also involves us wholly (*soma* and *pneuma*) to be embodied in the new creation (new person, new life, new covenant, Rom 8:11). Involvement together in this relational process is also defined by Paul as being baptized in the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Mt 3:11; Acts 1:5; 11:16). The theological dynamic of baptism is complex and mysterious but the relational process involved is uncomplicated yet rigorous: death to the old and raising of the new (Rom 6:3-8). Being baptized with the Spirit makes functional the redemptive change from reduced ontology and function (consequential of the sin of reductionism) necessary for the emergence of whole ontology and function (cf. Tit 3:5). The relational outcome of this relational process is the redemptive reconciliation of whole persons embodied in relationship together as the new creation family of God (Col 1:19-22; Eph 2:14-22)—“baptized into one body” without false human distinctions from reductionism (1 Cor 12:13). This *zoe*, the embodiment of the new creation, emerges specifically from the relational work of the Spirit (Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6; cf. Jn 6:63; Rom 8:6)—“we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Cor 12:13; cf. Jn 7:38-39). On this basis, Paul declares unequivocally: “Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. . . . For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Rom 8:9,14); furthermore, “no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 12:3). Therefore, the experiential truth of the theological dynamics of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity functionally emerge from reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit.

The dynamic interaction of the Spirit and the *pleroma* of God always constitutes ontology and function in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. Thus, the reciprocal relational involvement by the Spirit is neither with only the human *pneuma* nor with just the human *soma*. Such involvement would create a duality which fragments the person. Human *soma* without *pneuma* is a critical condition because it is a reductionism focused on the outer in that the person cannot distinguish unequivocally from *sarx*, consequently is rendered to the sin of reductionism notably in ontological simulation (as discussed earlier about Paul’s polemic beyond the situation to the underlying reductionism in 1 Cor 6:12-20). Likewise, human *pneuma* apart from involvement of *soma* becomes disembodied, which is also a reductionism focused on a subjective part of a person, not the whole person qualitatively integrated from inner out. The focus of such a person cannot distinguish from subjectivism, esoteric individualism or self-centered separatism—as often found in spiritualism, mysticism and asceticism—thus rendered to the sin of reductionism notably in epistemological illusion (cf. Paul’s polemic about

reductionism in spiritual practice disembodied from the church in 1 Cor 14). The Spirit is relationally involved only with the whole person (*soma* and *pneuma* inseparably) from inner out signified by the function of the heart and embodied in the primacy of relationship together (2 Cor 1:22; Gal 4:6; Rom 5:5; 8:16; Eph 1:17-18; 3:16-19). Additionally, the Spirit's relational involvement with the whole person from inner out includes both the person's mindset (*phroneo*, Rom 8:5) and its basis from the person's perceptual-interpretive framework (*phronema*, 8:6). In this involvement, the Spirit also transforms quantitative *phroneo* and reduced *phronema* and constitutes the qualitative *phroneo* (interpretive lens) in its whole *phronema* (interpretive framework). Both of these changes are necessary for persons to be embodied in qualitative *zoe* and wholeness together, and to function ongoingly in this new embodiment (1 Thes 5:19,23; 2 Thes 2:13; Rom 15:16).

Paul is clear about the experiential truth of the Spirit's relational involvement. Yet, it is important for his readers to understand that the Spirit is involved in reciprocal relationship, not unilateral relationship. By God's relational nature, the Spirit's involvement is reciprocal relational involvement, implying a necessary compatible reciprocal relational response to and involvement with the Spirit—not as contingency limiting God's relational nature but as the condition/terms for relationships together according to God's relational nature (cf. Paul's conditional sense in Phil 2:1; 2 Cor 13:13). Therefore, in relation to the Spirit, Paul always assumes the presence of the Spirit (e.g., 1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Gal 5:5), but he does not assume the Spirit's relational involvement and work, as he implies in his ongoing relational imperative (not moral imperative) "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thes 5:19). Certainly, the Spirit can and does act unilaterally; yet his primary concern and function is in reciprocal relational involvement with persons to extend and complete the whole relationship together constituted by the embodied *pleroma* of God—all of whom the Spirit also raised up together in order to functionally embody the *pleroma* of Christ as Jesus' relational replacement.

This is the depth and breadth of the Spirit's relational involvement with persons belonging to Christ, and the likeness of involvement necessary from those persons to be compatible, congruent and continuous in reciprocal relationship together with the Spirit. The dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes constitutes the ontology and function of the Spirit and can constitute the ontology and function of those in whom the Spirit dwells. In Paul's theological forest, anything less and any substitutes of the Spirit's ontology and function are an immature pneumatology still undeveloped and needing to be whole; anything less and any substitutes of human ontology and function are a deficient theological anthropology, the assumptions of which for Paul always need to be challenged in order to be made whole. That wholeness, however, is made functional solely by the relational dynamic of *pleroma* pneumatology.

In the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, the relational involvement of the Spirit's whole ontology and function makes functional the theological dynamics of wholeness integrated with relational belonging and ontological identity for the experiential truth of their embodiment in those belonging to Christ. The emergence of the new identity for these persons is functionally constituted only by the reciprocal relational work of the Spirit; human terms from human contextualization cannot establish the identity formation of who they are with Christ and whose they are in Christ (Rom 8:9-



11). Paul is definitive that this identity is not formed by a social process but by the relational dynamic of the Spirit in reciprocal relationship together (Rom 8:12-17; Gal 5:16-26). The new identity constituted in this relationship together as family is neither a static condition nor a contextual characteristic, but a dynamic process of relationship together necessitating by its nature ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with each other. Paul also describes this reciprocal response as “we are debtors” (*opheiletes* from *opheilo*, Rom 8:12), that is, not in human terms and contextualization but to God’s favor (indebted to a benefactor). Yet, *opheiletes* in this context should not be reduced to an obligation (*opheilo*) to fulfill. Paul is not defining an ethical mandate but illuminating, by the nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*) of God’s relational response of grace, the reciprocal relational response necessary for whole relationship together. Moreover, when Paul further defines this reciprocal response by “Live by the Spirit” and “are led by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16,18), he is also not defining a moral imperative for our conduct (outlined in 5:19-24). Rather this is another relational imperative by which he further illuminates the reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit necessary for functionally constituting the new identity of who we are with Christ and whose we are in Christ (5:25).

What this reciprocal involvement with the Spirit constitutes is the ontological identity and embodiment of God’s new creation (Gal 5:6; 6:15; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:10-11; cf. 2 Cor 3:17-18). Just as *pneuma* and *soma* are inseparable for the whole ontology and function emerging from the Spirit’s involvement, ontological identity and embodiment of the new creation are also inseparably conjoined for the wholeness made functional by the Spirit (examine Paul’s relational connections: 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:26-28; 4:6-7; Rom 8:14; 12:5; Col 3:15; Eph 2:14,18,22). And this ontological identity and embodiment of the new creation are predicated on the functional reality of relational belonging to God’s family as definitive daughters and sons, the experiential truth of which only emerges from the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (Eph 1:13-14; 2 Cor 1:21-22; Rom 8:14-16; Gal 4:6-7). Without the Spirit’s reciprocal involvement and relational work, this identity and new creation are rendered, at best, to only ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of wholeness—simulation of whole relationship together with illusions of the whole of God (Gal 6:16; Col 3:15; cf. Rom 12:3-5; 1 Cor 3:21-22).

This relational dynamic of belonging or not belonging is either the relational outcome with the Spirit or the relational consequence without the Spirit, which Jesus made unmistakable in his promise “I will not leave you orphaned” (Jn 14:18). The term for “leave” (*aphiemi*) means to let go from oneself, essentially abandon to a condition deprived of their parents and family, which in the ancient Mediterranean world was an unprotected, helpless position. What Jesus defines, however, is only that the significance of orphans is relational, not situational, which directly involves the condition of wholeness in relationship together constituted by the Spirit—the what and who, respectively, that Jesus *did* leave them (Jn 14:27; 16:33). Paul further illuminates the relational belonging emerging with the Spirit and its embodiment by the Spirit, which includes the counter-relational issue of orphans, to be discussed shortly in Paul’s ecclesiology.

In Paul’s theological forest, along with God’s relational dynamic of grace, the Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement is indispensable, *sine qua non* as with grace, for the experiential truth of the theological dynamics of wholeness, relational belonging and ontological identity. Clearly for Paul, those who are relationally involved with the Spirit

in reciprocal relationship together—“who are led by the Spirit of God”—are the daughters and sons of God (Rom 8:14). Paul is not using family language merely for emphasis in a kinship-oriented context, perhaps as a hyperbole, for example, to evoke obligation in response to the Spirit. Rather Paul is illuminating the depth of the theological dynamics involved in the gospel and clearly identifies the person who is necessary for its fulfillment and completion. In dynamic interaction with the embodied *pleroma* of God, the Spirit of the whole of God relationally extends *pleroma* Christology to make functional *pleroma* soteriology by the embodiment of God’s new creation family. That is to say, the Spirit makes functional the experiential truth of the whole gospel in its relational outcome ‘already’ in whole relationship together, just as the Son prayed for the formation of God’s family (Jn 17:20-26).

**What is the significance of distinguishing this relational outcome ‘already’ by the Spirit?** As Jesus’ relational replacement, the Spirit both fulfills this relational outcome ‘already’ and completes what is necessary for its relational conclusion ‘not yet’ (2 Cor 1:21-22; 5:4-5; 1 Thes 5:19-23; Rom 8:23; Gal 5:5 Eph 1:13-14; Phil 3:21). In Paul’s theological forest, pneumatology is conjoined with eschatology. Paul adds theological and functional clarity to the relational outcome already of the embodiment of God’s new creation family by engaging his family further and deeper into the big picture of God’s eschatological plan framing the trajectory of God’s thematic response to the human condition (Rom 8:18-23). Just as the Spirit is the functional bridge for the quantitative of *bios* with the qualitative of *zoe*, the Spirit functionally connects the whole embodiment of God’s family with all of creation, with the *kosmos* and those in it in order to be involved as well with the world for the redemptive reconciliation necessary to be restored to God’s whole—as Paul also made definitive in other letters (2 Cor 5:17-19; Col 1:20), and as Jesus constituted in prayer for the already (Jn 17:21-23).

The big picture Paul paints goes back to creation and the emergence of the human condition (cf. Gen 3:17-19 with Rom 8:20). Not only human persons were enslaved in the condition ‘to be apart’ from God’s whole but the rest of creation was also (Rom 8:20-22; cf. Gen 5:29). God’s whole also encompasses all of creation; and God’s relational response of grace to the human condition is the redemptive key for the rest of creation to “be set free from its bondage to decay” (8:21) and restored to God’s whole (“obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God,” v.21). Therefore, all of creation is dependent on the relational outcome and conclusion of the Spirit’s relational involvement to raise up and embody God’s whole new creation family: “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God” (8:19). The timing of this revealing is ambiguous in this verse but the contingency is clearly eschatological. If our eschatology involves both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’, as Paul’s did, then that new creation family ‘already’ is revealed by the Spirit’s relational involvement in those who belong to Christ (8:9), in those whom the Spirit has wholly embodied along with Christ and already dwells now (8:11), and thus in those “led by the Spirit” (8:14) and the Spirit relationally constitutes already and ongoingly as the whole daughters and sons of God’s family (8:15-16).

Paul further illuminates this already/not-yet eschatological picture to provide deeper clarity for God’s family. As all of creation waits eagerly for the embodiment of God’s children together, “we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies” (Rom 8:23). Paul is

not suggesting that the theological dynamics of redemption and adoption have not taken place, only that their functional significance is in the relational process and progression of being completed by the Spirit—who has already constituted the relational outcome for those belonging to Christ as God’s daughters and sons, and who continues to embody them for the relational conclusion ‘not yet’ in this eschatological process. Paul clarifies that the Spirit has not yet completed this relational progression, and the basis for this expectation (“hope”) is conclusive in the experiential truth already of having been both saved *from* and *to* (*sozo*, delivered and made whole in Gk aorist tense, 8:24). This hope for full completion “now” is always present and ongoing along with the already (“wait for it with patience,” v.25); yet this unequivocal hope should not be confused with ‘already’ (“hope...we do not see”), nor should it be perceived with a reductionist interpretive lens (“hope that is seen,” v.24).

As Paul clarifies the line between the already and the not yet, he understands that God’s children vacillate between them, even unintentionally or unknowingly. This happens notably when situations and circumstances are difficult. These tend to create various scenarios, drama and anxiety which can define and determine who we are and whose we are, thus rattling our sense of belonging and straining our relational response of trust, just as Paul summarized (8:28-39). In such moments, God’s presence may seem distant and perhaps too transcendent to make relational connection with. Paul addresses the equivocation of relational connection and the ambiguity of relational involvement in those moments. With more than just his own empathy, Paul makes definitive God’s deep understanding and intimate involvement with us through the relational involvement of the Spirit (8:26-27). Especially in our deepest moments of weakness when “we do not know how to *be relationally involved* as is necessary” (Paul uses *dei* not *opheilo*, v. 26), the Spirit helps us be involved in God’s relational context and process—“that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words; and God who searches the heart, *intimately* knows what is the *phronema* of the Spirit because the Spirit *is reciprocally relationally involved* with and for the saints according to *the whole ontology and function of God*” (italics added). Thus, the Spirit ongoingly helps God’s children in the relational connection and involvement with God necessary for engagement in the process of reciprocating contextualization (dynamic interaction between God’s context and human context) in order not to be defined and determined by human contextualization, whether in difficult moments or not.

The already-now embodiment of God’s new creation family, ongoingly functioning in reciprocal whole relationship together, unequivocally in relational progression to ‘not yet’, is the integrated relational dynamic at the heart of Paul’s pneumatology. The presence of the person of the Spirit as Jesus’ relational replacement and the Spirit’s reciprocal relational involvement must be accounted for both theologically and functionally. Therefore, Paul’s pneumatology is a theological dynamic always in conjoint function with an eschatology that is not either-or but both-and, both already and not yet. The significance of Paul’s eschatological picture above is to further deepen theologically the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the definitive wholeness in both the theology and function of the church as God’s new creation family. Paul’s primary concern always focused on the present from which the future will emerge.

In the complex theological dynamics of Paul’s theological forest, the dynamic presence and involvement of the whole person of the Spirit functions while inseparably

on an eschatological trajectory. Yet for Paul, this does not and must not take away from the primary focus on the Spirit's presence and involvement for the present, just as Paul addressed the Thessalonians' eschatological anxiety with the relational imperative not to quench the Spirit's present relational involvement (1 Thes 5:19). The Spirit's present concern and function is relational involvement for constituting whole ontology and function, for making functional wholeness together, and for the embodiment of the whole of God's new creation family in whole relationship together as the church, the *pleroma* of Christ—which is why the person of the Spirit is deeply affected, grieving over any reductionism in reciprocal relational involvement together.

In Paul's theological forest, the theological dynamic of the Spirit in wholeness is *pleroma* pneumatology. Anything less or any substitute of the Spirit is an immature pneumatology, both underdeveloped and stunted, the practice of which signifies the reduction of our reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit. In such reductionism, Paul rightly defines the Spirit's grief (Eph 4:30) because it clearly diminishes the Spirit's relational involvement for wholeness and being whole already (*amemptos*, as in *tamiym*, 1 Thes 5:19,23; cf. Gen 17:1). Even the historical theology of the church's spirituality and spiritual formation often has diminished involvement in whole relationship together reciprocally with the Spirit's person, in efforts ironically to participate in God's life. Any such immature pneumatology is underdeveloped or stunted and continues to grieve the Spirit.

## Participating in God's Life

For Paul, participating in God's life is neither precluded by a somatic limitation nor limited to just a pneumatic experience, but rather involves the relational dynamic of whole human ontology and function with the whole of God's ontology and function. In contrast, and at times in conflict, with how some of Paul's readers (past and present) have interpreted him, this relational involvement was not defined or determined by mysticism, nor was its depth esoteric and thus limited to certain individuals (cf. 1 Cor 14:36; Col 2:8). In Paul's theological forest, participating in God's life is the relational outcome that emerges from ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit.

How does this relational outcome emerge? Moreover, I think it is accurate to say that prior to the Damascus road Paul participated (however limited by reductionism) in the life of God's people, and that after the Damascus road he began participating in the life of God. What is the difference, and how is this difference constituted and its dynamic significance experienced ongoingly?

Participating in God's life necessitates by God's qualitative being and relational nature the following: the relational involvement of whole persons (*pneuma* and *soma*) of whole ontology and function from inner out, who are vulnerably involved by the heart with the whole of God's ontology and function, who initially is vulnerably disclosed to them in direct face-to-face, intimate heart-to-heart relationship together as family. As Paul indicated previously, Moses participated face to face in God's life, but it was limited (2 Cor 3:7-13; cf. Num 12:6-8). By the nature of reciprocal relationship, God's children can participate in God's life only to the extent that God participates in theirs; however,

participation in God's life is never the result of unilateral human effort. In Paul's theological forest, the whole of God's thematic relational response and involvement is fulfilled by Christ and completed by the Spirit (2 Cor 3:14-18; 4:4-6). In other words, with the depth of God's whole participation, it is now insufficient for God's children to participate in the whole of God's life with anything but face-to-face involvement compatible with God's qualitative being and congruent with God's relational nature—that glory of God vulnerably disclosed in the face of Jesus Christ's whole ontology and function (not just *soma* or *pneuma*, as some have interpreted the incarnation, but *soma* and *pneuma* together, inseparably without reduction). This is “the gospel of the glory of Christ” (4:4), the meaning of which is rendered without relational significance by the lack of reciprocal relational involvement face to face, thus reducing the gospel of its experiential truth.

Paul focuses all participation in “the glory of God in the face of Christ” first on Christ's blood and body and participating in his death (1 Cor 10:16) in order to participate in his resurrection (Rom 8:11,17; Phil 3:10). This participation involves being baptized with Christ and the Spirit for the death of reduced ontology and function and the raising of whole ontology and function (Rom 6:3-5; 1 Cor 12:13). Relational involvement with Christ and the Spirit in these theological dynamics is critical for face-to-face involvement compatible with God's qualitative being (the whole and holy God) and thus congruent with God's relational nature. To participate in the whole and holy God's life begins with the necessary transformation of human persons conjointly to ontology in the image of God's qualitative being vulnerably disclosed by Christ (“the image of God,” 2 Cor 4:4), and to function in the likeness of the whole of God's relational nature together (2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29; Col 3:10). Paul defines this critical initial participation with the term *koinonia* (“sharing,” 1 Cor 10:16) and its cognate *koinonos* (“partners,” 10:18), from which our notions of fellowship and communion come. Basically these *koin* terms define a common bond among its participants which is relational involvement definitive of having a share in something together. This understanding of participation goes further and deeper than what our practices of fellowship and communion tend to be; moreover, it goes beyond common efforts of spirituality to participate in God's life.

For Paul, the definitive relational involvement of sharing together in Christ's death is a complete participation, which is irreducible and nonnegotiable to *koinonia* and *koinonos* in human contextualization (1 Cor 10:20-21). Thus, this undivided-complete participation is inseparable from sharing together also in Christ's resurrection, by which the necessary transformation to whole ontology and function emerges in order to wholly participate compatibly and congruently in God's life as God's whole family in relationship together (Rom 6:5; 8:11,15; Gal 4:5-6). This inner-out change from the process of redemptive reconciliation is an ongoing necessity for increasing and deepening participation in the whole of God's life. The embodiment of this new creation in *koinonia* with the whole of God is both of the whole person and of whole persons together (1 Cor 10:17) in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Eph 2:22; 4:3-4). Therefore, participating in the qualitative whole of God's life is neither limited to the intimate involvement of the individual person, nor is individual involvement sufficient by itself to constitute participation in the relational whole of God's life. Participation is complete with only whole persons together (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-18); this challenges our theological assumptions about God, the human person, and the church. Paul makes these

vital distinctions for the reciprocal relational involvement in whole relationship together both with God and with each other, which is necessary to embody God's new creation family—the dwelling for the whole of God's participation in whole relationship together (Eph 2:22; cf. Jn 14:23).

Through the relational involvement of the Spirit, participation in the whole of God's life is unequivocal in its relational outcome 'already' (Eph 2:18,22; 3:12; Rom 5:5; cf. Jn 17:23). And by reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, participation in God's whole life in family is ongoing to its relational conclusion 'not yet' (Rom 8:14,17; Phil 2:1; 3:10)—just as Paul prayed for the church family (Eph 3:16-19) and Jesus vulnerably disclosed in his face and prayed for his family (Jn 17:26). The whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology fight for nothing less and no substitutes of this gospel of wholeness, thus nonegotiably against any and all reductionism.

As those belonging to Christ through the Spirit gather for the *koinonia* at the Lord's table to celebrate the Eucharist—that is, without reductionism to human terms shaped by human contextualization, as Paul's polemic makes indisputable about incompatible and incongruent participation (1 Cor 10:21; 11:17-22, 27)—their whole persons together deeply participate in the embodied *pleroma* of God. Conjointly, their intimate relational involvement with the whole of God in whole relationship together also embodies them together in the whole ontology and function of the church, the *pleroma* of Christ (1 Cor 10:17; Eph 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). This embodiment is the relational outcome of only direct participation in God's life, not from participation just in the church (note Paul's polemic, 1 Cor 11:20, 29).

Therefore, the church emerges as God's new creation family only to the extent that its reciprocal relational involvement is compatible and congruent with the extent of God's participation in its life, notably now by the Spirit. Given that God's participation is solely by the relational response of grace with the theological dynamic of wholeness, the participation of God's children likewise can be nothing less and no substitutes. Only this whole relationship together embodies the *pleroma* of Christ in Paul's theological forest, which Paul makes theologically definitive in Ephesians for the functional clarity necessary for the whole ontology and function of the church.

The theological dynamics deeply involved in this qualitative process of embodiment and its relational process of reciprocal participation not only have converged and are integrated in Paul's theological forest. These dynamics, both theological and functional, are also relationally extending 'already' beyond what Paul can only rightly describe as “abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church” (Eph 3:20-21).

## **Ecclesiology of the Whole**

The church, that is, the *pleroma* of Christ, is God's relational context of convergence for the theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest (Eph 1:22-23), and is God's relational context and process of relationally extending these theological-functional dynamics (Eph 2:22; 4:12-13). *Pleroma* (fullness, completion) is the wholeness that reflects the development not only in Paul's thought and theology (e.g. Col 1:19) but also in the whole of Paul's person (e.g., Col 2:10; 3:15; Eph 3:19; cf. Phil 2:1-2;

3:12, 15-16). The experiential truth of Paul's development is questioned or obscured by disputes over the authorship of some of these letters, notably Ephesians.

## **Pauline Development**

Ephesians emerges in the Pauline corpus without the usual context—no personal greetings and situations noted, with the Ephesian title added later—to understand Paul's purpose, or that he even wrote this text. Yet I assume Paul's authorship despite any style and language differences, and that Ephesians closely followed his Colossian and Philemon letters. I assume the insufficiency of these disputed details to deny Paul's authorship based on the depth of its content, which emerges to be an even further development of Paul's thought and theology than Colossians presents. That is, this development is his integrated content based on Paul's claim to have received further revelation (Eph 3:3-4), while in ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ (Gal 1:11-12; Acts 26:16) and in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10, 12-13). Paul's depth of development reflected in Ephesians is, to be specific, about his theological forest, which integrated his previous theological dynamics (notably in Romans); and then he extended these dynamics in the ecclesiology necessary for the relational function of the embodied *pleroma* of Christ, the church reconciled in wholeness 'already' by the *pleroma* of God, just as Paul introduced earlier and was developing about God's new creation family (2 Cor 5:17-19; Gal 3:26-28; 6:15-16; Col 1:19-22; 3:10-11,15). It is highly unlikely that any author other than Paul could have formulated this theological integration, and the existence of a Pauline school has not been established to attribute this to one of his students. This is the outcome of Paul's *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of the church that was developing from its earlier beginning in 1 Corinthians (e.g., 10:17-18, 12:13, 27). Paul's readers also need to *syniemi* further than the historical Paul in human contextualization to account for the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology.

Paul's summary of his theological forest (Eph 1:3-14; cf. Col 1:15-22) illuminates his *synesis* of God's thematic relational action in response to the human condition, which, as noted earlier, neuroscience defines also as the inherent human relational need and problem. Paul's *synesis* is the whole understanding that becomes the integrating process, framework and theme for the various theological trees (the complex dynamics) in his previous letters (particularly in Romans) which makes definitive their theological forest. It is within Paul's theological forest that the ecclesiology necessary to be whole, God's relational whole only on God's terms, is relationally embodied and wholly emerges in Ephesians. Without his ecclesiology in wholeness, Paul's *oikonomia* (relational responsibility) to *pleroo* (complete) the word of God would not have been fulfilled (Col 1:25).

## **The Roots of *Ekklesia***

In Ephesians, Paul makes definitive the ecclesiology that by the nature of its roots emerged from antecedents prior to Paul's letters and even predating his studies in Judaism. These antecedents were necessarily integrated into his ecclesiology. The first of these antecedents was rooted in OT Israel as the gathering of God's people. The

Septuagint (Gk translation of the OT familiar to Paul, a Roman-citizen Jew) uses *ekklesia* for Israel as the covenant community. This embeds the NT *ekklesia* (“church,” e.g., Eph 1:22; Col 1:18) in the context of God’s ongoing relational action with his chosen people and their covenant relationship together (Ex 19:5; Dt 7:6-8; Eze 11:19-20). Beyond being a mere historical root and religious heritage, this antecedent is important for understanding the whole of God’s thematic relational involvement and the theological dynamics in Paul’s theological forest enacted only for whole relationship together as God’s family (Eph 1:4-5, 14).

The term *ekklesia* itself, though used by Paul in his letters, appears to have only limited descriptive value for what the church is and does. As far as function is concerned, *ekklesia* is a static term that is neither sufficiently significant nor necessarily useful to define the church (notably the local church). A more dynamic understanding is needed for the church’s ontology and function than merely a gathering (even one called out, *ekkletoi*), which points to a second antecedent integrated into Paul’s ecclesiology.

Jesus himself used the term *ekklesia* when he revealed “I will build my church” (Mt 16:18). The functional significance of his church, however, emerges when the focus is given to the process Jesus implied in his statement—which directly involves what he relationally embodied face to face in his life and practice, and which he made further evident in his post-ascension involvement with various churches (Rev 2-3). Jesus’ relational involvement and relational work went further and deeper than a gathering, regardless of a gathering’s doctrinal and moral purity, its extensive church activity and its esteemed reputation (as demonstrated by churches in Ephesus and Sardis, Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2). In Jesus’ disclosure “I will build my church,” the term for build is *oikodomeo*. This term denotes building a house, derived from its root *oikos* meaning house, home, family, that is, a family living in a house, not merely a gathering under the same roof.

Paul later conjoined these terms with their significant cognates for the church’s ontology and function, with *oikos* as the basis for the church as God’s household (1 Tim 3:15): *oikeios*, belonging specifically to God’s family (Eph 2:19); *oikodomeo*, building God’s family (Eph 2:21; 4:12); *synoikodomeo*, being built together as God’s family (*syn* and *oikodomeo*, Eph 2:22); *oikonomos*, led by persons who manage God’s family (1 Cor 4:1); and *oikonomia*, for which Paul was given the specific relational responsibility to administrate the relational outcome ‘already’ of God’s family (Eph 3:2; Col 1:25), which is in relational progression on an eschatological trajectory to its relational conclusion ‘not yet’ (Eph 1:10).

The relational function of these terms points to the definitive relational process of the new kinship family of God that Jesus constituted in the incarnation. That is to say, the specific relational connections Jesus made throughout the incarnation to build his family together formed the embryonic church from which the whole ontology and function of the church emerged. Jesus provided Paul, partly through the Jesus tradition and mostly by direct relationship together along with the Spirit, with the necessary relational context for the relational embodiment of his church and the imperative relational process for the relational function of his church. This is the irreducible relational context and nonnegotiable relational process which the whole of Jesus vulnerably embodied progressively in the whole of God’s relational context of family by his whole relational process of family love. Thus, the church as God’s family was made definitive by Jesus even before the cross, and was fully constituted by his salvific relational work; and this



relational outcome is what the Spirit, as his relational replacement, will bring to its relational conclusion—and Paul, not Peter, would engage the *oikonomia* to provide the ecclesiology necessary for the whole of God’s family.

Therefore, Paul’s ecclesiology is rooted in what germinated with the whole of Jesus’ person and relational involvement, who relationally embodied the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology. This *pleroma* theological-functional dynamic was first Paul’s experiential truth and then was the key antecedent into which Paul’s ecclesiology is integrated for the church to be the *pleroma* of Christ. Any ecclesiology not rooted and integrated in *pleroma* Christology is insufficient to make functional the relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology (what Christ saves *to*), and fundamentally lacks wholeness. Such an ecclesiology is shaped by human terms rooted in human contextualization, which at best is only a gathering—an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of the *ekklesia* Jesus builds. While a mere gathering may have some functional significance for those gathered, it does not have relational significance to the *pleroma* of God and to the inherent human need of those gathered (cf. Jn 14:9; Mt 15:8-9).

### **Paul’s *Pleroma* Ecclesiology**

The doctrine of the church and church function is either whole or some reduction. This doctrine either defines the extent of what emerges in church life and practice, or limits it. Christ’s *ekklesia* rises up with him to emerge above and beyond a gathering. The whole ecclesiology that emerges for Paul is not a mere doctrinal truth of this new *ekklesia* but the experiential truth entirely of whole relationship together in God’s whole family on God’s relational terms. What unfolds in Paul’s ecclesiology?

In going beyond a doctrinal statement, Paul’s ecclesiology does not become a metaphor, an organizational structure or programmatic system for church life and function. Rather, his ecclesiology is the theological-functional dynamic signifying the embodiment of the whole ontology and function of the church in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. Thus, whole ecclesiology signifies the embodiment of God’s new creation family in the functional significance of its relational outcome ‘already’ in ongoing relational progression with the Spirit to its relational conclusion ‘not yet’. This ecclesiology emerges only from the embodied *pleroma* of God, who constitutes the embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ with the Spirit. For Paul, ecclesiology is rooted in this whole and is the theological dynamic of wholeness, nothing less and no substitutes. Paul’s ecclesiology then is always synonymous with *pleroma* ecclesiology. Therefore, the ecclesiology of this new creation is irreducible in the church’s ontology, and its shared new covenant is nonnegotiable in the church’s function. Anything less and any substitutes in the church are a renegotiated ecclesiology shaped by human terms from human contextualization.

The experiential truth of being whole and its function in wholeness together is both the theological purpose and functional concern of Paul’s ecclesiology. When he made the relational imperative in his Colossians letter to “let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body” (Col 3:15), his concern for the church was to be whole and to function in the wholeness of relationship together. For

these purposes, he wanted this letter to be read also in the church at Laodicea (Col 4:16). One person in particular whom Paul most likely targeted for this relational imperative of wholeness was Philemon, though whether he resided in Colosse or Laodicea is uncertain. Philemon was the slave-owner of Onesimus (4:9), who ran away from Philemon and with whom Paul shared family love and who now belonged to Christ as a son in God's family (4:9; Phlm 16). We will discuss the specific implications of their relationship in the next chapter, but for now it is important to identify his personal letter to Philemon as a key letter for the relational function of the church to be whole in its relationships together as God's new creation family. The Philemon letter is a specific relational context in which wholeness in ecclesiology is made functional.

Though written before Ephesians and closely aligned with Colossians, Philemon reflects what was already developing in Paul's thought for ecclesiology to be whole. Following the course of Colossians' theological dialogue (discourse in relational context) on God's new creation family (Col 3:10-11) and relational imperative of wholeness (3:15), Philemon emerges prior to Ephesians to become a functional bridge to Paul's thought and theology in Ephesians. In this vital letter to the Pauline corpus—both of whose understanding are diminished without their integrated development—Paul makes definitive the theological basis specifically for church-leader Philemon's relational function and generally for the whole ontology and function of the church in the ecclesiology of the whole, Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology.

### **Its Functional Basis**

In spite of its basic need in those who belong to Christ, the experiential truth of a whole ecclesiology is often reduced to, not distinguished from, or, indeed, even never realized as other than a doctrinal or propositional truth. While the objective truth is necessary, doctrinal and propositional truths are not sufficient in themselves to constitute whole ecclesiology. Paul's ecclesiology is not compatible with such theological reductionism, nor is this reductionism an option capable of replacing experiential truth. This reductionism predictably happens apart from the Spirit, as Paul has functionally identified throughout his previous letters (1 Thes 5:19; 1 Cor 12:13; 2 Cor 3:17-18; Gal 5:16,25; Rom 8:9,14,16; Phil 2:1). And conjointly in his dialogue with churches about the church, Paul challenges the assumptions of ecclesiology and its related theological anthropology held by his readers (both past and present).

The functional basis for Paul's ecclesiology is clearly identified as the Spirit's presence and involvement. In Ephesians, Paul integrates and relationally extends the Spirit's relational work. By reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, the Spirit baptizes and raises up those who share in (*koinonia*) Christ's body and blood for the redemptive change necessary to embody the new creation. The new creation is not a theological concept with only theoretical significance; rather this new creation is the experiential truth of the relational outcome that emerges only from relational participation in Christ's death and resurrection together with the Spirit for the death of reduced human ontology and function and the raising of whole ontology and function (Eph 2:1-10; 4:24; cf. Rom 8:11). This participation is relationally extended to the Father to involve the whole of God in whole relationship together in order, theologically and functionally together, to embody God's new creation family (2:18-22). The theological dynamics in Paul's

theological forest (1:3-14), which are involved in this process of redemptive reconciliation, by necessity transform human persons from being defined and determined by reductionism to be defined and determined by whole ontology and function created in the image and likeness of God—that is, that to which the Spirit raises those in Christ. This new creation of wholeness involves conjointly, and thus inseparably, the whole person and whole persons together to embody the whole ontology and function of God’s new creation family—all of whom and which are constituted together by the relational involvement of the Spirit. The collective ontology and function of God’s family define and determine its relationships together on the basis of this wholeness. These new and whole relationships together signify the transformed relationships between transformed persons which are necessary to be God’s whole family, the *pleroma* of Christ, thus which are also irreducible for church ontology and nonnegotiable for church function.

The reciprocal relational involvement by and with the Spirit is indispensable to this transformation process to wholeness and whole relationship together, and the person of the Spirit is inseparable from the embodiment of the whole ontology and function of God’s new creation family. On this determining basis, Paul prays clearly for and makes relationally imperative the church’s deeper relational involvement both with the Spirit and with each other together (Eph 1:17-20; 3:16-21; 4:3-6; 5:18b-21). He also makes definitive the relational consequence for the Spirit when the church’s relationships together function in reductionism (the context of 4:30). In addition, Paul implies that the relational consequence for church ontology and function is to be reduced to persons as *epistemic orphans* without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are (contrary to Paul’s prayers and Jesus’ promise, Jn 15:26; 16:13-15); and thus the deeper relational consequence for the church is to be reduced to a gathering of what are *relational orphans* from inner out despite bearing the family titles from outer in (contrary to Jesus’ claim, Jn 14:18). That is, in function such a gathering has no relational significance both to the whole of God (in Jesus by the Spirit with the Father) and to those gathered, leaving them essentially as orphans (cf. Jn 14:1,27; 16:33).

Jesus’ assurance to “not leave you orphaned” is contingent on the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit. The Spirit’s relational presence and work is certainly assumed by Jesus as his relational replacement and is further illuminated by Paul. The wholeness of relationship together as family promised by Jesus (Jn 14:18-20,23,27) and constituted by the Spirit (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 8:6) is the whole relationships together basic to Paul’s ecclesiology and the wholeness he builds by making it the relational imperative for the church (Col 3:15; Gal 5:16,25; 6:16). Yet, Paul also illuminates the reciprocal relational nature of the Spirit’s involvement, which includes exposing the lack or absence of the church’s reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit. In Paul’s ecclesiology, the relational consequence of function apart from the Spirit is to be rendered orphans, both relationally and epistemologically. ‘Relational orphan’ is a functional condition lacking the experiential truth of relationally belonging to God’s family, even while claiming its propositional truth or professing its doctrinal truth. ‘Epistemic orphan’ is a condition of cognitive and existential homelessness, signifying distance, detachment or separation in God’s family, which leaves God’s children in ambiguity, confusion or even deeper conflict about who they are and whose they are. Apart from relational involvement with the Spirit, how church members address this inner longing for relational connection or handle the fragmentation of their beliefs/faith directly involves

reductionism and substitutes of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion signifying renegotiated ecclesiology. Further discussion of this reductionist dynamic will be helpful for grasping the whole in Paul's ecclesiology.

There is a dynamic at work underlying the condition of epistemic orphans that interacts with the condition of relational orphans in church contexts where distance, detachment or separation exists in their relationships together. This dynamic overlaps in function with those living apart from God's created design and purpose for life in whole relationships together (cf. Gen 2:18), that is, the relational consequence that emerged in the primordial garden that involved both relational and epistemic issues (Gen 3:1-13). The loss of whole relationship together became the prevailing condition for human ontology and function, thus embedding and enslaving human life in the reality of relationships needing to be whole—the inherent human relational need and problem highlighted at the opening of the section on Paul's theology (chap. 5). Whether it is the general loss of whole relationship together in humanity's family or the lack of whole relationship together in the church as God's family, the consequential condition of relational orphans interacts with the condition of epistemic orphans to create the basis for either human shaping, construction and even reification of alternatives for the inherent human need, which includes alternative forms of church life and practice. Or it creates the basis for acknowledging the inadequacy of human effort and turning to the constituting source of whole relationship together. The latter dynamic is critical for the basis of Paul's ecclesiology, while the former becomes the basis for renegotiated ecclesiology. **How does this dynamic work to determine ecclesiology?**

It would be helpful to use the church at Corinth as a working example, since Paul's readers are given an overview of this dynamic in 1 Corinthians. Paul addressed this gathering of fragmented relationships with the epistemological clarification (e.g., 1 Cor 8:1-3, as discussed previously) and with the hermeneutic correction of wholeness and the whole relationships together to be God's whole family (e.g., 3:21-22; 10:17; 12:13)—similar to the clarification and correction he experienced from *tamiym*. His focus for their clarification and correction was centered on their learning from his personal example the meaning of "Nothing beyond what is written" (4:6). Assuming Paul is referring to more than his earlier quotes from Isaiah, Jeremiah, Job and the Psalms (1:19,31; 2:19,16; 3:19-20), Paul focuses on the whole OT canon existing during his time. For Paul, however, what is written goes beyond texts and is deeper than mere words. These are the words of God and thus the words from God communicated to his people. God's communicative act is the dynamic in question that Paul raises, whose initiating relational involvement Paul further illuminated in the next verse with the rhetorical question "What do you have that you did not receive?" (4:7), and later reinforces with "did the word of God originate with you?" (14:36). Paul focuses his readers on this relational dynamic. He is not raising a propositional truth for their epistemological clarification, nor is he teaching them a doctrinal truth for their hermeneutic correction. Rather his purpose is to illuminate the experiential truth involved in this relational dynamic initiated by God's communicative action. That is, Paul's epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction made definitive that it is the experiential truth of what is written that is primary; and this experiential truth is not found in the text alone and is not located in mere words. Texts and words apart from their relational dynamic are reductionism that has relational

consequences characteristic of reductionism's counter-relational work (cf. Jesus' critique, Jn 5:39-40).

Paul's clarification and correction illuminate that what is written are words only of God's communication, which by its nature involves a dynamic process of relational interaction. The reciprocal nature of this relational interaction necessitates involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit to know and understand what the author-God is communicating. An epistemic process with words/texts by themselves, even exegetic words about God, become disembodied and relationally separated from their author, thus any results at best can be no more than mere words known only as exegesis for propositional truth *about* God and simply texts understood only as a conventional biblical theology for doctrinal truth *about* God, each without any relational significance and only with reductionist functional significance. Such results or less signify the following consequence: when 'what is written' is reduced to words without relational significance, as Israel often experienced with Torah (cf. Paul's assessment, Rom 11:7-8; 2 Cor 3:15), the relational consequence is the condition of epistemic orphans, who knowingly or unknowingly are without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are and whose they are. This condition directly involves and affects human ontology and function, and is consequential for determining their further reduction in relationships together.

Having this whole knowledge and understanding is nothing less than the experiential truth of what is written. This experiential truth is entirely the relational outcome of direct involvement in the relational epistemic process with God by the reciprocal involvement of the Spirit—which is in contrast to engaging an epistemic process of mere human effort, even at exegesis and integrating what is written (as Paul contrasts, 1 Cor 2:13). Apart from this relational epistemic process with the Spirit, epistemic orphans also become relational orphans. The interaction of these two conditions creates the basis either for disillusionment and even despair, or for dissatisfaction and even desperation, which further creates the basis for human shaping of what is written (e.g., reader-response determination). Consequently, such persons go beyond those words having "lost" their relational significance, in order to find alternatives for relational significance to fulfill their inherent human relational need—whether they are aware of their condition or not. Moreover, this orphan-interaction creates the further basis for constructing substitutes whose ontological simulation and epistemological illusion often get reified as the source of fulfillment for the human need and resolution for the human problem. This reification, for example, has happened in mysticism and spirituality practices (cf. Paul's polemic in 1 Cor 14:1-33).<sup>2</sup> Such human construction and reification are what Paul confronts in his rhetorical question "did the word of God originate with you?" (14:36).

The dynamic of God's communicative act in what is written and the relational consequence of being apart from it are the issues which Paul raises to challenge the ontology and function of his readers. For Paul, however, the most significant consequence of reducing what is written and going beyond it is the emergence of a renegotiated ecclesiology. Epistemic-relational orphans renegotiate the ontology and function of the church as God's family in the absence of the experiential truth of God's

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the reification of worldviews, religion and ideology, see David K. Naugle, *Worldview: the History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 101-2, 178-80, 85-86, 236-38.

communicative relational action and involvement (e.g., 1 Cor 11:17-21, 27-30), renegotiating ecclesiology in contrast and conflict with *pleroma* ecclesiology (10:17; 12:13).

It is also insufficient for Paul's readers merely to acknowledge what is written as God's communicative act. Paul assumes that this affirmation involves the reciprocal relational response necessary for its experiential truth. Without the experiential truth of God's communicative act, readers are still left functionally in the condition of orphans, epistemic and/or relational orphans. The only recourse is to turn to the source of the word for the experiential truth of its Subject. This critical process of experiential truth (review its discussion in chap. 1) necessary to change from orphans to family starts with the reader's interpretive lens (*phroneo*) and what is perceived of what is written and in the word of God. The hermeneutic by which the reader engages the word/text is determinative of what emerges from this epistemic process. Just as Jesus critically distinguished the hermeneutic of "a child" and the hermeneutic of "the wise and learned" (Lk 10:21), the epistemic results are in contrast, if not in conflict.

A limited epistemic process of human effort from a quantitative lens dependent on outer-in rational interpretation alone invariably separates the object of the text from its relational context and process. This reduces the ontology of the object-God by fragmenting the whole Object into its components (e.g., laws, promises, teachings, example, etc.) without whole knowledge and understanding of the object-God as communicator-Subject disclosing the whole of God for relationship together. The epistemic result is without the experiential truth of the object-subject God of what is written. This is the unequivocal relational consequence because engaging the Object of the text also as Subject is a function only of relationship.

