



# Paul

## On a Mission from God

### Week 5

### Paul's Big Ideas – Part I

Michael Gorman's book, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord*, has been very helpful in the development of this class.



### What do we mean by “big ideas?”

- ❖ The first Christians had a lot to make sense of!
  - Jesus' crucifixion & resurrection
  - Pentecost and the outpouring of God's Spirit
- ❖ The resurrection and the arrival of God's Spirit are part of the package called the Day of the Lord. This is about the long-awaited arrival of God's kingdom, but in new and unexpected ways.
  - Paul's “big ideas” are his conclusions about the meaning of all this. If Christ is the foundation on which Paul builds God's colonies, these “big ideas” are the framework. They are his fundamental convictions – and they should be ours too.
- ❖ These are Jewish ideas, interpreted and adjusted in light of the resurrected Messiah. In other words, Paul is thoroughly, though creatively, scriptural, bearing in mind that Scripture for Paul is the Old Testament.
- ❖ Paul is a “pastoral theologian.” He is not exploring these ideas out of curiosity or as an intellectual pursuit. For Paul, this theological thinking is necessary to support his mission to take the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles and to build lasting covenant communities.



## ***Today's Three Big Ideas***

**The covenant God of Israel**

**The power of sin and the powerlessness of  
the Law**

**The righteousness of God: Faithfulness to  
Israel and mercy to the Gentiles**

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## ***The Covenant God of Israel***

❖ **I Corinthians 8:6**

- “. . . yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.”

❖ **Romans 3:29-30a**

- “Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, since God is one . . . ”

❖ **Galatians 3:8**

- “And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.’ ”

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## **The covenant God of Israel (cont.)**

### ❖ Romans 2:9-13

- “There will be anguish and distress for everyone who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality. All who have sinned apart from the law will also perish apart from the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous in God’s sight, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

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## **The God of the Covenant**

- ❖ The one God who created everything chose Israel and entered into a covenant with Israel who was to be the vehicle through whom God would rescue all humankind.
- ❖ God expects obedience, both from those who have the written Law and those who do not but can listen to their consciences.
  - Israel’s obedience to the Law is grounded in their covenant relationship with God. The giving of the Law came *after* the Exodus, the great salvation event of the Jews.
- ❖ However, Israel has been faithless and the Gentiles have been idolatrous and immoral.
- ❖ Thus, God has planned for a new covenant (Jeremiah 31:31-34; 2 Corinthians 3:6) with Israel and, therefore, with all peoples. God will do himself – for us – what we are unable to do for ourselves.

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## The Power of Sin and the Powerless of the Law

### ❖ Galatians 3:21-22

- “Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through the faith of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe [have faith].”

### ❖ Romans 3:9

- “What then? Are we any better off? No, not at all; for we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under the power of sin, . . .”

### ❖ Romans 8:3

- “For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, . . .”

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## Sin and Law

### ❖ The fundamental human problem is sin (singular). It is a kind of power that overwhelms us (see Genesis 4:1-7).

- Humankind cannot outrun sin or outgrow it. Left to ourselves, another billion years of evolution and education couldn't fix the problem.

### ❖ Sin manifests itself in all the ways we diminish our relationships with God and with one another. We call these sins (plural).

- Gorman uses a great phrase here: *covenantally dysfunctional*. Hence, God uses the metaphor of another covenant, marriage, to talk about Israel's covenant dysfunction.

### ❖ We need to be liberated from sin and forgiven for our sins.

- Liberation/freedom/redemption are **not** synonyms for forgiveness.

### ❖ The Law is simply unable to liberate people