In contrast, the hermeneutic of "a child" vulnerably engages in a relational epistemic process, not to be confused with subjectivism or fideism. This hermeneutic certainly does not eliminate reason but puts rational interpretation into congruence with its whole relational context and into compatibility with its whole relational process; thus it does not disembodify the words from the author revealing object-God communicated from subject-God in relationship. For Paul, experiential truth must by its nature involve the relational epistemic process in which truth is beyond the reader as "subject" and is definitively found in the object-God of the text (notably confirmed in quantitative history). The reader cannot define and determine the object of the text without reducing the ontology and function of object-God; and involvement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit is the conclusive means to disclaim reification by the reader. Yet, this does not complete the relational epistemic process for experiential truth.

It is vital not only to distinguish object-God from subject-reader but equally important to distinguish the subject-God who relationally communicates with subject-reader for relational involvement together in Subject-to-subject, face-to-face relationship. The reader as person cannot have relational connection with an object but only with the Subject whose reciprocal involvement can be experienced in relationship together. The relational epistemic process is complete with this reciprocal relational connection with the subject-object God through the Spirit, and the definitive relational outcome is the experiential truth of the whole of God's ontology and function in relationship together as family. It is this experiential truth of the *pleroma of God* embodied for face-to-face relationship together that is the basis, by the Spirit, to further embody the ontology and

function of the *pleroma* of Christ and, with the Spirit, to ongoingly constitute the whole ontology and function of the church. Nothing less and no substitutes than wholeness is the functional basis for Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology. Anything less and any substitutes, even in correct exegesis as propositional truth or rightly integrated for doctrinal truth, are a renegotiated ecclesiology signifying a reduced ontology and function of a gathering of epistemic and/or relational orphans.

## **Its Ontology and Function of the Church**

Paul previously identified the church as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27; Col 1:24), yet his later dialogue on the church helps to distinguish this as nothing other than a metaphor for an organic structure and system. In Ephesians, however, Paul's *synesis* (e.g., 3:4) provides the theological-functional clarity to distinguish the body of Christ beyond a metaphor of the church and makes functional the embodiment of the church's ontology as the *pleroma* of Christ (1:23; 4:12-13; cf. his prayer, 3:16-19). Christ's wholeness is the peace (cf. *tamiym*) which Paul's epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction have illuminated to the churches throughout his letters (e.g., 1 Cor 7:15b; 14:33; Gal 6:16; Rom 14:19; Col 3:15). In contrast to a Greek emphasis on peace, this is not about the mere absence of conflict for Paul, despite the situations he was addressing in the churches. This peace is the presence of wholeness, even in situations of conflict, that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27). Moreover, this is the wholeness those "in me" will have, Jesus declared (Jn 16:33); that is, the relational outcome "in Christ" Paul illuminated by the *koinonia* with Christ's body and blood (1 Cor 10:16-17) and baptism in Christ's death and resurrection through the Spirit (Rom 6:4; 8:11; 1 Cor 12:13)—the wholeness which Paul theologically and functionally clarifies in Ephesians (2:14-17; 4:3-6).

In full congruence, then, the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of God Jesus embodied in death and the Spirit raised whole in the resurrection is also participated in by those in Christ through the Spirit. The relational outcome of this participation together also embodies them in the whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, in the image and likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:24; cf. 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 8:29). From the convergence of these complex theological dynamics in Paul's theological forest emerges this reciprocating relational dynamic of embodiment by the Spirit, in which the embodied *pleroma* of God is relationally extended in likeness not by a metaphor but by the definitive embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ, that is, the embodied wholeness of the ontology and function of the church (1:9-10, 22-23).

**What theological-functional clarity does Paul make definitive for the whole ontology and function of the church?** First of all, that the body of Christ clearly is not a metaphor, a doctrine, a truth-claim or a confession of faith. This is the embodiment of the wholeness of the church's ontology and function in likeness of the embodied whole ontology and function in the face of Christ. Thus, embodiment is not theoretical, an ideal or an intention. The embodied church of Christ is the experiential truth of the relational outcome 'already' and the ongoing functional reality in relational progression to 'not yet', both in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit. Therefore, the church is fully accountable to be whole in its ontology and function now. By its nature in the present, neither epistemic orphans without whole knowledge and understanding of who they are

and whose they are, nor relational orphans with distance, detachment or separation in their relationships together can account for the embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ. For Paul, anything less and any substitutes of whole ontology and function cannot embody *pleroma* ecclesiology, but only constitute a renegotiated ecclesiology of reduced ontology and function. Embodiment in likeness of the embodied *pleroma* of God is the initial function that Paul makes definitive for the church. This function is not optional for a church's life and practice, nor is it reducible or negotiable. Embodiment in Paul's ecclesiology is the key for the emergence of the church.

What emerges in this embodiment that distinguishes it clearly from all other church life and practice? Embodiment should not be confused with simply an incarnational notion. Just as the incarnation of the *pleroma* of God is constituted in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, so is embodiment. That is, embodiment is conjointly whole ontology irreducible to human shaping and construction and whole function nonnegotiable to human terms from human contextualization, including of culture and other contextual aspects. The embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ, by its very nature, is defined and determined by only the combined transformation of 'who the church is' to its ontology in the qualitative image of the holy God, and of 'whose the church is' to its function in the relational likeness of the whole and holy God. This transformed identity of 'who and whose the church is' is the new creation of God's family, which emerges only by the reciprocal relational presence, involvement and work of the Spirit. Embodiment of the church, therefore, is only the new creation; otherwise, its ontology and function cannot be in likeness to the embodied *pleroma* of God, as Paul clearly distinguished (4:23-24; cf. Rom 8:29). This ontology and function can be rendered at best as just an ontological simulation by relational orphans and an epistemological illusion by epistemic orphans; but relational-epistemic orphans in the church neither can constitute nor do they signify the whole ontology and function of the church in *pleroma* ecclesiology.

The transformation to the new creation that is necessary to embody the *pleroma* of Christ involves both individual persons and relationships. In Paul's theological forest, the theological dynamics of this transformation process are made functional by the Spirit, and thus the transformation of persons and relationships is inseparable from the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit. For Paul, the Spirit is simply indispensable for the embodiment of the church to emerge in whole ontology and function.

Paul reviews first the transformation of persons to whole ontology and function (Eph 2:1-10). The sin of reductionism prevailed in reduced human ontology and function, to which God's thematic relational action of grace responded in *agape* involvement for the redemptive change necessary from reduced to whole ontology and function. The process from reductionism to wholeness involves the theological-functional dynamic of equalization, integration and reconciliation, or what I simply call *redemptive reconciliation*.

The redemptive change from *old* to *new* involves freeing human persons from being defined and determined by reductionism. The sin of reductionism reduces human ontology and function to be defined and determined from the outer in, for example, by what persons do and/or have. This fragments human persons and enslaves human integrity, worth and identity to these reductionist criteria, to which are ascribed human distinctions not only fragmenting but stratifying human persons as 'better or less'.



Enslavement to reductionism is redeemed by God, and persons entrenched in better-or-less distinctions are equalized before God, which frees them from fragmentation to be integrated and made whole in ontology and function. Transformed persons are equalized persons who have been freed from reductionism. Yet, transformed persons are not just free persons who have been equalized before God but who also have been equalized as persons with each other. Thus, the nature of their relationships together necessarily also undergoes redemptive change. Transformed persons have not only been saved *from* reductionism but they are also irreducibly and nonegotiably saved *to* wholeness together. In other words, being equalized from better-or-less distinctions conjointly and inseparably integrates persons to whole ontology and function and then reconciles those transformed persons into equalized relationships in order to transform their relationships together—just as Paul previously qualified for redeemed persons (Gal 5:1,13; 6:15-16; cf. 1 Cor 8:1).

The embodiment of the *pleroma* of Christ involves the transformation to the new creation in likeness of God, which necessitates transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationship together for the church's whole ontology and function. The whole function aspect of this new creation, that Paul identified as the outcome of persons being equalized, is not merely the work of individual persons but also necessitates the collective function of persons together in relationship (Eph 2:10); this is the function that Paul qualifies as ontology and function in likeness of the whole and holy God (4:24). Paul continues to illuminate the collective function of the church in order to be whole and distinguished from the common of human contextualization (2:11-22).

Transformed persons are equalized persons who are relationally involved in transformed relationships, which clearly necessitate equalized relationships (2:11-13). Paul makes equalized relationships together in the church the relational imperative for the whole function of the church to be compatible and congruent with the wholeness that Christ himself embodied only for the embodiment of the church to be whole (*pleroma*) in equalized relationships together (2:14-17). In the transformation process to the new creation, the relational purpose of its theological dynamic of redemption and integration is reconciliation. Without equalized relationships in the church, relationships together are not transformed to whole relationships together, thus they still labor in the fragmentation of persons and relationships defined by stratifying better-or-less distinctions (2:15-16)—distinctions which totally nullify God's relational response of grace in Paul's ecclesiology (2:8-9). God's grace demands the loss of human distinctions to be in relationship with God as well as the elimination of the influence from distinctions to be in whole relationship with each other.

Without the transformed relationships of equalized relationships, what the church is saved *from* has lost its functional significance for what it is saved *to*; in addition, the gospel that Paul made definitive has lost the relational significance of what the church is saved *to* (3:6). This is the gospel of wholeness/peace (6:15) basic to what Jesus embodied and constitutes for the embodiment of the whole church (3:6). Therefore, equalized relationships together are neither optional for church function nor negotiable for its embodiment. The only alternative is reductionism, which fragments church ontology and function by its counter-relational work, notably and inevitably promoting better-or-less distinctions, even under the guise of spiritual gifts and leadership roles (as Paul will clarify, 4:11-16).

Just as embodiment of the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ should not be confused with a conventional notion of incarnational, the transformation of the church's ontology and function should not be confused with an increasingly common usage of the notion "transformational." Paul continues to illuminate the transformed relationships embodying the church's whole ontology and function, and, as he does, transformed relationships are taken deeper than equalized relationships (2:18-22). Though equalized relationships are necessary to constitute the transformed relationship for the church, they are not sufficient by themselves to complete the transformed relationships involved in the whole relationships together of God's new creation family.

Transformed relationships are relationships both with God and with each other together as family. While transformed persons are equalized persons before God, they are not in equalized relationship with the whole and holy God. Nevertheless they have a unique relationship with God to participate in God's life. This unique involvement more deeply signifies the transformed relationships necessary together with God and with each other to be whole as God's new creation family and the *pleroma* of Christ. Paul initially defines this unique relational involvement as having "access in one Spirit to the Father" (2:18). The term for access (*prosagoge*) was used for an audience granted to someone lesser by high officials and monarchs; it comes from *prosago*, to bring near. This involved not merely an open door but the opportunity to interact with someone greater. Access for Paul goes deeper than this notion. He defines further the nature of this relational involvement with the Father as access "to God in boldness and confidence" (3:12). "Boldness" (*parresia*) involves to speak all that one thinks, feels, that is, with "confidence" (*pepoithesis*, trust). This trust to share one's person openly with the Father points clearly to an intimate involvement, not merely having access to the Father. This is the intimate connection which Paul previously defined for those who have been equalized to be relationally involved with Abba as his very own daughters and sons, and the connection which makes functional their relational belonging and ontological identity (Gal 4:4-7; Rom 8:15). Access to the Father, therefore, involves this intimate relationship together in which the whole of God is relationally involved by family love in being family together (2:4,22); and this intimate reciprocal involvement is reinforced by Paul's prayer for specifically knowing God in their hearts (1:17-18; 3:16-19).

Just as important as equalized relationships for church ontology and function is this involvement in intimate relationships together with each other. *Together* is not a static condition but the dynamic function of relationship. The transformation of equalized relationships provides the equal opportunity without the distance or separation of stratified relations for whole relationship together to develop, but intimate relationship is the function that opens persons to each other from inner out for their hearts to fully come together as the new creation in likeness of the whole of God (4:24-25,32; 5:1-2, 18a-21). Intimate relationships functionally reconcile persons who have had the distance and separation in relationships removed by equalization. Moreover, intimate relationships go deeper than just occupying time, space and activities together, even as equal persons, and take involvement to the depth of *agape* relational involvement in likeness of the *pleroma* of God (3:19; 5:1-2; cf. Col 3:14). *Agape* is not about what to do in relation to others but how to be relationally involved with others; and *agape* relational involvement goes beyond sacrifice for deeper intimate relationships together—just as Jesus vulnerably

disclosed in relationship together with the Father and vulnerably embodied in relationship together with us (Jn 15:9; 17:23,26).

The experiential truth of the ontological identity of God's new creation family depends on the function of these intimate relationships together. There is no alternative or substitute for intimate relationships which can bring persons into whole relationship together to embody God's family. For Paul, being *together* is inseparable from relationship and is irreducible from the function of these relationships. Relationally belonging to each other in one body emerges only from the transformation to intimate relationships together. Relational belonging should not be confused with "belonging" to a church-group, nor should ontological identity be mistaken for church-organizational identity. Despite any cohesion of "belonging" and strength of identity in the latter, they are just simulations or illusions of the relational bond constituted only by transformed intimate relationships together (cf. 4:3).

Paul conjoins these intimate relationships together with the necessary equalized relationships in a dynamic interaction to complete the transformed relationships together for the embodiment of the whole ontology and function of the church. These conjoint-transformed relationships in wholeness embodies "a holy temple...a dwelling place" for the whole of God's intimate relational involvement (2:19-22; cf. Jn 14:23). In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, the whole ontology and function of the church can be constituted only by transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together; and transformed relationships are constituted only by the conjoint function of equalized and intimate relationships together. Therefore, church ontology and function is this new creation in likeness of the whole and holy God, nothing less and no substitutes. And the function of these transformed relationships together, both equalized and intimate, distinguish the church unequivocally as God's new creation family, and those who relationally belong in this definitive ontological identity are clearly distinct from any other church gathering of relational and epistemic orphans. Most importantly, this relational dynamic and outcome of wholeness emerges entirely by the ongoing reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (2:18,22; 4:3-4; cf. Tit 3:5), which is why the Spirit's person is grieved by reduced ontology and function in the church (the context of 4:30).

## **Its Functional Significance**

Embodying the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ in transformed relationship together is a relational function only in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes. The wholeness of God defines and determines who the church is and whose the church is. Yet, having this relational clarity of wholeness together is one issue for the church, and living its functional significance in wholeness together is a further issue ongoing in church life and practice. That is, for the church to be whole is one matter, and for the church to live whole as well as make whole is another matter; even so, for Paul these functions are inseparably interrelated in God's new creation family. This ongoing issue for the church further amplifies the tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, which Paul continues to address in his ecclesiology.

As the embodiment of the church's whole ontology and function emerges, reductionism and its counter-relational work increasingly seeks to exert more indirect and

subtle influence to define and determine church life and practice with ontological simulations and epistemological illusions which Paul illuminated previously to the church at Corinth (2 Cor 11:12-15). In the further theological-functional clarity Paul illuminates in his *pleroma* ecclesiology, the functional significance of the church is never assumed but is a relational imperative ongoing for church life and practice in wholeness together. **What is this functional significance and how does its dynamic work for wholeness?**

When Paul defines the church as being reconciled in one body (Eph 2:16) and as equalized persons relationally belonging to God's family (*oikeios*, 2:19), this *oikodome* (church family not church building) is further defined as being "joined together" (2:21). Paul is providing further theological-functional clarity to his previous dialogue on the church (1 Cor 12:12-31; Rom 12:5). His earlier relational discourse appears to describe an organic or organizational structure of the church whose parts are interrelated and function in interdependence. Paul deepens the understanding of interrelated parts in interdependence by further defining the relational dynamic involved to make this function in wholeness together (4:16).

This *oikodome* is dynamic, not static, and by its dynamic nature necessitates ongoing growth ("building up," *oikodome*) for the embodiment of the church's whole ontology and function as the *pleroma* of Christ, as Paul illuminates (4:12-13). The dynamic of *oikodome* both defines the church family in joint interrelations together, and determines how church family interrelations function in the interdependence necessary for embodying wholeness in its ontology and function. In Paul's ecclesiology, *oikodome* is relationship-specific to the church as family, not as a religious group or organization (2:22), and, therefore, the dynamic of *oikodome* is functionally significant in only the depth of its relational involvement together, not to the extent of its working relations (4:15-16,25). This points to two contrasting ways interrelatedness is defined and interdependence is determined. These distinctions are critical to understand and ongoingly are essential to make because each involves a different church ontology and function, with different perceptions of human ontology and function. Not surprisingly for Paul, this difference involves the contrast between wholeness and reductionism.

*Oikodome* is rooted 'in Christ' and thus embodies Christ's wholeness (1:23; 2:21). The dynamic of *oikodome* is a function of the dynamic of wholeness in ontology and function, conjointly of whole persons and whole persons in whole relationship together (i.e., transformed persons in transformed relationships together). Thus, the interrelations of *oikodome* are constituted only by whole/transformed persons in whole/transformed relationships together. Reductionism more likely does not blatantly fragment these whole interrelations, for example, as Paul encountered between Jew and Gentile, but more subtly redefines ontology and function for person and church to create distance, detachment or separation in church relations and thereby making relationships together fragmentary. This is effectively accomplished by defining persons from outer in by what they do/have, creating better-or-less distinctions in stratified relations which prevent deeper relational involvement (cf. 4:2). This is accomplished in a more subtle yet insidious way when church leaders and church members define themselves by their roles and/or gifts and relate to each other in the church based on their roles or gifts, all for the work of ministry for building up the church. This may work for group cohesion or organizational identity in building up a gathering but it signifies a reduced ontology and function for both person and church. This is not the work "created in Christ Jesus" that

Paul means for the church (2:10). Such practice is a major misinterpretation of Paul's ecclesiology, which does not have the relational outcome he defined for whole church interrelations and their function in interdependence (4:11-13).

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, the functional significance of church ontology and function emerges as the church lives "created according to the likeness of God" (4:24). The church, for Paul, is the Father's new creation family embodied in Christ and raised up by the Spirit in the relational likeness of this whole of God, who dwells intimately present and *agape*-relationally involved. If not created and functioning in this likeness, church becomes a gathering of human shaping or construction in likeness of some aspect of human contextualization, which then often reifies its ontological simulations and epistemological illusions as the body of Christ.

Paul was no trinitarian in his theological development, yet his monotheism went beyond the knowledge and understanding of the Shema in Judaism. His experiential truth of Jesus and the Spirit in ongoing relationship together gave him whole knowledge and understanding of the whole of God. The relational and functional significance of Paul's whole God constituted him as a new creation in God's family and provided the basis for the church as God's new creation family to be in the relational likeness of this whole of God whom he himself has experienced. The church in likeness of the whole of God was not a theological construct in Paul's ecclesiology, the concept of which has growing interest in modern theology, of course, as the church in likeness of the Trinity.<sup>3</sup> Yet, Paul's understanding of the church's likeness emerged from engagement in the relational epistemic process with the whole of God, the *synesis* (whole knowledge and understanding) of which appears to elude many of his readers.

In *pleroma* ecclesiology, church ontology and function in likeness of the whole of God is not a construct but the embodiment of a relational dynamic which emerges from whole relational involvement together with both God and each other. The embodiment of the interrelations of transformed/whole persons in these transformed/whole relationships is functionally significant only as it emerges in relational likeness to the whole of God's relationships within the Godhead (cf. Col 2:9-10; 3:10-11). The interrelations within the whole of God between the Father, the Son and the Spirit can best (not totally) be defined as intimate relationship to the depth that, as Jesus disclosed, to see the Son is to see the Father, to know the Son is to know the Father (Jn 14:9; 17:26); and their intimate relationship functions together in the dynamic interaction of interdependence to the further depth that, as Jesus promised and the Father fulfilled, the Spirit's person will be his relational replacement so that his followers would not be reduced to orphans, but by the Spirit's relational presence and involvement the Father and the Son will be also and they all will be intimately involved together as family (Jn 14:18,23; 15:26; 16:14-15). Paul was further illuminating this intimate interrelationship together in interdependence in his letters, which he develops theologically and functionally in *pleroma* ecclesiology for the embodiment of the church's whole ontology and function. In trinitarian theology, this relational dynamic of God is inadequately described as *perichoresis*, tending to be overly conceptual.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, see John D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985). Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991). Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

The interdependence within the whole of God can only be understood to the extent that God has disclosed his ontology and function. In Paul's theological systemic framework and forest, his experiential truth centered on the function Jesus embodied and on the overlapping and extended function the Spirit enacted, both of which the Father initiated and ongoingly functions to oversee. Paul's connection to each of them appears to be in their specific functions, which seem to overlap and interact yet remain unique to each of them. (How this is perceived and interpreted has theological implications or repercussions depending on the interpretive framework of Paul's readers—to be discussed further in the next chapter.)

Interacting functions in themselves, however, do not account for the dynamic of the trinitarian Persons' whole relationship together, which underlies each of their functions and which integrates their uniqueness into the whole they constitute together, the whole of God. The ontology and function of God's whole relationship together lives also in interdependence. In this dynamic, any distinctions of their unique functions are rendered secondary; and such distinctions should not be used to define each of them or to determine their position in the Godhead. As vulnerably disclosed, the Father, the Son and the Spirit are irreducibly defined and inseparably determined only by whole relationship together, and this relational dynamic functions in various involvements with human contextualization to enact, embody and complete the whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, that is, to save both *from* reductionism and *to* wholeness together. To highlight their distinctions, for example, by being overly christocentric, simply binitarian, or even gender-specific, is to diminish the whole of God's ontology and to fragment the whole of God's function.

Paul grasped their whole relationship together as the experiential truth of the whole of God relationally undifferentiated. His *synesis* of this relationally whole God was the theological-functional basis for the church's whole ontology and function to be embodied in likeness (Eph 4:4-6). Anything less or any substitute is neither in relational likeness to the whole of God, nor, therefore, embodies the intimate interrelationships together in interdependence to grow in the wholeness of the *pleroma* of Christ (4:12b-13).

The ontology and function of whole relationships together, either for God or the church, lives in interdependence, which for the church is the relational outcome and ongoing dynamic of transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together. Church interdependence in likeness of the whole of God's interdependence enters a critical condition when it shifts from being a function of transformed/whole relationships together. In an early letter, Paul warned against such a shift as he described this interdependence for the fragmented church at Corinth (1 Cor 12:12-31). This interdependence of the individual parts involved the connections together which resulted in covariation between the individual parts; moreover, if the parts are properly connected together, the implied result would be synergism in which the whole becomes greater than the sum of its individual parts (12:25-26). To what Paul points to constitute that connection is the relational involvement of *agape* (12:31). In another letter, Paul provided the theological clarification needed to define the transformed relationships together as the basis for church interdependence (Rom 12:3-16). Both of these church scenarios struggled with the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work affecting their relationships together.

Reductionism, however, is often not as blatant as at the church in Corinth. As noted earlier, it is often more indirect and subtle, for example, involving assimilation into human contextualization as existed perhaps in the Roman church (cf. Rom 12:2). The norms prevailing in the surrounding context are in their function mainly how reductionism affects church relationships together in general and church interdependence in particular. For example, when the norm for defining persons is based on what roles they perform and/or resources they have, this determines how relationships function, which affects a church's interrelations together and, subsequently, affects church interdependence. Cultural models of family, social models of group relations, organizational and business models of interdependence, all influence a church's interrelations together and its interdependence, with substitutes for the relational likeness of God. Furthermore, norms of individualism and individual freedom foster the independence which strain and weaken church relationships *together* and counter church interdependence, thus redefining, reshaping and reconstructing what it means to be created in the likeness of God.

Reductionism defines a church and explains church function by the behavior of its individuals and their resources. A church, therefore, becomes the sum of its individuals; church interdependence is thus no longer the relational outcome of relationships together with the Spirit but a byproduct at the mercy of individuals. The shift from top-down and inner out to bottom-up and outer in is subtle. In the church today, synergism has been replaced by individualism, and church interdependence has been renegotiated to church dependence on the individual's terms—in contrast to Paul's relational imperative for the church (Eph 4:2,15-16; cf. Col 3:10-15). Independence is the reductionist alternative to interdependence and, intentionally or unintentionally, serves as the functional substitute for it, with freedom as its identity marker. This was a major issue which Paul was fighting against, making epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction, even in that collective-oriented sociocultural context (e.g., Gal 5:1,13; Rom 12:3; Phil 2:1-4; 1 Cor 4:7; 8:1,9). Even modern neuroscience recognizes that interdependence is the natural state for human persons, and that independence is a political notion, not a scientific one.<sup>4</sup>

Paul challenged the renegotiated ecclesiology of churches in reduced ontology and function, and also challenged the assumptions of theological anthropology underlying the definition of the person and its determination of relationships together in reductionist terms. Both of these conditions existed in churches apart from, in contrast to, or in conflict with the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. Paul's challenges to such reductionism are summarized in his response to make relationally specific the functional significance of *pleroma* ecclesiology (Eph 4:14-25). His theological-functional clarity of this functional significance is directly connected to and emerges from his dialogue on the theological dynamic of church ontology (4:7-13).

For the ontological identity of the church to be of functional significance, it cannot be shaped or constructed by human terms from human contextualization. In Paul's ecclesiology, the church in wholeness is the new creation by the whole of God's relational response of grace ("was given grace") from above top-down, the dynamic of which ("descended...ascended") Christ relationally embodied to make each one of us together to be God's whole ("he might fill all things," *pleroo*, make complete, 4:7-10; cf.

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<sup>4</sup> John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 248.

1:23). This is the church in wholeness embodying the *pleroma* of Christ. In God's relational response of grace, Christ also gave the relational means to church leaders for the dynamic embodiment of the church (4:11), which Paul previously defined also as part of the Spirit's relational involvement to share different *charisma* from the whole (not a fragmented source) for the functional significance of the church body (1 Cor 12:4-11). Paul illuminates this further to make definitive the functional significance of embodying of the church in relational likeness to the whole and holy God.

Church leaders are given the relational means for the purpose "to equip the saints" (*katartismos* from *katartizo*, to put into proper condition, to restore to former condition, make complete, 4:12). This directly points to the dynamic of transformed persons reconciled and relationally involved in transformed relationships together in relational likeness to God, and integrated in interdependence of the various church functions ("work of ministry") necessary for the dynamic embodying (*oikodome*, 4:12) of the church's whole ontology and function of "the *pleroma* of Christ" (4:13). This means unequivocally: For church leaders to be of functional significance, their persons must be defined by the wholeness of the new creation in the qualitative image of God from inner out, not defined by their gifts, resources or the roles and titles they have which reduce their persons to outer in; and for their leadership to be functionally significant as transformed persons, their function must be determined by *agape* relational involvement in transformed relationships together (both equalized and intimate) as God's new creation family in the relational likeness of the whole of God, not determined by the titles and roles they perform (even with sacrifice) which make distinctions, intentionally or unintentionally creating distance and stratification in relationships together. The latter practices by church leaders renegotiate ecclesiology from bottom-up based on a theological anthropology from outer in.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, church leaders in reduced ontology and function are not created or living new in the image and likeness of God and, therefore, cannot *katartismos* others in the interdependence necessary to be of functional significance for embodying the church in relational likeness of the whole and holy God. Nor can they proclaim the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). Only transformed leaders—whose persons are ongoingly being restored to the image and likeness of God (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10-11; cf. *ananeoomai*, Eph 4:23)—vulnerably involved in transformed relationships together with the Spirit can help make complete the saints—that is, *katartismos* emerges from conjoint interaction with *anakainoo*. Only whole leaders relationally serve to make complete the saints in the interdependence that is functionally significant for the church's whole function: to dynamically embody (*oikodome*) the *pleroma* of Christ until all those relationally belonging to God's family come to (*katantao*, reach, arrive) be together as one (*herotes*, unity), that is, whole in their relational response of trust in reciprocal relationship together and whole in specifically knowing (*epignosis*) the Son of God in intimate relationship, the relational outcome of which is persons without distinctions (beyond *aner*) who are wholly complete (*teleios*) in the qualitative depth (*helikia*, stature) of the *pleroma* embodied by Christ, therefore who together with the Spirit can embody the *pleroma* of Christ in functional significance of the relational likeness of the whole of God (4:12-13).

Paul is not outlining an ecclesial function of church growth models, missional models or any other ministry techniques of serving for the quantitative expansion of



gatherings shaped or constructed by human terms. Paul makes definitive the theological paradigm for the whole function embodying the church's ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is as God's new creation family in his qualitative image and relational likeness. This paradigm is the theological dynamic of church ontology, whose function is entirely relational and whose whole ontology and function is the functional significance of just transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together in interdependence, the definitive paradigm especially for its leaders (discussed further in chap. 10).

It is unequivocal in Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology that the church in relational likeness of the whole of God is irreplaceable for the functional significance of its ontology and function. For the church's ontology and function to be whole as God's new creation family, it must (*dei* not *opheilo*) be the functional significance of both transformed relationships reconciled together and intimate interrelations integrated together in interdependence; and both of these are functionally significant only in *agape* relational involvement. Church whole relationships together are reconciled together by Christ with the Spirit, thus are by their nature irreducible; and its integrated relational outcome of church interdependence in relational likeness to the whole of God is nonnegotiable. Interdependent is how God created his new creation family, as well as created the whole human family in relationship together (cf. Gen 2:18) and integrated all of creation (cf. Col 1:20; Rom 8:19-21). Just as modern neuroscience affirms this interdependence and acknowledges the influence of reductionism to counter it, the whole ontology and function of the church embodies the functional significance of this new creation to fulfill the inherent human relational need and to solve the human problem—which neuroscience can merely identify without good news for its fulfillment and resolution. Yet, the church in renegotiated ecclesiology is also without both the functional significance of the good news of what persons are and its relational significance of what persons can be saved *to*.

## **Its Functional Imperatives and Implications**

Renegotiated ecclesiology may be considered to be pragmatic by some of Paul's readers, even a necessary reality. On the other hand, *pleroma* ecclesiology may be perceived as "just theological" by his readers, perhaps an ideal not attainable in practice. Many of his readers may even argue that some of Paul's prescriptions for the church (e.g., about women and slaves) appear to be pragmatic ecclesiology, thus that he either contradicted his theology or suspended its ideal. While there seems to be ambiguity in some of his church prescriptions, the issue in understanding the whole of Paul and the whole in his ecclesiology is about the perception of what context Paul is speaking *from*, not the context he is speaking in and to. Renegotiated or pragmatic ecclesiology is based on human contextualization and shaped by human terms. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology emerges from God's relational context and process and is defined and determined by God's terms through reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit—terms irreducible by the nature of the whole of God and nonnegotiable by the nature of the holy God. In his prescriptions for the church, Paul is speaking from God's relational context and process. Therefore, Paul's prescriptions need to be seen in the strategic interest and concern of *pleroma* ecclesiology and must not be confused with or reduced to renegotiated

ecclesiology for pragmatics. His prescriptions involve a tactical shift advocated by Paul which points to the strategic concerns of God's relational whole on God's terms to fulfill and complete God's thematic relational response to the human condition.

The church is God's new creation family which fulfills the inherent human relational need. The embodiment of church ontology and function can be either reduced ontology and function based on the perception of pragmatics and/or a necessary reality. Or it can be whole ontology and function constituted by being transformed from old to new in the likeness of the whole and holy God. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology makes the latter the functional imperative, not an obligatory moral imperative, by the nature of wholeness together being the only solution to the human problem that can fulfill the inherent human relational need. Moreover, by the nature of wholeness, *pleroma* ecclesiology cannot be reduced in its ontology of the church or be renegotiated in its function of the church and still have the functional significance for the human problem and the relational significance for the inherent human need. This is the gospel of wholeness by which the church was constituted and in which it must be congruent for the church to claim ontological identity and relational belonging with the whole of God (Eph 2:14-22; 6:15).

When Paul said "Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8), he gave both a functional imperative and a relational imperative for embodying the church. Here Paul is defining neither an obligation (or duty, *opheilo*) nor a moral-ethical framework, as the context of this verse may suggest (particularly for women and slaves). Rather, Paul is further illuminating what is necessary (*dei*) by the nature of the ontological identity of who the church is and whose the church is—that is, the ontology of the church in wholeness of those relationally belonging in God's new creation family. This is made necessary not by a theological construct of light but by the experiential truth of the Light in reciprocal relational involvement with Christ together with the Spirit, just as Jesus vulnerably disclosed (Jn 8:12) and relationally embodied in the whole ontology and function of his face (2 Cor 4:6). Paul makes definitive that in face-to-face involvement with Christ in relationship together, "you are light" (Eph 5:8; cf. Mt 5:14) because God has shone "in our hearts" (2 Cor 4:6) to transform our ontology and function into the image and likeness of the whole of God (2 Cor 3:18; 5:17; Col 3:10) and now relationally belong to the family of the Light (1 Thes 5:5). For Paul personally, theologically and functionally, this is the experiential truth of "the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor 4:4). On the basis of this experiential truth, therefore, Paul is decisive, that by the nature of the church's new and whole ontology it is functionally and relationally imperative to "Live as children of *the ontology of the light*," no longer in the old ontology and function of darkness. Paul is unequivocal because the church's ontology in whole relationship together is the functional and relational significance of relationally belonging wholly in family 'already' as "children of light...not of darkness" in relational progression to 'not yet' (1 Thes 5:5, in its context of eschatological concerns).

The imagery of light and darkness is unlike a traditional dualism between good and evil. For Paul, light and darkness involve the dynamic of wholeness in ontology and function and the only alternative, reductionism, which is anything less and any substitute of wholeness. "Darkness" is both an ontological condition and a relational condition, the full significance of which cannot be limited to quantitative conditions or described simply as evil. Darkness-reductionism encompasses the prevailing ontology and function of

human contextualization “in which you once lived, following the course of this world” (Eph 2:2), that is, the counterproductive efforts (“unfruitful works”) of reductionism which need to be exposed, confronted and convicted (*elencho*, 5:11). This can only happen when light engages the darkness (5:13-14). Not to live in the ontology as light, however, is to diminish or minimize the light by the influence of darkness, that is, by reductionism (cf. Mt 5:14-16), for which Paul makes epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction in order to embody the church’s whole ontology and function. The imperatives in Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology are for the church to live whole, God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms, in the midst of reductionism surrounding it, and to make whole any reductionism, both within itself and in the world.

Paul further illuminates the light in *pleroma* ecclesiology because in Paul’s theological forest the light’s ontology and function emerged from the *pleroma* of God in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology with *pleroma* pneumatology to be embodied whole as the *pleroma* of Christ in *pleroma* ecclesiology. Furthermore, since these theological dynamics of the light in wholeness are clearly distinguished from any reduced ontology and function in darkness, the light’s whole ontology and function in church life and practice becomes more easily recognized in contrast to reductionism in darkness. The light’s contrast, however, presupposes whole ontology and function; otherwise, the church’s light can no longer claim to be different from reductionism, and thus not be recognizable either within the church or in the world.

“You are light” supposes only an inner-out ontology (2 Cor 4:6; cf. *metamorphoo*, Rom 12:2) that cannot function from outer in to give just the appearance of light (cf. “angel of light” of reduced ontology and function, *metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:14). Paul made it definitive that the light constituted in these persons’ hearts illuminates the glory of God’s qualitative being and relational nature in the whole ontology and function of Christ’s face, thus this light can only be whole ontology in likeness of God’s; and that light’s inner-out whole function can be at best only simulated by outer in function from reductionism, as with “an angel of light” and “ministers of righteousness” (2 Cor 11:14-15). Any outer-in simulations and illusions of light happen when light is disconnected from its source, because light is neither an energy nor ethereal and must not be disembodied from the Light. “In the Lord you are light” Paul said clearly. When Jesus disclosed his embodiment of the light, he also made clear a contingency about light. Those who have his embodied light are only “whoever follows me” (Jn 8:12). This is not, however, a discipleship of merely following his teachings or example—which commonly get disembodied from his person—but of following “me, my whole person,” who embodied the *pleroma* of God only for relationship together (Col 1:19-20; 2:9-10). Church leaders and any person wanting to serve Christ must first “follow me” in relationship together, as Jesus made imperative in a paradigm for serving (Jn 12:26)—which Peter learned the hard way (Jn 21:22), and Paul points to (Eph 5:10).

In other words, Paul’s emphatic message is “you are light” only on the basis of your whole ontology from inner out, signified by the function of your heart following Jesus’ person in relationship together with the whole of God. For the functional imperative “live as children of light” to be functionally significant, it must by its nature (*dei*), and not by obligation or duty (*opheilo*), be the embodiment of whole relationship together as God’s new creation family. Moreover, Paul conjoins other imperatives to support this primary one of embodying the whole ontology and function of the church:

“discern, distinguish and determine [*dokimazo*] what is pleasing to the Lord” (Eph 5:10); “Be careful then how you live *both within the church and in the surrounding context*...making the most of the time,” that is, *exagorazo*, “redeem from reductionism in these days of opportunity” (*kairos*, not *chronos*, 5:15-16); and most importantly, “be made complete [*pleroo*] with the Spirit” (5:18).

Paul is emphatic with these imperatives in order for the embodiment of church ontology and function to be whole, as light in the darkness, in wholeness in the midst of reductionism. He is also decisive because he never underestimates the surrounding influence of reductionism (“the days *exist in the sin of reductionism*,” 5:16), and the persistence of its author (6:16) and its subtle presence within the church (2 Cor 11:14-15). Yet, he is not pontificating about church life and practice and legislating relationships together, nor does he prescribe anything less and any substitutes of what the whole of Jesus relationally embodied for the experiential truth of the whole gospel—the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ’s whole ontology and function (2 Cor 4:4), the gospel of wholeness (Eph 6:15). In his conjoint fight for this gospel and against any and all reductionism, Paul is not apologetic about *pleroma* ecclesiology. The only embodiment the Spirit raises up with the embodied *pleroma* of God is God’s new creation family, the church, the *pleroma* of Christ (Rom 8:11,14-15; Eph 1:23).

Wholeness is not optional in Paul’s ecclesiology. Wholeness is the basis for *pleroma* ecclesiology, which is constituted by the embodied *pleroma* of God himself, who “is our wholeness...making wholeness...proclaimed wholeness” (Eph 2:14-18). Therefore, by the nature of God’s wholeness, church wholeness is irreducible in its ontology and nonnegotiable in its function. *Pleroma* ecclesiology accounts for, signifies and constitutes nothing less and no substitutes. And for the church to live whole has inescapable implications for church life and practice.

With wholeness no longer being optional for the church and thus no longer reducible in church life and negotiable in church practice, there emerge further implications for its ontological identity and relational belonging which are vital to understand for church life and practice.

In Ephesians, Paul illuminates *pleroma* ecclesiology. Yet he was not engaging in a conventional theological task but, rather, the experiential truth constituting the heart of who the church is and whose the church is as the *pleroma* of Christ. In the either-or dynamic between wholeness and reductionism, there are ongoing distinctions to be made and maintained for the church to embody its ontological identity. His theological dynamic of church ontology (4:7-13) is prefaced by this concern (4:1-6). Part of his concern can be understood in terms that the church not experience identity loss or even identity theft. Thus, Paul is engaging the church directly in God’s relational process of family love (from his earlier prayer, 3:18-19) for the transformed relationships together of ‘who the church is’ necessary to be ‘whose whole family they are’: “lead a life *corresponding to [axios], in congruence with, the klesis* to which you have been called” (4:1). *Klesis* can mean call or vocation, either of which signifies the identity of the church that needs to be clearly distinguished and ongoingly lived in correspondence, congruence (*axios*).

The implication here is that clarity of the church’s ontological identity depends on two dynamics which must be engaged: (1) making the functional distinction of the whole integrity of who and whose the church is in church life together, and (2)

maintaining and ongoingly living this relational distinction of wholeness together both within itself and in the surrounding context—“making every effort...in the bond of wholeness...one body and one Spirit...one hope of your identity [*klesis*], one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (4:3-6).

Moreover, Paul was relationally involved with churches whose surrounding context was the dominant Greco-Roman world, within the pervading ancient Mediterranean world. The further implication is that making and maintaining the distinction of the church’s whole identity in these surrounding conditions necessitates having a *minority identity*. That is, a minority identity signifies persons and persons together (“saints,” *hagios*, holy, uncommon, 5:3) who are not distinguished by the ordinary, common, normative practices of the surrounding context, that which Paul has been identifying and detailing as sins of reductionism—which Paul’s readers should neither limit to his specifics nor assume are the same for all surrounding contexts. Paul is not focused on moral purity and having a glorified status in an elite position with the notion of saints. A minority identity is *hagios*, uncommon, not common. Therefore, how the church lives in the surrounding context must not be with a bifocal identity (primary identity defined by human contextualization, secondary identity defined by God’s context), a hybrid identity (crossbreeding both), or with any form of pluralistic identity in mutual coexistence without the distinction of its ontological significance. These identities are reductionist substitutes which cannot make and maintain the necessary distinction for the whole integrity of who and whose the church is. This distinct identity of wholeness is easily lost or “taken” from the church (identity theft) in the *common* of the surrounding context, which is less about the Greco-Roman and ancient Mediterranean worlds and more about reductionism. This does not imply that the church’s ontological identity of wholeness is separated, isolated or disengaged from the surrounding context, but that how the church can be involved in it and maintain its primary identity is a function only of wholeness, which is a function of its relationships together.

If the church does not conjointly make the functional distinction of the whole integrity of its ontological identity and ongoingly live the relational distinction of its wholeness in relationships together, the church no longer embodies the whole ontology and function of God’s new creation family. The relational consequence is various forms of *ekklesia*, gatherings not family, to which epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction are directed for the church’s wholeness within itself and in the surrounding context. The relational consequence of the loss of wholeness is not a conclusion Paul shaped from his own thought. Jesus already made definitive the consequence for the new creation by mixing the new with the old (Mk 2:21-22; Lk 5:36-38).

The ontological identity of God’s whole and holy family can only by its nature of wholeness be in congruence with its *klesis* when the church lives whole in the surrounding context in order to make whole in the world. Anything less and any substitutes lack distinction for the three critical issues unavoidably involved in all church practice, for which each of its members in the body and members together are accountable, just as Paul himself accounted for in his own life and practice:

1. The integrity and significance of what and whom the church/members present of themselves to others in the surrounding context (e.g., *prepo*, “fitting” our identity, or not, Eph 5:3).

2. The quality of their communication while in their presentation of self to others and the message it communicates to them (e.g., *morologia*, “foolish talk,” which includes style and content of broad spectrum of speech essentially without depth of significance, thus reductionist communication with “empty words,” *kenos*, lacking content or hollow, 5:6; also, e.g., *eutrapelia*, “coarse talk,” wittiness that essentially uses one’s speech to draw attention to oneself and promotes one’s knowledge, self-interest or other self-concern [cf. 1 Cor 8:1]; in contrast, e.g., to “thanksgiving” that does not focus on or revolve around oneself but is relationally communicating involvement with others, 5:4).
  
3. The depth level of relational involvement the church/members engage with their communication while in what/whom they present of themselves to others—a level of involvement, for example, from the outer in without the primacy of inner out involvement in relationships (i.e., *agape* relational involvement of family love), thus signifying reduced ontology and function (e.g., *eidololatres*, one submitted, even unintentionally, to outer-in form and appearance, i.e., reductionism, thus church/members who “disregard,” *apeitheia*, God’s relational terms congruent to “the family of Christ and of the whole of God,” 5:5-6), all in contrast to the wholeness about which Paul is decisive to make imperative for the church and its members, “therefore do not share in and become partners with [*symmetochos*] the reductionists in the surrounding context” (5:7).

Paul simply illuminates further the consequence for God’s new creation family of mixing the new with the old that Jesus clearly defined for the new creation already, in which the reductionists consider “The old is good or better” (Lk 5:39). It is unavoidable for the church and its members to give account of their practice in these three critical issues. As Paul continues on to make further imperative, this accountability is necessary both for the embodiment of the church’s whole ontology to be light in the surrounding context and for the church’s ongoing function to be whole in order to “Live as children of light” (5:8ff).

In Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, God’s thematic relational response of grace, *agape* relational involvement and dynamic of wholeness (peace) converge only for this irreducible and nonnegotiable relational outcome: to embody the ontological inner-out depth of church identity in the interrelated, interdependent and integrated function of who the church is together and whose family the church distinguishes, and thus to embody ‘already’ the new creation family of transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together for the whole ontology and function of the church. This relational outcome emerged from Paul’s *synesis* of the theological dynamics of the whole of God (Eph 3:2-6)—from his involvement not in a theological task but in his *oikonomia* family responsibility to make complete the whole (*pleroo*) of God’s relational communication for his family (Col 1:25-28). Therefore, there are further implications inescapable for the church’s accountability.

Along with the implications for the church’s ontological identity are conjoined inescapable implications for the functional significance of relationally belonging to the church as God’s new creation family (Eph 2:14-16 in conjoint function with Col 3:10-11; Gal 3:26-29; 6:15). What unfolds in Paul’s theological development of *pleroma*

ecclesiology go further and deeper, indeed well beyond, what many of Paul's readers merely perceive as moral/ethical imperatives or household codes of collective life in the church while in the surrounding context. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology gets to the heart of the experiential truth of relationally belonging in God's new creation family, the implications of which the church cannot avoid being accountable for. They are simply:

1. Relationally belonging in God's new creation family is the relational outcome 'already' that cannot be set aside or relegated (and thus neglected) to 'not yet'; therefore the church is accountable now to function in this experiential truth.
2. The experiential truth of this relational outcome also has a reciprocal contingency which necessitates conjointly the relational significance of the church's intimate relationships together and the functional significance of its equalized relationships together—the interaction of which implies that the church cannot have one (significant aspect of relationships together) without the other for the church to embody its whole ontology and function. In other words, transformed relationships together of the new creation can be nothing less than the conjoint function of intimate and equalized relationships together; and relational belonging in the church as God's new creation family can be nothing less than ongoing *agape* relational involvement in these transformed relationships together.

Therefore, the combined implication of being accountable already for the relational-functional significance of transformed relationships together is for the church to be making whole and living whole in a new relational order of whole relationships together. These definitive relationships are the intimate relationships together in a new order which are without the determinacy of human distinctions from outer in and are equalized from inner out, thus in contradistinction with the reductionism of human contextualization. The church functioning intimately without human distinctions and as the equalizer may be perceived by Paul's readers as a theological construct, whose ideal transcends pragmatic function in the real world. Without the Spirit that would be the reality. Yet, in the relational dynamic of Paul's theological forest the *pleroma* of God relationally embodied nothing less than the whole ontology and function of God in order to embody with the Spirit nothing less than the whole ontology and function of the *pleroma* of Christ, the church. In this definitive relational process of wholeness, the relational embodiment of the church is wholly constituted in the qualitative image and the relational likeness of the whole of God—the relational outcome 'already'. The experiential truth of this ontological identity for Paul is found in the congruence of the church's identity to nothing less and no substitutes, regardless of its constituency or its situation in the surrounding context. And so the wholeness of relational belonging in the church is neither optional for church function nor negotiable to other church terms. The gospel of wholeness has no other relational significance and outcome.

Moreover, just as the whole of Paul experienced for himself, it is important to underscore that this relational-functional transformation to a new relational order in the church also requires a redemptive change in the church's perceptual-interpretive framework and lens from outer in to the inner-out framework and lens—the new *phronema* and *phroneo* with the Spirit which Paul made definitive for “*zoe* and

wholeness” (Rom 8:5-6)—necessary for the following: for the church to have the sensitivity of quality over quantity in its life and practice, and for the church to have relational awareness in its ontological identity and relational belonging. This relational awareness is dependent on the qualitative sensitivity that is inseparable from relational function in likeness of the whole of God, which Paul clearly distinguishes from reductionism (Eph 4:14-24). This interaction involves the dynamic of wholeness in which the church is accountable for all the imperatives and implications of *pleroma* ecclesiology—accountability which extends to all of Paul’s readers, who themselves may require a critical change in interpretive lens to pay attention to the whole of Paul (historical, relational and theological), and a basic change in interpretive framework to grasp the whole in Paul’s theology.

“But now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light.” The Spirit grieves over anything less and any substitutes, whose sentiment necessitates relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity for Paul’s readers to understand (Eph 4:30).



## Chapter 10 The Church Alive in Wholeness

**Put on whatever will make you ready to *live* the gospel of wholeness.**

Eph 6:15

As unfolded in the previous chapters, the theological dynamics within Paul's theological systemic framework converged in his theological forest and were integrated with further theological dynamics with just one relational purpose for wholly one relational outcome and condition: to constitute God's new creation family, whose relational outcome emerges already in the embodied *pleroma* of Christ, the church, and whose relational conclusion completes the church's eschatological trajectory. Paul remains focused primarily on the relational outcome 'already', perceiving its context within the time of qualitative *kairos* and not of quantitative *chronos*, thus his imperative for the church to be free to live in the present (Eph 5:15-16). Any dialogue with churches that Paul makes about the relational conclusion 'not yet' and the end times is always in the context of 'already', therefore the not yet emerges inseparably from the already (e.g., 1 Thes 5; Gal 5:5-6; Col 3:14).

For the church to be free to live in *kairos* and not be determined by *chronos* is no spiritualized paradigm shift but involves redemptive change. In Paul's relational imperative above, "making the most of *kairos*" (*exagorazo*) implies being redeemed from not only determination by *chronos* but also its underlying influence, "because the days are evil" (Eph 5:16)—that is, reductionism and its ongoing efforts against wholeness and God's relational whole, as Paul further makes definitive (Eph 6:16). What Paul illuminates points to issues ongoing for the church to live wholly embodied in the relational outcome now.

Through the course of his letters, Paul has been focused on the gospel more than theology. This same gospel unfolds as God's thematic relational response of grace to make whole the human condition, which Paul identifies as "the gospel of God" (Rom 15:16), "the gospel of the glory of Christ" (2 Cor 4:4), and lastly as "the gospel of wholeness" (Eph 6:15). Consistently, passionately and ongoingly, Paul has fought for this gospel and against reductionism. His conjoint fight shifted to the church and is now fully engaged in and inseparable from the church's life and practice. Specifically, Paul's fight within the church directly involves the three crucial interrelated issues which frame the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism (discussed previously in *Theology of Wholeness*, chap. 6):

1. The interpretive lens we use to perceive the person (from inner out or outer in) determines in function how we actually (not ideally) define ourselves and others.
2. Then, how we function in relationships is generally determined by how we have defined ourselves and others with that interpretive lens; and in reflexive

interrelated influence, how our relationships are experienced can also determine further how we see and define ourselves.

3. Therefore, how these two issues become the actual primary inputs which influence, define, even determine how we really see church and function in relationships together at church, in our gatherings in church.

The first two issues involve theological assumptions of the human person, the reduced ontology and function of which Paul challenges. These issues extend to Christ (thus, of assumptions of Christology and soteriology) in whose image and likeness the church is the new creation. The third issue signifies the extent to which Paul challenges their theological assumptions of pneumatology and ecclesiology.

These three crucial issues further interact with the three critical issues involved in all practice for the church and its members (discussed in the previous chapter):

1. The integrity and significance of what and whom the church/members present of themselves to others, both within the church and in the surrounding context.
2. The quality of their communication while presenting themselves to others and the message it communicates to them.
3. The depth level of relational involvement the church/members engage through their communication by what and whom they present of themselves to others.

These six issues together are ongoing, which Paul continues to address with the church and to challenge within churches in order for the church to live in wholeness ‘already’.

This chapter completes the whole in Paul’s theology. His fight against reductionism continues to be as strong as ever. His fight for the gospel of wholeness—vulnerably embodied by the *pleroma* of God—becomes his fight for the church embodied to be alive in wholeness, that is, irreducibly alive in Christ’s likeness as the *pleroma* of Christ. For Paul, the good news for the inherent human relational need is further embodied by the church’s whole ontology and function.

## **The Church on the Offensive**

The church in wholeness ‘already’ is neither passive nor in a defensive mode. The new creation of whole persons conjoined in whole relationships together is by its nature dynamic and alive. Any condition of apparent homeostasis in the embodied church should not be confused with maintaining the status quo; the latter essentially is a deteriorating condition in a church (cf. the church in Laodicea, Rev 3:14-17). The dynamic in the church alive involves ongoingly distinguishing the church’s ontology and living the church’s function in wholeness while in the surrounding context of reductionism.

Paul’s closing relational imperative for the church, “be strong,” stated in the Greek passive voice (Eph 6:10), appears to put the church in a passive position and a

defensive mode with the armor of God (6:11-18). Yet, by combining the passive voice with the middle voice (indicating direct involvement of subject), Paul is further illuminating the church's reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit, and thus with the whole of God. This direct involvement with the Spirit is integral for the church's whole ontology and function in the midst of reductionism, while not ignoring reductionism's presence or underestimating its influence. This reciprocal relationship together does not render the church passive and on the defensive but rather embodies the church in the dynamic position to be on the offensive, alive in the experiential truth of wholeness (6:15). In its ontological identity as light, the church does not just resist reductionism but also exposes, rebukes, refutes and shows its fault (*elencho*, Eph 5:11-14) in order to extend God's family love to the human condition with the gospel of wholeness. Paul assumes the offensive enactment of this whole function of the church, in which he personally engages in reciprocal relationship together with them (6:19-20; cf. 2 Cor 5:18-20).

Paul assumes that the whole ontology and function of the church is in likeness of the *pleroma* of God. The whole of God's thematic relational response to make whole the human condition was embodied and fulfilled by Christ. The truth of this gospel was not a proposition or doctrinal truth to Paul but only the experiential truth of the embodied *pleroma* of God in whole relationship together—Paul's definitive basis for exposing, rebuking, refuting and convicting Peter in his reductionism (Gal 2:11-14). The evidence of the experiential truth of this whole relationship together embodied by Christ is now embodied and extended by the church in likeness. Therefore, the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness is now wholly embodied in the church to live whole together as God's new creation family and to extend God's family in the world to make whole the human condition. Pointing to his own past updated, Paul earlier reflected on this relational dynamic for those made whole and their call and commission to share the experiential truth of the whole gospel: "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news" (Rom 10:14-15; Isa 52:7). The functional significance of this gospel of wholeness is embodied unequivocally in the church's whole ontology and function, which is the basis for Paul's relational imperative for the church in wholeness (Col 3:15) and its relational significance already as God's new creation family (Gal 6:15).

The nature of the church family as dynamic and alive in the new creation is distinguished only by the function of relationship—that is, whole relationships together, the function of transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together. How deeply a church is distinguished by this function of relationship is the relational outcome of its reciprocal relational involvement together with the Spirit, starting foremost by the vulnerable involvement of its leadership.

## **Leadership in the New Creation**

How is a minister of righteousness distinguished from other "ministers of righteousness"? Not by their gifts, resources, role-performance or any other outer-in measure (*metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:15). Based on outer-in perception and assessment, Paul said *to telos* (end, goal or limit) of ministers will be determined by the workings of how they define themselves and thus determine their function, notably in how they do

relationships and lead in church (“Their end will match their deeds.”). In other words, Paul makes the theological anthropology of church leaders a basic issue in church leadership and a basic antecedent needing to be congruent for leading the new creation church family (cf. Phil 2:1-5; 1 Cor 12:12-13).

Theological anthropology congruent with the gospel of wholeness is a function only of experiential truth, not mere doctrinal or propositional truth. Given that the church now embodies this gospel of wholeness, the church’s ontology and function must be an outworking of its theological anthropology that is congruent with the experiential truth of wholeness. Anything less or any substitutes in the church—for example, leadership defined and determined from outer-in—fragments the wholeness of God’s new creation to the various shaping of reduced ontology and function, which becomes indistinguishable from reductionism (cf. “ministers of righteousness”) and thus no longer growing in the functional significance of the gospel of wholeness both to experience within its own life and to extend to the world.

Reductionism functions in an outer-in dynamic contrary to the inner out of the new creation; reductionism signifies a shift in theological anthropology of how persons are defined and thus determined. Paul’s theological anthropology (discussed previously in chap. 6) is definitive discourse precisely on the experiential truth of whole ontology and function, invariable in definition yet growing in wholeness, in which Paul’s own person functions to integrate the whole of his witness—both within the church (e.g., 2 Cor 12:7-10) and to the world (cf. Acts 27:23-25)—and the whole in his theology (e.g., Phil 3:7-9). On the basis of the integrity of his whole person presented to others, Paul engaged others with the quality of his communication (e.g., honest and loving, Eph 4:15, 25) which relationally involved himself with others for the depth of whole relationship together congruent with God’s new creation family (e.g., 2 Cor 12:14-15). Persons congruent with the new creation are being transformed to live from inner out in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God (Eph 4:24; Col 3:10-11).

This theological anthropology of whole ontology and function for the person and persons together as church is nonnegotiable for Paul (1 Cor 4:6). The new creation is not open to be defined and determined by human terms and shaping (Eph 4:22-24; Col 3:9-10; 2 Cor 5:16-17). Just as Paul holds himself accountable for his wholeness (cf. 1 Cor 15:9-10), he firmly holds church leaders accountable for theirs because, for all of them, their wholeness is inseparable from the embodiment of the church in whole ontology and function (Col 3:15; Eph 2:14-15; cf. 1 Cor 3:21-23). The new creation functions only in the inner-out dynamic in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God, the transformation which emerges from *anakainoo* (restored to being new again in one’s original condition, Col 3:10) and *ananeo* (being made new from inner out, Eph 4:23). The responsibility for engagement in this process of transformation is reciprocal. On the one hand, all persons being transformed by the Spirit are responsible for their involvement. On the other, church leaders are further responsible for what they share and teach (as Paul implies, Eph 4:20-22) since their definitive purpose and function is the *katartismos* (from *katartizo*, to restore to former condition for complete qualification) of church members to embody the whole ontology and function of God’s new creation family (Eph 4:12-13). Paul assumes for church leaders in their purpose and function in *katartismos* that their own persons have been and continue to be *anakainoo* and *ananeo*. If their ontology and function are not whole, then their theological anthropology has

shifted to a reduced ontology and function incongruent with the new creation, and thus they no longer have functional significance for the embodiment of God's new creation family and the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, much less to assume a leadership function. Church leaders (including in the academy) need to understand that *katartismos* has functional significance only in dynamic interaction with their *anakainoo* and *ananeo*, and that this ongoing interaction is requisite for their ministry to be integral for embodying the church as the *pleroma* of Christ, the whole of God's new creation family. On no other basis can ministers of righteousness be distinguished.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, church leadership in the new creation is a new creation of those who are defined and determined by whole ontology and function, not by their roles and resources. Thus, these persons are in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit for the ongoing involvement together necessary to constitute God's new creation family in embodied whole ontology and function, which conjointly involves their own person with persons together. With this leadership the church is alive and grows in wholeness. Therefore, Paul both expects this wholeness in church leaders and holds them accountable to be transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together conjointly equalized and intimate (Eph 4:14-16; Gal 5:6; 6:15). This expectation and accountability of church leaders was demonstrated earlier by Paul with Peter and Barnabas (Gal 2:13-14), and is demonstrated further with Titus, Timothy and Philemon.

Titus and Timothy were Paul's partners and coworkers in church leadership among various churches (1 Thes 3:2; 2 Cor 8:23; Rom 16:21). The depth of their relationship together as church leaders is expressed in Paul's so-called Pastoral Epistles (1 & 2 Tim, Ti). Paul's authorship of these letters is debated in Pauline scholarship because of questions involving them: lack of general knowledge of these letters prior to the second century along with the rest of Paul's letters; terms and expressions not found in his undisputed letters; theological terms and concepts from undisputed letters either missing or used differently in the Pastorals; form of church order in Pastorals not found in undisputed letters; difficulty placing Pastorals into Paul's known career; and they point to a softer, domesticated and somewhat idealized Paul. The sum of these questions suggests that the Pastorals appear to be the work of someone other than Paul (e.g., pseudonymous, final form by a secretary, his fragments compiled after his death). There are lingering questions unanswered about the Pastorals as representative of Paul himself.<sup>1</sup>

I suggest another alternative for the Pastorals: these letters are a compilation of Paul's personal thoughts, advice and written notes communicated directly to Timothy and Titus, who formed them with the Spirit into a personal letter for some edifying purpose (not for nostalgic reasons) after Paul's death, while contextualizing Paul in the church of this later period, thus accounting for apparent further development of church order and giving only the appearance of a softer Paul in his communication with these church leaders. Though Timothy and Titus may not have understood the full edifying purpose of compiling a letter from Paul to each of them respectively, their reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit for this cooperative effort points to God's complete purpose for canonical inclusion. On this basis, I assume Paul's unintended authorship of the form of these letters yet his full responsibility of their content for church leadership, which in

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of this discussion, see Arland J. Hultgren, "The Pastoral Epistles" in James D.G. Dunn, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 141-155.

their canonical inclusion are representative wholly of Paul and not mere Pauline fragments. This is not to say that Timothy and Titus constructed Paul's thought, nor added their own shape to the Pauline corpus. They merely compiled what was from and of Paul—neither to idealize nor to give tribute to Paul—in cooperation with the Spirit in order to fulfill Paul's *oikonomia* to *pleroo* the whole of God's desires and thematic action to make whole the human condition in relationship together as God's new creation family.

For this relational purpose, what has become known as the Pastoral Epistles perhaps is better understood as Paul's Album of Family Love—which is more than pastoral but further and deeper involves Family Letters for the whole relationship together necessary to be God's whole family only on God's relational terms. And in this relational purpose for church leadership, Titus needed for accountability just a condensed summary from Paul, while Timothy necessitated greater input and feedback from Paul in family love.

Though not very much is known about Titus (he is absent from Acts), he became a key member of Paul's team (2 Cor 2:13; 8:23), notably in mission to Corinth (2 Cor 7:6-15; 8:6-23), now to Crete (Ti 1:5), and later to Dalmatia (2 Tim 4:10). Paul appeared to have confidence in Titus to address the difficulties in these situations (Ti 1:5,13; 2:15). In a sense, it can be said that Titus became Paul's troubleshooter for churches to function in *pleroma* ecclesiology. This personal letter then needs to be understood for the edifying purpose for all church leaders to engage their responsibility for church ontology and function to be God's new creation family together.

Paul's personal communication reminds Titus what is expected of him and for what he is accountable as a church leader, which extends to all church leaders. This is focused for Titus (and for Timothy) on the necessity of "sound doctrine/teaching" (*hygianino*, sound, healthy, from *hygies*, sound, whole, Ti 1:9; 2:1; 1 Tim 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3). As Paul made clear to Timothy, this is about the whole teaching congruent with the experiential truth of the whole gospel which was relationally entrusted to Paul (1 Tim 1:10b-11). What Paul illuminated to center their focus as church leaders cannot be reduced to a static notion of "sound doctrine." This would be a reduction of the whole gospel, thus reducing the experiential truth of the gospel's functional and relational significance in wholeness. The functional consequence would be a different gospel under the veneer of "sound doctrine" and the relational consequence would involve a renegotiated ecclesiology. It is this tension and conflict with reductionism of God's relational whole which must be grasped in these personal letters for them to constitute being from and of Paul. Only this understanding and accountability by church leaders extends Paul's fight for the experiential truth of the gospel of wholeness, which by necessity defines and determines their *katartismos* of the church to embody the whole of God's new creation family.

The Titus communication stresses similar aspects as in 1 and 2 Timothy, yet without the personal challenges, charges and even "pushing" Paul used with Timothy (1 Tim 1:18; 4:6, 11-16; 6:11-14; 2 Tim 1:6-8, 13-14; 2:1-7; 4:1-2, 5). Even though I assume their compilation of Paul's communication (oral and written) with each of them for their respective letters, this is not to suggest that Titus selectively left out those elements in his shorter account. Rather it suggests that Timothy was less firm and decisive than Titus and thus needed more exhorting from Paul to be definitive in whole

ontology and function, not reverting back to reduced ontology and function—that is, in what he presented of himself to others, in the quality of his communication and in the depth level of his relational involvement. Paul, however, is not focused on Timothy becoming more assertive in his role as church leader, nor more dynamic with his gifts. Paul focuses Timothy only on living in his wholeness. The Greek Titus, even among Jews, seemed to more readily live in his whole ontology and function (e.g., 2 Cor 7:6,13; 8:6,16-17; 12:18; Ti 1:5), and likely was encouraged that Paul did not define him by external identity markers even on religious terms (Gal 2:3).

In these Family Letters, Paul is not suggesting a certain type of personality to be effective church leaders. Paul's nonnegotiable expectation of church leadership is unequivocally for wholeness in ontology and function and accountability as transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together. His expectation and accountability are based on defining the person, engaging in relationships and practicing church only in the new creation image and likeness of the whole of God—just as Paul made imperative for Timothy (1 Tim 4:12, 15-16; also see Additional Textual Notes on Timothy in chap. 12). Therefore, whether leaders are “stronger” like Titus or “weaker” like Timothy, Paul holds all accountable in family love for nothing less and no substitutes—which included himself in all that he is, or isn't (2 Cor 12:9).

Paul's expectation and accountability of church leaders to be transformed persons relationally involved in transformed relationships together is even more clearly distinct with Philemon. In his personal letter to Philemon, Paul identifies him as a beloved church leader in partnership with him and Timothy (Phlm 1,17). Philemon leads a house church in his own house (v.2), in which Paul indicates Philemon's role as a benefactor and points to the deeper function of the church as family beyond a mere gathering (vv. 5,7, 9-10). The prevailing sociocultural role of benefactor combined with a leadership relational function in the church as family creates tension and conflict, even incompatibility, if the basis for the benefactor (i.e., outer-in distinction of reductionism) becomes the defining measure of the leader and thus the determining influence for the function of the church. By implication, Paul addresses a potential problematic ecclesiology which redefines the relational dynamic of an embodied family. Whenever a part(s) in the church body, even if that person is a benefactor providing for the physical existence of a house church, determines the whole of God's family, then reductionism has taken effect, shaping the whole by the terms of a part(s)—becoming a gathering of reduced ontology and function in renegotiated ecclesiology.

Paul writes to Philemon to take him further and deeper into the relational whole of God's new creation family only on God's relational terms, as a direct extension of his purpose for the Colossian letter (read also in the church at Laodicea). Thus, the Philemon letter needs to be read, interpreted and understood by the qualitative *phroneo* from the whole *phronema* Paul established in Colossians for the *synesis* necessary for the *pleroma* of God, who constituted the embodiment of the wholeness of the church. Paul was developing, yet had not fully articulated, *pleroma* ecclesiology. In this process for Paul, Philemon is a key letter for church ontology and function to be the relational whole of God's new creation family, and it becomes a functional bridge to Ephesians. In the Pauline corpus, Paul makes definitive in Ephesians the theological basis for Philemon's relational function as a transformed person *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together to embody the church's whole ontology and function as family.

For Philemon, as both benefactor of this house church and slave owner of Onesimus, the process of involvement in transformed relationships conjointly equalized and intimate is not a simple transformation, and likely a threatening engagement to make himself vulnerable to. It is important to understand that Paul does not simply articulate to Philemon the expectation and accountability of church leadership. Because Paul writes from the whole of God's relational context of family by the relational process of God's family love (vv.9-10), Paul engages Philemon as a whole person (not merely as a benefactor or church leader) in a family dialogue within the very transformed relationships which he wants Philemon to experience further and deeper (vv.8,14). These are the relationships both equalized and intimate which constitute God's new creation to be whole persons in whole relationship together in the image and likeness of God. Thus, these whole church relationships are not reduced by the false distinctions of persons from outer-in function in relationships fragmented by vertical separation and/or horizontal distance. Whole church relational involvement together in family love is the relational and functional basis for Philemon as a transformed church leader and for the church he leads to embody the transformed relationships together necessary as God's new creation family (vv.15-16). How does this relational outcome happen?

## **The Church in Love**

Philemon's challenge as a new creation was to function as a person being transformed from inner out, thus to be vulnerable in his whole person without defining himself by the roles he had and performed and without engaging relationships on that basis. Equally challenging for Philemon was to define Onesimus as a person without those distinctions who is also being transformed from inner out on the same basis, thus to see each other as whole persons vulnerably from inner out. Conjointly, on this basis, Philemon's further challenge was to vulnerably engage Onesimus from inner out to be relationally involved together in family love as equalized and intimate brothers; and for this new relationship together to be the relational basis for their church family would necessitate Philemon to restructure his own household operation ("business") as a slave owner in order to embody God's new creation family. These challenges illuminate the tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, and the interrelated issues of how we define ourselves and do relationships on that basis, and thus practice church on the same basis.

Certainly, there is a human cost for Philemon to meet these challenges and engage in the relational work of equalizing. There is also a cost for engaging in intimate relationships but the cost is less obvious. It is important to understand a vital distinction about *agape* in this matter because Paul challenges (*parakaleo*) Philemon "on the basis of *agape*" (v.9). Paul is not calling upon Philemon for sacrificial action. There is indeed a human cost for equalizing relational work—first to be equalized within one's own person and then to equalize all persons in relationships—which is similar to the divine cost of the embodied *pleroma* of God (cf. Phil 2:6-8; Col 1:19-20). This cost involves ongoingly giving up the benefits or letting go of the burdens from all elements of reductionist human distinctions which reduce persons to the outer in and fragment relationships in vertical stratification and/or horizontal distance. The person then presented without



reductionist distinctions involves submitting one's whole person (as is, without the benefit or burden of those distinctions) to be vulnerably involved from inner out in relationships with others, thus beyond the comfort or security of keeping distance in relationships. This vulnerability opens the functional door to the heart to engage the depth of *agape*, not as sacrifice but as intimate relational involvement together as family (Col 3:11, 14-15; cf. 2 Cor 12:15; Rev 3:20).

*Agape* family love was initiated by God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. In this relational process of family love, God pursued persons like Paul, Philemon and even Onesimus, embraced them as they are from inner out, paid the cost to take them into his family and made them whole together as his very own sons and daughters (as Paul clarified, Gal 4:4-6). This irreducible relational process, irreplaceable relational action, and nonnegotiable relational involvement constitute the family love embodied by the *pleroma* of God to equalize and reconcile persons intimately together in God's new creation family (as Paul made definitive, Col 1:19-22; 2:9-10; 3:10-11).

This is the *agape* by which Paul engages Philemon and into which he takes Philemon deeper. Family love is the depth of *agape* which changes incurring the above cost from the notion of a sacrifice, tending to signify a compelled obligation (*ananke*, "something forced," Phlm 14). Rather family love emerges from a transformed heart by choice, freely and uncompelled (*hekousios*), which is how Paul encouraged Philemon to function. Paul is making this rigorous relational process of family love functional for Philemon, and all church leaders and members in reductionist distinctions, in order to live as whole persons in whole relationship together, the embodiment of God's new creation family. On the relational-functional basis of family love, Philemon would give up a slave to gain a brother ("you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but...a beloved brother," vv.15-16), give up a household shaped by the surrounding context to gain whole family together ("but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord," v.16). As Paul signified in his opening and closing greeting (vv.3,25), by the whole of God's relational process of family love, he takes Philemon further and deeper into the importance of his whole person from inner out involved in the primacy of relationship together to be whole in the experiential truth of God's family 'already', so that "your faith may become more effective when you *specifically understand* [*epignosis*] all the good that we may do for Christ" (v.6). This good was not about serving in mission but about deep involvement in relational family love together.

Paul made unequivocal to Philemon, all church leaders and the entire church that the embodied church becomes alive only in family love to be wholly the new creation in relational likeness to the whole of God (Col 3:14-15). This is the relational purpose of Paul's prayer for the church to specifically know from the Spirit God's family love from inner out in order to wholly embody the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:17; 3:14-19). Moreover, as Paul clarified for Timothy, this relational process of family love necessitates the whole person (*pneuma* and *soma* together) to embody the *agape* relational involvement for whole relationship together, by which Timothy would engage in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (2 Tim 1:7, 13-14; cf. Rom 8:14-15). This depth of *agape* is not engaged merely by the quantity of deeds one does or resources one gives, even in great sacrifice. *Agape* family love is a function only of relational involvement from inner out. This relational function emerges only from persons (and notably church leaders) being restored to new again (*anakainoo*, Col 3:10) and being made new from

inner out (*ananeo*, Eph 4:23) to prepare and be prepared (*katartismos*) to embody the *pleroma* of Christ, and thus live and make whole (Eph 4:12-16).

Since family love is involvement of the whole person in reciprocal relationship together conjointly with each other and with the Spirit, another important necessity in this relational process is to submit one's person to one another (*hypotasso*, Eph 5:21). Paul does not make this an imperative because as a participle (*hypotassomenoi*) it directly defines the relational means by which his prior relational imperatives for the church are engaged (Eph 5:1-2,8,15,18b). *Hypotasso* makes definitive both the relational nature of the new creation and the relational primacy of God's new creation family before the individual, thus its priority over individual self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification. *Hypotasso* becomes a reductionist act when taken out of the relational context of Paul's imperatives and engaged apart from the relational process of family love.

Family love in relational likeness of the whole of God is neither optional nor negotiable in Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology. "Be imitators of God, as beloved children, and live in *agape*, as Christ loved us" are relational imperatives for the new creation church family, which by their very nature necessitate being submitted to one another based on experiencing the love from Christ's submission. *Hypotasso* has been interpreted with a reductionist lens of human distinctions to mean to render obedience, be submissive, be subordinated, with implications of becoming objectified or reduced in ontology and function—notably for women and slaves as Paul's prescriptions for them appear to suggest. Moreover, this interpretation has application only for certain persons to submit, not all. In interaction with his relational imperatives, however, Paul uses *hypotasso* as every person's initiation of a voluntary relational action and should not be confused with a compulsory act of obedience or subordination to, for example, someone with authority, power or more status as defined by human distinctions. Paul's relational dynamic of submitting one's whole person to one another is a function only of family love extended to one another in relational likeness of Christ's family love of us. This reciprocal relational involvement of family love signifies the whole person giving primacy to the relationships together of God's relational whole over an individual's self-interests and self-concerns (cf. 1 Cor 10:23-24, 31-33; Eph 4:14,19)—yet without sacrificing the whole person's significance in the family, for example, as experienced often in collective contexts and some human families. Personhood is constituted from inner out in wholeness with the relational means of submitting one's person, not by highlighting it from outer in.

Paul's interpretive lens for 'submitting' is not from human contextualization but from the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love vulnerably embodied by Jesus' whole person, in *pleroma* Christology for *pleroma* soteriology 'already' to embody the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:22-23). Therefore, in clear contradistinction to any self-centeredness of self-autonomy, any self-interests of self-determination, and any self-concerns of self-justification—all from the influence of reductionism and its counter-relational work fragmenting relationships together (as Paul clarified earlier, Gal 5:13)—Paul makes definitive this vital relational dynamic for relationships together to function whole in relational likeness to God: submitting our whole person to one another in family love while in intimate relational response to Christ, who submitted his whole person to the Father in order to relationally embody the whole

of God's family love for us to be equalized and intimately made whole together in God's new creation family.

This relational whole *in* family love is what Christ saved us *to* 'already' to constitute the whole ontology and function of who the church is and whose the church is (Eph 2:4-5, 14-22). What emerges from this relational whole in ontology and function *with* family love is the new relational order integrally signifying and further constituting transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together (Eph 4:15-16, 23-25). This is the new relational order with its essential relational process of family love which Paul identified previously (Gal 5:6) and makes definitive in *pleroma* ecclesiology for the new creation church to be embodied alive in wholeness (Eph 2:15b; 4:2-6; cf. Gal 6:15).

Clearly for Paul, the church alive in wholeness is the church in love, family love, *agape* family love in relational likeness to the whole of God. Yet, family love should not be idealized, nor should it be rendered to a "kingdom ethic." Family love is vulnerable relational work, made difficult in the midst of counter-relational work. As Paul has made unmistakable to various church leaders and churches, engagement in family love is a relational process continuously subjected to human terms and shaping. Consequently, just as leadership in the new creation faces ongoing tension and conflict with reductionism, the church as the new creation family is ongoingly challenged to be defined and determined by wholeness or reductionism, by the new or the old, by *pleroma* ecclesiology or renegotiated ecclesiology. What emerges from the church and its leadership signifies either the gospel of wholeness or a different gospel, which Paul defined as no gospel for the inherent human need and problem (Gal 1:6-7). And it needs to be emphasized that the new creation church family should not be confused with a gathering of relational-epistemic orphans, no matter how much sacrifice has been made for gathering.

## **The Church in the New Relational Order**

A theological assumption Paul makes through the whole in his theology is that the new creation is 'already', even though not yet totally completed (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15; Rom 6:4; Col 3:10; Eph 2:15b; 4:23-24). To embrace this assumption with Paul is to be accountable for its functional significance and implications both for the person and persons together as church, and for their witness and mission in the world.

Directly as a result of the new creation 'already' for Paul, the outcome emerges of having a qualitative new *phroneo* (mindset) from a whole new *phronema* (framework for thought, Rom 8:2, 5-6; cf. 12:2). It is from this whole interpretive framework with its qualitative lens that life is perceived in the depth of qualitative *zoe* (not the limits of quantitative *bios*), and that peace is grasped with the presence of wholeness (not the absence of conflict). Paul makes definitive that this new interpretive framework with the Spirit is "life and peace" (v.6), and its interpretive lens determines the qualitative depth level of life discerned and its wholeness realized inner out.

This new interpretive framework is critical for Paul in his discourse about peace throughout his letters and is essential for his readers to grasp the whole in his theology. When Paul addressed the church at Corinth in their disputes, he illuminated "God is a

God not of disorder but of peace” (1 Cor 14:33). This may appear to illuminate the obvious but that depends on our interpretive framework. The term for disorder (*akatastasia*) involves being without a fixed or settled condition. Since Paul added that their church life and practice should be “in order” (*taxis*, v.40), that is, according to a set of guiding principles or an established framework, there are various conditions of church life and practice which would appear sufficient to establish order in the church—even by maintaining tradition or the status quo (cf. Jesus’ interpretive lens, Mt 15:8-9). If Paul understood peace as just the absence of conflict, then these various church conditions (including the status quo) would qualify as sufficient ecclesial order.

A deeper tension and conflict emerge because this is not the peace of God that Paul illuminates. As urgent as disorder may be in some churches and around the world, Paul is deeply focused both on the quantitative of *bios* and the qualitative of *zoe*, with *zoe* always primary; and the absence of conflict does not adequately address the existing disorder, nor does it fulfill the order needed for the human condition, the inherent human relational need and problem neuroscience reminds us about. The juxtaposition of disorder (*akatastasia*) with Paul’s peace reveals: Paul’s use of *akatastasia* is not merely about being in a fixed or settled condition of *taxis*, but that this condition of *akatastasia* is a function of fragmentation, that is, practice that fragments the whole; and that God is not a God of reductionism but the God of wholeness, who thus does not fragment but who makes whole (cf. Jesus’ practice of peace, Mt 10:34). Moreover, what Paul further illuminates for his readers is that any ecclesial order without wholeness has no significance to God—as Paul further clarified later for the new creation church (Col 3:15; Eph 4:3).

Paul’s *synesis* of peace emerged with the Spirit in a new *phronema* with a new *phroneo*. His *synesis* of wholeness included the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* (cf. Gen 17:1), which helped him to grasp God’s establishing the new relationship (*siym*) of wholeness (*shalom*) in God’s definitive blessing of his family (Num 6:24-26), and to relationally receive the wholeness that only Jesus gives (Jn 14:27) to embody the gospel of wholeness for the human condition (Eph 6:15). What Paul illuminated above about God and peace and extends in relational discourse throughout his letters made definitive: the whole ontology and function of God, the whole of God’s thematic relational response to make whole the human condition, the new creation of human ontology and function in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God, and the embodiment of the whole ontology and function of the church as God’s new creation family—the relational outcome of wholeness ‘already’ in the midst of reductionism.

While Paul assumes the new creation ‘already’ and its relational outcome with the Spirit to embody the church’s whole ontology and function as God’s new creation family, he never assumes the church will live whole in its new relational order, and thus make whole in the surrounding context of reductionism. To live in wholeness is the challenge for the church, whose ontology and function are also ongoingly challenged by and susceptible to reductionism. The tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism is ongoing with deep repercussions, which is why Paul settles for nothing less and no substitutes in his *pleroma* theology.

In Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology, for the church to live in wholeness is for the church to be ongoingly involved relationally with the Spirit for its embodiment together

“in the bond of wholeness” (Eph 4:3). This bond (*syndesmos*) is the whole relationships binding the church together as one interdependent body, which Jesus embodied for transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate (Eph 2:14-22). For the church to live in wholeness as God’s new creation family is to be deeply involved together in this new relational order of equalized and intimate relationships. When Paul illuminated “God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness,” he also made unequivocal that this new church relational order is neither optional nor negotiable. The challenge for Paul’s readers, then, becomes both about his assumption of the new creation ‘already’ and if God’s new creation family is truly the church. Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology defines these as inseparable and irreducible. Reductionism would renegotiate church order as sufficient alternative, perhaps even with its reification as the peace of God with irenic identity markers.

In Paul’s ongoing fight for the gospel, wholeness is a theological given for the truth of the gospel, just as Peter, Barnabas and other church leaders experienced this truth from Paul (Gal 2:11-14). They learned a difficult lesson about the experiential truth of the gospel (distinguished from only having a doctrinal truth) that whole relationships together are a theological imperative for the functional significance of the gospel. The polemic Paul framed around the issue between the works of the law and faith is more deeply focused on the underlying conflict between reductionism and wholeness, either reduced ontology and function or whole ontology and function (Gal 2:19-21). Even though some of Paul’s readers may not affirm the relational outcome of the gospel until ‘not yet’ for whole persons and persons together in whole relationship, they still must account for the persons and persons together now in the image and likeness of God. Past, present and future, God is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness. Even now, therefore, human terms and shaping of church life and practice are not sufficient to be of significance to God; reductionism is never an option or substitute for the whole of God and God’s relational whole embodied in the face of Christ, who has “shined on you and been gracious to you...and established the new relationship of wholeness.” This peace—from the God of peace embodied by the *pleroma* of God for the gospel of peace to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the persistent human problem—must be accounted for by the church now. Doctrine alone is insufficient to account for this peace, tradition has been inadequate, and missional, servant, incarnational, inclusive and postmodern models for church are ambiguous. In the midst of reductionism, Paul is still exhorting his readers to “put on whatever *is necessary to live* the gospel of wholeness” (Eph 6:15).

Within the reductionism-wholeness issue is the tension between the already and the not yet, both of which Paul engaged in his relational discourse with the church at Philippi in what is likely one of his last prison letters. Paul raised some interrelated conditional (or factually implied) statements about their experiential truth of relationship with God in the present (Phil 2:1). They evoke reflection on the existence of the following: encouragement being in relationship with Christ, intimately experiencing his family love, having reciprocal relational involvement ongoingly together with the Spirit, and being affected in one’s persons from inner out. From Paul’s interpretive lens (*phroneo*), if these exist (or since they exist), then this defines their new mindset and interpretive lens (*phroneo* in likeness, 2:2,5) to determine their reciprocal involvement in relationships together, first based on their experiential truth of the whole of God and thus

in relational likeness to this whole of God (2:2-4). This new *phroneo* is not the result of human effort but emerges from a transformed *phronema* constituted by the experiential truth of relationship together with the whole of God. With this new interpretive lens, the person perceives oneself wholly from the inner out and others in the same way, and is involved in relationships together on this basis, which is congruent with their experience of relational involvement from God and in likeness of how God does relationships.

The *agape* relational involvement Paul defines is not about sacrificial love but family love, which submits one's whole person from inner out to one another in equalized and intimate relationships signifying whole relationship together—just as the whole of God functions together and is relationally involved with us. Paul makes definitive that in the midst of reductionism, this is the church order in which “the wholeness of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard *your persons from inner out* in Christ *from reductionism*” (Phil 4:7) and by which “the God of wholeness will be *relationally involved* with you” (4:9).

For Paul, God indeed is not a God of fragmentation but the God of wholeness, and thus nothing less and no substitutes of the person and persons together in the new relational order are functionally significant for all of the following: to reciprocally involve the whole of God (Eph 2:17-22), to constitute God's relational whole as family in his relational likeness (Col 3:10-11,15), and to embody the ontological identity and relational belonging which are necessary to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human problem existing both in the world and even within churches (Eph 3:6,10-12; 4:13-16). In *pleroma* ecclesiology, the church in whole ontology and function signifies only transformed persons *agape*-relationally involved in transformed relationships together conjointly equalized and intimate, constituting the new relational order for the embodied church alive in wholeness in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy God (Eph 4:23-25)—who is not a God of reductionism promoting ontological simulations and epistemological illusions.

## **The Church as Equalizer from the Inner Out**

The relational outcome and order from the theological dynamics integrated in Paul's *pleroma* theology are distinguished clearly in the church only to the extent of their functional significance in church life and practice (Eph 5:8-14). Yet, functional significance is not as variable as many churches perceive. Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology should not be confused with an elective-type referendum for local churches to define and determine their own life and practice according to contextualization in their surrounding settings. Such shaping results in a garden-variety of churches engaged in church building, the process of which is both distinct from the growth of God's family and indistinguishable from church by human terms.

Paul's conjoint fight for the truth of the whole gospel (the theme in Gal) extended to the gospel of wholeness and shifted into the church (the theme in Eph). For Paul's readers to fully understand what Paul fights for and against in Ephesians, we need to grasp what he fights for and against in Galatians. The dynamic for both in which Paul is engaged signifies the development of the whole in his theology.

Paul's emergence from the Damascus road was the relational outcome of his experiential truth of the gospel. The truth of this gospel is clearly illuminated by Paul in Galatians, which is less theological discourse about doctrinal purity and more relational dialogue about function together for wholeness (cf. Gal 2:12-13 and 6:16). The alternative to this gospel is labeled "a different gospel" by Paul (1:6). The subtlety of a different gospel becomes apparent only as the whole gospel is distinguished next to it (Gal 1:7,11-12), and the correct interpretive lens is used to pay attention to this crucial distinction and to ignore other human-shaped distinctions (3:1-3; 5:25-26). The issue of one's interpretive lens is again critical to Paul's polemic for determining what is defined as primary and significant in comparison to what is secondary and insignificant. Paul makes unmistakable what the interpretive lens of a different gospel is focused on: "to make a good showing in the flesh" (6:12), "to make a good impression outwardly" (NIV). The term *euprosopeo* (from *euprosopos*, pleasing in appearance) is focused on the person from outer in, whose function may be misleading (even unintentionally or unknowingly), as Peter's and Barnabas' was in their *hypokrisis* (i.e., outward identity inconsistent with inward), or whose function may be specious as some Christian Jews' was (6:13).

Paul exposes the use of an outer-in interpretive lens to define the nature and function of a different gospel, the bias of which determines a greater importance of quantitative significance over qualitative significance. Any emphasis on the outer in is often problematic for the gospel because its practice can even unknowingly give just the appearance (as in *metaschematizo*) of the gospel without its qualitative relational significance. Intentional or not, this becomes a reductionist gospel shaped by human terms and engaged by human effort rather than the whole gospel constituted by God's thematic relational response of grace. This is the ongoing conflict between faith (or church) from below and faith (and the church) from above—an antinomy basic to relations between human persons and God (Gal 6:14). The former is focused on human distinctions from outer in with its quantitative interpretive lens, while the latter embraces whole persons from inner out with its qualitative new interpretive lens (5:6; 6:15). Ontology and function in wholeness even embraces "the Israel of God," which is not about faith based on human distinction (e.g., the notion of the God of Israel with its identity markers) with its comparative human effort (e.g., observing the Torah) but is only God's grace constituting the whole of God's new creation family (6:16), as Paul later clarified theologically (Rom 2:28-29).

Paul illuminated in Galatians the experiential truth of this whole gospel that clearly distinguishes it from any ontological simulations and epistemological illusions from reductionism. The qualitative new interpretive lens, which is needed to pay close attention to this critical distinction while putting other human-shaped distinctions into deeper focus, is a key for Paul in his fight. This strongly suggests that Galatians needs to be the lens by which to read Paul's letters and theology in general, and Ephesians and his ecclesiology in particular. As Paul's twofold fight shifted into the church, his readers need to use this qualitative new interpretive lens to grasp the functional whole of his ecclesiology for the church to be embodied alive in wholeness as the equalizer from inner out.

When Paul declares that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything" (Gal 6:15), the term for "anything" (*tis*) means having significance—which applies to all human distinctions identified earlier (3:28). That is, Paul makes conclusive that all

human-shaped distinctions exist (*eimi*, verb of existence) without having significance. For Paul, life and practice in human distinctions is a reduced ontology and function which has no ontological existence, only the new creation exists in the significance of whole ontology and function. Any life and practice shaped by human terms and based on human constructs from human contextualization has no ontological reality and thus significance, but is only an ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism. Paul makes further definitive that the only life and practice with ontological and functional significance is “faith functioning in reciprocal relational response of trust of one’s whole person both to be vulnerably involved with the person of Christ Jesus and to be *agape* relationally involved in family love with others for relationship together” (5:6). This relational dynamic clearly distinguishes the cogent value and significance (*ischyo*) of the relationships together of God’s new creation family. Paul can be definitive because he was not engaged by Jesus according to Paul’s own human-shaped distinction; rather, Jesus intimately embraced Paul in family love and equalized him from inner out to relationally belong in God’s family. This was his experiential truth of the whole gospel, which is now embodied in the whole ontology and function of the church. It is with this lens from Galatians that Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology emerges to complete the ontological and functional significance of the new creation church as equalizer from the inner out.

The human-shaped distinctions Paul has identified (Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11) always need to be perceived and addressed within the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism. Paul’s purpose was not to eliminate all distinctions in the church but to neutralize the influence of such distinctions as primary for defining and determining life and practice. The fact of human differences and the reality of any valid distinctions are only secondary for Paul (1 Cor 12:12-13; Rom 12:3-5), and any meaning and significance given to them beyond being secondary fragment human ontology, function and relationships together in the church (e.g., 1 Cor 1:12-13; 3:4-5, 21-23; 4:6-7). Yet, it seems only natural to ascribe value to human differences, which is exactly Paul’s polemic addressing the need for redemptive change (1 Cor 3:3-4).

Human differences evoke different responses from persons depending on their interpretive lens. When Paul argues “who sees anything different in you?” (*diakrino*, 1 Cor 4:7), he points to both *who* sees and *what* is seen as different. Who and what are interrelated in a reflexive dynamic: ‘what is seen’ is determined by a person’s interpretive lens, and in reflexive interaction ‘who sees’ also becomes determined by the nature of what is seen. The issue is between outer in and inner out (as Paul clarified later, 2 Cor 5:12). Whoever sees from outer in perceives outer-in differences as primary by which both others and they are defined and relationships together are determined. Whoever sees from inner out perceives any differences as only secondary, which thus neither define others and themselves nor determine their relationships together. Paul is confident in his polemic that any differences used “to treat persons differently by making distinctions” (*diakrino*) are the terms of human constructs—which either create further value differences from those differences, or boast about differences as their own when in fact they were only given to them by God. These comparative values construct a ‘deficit model’, which is used for differential treatment of others who are different as being essentially less (*diakrino*). Paul knows from his own relational involvement with God



(Phil 3:4-9) that *diakrino* is of no significance to God and contrary to how God functions (as Peter testified, Acts 15:9).

Therefore, *diakrino* has no place or function in the new creation church embodied in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole of God. **What is the functional significance of the church without *diakrino*?**

When Paul made definitive the relational process of equalizing persons, he noted the human condition of persons in human distinctions valued as less (Eph 2:11-12). There was a relational condition “to be apart” from God’s relational whole, who were pursued in family love by Christ to be equalized and made whole together in God’s family (2:13-22). The contrast between the relational condition “to be apart” and made whole together parallels the relational condition of the temple prior to Jesus’ final entry into Jerusalem and after those closing days. God’s house had been stratified in the relational condition “to be apart” that denied access to persons of certain distinctions; this relational condition, after Jesus’ redemptive cleansing, was made whole as “a house of prayer for all nations” (Mk 11:15-17; cf. Isa 56:3-8). By his relational process of family love equalizing persons to be made whole together, Jesus shifted the temple from the outer in to its deeper significance inner out (1 Cor 3:16), in which the whole of God is intimately present and relationally involved to embody the church as God’s whole family together (Eph 2:18-22; Rom 8:9,14; cf. Jn 14:23; 17:21-23,26).

There is a direct correlation between treating persons differently by making distinctions (*diakrino*) and who has equal access and intimate involvement in the church. The relational process of family love equalizing persons is an inner-out dynamic incompatible with *diakrino*, because treating persons differently by making distinctions is an outer-in dynamic which limits access and creates barriers to intimate relationships together for those having the distinction of being less. Paul makes unequivocal that these are limits and barriers which Jesus redeemed for persons to be equalized and reconciled together without human-shaped distinctions to be made whole in God’s family (Eph 2:14-16). For the church to have limits on accessibility based on distinctions, and barriers to intimate involvement due to distinctions, even unintentionally out of tradition or from the influence of culture, is to fragment God’s relational whole and to be reduced in ontology and function. This often subtle church practice renders Christ’s salvific work of wholeness devoid of its relational significance to fulfill the inherent human relational need and resolve the human relational problem “to be apart.”

Making distinctions and treating persons differently are inseparable because human-shaped distinctions are rooted in a comparative process of more-or-less value, which engages relationships accordingly by treating persons differently (cf. Paul’s polemic, 2 Cor 10-12). Intentional or not, this is the dynamic that, for example, church leaders promote by emphasizing roles and gifts, and church members reinforce by treating leadership based on roles and gifts (e.g., 1 Cor 1:12; 3:5-7). In this dynamic, how well persons measure up determines their position and influence in church. This often well-intentioned mutual engagement functionally (not theologically) limits access in a church to those in a deficit position, which obviously creates vertical barriers to intimate relationships together. Further, since this dynamic is an outer-in process of engagement, there is also ongoing horizontal distance precluding intimate involvement together. This apparently acceptable relational distance in churches makes for a comfortable arrangement with minimal accountability, that is, for a gathering of relational-epistemic

orphans, but not for God's new creation family "in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3). The contrast for Paul is between the counter-relational nature of outer-in function shaped by human terms and the relational nature of inner-out function in likeness of God.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, the bond of wholeness with the Spirit is embodied inner-out function of whole persons who relationally submit to one another in family love to be intimately involved in relationships together without the limits, barriers or comforts of human-shaped distinctions. This relational process of equalizing from inner out needs to become the experiential truth of church ontology and function, and not remain in doctrinal truth or as a doctrinal statement of intention. This experiential truth happens only when the church is made whole by reciprocal relationship with the Spirit in the functional significance of four key dynamics. These key dynamics constitute the church to be embodied alive in wholeness in the qualitative image of God and to live ongoingly in whole relationship together in the relational likeness of the whole of God.

Two of these keys for the church necessitate structural and contextual dynamics and the other two involve imperatives for individual and relational dynamics. In each dynamic, redemptive changes are necessary to go from a mere gathering of individuals to the new creation church family—changes which overlap and interact with the other key dynamics.

**First Key Dynamic:** *the structural dynamic of access.* While access can be perceived from outer in as a static condition of a church structured with merely an "open-door policy," access from the inner out of God's relational context and process of family is dynamic and includes relational involvement—implied, for example, in Jesus' transformation of the temple for prayer accessible by all. When Paul made Christ's salvific work of wholeness definitive for the church, all persons without distinctions "have access in one Spirit to the Father" (Eph 2:18) for relational involvement together "in boldness and confidence" (3:12) as persons who have been equalized for intimate relationships together as God's family (2:19-22; cf. Gal 4:4-7). Access, therefore, is the structural dynamic of the church without *diakrino*, which is congruent with Christ's relational work of wholeness (Eph 2:14-17) and is in relational likeness to God (Acts 15:9).

The issue of access is deeply rooted in human history. Peter himself struggled with his interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) shaped by his tradition, whose *diakrino* denied access to those of Gentile distinction. Even after Jesus changed his theology (Acts 10:9-16), Peter struggled to change from the practice of his tradition because of his emotional investment and likely perception of losing something related to the privilege, prestige and power of having access. Human-shaped distinctions signify having advantage in comparative relations, the absence of which precludes that advantage. After the primordial garden, the human relational condition "to be apart" became an intentional goal of human effort to secure advantage and maintain self-preservation—the 'survival of the fittest' syndrome masked even by religious faith. The specific resources for this relational advantage may vary from one historical context to another (cf. even the works of the law and justification by faith). Yet, privilege, prestige and power are the basic underlying issues over which these relational struggles of inequality are engaged—whether the context is family, social, economic, political or even among churches. Any aspects of privilege, prestige and power are advantages (and

benefits) which many persons are reluctant to even share if the perception (unreal or not) means less for them. The control of this distribution is threatened by equal access.

Human-shaped distinctions create and maintain advantage, which certainly fragments relationships together. By their very nature human distinctions are an outer-in dynamic emerging from reduced ontology and function, which in itself already diminishes, minimalizes and fragments God's relational whole. Access, however, is an inner-out dynamic signifying the relational dynamic and qualitative involvement of grace. That is, the functional significance of access is for all persons to be defined from inner out and not to be treated differently from outer in, in order to have the relational opportunity to be involved with God for their redemption from the human struggle of reductionism, and thus to be equalized and intimately reconciled together to fulfill their inherent human relational need in God's relational whole (as Paul clarifies in his polemic, Gal 3:26-29). Equal access does not threaten personhood and wholeness for the church, but is a necessary key dynamic for their qualitative development wholly from inner out. Therefore, for a church to engage the necessary redemptive change that makes functionally significant 'access without *diakrino*' is relationally specific to what wholly embodies church life and practice for the ongoing relational involvement with persons who are different, in order for them also to receive equally and experience intimately the ontological identity and relational belonging to the whole of God's new creation family.

This structural dynamic flows directly to the contextual dynamic.

**Second Key Dynamic:** *the contextual dynamic of reconciliation absorbing human differences and valid distinctions.* This is not a contradiction of the church without *diakrino*, but the acknowledgement of the fact of differences in human makeup and the reality of valid distinctions given by God, without the church engaging in *diakrino*. The ancient Mediterranean world of Paul's time was a diversity of both human differences and human-shaped distinctions. Yet, prior to its diaspora due to persecution (before Acts 8), the early church community was a mostly homogeneous group who limited access to others who were different to be included in their house churches, table fellowships and community identity (e.g., Acts 6:1). Despite a missional program to the surrounding diversity, church practice had yet to relationally involve the reconciliation dynamic of family love to take in those persons and absorb (not dissolve) their differences. This purposeful relational involvement necessitates a major contextual change in the church, especially for a homogeneous gathering. Paul was pivotal in bringing such redemptive change to the church (e.g., 1 Cor 11:17-22; Gal 2:1-10).

Paul delineates a twofold reconciliation dynamic constituted by God's relational process of family love. On the one hand, family love dissolves human-shaped distinctions and eliminates *diakrino*. Equally important, on the other hand, family love absorbs most human differences into the primacy of relationships together—not dissolving or assimilating those differences into a dominant framework (Rom 12:4-5). The twofold nature of this reconciliation dynamic of family love is the functional significance of Paul's conjoint fight against reductionism and for wholeness (1 Cor 12:12-13). Yet, in order to be God's relational whole, it is not adequate to include persons of difference for the purpose of diversity. The relational process of family love extends relational involvement to those who are different, takes in and vulnerably embraces them in their difference to wholly relationally belong to the church family. This is the dynamic made

essential by Paul for the church's "unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3,16).

This reconciliation dynamic signifies the contextual change necessary for the church to be ongoingly involved in the relational process of absorbing human differences into the church without dissolving or assimilating those differences. This involves, therefore, its willingness to change to adjust to differences and even to adopt some differences, all of which are only compatible with God's relational whole and congruent with God's relational terms. Redemptive change also involves the reflexive interaction between these contextual and structural dynamics.

In addition, just as Peter was chastened by Christ in his interpretive framework and theology, and humbled by Paul, making this contextual change functional in the church may require us to humbly accept the limitations of our current interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) to understand the significance of differences to the whole of God as well as of those in the whole and holy God. It also requires us to honestly account for any outer-in bias necessitating a whole *phronema* and a qualitative *phroneo* (as Paul delineated, Eph 4:22-25). This humility and honesty are essential for the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to be of functional significance to absorb human differences into church life and practice as family together (cf. Eph 4:2).

The importance of these structural and contextual dynamics for the church to be whole as the equalizer from inner out also directly involve the other two key dynamics. These are dynamics for the individual person and our relationships. The four dynamics strongly interact together in reflexive relationship which suggests no set order of their development and function. Yet, there is a clear flow to each pair of dynamics—for example, there has to be access before differences can be absorbed—while in crucial and practical ways the latter pair will determine the extent and significance of the former's function.

**Third Key Dynamic:** *the person's inner-out response of freedom, faith and love to others' differences.* When a person is faced with differences in others, there is invariably some degree of tension for that person, with awareness of it or not. The tension signifies the engagement of our provincial context or 'our little world' we live in—that which is constructed from the limitations of the person's perceptual-interpretive framework, which is why humbly accepting its limits and honestly accounting for our bias are needed for the reconciliation dynamic to be whole together. What does a person(s) do with those differences in that relational context? The structural and contextual dynamics can be invoked, yet their functional significance interacts with and will ultimately be determined by the individual person's response.

The person's response will emerge either from outer in or inner out. What differences we pay attention to and ignore from our interpretive lens are critical to understand for the following ongoing interrelated issues: first, what we depend on to define our person and maintain our identity; then, on this basis, how we engage relationships in these diverse conditions; and, thus, based on these two issues what level of relationship we engage in within the church. These are inescapable issues which each person must address as an individual and be accountable for, on the one hand, while the church community must account for these in practice on the other.

Paul demonstrated the person's inner-out response to others' differences that is necessary both to be a whole person and to be involved in whole relationship together. In his fight for the gospel, Paul is also always fighting against reductionism. One aspect of the relational outcome of the gospel is the freedom that comes from being redeemed. Yet, for Paul the whole of the gospel is not a truncated soteriology but the whole relational outcome of *pleroma* soteriology. He constitutes Christian freedom in the relational context of God's relational whole so that the relational purpose of Christian freedom and its functional significance would not be diminished, minimalized or abused in reductionism (Gal 5:1,13; 1 Cor 8:9). From this interpretive framework and lens, Paul highlights his own liberty and the nature of his relational response to others' differences (1 Cor 9:19-23). He deeply engaged the relational dynamic of family love in the process of submitting his whole person to those persons, simply declaring "I have become all things to all people" (v.22). Clearly, by his statement Paul is not illustrating what to do with the tension in those situations created by human differences and how to handle those differences. Further clarification is needed, however, since his apparent posture can be perceived in different ways, either negatively or positively.

Given his freedom, Paul was neither obligated nor coerced to function in what appears to be an absence of self-identity. His response also seems to contradict his relational imperative to "Live as children of light" (Eph 5:8). Yet, in terms of the three basic issues for all practice (discussed throughout this study), the person Paul presented to others of difference was not a variable personality who has no clear sense of his real identity (e.g., as light). Nor was Paul communicating to them a message of assimilating to their terms, and to try to fit into their level of relationship or even masquerade in the context of their differences. Contrary to these reductionist practices, Paul engaged in practices of wholeness. Since Paul did not define his person in quantitative terms from the outer in, he was free to exercise who he was from inner out and to decisively present his whole person to others even in the context of any and all of their differences. He communicated to them a confidence and trust in the whole person he was from inner out, the integrity of which would not be compromised by involvement with them in their difference and could be counted on by them to be that whole person in his face-to-face involvement with them. His involvement with them went deeper than the level of their differences and freely responded in the relational trust with the Spirit to submit his whole person to them in their differences for the relational involvement of family love needed for the relational purpose "that I might by all means save some" (v.22). Paul submits his whole person to them in family love not for the mere outcome of a truncated soteriology of only being saved *from* but for the relational outcome of also being saved *to* gained from "the *whole* gospel so that I may share in its blessings *of whole relationship together as family*" (v.23, italics added).

In the face of others' differences, Paul neither distanced himself from them in the province of 'his little world' nor did he try to control them to assimilate and fit into his world and the comforts of his framework. In contrast, he acted in the relational trust of faith to venture out of his old world and beyond the limitations that any old interpretive framework imposes on personhood and relationships in order to illuminate the wholeness of God in the midst of reductionism. In this relational process, he also illuminated the relational need of the person and persons together as church to have contextual sensitivity and responsiveness to others' differences, without reducing their ontological identity of

who and whose they are. Clearly, Paul demonstrated the necessary response of the whole person from inner out to those differences in order to engage those persons in the reconciliation dynamic of family love for their experience in the relational whole of God's family. Yet, Paul's response also demonstrated the needed changes within the individual person involving redemptive change (old "worlds," frameworks and practices dying and the new rising). This process addresses any outer-in ontology and function needing to be transformed from inner out (*metamorphoo*, as Paul delineated, Rom 12:2-3). This transformation from outer in to inner out not only frees the relational process for the new creation but directly leads to its embodiment. Redemptive change must antecede and prevail in the relational process leading to reconciliation to the whole of God's new creation family.

In the freedom of the person's inner-out response to submit one's whole person to others in family love, the act of submitting becomes a reductionism-issue when it is obligated or coerced apart from freedom. Freedom itself, however, becomes reductionist when it is only the means for self-autonomy, self-determination or self-justification, which are the substitutes from reductionism. Paul made clear that God never redeems us to be free for this end (Gal 5:1,13; cf. 1 Cor 7:35). God frees us from reductionism to be whole (1 Cor 10:23-24). Redemption by Christ and what he saves *from* are inseparable from reconciliation and what he saves *to*. The conjoint function of redemptive reconciliation is the whole (nonnegotiable) relational process of the whole (untruncated) relational outcome of the whole (unfragmented) gospel. Therefore, it is crucial for our understanding of the inseparable functions of personhood and human relationships, both within the church and in the world, to grasp that deeply implicit in the wholeness of Christian freedom is being redeemed from those matters causing distance, barriers and separation in relationships—specifically in the relational condition "to be apart" from whole relationship together, which if not responded to from inner out leaves the inherent human relational need unfulfilled even within churches.

In this dynamic for personhood, for example, can women or slaves submit their persons without falling into reduced ontology and function? Paul's prescriptions and directives for them can be taken or applied in the negative if separated from the function of relationships in wholeness together from the inner out (discussed further in chap. 11, questions 10 and 11). Personhood is an inner-out function of the individual person always in relationship with other persons (different or not), never in isolation regardless of the extent of freedom the individual person has. Therefore, whether women and slaves are those responded to in their difference or are the persons responding without being defined by their difference, the focus for Paul always centers on wholeness for persons in relationship together in the qualitative image and relational likeness of God.

Paul's exercise of freedom in submitting his whole person to others in family love was constituted by the convergence of the theological dynamics of *pleroma* Christology in *pleroma* soteriology with *pleroma* pneumatology for *pleroma* ecclesiology to be involved in the relationships together necessary to embody the church as equalizer from inner out. This is what Paul condenses in the gospel of wholeness vulnerably embodied in the face of Christ, which has the relational outcome 'already' of only whole persons *agape*-relationally involved in whole relationships together.

The conjoint function of whole persons and whole relationships together is deeply integrated, the interaction of which must by their nature emerge from inner out. For the person and persons together as church to have the functional significance of being equalized in intimate relationships, their ontology and function need to be whole from inner out—nothing less and no substitutes for the person and for relationships together. This inner-out process leads us from the key dynamic for the individual to its interaction with the key dynamic for relationships.

**Fourth Key Dynamic:** *relationships engaged vulnerably with others (different or not) by deepening involvement from inner out.* The dynamic engaged within individual persons extends to their relationships. What Paul defined as his whole person's inner-out response—"I have become all things to all people"—also defines his relational involvement with them by making his whole person vulnerable from inner out—"I have made my person vulnerable to all human differences for the inner-out relational involvement with all persons." This decision to engage relationships vulnerably must be a free choice made with relational trust and in family love because there are risks and consequences for such involvement. On the one hand, the consequences revolve around one's person being rejected or rendered insignificant. The risks, on the other hand, are twofold, which involves either losing something (e.g., the stability of 'our little world', the certainty of our interpretive framework, the reliability of how we do relationships) or being challenged to change (e.g., the state of one's world, the focus of one's interpretive lens and mindset, one's established way of doing relationships). The dynamic of 'losing something-challenged to change' is an ongoing issue in all relationships, and the extent of the risks depends on their perception from outer in or from inner out. For Paul, this is always the tension between reductionism and wholeness, that is, relationships fragmented by limited involvement from outer in or relationships made whole by deepening involvement from inner out. Regardless of the consequences, Paul took responsibility for living whole in relationships for the inner-out involvement necessary to make relationships whole together, because the twofold risks were not of significance in wholeness but only in reductionism (cf. his personal assessment, Phil 3:7-9; also his challenge to Philemon).

Later, Paul appeared to qualify the extent of his vulnerable involvement in relationships by stating "I try to please everyone in everything" (1 Cor 10:33). The implication of this could be simply to do whatever others want, thereby pleasing all and not offending anyone (10:32). Paul would not be vulnerable in relationships with this kind of involvement. *Aresko* means to please, make one inclined to, or to be content with. This may involve doing either what others *want* or what they *need*. Paul is not trying to look good before others for his own benefit (*symphoros*, 10:33). Rather he vulnerably engages them with the relational involvement from inner out which they need (not necessarily want) for all their benefit "so that they may be saved *to whole relationship together in God's family*." In his statement, Paul does not qualify the *extent* of his vulnerable involvement in relationship with others by safely giving them what they want. He qualifies only the *depth* of his vulnerable involvement by lovingly giving them what they need to be whole, even if they reject his whole person or try to render his whole function as insignificant (cf. 2 Cor 12:15).

This deepening relational involvement from inner out to vulnerably engage others in relationship with one's whole person certainly necessitates redemptive change from our prevailing ways of doing relationships, including from a normative church interpretive lens of what is paid attention to and ignored in church gatherings and relationships together. If the vulnerability of family love is to be engaged, whether for the individual person or persons together as church, the concern cannot be about the issue of losing something. The focus on such risks will be constraining, if not controlling, and render both person and church to reduced ontology and function, thus exposing the greater risk of being challenged to change and their need for it. Faith as relational trust with the Spirit is critical for freeing us to determine what is primary to embrace in church life and practice and what we need to relinquish control over "for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3; Gal 5:16,25). The bond of wholeness by its nature requires change in us: individual, relational, structural and contextual changes. With these redemptive changes for person and church, the conjoint function of redemptive reconciliation can emerge in family love for vulnerable engagement of others (different or not) in relationships together from inner out.

The dynamic flow of these four key dynamics is the dynamic of wholeness constituting the experiential truth of the church's ontology and function as equalizer from inner out. In ongoing tension and conflict with the church in the bond of wholeness is reductionism seeking to influence every level of the church—individuals, relationships, its structure and context. For Paul, this is the given battle ongoingly extended into the church, against which reductionism must be exposed, confronted and made whole by redemptive change at every level of the church. While Paul presupposes the need for redemptive change given the pervasive influence of reductionism, he never assumes the redemptive-change outcome of the new emerging without the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit (Gal 5:16; 6:8; Rom 8:6; Eph 3:16). The reciprocal nature of the Spirit's relational involvement makes change an open question. These redemptive changes at all levels of the church certainly do not occur smoothly or in linear order, as Paul's dealings with Peter and Philemon demonstrate. The interaction between the four key dynamics frequently influences how the functional significance of one key dynamic may be contingent on the redemptive change made necessary by another key dynamic. Both Peter and Philemon could not practice church-without-*diakrino* or reconciliation absorbing differences until they were free in their own persons to be vulnerable from inner out with others, notably in Jew-Gentile relations and with slaves.

The church embodied as equalizer from inner out is the embodied church alive in wholeness. The church in wholeness is the relational outcome only of redemptive change with the Spirit. Redemptive change distinguishes the church from reduced ontology and function in a renegotiated ecclesiology. Redemptive change also signifies that the church is different from all that prevails around it or pervades its surrounding context. The dynamics of Paul's *pleroma* theology constitute the coherence for the church to emerge 'already' in *pleroma* ecclesiology as the whole of God's relational whole with the relationships together necessary to fulfill the prevailing inherent human relational need and to solve the pervading human relational problem—that is, if the church is different.



## The Church in Its Own Difference

When Paul illuminated theological clarity for the gospel of God's relational whole without human distinctions, he integrated Israel's relational position with the Gentiles' relational position in God's thematic relational response of grace to the human condition (Rom 11:11-24). God's salvific action was initiated through Israel on the collective level ("firstfruits," v.16) and now extends to Gentiles. The deeply interrelated relational position of Jews and of Gentiles is in complex interaction to render them without distinction, which signifies the whole of God's thematic response of grace. What Paul makes definitive is that in terms of each other's relational position, one is not the cause of the other's; neither is one at the exclusion of the other, nor marginalizes or is better than the other. These theological dynamics emerge in the relational context and process of God's relational involvement of grace, the relational source and relational outcome of which Paul illuminated conclusively as holy: "if the root is holy, then the branches also are holy" (v.16). This is no mere theological proposition or doctrinal truth Paul makes for the church's heritage and pronouncement.

There is a dynamic functional interaction illuminated by Paul that conjointly deconstructs human-shaped distinctions and differences in God's relational whole, and constitutes the difference distinguishing God's relational whole. Paul identifies this dynamic for the church as the functional significance of "holy" (Col 1:22; Eph 2:21; Rom 12:1; 2 Tim 2:21). The ontological identity of the church is rooted in the relational source of who the church is and whose the church is. This integrated identity emerges with the embodiment of the church's whole ontology and function, whose relational outcome to be whole is also distinguished by its relational source clearly as holy. In Paul's *pleroma* theology, the embodied church alive in wholeness with a new relational order is functionally significant only when distinguished as holy. The dynamic of being holy engages a reciprocal process of deep relational involvement in the whole of God's relational context and process. It is unattainable for the church to be distinguished whole from inner out apart from this ongoing reciprocal involvement, as Paul prayed for the church in *pleroma* ecclesiology (Eph 1:17-23; 3:14-19) and as Jesus prayed for his whole and holy family (Jn 17:17-23).

Forming and maintaining clearly distinguished church identity is not the outcome of identity markers from outer-in theological propositions but from inner-out theological practice, not with possessing doctrinal truth but with the experiential truth of the whole gospel, and thus not with the limited significance of what the church is saved *from* but with the full significance of what it also is saved *to*. What distinguishes the church's identity, therefore, is not what it has and/or does from outer in but only its wholeness from inner out. Yet, wholeness from inner out must be further distinguished uniquely from the competing source of outer in. This contrast emerges when the church's whole ontology and function is distinguished solely in the qualitative image and relational likeness of the whole and holy God—the church's relational source and outcome.

The church's relational outcome in wholeness is whole persons *agape*-relationally involved vulnerably in whole relationships together, which are both equalized and intimate. This relational outcome is defined and determined by the church's relational source, which Paul illuminated with the church's "call to be holy" (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Tim 1:9; Eph 1:4). The term for holy (*hagios*; cf. sanctify, *hagiazō*) means to be separated from

ordinary or common usage and devoted to God, whose functional significance Paul makes a contingency for the church to be whole in likeness of its relational source. Paul's call (echoing Jesus' prayer) signifies 'already' for the church to be different from the surrounding context of sin, that is, clearly distinguished from the sin of reductionism in human contextualization (Rom 11:16; 12:1-2; Eph 5:3; Col 1:22); and this difference is not distinguished by mere moral purity and ethical perfection but to be whole in relationship together (Eph 1:4; 2:21; Ti 1:8). Therefore, Paul's call to be holy is inseparable from the call to be different, a difference which is irreducibly integrated with being distinguished whole from inner out and nonnegotiable.

For the church to be clearly distinguished in its wholeness, the functional significance of its life and practice must be distinct from reductionism; and in its wholeness the church must ongoingly expose the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism and reconcile reductionism's counter-relational work. While the church can absorb human differences, its ontology and function cannot mirror any differences which diminish its own difference. In its vulnerable engagement in the reconciling dynamic of family love, the church embodies a new relational order which equalizes all persons intimately from inner out to be whole in relationship together, to live whole as God's new creation family and to make whole the human relational condition "to be apart". In other words, the church in wholeness cannot mirror existing relational orders or it would no longer be or live whole, and thus render itself functionally insignificant to make whole, both within itself and in the world. A church, for example, may have multicultural aspects in its life and practice, but the church in wholeness cannot be defined or determined by them or it becomes shaped from outer in by human terms from human contextualization, that is, by reductionism. As Paul made unequivocal, the new creation church is distinguished by its difference from the common in the common's sociocultural and racial-ethnic categories, socioeconomic emphases and gender characteristics, whose comparative values are all embedded in human contextualization signifying the reductionism of the common (1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27-28; 6:15; Col 3:10-11).

Paul's call for the church to be holy, therefore, is for the church to live in its own difference from the sin of reductionism in all its forms. The church embodied in its own difference is not in a separatist, exclusionary life and practice, but is to be distinguished as whole in the midst of reductionism, and thus to expose, confront and make whole all reductionism. This necessitates for the church both a further grasp of sin and a deeper means to deal with it.

Being holy and sanctified is a relational process with the Spirit (Rom 15:16) that engages an inner-out dynamic. This inner-out dynamic to be holy does not stay 'inner' (or "spiritual") because the Spirit's involvement always conjoins *pneuma* and *soma*, inner and out, for wholeness of the persons and persons together (1 Thes 4:3-4; 5:19,23). This inner-out relational process with the Spirit to be holy and thus whole also constitutes the inner-out lens necessary to further grasp the sin of reductionism (cf. *phroneo* and *phronema* in Rom 8:5-6).

Sin or reductionism also does not stay 'inner' of the person and is not limited to the individual. Nor is the 'outer' of sin limited to individuals in relationships, though these are the main aspects of sin Paul addresses in the situations in his letters. With Philemon as a slave owner, Paul points to the further presence and influence of the sin of

reductionism which even this church leader and church needed to address. Paul understood that paying attention to or ignoring reductionism, its counter-relational work and its substitutes is directly correlated to our lens (*phroneo*) and its perception of sin. Our lens reveals assumptions we make about the human person and the collective order of persons together. This involves our view of the nature of humanity and the nature of the social order (or society). For example, if we assume the goodness of humankind and/or the existing order of life, there is no need for redemptive change—which was a question Philemon and Peter (as noted in Acts 10) needed to answer. Yet, even assuming these levels of sinfulness assures neither a need for redemptive change nor the extent of such change, which Peter later demonstrated and Paul exposed (noted in Gal 2). The change perceived to be needed is contingent on the strength and adequacy of our view of sin.

Paul's fight for the gospel of wholeness, now extended into the church, is ongoingly also fighting against reductionism. This was an assumed inseparable fight for Paul because any reductionism of God's relational whole on God's relational terms to human terms and shaping from human contextualization engages the dynamic process of sin. Paul never assumes the absence of reductionism, even when its presence is not always clear, because its absence would not be reality. Nor does he ignore any form of reductionism, since reductionism as sin is incompatible with being holy and thus incongruent with being whole. All sin as reductionism needs to be redeemed, which is why Paul appealed to Philemon and confronted Peter with family love. Paul demonstrates in relational dialogue, not theological discourse, the strength and adequacy of his view of sin, which is necessary in order for the embodied church to live in its difference and to be alive in wholeness.

It is helpful for our grasp of the presence and influence of sin to realize two factors strongly influencing our ongoing working perceptions of sin. One factor is contextual and the other is structural, which also indirectly interacts with the contextual and structural dynamics of the church as equalizer from inner out to influence a shift to outer in.

The contextual factor is the increasing normative character of sin as reductionism. We need to realize that the growing frequency and extent of any negative behavior or practice create conditions for redefining those very behaviors more favorably, which was Paul's ongoing effort to help distinguish (e.g., 2 Cor 2:17; 4:2; 5:12; Eph 4:17-20; 5:10-11). As Paul implied, our perceptions of what is unacceptable are being redefined continuously. That is to say, what we pay attention to or ignore through our perceptual-interpretive lens to identify sin shifts in acuity and awareness in a surrounding context's normative practice of sin—notably when our focus shifts from inner out to outer in. When reductionism is the norm, it is a decisive difference to live whole since wholeness would be clearly in the minority. In that context, the church in wholeness is subject to pressure, both from without and within, not to be different but to fit in (cf. Paul's polemic, 2 Cor 6:14-18; Col 2:20-23).

The other factor which subtly yet pervasively influences a weak position on sin is a structural one. Being a structural factor, its effects on our understanding of, and subsequent dealing with, sin is much less obvious than the conventional moral and spiritual issues. Paul seemed to address only the latter issues of sin, yet there are contextual and structural factors which were underlying his situations. Whether in a

collective context of Paul's Mediterranean world or in an individualistic context of the modern Western world, it is important to understand that human life does not merely operate under the total control and influence of the individual person or even persons together. This further involves the social design and construction of ongoing human life, whose operations are found on the collective and more systemic level of everyday life. This was what Paul indirectly points Philemon to in the issues with his slave Onesimus.

Whether Philemon changed or not, it is in this broader area of human life that our understanding of sin as reductionism must be further developed. Sin can no longer be seen merely as the outworking of the individual(s) alone. In its historical development, contextually and structurally, sin can also be found in the operations of institutions (even churches), systems and structures of a social order, and today in modernity's global community. In its more developed stages, sin as reductionism is not only manifested as the norm at this structural level but rooted in those very institutions, systems or structures such that they can operate quite apart from the control of the individual(s), or even the latter's moral character. This is particularly true, for example, when the very infrastructure of a society obscures moral issues and legitimates such systemic operations. Reductionism of the human person and its counter-relational work of fragmenting relationships together (e.g., by stratification or segregation) have underlain the human relational condition and created ontological simulations and epistemological illusions to mask its reductionist operation, thus precluding the fulfillment of the inherent human relational need and preventing the resolution of the human relational problem.

The contextual factor is the *normative character* of sin, and the structural factor is the *collective nature* of sin. Their increasing presence in our midst as reductionism strongly influences our working perceptions of sin. Just as a weak view of sin ignores the normative character of sin, an inadequate perception of sin fails to pay attention to and address its broader relational issues in operation on a collective level. Yet, sin is a dynamic relational process always in specific relational context with God, which involves the whole relational order of life God constituted for all of creation (cf. Col 1:20). Sin as reductionism is a violation of this relationship with the whole of God that also has relational consequences in God's whole design and purpose for creation (cf. Rom 8:19-21). Therefore, sin also goes beyond its effects on the individual and has social consequences, as well as social influences. Our grasp of sin as reductionism must be broadened to include these macro-level human factors and human contexts which establish the complexity of the human relational problem.

Even at the early stages of the church, Paul was at the heart of this fight against reductionism, calling for redemptive change to distinguish the church as conjointly holy and whole. This distinguishing-process is essential for the structural dynamic of the church to be accessible for all persons without *diakrino* (differential treatment) and the church's contextual dynamic of reconciliation to absorb human differences in whole relationship together both equalized and intimate. Moreover, this fight against reductionism was not Paul's human effort but the relational means to deal with sin as reductionism which he received in reciprocal relational involvement with the Spirit (Gal 5:16-17,25; Rom 8:5-6; Eph 4:3).

In *pleroma* ecclesiology, the Spirit constitutes access and ongoing involvement with the Father as Jesus' relational replacement for relationship together as family (Eph 2:18,22). Reciprocal relationship with the Spirit embodies the church's life and practice

in the whole of God's relational context and process from the already to the not yet (Eph 1:17; 3:16-17; Rom 8:25-27), which is necessary to embody the church alive in "the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3). Given the ongoing tension and conflict between wholeness and reductionism, the Spirit's reciprocal involvement is indispensable for the church to decisively deal with sin as reductionism in all its forms, and thus be clearly distinguished in its difference as holy and whole in the midst of reductionism (Gal 5:16-18, 22-26).

**How is this relational process made functionally significant for the church, notably given the normative character and collective nature of reductionism?**

When Paul addressed Philemon about his slave, Onesimus, he appealed to him on the basis of the family love experienced by both of them (Phlm 9). This family love centered Philemon's focus on the whole of God's relational context and process, in which he experienced God's involvement in whole relationship together. While Paul centered Philemon's focus on God in the relational process of family love, on the one hand, he also widens Philemon's focus to include Onesimus on the other hand (v.10). These separate but interrelated relational connections formed for Philemon what can be defined as *the triangulation process* (cf. to navigation). Faced with each on corresponding sides of him, Philemon needed to decide which one would determine his response: the wholeness of God in family love or the reductionism surrounding the status of Onesimus.

Paul's relational imperative for the church to "Live by the Spirit" (Gal 5:16) is vital both to be whole together (Eph 4:3) and to ongoingly live whole in the midst of reductionism (Gal 5:25; Rom 8:6). And Paul grasped deeply that pressure and conflict from reductionism always intensifies in the presence and function of the whole. The Spirit involves us with the whole of God in the triangulation process for God to define and determine the specific relational response needed to engage a person, situation or issue embedded in reductionism, and be clearly distinguished as different and whole. Triangulation serves to give clarity to the ontological identity and function of both person and church in order to live whole and thus make whole all encounters with reductionism. Without involvement in the triangulation process with the Spirit, the influence of the normative character and collective nature of reductionism subtly diminishes, minimalizes and fragments person and church, and often renders them to ontological simulations and epistemological illusions.

In Paul's *pleroma* ecclesiology, the *pleroma* of Christ embodies in likeness what Jesus, the *pleroma* of God, vulnerably embodied in the context of the common without being contextualized by reductionism. The embodied church alive in wholeness is contextualized only in the whole of God's relational context and process embodied by Jesus. Just as Jesus engaged various aspects (e.g., culture, institutions, social order) of human contextualization without being reduced by them (as Paul delineated, Phil 2:6-8; 2 Cor 8:9), he also contextualized those aspects in his primary context of the whole of God and in his context's relational process of family love. In this contextualizing process, Jesus unequivocally distinguished his wholeness from the common in order to make them whole (Eph 2:14-16). This dynamic interaction with human contextualization by the whole of God's relational context and process signifies what further distinguishes the church by *the process of reciprocating contextualization* (discussed in chap.1 to define Paul). Engaging in reciprocating contextualization helps person and church maintain the focus on the relational source of their ontological identity, which is vital for distinguishing what and who defines them in the midst of reductionism, particularly in its

normative character and collective nature. This dynamic was clearly demonstrated by Jesus when he was tempted by reductionism (Lk 4:1-13), and which had emerged even as a boy of twelve (Lk 2:49). Moreover, this dynamic was implicit in Jesus' teaching, which in function prevents his teachings and examples from being disembodied from his whole person.<sup>2</sup> Paul also learned to distinguish what and who defines him while dealing with reductionism (Phil 3:4-8; 2 Cor 11:21-12:1, 7-9). Without engagement in reciprocating contextualization, person and church are more susceptible to reductionism, thus often unknowingly rendered to reduced ontology and function and determined in a renegotiated ecclesiology.

This process of reciprocating contextualization is what Paul also implied for Philemon to engage in order for his person and church to be redeemed from the influence of human contextualization, with the relational outcome to be distinguished in their difference as holy and whole in relationship together. As Paul illuminated for Philemon, it is vital for person and church to engage with the Spirit in the dynamic of reciprocating contextualization (discussed in chap. 9), and to grasp this involvement as a relational process in necessary conjoint function with triangulation (as Paul also demonstrated, noted above, 2 Cor 12:8). The urgency was twofold for Paul. This integrated relational process is necessary for the qualitative distinction from inner out in the common's surrounding context of reductionism in order not to be defined or determined by the common's function from outer in. In reciprocal involvement with the Spirit, triangulation and reciprocal contextualization function conjointly in relational interaction to constitute church life and practice to be "sanctified whole" (*holotelos*) and ongoingly "maintain your whole [*holokleros*] person blameless" (*amemptos*, i.e., whole, cf. *tamiym*) before and with "the God of wholeness" (1 Thes 5:23; cf. Gen 17:1). In this reciprocal relational process, the church is ongoingly engaged in its own difference as holy, and thus ongoingly involved, in its own difference as whole.

Since Paul's emphasis throughout his letters was on function more than theology, he engaged in direct relational dialogue over conventional theological discourse in order for his readers to grasp the experiential truth of God's thematic relational response to the human condition. All his theology converged for this thematic relational purpose and emerged in just this integral relational outcome. For the whole of Paul and the whole in his theology, this is the definitive relational outcome that clearly embodies the church alive in wholeness to fulfill its 'uncommon' relational purpose in the midst of the 'common', just as Christ embodied (and prayed for this family, Jn 17:15-23). With whole ontology and function clearly distinguished from inner out, person and church together live in "the bond of wholeness" (Eph 4:3) ongoingly in the relational imperative for God's family, "let the wholeness of Christ rule in your hearts...in one body" (Col 3:15). On this relational basis alone, they submit their whole person to be vulnerably involved in the midst of reductionism to relationally engage persons in the human relational condition without differential treatment in family love, and to reconcile them to equalized and intimate relationships together in the whole of God's new creation family (Gal 5:6; 6:15; Col 3:11; cf. Eph 2:15-16). Nothing less and no substitutes for Paul constitute and

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<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of reciprocating contextualization and the triangulation process in the life and teaching of Jesus, see my study, *Sanctified Christology: A Theological and Functional Study of the Whole of Jesus* (Christology Study, 2008), online at [www.4X12.org](http://www.4X12.org), ch. 7 "Jesus and Culture, Ethics, Mission."

distinguish person and church together to be holy and whole; anything less and any substitutes do not have functional significance from inner out. Therefore, the *pleroma* of Christ must by the very nature of its relational source embody this difference ‘already’ in the image and likeness of the *pleroma* of God (Eph 1:23; 4:24; Col 2:10; 3:10-11).

Only the convergence, interaction and coherence of these theological, relational and functional dynamics “will make you ready to *live* the gospel of wholeness” (Eph 6:15) in the relational outcome ‘already’ of what the whole of God saves us *to*: God’s new creation family embodying the church alive conjointly in whole relationship together to fulfill the inherent human relational need and in the new relational order to redemptively reconcile the pervasive human relational problem.

This is the *pleroma* theology of Paul, which signified his *synesis* from the Spirit and constituted his *oikonomia* with the Spirit to *pleroo* the communicative word from God. With the whole in his theology, Paul challenged the theological assumptions of his readers, even their theological cognition. In this relational process, the whole of Paul continues to challenge his readers for the functional significance of this whole relational outcome—ongoingly holding us accountable for the already while encouraging us to the not yet.





## Chapter 11 Supplemental Theological Notes

### Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1 Cor 8:1

An ongoing challenge for Paul's readers (past and present) is to understand where Paul was coming from in his letters. When he spoke to different situations and in different contexts, it is not always clear whether he was speaking in theological terms, ethical terms or merely to the situation. This understanding is made difficult when the context of his words is limited to the historical Paul in human contextualization. This limited view of Paul is insufficient to grasp his discourse as theological and his language as relational, both of which expressed the whole of Paul and not merely the historical Paul. This critical distinction is necessary to understand where Paul was coming from.

Throughout his letters Paul always engaged in theological dialogue and relational discourse, because he spoke from the whole of God's relational context and process which constituted the whole of Paul. It was this experiential truth constituting his whole person (notably the relational Paul) which then constituted the whole in his theology (the theological Paul). For Paul, his language could not be separated from his theological experience in God's relational context and process from which he spoke. Likewise, his conjoint theological dialogue and relational discourse are inseparable and emerge only from his experiential truth of the whole of God in relationship. Accordingly, Paul's theology is indistinguishable from his function since his theology was ongoingly developed by his relational function with God, whose revealed desires are entirely for whole relationship together. Paul's thematic purpose and concern in his letters were always for the function of this relationship—function based on theology which emerged from only the experiential truth of whole knowledge and understanding of God.

Paul did not have a theological agenda to promote his theological theories or, as an innovator, to promote models to establish Christianity beyond Jesus. Despite little reference to Jesus' words, his theological cognition was not speculative but the relational outcome of whole function in vulnerable relationship together with the whole of God and God's communicative action in thematic relational response to the human condition. Therefore, Paul's theological dialogue and relational discourse throughout his letters are indeed good news for the inherent human relational need and human relational problem, which are further quantified by modern neuroscience. Moreover, this functional good news, not theoretical, also informs physics for the quality of life in the cosmos, chastens the development of technology for whole relationships, and makes whole such human efforts as the medicalization to control and extend life by advanced yet fragmented knowledge, as discussed previously. In eschatological progression, Paul's theological dialogue and relational discourse have even further and deeper significance for human ontology and function today, whether in the church, the academy or their surrounding context: "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up" (1 Cor 8:1).

Given the language from the whole of Paul in God's relational context and process, there are some related questions to address in his *pleroma* theology.

## Eleven Interrelated Questions in Paul's Theology

It would be helpful to read these questions in sequence since they interrelate somewhat in progression.

### 1. How important is continuity and discontinuity in Paul?

Part of the answer depends on the focus of what Paul had continuity with and discontinuity from. Related questions implied here involve whether Paul converted to Christianity or remained in Judaism, whether Christianity is a new religion or not, and whether Paul's emphases were innovations about Christ or an extension of Jesus. Paul's continuity or discontinuity varies with the position of each question.

The primary question, however, involves a deeper significance which gives full meaning to the issue of continuity-discontinuity and how important it was to Paul. This issue needs to be framed in the whole of God's thematic action in relational response to the human condition, and thus be framed by the extent of God's self-disclosure in this relational purpose for its only relational outcome. God's self-disclosed action included the incarnation which Christ embodied to fulfill God's relational purpose. Yet God's relational response is not limited to the incarnation, thus for Paul both God's relational context and process were not christocentric and the relational outcome was not just about Christ. This focus on the whole of God is critical to understand in Paul, and with what he has continuity (see previous discussion on continuity in "Paul's *Pleroma* Christology," chap. 7). The primary question then—which signified Paul's direct experiential truth of God's thematic relational response to him—becomes the extent of continuity between the OT and the NT of this definitive relational purpose and outcome.

Since God's thematic action is a function only of relationship, the nature of God's relational involvement necessitates reciprocal human relational response. The human response compatible to God by necessity is part of the continuity question, which includes the extent of continuity existing between Abraham's faith and NT faith, specifically as delineated by Paul (see question 5). Moreover, as the significance of the relational purpose and outcome of God's thematic action is grasped—which Paul did in his experiential truth and *synesis* from the Spirit—the continuity-discontinuity issue becomes the inseparable issue between God's whole and reductionism (raised in question 2).

Therefore, the issue of continuity-discontinuity in Paul needs to be understood in the deeper issues both relational and qualitative: (1) congruity and incongruity with God's thematic relational action, and (2) compatibility and incompatibility with God's whole and wholeness. These deeper issues, and their importance for Paul, do not fully emerge from focusing on the historical Paul merely in human contextualization and its related questions, but only from the relational Paul in God's whole relational context and process—that is, from the function of the whole of Paul who constituted the theological Paul and the whole in his theology, in continuity with God's revealed whole and in discontinuity with reductionism, which is anything less and any substitutes. Decisively for him and unequivocally in his thought and theology, continuity in Paul depends

functionally on the presence of the whole in Paul, which is contingent on the reality of the wholeness of Paul. And discontinuity in Paul depends conjointly, on the one hand, on the experiential truth of this wholeness and, on the other, on the reality of reductionism and its presence and influence in human life. The latter raises the next question, perhaps already asked by some readers of this Paul study.

## **2. Is reductionism a straw man in Paul's polemic which becomes reified as his discourse unfolds?**

Partly, the answer depends on understanding Paul's relational language. Mostly, the answer will not be apparent if Paul is just seen in human contextualization, because there is no wholeness present in the historical Paul to illuminate God's whole needed to identify this reductionism. Reductionism functions only to counter wholeness, thus the function of the whole is necessary to clearly expose the reality of reductionism. The unequivocal existence of reductionism has an ontological source but its primary presence appears in functions (individual and collective) as the alternative of anything less and any substitutes to God's whole. The appearance of reductionism in human function is indistinguishable without the presence of whole function. Even the contrast between reduced function and whole function is obscure when our interpretive lens does not pay attention to or ignores the difference. This lens becomes part of the issue in answering this question for Paul's readers.

In a sense, this question would be like asking the historical Paul if he existed prior to the Damascus road since that's when the reality of reductionism had specific existence in his ontology and function. That period of his life had less to do with Judaism and the law and was more about his practice of it. Paul could not and did not deny the reality of his faith-practice. After the Damascus road, reductionism was not a straw man for Paul to justify a new faith and practice. Rather reductionism signified the condition of his faith-practice—in contrast to the significance of Abraham's faith—from which he necessarily was redeemed and was ongoingly transformed in order to be made whole in the ontology and function of God's new creation family. If anything, reductionism was promoted by those who shaped and constructed alternative practices in the church to this wholeness, which was the nature and focus of Paul's polemic.

Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel of God's thematic relational response signified the acutely real and present reality of reductionism and its influence to shape and construct alternatives to, or otherwise fragment, God's relational whole—pervading and prevailing even in churches. Reductionism was never its reification in Paul's polemic but unmistakably the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions engendered by its ontological source, the author and propagator of *metaschematizo* and deception, as Paul made definitive and exposed (2 Cor 11:13-15; cf. Jn 8:44; Lk 12:1). The source and its reduced ontology and function must be accounted for—which Peter and Barnabas learned the hard way (Gal 2:13)—and whose influence and alternatives must be exposed, refuted and redeemed by the reciprocal involvement of all of Paul's readers. Or the relational consequence is to be rendered to reductionist practice themselves, whether in the church or academy, individually or collectively, even unintentionally or unknowingly, as Barnabas appeared to function with Peter above.

The question about reductionism then becomes for Paul's readers: **On what basis do we ignore or not pay attention to the reality of reductionism and its prevailing presence and pervasive influence on human life**, evident even to observations in modern science noted previously? Part of this answer involves the strength and adequacy of our view of sin, notably in its normative character and collective nature.

In Paul's *pleroma* theology, he is focused unavoidably on a full view of sin, not on moral and ethical issues. This focus is necessary to engage not only the qualitative holy God but also the relational whole of God. Paul never assumes in theological discourse that illuminating the whole of God and the whole gospel are without struggle, the struggle due solely to the sin of reductionism and its source (cf. Col 1:28-2:8). Based on the epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction from *tamiym* and Abraham's faith, Paul grasped the deeper significance of Satan's seduction in the primordial garden to redefine human ontology and function from inner out to outer in. This redefinition was attempted unsuccessfully with Jesus in his temptation to reduce Jesus' ontology and function. What Paul gained from the narratives of others' lives and his own life was a full view of sin, the strength and adequacy of which is necessary to expose and establish the ongoing presence and influence of reductionism in operational tension and conflict with the wholeness of the whole and holy God. Without this lens of sin, Paul's readers have inadequate relational connection with the definitive basis for understanding the alternatives used for ontology and function, both for God and humans, which signify and constitute anything less and any substitutes of God's whole and the gospel of wholeness. The relational consequence from this epistemic gap would be, functionally, a different gospel than Paul's experiential truth, and, theologically, an incomplete Christology, a truncated soteriology, an immature pneumatology and a renegotiated ecclesiology—that is, reductionism of the *pleroma* of God, which reduces Paul's function to *pleroo* the word of God and illuminate *pleroma* theology. That is the nature of reductionism, reified not by Paul but by its ontological source, for whom all of Paul's readers must account.

Paul's discourse is nonnegotiable in holding his readers accountable for God's whole. He grasped fully that the only alternative functionally and theologically is to be rendered to human terms, shaping, construction or fragmentation from reductionism. Perhaps this is the current state in which many church leaders have become embedded and Pauline scholarship has struggled.

### **3. How much of Paul's claim to have received direct revelation from God can be factored in to make definitive the whole in his theology, the development of which goes both further than Judaism and even deeper than the Jesus tradition?**

Paul underwent a hermeneutic shift in his understanding of Hebrew Scripture. His interpretive lens changed from an outer-in quantitative view to the qualitative whole from inner out, thus from fragmented knowledge about God and skewed understanding of God's law to whole knowledge and understanding. This transformation involved the embodied Word who took Paul from a disembodied perception of Scripture to the communicative words from God. God's words revealed in Scripture are relational communication which cannot be disembodied from their source, or those words lose their relational significance. Paul had been a learned student of Scripture, filled with

information about God without its relational significance. That changed with his relational encounter with the embodied Word.

In Paul's theological systemic framework and forest, God's revelation is God's communicative act only from top down, implicit in creation and explicit in God's thematic relational action responding to the human condition. The whole of God's self-disclosure in relational response was fulfilled by the embodiment of Jesus, the extension of whom Paul experienced face to face on the Damascus road. The whole of God's communicative action, however, did not end here for Paul, who continued to experience God's further self-disclosures in the relational epistemic process together both from Christ (Gal 1:11-12) and from the Spirit (1 Cor 2:10,13; Eph 3:3-5). The relational outcome of this relational epistemic process was never diminished by Paul, chastened but never minimalized (2 Cor 12:1-7), because these revelations from God in communicative action were the definitive basis for Paul to fulfill his relational purpose and responsibility (*oikonomia*) for the *pleroma* of God's family to *pleroo* the word of God's relational communication in response to the human condition (Col 1:19-22, 24-28; cf. Eph 3:2-12). Therefore, since Paul was not engaged in a conventional theological task from bottom up, his theological focus centered always on subject-*theos* relationally disclosed from top down; and Paul accounted for all of God's revelations to him in his *pleroma* theology because he was accountable for the communicative action of God's irreducible and nonnegotiable words.

In Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel of wholeness and against reductionism, he presents three sets of contrary approaches to the revelation of God's communicative word and how it's used:

1. To define and determine ontology and function only to the extent of God's revelation from top down, thus on the basis solely of the relational word of God; or to disengage from this relational epistemic process and to go "beyond what is written [words from God]" (1 Cor 4:6) to shape ontology and function in human terms (cf. Col 2:8).
2. To relationally share the word of God as a relational extension of God's communicative action to fulfill only the whole of God's desires for relationship together (Paul's *oikonomia*), which necessitates the wholeness of his person presented to others and the relational quality of his communication; or to use it as did the "peddlers of God's word" for personal gain or profit (*kapeleuo*, 2 Cor 2:17), which may appear from outer in to be meaningful but has no relational significance to God.
3. To present the totality of God's revelation as God's communicative word in its whole (Paul's *pleroo*), without reductionism, as constituted in the incarnation by the embodied Word in the dynamic of nothing less and no substitutes, thus involving the relational vulnerability from inner out, both to receive the Word and to present it; or to intentionally reduce God's word and to engage in the ambiguous practice "to falsify God's word" (*doloo*, 2 Cor 4:2), that is, to adulterate, dilute, water down and cheapen—for example, as merchants did with wine in Paul's time—which may be more agreeable for popular consumption, but

lacking in wholeness and thus significance for the inherent human relational need and problem.

These three approaches overlap within their own type of approach and interact together to intensify the conflict with the contrary type of approaches. Each set-type signifies a different *phronema* that constitutes a different *phroneo* to interpret God's word. The first set-type approaches God's word as a function of relationship together on God's terms from inner out; the latter set-type disembodies God's word from the primacy of this relationship and shifts to a reduced function from outer in. Thus, the first set of approaches can emerge only from God's revelation as the sole determinant for ontology and function, while the latter set can signify no more than human terms, shaping and construction as a substitute.

For Paul, nothing less and no substitutes for the revelation from top down of God's definitive word constituted the whole in his theology. And the extent of what the whole of God relationally shared with Paul went further than Judaism and deeper than the Jesus tradition. Therefore, Paul's *pleroma* theology was whole knowledge and understanding, the extent and depth of which Paul could not be puffed up about but could only be in epistemic humility (cf. 2 Cor 12:7) since his *synesis* was entirely the relational outcome of God's relational response of grace to build up God's new creation family (Eph 3:2,7-12).

Moreover, since God's self-disclosures (more *phaneroo* than *apokalypto*) were for the sole purpose of whole relationship together, Paul's theology necessarily involved the reciprocal relational response to complete the relational connection for this wholeness. Before we further discuss this reciprocal response to God's revelation, however, we need to ask a transitional question.

#### **4. How important was methodology to Paul's theology?**

As discussed in chapter five, Paul's theological engagement cannot be described in conventional terms but is better defined in function as a process of living theology—in which theology was never separated from function and the priority was always function over theology for Paul. Thus, Paul was involved in communicating God's story of thematic relational response to the human condition, a story with which Paul earlier had had only historical association. He now, however, has directly experienced the truth of God's story relationally and continues in that experiential truth to illuminate God's story theologically. This relational process is vital to theological engagement and was Paul's basis for it.

The theological Paul was able to distinguish the fact of God's story from fiction, and to grasp God's definitive relational action without speculation, unequivocally on the basis, and thus to the extent, of God's direct revelation to him. That is to say, the theological Paul was not wholly constituted by the limited historical Paul but most significantly by the vulnerable relational Paul. Theological engagement, then, involved implicitly a *relational "methodology"* for Paul. His readers need to understand that this theological process is a function of relationship, not a quantified theological task without that qualitative involvement even if it included biblical exegesis.

In his theological process, Paul made a further claim to “have the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). If his claim is understood in only epistemological terms, then what Paul possessed was further knowledge (albeit inside) about God. For Paul, however, having the mind of Christ was the relational outcome of reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9-10; cf. Jesus’ claim, Jn 14:26; 15:26; 16:12-15). To have the mind of Christ from the Spirit signifies the new *phroneo* and *phronema* with the Spirit (Rom 8:5-6), which are necessary for the whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) to engage unequivocally in factual theological discourse of God’s story and definitive theological dialogue of the whole of God’s thematic relational action. This theological engagement for Paul further implies a *qualitative “methodology”* of having the mind of Christ for the needed interpretive framework and lens, which provide the relational awareness and qualitative sensitivity to wholly grasp the relational extent and qualitative depth of God’s vulnerable revelation (cf. Paul’s imperative, Rom 12:2). This qualitative methodology emerges in function entirely from reciprocal relationship with the Spirit, the outcome of which is by its nature a relational outcome and not from a subjective self-consciousness. Therefore, Paul’s qualitative methodology is inseparable from and in ongoing interaction with his relational methodology.

Paul never engaged in theological discourse beyond God’s self-disclosure (as he demonstrated, 1 Cor 4:6) in order to construct any fictional parts of God’s story or to speculate about God’s thematic relational response to the human condition. He did not need to be engaged in such theology from bottom up because he was relationally involved with the mind of Christ ongoingly with the Spirit to extend the theological dialogue of the Word from top down. The relational outcome of Paul’s reciprocal relational response was from “him who...within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can *do* or imagine *by our own theological reflection*” (Eph 3:20, my paraphrase): “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him’—those things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2:9-10).

Listening to God became a relational function for Paul and not merely a pronouncement of moral obligation from the tradition of Jewish Scripture. Relational connection and involvement with the whole of God was nonnegotiable for Paul and the relational imperative for both his function and his theology. Therefore, Paul was able to *pleroo* the communicative word from God and to illuminate *pleroma* theology only on the basis and to the extent of his relational and qualitative methodology; this compatible process clearly signified his reciprocal relational response to God’s vulnerable revelation and Paul’s ongoing relational involvement with the whole of God. And by his reciprocal relational involvement in the whole of God’s relational context and process, Paul’s theological engagement is paradigmatic for all his readers, notably in Pauline studies.

### **5. What was the nature of Paul’s faith-response to God’s revelation and how did it differ from OT faith? Was Paul’s view of faith (including for justification) any different than James’ view?**

The nature of God’s revelation defined the nature of and determined the terms for the response to the words from God. Since the nature of God’s words is relational communication, the nature of the response can only be relational and must function in

the reciprocal relational terms of God to be compatible (see previous discussion on faith in chap. 8). This response becomes equivocal when determined merely by the notion of obedience. That is, obedience is insufficient response by itself and becomes incompatible when this response is only to disembodied words, laws or propositional truths. This type of obedience essentially shifts the nature of the response from God's relational terms to human terms, even with good intentions or unintentionally, and thus focuses the response more on what we do rather than how to be relationally involved with God. Such obedience's focus is quantitative from outer in and the response becomes measured, for example, in accordance with a code of behavior or doctrinal purity. The response of God's relational terms is qualitative from inner out and is increasingly vulnerable to the vulnerable presence and relational involvement of God.

Obedience alone, at best, is an ambiguous response to God's revelation and can be, at worst, an incompatible response in conflict with God's words—an issue raised even in a response for justification by faith. Moreover, disobedience can even have the appearance of obedience in settings of the normative character and collective nature of the sin of reductionism.

By the definitive nature of God's words, listening to God is solely a relational function from inner out for Paul, whose response is distinguished by its nature from all reductionist alternatives. Both the nature of God's relational action and of human relational response are irreducible and nonnegotiable. In the relational language of Paul's discourse, his shorthand term for this reciprocal relational response is *faith*. Yet, faith in practice is often the notion of what we have and/or do, the possession or act of which is perceived as necessary and also sufficient in itself. James certainly refuted such a redefined view of faith (Jas 1:22; 2:17-20) and Paul's practice did also. While the object of such faith is God, God becomes only an Object in the relationship who intervenes and supports as necessary. Paul's theological discourse is centered also on God as the Subject in whole ontology and function for reciprocal relationship together (cf. 2 Cor 4:6); and compatible response to subject-*theos* in Paul's theology is with the whole ontology and function of the human person as subject also in Subject-to-subject relational connection (cf. Eph 3:12).

In Paul's own experience, his faith shifted from the tradition of what he had and did back to the nature of God's revelation and terms. His shift was to the faith constituted by Abraham, which often was not the faith practiced in Judaism throughout the OT narrative. Even further and deeper than Abraham's experience, Paul's faith-response to God's vulnerable revelation signified the relational response of being vulnerable with his whole person. Yet, just as Abraham was in *tamiym*, this vulnerable involvement was constituted by the ongoing relational trust of his person from inner out to the whole of God for reciprocal relationship together, not unilateral relationship or measured involvement. Nothing less and no substitutes of relational trust make a person vulnerable for compatible response to the communicative words from God, significantly and vulnerably embodied by the Word. Paul did not define a new faith-response but extended the original relational response further and deeper into God's relational context and process in order to intimately participate in the whole of God's life in whole relationship together—just as Jesus embodied, promised and prayed for (Jn 14:6,23; 17:26), and Paul illuminated theologically (Eph 2:8,18,22) and prayed functionally (Eph 3:14-19).



Both Paul and James challenged a faith reduced to practice without relational and functional significance (Gal 5:6; 1 Thes 1:3; 2 Thes 1:11; Jas 2:14,21-24). Both countered a faith that was an end in itself or a means for oneself, even for justification. When justification is seen only in its judicial aspect before God, *dikaio syne* has lost the compatible relational function with God necessary for ongoing involvement in relationship together. Justification by faith becomes inadequate when the process is limited solely to being justified before God. This limitation involves a reduced faith, which implies a truncated soteriology focused only on being saved from sin—and that view of sin is limited also. *Dikaio syne*, however, also involves righteousness, which is not an attribute but the congruent function of a person's whole ontology in relationship. That is, righteousness is the inner-out function of the person's whole ontology which God and others can count on in relationship together. Being righteous engages the whole person in *pleroma* soteriology and involves those persons directly in what we are saved *to*—whole relationship together in God's new creation family. Righteousness constitutes the compatible involvement needed for relationship with the whole of God, which is an inner-out relational function emerging only from the vulnerable relational response of trust, whole faith. Therefore, the more basic issue underlying the issue of justification by faith is the nature of the faith practiced to claim justification. This basic issue addresses the sin of reductionism and its influence to redefine faith and truncate salvation.

Reductionism in faith-practice has had an ongoing history among God's people, whether by ancient Jews, Christian Jews, Jewish and Gentile Christians, or modern Christians, whether for identity, ideology or justification. Such faith has the primary focus on oneself, which has no relational significance to God and functional significance to others. The practice of such faith in relationship is outer in, and thus is measured or distant, if not detached. In contrast, the relational response of trust makes one vulnerable from inner out and engages the primacy of relationship, first with God and then with others, for the reciprocal relational involvement necessary for relationship together to be whole—not measured or distant and thus, simply, fragmented. In other words, for both Paul and James, faith is not static, passive, self-involved and a mere statement of belief. Rather, by the nature of God's relational action, compatible faith is a relational dynamic, actively responding to God and others in relationship with one's whole person from inner out as the relational outworking of one's belief (Gal 5:6; Jas 2:17; cf. Amos 5:21-24). Anything less and any substitutes of this relational response are reduction, the sin of reductionism. The simulations and illusions of faith from reductionism is the underlying issue Paul and James challenged in its function and outcome, both of which they countered with whole faith—the wholeness of one's relational response of trust and its relational outcome of whole relationship together with God and God's family.

Paul and James did not differ in their views of faith and were united in their fight against reductionism in faith. This may be confusing since their discourses on faith and works appear to be in opposition to each other's, notably in relation to Abraham (cf. Rom 4:2-5; Jas 2:21-24). In truth, each is challenging reductionism in his discourse. Paul challenged reductionism in the practice of works, which became a substitute for faith as the relational response expected by God. James challenged reductionism in the practice of faith, which became a substitute for accountability of faith's conjoint works expected by God (see James' definitive analogy, Jam 2:26). For both James and Paul, the relational outcome of whole faith is the relational function of *dikaio syne*, whose ongoing

relational work can be counted on by God in relationship together, with nothing less and no substitutes of one's whole person. They indeed were not in opposition but were fully complementary, fighting for God's whole and against reductionism.

## **6. How did Paul see works and what did he mean by doing good, good works?**

In the discussion above, works and faith are inseparable, on the one hand, yet Paul also distinguishes works from faith, on the other hand. Paul sees works also as inseparable from God's law, those desires framed in the torah and created in the human heart (Rom 2:13-15). The works of the law can be further distinguished in its moral aspect and ceremonial aspect (e.g., circumcision, kosher and Sabbath for Jews). While these two distinctions certainly existed in Paul's background to influence his view on works, I suggest that his discourse on works also went beyond these distinctions and thus deeper than their contextual practice involved, notably for the context of Judaism.

Works of the law, whether moral for all persons and/or ceremonial for Jews, in practice reflect an interpretive framework which Paul addressed, challenged and exposed. Paul's roots did not originate in Judaism, thus his discourse on works went beyond his religious tradition and deeper into human origin. That is, Paul is addressing human ontology and how the human person is defined, and what determines human function. Paul knew from the creation narrative that the human person was designated with "work" to accomplish (Gen 2:4-5,15). The term for work (*abad*) also means to serve, minister and worship. *Abad* then is not an end in itself by which to define human persons. *Abad* is a designated function in a broader context than just the individual person, which the Creator established to define human ontology and determine human function. The issue for *abad* becomes whether this broader context is to serve the physical creation, minister to the human creature or worship the Creator. This is an ongoing problem of interpretive framework which will determine our perception of work, the significance of its context and what will define the human person. Paul was addressing these issues in his discourse on works.

The creation narrative further illuminated the context of *abad* by defining human persons as created in the image of God and by determining human function as "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen 1:27-28). "To *fill* the earth" (*male*) denotes to complete what God established and set in motion for all life and function. What makes the broader context definitive, however, was God's declaration that the human person in God's image cannot "be alone," or "be apart,"—that is, be separated from God's whole with other human persons—but by the nature of God's likeness all persons are created for, and therefore must be in, whole relationship together (Gen 2:18).

Relationship in God's likeness is the deeper context of *abad* which established the roots for Paul's interpretive framework defining all works, inclusive of all human activity for physical creation, for human creatures or for the Creator. In Paul's deeper framework, therefore, the primary work defining human ontology and determining human function is relational work: namely, the whole person from inner out in the vulnerable relational response of trust with God (faith) and in the vulnerable relational involvement with others in relationship (*agape*, Gal 5:6). All other works and human activity are secondary to this relational work in the primacy of relationship together. If

persons are defined by doing secondary work or activity, for Paul this constitutes a reduction of the person created in God's qualitative image and relational likeness, a reduction which signifies a quantitative interpretive framework redefining human ontology and function from inner out to outer in. In Paul's polemic, if persons define themselves by this reduced human ontology and by their function in the works of the law, then they are obligated to do "all the things written in the book of the law" (Gal 3:10) and are measured by "the entire law" (Gal 5:3). Without complete and perfect adherence, they can never fully measure up on these terms; therefore they are deficient ("cursed") and must be deemed as *less* and unacceptable to God, that is, on these redefined terms based on reduced human ontology constituting persons by what they do. Paul is only raising a hypothetical process of works on human terms, not God's terms. By this polemic, Paul challenges the assumptions about theological anthropology of all his readers.

Works based on reduced human ontology and function are never sufficient to complete (*male*) what God constituted at creation to be whole in relationship together, with God and each other, which is the deeper issue in Paul's polemic. Paul was able to be decisive because no one knew more from personal experience than Paul in his own previous works (Phil 3:4-7). These works are reductions to human terms and shaping, not God's terms in his image and likeness. These are the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions which Paul exposed to make them whole. That included certain practices in Judaism, among Gentiles, with churches and by church leaders, such as Peter and Barnabas in the incongruity of their outer-in actions (Gal 2:13). Reductionism influences, if not pervades, human ontology and function in all contexts, and works are its most common yet subtle denominator, and thus the most difficult to distinguish and change in Paul's fight for wholeness.

On God's terms, Paul grasped that works are inseparable from the relational work of faith (Gal 5:6). Faith is the primary relational work which by its nature constitutes the functional significance of the person's involvement in all other works (1 Thes 1:3; 2 Thes 1:11). When Paul talks about "doing good" and "good works" (Rom 2:7,10; 2 Cor 9:8; Gal 6:9; Eph 2:10; Col 1:10; 1 Tim 6:18; 2 Tim 3:17; Tit 2:7,14), he is not creating a new category of 'good' in contrast to 'bad' which quantifies a different measurement to define human ontology and function. Paul never established a new ethical framework; and what has been perceived as ethical discourse throughout his letters needs to be understood with his lens and language of "doing good" and "good works." This is a critical distinction for Paul's perspective on works and his discourse on observing the law because Paul put all of these practices into their full context and deeper process of God's whole—just as Jesus made conclusive about the law (cf. Mt 5:17-48).

While Paul discusses "doing good" based on God's law (in the torah for Jews and in human conscience for Gentiles, Rom 2:13-15), he uses "good" in a limited sense in his discourse here. The perception of good is again an issue of interpretive framework and lens (cf. Mk 10:17-18), which Paul unfolds in his theology and later makes definitive (Rom 8:5-6). In this context, Paul is both breaking down the barrier between Jews and Gentiles and dissolving the reductionist distinction between "more" and "less." Yet, Paul did not open the door to anyone (Jew or Gentile) who reduces "doing good" to merely moral and/or ceremonial practice based on God's law. For Paul, good (*agathos*) is not about what is useful, profitable or even benevolent. He limits good to an inner-out

quality of whole ontology which determines whole function (cf. Rom 7:12-13, and Jesus' clarification, Mt 19:16-17). Though good may have a useful, profitable or benevolent result, doing good and good works are a function only of relationship that emerges entirely from the relational work of faith—an inner-out function on God's relational terms.

Good works are inseparable from relational faith because of the relational nature of God's communication revealing the law (cf. Num 12:6-7). God's law, without reduction and disembodiment, expresses God's desires and terms just for reciprocal relationship together. Observing the law is more accurately described as the relational function of responding to God's desires for relationship, which for Paul became the experiential truth of his discipleship with Christ in relationship (cf. Acts 26:16b; 1 Cor 11:1)—just as Jesus made definitive for observing the law (Mk 10:21) and for serving him (Jn 12:26). God did not vulnerably share these desires and terms for the sake of the moral and ethical conformity of persons in doing good. The relational response of God is to redeem persons from such reductionism and to reconcile them to whole relationship together (Gal 4:3-7, *pleroma* soteriology).

The reciprocal relational response of trust is the vulnerable involvement necessary to be compatible with God's relational response communicated in the relational message of the law, and to be congruent with the human ontology and function created in relational likeness to the whole of God. Merely doing good and good works, even with good intentions, reduce God's relational response, God's law, human ontology and function. Paul's polemic exposes these reductions and illuminates the *good* to make them whole. His *pleroma* theological discourse on good defines its determinant relational work by those who function from inner out ongoingly in reciprocal relational response back to God for nothing less than and no substitutes for whole relationship together—what the *pleroma* of God saves us *to*, which is indeed the only good news for the inherent human relational need and problem.

## **7. As a Jew and a Christian, what was Paul's understanding of God's people?**

This involved his theological cognition of who, what and how God is, and his theological assumptions of human ontology and function.

On the one hand, God's people were the same for Paul, though, on the other, there was a qualitative and functional difference which needed to be grasped. A Jew was not unclear about the identity of 'who God is'. Most Jews in ancient Israel, however, typically had difficulty with the ontology of 'what God is' and often had problems with the nature of 'how God is'. These ontological and functional issues certainly influenced and shaped, if not constructed, knowledge and understanding not only of God but also of God's people. Whether God's people were the same for Paul or had a difference depended on his theological cognition of God's ontology and function and his directly related theological anthropology.

Prior to the Damascus road Paul claimed his identity with God's people through membership in Israel as a nation-state. As a nation-state in Paul's day, Israel was dominated by the Roman state and threatened by the Way in its identity as God's people. Jewish identity was based on the identity of their God, rooted in the monotheism of the Shema. The identity of 'who God is' may have been compromised in Israel's history but

never redefined. Only the one God prevailed and would save them from their plight. The issue, however, was not the identity of who the Deliverer is but the insufficiency of both the ontology of the one God and the nature of this God as well as the full significance of God's salvation. Their God, for example, was also the holy God, yet the full significance of God being uncommon was not grasped in depth (cf. Ez 22:26). This lack equally signified and constituted a reduced ontology and function from outer in by human terms and shaping, which redefined the qualitative being and renegotiated the relational nature of God and of the ontology and function of God's people in likeness (cf. Moses' lens, Ex 33:15-16). In the process, Israel's identity as God's people shifted to nation-state in a truncated soteriology and away from the covenant people of God being saved to whole relationship together as God's family. Paul had to account for this as a Jew and be accountable as a Christian.

Paul received the needed epistemological clarification and hermeneutic correction to understand the inner-out significance of God's people (Rom 2:28-29). This further and deeper significance was based on the experiential truth of his whole knowledge and understanding (*synesis*) of the whole of who, what and how God is, that is, Paul's *pleroma* theology relationally revealed to him face to face in the embodied face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). His grasp of the whole of God and God's relational whole involved his own ontology and function made whole. Having been restored to God's relational context and reconciled in God's relational process, as a Jew now from inner out, Paul turned from identity in a nation-state back to the covenant relationship of God's people; and as a Christian, he experienced the full significance of the relational belonging and ontological identity of God's people (cf. 2 Cor 6:16; Ti 2:14).

Turning away from nation-state, Paul's discourse partially turned to "the kingdom of God" (e.g., Acts 19:8; 20:25; 28:23,31). This focus for God's people, however, did not clearly distinguish it from nation-state if it was still perceived with a quantitative lens from outer in. Paul's discourse about the kingdom was an extension of Jesus' kingdom discourse, who made definitive its qualitative ontology from inner out (Lk 17:20-21) and relational function (Lk 11:20; 18:16-17). Paul extended this qualitative ontology and relational function of the kingdom as God's people (cf. Rom 14:17; 1 Cor 4:20), and he also further distinguished the kingdom and deepened the understanding of God's people in his *pleroma* theology (Col 1:12-13; Eph 1:4-14, 22-23).

In the whole of Paul's theology, and in the relational progression with Christ (the *pleroma* of God) and the Spirit (Christ's relational replacement), God's people became the relational outcome which emerged in the church (the *pleroma* of Christ). Yet, for Paul the *pleroma* of Christ (Eph 1:23) is not the institution of the church but the embodiment of the church in the qualitative ontology from inner out and the relational function of *agape* involvement in the whole relationship together of God's new creation family—conjointly in the image of the one God's qualitative ontology and in the likeness of the whole of God's relational function. Nothing less and no substitutes of who, what and how God is and God's people are could signify and can constitute their whole ontology and function. More important than as a Jew and a Christian, Paul's experiential truth as the adopted son in the whole and holy God's family was 'who he is' and 'whose he is', in whole relationship together both intimate and equalized with his sisters and brothers.

This relational outcome raises some further questions about practices (e.g., in culture) and relationships (e.g., for women and slaves), which may result in compromise in the surrounding context and may appear contradictory in Paul's letters, thus diminishing the functional significance of his *pleroma* theology. The remaining questions address such problems.

**8. As a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son, to what extent did change need to take effect 'already' for his theology to be functional?**

It was never sufficient for Paul to change from outer in, either by outward change only, giving the appearance of some inner significance (*metaschematizo*, 2 Cor 11:13-15), or by change just from conforming outwardly to a surrounding context's normative influence and terms (*syschematizo*, Rom 12:2). What only constituted change for Paul, together as a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son, involved a pivotal relational process which by its nature necessitated his whole person from inner out. The relational outcome of whole relationship together in God's family can emerge just from this pivotal relational process. In Paul's theology, the pivotal relational process is made definitive by being "baptized into Christ" for the redemptive change 'already' in which the old dies and the new rises with Christ (Rom 6:4-5) by the Spirit (Rom 8:10-11). The old is the reduced human ontology and function entrenched in the sin of reductionism which needs redemption to be conjointly freed and made whole as a person in relationship together. The dynamic of the cross becomes paradigmatic for this ongoing process of the old to die 'already' and the reality of the new to rise (cf. Paul's desire for further intimate relationship with Christ, Phil 3:10-11).

The wholeness dynamic of redemptive change is the pivotal process of relational involvement with Christ for the inner-out transformation of the whole person by the Spirit (*metamorphoo*, 2 Cor 3:18; Rom 12:2), which is necessary for the experiential truth 'already' of the relational outcome for relational belonging and ontological identity in God's new creation family of transformed relationships together, both intimate and equalized (Rom 8:14-17; Gal 3:26-29; 1 Cor 12:13; Col 3:9-11; Eph 4:22-24). Without full and ongoing engagement in redemptive change, there is no reconciliation to these relationships together—though possibly in appearance from outer in, but not inner out. The inseparable dynamic of redemptive reconciliation is indispensable for relationship with the whole and holy God and for all relationships together to be whole in God's likeness.

This relational outcome entirely from redemptive reconciliation was the experiential truth of Paul, from inner out as a Jew and a Christian and an adopted son. Therefore, redemptive change is nonnegotiable and its pivotal relational process of baptism into Christ is irreducible in Paul's *pleroma* theology. And Paul's readers need to understand 'already' that nothing less and no substitutes are of functional significance both for the whole of Paul's person and the whole in his theology.

**9. Since the influence of reduced human ontology and function limits this relational outcome, what was Paul’s position on religio-cultural and sociocultural practices which may appear to be problematic, or not?**

The key word in this question is “appear.” What appears to be a problem to someone may not be to another, which was an ongoing issue in Paul’s surrounding contexts of Judaism and the Mediterranean world as well as within churches. Of course, this issue directly involves one’s interpretive lens, which extends from one’s interpretive framework rooted in religious culture or a worldview rooted in social culture. The bias created from our interpretive framework and lens needs to be understood, accounted for and addressed accordingly. This process was a major part of what Paul engaged in his discourse on religio-cultural and sociocultural practices.

Prior to the Damascus road, Paul’s view of Judaism was religious. Yet, what he was unaware of during that time was the sociocultural influence on Judaism which shaped its interpretive framework and determined the significance of its religio-cultural practice. The overlap of Judaism’s religio-cultural practice with sociocultural practice in its surrounding context may not be apparent on the surface. Yet, Israel’s shift, for example, to nation-state (with its quantitative identity markers) indicated the sociocultural influence surrounding Israel and the implicit interaction taking place between the frameworks of the surrounding sociocultural practice and Judaism’s religio-cultural practice. Despite overt differences in behavioral appearance (e.g., circumcision or uncircumcision, kosher or not), these frameworks demonstrate a common quantitative character and concern focused on the outer in to define and determine human ontology and function, whether in relation to God, other persons or nations (e.g., 1 Sam 8:5,19-20). In other words, Israel as God’s so-called people often got embedded in the surrounding context rather than sojourning in covenant relationship together to its apocalyptic end.

After the Damascus road, Paul’s view of Judaism was no longer religio-cultural and his view of Israel was not sociocultural. Yet Paul fully grasped their subtle interaction and its effect on ontology and function, because Paul’s framework changed from quantitative to qualitative and his lens refocused from outer in to inner out as a follower of Christ made whole in relationship together. Thus, just as Jesus did not condemn the identity that culture promotes but made whole its life and practice (cf. Jn 3:17), Paul did not start condemning the identity of Judaism and Israel as God’s people. Nor did Paul really condemn the circumcision which symbolized that identity. He affirmed that identity (cf. Rom 11:1), and in fact supported the practice of circumcision only as it signified the circumcision of the whole person from inner out necessary to be God’s whole people (Rom 2:28-29). These overlapping aspects of religious culture as a Jew and a Christian, Paul affirmed and had no issue with.

The aspects of a culture’s practice (religious and/or social) which needed to be made whole, however, had to be addressed by Paul, just as Jesus did. Righteousness, for example, could not be measured by conformity to a moral-ethical code or ceremonial observance of behavior—an outer-in framework. Righteousness is, rather, only the congruence of one’s whole person to inner-out ontology and function that others can count on in the context of relationship. This is the critique of reductionist Jews that Jesus made imperative for his followers’ righteousness to exceed (Mt 5:20). With this

righteousness, along with the significance of the rest of Jesus' critique of reductionist religio-cultural practice (Mt 5-7), Paul's critical basis was established for his position against reductionism both in Judaism and among Christian Jews who imposed conformity to the observance of circumcision, kosher and calendar practices onto Gentiles. This type of religio-cultural practice demonstrated the sociocultural influence of the surrounding context, which signified the terms and shaping of human ontology and function from the outer in of reductionism. The interpretive framework and worldview that defined and determined this reduced human ontology and function is what Paul exposed as the elementary rudiments or basic parts, elements and principles (*stoicheion*) prevailing in the surrounding context and now pervading religious life and practice to be a prevailing influence shaping its participants (Gal 4:3,9; Col 2:8,16, 20-22).

These religious and church practices in reduced human ontology and function signify the ontological simulations and epistemological illusions constituted only by the influence of reductionism from the surrounding context. In Paul's fight for the gospel of wholeness, reductionism is never tolerable in any form and must be fought against without compromise in all contexts. For Paul, sociocultural practice and its framework are never neutral; and since they are not whole, they are at best fragmentary. While some of their parts may point to God's whole (cf. Acts 17:23), they are never sufficient to define and determine life and function in the *kosmos*, much less human ontology and function. Such fragmented knowledge and understanding are reductions and their use to shape and construct the whole is the sin of reductionism. Notably, but not exclusively, in religio-cultural and church practice, Paul exposes, confronts, refutes and seeks the redemption of the sin of reductionism in order to make it whole. And Paul is not fooled by the fact that such fragmented knowledge and understanding "have indeed an appearance of wisdom" because his whole interpretive framework and lens from the Spirit is able to discern that "they are of no value" for wholeness in human ontology and function (Col 2:23; cf. Rom 8:6).

Where Paul is accepting or affirming of religio-cultural and sociocultural practices, it is based on those practices not being incompatible with whole ontology and function. When he is intolerant of their practices, or his critique appears to contradict his acceptance, those are the practices of reductionism which are in conflict with God's whole. With his *synesis* from the Spirit, Paul is vulnerably engaged in the relational dynamic of wholeness; therefore, any and all reductionism creates unavoidable problems and must be dealt with directly, whether in Judaism, Christianity, the church or in the world. More than problematic in Paul's theological systemic framework and forest, reductionism is counter-relational to God's relational whole: diminishing, minimalizing or otherwise fragmenting the relational outcome 'already' of whole relationship together, thus distancing the intimate relationships and re-stratifying the equalized relationships necessary for constituting the transformed relationships together of God's new creation family. In his *agape* relational involvement fighting for the gospel of wholeness and to *pleroo* the word from God, the *pleroma* of God and the *pleroma* of Christ were the whole of Paul's witness and the whole in his theology. For Paul, anything less and any substitutes did not and cannot account for this wholeness.

In Pauline scholarship, both the traditional perspective of Paul and the new Paul perspective, I suggest, fall short of understanding this qualitative and relational whole,



and thus focus only on fragmentary aspects (or reductionist fragments) of God's whole, namely in doctrinal terms or from human contextualization. Yet, Paul's relational language in theological dialogue still redeems his vulnerable readers from reductionism and reconciles them to God's relational whole.

**10. Given Paul's emphasis on the relational outcome 'already' of God's relational response to the human condition, how is Paul's discourse on slaves congruent with this relational outcome, and his directives for them compatible with its function in transformed relationships together?**

As we discuss slaves in this question, and women in the next question, the issue of freedom and its determinative dynamic of redemption are basic to both. In Paul's *pleroma* theology, part of the outcome of redemption is to be free, which cannot end here or the outcome becomes fragmentary and reduced in human ontology and function. The full outcome of redemption is a relational outcome. Redemption in Christ is not about just being set free and Christian freedom is not the freedom to be free—that is, for self-autonomy, self-determination, or even a variation of self-justification. We are redeemed to be made whole in ontology and function for the primacy of relationship together with the whole of God and with God's whole family, which is the relationship that the Creator originally created in God's likeness and that the whole of God redemptively reconciles in the new creation.

Paul's relational discourse on slaves (and women) is from this framework within this context, by which his theological dialogue must be interpreted and understood. Otherwise, his readers are left with only the human contexts of Paul's situations to frame his dialogue with slaves, and thus will go no further and deeper into his framework in the context of relationship with God, the primary context into which Paul contextualizes these theological issues and their human shaping.

There are two levels of slavery for Paul:

1. Slavery embedded in social conditions, thus from outer in (cf. 1 Tim 6:1).
2. Slavery embodied in the human condition, thus from inner out (cf. Rom 6:6).

These two levels interact between them, with the first emerging from the second and the first confirming or reinforcing the second. Paul always contextualizes level one in the workings of level two. Thus, Paul always gives greater priority to level two over the first, because two underlies one and is necessary to be redeemed in order for level one to have full redemption. Yet, in what appears contrary to his directives for slaves in level one, Paul neither ignores this level nor accepts it due to its underlying condition in the sin of reductionism.

Paul addressed all sin of reductionism (slavery in both levels, cf. Phlm) while he was focused on being whole, God's relational whole on God's relational terms. This conjoint dynamic is critical to Paul's discourse. Redemption is neither an end in itself for slaves nor sufficient to deal with the sin of reductionism in the human condition involved in slavery. Paul is unequivocal that we are not redeemed just to be free but for whole relationships together (Gal 5:1, 13-14; cf. 1 Cor 8:9-13). Relationships together necessitate a process of reconciliation to be in conjoint function with redemption for the

redemptive reconciliation required for relationships together to be whole on God's relational terms from inner out, not shaped by human terms from outer in (cf. Rom 14:13-19). Paul neither pursues redemption over reconciliation nor does he sacrifice reconciliation for the sake of redemption since there cannot be wholeness for slaves and their relationships without this reconciliation.

When Paul directs slaves in the social conditions of slavery, who are also part of the church, to submit to their masters (Col 3:22-24; Eph 6:5-7; 1 Tim 6:1-2; Tit 2:9-10; cf. for masters, Col 4:1; Eph 6:9), he did not define an obligation (or duty, *opheilo*) or an ethical framework for slaves to conform to. Paul is focused on slaves being whole and the relational outcome of whole relationship together for slaves. That is, he calls for their congruity from inner out with the ontological identity of who they are and whose they are, without outer-in distinctions defining their persons. And he takes them further and deeper into their whole function on God's relational terms to live whole together and even to make whole in the world, without outer-in terms and circumstances in the surrounding context determining their primary life and function. Paul's implied message to slaves is that freedom does not guarantee their whole ontology and function, nor does being a social-level slave preclude it.

Since Paul defines the ontological identity of God's new creation family without outer-in distinctions like "slave or free" (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11), and did not determine its function by situations and circumstances, he did not give those matters priority over being God's relational whole. Thus, as discussed in the previous chapter about Philemon and Onesimus, Paul's primary focus was not on the social conditions of slavery but on the primacy of a slave's redemptive outcome of relational belonging and ontological identity in God's family, and on the redemptive reconciliation of slavery's human condition necessary for persons like Philemon and Onesimus to be equalized brothers in this family. This process of equalization certainly then will have direct relational implications for the social level of slavery, but even more important for Paul was his intended purpose for social-level slaves in whole ontology and function to plant the seeds, cultivate and even grow whole relationships together, first within the church and then in the surrounding context.

### **11. Equally important, if not more, how are Paul's new creation view of women and his prescriptions for them in agreement, and how are his directives compatible for the relational outcome of God's new creation family?**

The above discussion on slaves extends in direct application to women. I have purposefully left this question for last, not since women have traditionally occupied last place. Rather because, in my opinion, women signify the most consistent and widespread presence of reduced human ontology and function in the history of human contextualization, this condition is unavoidable for all persons to address for our wholeness. Theological discourse and pronouncements have not significantly changed the embodiment of this human condition, perhaps due to ignoring its enslavement. Paul has been placed at the center of this human divide which fragments the church and renders God's family "to be apart" from being whole in likeness of the relational whole of God—a condition existing knowingly or unknowingly, intentionally or unintentionally. As long as this condition of reduced human ontology and function

continues, the relational outcome ‘already’ will not be our experiential truth until ‘not yet’.

Paul would dispute how his relational discourse on women has been interpreted; he would expose and confront the reductionism underlying such interpretation and application for the reduced ontology and function of women—for example, by both complementarians and egalitarians. Yet, his prescriptions and directives for women will have to be clarified in order for Paul to be vindicated, his theological anthropology affirmed and his *pleroma* ecclesiology in transformed relationships together to be the experiential truth ‘already’.

The issue of Christian freedom continues in Paul’s discourse, which he always frames, defines and determines by the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ. Just as Paul defined for slaves, the importance of women having freedom is never about self-autonomy and self-determination or justification but only to be whole in ontology and function, not yoked to reduced ontology and function (Gal 5:1). This also applies to men, and any other classification of persons. The issues of freedom and of wholeness are critically interrelated for Paul; and, as was discussed earlier for slaves, having freedom is no guarantee of whole ontology and function. The dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ is the functional bridge between freedom and wholeness. Paul makes this link definitive.

From the interpretive lens of his theological framework, Paul’s definitive view of women is that “there is no longer male and female” (Gal 3:28). His perception could be taken as contrary to the reality of creation, yet Paul is not implying that there are no physical and biological differences between the genders, and thus that no distinctions should be seen. Paul’s view is the definitive declaration: In the dynamic of baptism into Christ, the redemptive outcome is the human ontology freed from being defined and the human function freed from being determined by the gender differences of any kind shaped or constructed by human terms, whether in the surrounding context or even within churches. These human differences are used to create distinctions which reduce the whole human ontology and function of those baptized into Christ’s death and raised with him by the Spirit in the whole image and likeness of creator God (cf. Col 3:10-11; 2 Cor 3:18).

As Paul makes definitive, the person emerging from baptism is a new creation, whose ontology and function from inner out cannot be defined and determined by any differences and distinctions from outer in, not even by one’s gifts or role in the church. This transformation from inner out in the redemptive change to whole human ontology and function also involves reconciliation to the whole of God in God’s family, which is constituted in the process of redemptive reconciliation to the transformed relationships together both intimate and equalized (Eph 2:14-22). As with slaves, Paul’s concern for women is their whole ontology and function and the relational outcome of whole relationship together, of which women are an integral part and whose function women are the key. Yet, it has been difficult for Paul’s readers (both women and men) to reconcile his definitive view of women with his prescriptions and directives for them.

In his relational discourse, Paul continues to integrate Christian freedom with redemption, which is inseparably conjoined with reconciliation. Also in his theological dialogue, Paul converges the redemptive-reconciliation dynamic with the creation narrative for the redemptive outcome in the image and likeness of God. His convergence

is made deeply in his main directives for women, and this convergence must be accounted for to understand where Paul is coming from in his relational discourse. As discussed previously about hermeneutic factors in interpreting Paul (chaps. 3 and 5), though he speaks *in* a human context involving women and speaks *to* their human context, Paul is not speaking *from* a human context. His prescriptions and directives for women are contextualized beyond those human contexts to his involvement directly in God's relational context and process. These directives emerged *in* human contexts, along with his letters, but were constituted *from* the further and deeper context of the whole of God—which is the significance of Paul's convergence I will attempt to account for in this limited discussion.

There are two main directives representative of Paul's relational discourse with women and his theological dialogue for all persons: 1 Corinthians 11:3-16 and 1 Timothy 2:8-15.

### **1 Corinthians 11:3-16**

This section of Paul's letter must be read in the full context of his letter. From the beginning Paul was dealing with the reductionist practices fragmenting this church (1:10-15). While confronting these persons in family love throughout the letter, in fairness to them and for their encouragement Paul puts their context into a larger picture of God's people (10:1-11) and their practices into the deeper process of the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (10:16-17). This exposed the sin of reductionism common not only in Israel's history but the history of humankind ("common to everyone," 10:13). Despite its normative character and structural nature, human contextualization and its common practices are incompatible with God's (10:21); therefore, Christian freedom must function on God's relational terms, not human terms (10:23-24, 31-33).

On this basis, Paul's further relational discourse with women continues, with its convergence with the creation narrative. Earlier in his letter, Paul had made definitive for this fragmented church: "'Nothing beyond what is written,' so that none of you will be puffed up in favor of one against another" (4:6). The comparative dynamic Paul magnifies here is the natural relational consequence of reduced human ontology and function defined from outer in and determined by human terms, that is, beyond God's relational terms revealed in God's communicative word written in Scripture. In this section on women, Paul restores the focus to what is written in the creation narrative in order to illuminate the relational outcome from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (1 Cor 10:16-17; 12:13). If the creation narrative does not converge with this dynamic in the intended focus of Paul's interpretive lens, then the relational outcome will be different for Paul's readers, and neither compatible with his relational discourse nor congruent with his theological dialogue.

Paul's focus can be misleading due to the explicit aspects he highlights in the creation narrative, namely, chronological or functional order and quantitative significance. Yet, Paul's focus remained on God's communicative action in the words written, without disembodiment of those words in the narrative, which would be essentially to go beyond what is written.

In chronological and functional order, Christ participated in the creation of all things and its whole, as Paul later made definitive in the cosmology of his theological

systemic framework (Col 1:16-17). Thus, “Christ is the head (*kephale*, principal or first) of every *created* man” (1 Cor 11:3). The embodied Christ also became the *kephale* “over all things for the church” (Eph 1:22) and the first to complete the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation as its functional key (Col 1:18). Whether Paul combines the embodied Christ with creator Christ as the *kephale* of man is not clear in 1 Cor 11:3. The creator Christ certainly has the qualitative significance of the embodied Christ, conversely, yet highlighting the chronological-functional order has a different emphasis in this context. This quantitative difference is confirmed by “the head of Christ” is God. Since the Creator (the Father and the Son with the Spirit) precedes the creation, creator Christ is obviously first in order before Adam. It follows that Adam came first in the creation narrative before Eve, thus this husband (or man, *aner*) was created before his wife (or woman, *gyne*). This is only a quantitative significance Paul is highlighting. If Christ later became God, then there would be a qualitative significance to “God is the head of Christ.” Christ as the embodied God was neither less than God nor subordinate to God, yet in functional order the Son followed and fulfilled what the Father initiated (e.g., Jn 6:38-39; Acts 13:32-33).

The quantitative significance of this chronological-functional order has been misinterpreted by a different lens than Paul’s and misused apart from his intended purpose by concerns for the sake of self-autonomy and self-determination, even self-justification efforts—which have reduced human ontology and function and fragment relationships together. Paul expands on the quantitative significance with application to prayer and whether the head should have a covering or not (11:4-7). The quantitative significance of head coverings during prayer is connected by Paul to the chronological-functional order in creation. While such practice is actually secondary (11:16), Paul uses it to illustrate an underlying issue. Apparently, for a man to cover his head was to void or deny that Christ is the head, who created man in the image and glory of God (11:7). For a woman to be uncovered implies her independence from the creative order, implying her self-determination, which in Paul’s view she needed to be purified of (11:6; cf. Lev 14:8) because she was created from the qualitative substance of the first human person in the same image and glory of God (11:7). Her glory cannot be reduced to being “the glory of man” but nothing less and no substitutes of the man’s glory, that is, in the same image and glory of God. This distinction of glory is critical for understanding the basis used for defining gender ontology and, more likely, for determining gender function in reductionism or wholeness. Yet, it would also be helpful for women to have for themselves a clear basis (*exousia*) for distinguishing their whole ontology and function to grasp their position and purpose in the created order (as angels needed, 11:10).

A further distinction is also critical to Paul’s relational discourse. The glory of God had a more quantitative focus in Hebrew Scripture and quantitative significance for Israel. The focus and significance of God’s glory deepened to its full qualitative and relational depth in the relationally revealed face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6). This qualitative and relational depth is the glory Paul experienced from Christ and the full significance of glory he alludes to. It is this glory in Paul’s *pleroma* theology which is basic to whole ontology and function, both of God and of human persons.

When Paul restates this chronological order (11:8) and its functional order (11:9; cf. Gen 2:18), he is shifting from its outer-in quantitative significance to point to the inner-out qualitative significance of creation: the primacy of whole relationship together

(in contrast, “to be apart” as in creation narrative above) constituted by the whole human ontology and function created in the image and likeness of God (11:11-12; cf. Gen 1:26-27; 2:25). In this shift, Paul also engages the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation to converge with the creation narrative. The other quantitative matters are secondary, even if they appear the natural condition (*physis*, 11:14-15); therefore, they should not define and determine human ontology and function, both for women and men (11:16). To use secondary matters as the basis is to reduce all persons’ ontology and function, and thus to go beyond what is written by substituting outer-in practices of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism—that is, ontology and function shaped from outer in by human terms, not God’s relational terms from inner out. The relational consequence is to diminish the primacy of relationships, minimalize their function, and fragment relationships together, which can only be restored in the process of redemptive reconciliation to the transformed relationships together of the new creation (cf. 2 Cor 5:16-18).

This is the ontological and functional condition Paul addressed and the purpose of his relational discourse with the church at Corinth to fight conjointly against their reductionism and for God’s relational whole—which Paul makes definitive in the remainder of his letter (11:17ff), notably with the summary declaration: “for God is a God not of *fragmentation* but of *wholeness*” (14:33). When Paul adds to this declaration further relational discourse for women, somewhat parenthetically, his only concern is for this wholeness of human and church ontology and function (14:34-35). Paul is not seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code of silence but rather their congruity to the whole ontology and function in the image and glory of God. Thus, what Paul does not give permission to for women in the church is for them to define their persons by what they do (“to speak”) and have (knowledge, position or status) because this would reduce their ontology and function. Certainly, this applies to men equally, whom Paul has been addressing throughout this letter.

How persons define themselves is a major issue basic to how persons engage in relationships, and on this basis how these persons in these relationships then constitute church. The whole of Paul and the whole in his theology challenge the assumptions and theological basis persons have in these three major issues. In his family communication with Timothy, Paul extends his relational discourse for women to provide further clarity to this process to wholeness.

### **1 Timothy 2:8-15**

The letters to Timothy and Titus have been perceived to depict a less intense, more domesticated Paul, with a more generalized focus of faith and an emphasis on the virtue of “godliness” (1 Tim 2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,6,11; 2 Tim 3:5; Ti 1:1; cf. 1 Tim 5:4). This milder image and emphasis not found in his undisputed letters are part of the basis for disputing Paul’s authorship of these letters. His relational discourse for women, I suggest, helps “restore” the intensity of Paul in his fight, not for having a mere faith and mere virtue, but for wholeness and against reductionism.

In his loving encouragement of Timothy to engage in this fight (1 Tim 1:18), he reminds Timothy that the primary purpose and outcome (*telos*) of his proclamation (*parangelia*) for the church is not purity of doctrine and conformity of belief but is only

relational: persons in whole ontology from inner out *agape*-relationally involved by the vulnerable relational response of trust (1:3-5). Paul's intensity of meaning should not be confused with quantitative density, thus not grasping the quality of Paul's intensity in the absence of any quantitative density in his words. The faith and love referenced above by Paul (v.5) were first Paul's experiential truth of vulnerable relationship face to face with Christ (1:12-14). Paul's intensity of meaning is critical for his readers to grasp in order to understand where Paul is coming from. On the basis of his "*relational* faith and *experiential* truth" (2:7), Paul's whole function establishes the context of his communication with Timothy and his relational discourse for women.

Paul begins this section with the practice of worship, with the focus first on men (2:8). Based on where Paul is coming from, his deep desire is for men to move beyond any negativity they have from situations and circumstances—not letting that define and determine them—and to openly participate in worship, not merely observing or being detached (cf. *abad*, work from the creation narrative, also rendered as worship). Yet, participation was not about being more demonstrative by lifting up their hands outwardly. "Holy hands" signified an inner out action of personal involvement, not as an end in itself but lifted up in relational response to God. This personal relational involvement with God was Paul's deep desire for men to engage further and experience deeper, because the only alternative is a reductionist practice even if the hands were lifted. Paul's focus for men is the focus by which his similar desires for women need to be seen.

Paul's concern for women's practice in worship may initially appear to be a reverse emphasis than for men, less visible and more in the background as observers (2:9-10). Paul's focus, however, went deeper than outward appearance and further than the common church practice of "good works." This involved the vital issue in all practice about the integrity of the person presented to others, which is directly integrated with how that person defines herself. In other words, Paul's concern is about women who focus on the outer in to define themselves by what they have and do. Defined on this basis, women depend on drawing attention to their appearance and other outer-in aspects of themselves.

The issue for Paul was not about dressing modestly and decently, with appropriateness. Again, Paul was not seeking the conformity of women to a behavioral code. While modesty is not the issue, highlighting one's self to draw attention to what one has and does is only part of the issue. When Paul added "suitable" (NRSV) or "propriety" (NIV) to this matter and later added "modesty" (NRSV), "propriety" (NIV) to another matter (2:15), the same term, *sophrosyne*, is more clearly rendered "sound mindset." That is, Paul was qualifying these matters by pointing to the necessary interpretive lens (*phroneo*) to distinguish reductionist practice from wholeness—the new interpretive framework (*phronema*) and lens (*phroneo*) from the dynamic of redemption and baptism into Christ (Rom 8:5-6). The underlying issue for Paul, therefore, is whole human ontology and function, or the only alternative of reduced human ontology and function. Paul's initial focus on men clearly indicates that this issue equally applies to men.

How a person defines one's self interacts with the presentation of self, which further extends in interaction with how the person engages relationships. The person's interpretive framework with its lens is critical to this process. Paul's alternative to outer-

in function for women is “good works” (2:10), yet this can be perceived still as being defined by what a woman does. With Paul’s lens, however, good works must always be defined by and determined from the primary relational work of relational involvement with God from inner out—the ongoing vulnerable relational response of trust in relationship together, as discussed earlier in question 6 above on good works. This is also the lens and focus of the process of learning for women. Yet, Paul appears to constrain and conform women to keeping quiet (*hesychia*) as objects in the learning process. Rather, *hesychia* signifies ceasing from one’s human effort—specifically engaged in defining one’s self and notably to fill oneself with more knowledge to further define one’s self with what one has (cf. 1 Cor 8:1)—and, with Paul’s lens, to submit one’s person from inner out for vulnerable involvement in the relational epistemic process with God (further qualifying 1 Cor 14:35). Certainly, this learning process equally applies to men (cf. 1 Cor 2:13; Gal 1:11-12).

Paul’s deep desire and concern for persons are for their whole ontology and function and for their whole relationships together, which can only emerge with these persons transformed from inner out, thus redeemed from life and practice, both individually and collectively as church, which are defined and determined from outer in. He pursues them intensely with family love for their congruence to this wholeness. Yet, his further communication to Timothy about women appears incongruent with God’s relational whole created in relational likeness to the whole of God: “no women to teach or to have authority” (1 Tim 2:12). The lens and focus of the relational epistemic process continued to apply in Paul’s directive for women. Information and knowledge about God gained from a conventional epistemic process from outer in do not have the depth of significance to teach in the church, that is, teach to God’s relational whole on the basis of God’s relational terms. Such information and knowledge may have functional significance to define those human persons by what they have but have no relational significance to God and qualitative significance for God’s family. The term for authority (*authenteo*) denotes one acting by her own authority or power, which in this context is based on the human effort to define one’s self further by the possession of more information and knowledge, even if about God. Therefore, Paul will not allow such women of reduced ontology and function to assume leadership in God’s family. Moreover, he would not advocate for Christian freedom for women to be the means for their self-autonomy and self-determination, because the consequence, at best, would be some form of ontological simulation and epistemological illusion, that is, only reduced ontology and function. He turns to the creation narrative to support this position (2:13-14).

By repeating the chronological order of creation, Paul was not ascribing functional significance to man to establish male priority in the created order. Paul was affirming the whole significance of the human person created in the image and glory of God, just as he affirmed in his previous directive to women (1 Cor 11:7). Yet, Paul appears to define their function differently by blaming Eve for the dysfunction in the primordial garden, as if Adam did not engage in it also and was an innocent bystander. What Paul highlights was not Eve’s person but the effort of Eve’s self-autonomy to gain more knowledge for self-determination, perhaps even self-justification—human effort based on outer-in terms in reduced ontology and function—which she certainly engaged first, followed by the willful engagement of Adam (cf. Gen 3:2-7). Paul uses the



chronological order in the creation narrative to magnify, on the one hand, the qualitative and relational significance of the human person's ontology and function and, on the other, the functional and relational consequences of engagement in the sin of reductionism with reduced ontology and function.

At this point Paul converges the creation narrative with the dynamic of redemptive reconciliation and integrates them into the relational outcome of baptism into Christ (2:15). In Paul's *pleroma* soteriology, *sozo* (saved) is conjointly deliverance and being made whole. Curiously, Paul declares that women "will be saved through childbearing," which appears to be a human effort at self-determination and justification, limited to certain women. With Paul's lens, he highlights an aspect from the creation narrative, whose quantitative significance is only a secondary function in God's whole plan (cf. Gen 1:28), to magnify the qualitative significance of the primary function of whole relationship together, both with God and with persons in the image and likeness of God (cf. 2:18)—which childbearing certainly supports in function but does not displace as the primary function. Therefore, with Paul's convergence and in his *pleroma* theology, women will be saved *from* any reduced ontology and function and saved *to* wholeness and whole relationship together. That is, women are *sozo* while they engage in secondary functions—as identified initially in the creative narrative by childbearing, but not limited solely to this secondary function—based not on the extent of their secondary functions but entirely on ongoing involvement in the relational contingency ("if they continue in," Gk active voice, subjunctive mood) of what is primary: the vulnerable relational response of trust ("faith") and the vulnerable relational involvement with others in family love ("*agape*") only on God's relational terms from inner out ("holiness") with a sound mindset ("*sophrosyne*"), the new *phronema*-framework and *phroneo*-lens from the dynamic of baptism into Christ and redemptive reconciliation. Women's ontology and function pivot on this contingency.

The faith in Paul's relational contingency is not the generalized faith of what the church has and proclaims but the specific function only of relationship. The vulnerable relational response of trust signifies the ongoing primary relational work which constitutes the "good works" of Paul's alternative to outer-in function for women, and from which all secondary functions need to emerge to be whole from inner out. Moreover, the *agape* in Paul's relational contingency is also reflexively contingent on faith. To be *agape*-relationally involved with others must be integrated with and emerge from the vulnerable relational response of trust; without this, *agape* becomes a more self-oriented effort at sacrifice, focused on what that person does—for example, about others' needs, situations or circumstances—without the relational significance of opening one's person to other persons and focusing on involvement with them in relationship. Paul was definitive that any works without the primacy of relational work are not the outworking of the whole person created in "the image and glory of God" (1 Cor 11:7).

Of course, everything which Paul has directed to women is also necessarily directed to men in Paul's *pleroma* theology, except perhaps for childbearing. Paul sees both of them beyond their situations and circumstances and defines them as persons from inner out. Yet, I wonder if an 'unexpected difference' has emerged in the church, which no one has, or perhaps wants to, seriously address. Whole ontology and function for

persons of both genders are defined and determined only as transformed persons from inner out relationally involved in transformed relationships together, both intimate and equalized—the relational outcome ‘already’ in Paul’s *pleroma* ecclesiology. This relational outcome of the experiential truth of the gospel has been problematic in church history as far back as Peter (cf. the churches in Rev 2:2-4; 3:1-2, 15-17), and which continues to grieve the Spirit. While the situations and circumstances in the church have certainly varied, the underlying issue of reductionism in church ontology and function has remained the common problem—which may be pointing to an emerging solution needing our attention.

Since Paul was occupied with fragmentation in churches, I doubt if he had any initial awareness of this ‘unexpected difference’ in his early experience with churches. But if the difference between Jesus’ relationships with women compared with men during his earthly life has any further significance for the church, it supports what I suggest without apology: Women who are emerging in whole ontology and function are the relational key for the whole function of this relational outcome and the persons most likely to be vulnerable from inner out in order to lead other persons in this process to wholeness in church ontology and function.

The Creator made no inner out distinction between male and female, as Adam and Eve experienced in whole relationship together (Gen 2:25), in contrast to their experience in reduced ontology and function (Gen 3:7). The extent of a person’s engagement in reductionism is the key. In Paul’s *pleroma* theology, the righteous are not those who simply possess faith—a common theological notion. The righteous are those in ongoing congruence with their whole ontology and function in relationship with God, whom God can count on to be those persons in their vulnerable relational response of trust. Whom God can count on to be vulnerable in relationship with their whole person is the question at issue; which persons will step forward to be accountable with God and to act from inner out on the challenge in transformed relationships together, conjointly intimate and equalized, as the church is the question before us all. No human distinctions in Paul’s lens have any qualitative significance for persons baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27-29), only the primary relational work of trust making persons vulnerable to be *agape*-relationally involved with others in and for God’s new creation family ‘already’ (Gal 5:6; 6:15)—nothing less and no substitutes.

This is the whole of Paul and the whole in Paul’s theology, whom he vulnerably presented for the experiential truth for his readers—the whole of the gospel who fulfills the inherent human relational need and resolves the human relational condition and problem. And Paul holds his readers accountable for the whole of who, what and how God is—vulnerably revealed only for whole relationship together. Therefore, this raises a twelfth question for all of Paul’s readers to answer:

**Who will extend his fight conjointly *for* the experiential truth of the whole gospel and *against* reductionism, without anything less or any substitutes?**

The Spirit, indeed the whole of God, waits for our compatible response.

## Chapter 12 Additional Textual Notes

...to me to you to make the word of God *complete*.

Col 1:25

If not apparent, this study has not been a detailed commentary on the content of Paul's corpus. Ongoingly, while engaged in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit, I have focused on the significance of Paul's relational discourse and theological dialogue, in what hopefully presents a clear theological interpretation of the developing content of Paul's life, function and theology as communicated in the biblical text.

It has been important to examine the relational language and purpose of his texts—which includes both the content level and the relational level of the communication—not only in relation to Paul's communicative action but God's also as the implied author of the text. The intention of Paul's communication and God's communicative action are inseparable for canon Scripture. Paul was contextualized in God's communicative action and by God's thematic relational process, thus he always spoke from this deeper context while speaking in and to a human context. His letters are the relational outcome of both his vulnerable involvement with the whole of God in God's vulnerable relational response and his ongoing engagement in the relational epistemic process with the Spirit.

Sensitivity to the qualitative and awareness of the relational conjointly characterize the whole of Paul from inner out and the whole in his letters, which are often perceived only from outer in focused on the quantitative content without its relational message. Therefore, Paul's readers need to have his qualitative interpretive lens and relational engagement to "listen" to Paul's relational message extending from God's relational message, which the Father made imperative for Christ's followers: "This is my Son, my beloved Son, listen to him" (Mk 9:7). Just as with listening to Jesus throughout the incarnation, listening to Paul is an ongoing relational epistemic process throughout his letters that necessitates a hermeneutical cone. It is a necessity because Paul was not static in his life and practice but developed in his ongoing involvement in the relational process of listening to God. Paul's relational epistemic engagement explains his further and deeper understanding of the whole of God beyond monotheism, God's relational whole on God's relational terms beyond the prevailing perception of the covenant, and the definitive theology necessary for wholeness beyond the common experience of *shalom*. And Paul's readers need to account for the qualitative-relational significance of Paul's communication as well as their own epistemic engagement.

Paul's letters are not random statements, notably in response to various situations affecting the church. He was not dispensing moral prescriptions to cure a bad situation or ethical advice to fix a broken situation. In fulfillment of his relational responsibility for God's family (*oikonomia*, Col 1:25; Eph 3:2), Paul's letters represent the key aspects

critical to the whole of God's revelation in thematic relational response to the human condition. His letters included aspects from the relational outcome of the whole of God's self-disclosure to Paul, whether by Christophany or through the Spirit. As noted previously, this clear relational process implies three vital matters:

1. The development of Paul's thought and theology signifying his *synesis* of God's whole relational response of grace that constituted Paul's experiential truth of the whole gospel.
2. This developmental process is demonstrated and unfolded in his letters, which necessarily include all thirteen (undisputed and disputed) attributed to Paul, and thus strongly suggests their chronological order.
3. That God's direct relational involvement with Paul throughout this process not only constituted Paul's *oikonomia* to definitively *pleroo* the word from God, but also that God was involved further in the process in order for the complete Pauline corpus to be included in the biblical canon; therefore, that it was not arbitrary selection or a mere human construction which both attributed and included these thirteen letters of the Pauline corpus into the whole of God's word.

The additional textual notes below provide added detail (not exhaustive) in his letters not discussed in the main study, which may further help Paul's readers' *synesis* (as Paul encouraged, 2 Tim 2:7) of the whole of God and God's relational whole, and for our further relational response and deeper involvement from inner out in whole ontology and function.

## 1 Thessalonians

**1:1**—Paul consistently conjoins Father and Christ, thus implying their inseparable relationship as the whole of God, whose relational action and outcome are signified further in his conjoined greeting “grace and peace.”

**1:2-4**—Note Paul's triangulated involvement, which points to where Paul is speaking from as he speaks in and to this context.

**1:5**—Paul's gospel, indicating its functional and relational significance in practice (see 2:1-2).

**1:6-10**—The Thessalonians' faith was signified, yet apparently too future-oriented, perhaps in a truncated soteriology (3:10-12; 4:9-12; 5:10-11).

**2:1-12**—Paul's practice of gospel with v.8 the key, demonstrating the relational involvement of *agape* family love.

**3:13**—“blameless and holy” is an ongoing theme in Paul, which is about persons being *whole* in relationship together with the holy God, thus only on God's terms.

**4:7-10**—The relational significance of being and functioning on God's terms in whole relationship together with family love.

**5:5**—The necessary distinction and function of light with darkness, thus Paul's focus of our identity in the context of the world.

**5:10-11**—The ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ of life together and the need to build God’s family in the present.

**5:19-24**—Paul assumes the Spirit’s presence, involvement and relational work (“since you entirely,” *holotelos*, the whole) with the *whole* of persons (*holokleros*, whole, having all its parts) together in life and practice in the whole of God’s relational context of family and relational process of family love.

Note: This letter begins the process of Paul pointing to the experiential truth of the whole gospel, in which he makes functional what Christ saved both from and to—life together as the whole of God’s family ‘already’ and to live and make whole until ‘not yet’. This keeps unfolding throughout his letters to Ephesians, in which he makes definitive *pleroma* ecclesiology.

## 2 Thessalonians

**1:3-4**—Evidence of their growth since the first letter, an indicator of this letter as an extension from Paul of 1 Thes.

**2:2**—This verse is used by some scholars to indicate an opposite position of the believers in 1 Thes. But Paul is clarifying the last days so these same believers don’t become alarmed or misled by Christ having returned, thus Paul points to relationship and not event.

Note: The different style and wording of this letter suggest that Paul likely used a secretary to pen this for him.

**2:13-14**—the relational outcome ‘already’ of full soteriology to be made whole through the relational work of the Spirit and the reciprocal relational response of believers.

**2:16-17**—Paul’s primary focus on the ‘already’ of the whole of God’s relational process of family love (cf. 3:5).

**3:5**—“Lord” may refer to the Spirit, who works in the hearts of God’s family for the whole relationship together defined in 2:13.

**3:6-9**—the nonnegotiable and irreducible character of Paul’s role-model, which is based on the ontology and function of Christ embodied.

**3:16-18**—“peace at all times and in every way,” that is, wholeness is not only future but ‘already’, and this wholeness signifies (*semeion*) Paul’s purpose in his letters. “Lord of peace” directly interrelates to and is inseparable from “God of peace” (1 Thes 5:23), and constitutes a theme for Paul, an integrating theme (cf. 2 Cor 13:11; Rom 15:33; 16:20; Phil 4:9; 2 Thes 3:16). This points to Paul’s authorship of this letter, which is not only Pauline but at the heart of his theology and the experiential truth of the whole gospel—which he passionately fights both for and against reductionism.

## 1 Corinthians

Paul experienced in Corinth a vision of the Lord's vulnerable presence and relational involvement with him in his fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism (Acts 18:9-10). The relational outcome of this reciprocal relationship emerged ongoingly in his letters with the theological development to wholeness, notably emerging initially with 1 Cor.

**1:4-9**—The 'already-not yet' dynamic of the identity of God's people constituted on the basis of God's grace relationally extended to them by Christ, by which they have been defined and determined to be whole ("blameless," cf. *tamiym*) as family together ("fellowship of his Son"). "Spiritual gifts" are a means only for this relational purpose and not for indicators used to define them.

**1:10-17**—What unfolds in Paul's thought and theology is not focused on their situation embedded in "divisions," which he puts in juxtaposition with 'being united.' This points to the whole, God's whole, where Paul is focused, which he makes definitive for their relationships to be whole together on God's terms (cf. 12:12-13; 14:33). God's whole is always in contrast to and in conflict with human shaping on human terms, that is, reductionism.

**1:18-31**—"saved" (*sozo*, made whole) and the ongoing tension-conflict between human effort (from below) and God's relational action (from above). The former exacerbates the human condition (cf. medicalization of life) and further fragments human relationships (cf. modern electronic technology, globalization). The latter redeems human persons and reconciles relationships together.

**2:4-5,13**—key verses defining the functional significance of Paul's communicative action determining from top-down causation, not bottom-up (cf. 4:19-20).

**2:6**—"Wisdom of this age," a quantitative rationalism that elevates human thought to preeminence for knowledge and understanding, notably about the whole of life and function—the epistemological illusion from reductionism (cf. 3:18-20).

**2:7-16**—"God's wisdom, secret and hidden," not about mysticism but a wisdom about the whole that had yet to be revealed but which is now accessible because "God has revealed to us through the Spirit," The qualitative agency of the Spirit and the reciprocal relational involvement of the Spirit to intimately connect us with the heart of God, "the mind of Christ," and thus to "comprehend what is truly God's"—the basis for Paul's theology, for all definitive theology.

"foolishness"—can be understood as the conclusion of a quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework of reductionism, precluding the qualitative.

"spiritual"—can be understood as the qualitative perceptual-interpretive framework of the whole of God.

Note: Paul's polemic here is between human contextualization and the Spirit's relational work to constitute us further and deeper in the whole of God's relational context and process.

**3:**—God's whole only on God's terms

**3:10-13**—The qualitative and quantitative processes of building the church.

**3:16-17**—God's temple and dwelling shifted directly to his people, the context of which is holy, thus distinct from common or ordinary in the surrounding context. The holy of

God's terms is important to constitute the ontology of his church/people; the church only in human contextualization reduces it to human terms and shaping, ontological simulation from reductionism.

**3:18-23**—Paul's polemic for God's whole: "wise in this age," "wisdom of this world," knowledge and wisdom are not worthless in themselves but how they are used determines their significance and value. As a means of self-determination that constructs distinctions used to define human persons on a comparative basis and thereby stratify human relationships (cf. 4:7), these are "foolishness with God" and "futile." There are no false distinctions in God's relational whole, whose relational belonging and ontological identity are definitive in the relational dynamic: "all belong to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God."

**4:1**—"servants of Christ" who are "stewards of God's" (*oikonomos*, manages a house), which continues Paul's emphasis of *oikos* and other cognates to signify the church as family.

**4:6-7**—Paul's perceptual-interpretive framework and lens

**4:8-17**—"be imitators of me," not specific to these behaviors/practices outlined but for being whole and making whole.

**5:3**—Paul uses *pneuma* to signify his relational involvement in the qualitative significance of his heart.

**5:9-11**—He qualifies involvement with sinners: on the one hand, God's family involves relationship together on God's terms, thus relationship necessary to be whole and holy; on the other, involvement with world is a necessary part of God's grace and thematic relational response to the human condition.

**6:**—Paul extends this polemic, which goes beyond situations,

**6:9-11**—and applies it to "kingdom of God," reminding them that they were sinners reached out to and were "washed...sanctified...justified" by the whole of God's family love.

**6:12-20**—Redemption frees us from legal consequences of the law, not merely to be free but only for relationship together ("beneficial," *symphero*, to bring together). Freedom does not define and determine the identity of God's people ("not be dominated by anything") but is just the means to enact God's relational purpose ("body is meant not for...but for the Lord") in the relationships necessary to be God's whole ("united to the Lord becomes one spirit with him"). Counter-relational work of reductionism fragments these relationships together. "One flesh" (e.g., with a prostitute) is not merely about sexual union but about reductionist relationships (possible even in marriage, cf. Eph 5:25-32) which fragment God's whole. The relational consequences are significant and critical in Paul's polemic, which goes well beyond moral and ethical behavior. Paul's focus is a wholeness of the person ("your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit") and the relationships by nature to be God's whole "within you which you have received from God...you are not your own").

**7:1-16**—In response to matters this church wrote to him about, Paul is making functional the relationships together necessary to be whole. Whatever the specific matter, "it is to *wholeness* God has called you." This wholeness is what Paul makes operational in their situations for the church to be and function whole.

**7:17-24**—Knowing what defines the human person in the image of God and finding one's part in God's whole in God's relational likeness. Paul does not advocate

passiveness or resignation to our situations but puts these secondary conditions into the context of what is primary, though not to be lost or forgotten. Redemption frees us from the deeper enslavement of reductionism in order to be whole in relationship together “with God” as God’s family, thus don’t get distracted from what is primary.

**7:25-40**—Points to different scenarios of life and their realities given the primacy of whole relationship together, not so much the dos and don’ts of marriage. Paul contextualizes all these matters in the eschatological trajectory of the relational progression with Christ and the Spirit (“the appointed time has grown short”). This is not about life in *chronos* but *kairos* and the qualitative significance of being the whole of God’s new creation family together and the relational work involved on God’s terms.

**8:**—Paul’s illumination in this chapter has been discussed previously.

**9:1**—His historical life (*bios*) in deeper context becomes about *zoe*.

**9:15-23**—He presents a new paradigm for servants of the gospel:

- *The nature of preaching the gospel:* “entrusted with a commission” (*oikonomia*, responsibility for the family); not about role performance but the relational response to God in relationship together as family.
- *The character of preaching the gospel:* “...I may make the gospel free of charge”; removes conflict of interest and other reductionist contingencies which Jesus implied in the above quote (9:14).
- *The inner-out nature of relational involvement for the gospel:* “...I have made myself a slave to all...,” which certainly appears to reduce his person and function. Yet, as discussed previously, his person remained defined and determined by the primary, not reduced to secondary. Paul made his whole person vulnerable from inner out to be involved with others for their wholeness.

**9:24-27**—This paradigm is ongoingly subject to the lure and influence of reductionism, waiting to diminish this wholeness by its counter-relational work, which is not nullified by self-discipline (notably in outer-in human effort, ontological simulation) but by only living whole specifically from inner out in relationship together.

**10:1-10**—Paul wants them to remember and learn from the history of God’s people, not to ignore this history and thus make the same mistakes.

**10:11-13**—Being presumptuous and sin seem to go together because the influence of reductionism always cultivated self-autonomy and –determination with the assumption that functionally disconnects from God’s grace as the source of life and covenant relationship together. Yet, God’s involvement in reciprocal relationship can be counted on for the means to live whole.

**10:14-22**—In other words, reductionism and God’s whole are always in conflict, which raises the issue whether a church functions in relationship together on “our terms” or God’s terms.

**10:23-33**—Paul is fighting against “our terms” and for God’s terms. And the issue is not readily distinguishable because “all things are lawful” for the redeemed. Two critical matters to understand in Paul’s theology: (1) redemption is not merely to be free, and (2) soteriology is not only saved from but necessarily also saved to—both of which constitutes persons whole in whole relationship together. Therefore, Paul’s functional discourse is not about ethics per se or about behavioral purity but about the primacy of relationships together necessary by its nature (*dei* not *opheilo*) to be God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms.



**11:**—Each matter in these situations and circumstances must be understood in Paul’s conjoint fight against reductionism and for wholeness. This chapter has been discussed in previous parts of the study (notably 11:3-16 in chap. 11, question 11).

**12:1**—“to be uninformed” (*agnoeo*, ignorant, to ignore, fail to comprehend, grasp, to perceive wrongly, think erroneously, cf. 10:1). Paul ongoingly clarifies, sets the record straight, and holds accountable in both the epistemic process and function for persons and church.

**12:3**—He makes unequivocal that the Spirit is the definitive key in this whole process.

**12:4-31**—“same Spirit...Lord...God,” the whole of God who constitutes God’s whole in the primacy of relationship together and the interrelated function of its secondary parts. Key verse defining the Spirit’s function (v.7): “To each if given the manifestation of the Spirit [*phanerosis* from *phaneroo*, referring to those given revelation] for the common good” (*symphero*, to bring together, contribute for the benefit of the whole). “The same Spirit who allots” (*diarea*, divides, part, apportion, assign, v.11), that is, in terms of gifts and resources the Spirit decides to take one thing from the whole for each person, not to highlight the individual part but to build up the whole with a diversity of parts. The relational significance of the whole is necessary for relationship together to function in wholeness; and this whole relationship together is based on the depth of relational involvement with each other, which is constituted by *agape* and not by the extent of various gifts and resources the parts have and do. Faith makes persons vulnerable to be *agape*-relationally involved with each other for the intimated relationships necessary to function as God’s relational whole.

**13:1-3**—Paul points to all the gifts and knowledge persons can exercise and express, which may puff up the individual but in reality “I gain nothing” unless functioning in the relational context and process of *agape* (cf. 8:1). This popular chapter needs to be read in the context of the entire letter.

**13:8-13**—*Agape* never falls (*pipto*, v. 8) to reductionism but remains involved in relationship together, not just for oneself but mainly for others. *Agape* is always relationship-specific to others in the church, God’s family, and thus is family love. This is Paul’s function in this letter. And even faith and hope do not constitute the depth of involvement with others that *agape* involves, the family nature of which underlies Paul’s decisiveness with them.

**14:1**—Paul reiterates that the dynamic of *agape*’s relational significance antecedes the functional significance of gifts.

**14:2-5**—He is not focused on spiritual activity but on the purpose of communication.

**14:6-12**—The quality of our communication is not defined by verbosity, eloquence or any other indicator measuring the words of the speaker (cf. vv.18-19). It is defined only by its relational context and thus is determined just by the relational function of engaging others in that context. To be “a foreigner” to each other implies distance in the relationship. What is definitive of qualitative communication is relational involvement with others for the relational process of “building up the church,” which is directly influenced by the integrity of the person presented in the communication (see vv.13-17). Given Paul’s concern for God’s whole and against all reductionism, this dynamic of communication applies to any utterance in the church: tongues, preaching, teaching, general interaction, etc.

**14:13-17**—Paul takes the mystery out of communication and thus eliminates the esoteric character associated with mysticism. In qualitative communication, he clearly prioritizes the whole over the individual (v.17).

**14:20-25**—He further reiterates (cf. 13:11) the self-centered immaturity and limitations of childish thinking, and such a reductionist perceptual-interpretive framework. And he points to the relational response (“listen to me”) necessary by its nature to engage the reciprocal relational process, the involvement of which will even have an impact on those who observe their relationships together (“God is really among you”).

**14:26-40**—Paul has been redirecting them further and deeper into church life and function together. His primary concern is not to detail procedures to maintain harmony in the church. Church function by its nature must go further and deeper to the whole that Jesus constituted and the Spirit completes: “God is a God not of *fragmentation* but of *wholeness*” (v.33). God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms is where all of Paul’s function, thought and theology converges, nothing less and no substitutes.

**15:1-11**—Is the gospel just words, teachings, tradition, doctrine? Paul identified the relational process which he experienced (“what I received”) to define the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel was not embedded in doctrine for Paul but was embodied by Jesus for relationship together. Paul’s gospel must always be seen in this relational context to understand the full significance of the primacy of the relational process inherent to the gospel. The historical overview was not of mere events but of the newly constituted relationships together necessary to be God’s whole family, which determined the experiential truth of Paul’s ontological identity and relational belonging (“I am what I am”) by God’s grace.

**15:12-19**—Issues about the resurrection which essentially are about not only the embodiment of Jesus but also of the embodied Christ who is present and vulnerable for relationship together. Paul’s theological and philosophical polemics should not detract from the primary issue, which emerges as the human relational condition of being apart from the relationship together of God’s whole.

**15:20-28**—A theological framework for the human condition and God’s thematic relational response to our condition, which Christ embodied for its eschatological conclusion with the whole of God.

**15:35-58**—Paul applies his theological framework to a practical question about the nature of life ahead and the qualitative transformation necessary which will constitute life together in God’s whole. Therefore, Paul is able to confidently call his family to the relational response of “becoming” (*ginomai*) who and what they are in relationship together as whose they are—relational work, not “doing” their Christian duty.

**16:13-14**—Paul’s imperatives are not about merely having a certain awareness and posture. He uses relational language to reinforce *agape* not as a moral imperative but as the relational imperative. For Paul, anything less and any substitutes of the whole of the gospel is reductionism, and thus engaged in counter-relational work and embedded in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion.

## 2 Corinthians

This seems to be Paul's most heartfelt letter, in which the whole of Paul is likely the most vulnerable.

**1:3-7**—Paul points to the reciprocal relational nature of involvement in the whole of God's relational context and the reciprocal relational responsibility of engaging God's relational process for relationship together to be God's whole—regardless of situations and circumstances. This is what he makes operational for the church with more development in 2 Cor, which includes triangulation and reciprocating contextualization.

**2:12-3:6**—He contrasts the quantitative focus of reductionism with the qualitative significance of God's whole for new covenant relationship together.

**3:7-18**—He provides the theological framework of God's thematic relational action from the old to the new for covenant relationship together: “being transformed into the same image” of the whole of God. Makes definitive the qualitative significance of the whole of the gospel embodied by Christ and constituted by Spirit for both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’.

**4:7-18**—Points to human limits (“clay jars,” “outer nature is wasting away”) and the situations and circumstances of the human context, which don't define or determine Paul. He never ignores the human context but always contextualizes it from within the relational context of God's whole and by the relational process of God's terms. Thus, he either confronts the reductionism of human contextualization or recontextualizes it into God's whole.

**5:1-10**—The tension continues between the human context and its quantitative reductionism and the qualitative relational context of life together in God's family. We are susceptible to be defined and determined by the former, unless we engage the latter in ongoing relational involvement by the primary relational work of “faith not by sight.” This already/not-yet relational process is the very purpose God has made us for (v.5, cf. Gen 2:19), which continues to be definitive for the new creation.

**5:11-21**—Paul makes his person transparent to them from inner out, thus vulnerable for relationships to be reconciled together in the wholeness of the new creation.

**6:1-2**—The relational dynamic of God's grace in response to the human condition is not merely to save us from but also to save us to relationship together in God's new creation family, the relational outcome both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’. For God's grace not to be received in vain necessitates relational involvement compatible for relationship together on the terms initiated by the whole and holy God. What Paul illuminates here and continues to discuss in his letter is not about morality, ethics or religious obligation but only about compatible reciprocal relationship together in God's family (cf. vv.11-18).

**7:**—Extends the above discussion. Sanctification is only about the relational compatibility necessary for involvement in ongoing relationship with God. “Making holiness perfect (*epiteleo*, an intensive of *teleo*, to complete, fulfill goal) points not to the individual focused on becoming holy in oneself but rather signifies the relational purpose of the relational progression as the new creation family together ‘already’ in process to its completion ‘not yet’.

**8:**—Paul continues the functional significance of family love to encompass the whole of the church (local churches together) by highlighting the Macedonian churches' involvement with the Jerusalem church in their crisis need. He encourages, not

commands (v.8), the saints in Corinth to function in the same relational significance also, which he bases on the function of the relational significance of equality (*isotes*, vv.13-14). While family love cannot be legislated, he tests the depth of their family love, *agape* relational involvement (vv.8,24). And he makes definitive: relationships together in God's new creation family must by its nature (*dei*, not *opheilo*'s obligation or command) function in the primacy of both intimacy and equality.

**9:**—As demonstrated by Jesus in the incarnation (8:9), anything less for Paul is not whole and the outcome is not whole relationship together. No substitutes for *agape* relational involvement are compatible for reciprocal relational response to God's relational grace—"his indescribable gift" embodied by Jesus, who constituted the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love for the new creation of whole relationship together.

**10:1-6**—Paul gets into polemics in defense of his ministry, which needs to be understood in the context of his fight for wholeness and against reductionism.

**10:7-18**—He exposes his detractors' quantitative perceptual-interpretive framework and lens. He refuses to engage in the reductionist processes of human "classifying" (*enkrino*, categorize) essentially to stratify, stereotype in human constructs of distinction making, which invariably involves a comparative process ("compare ourselves with some," *synkrino*, v.12). Thus, he exposes this process as the fragmentation of reductionism, counter-relational work; and those who engage in it fail to understand the whole because they don't put the parts together (*syniemi*, v.12).

**11:**—Paul expresses some indulging thoughts (vv.2a,7-10), images (vv.2b,8,21) and comparisons (vv.5,16-18,22-29) in order to give situational context to his fights against reductionism. He hopes that they "would bear with me in a little foolishness" as he makes definitive a theological framework for the sin of reductionism and its counter-relational work—not merely about disobedience but also about reducing the whole person to outer in, defined by what one has/does, reducing God and what he said, and reducing relationship with God to one's own terms, pointing to similar relational consequences. In the context of this chapter, and all of 2 Cor, it is conclusive that reductionism is always positioned against wholeness to generate, shape and construct alternatives to be whole, namely by the counter-relational work which often takes on a quantitative appearance of God's whole (*metaschematizo*, vv.14-15) but are inherently only ontological simulation and epistemological illusion from reductionism.

**12:**—Critical account of Paul's transforming relational involvement with the whole of God. Contrary to sin of reductionism, Paul resolves to define his person by his humanity ("the things that show my weakness," 11:30) because this gets to his whole person defined from inner out. And Paul's whole person defined from inner out can only boast of God's grace: the whole of God's vulnerable relational initiative to him for relationship together. In making his whole person vulnerable to God and then to this church, Paul gets down to the heart of the issue for them: the whole person from inner out signified by the function of the heart involved in whole relationship together, which are necessary to be both intimate and equalized for God's new creation family on God's relational terms. Thus, Paul asks the most critical and urgent question facing them, and all Christians today: "If I love you more, am I to be loved less?" (v.15). That is, "If I involve my whole person further and deeper with you in family love, will you back off, distance or separate yourself in the involvement of your person in our relationship together?" God in his

relational grace with *agape* asks us the same question, and in family love holds us accountable for our relational response of *agape* involvement to the whole of God's vulnerable presence and ongoing intimate involvement.

**13:**—Paul declares the extent of relational action his family love will take with them (“I will not be lenient,” v.2); and he aligns his family love to how Christ was (“He is not weak in dealing with you,” v.3). Paul defines reciprocal relationship in the process of triangulation (“in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God,” v.4). In family love, he makes two ongoing imperatives: First, “examine” (*peirazo*, with the purpose to show where one has fallen or failed, v.5) two vital matters—(1) “yourselves,” your person, and (2) “whether you are living in the faith,” that is, your vulnerable relational trust in involvement with God, and see if, where and how you have sin of reductionism. Then secondly, “test yourselves” (*dokimazo*, prove one good and acceptable) ongoingly to distinguish your person as whole and your relationship together as God's whole family. The only alternative to God's whole is reductionism (*adokimos*, “fail to meet the test”). These are not mere moral imperatives and ethics. They go much further and deeper into human ontology made in the image of God (cf. 3:18), and the relational imperative for relationship together to be whole as the new creation in relational likeness of the whole of God—nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, Paul's added closing imperatives to be whole are relationally conjoined with the intimately involved whole of God (“the God of *agape* and wholeness be with you,” v.11) in the experiential truth of the whole of God's relational context of family and relational process of family love: “The *vulnerably embodied* grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the *agape relational involvement* of the Father, and the *reciprocal relational koinonia* of the Holy Spirit be with all of you” (v.13).

## Galatians

In Galatians Paul establishes the functional clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel from any alternatives of reductionism, and thus to be distinguished from any alternative gospels—the ongoing tension and conflict not only in Galatians which signified his conjoint fight for the whole gospel and against reductionism. This suggests that Galatians should be the lens by which to read Paul’s writings.

**1:1-5**—More than a greeting, his opening words make definitive the basis for the truth of the gospel and the ongoing base for the whole of the gospel—“grace and peace from...,” v.3—which are in conflict with a gospel of human contextualization and shaping from reductionism.

**1:6-9**—The difference in gospels is not a minor adjustment but a fundamental deconstruction of the relational source of the gospel, which redefines its functional and relational significance. Paul’s purpose in this letter is to illuminate this qualitative difference in order to establish the functional clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel, thus exposing any alternatives from reductionism.

**1:11-12**—He makes definitive the source of his gospel—a pivotal declaration of the relational source who constituted his gospel as a direct experiential truth, the construction of which is neither Paul’s nor any other human’s and thus which is not amenable to deconstruction, reduction and negotiation.

**1:13-24**—The old Paul embedded in reductionism (vv.13-14) and the new Paul called to be whole “through his grace” (v.15) and thus transformed and made whole (“his Son in me,” v.16) with the relational outcome (“so that”) of Paul sent to make whole (“proclaim him”) the human relational condition.

**2:1-10**—He returned to Jerusalem “in response to a revelation” (v.2). Some see this trip as his response to famine in Jerusalem (as Agabus predicted, Acts 11:27-30), yet this doesn’t seem to fit the context of Paul’s purpose and should not be seen as a mere parenthetical statement. Adding circumcision to the gospel was a major issue confronting the church, the seriousness of which he addressed as the purpose of their trip “so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you” (v.5). For Paul, the issue wasn’t about Christian freedom to shape the gospel, which contrarian teachers were seeking to make uniform by conformity to circumcision. “The freedom we have in Christ Jesus” (v.4), for Paul, involved not having our person reduced by false distinctions of human constructs, which engage a comparative process using a deficit model to stratify relationships—“God shows no partiality” (v.6). This reductionism and its counter-relational work “enslave us” (v.4). As Paul states later (5:1,13), the critical issue for the church is about being whole, neither reduced nor fragmented in relationships apart from God’s whole. Paul’s grasp of the whole of the gospel had the qualitative significance of experiential truth, such that even the church leaders at Jerusalem “contributed nothing to me,” (v.6), implying that Paul and his gospel were whole to which nothing could be added, nor could anything be taken away. They recognized God’s direct relational involvement with Paul, “the grace that had been given to me” (v.9).

**3:**—The view the Galatians received of Jesus on the cross was no mere picture of a crucifixion event. More significantly, it was a qualitative view of Jesus’ whole person functioning in *agape* relational involvement with them for the purpose and outcome only

of relationship together with the whole of God. From the qualitative view of Jesus' relational involvement, Paul shifts to the Spirit. While Paul still engages the issue of "doing the works of the law" or "through faith in Christ," shifting from Christ to the Spirit seems like a big jump, somewhat disjointed. Not for Paul. He extends the discussion of God's whole and gives functional clarity to the whole of God's relational context and process—the necessary relational context of God's new creation family and relational process of family love which constitutes whole relationship together, both intimate and equalized from inner out.

**4:**—the nonnegotiable relational process and irreducible relational outcome continues in Paul's relational discourse and theological dialogue, discussed earlier in this study. "Have I now become your enemy by telling you the truth?" (v.16) is raised by Paul to put things into deeper perspective (cf. similar question with deeper relational significance, 2 Cor 12:15). While the situation involved "false brothers" (2:4) who were teaching "a different gospel" (1:6) and "confusing you" (1:7) and "bewitched you" (3:1), the underlying dynamic involved assimilation into human contextualization, which thus shapes church life and practice in human terms and redefines covenant relationship together with God on our terms. This reductionism has relational consequences both with God and among each other in its counter-relational work ("to exclude you," 4:17) because reductionism always seeks to diminish the whole person (our new identity) and fragment the relationships of the whole (whose we are together as God's whole).

**4:21-31**—Paul further makes definitive the relational and ontological consequences of any such assimilation into human contextualization shaping our life and practice in human terms. Two covenants represented by Hagar and Sarah which distinguish their relational and ontological difference. A reduced human ontology embedded in relationships functioning with distance within the church essentially function in the ontological limits and relational constraints of slaves, even though our theology may be of a free child of promise.

**5:**—Paul asserts the redemption of Christ in opposition to the above condition of enslavement. Yet, redemption is only the necessary means for reconciling relationship together into God's family as adopted daughters and sons—the redemptive reconciliation of whole relationship together both intimate and equalized from inner out (5:6,13).

**5:16-26**—Paul defined this new identity "in Christ" as a function not of mere Christian ethics and morals, which then becomes reductionism, but only as a function of the whole person in relationship. And the most significant relationship of which the new identity "in Christ" is a function is with Jesus' relational replacement, the Spirit. Therefore, it is nonnegotiable for Paul that we "be guided by the Spirit" (*stoicheo*, to follow, walk in, adherer to, v.25), that is, in reciprocal relational involvement together. This relational involvement frees us from reductionism of the human person ("become conceited" by what we do/have) and makes whole reductionism's counter-relational work ("competing...envying one another," v.26).

**6:1-10**—Above discussed by contrasting, on the one hand, the relational involvement of family love ("restore such a one...bear one another's burdens," vv.1-2) and its relational outcome ("reap at harvest time," v.9), on the other, with the self-autonomy/interests/determination of reductionism ("think they are something," v.3, expands on "conceited" in 5:26, "rather than their neighbor's work," v.4, expands on "competing...envying") and its relational consequence ("they deceive themselves," v.3,

“reap corruption,” v.8) of reduced ontology and function. Paul calls them to be whole and live God’s whole in relationship together with “those of the family of faith,” and thus to make whole “all” (v.10). This inner-out *agape* relational involvement (extending 5:6) goes beyond the moral and ethical “work for the good of all.”

**6:11-18**—Paul closes in summary on the ontological significance of God’s whole and the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionism: “Any function of reductionism, whether in the practice of either circumcision or uncircumcision, is without any ontological existence [*eimi*]; only the new creation exists in ontological wholeness” (v.15, my paraphrase). And the wholeness (“peace”) of God’s relational involvement of grace (“mercy”) will be the relational outcome for all who are relationally involved compatibly with God, even those of Israel who are not reduced but function in the faith of Abraham.

Just as Paul opened this letter by defining his identity as contextualized in the whole of God’s relational context and process—not by human contextualization shaping him by human terms—he now makes unequivocal that any faith and works rooted in human contextualization, based on human shaping and construction by human terms, have no ontological reality and thus significance. The only faith with work with ontological significance is “faith functioning in its inner-out relational response of entrusting our whole person, both to be vulnerably involved with the person of Jesus Christ and to be vulnerable in the relational involvement of family love with others” (5:6, my paraphrase). This qualitative relational dynamic is the definitive life and practice which signifies the new creation of God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms—which, as Paul’s life and practice demonstrated, is both ‘already’ and more to come.

For Paul, therefore, the gospel was no mere doctrinal statement and propositional truth, nor was it of his own shaping. His gospel was the experiential truth of God’s relational response of grace vulnerably embodied by Jesus only for relationship together, which he directly experienced with Jesus to transform his life and practice to the new creation. Thus, Paul’s gospel was rooted only in a complete Christology and full soteriology; and this functional significance was first his relational experience and then his *synesis* for the truth and whole of the gospel—the theological basis of which Paul expands on in Romans.



## Romans

In Galatians, Paul made unequivocal the functional clarity necessary for the truth and whole of the gospel that distinguishes it from any alternative gospel. In Romans, he makes definitive the theological basis for this gospel, thus providing the theological clarity necessary to be integrated with the above function clarity to constitute the experiential truth of the whole gospel as the whole of God's relational context and process in response of grace to the human condition. Nothing less and no substitutes for Paul, thus his theological dialogue unfolds ongoingly in contrast and conflict with reductionism.

**1:16-17**—Paul gets into the heart of the gospel (“the power of God for salvation”) and its significant roots both historically (“to the Jew first”) and, most important, relationally in reciprocal involvement together (“righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith...one who is righteous will live by faith”).

**1:18-32**—The roots of God's involvement with the human context and God's response to the human condition. Two responses by God: (1) God's grace signified by the gospel, (2) “the wrath of God.” Paul focuses first on God's latter response to expose the underlying dynamic of the human condition in which all sin is rooted. What Paul outlines is less about the various characteristics of the human condition distinguishing human contextualization, and more about the relational consequence from “to be apart” from the whole of God. The outline of sins must be understood in this deeper relational context with God (“the truth about God...the Creator,” v.25). Yet, persons “suppress the truth” (v.18) specifically revealed to them for relationship together (“known about God...God has shown it to them,” v.19); and “though they knew God” (v.21, they substituted (“claiming to be wise,” v.22) human shaping and terms for the whole of God (vv.23,24). That is, they engaged the sin of reductionism by reducing God and themselves in ontology and function. It is in this deeper relational context and process that Paul gives theological basis and clarity to root the human condition in its proper relational significance.

**2:**—At the end of Paul's overview in chapter 1, he extends God's justified anger (1:32) leading to judgment in chapter 2. Here he shifts the focus of God's response to the human condition specifically to the Jews, who are the recipients of God's further revelation for the terms of relationship together (the law)—notably to Jews who have engaged the sin of reductionism. Paul redefines who is a definitive Jew and what is definitive Judaism by recontextualizing them in God's involvement with the human context (“the law...written on their hearts,” v.15) and God's response to the human condition (“the riches of his kindness...to lead you to repentance,” v.4). In the whole of God's relational context and process, Paul now begins to make definitive God's second response to the human condition, which is interacting with God's first response of justified anger and judgment. In the initial stages of the good news of God's thematic action of grace, Jews made whole are persons who have received God's relational involvement of family love to redeem them of their sin of reductionism (“real circumcision...of the heart,” v.29) for covenant relationship together. Therefore, whole Jews are persons not defined, determined and constituted from human contextualization “but from God.” In this chapter, Paul also introduces the theological anthropology defining all persons in the created ontology from

inner out, not a reduced human ontology from outer in signifying an anthropology merely of human contextualization. At the same time, by contextualizing all persons (Jew and Gentile) in the human condition embedded in the sin of reductionism (“anguish and distress for everyone,” v.9), Paul equalizes all persons in a common ontology before God. Yet, in the context and process of God’s thematic relational response of grace, Paul appears to give priority to the Jew not *over* but *before* the Gentile: “the Jew first and also the Greek,” 1:16;2:9,10). What is the significance of this priority and what is the difference between over and before? Paul goes on to give theological clarity to this.

The reduced Jew in chapter 2 is put into juxtaposition with a whole Jew in chapter 3 by Paul.

**3:1-2**—Whereas the ancient person of creation only possessed an indirect revelation from God, the ancient Jew in history received direct communication from God revealing God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition. That is, God entrusted Jews with “the oracles of God” (v.3), which included the promise of covenant relationship together and the terms for this relationship. Those words of God were the words from God’s mouth given in God’s relational context and process; this necessitated a compatible relational response from the Jew of trust (faith) in God and God’s words—which Abraham and subsequent whole Jews engaged with God in reciprocal relational response.

**3:3-8**—A reduced Jew redefines God’s terms for relationship to human terms. But they cannot redefine God and God’s words (“nullify the faithfulness of God,” v.3, “God be proved true,” v.4). the identity of who, what and how God is is not determined by human contextualization. A reductionist may argue that our reductionism helps bring out and define the whole of God (“through my falsehood God’s truthfulness abounds,” v.7). Some have accused Paul of this kind of reductionist thinking (v.8). Reductionist thought is based on the premise: the parts (human effort) define and determine the whole. The truth is that only the presence of God’s whole can expose the reductionism in human contextualization.

**3:9-20**—To have directly received the whole of God is the advantage of the Jew signified in circumcision. Yet this advantage does not place Jews *over* Gentiles (“not at all,” v.9); it only puts them *before* Gentiles in knowing the whole of God and thus in perceiving the sin of reductionism. And God’s further salvific action is necessary to redeem and reconcile them to God’s whole on God’s terms, not by human terms shaped by human effort (“by deeds prescribed by the law,” v.20). 3:20 does not contradict 2:13, because the former is about a reduced Jew and the latter is a whole Jew who functions according to God’s terms for relationship together, thus who is engaged in the reciprocal relational response to God that God expects in relationship together.

**3:21-31**—God’s salvific response of grace as the only means for the human condition. God’s salvific response embodied in Jesus is accessible to all persons equalized before him, whatever their sin of reductionism. This is the truth and whole of the gospel; and its theological anthropology and full soteriology begs the question for Paul, “what becomes of boasting?” (v.27). The issue is not necessarily between “works of the law” and “faith” because pride in faith (i.e., having or doing it) define persons in the same reductionist way. The issue is between reductionism and wholeness. Faith does not render the law “useless, ineffective, invalid and nullified” (*katargeo*, v.31); but since the law points us to

God's salvific response "in Christ" (Gal 3:22), faith actually "confirms" (*histemi*) the experiential truth of the law as God's terms and desires for covenant relationship together. Therefore, Paul does not diminish the law as God's relational terms, nor does he ever have a problem with the law in these terms. He, however, is in conflict with the reductionism of the law that renegotiates God's terms for relationship to human terms.

Paul gives further theological clarity to the matter.

**4:**—By delineating the relational context and process of God's thematic response to the human condition and by unfolding the relational progression of God's grace to the gospel embodied by Christ, Paul is also able to give further and deeper theological clarity to the roots of the covenant relationship together promised and consummated with Abraham and constituted by God. The retrospective Paul gives of Abraham is contextualized in various human relations interacting with relationship with God, in which Paul clearly identified Abraham as "our ancestor" (v.1), "the father of all who believe" (vv.11-12), "the father of all of us" (v.16). Abraham and his relational response are the roots of covenant relationship together with God on God's terms, the same roots which make definitive the necessary relational response for all persons who engage God to constitute covenant relationship together. The truth that God does not engage us in relationship on human terms is not about a doctrine defined as 'justification by faith'. This truth is the experiential truth of receiving God's initiative of his relational response of grace to the human condition only for relationship together. The only solution to our human condition is to receive God's relational action by our reciprocal relational response of trust from inner out (faith). This relational outcome is what Abraham obtained, gained and experienced, which defined him and determined his relational involvement with God—"the father of all of us who believe just as he did."

**5:1-5**—The relational outcome of having been brought into right relationship with God ("justified by faith,") is wholeness with God ("peace with God") through Christ's salvific action—the relational outcome both 'already' ("in which we stand") and 'not yet' ("in our hope"). Moreover, our situations and circumstances are contextualized in God's relational context and process of relationship together to take us further and deeper in this relational progression and outcome because of God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us ("God's love poured into our hearts through the Spirit").

**5:6-11**—Paul gives the theological clarity of a full soteriology (saved from and to), not a mere truncated soteriology (only saved from): "justified by his blood...saved from God's wrath" and "reconciled to God...saved by [in] his life." For salvation to be full and to be saved (*sozo*) made whole, the relational outcome of Jesus' salvific work of grace must by its nature engage the functional involvement of being the whole of God's family together. This is the only functional and relational significance of Paul's definitive assertion: "we have now received reconciliation"—the experiential truth of the whole gospel of what we are necessarily 'already' also saved *to*.

**5:12-21**—He gives theological clarity to the structural roots of the human condition. Adam is the functional key to sin and its relational consequence (vv.12,14,16-19), who set in motion this relational consequence for all human persons, not because of his sin but "because all have sinned." Paul is not stating the root cause for all to be condemned (vv.15,18) but only clarifying the roots of the process that ends in this relational consequence. Paul puts Christ in juxtaposition with Adam, the functional key for the

roots of our relational consequence from God. Adam bears a resemblance to Jesus, who is the functional key to the relational outcome of the gift of relationship together with God (vv. 15-19). Paul makes theologically clear the relational roots of God's relational response of grace to the human condition which counterbalanced the structural roots of the human condition and negated its relational consequence. This relational outcome is the full soteriology of what Christ saved us conjointly from and to in order to make us whole in the whole of God's family—the experiential truth of the whole gospel.

**6:1-14**—The above relational roots of this relational outcome necessarily involve a specific relational context and process, the whole of God's relational context and process. To be involved with God in his relational context and process necessitates redemption and transformation. Paul brings theological clarity to this process by constituting it in baptism into Christ: “into his death...buried with him...raised from the dead...walk in newness of life,” thus transformed to the relational outcome of God's new creation family. Redemption and transformation necessarily go together in conjoint function and cannot be separated. The ongoing process of the old dying and the new rising involves the whole person in whole relationship together. Nothing less and no substitutes can be whole in the new creation.

**6:15-23**—He clarifies further the relational process involved, using an analogy “in human terms.” He uses the analogy of slaves for relationship with God also, and even though God has ownership by redemption there is no enslavement as exists in relation to sin. Most important, slave signifies the depth of the relational bond (not its character) involved in relationship together with the holy God on God's terms—which are nonnegotiable and irreducible to human terms—thus submitting (“obedience”) one's whole person in righteous function (“slaves to righteousness”) in the relational context and process of the holy God, with the relational conclusion of being set apart (“sanctification”) in “eternal life” of relationship together with Christ and the whole of God (cf. Jn 17:3).

Reductionism is always positioned against God's whole, and engaging the sin of reductionism is always trying to redefine God's terms by human contextualization shaped by human terms. Paul continues in the next chapter to give theological clarity to this tension, conflict and struggle.

**7:1-6**—He uses another analogy from human relationships (“marriage”) to make definitive the total commitment by necessity involved in this relational bond together. Analogous to marriage, as long as a person has not died to one's involvement in sin of reductionism, the relational bond with sin is still binding in function and no release from that bond (enslavement) can be realized (“work in our members”); and he defines the functional process of redemptive change necessary to go from one relational bond to the other (“you have died...so that you may belong to him”). Paul expands on the dynamic from Gal 6:15 and gives further theological clarity to it in these sections. And he makes definitive that the new creation is only a function of relationship with the Spirit, who constitutes our function in whole relationship together as God's new creation family—“the new life of the Spirit.”

**7:7-25**—Yet, Paul is well aware—both in the human condition and in the experiences of his own life—that our function does not readily flow from our theology, even that our function at times is not congruent with our theology (cf. 2:14). Moreover, our function

can even precede our theology to shape it to conform to our function in reductionist terms. Paul tries to sort this all out, helping to distinguish the forest from among the trees, and keeping the cart from going before the horse. First, he doesn't allow the law to be reduced or renegotiated but clearly defines the law and its function as God's desires and terms for relationship together: "the law is holy and the commandment is holy and just and good" (v.12). Next, Paul addresses the tension, conflict and struggle the new person has with the reality of reductionism, both theologically and functionally. His use of "I" is unclear as to its reference but it appears to refer to a mixture or combination of a collective "I" and a personal "I." In 7:15-20, Paul appears to be describing the human condition. I don't think he is talking about two natures (+ and -) both within the same individual. Here he describes the limits, constraint and enslavement of the human condition. Then he turns to Christian function from inner out or outer in (vv.21-25). For the Christian person, a similar conflict and struggle between reductionism and being God's whole can exist, not as an issue of life or death but as an issue of the heart. On the one hand, this whole person from inner out signified by the heart ("my inmost self") is directly involved (Gk. middle voice) to "delight in the law of God." On the other hand, reductionism "lies close at hand," trying to influence the whole person to engage sin of reductionism: "reducing my whole person to parts...fragmenting my perceptual-interpretive framework (*nous*, mind)...and embedding me in a reduced ontology (*eimi*, being) and function from outer in." This ongoing conflict and struggle with reductionism is what the new person in Christ still faces, which nothing less and no substitutes of God's whole on God's terms constituted by Christ and completed by the Spirit can expose, deal with, redeem, transform and make whole. Therefore, this is not about dual natures but rather function as a reduced person from outer in or as the whole person from inner out of the new creation.

In the relational context and process of the whole of God's relational response of grace, Paul focuses now on the Spirit and the theological clarity necessary to make functional the vital relational work of the Spirit in the transformation to wholeness.

**8:1-8**—While redemption is fulfilled, redemptive change and the process of transformation (sanctification) have yet to be wholly completed. This process is brought to completion by the Spirit. Paul is building on the pneumatology established in Gal 5:16-26 and initially set forth in his Cor letters, in order and so that the church as God's family has the wholeness in theology and function signified in the new creation. The ongoing issue between reductionism and the whole continues: the sin of reductionism prevents the whole of God, the whole of God rejects or redeems the sin of reductionism but cannot coexist with it. To try to coexist is a reductionist effort, notably in ontological simulation and epistemological illusion.

**8:9-17**—Paul makes definitive Christian identity and *what* as well as *who* defines us. No longer being (*eimi*) defined by human contextualization ("in the flesh"), Christians are defined by the whole of God's relational context and process "through the Spirit" who is ongoingly present and intimately involved ("dwells in you"). Christian identity constituted in this relationship together as family is not a static condition or character but a dynamic process of relationship together necessitating by its nature reciprocal relational involvement with each other. Paul's relational language is not hyperbole (e.g., to evoke obligation), rather the theological depth of the experiential truth of the whole gospel:

God's intimate relational response of family love adopted us into God's own family. The experiential truth of this theological reality is the relational reality that functionally constitutes the relational belonging and whole ontological identity of who we are and whose we are. Anything less and any substitutes in function disengages Christian identity from the whole of God's relational context and process and engages it is human contextualization to redefine Christian identity in the shape of human terms from reductionism. This has far-reaching implications, as Paul continues to unfold.

**8:18-27**—Paul adds theological and functional clarity by taking all this further and deeper into God's big picture eschatological plan framing God's thematic relational response to the human condition. He paints a big picture that goes back to creation. God's whole also encompasses all of creation, and God's response to the human condition is the redemptive key for the rest of creation to “be set free from its bondage to decay.” The significance of this already-not-yet eschatological picture is to deepen theologically the experiential truth of the whole gospel for the definitive wholeness in theology and practice of the church as God's new creation family.

**8:28-30**—God's vulnerable presence and intimate involvement with us are ongoing and irreducible, that is, cannot be defined or determined by situations and circumstances, nor by any issues in human contextualization. God's thematic relational response of grace is irrevocable in God's relational context of family and unremitting in God's relational process of family love. Therefore, Paul can be definitive that God is wholly in control and sovereign, though not by determinism; the Father's definitive desire is for the relational involvement of his sons and daughters—by their reciprocal relational response of trust—“to be conformed to the image of his Son” for the relational outcome and conclusion to be the whole of God's family together (“the firstborn within a large family”). This necessitates compatible ontology and function from inner out, thus relationship in intimacy together.

**8:31-39**—The relational significance that this relational outcome ‘already’ has for the issues faced in human contextualization is addressed directly. He makes the definitive connections with these issues in human contextualization by addressing each of them in the relational context and process directly from the Father and embodied by his Son and extended by his Spirit—definitive connections made functional by the process of reciprocating contextualization in conjoint function with triangulation. Regardless of the situation or circumstance faced, the outcome is assured—not a situational outcome but the relational outcome “through him who loved us.” Paul is convicted (*peitho*, v.38) by the experiential truth with the Spirit, not by self-conviction, “that neither...nor anything else in all creation (human contextualization)...separate us from the whole of God's family love constituted by Christ Jesus and his relational replacement, the Spirit.” The Spirit is absolutely necessary in order for this relational reality to function in the wholeness definitive of theology and practice constituting God's relational whole on God's relational terms.

On this relational basis, from this whole *phronema* (perceptual-interpretive framework) and with this qualitative *phroneo* (lens and mindset), Paul addresses further urgent issues.

**9:**—He addresses an issue weighing personally on him but also urgent for the church: the Jew, Israel and God's people. In an overview of God's thematic relational response of

grace, Paul makes definitive the identity of God's people and the place of "my kindred according to the flesh" (v.3). He clearly identified Israel, as unfolded in OT history, as adopted children, the divine glory, the covenant and promises, and from them is the human ancestry of the Messiah (vv.4-5). Yet, he also makes definitive that Israel's identity is not about nation-state: "not all Israelites truly belong to Israel" (v.6); nor because they are Abraham's children are they "his true descendents" (v.7). As Paul expands on 2:28-29, he continues to distinguish that "not the children of the flesh who are the children of God but the children of the promise" (v.8), that is, those involved in the primacy of covenant relationship together. By decontextualizing Israel's identity from nation-state, Paul recontextualizes Israel and the true Jew to their definitive identity only in relational terms. This vital distinction is the significant difference between the quantitative reductionism of sin and the qualitative whole of God. The former is shaped by human terms and determined by human effort, and in contrast the latter is defined and determined only on God's relational terms (v.16). Yet, God's relational action is not unilateral and deterministic, though it may appear that way to some (vv.14-19). In his polemic, Paul anticipates the question "who can resist his will?" His potter-clay analogy (vv.20-21) appears not to answer the question but Paul is making definitive that God's action is not defined and determined by human contextualization, though human response to God's initiative of grace is certainly a determiner of the resulting negative relational consequence or positive relational outcome. It is crucial to see the relational dynamic involved and to see what order things unfold in this relational process, because Paul highlights involvement in reciprocal relationship and accountability for it. In the question above, there is some truth to the inability to resist God's will, since when God decides to do something it is done—which Calvinists signify by 'irresistible grace'. But this is only true of God's will as *thelema* (cf. Jn 6:38-40), denoting not just a will or an intention but also the execution of it. Paul frames the question with *boulema*, denoting only the thing willed, the intention. When the question is clarified, what is implied about God's action shifts from unilateral to intentional desire for relationship, reciprocal relationship together. The answer then involves the other person(s), and certainly includes whoever avoids, denies or rejects God's desires for reciprocal relationship together signified in God's relational response of grace.

As Paul further unfolds God's thematic relational response to the human condition, the interaction between God's two-fold response of wrath-judgment and of grace is given theological clarity to understand the full relational significance of God's response, notably for the Jews (vv.22-29). The issues throughout remains: covenant relationship together based on either human contextualization defined by human terms and determined by human effort (vv.31-32), or God's relational context and process of grace embodied by Jesus evoking the compatible relational response of trust (vv.30,32). The choice always remains ours.

**10:1-4**—Paul heightens his pursuit for the Jews' salvation, in full soteriology and not merely delivered *from* (as much of their history reflected) but also saved *to* the whole of God's family. He acknowledges their good intentions ("zeal for God") but their basis "is not enlightened" (*epignosis*), that is, according to specific knowledge. He is not advocating a specialized knowledge from mysticism. *Epignosis* is the specific knowledge of someone which is gained from relational involvement with that person, and thus what

that person has disclosed to them. Engagement in relationship with God is the functional key Paul makes definitive, contrary to shaping this relationship by one's own terms (v.3).

**10:5-13**—When the law is understood as God's terms for covenant relationship together, Moses can be followed for righteousness from the law ("does these things"). The problem is no one can fulfill those terms on the basis of one's own effort. That attempt is only a reductionist substitute which reduces one's whole person, God, God's terms and relationship together to human terms. The only alternative for relationship together emerges from one's relational response of trust to God's grace embodied by Jesus, who constitutes the whole person in the righteousness God can count on in relationship together (vv.6-13).

**10:14-21**—This good news embodied by Jesus is further embodied by those who share in and thus share this good news. Not all Jews relationally responded (vv.16,18). "Did Israel not understand?" Paul asks. Yes and no. No, for the reductionists who saw Israel as mere nation-state (v.19); and yes, because the reductionists also failed to perceive, listen and respond back to God's ongoing relational response and involvement of grace (vv.20-21). Those Jews who did not respond to God on God's terms redefined the covenant on their terms, thereby reducing human ontology to outer in (cf. 2:28-29) and only the idea of relationship without its qualitative relational significance.

**11:1-6**—Throughout God's thematic relational response of grace to Israel, only a minority of Jews relationally responded in trust—thus making Israel definitive not as nation-state but as a significant minority designated "a remnant" by God (vv.4-6). Paul clarifies that God's "chosen by grace" had nothing to do with the remnant's "works" (v.6). Yet, Paul has been making definitive in Romans that God's thematic relational action of grace constitutes the relational context and process necessitating our reciprocal relational response of trust for compatible relationship together on God's terms—irreducible and nonnegotiable terms, which is how the remnant (minority Israel) received God and responded back in contrast to other Jews (majority Israel) functioning in reductionism on human terms.

**11:7-10**—'Majority Israel' determined their relational position to God—that is, seeking relationship with God on their terms—and God responded by letting them remain embedded in it. "Hardened" (*poroo*) signifies to become callous and insensitive, without relational awareness and sensitivity to the qualitative; *poroo* is from *poros*, a small piece of stone broken off from a large one, which implies the fragmentary process of reductionism 'majority Israel' engaged "to be apart" from God's whole. God let them be accountable for their relational position. And Paul addressed further the relational consequence or outcome of Israel's relational position.

**11:11-24**—He discussed Israel's relational consequence or outcome by integrating their relational position with the Gentiles relational position to God's thematic response to the human condition. The deeply interrelated relational position of Jews and Gentiles is in complex interaction to signify the whole of God's thematic response of grace. Paul makes definitive that in terms of both of their relational positions one is not the cause of the other's, nor is one at the exclusion of the other and precludes or is better than the other.

**11:25-32**—Paul acknowledges the lack of full knowledge of what is involved in all the details of God's thematic action ("this *mysterion*"). Yet, what is known Paul details for them. This raises two questions: Is God's relational response to Israel's relational position indeed apart from the gospel? and who is Israel? Paul already identified



definitive Israel as “the remnant,” ‘minority Israel’. The remnant has always engaged God’s grace in reciprocal relationship together, thus their trust will always experience God’s relational response of grace to be made whole in relationship together. This is not apart from the gospel of God’s grace embodied by Jesus but congruent with God’s thematic salvific action for the human condition. In God’s action, he also holds them accountable for their relational position (v.32). This action, as the law did, not only illuminated the issue of the human condition but pointed to its solution in God’s relational response of grace embodied and fulfilled by Christ. Though Paul said “As regards the gospel they are enemies” (v.28), two distinctions need to be understood about the gospel and Israel. First, the gospel should not be reduced to propositional truths, doctrine and beliefs, or be disembodied to event or teachings. The truth and whole of the gospel is only God’s grace relationally embodied and fulfilled by Christ for relationship together as God’s whole family. Anything less and any substitutes are a reduced gospel of human contextualization. The second distinction is about Israel, which Paul distinguished unequivocally as either ‘majority Israel’ or ‘minority Israel’. ‘Majority Israel’ is indeed an enemy of the whole gospel, given its relational position to God’s relational response of grace. ‘Minority Israel’, however, is not an enemy of the whole gospel because they function in the relational response of trust necessary in the whole gospel. Therefore, Paul’s statements in 11:28-29 about the gospel and Israel are not contradictory when these two distinctions are understood.

**11:33-36**—For the depth and breadth of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition—which by the nature of the whole and holy God includes the *mysterion* of the details of God’s response in the whole of God’s eschatological big picture—Paul rightly and humbly concludes his theological overview with this summary doxology. This doxology is not a mere description of the attributes of God, nor to merely ascribe them to God in closing. Paul closes relationally focused and involved with the relational dynamic inclusive of God’s whole (“from him”), God’s wholeness (“through him”) and the whole of God (“to him”)—the whole of the gospel, nothing less and no substitutes (cf. 1 Cor 8:6).

Having provided the theological clarity of the whole of God’s thematic relational response of grace to the human condition, Paul now concentrated on the further functional clarity (again building on Gal) necessary to be whole, live whole and make whole, God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms.

**12:1-2**—“Therefore,” based on the theological clarity unfolded in the previous eleven chapters, Paul issues to his family (“brothers and sisters”) a definitive call to effect (*parakaleo*) the necessary reciprocal relational response to God’s relational response of grace. What follows aligns with the vital issues for all practice: (1) the integrity of the person presented (“present...”), (2) the quality of what the person communicates (“...your bodies as a living sacrifice”), and (3) the depth of relationship the person engages (“holy and acceptable to God”). Paul is expanding on 6:13,16,19, where he used a slave metaphor. Here he shifts to an offertory metaphor, yet the significance of human ontology and function from inner out is the same to involve the whole person, including all the outer parts of the body. The functional significance here is not to offer in sacrifice merely a part of one’s person—notably a reduced person of outer in defined by ‘what to do’—but to relationally present to God and stand vulnerably before him with one’s whole

person (cf. Abraham's call, Gen 17:1). Moreover, how to be involved in relationship with the whole and holy God is not only with one's whole person but also to be ongoingly involved in God's relational context and process on God's terms, which are the only terms "holy and acceptable to God" for whole relationship together. This practice is not a function of the individual doing a certain thing or living a certain way acceptable to God; this process is a function only of reciprocal relationship together compatible to the wholeness of God's ontology and function, in whose image and likeness human ontology and function were created. Yet, reduced human ontology and function from outer in, signifying conformity to human contextualization (*syschematizo*), is fragmentary, which needs to be redeemed and transformed from inner out (*metamorphoo*) in order to be whole in ontology and function and thus to live whole.

**12:3-21**—On the basis of God's relational response of grace defining Christian identity as who we are and whose we are and determining Christian function as how to be involved in whole relationship together, Paul gives further functional clarity to define the relational responsibility (even demand) which comes with God's relational grace. Only the experiential truth of whole persons in transformed relationships together both equalized and intimate is the relational outcome of wholly receiving God's relational response of grace. God's grace is the basis and ongoing base for the church to be the whole of God's family—the ecclesiology of the whole which Paul is making functionally clear in these closing chapters of Rom. While the church is called to be and live whole and sent to make whole in the human context, Paul is unequivocal that human contextualization does not define *who* they are and *whose* they are, nor does human contextualization determine *how* they are. The church's ontology is to be the whole of God's family in the world and to function whole in it by extending God's family love, just as Jesus vulnerably embodied to them (and prayed in his formative family prayer, Jn 17:20-26).

**13:1-7**—Fragmented relationships prevent wholeness from developing. Some ways the whole is fragmented are by self-autonomy promoting individualism, self-determination pursuing self-interests/concerns, and self-justification necessitating self-centeredness. One means to chasten these is with the presence of "authority" (*exousia*, the physical capability to do something and also the right and authority to carry out the action) to centralize or bring coherence to a group of persons, so that they will not be fragmented into merely disconnected individuals. Throughout the human condition God has chastened the human condition by appointing (*hypotasso*) such authorities to serve to bring persons together, whose function in effect can only point to the need to be whole without functionally being able to make whole. That wholeness only God can accomplish by his relational response of grace. Yet, human authorities serve God's purpose for the need to be whole together, if only to highlight the need. Even negative authorities serve some purpose, despite the severity of their action—which God and Paul do not dismiss or merely tolerate—since what they do is not the underlying problem but only symptomatic of the deeper human condition "to be apart" from God's whole enslaved in sin of reductionism. Thus, negative authority still serves God's purpose by pointing to the inherent need for the human condition to be made whole. In this sense, "those authorities that exist have been instituted by God." And without condoning negative authority or blindly submitting to them, Paul states that Christians need to affirm what God is doing,

be involved with God to make whole, and ensure we are not acting in cross-purposes with the whole of God.

**13:8-10**—Paul makes clear the need not to have any secondary debts (*opheilo*, obligation) which are able to determine or dilute our primary function: “to share God’s family love with one another.” Secondary obligations fragment the whole in reductionism, whereas the qualitative relational involvement of *agape* builds God’s relational whole on God’s relational terms, thus fulfills the law (God’s desires for relationship together).

**13:11-14**—The ongoing conflict between reductionism and being whole is framed by Paul in the context of qualitative *kairos* time, not quantitative *chronos* (v.11). While Paul’s eschatology is both ‘already’ and ‘not yet’, he is focused on the importance of the already and its opportunity (*kairos*) to function clearly in our identity as the light (v.12). To live whole illuminates the present practices of reductionism, thus giving Christians further opportunity to make whole. Paul makes it definitive that this *kairos* is now.

**14:1-18**—The issue of dealing with reductionism is an ongoing necessity in the church if being and living whole is to be an experiential truth and functional reality. For example, “those who are weak in faith” signify their relational response of trust that has been diminished, diluted or redefined by reductionism—essentially focused on secondary issues from outer in over the primary from inner out. He goes into other secondary matters and makes it imperative for church whole ontology and function not to be defined and determined by them. Rather stay involved in the primacy of whole relationship together with family love. In all these secondary issues, Paul is emphatic about the importance of God’s whole and functioning together in wholeness: “the kingdom of God is not [those things] but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

**14:19-15:13**—Therefore, “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (v.19), that is, be and live whole by building God’s family with family love, and “do not [fragment] the work of God” (v.20). The primary work is the relational work of trust, without which all other activity and effort are “sin of reductionism” (v.23). Those mature in wholeness (“strong”) need to help those susceptible to reductionism (“weak”) and not be focused “to please ourselves” (15:1) for the relational purpose “of building up the neighbor” (v.2), just as Christ himself extended God’s family love (vv.3,7-9). All of God’s thematic relational response of grace unfolded in Scripture only for whole relationship together, and was written for our “steadfastness and encouragement” in order to work through these various secondary issues, situations and circumstances, and thus attend to the primacy of relationships together necessary to be the whole of God’s family (vv.4-6,10-13). Paul essentially closes the main body of Rom with the conclusive benediction (v.13), which is the relational progression of the definitive benediction in Num 6:22-27 that Jesus embodied for our experiential truth and relational reality along with the Spirit.

**15:14-16:27**—Paul adds some personal notes in closing.

## Colossians

Colosse is a specific situation—different from controversy in Gal in apparent philosophical notions (Col 2:8)—in which the functional and theological clarity of the truth and whole of the gospel are needed to expose, challenge and negate reductionism in order to be and live the whole of God’s family and to make God’s whole on God’s terms. While Col is somewhat of a test-case application of the functional and theological clarity from Gal and Rom, Paul’s theology in Col also reflects further development from Gal and Rom, likely gained with the Spirit while in prison.

**1:1-2:5**—The extended length of these opening remarks is not characteristic of Paul’s undisputed letters. Yet the situation and developments in Col required a further and deeper response from Paul than he had expressed fully before, though he did partially. The situation necessitated establishing the further framework and deeper context (than human contextualization) to address the issues for Col. In doing so, Paul also had opportunity to make definitive his further theological reflections and deeper theological development in the relational epistemic process for *synesis* of God’s whole, which included integrating the Jesus tradition for *pleroma* Christology and soteriology.

Paul wants them to be made complete (“be filled,” *pleroo*) “with the specific knowledge (*epignosis*) of God’s will” (desires, *thelema*, v.9) for whole relationship together. This relational process involves a qualitative knowledge and understanding of the whole (“wisdom and *synesis*), thus “growth in the *epignosis* of God” (v.10) is not about gaining more information about God but only about growing in whole relationship together as family with “the Father who has enabled you to share in the inheritance” (v.12) as his adopted children (vv.13-14). Without apology, Paul declares openly the whole of Jesus, “the image of the invisible God” (v.15), “the *pleroma* of God” (v.19), in order for the relational outcome “in Christ” for every person to be complete, made whole (“mature,” *teleios*, v.28). This is Paul’s passion (“I toil and struggle”) in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit (v.29) and compassion for the churches in Colosse and Laodicea (2:1; cf. 4:16). His purpose clearly stated (2:2-3): that their whole person from inner out to be encouraged (“hearts to be encouraged”) and thus be deeply involved in relationship together (*symbibazo*) in family love; this necessitates all the wealth (*ploutos*) of the full assurance from whole understanding (*synesis*) without reductionism, in order for the relational outcome to specifically know (*epignosis*) God’s self-disclosure embodied in Christ (“God’s mystery”), in whom is the source of all life and function (“the treasures of wisdom and knowledge”). With *synesis* Paul makes definitive the whole of God in order to expose the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionism, which “may deceive (*paralogizomai*, or delude) you with plausible arguments” (v.4). This will help them not to be fragmented by reductionism and to function in relational wholeness on God’s terms to have “a context in order” (*taxis*, cf. 1 Cor 14:33) and deeply involved together in “your relational response of trust in Christ” (2:5)—that is, the integral relational process of family love in which Paul is also involved together with them (“I am with you in spirit”).

**2:6-8**—Just as their compatible relational response of trust to God’s relational response of grace constituted them in relationship together in God’s relational context and process, these terms for relationship together cannot be reduced or negotiated by human terms and still have compatible relationship. Anything less and any substitutes of the whole relational context and process of God’s terms are attempts to reduce God’s whole or to renegotiate God’s terms. This is the reductionist influence Paul urgently addressed. Exactly where this reductionist influence originated is not clear from the text. He earlier cautioned against those “with plausible arguments” (v.4). Now he impresses on the church to be aware “that no one takes you captive” by the arguments “through philosophy and empty deceit” (v.8), thus qualifying 2:4. Paul clearly identified the basis of this thinking, human constructs, shaping and terms as the notions only “according to human tradition” and the formulations only “according to the elemental spirits of the *kosmos* and not according to Christ.” How much Greek philosophy and its worldview Paul points to here are unclear but certainly their influence in the ancient Mediterranean world had its effects. Paul is emphatic that those who turned to this thinking cannot be whole and could not expect to live whole or to make whole. The truth and understanding of the whole can only be illuminated ‘from above’ by the vulnerable disclosures of the *pleroma* of God embodied by Christ.

**2:9-10**—In contrast and conflict with the human efforts ‘from below’, he gives further theological clarity of the *pleroma* who is ‘from above’ and how he constitutes the *pleroma* of those ‘from below’,

**2:11-3:17**—Paul outlines the relational process constituting the whole of Christian ontology, in which Christian identity must by its nature be rooted: the integral relational process of redemptive change in which the old person dies so that the new person is raised up for *pleroma* soteriology of what Jesus also saved us to in relationship together as the whole of God’s family—“*pleroma* in Christ, “the wholeness of Christ” (3:15, cf. “the *pleroma* of Christ,” Eph 1:23). Yet the line between the old and the new gets blurred in practice. Therefore, given the experiential truth and whole of the gospel, Paul is decisive: don’t let anyone define and determine your person from the outer in of reductionism based on what you do/have—norms not only in Judaism (2:16) but in human contextualization (2:20-21)—which are only the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion (“shadow,” 2:17, “an appearance of wisdom,” 2:23) from reductionism, not “the substance of Christ” who defined the whole person from inner out; and don’t let anyone prevent you from experiencing this relational outcome, that is, “disqualify you...by a human way of thinking,” (v.2:18)—the relational outcome that reductionism prevents from being the experiential truth. The distinction between reductionism ‘from below’ and God’s whole ‘from above’ can be confused when their contexts are not clearly distinguishing or are put in some combination. For Christian ontology, both individual and as church, to be whole is not about a static condition. The whole of Christian ontology is a dynamic function of reciprocal relational involvement together, signifying the ongoing process of redemptive change from old to new: “Set your *phroneo* on...above, not on...earth...put to death whatever in you is earthly” (3:2,5).

This is the integral relational context and process of God’s whole into which Paul’s prescriptions for the following situations need to be contextualized; and this is the whole *phronema* and the qualitative *phroneo* necessary in order to understand Paul’s position in these matters (and those similar in Phlm, Eph and Tim).

**3:18-4:1**—In reductionism, the parts are primary and the whole, if addressed at all, is subject to these parts—defined by its parts and explained by the sum of its parts. In the sin of reductionism, the individuals are primary, even in a collective context, and the whole is subordinated to their self-concerns/interests, and thus is subject to and shaped by those human efforts at self-autonomy/determination/justification. By his lens of whole *phronema* and *phroneo*, he focuses on the sin of reductionism and addresses individual efforts in each of these situations, which function in the following way: (1) with the autonomous thinking in lieu of the priority of God’s whole, (2) by the self-serving-determination to build-up self at the expense of serving the growth of God’s family, and (3) for the validation of the individual value or self-worth over primary involvement in the relationships together necessary for the experiential truth to be God’s whole family constituted only by God’s relational terms.

**4:2-6**—Paul closes with the functional clarity to be whole, live whole and make whole. Wholeness in God’s relational context of family by his relational process of family love is by its nature entirely a relational function. This relational function cannot be reduced to anything less or any substitute, that is, anything less than direct relational involvement and any substitute for direct relational communication. The primary communication we engage for relational involvement with God is prayer, which Paul therefore makes the relational imperative (v.2). He also expands their relational involvement with God beyond themselves to embrace the global church (vv.3-4). Moreover, he impresses on them the need to make whole in the world with family love (vv.5-6). This relational function is not optional or negotiable but what must be (*dei*, not *opheilo*, obligation) by the nature of who we are and whose we are as the *pleroma* of God’s new creation family.

## Philemon

This personal letter is a specific relational context in which the ecclesiology of the whole is made functional. Paul takes Philemon deeper into God’s whole on God’s terms, just as his purpose for Col. Thus, Phlm needs to be understood by the *phroneo* and *phronema* Paul established in Col for the *synesis* necessary for the *pleroma* of God. Placed prior to Eph, Phlm becomes a functional bridge to Eph, in which Paul makes definitive the theological basis for Philemon’s relational function.

## Ephesians

This letter closely followed Col and Phlm, and it represents an even further development of Paul's thought and theology than Col. Paul also appears to develop further the theological clarity of Rom—likely his deeper theological reflection with the Spirit for *synesis*, while in prison—by defining the theological forest and adding aspects he did not include in Rom, notably *pleroma* ecclesiology for the theology of God's whole family functioning on God's relational terms. Yet, ecclesiology is never about doctrine for Paul but only about relationship together to be God's whole family on God's relational terms of wholeness.

**1:3-14**—Paul's theological forest within which *pleroma* ecclesiology is relationally embodied.

**1:15-23**—He keeps praying for them for the purpose that the Father may give their persons an inner-out quality in reciprocal involvement with the Spirit to specifically know God further (*epignosis*, v.17), and that their qualitative *phroneo* of their inner-out person (“the eyes of your heart”) be illuminated to know the hope of God's calling (‘already’ and ‘not yet’)—to be in whole relationship together, which involves the depth of the Father's inheritance as his very own children (v.18) and which includes “the immeasurable greatness of his power for us who relationally respond in trust” (v.19). This power is the same as the relational function of the whole of God's power which worked “in Christ” in the process of redemptive reconciliation for God's eschatological plan (vv.20-22). God's power is not about what God has but it always involves God's relational action in how God is to enact his eschatological plan in thematic relational response of grace for relationship together. God's power only functions with this relational purpose; therefore, it must not be disconnected from its relational action or it loses its functional significance, both in its eschatological trajectory and in its present involvement with the church. The church is both the object of God's power and its recipient to be its subject in ontology and function as “the *pleroma* of Christ” (v.23).

**2:1-22**—Paul then penetrates even deeper into the experiential truth for those “in Christ.” He gets to the heart of Christian identity, that is, to the inner-out ontology of the person made whole (and new) and to the whole ontology of the church with those whole persons in the transformed relationships together necessary to function whole in God's new creation family.

**3:1-13**—“My *synesis* of the mystery of Christ” (v.4) was never shaped by his own theological effort but only “revealed to this holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit” (v.5), notably to Paul. Paul did not draw only from the Jesus tradition but his direct relational experience with the whole of God. The relational epistemic process engaged with the Spirit precludes the need for human speculation, shaping and doubt.

**3:14-21**—“Because of this experiential reality (*charin*) I engage the Father in relationship directly” (v.14), in Paul's identity of ‘whose we are’ (v.15), to pray in the qualitative depth of God's relational context of family with the integral relational process of family love. Paul's prayer is only for wholeness, the peace Christ embodied, thus it focuses only on the whole person with an inner-out ontology and the primacy of function in whole relationships together in God's family love necessary to constitute the church.

**4:1-6**—This wholeness for Paul was not about theological discourse and having the correct theology. Rather than engaging in a theological task, he engaged the experiential truth constituting the heart of who they were and whose they were “in Christ.” Thus, he engaged them directly in family love for the transformed relationships necessary to be God’s whole family, and not to diminish, minimize or even lose their ontological identity. The ontological inner-out depth of church identity is relationally embodied in the interrelated, interdependent and integrated function of the whole of who they are together in whose they are.

**4:7-13**—The ontological whole of church identity is not a human construction shaped in human contextualization by human terms. This identity is solely constituted by God’s relational action of grace ‘from above’, the dynamic of which Christ relationally embodied to make each person together to be God’s whole (vv.8-10).

**4:14-19**—The relational and functional significance to be whole together is qualitatively distinct from the reductionism shaping human contextualization by human terms and effort. Paul describes the latter as those functioning in a reductionist ontology shaped by prevailing human context (*nepios*, immature, v.14), for which he prescribes the vulnerable involvement of reciprocal relationship together in family love (v.15). The relational outcome will be “the body’s growth in building itself up in love” (v.16). The alternative in contrast and conflict is outer-in ontology and function (vv.17-19).

**4:25-32**—He makes functional what is the relational significance of this new creation—various relational functions congruent with the wholeness of the new creation, which should not be confused with obligation/duty (*opheilo*) of mere Christian ethics and morality. These relational functions need to be understood in relation to the three issues involved in all practice: (1) the integrity of the person presented, (2) the quality of communication from that person, and (3) the depth level of relationship that person engages. And the Spirit is the primary key to this whole process (v.30).

**5:1-14**—“live in love as Christ loved us” is not about imitating his behaviors or merely following his example or model. This relational imperative is the accountability of one’s ontology and function to be (*ginomai*) in relationship together with the depth of involvement of love, which signifies God’s new creation family as constituted by the *pleroma* of God’s relational response of grace. But church ontology and function is diminished without clear distinction from the ordinary, common, normative practice of the surrounding context—the distinction only of “children of light” (v.8). The light is both an ontological condition and a relational function, whose identity and function must be accounted for in all church life and practice (vv.9-14).

**5:15-21**—Therefore Paul is emphatic about the imperative “Be careful how you live [in the surrounding context]...making the most of the *kairos* [to live whole] because the days are [existing in the sin of reductionism]” (vv.15-16). He never underestimates the influence of reductionism and the persistence of its author (cf. 6:16). The presence and function of God’s whole is the only definitive alternative of qualitative significance to reductionism. And to be whole and live whole is a functional only of the integral relational process of *agape* involvement together in the relationships of God’s family. The key in this process for Paul is not more human effort (“do not”) but the necessity to “be complete (*pleroo*) in reciprocal relationship with the Spirit” (v.18) in order to be the whole that counters reductionism. Moreover, this reciprocal relational involvement includes worshipping God together (vv.19-20). And in contradistinction to the self-



autonomy/determination/justification of reductionism, Paul makes definitive the critical relational dynamic for relationship together to function whole: “submit to one another *with family love* out of reverence for Christ” (v.21), who submitted to the Father in order to relationally embody God’s family love so that we can be made whole in God’s family. This is the whole Christ saved us to, which constitutes our ontological identity together of who we are and whose we are. “Submit” (*hypotasso*) is a voluntary relational action and should not be confused with a compulsory act of obedience. Paul’s relational dynamic of submission is a function only of family love, which gives primacy to whole relationship together over an individual’s self-interests/concerns yet without sacrificing the whole person’s significance in God’s new creation family. Paul’s interpretative lens for “submit” is not from human contextualization but from the whole relational context and process embodied by Jesus.

**5:22-6:9**—It is only in this integral relational process of family love that “submit” has significance for Paul, and thus how any submission he advocates must be understood. The three relationships he highlights here echo Col, with notable extension of the marriage relationship in analogy with the church. Each of these relationships is associated with a social role that forms a secondary identity, which Paul takes beyond to contextualize all roles and secondary identities into our primary identity of who we are and whose we are together as the church family. And what Paul makes definitive is the new relational order of God’s new creation family—the transformed relationships together of *pleroma* ecclesiology.

**6:10-20**—He contextualizes these persons, relationships, roles and identities in the whole of God’s relational context and process. As he does this, the surrounding context of the world also goes further than the Greco-Roman world within the ancient Mediterranean context, and deeper than any other human contextual, structural or systemic factors. Paul penetrated deeply into our human ontology and the heart of our identity “in Christ”; and he clearly makes definitive our surrounding context in which we are called to be whole and sent to make whole. This unavoidable context is not only the context of reductionism but most importantly the context of its author (“the devil,” v.11, “the evil one,” v.16). Despite all the negative human situations, circumstances, conditions and issues, Paul makes known unequivocally: “our struggle is not against *those quantitative indicators* but against *their underlying influence and counter-relational work or reductionism constituted by evil*” (v.12). Paul doesn’t underestimate reductionism or assume overconfidence toward Satan. To live and make whole in the surrounding context of reductionism in confrontation with its author necessitates the whole of God and God’s resources (vv.11-17, not by our own well-intentioned effort), which Paul bookends (vv.10,18, in possible chiasm) with the relational process involved that might otherwise appear as our burden of responsibility: “be made strong (passive voice) in *your relational involvement with the Lord*” by means of ongoing reciprocal relational involvement of “pray in the Spirit....” This reciprocal relational involvement will engage the presence, involvement and resources of God “to stand against the wiles of the devil” (v.11) and thus “to withstand” (v.13) reductionism and to be whole. Therefore, Paul’s conclusion in this letter is directed solely to this ongoing conflict for the sake of the experiential truth and whole of the gospel, the gospel of wholeness (v.15), for which he had been fighting and continues to seek boldness without constraint (vv.19-20). The relational outcome ‘already’ for Paul is *pleroma* ecclesiology, nothing less and no substitutes.

## Philippians

**1:1-2**—In his address Paul includes the bishops (cf. *presbyteros*, Acts 20:28) and deacons, which indicates some structure or organization to that church. Church leadership, however, does not suggest a hierarchy of roles, sine Paul identifies both Timothy and himself as servants. This was still about their wholeness together (“peace”) based on God’s relational response of grace (“from God”).

**1:3-11**—He identifies them as fully sharing together (*koinonia*) in the experiential truth of the whole gospel (v.5); and he affirms his intimate relational involvement with them in reciprocal relationship (“you hold me in your heart,” v.7, “I long for all of you,” v.8) constituted by their involvement together (*synkoinonos*) in relational response to God’s grace (v.7). This is God’s family love they share in together, and Paul prays for their family love to grow in the relational function of wholeness together until ‘not yet’ (vv.9-11).

**1:12-18**—Paul puts his own situation into the relational context and process of God’s big picture (vv.12-14). Regardless of his situation and how others react to them (vv.15,17), Paul is confident that God can still use that negativity for the purpose to fulfill God’s desires and action. So Paul still rejoices, even at some personal cost to him (v.18).

**1:19-30**—He qualitatively understands (*oida*) that through their relational involvement together in God’s relational context of family and relational process of family love (“your prayers and the help of the Spirit”) they will experience further the relational outcome to be more deeply made whole (*soteria*, v.19). Thus he will not allow situations to define him and determine his practice (v.20) because for Paul living was about *zoe* (not *bios*) in family together with Christ (v.21). And this creates ambivalence for Paul to be ultimately with Christ in his relational context (v.23) or to remain (*meno*) to share in relationship together (*parameno*) “with all of you” (v.25). The former is more important but the latter is also vital “for your *relational* progression of your relational response of trust in relationship together for the joyful relational outcome in Christ ‘already’ to go further and deeper” (*perissos*, v.26). Therefore, whatever situations happen ahead, Paul makes it definitive for them to relationally function in the experiential truth of the whole gospel (v.27). This will signify the relational and functional significance of the gospel of wholeness, *pleroma* soteriology, to the reductionists for their redemption (v.28). He makes paradigmatic the theological journey of the whole relational process Christ embodied, in which they have the relational opportunity to be involved with Christ in the various situations, circumstances and struggles in the surrounding context in order to be whole, live whole and make whole—God’s whole family relationally embodied by Christ (vv.29-30).

**2:1-4**—Some critical issues are raised in four interrelated conditional statements involving their relational experience. This is neither about implementing doctrine nor about following disembodied teaching in ethical practice.

**2:5-11**—That is, have the same qualitative *phroneo* as Christ and function relationally just as Christ also relationally embodied: the theological journey of Christ begins with a high Christology (“was in the form of God,” v.6), that is, preexisting in the ontology as God, not as mode but as person; although completely equal with God, Christ did not regard it “as something to be exploited” (*harpagmos*, v.6); unclear theologically what *harpagmos* involves, I suggest in terms of function it involves not being defined by that

aspect of his identity and letting it determine how he would function in the incarnation—implying that Jesus didn't impose himself on us and engage in power relations; on the contrary, he “*keno* himself” (from *kenos*, empty, v.7), which is also unclear theologically, yet I suggest in terms of relational function *keno* involves submission and humility of his God-person in order to take on aspects of human identity in ontology and function, inexplicably conjoined with his God-person, and thus to relationally embody God's family love for the redemption necessary (“death on the cross,” v.8) to be reconciled and made whole in God's family together—fulfilling God's relational response of grace to the human condition; therefore, also, the God-persons were relationally united (never ontologically separated), and the Son assumed his relational position and function in the whole of God's eschatological plan and is once again exalted as Lord, along with the Father in God's whole (vv.9-11).

Paul makes this theological journey of Christ paradigmatic as the relational model for congruent relational function in Christian life and practice to be whole with Christ in his relational context of family by his relational process of family love: Just as Jesus relationally embodied the ontology from inner out of one whose identity is special as person in the whole of God, yet whose unique God-person function is not special in the sense of giving priority to the individual over the whole. Just as Jesus submitted in his special identity to relationally function in his unique God-person function for the sake of the whole of God's family love to be relationally embodied to us for the experiential truth of the whole gospel (as signified in Paul's four interrelated statements, vv.1-4). In other words, just as Jesus relationally embodied in the incarnation, those “in Christ” must by its nature be congruent with in order to be compatible in relationship together.

**2:12-18**—Therefore, Paul makes it imperative for their ongoing involvement in only the relational work to be whole (“work out your own salvation,” v.12), not in human works but in reciprocal relationship with the whole of God and God's relational work “who is at work in you” for God's only relational purpose (*eudokia*)—as Jesus relationally embodied—of whole relationship together in God's family (v.13). Thus, whatever their situation or circumstance (v.14), they are to function only for the relational purpose to be and live God's whole family—“blameless (*amemptos*) and innocent (*akeraios*) children of God” (v.15). *Amemptos* and *akeraios* are not sufficiently understood by ethical and moral practice; they have the sense of a condition that is not qualitatively reduced, and thus are better rendered to be “whole.” This sense is the functional significance Paul further describes with *amomos* (not crooked, in sound or unblemished condition, that is, whole), which is necessary in a reductionist context (“a crooked and turned-from-the-truth generation”) for their whole ontology and function to be undiminished light to illuminate the relationally embodied “word of *zoe*” (v.16) for the human condition in the world. Nothing less and no substitutes of their life and practice could be whole, or could make Paul “glad and rejoice” in reciprocal relationship together (vv.17-18).

**2:19-30**—Paul elaborates on his relational involvement in family love together with Timothy and Epaphroditus. What is unmistakable about their surrounding context, which apparently also fragments their church, is the influence of reductionism signified in the function “All of them are seeking their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” (v.21).

**3:1-11**—Without apology, Paul further identifies the reductionists in the church who function from an outer-in ontology defined by their human effort (vv.2-3), which, in

comparative analysis, Paul highlights his own reductionist identity previously defined by what he did and had (vv.4-6). What follows demonstrated Paul's process of his own growth and development.

**3:12-16**—Despite his metaphor (cf. 1 Cor 9:24-25), Paul understands that this is not about achievement in human effort, however rigorous and well-intentioned. This work is only relational work in the process of reciprocal involvement together with the whole of God. Those growing (mature, *teleios*) in this relational process have the necessary qualitative *phroneo* (from the whole *phronema*); and when their perspective becomes qualitatively different (*heteros*) the Spirit will give them feedback to function based on the relational outcome 'already' (vv.15-16).

**3:17-21**—Paul reminds them that their ontology and function are defined and determined by either of two contextualizations: either human and thus reductionism ("their *phroneo* is set on outer-in earthly things," vv.18-19), or God's and thus whole ("transformed from inner out," vv.20-21). The distinction between these two contextualizations is crucial.

**4:1**—Therefore for the purpose (*hoste*) of family love together to be God's whole, Paul makes it a relational imperative for them to relationally function clearly without ambiguity (*steko*, "stand firm") in relational compatibility (*houtos*) with the whole of God—and thus nothing less and no substitutes from reductionism.

**4:2-20**—Paul adds various ongoing practices which help to constitute this necessary relational function:

- As those ontologically and relationally interconnected together (*syzygos*, "yoke fellows," v.3), be involved among yourselves (*syllambano* in middle voice) in the relational work of reconciliation necessary ongoingly to be whole together without relational fragmentation or distance (as signified between Euodia and Syntyche, v.2); a functional key for whole relationship together as family.
- Whatever your situation or circumstance, maintain ongoing relational involvement and open communication with God, "rejoice in the Lord...who is near...let your requests be made known to God, and the wholeness of God...will guard your *whole person from inner out* in Christ Jesus" (vv.4-7); a functional key for reciprocal relationship together .
- Focus on qualitative things and "put them together in your mindset" (*logizomai*, v.8), moreover the wholeness "you learned, received, heard and saw in me," ongoingly engage in relational function (*prasso*) "and the God of wholeness will be *relationally involved* with you" (vv.8-9); a hermeneutical key to be and live whole.

Paul closes with a secret he has learned (*myeo*) from his own circumstances (v.12) and thus has learned (*manthano*, v.11) the experiential truth: that situations and circumstances do not define who and what he is or determine how he functions—which otherwise reduces the person to outer in—but in all those I can be a qualitative whole person from inner out and live whole in relationships together, even make whole, by ongoing reciprocal relational involvement with the whole of God who constitutes me (*endynamoo*, v. 13) not to do something from outer in but to live whole from inner out, and who continues to make me whole (*pleroo*) according to God's whole, "his riches in glory *relationally embodied* in Christ Jesus" (v.19). This is the relational outcome 'already' of the experiential truth of the whole gospel—which, if your experiential truth also, you are then accountable for (2:1-5).

## Paul's Album of Family Love (Pastorals)

I suggest that the following letters were a compilation of Paul's personal thoughts, advice and written notes to Timothy and Titus, who formed them with the Spirit into personal letters for some edifying purpose (not for nostalgic reasons) after Paul's death—while contextualizing Paul in their later period of the church, thus accounting for the apparent further development of church order. The content of these letters is representative wholly of Paul, not mere Pauline fragments which Timothy and Titus shaped or constructed of the Pauline corpus. What unfolds is more than pastoral but reflects the further and deeper involvement of Paul's family love to make the whole relationships together of God's family.

By working in cooperation with the Spirit, Timothy and Titus fulfilled God's complete relational purpose for the canonical inclusion of Paul's corpus.

### Titus

For the relational purpose of building God's whole family on God's terms, Titus needed only a shorthand summary from Paul.

**1:1-4**—Other than Rom, none of Paul's other letters identified him in the expanded context of the whole of God's thematic relational response of grace for relationship together. The theological content ("God's elect," "the truth," "eternal life," "before the ages began," "in due time revealed his word") should not distract us from the relational process of God's action. Nor should this theological content be assumed without the relational significance of God's vulnerable involvement. God's relational process of vulnerable involvement is the only functional basis to know God specifically as experiential truth ("the *epignosis* of the truth"), the relational outcome of which necessitates the reciprocal response of trust ("the faith we share") for whole relationship together ("grace and peace"). This is the relational function of God's family, the church, which Paul makes further operational for Titus to engage the churches in Crete for their ecclesiology to be whole.

Evidently, Titus—whom Paul would not allow to be circumcised (Gal 2:1-3)—faced opposition in Crete from "those of the circumcision" (1:10), which signified the influence and conflict of reductionism (notably of the law) and its counter-relational work (v.11). He encourages Titus to clearly teach the distinction between reductionist function and wholeness and what they are saved to (2:1-14), thus for Titus to live whole and make whole among them (v.15).

Paul reiterates (a reminder to Titus from his other letters) the basis and ongoing base for Christian life and practice as only God's relational response and involvement of grace (3:4-7). This was already the experiential truth for the Gentile Titus, and the experiential truth Paul wants Titus to make relationally functional for "those who have *the relational response of trust* in God" (v.8), in order that the church family "learns to devote themselves *in the necessary relational work* so that they may not be *relationally uninvolved, disconnected*" (v.14). This is the vulnerable involvement of family love in

whole relationship together that signifies reciprocal relational involvement to God's relational response of grace (v.15).

Thus, Paul reminds Titus what is expected of him and for what he is accountable as a church leader. This letter then can be seen for the edifying purpose for all church leaders to engage their relational responsibility for church ontology and function to be God's whole family together, and only on God's relational terms.

## 1 Timothy

Timothy necessitates greater input/feedback from Paul in family love for his accountability as a church leader than was needed for Titus.

**1:1-2**—Timothy's compilation of Paul's communication to him appears to be expressed much more in Timothy's wording than Paul's—emphasizing authority over relationship and shifting subtly from gospel to doctrine, perhaps to help Timothy deal with the difficult situations he faced.

**1:3-11**—Paul distinguishes the teaching of “any different doctrine” and the speculations of human effort in “myths and endless genealogies” from the relational epistemic process “by faith.” He clarifies that the *telos* (purpose, objective, end) of God's desires is not doctrinal purity but only God's relational process of family love emerging out of (*ek*) a heart made whole (“pure”) qualitatively from inner out (“a good conscience,” not about mere ethics) signifying a genuine relational response of trust (“sincere faith”). Anything less and any substitutes reduce God's whole and reshapes the gospel by human effort on human terms, which is the ontological simulation and epistemological illusion of reductionism being practiced by some in the church (1:6-7). Paul reminds Timothy that focusing on “the law is good” only “if one uses it legitimately” (v.8), that is, in its relational context without reductionism and thus not contrary to whole (*hygiaino*, healthy) teaching (not merely sound doctrine) constituted by the experiential truth of the whole gospel entrusted to Paul (v.11).

It is this tension and conflict which must be grasped in these three letters for them to clearly demonstrate being from Paul and of Paul. Only this extends Paul's conjoint fight for the gospel of wholeness and against reductionism.

**1:18-20**—In family love, Paul gives Timothy definitive instruction, reinforcing Timothy's call (4:14), to be rigorous in the qualitative relational context and process necessary to be whole and not in quantitative secondary matters which reduce the whole of God's relational context and process as some in the church function.

**2:**—discussed previously in chapter 11, question 11.

**3:**—Paul previously indicated the presence of some church order (Phil 1:1), which is expanded now by Timothy's current church context, and the function of church leaders remains for the church to be God's relational whole on God's relational terms. Paul anticipates the development of church order for Timothy and Titus in order for them to have his whole perspective of this relational order. God's relational context and process of family clearly distinguish the church from an organization, institution or mere voluntary association (v.15). Therefore, given Paul's whole *phronema* and qualitative *phroneo*, church leadership should be characterized not merely morally and ethically but

also with more significance relationally. This signified who and what Jesus relationally embodied and how he functioned in the incarnation, the “mystery” (v.16) of whose relational context and process Paul made definitive for the church and its leaders to be whole in likeness.

**4:**—Paul concentrates Timothy’s focus on “godliness” (4:7-8), which is only a function of relationship together and not a function of an individual’s behavior and character; also, *eusebeia* is certainly not about asceticism (vv.3-5) or based on any human construction of religious practice (v.7, cf. 2 Tim 3:5). While *eusebeia* may involve virtues, Paul is not focused on individual virtues. Moreover, godliness is not about “sound doctrine” or doctrinal purity (v.16). These all shift the focus and involve reductionism of the relational function in qualitative involvement together necessary to be God’s whole family. Paul focuses Timothy only on this relational function, which was not about strengthening Timothy in self-discipline like an athlete despite being “of some value,” but for the primary function “valuable in every way” (v.8). Thus, Paul formulates a “relational paradigm of godliness” for Timothy’s wholeness in his ongoing life and practice: “Be involved (*eimi*) wholly in this *primary relational* practice (*meletao*) so that your progress, that is, wholeness, may be openly seen (*phaneros*, cf. *phaneroo*) to all” (v.15). It is Timothy’s experiential truth of this “teaching” in his whole person, not about doctrine, that Paul makes imperative for Timothy to “continue to live, dwell in” (*epimeno*) because this relational involvement is the functional key to “make whole (*sozo*) both yourself and your hearers” (v.16). Along with the Spirit (4:1), Paul makes operational for Timothy the experiential truth of the whole gospel in the ecclesiology of God’s whole, for which Timothy is wholly accountable as a church leader.

**5:1-6:21**—Anything less and any substitutes in relationship together are reductionism, which Paul continues to address in church life and practice. What counters and nullifies reductionism’s counter-relational work of distancing and fragmenting relationships are the transformed relationships together both equalized (5:21) and intimate which are necessary by its nature to be God’s whole family in the relational function of family love (5:1-2).

Thus Paul’s charge to Timothy (5:21; 6:11-16,20) was not to bear witness to Christian virtues but to wholly bear witness to his full identity of who he is and whose he is—in the experiential truth of whole relationship together as God’s family by family love, not by doctrine. This is the experiential truth and wholeness of the gospel which “has been entrusted to your care” (6:20) with nothing less and no substitutes. Therefore, Timothy necessarily by the nature of (*dei*, not obligation) his full identity had to make his whole person vulnerable and to step out in family love in order for his relational involvement to be compatible, congruent and thus definitive in function. Any shyness, timidity, backing away or wishy-washy action on his part signified his engagement in reductionism.

Timothy’s susceptibility, or even tendency, to be influenced by reduced ontology and function was further addressed by Paul with supportive family love in a more affectionate second letter.

## 2 Timothy

**1:1-2**—Either Paul included “mercy” or perhaps Timothy added this (in both letters, 1 Tim 1:2) to the significance of Paul’s usual greeting (“grace and peace”) because Timothy personally has been experiencing much *eleos* (mercy, compassion) due to his shortcomings. Also, the affectionate tone of this letter over the more business-like first letter is quickly set by Paul’s address of Timothy as “my dear son.”

**1:3-18**—Unlike 1 Tim, Paul includes a reflective section about Timothy, which is characteristic of Paul’s undisputed letters about his addressees. His reflection is relational (“I remember you constantly,” v.3) and intimate (“recalling your tears, I long to see you,” v.4). At the same time, Paul gets down to the heart of Timothy, a heart that has been somewhat restrained and not vulnerably in its full involvement, thus reduced: “I remind you...for God did not give us...but rather a *qualitative resource from inner out (dynamis)* of love *to be relationally involved* and of *the right mindset*” (*sophronismos* from *sophroneo*, vv.6-7) so that Timothy would not be reduced to counter-relational work.

The relational consequence of Timothy’s functional posture in reductionism may not be apparent because it may be obscured by the appearance “of your sincere faith” (v.5). Yet Paul makes clear its relational repercussions with the penetrating phrase “do not be ashamed” (v.8). Timothy likely was not knowingly or intentionally ashamed but his reductionist function of avoiding vulnerability involves keeping relational distance, which has the essential relational consequence of being “ashamed of our Lord or of me.” In relational contrast, Paul affirms his relational function, “I am not ashamed...whom I have put my trust” (v.12), and testifies of Onesiphorus who “was not ashamed of *me even in my chain*” (v.16).

Any relational distance, whether from implied shame or not, involves a relational dynamic of not being vulnerable in one’s whole person with other persons or what identifies them, thus resulting even in a disassociation with one’s own person and identity. In other words, Paul implies that by Timothy’s action (or lack of) he diminishes his person and identity, the gospel and also minimalizes God and God’s relational response of grace merely to what Jesus saved *from* without the full soteriology of what Jesus saved *to*. This is a subtle process for those engaged in ministry, notably as church leaders, yet who avoid making themselves vulnerable to action, relationships, situations, etc., which may have consequences for their self-image/worth/concerns/interests or self-autonomy/determination/justification.

‘Who one is’ and ‘whose one is’ are a function of only relational involvement together in the relational context and process embodied by Christ and deepened in reciprocal relationship by the Spirit (vv.13-14).

**2:1-13**—“Therefore,” Paul says affectionately in family love, “you, my child, be strong in the *relational response* of grace that is in Christ Jesus.” In contrast to timidity, the common perception would be of Timothy needing to take on a strong personality, demonstrating strength and not weakness. Paul is directing him deeper into his whole person. While there may not be a necessary difference between the compound *endynamoo* (to make strong or vigorous) and its simpler root *dynamo* (from *dynamis*, 1:7), Paul is going deeper with *endynamoo* to address Timothy’s person from inner out.



He is not trying to change Timothy's outward personality but pointing to the experiential truth of Timothy's whole identity, which is made definitive by the relational response of grace embodied by Jesus. That is, Timothy's whole person from inner out needs to be determined, and thus made vigorous, by his vulnerable relational involvement of trust with the vulnerable relational involvement of grace embodied by Jesus. Only the experiential truth (not doctrinal) of this relational involvement together can have the unmistakable relational outcome both necessary and sufficient for Timothy's whole person and identity to relationally function wholly in the relationships necessary to constitute God's new creation family.

For this reason, therefore, Paul makes this a relational imperative for Timothy, and all church leaders (v.2). What Paul makes definitive, however, is not a system (*hypotyposis*) of static doctrine (1:13), nor a rigorous paradigm for ministry (2:3-6). Moreover, Paul is not suggesting merely optional teaching shaped by an individual's terms. This relational imperative is irreducible and nonnegotiable because it signifies the only relational response compatible to God's relational response of grace for vulnerable reciprocal relationship together. Since this relational imperative involves the whole person, Paul understands well that it cannot be engaged by reductionism from outer in—just vulnerably from inner out. Thus, it cannot be legislated, self-generated out of obligation or a mere expression of duty from one's role. So Paul conjoins this relational imperative with another: “Think over (*noeo*, meditate on) what I communicate (both content and relational messages) for the Lord will give you *synesis* in all things” (v.7). This imperative is not about turning inward in some self-reasoning process because the noetic process highlighted is the relational epistemic process engaged with God—Paul assumes Timothy's reciprocal involvement with the Spirit (1:14)—who will help us grasp all this by interrelating these aspects together for integration into its whole (*synesis*). This whole is entirely God's whole, the whole of the gospel that Jesus relationally embodied for our experiential truth (2:8-13), without which there is no coherence in theology and peace in practice.

**2:14-26**—Paul knows that as Timothy's experiential truth of God's relational response of grace is deeply rooted in relationship together with his vulnerable reciprocal involvement, that Timothy's relational function in the whole of the gospel will emerge also—free from reductionism. So he encourages Timothy to “be diligent to present your *whole person vulnerably* to God *in his grace* as one affirmed by him, who does his relational work unashamed, thus who wholly handles (*orthotomeo*) the word of experiential truth *entirely for relationship together, not as static doctrinal truth reduced of its relational significance*” (v.15). Yet, Paul also knows well that unless Timothy relationally functions whole in his person (vv.21-22), that he will be unable to wholly address the influence of reductionism surrounding him (vv.16-20) and also will be inadequate to necessarily deal with reductionism's counter-relational work (vv.14,23-26). This points to the integrating them of Paul's fight for the whole of the gospel and his concern in family love for ecclesiology to be whole.

**3:1-9**—Reductionism not only persists but will get worse in the church, both in ontological simulation (“holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power,” v.5) and epistemological illusion (“always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of truth,” v.7).

**3:10-17**—Thus, Paul makes another relational imperative for Timothy to “dwell (*meno*) relationally in what you have learned...” (vv.14-17), that is, to ongoingly engage the relational epistemic process and be relationally involved with God’s communicative action (“the holy Scriptures...breathed out by God,” *theopneustos*, vv.15-16). It is this ongoing relational involvement with the communicative words from God—not the mere rational study of quantitative discourse on doctrine—which will have the relational outcome “so that persons relationally belonging to God may be whole (*artios*, complete), having been made functionally complete (*exartizo*, cf. *katartizo*, Eph 4:12) for every relational work *necessary to be whole, live whole and make whole*” (v.17).

**4:1-5**—It is with this qualitative *phroneo* within the whole *phronema* of the whole of God’s relational context of family and relational process of family love in the eschatological big picture that Paul completes his charge to Timothy and all church leaders: “relationally communicate the embodied Word for relationship together, not a disembodied Word for mere doctrine; be relationally involved (*ephistemi*, to come near, stand beside), whether opportune (*eukairos*) or not (*akairos*), whatever the situation or circumstance, in order to make God’s whole in family love (“expose, rebuke, encourage”) with the utmost patience in relationally embodied teaching...; keep your perspective (*nepho*) with the qualitative *phroneo* and whole *phronema* in all matters, even during hardship, and engage the necessary relational work of a person functioning not from outer in merely in a role of church leader but rather from inner out involving your whole person, who therefore fulfills your ministry in wholeness” (*plerophoreo*, cf. v.17).

**4:6-22**—Paul’s closing notes are an interaction of this relational process with reductionist situations/circumstances, with God’s whole of reciprocal relationship together ongoingly prevailing (vv.8,18)—the experiential truth and whole of the gospel, nothing less and no substitutes.

This completes Paul’s album of family love for ecclesiology to be whole, the whole ontology of God’s new creation family in whole function on God’s relational terms—which Paul holds church leaders accountable for and challenges their theological assumptions of anything less and any substitutes.

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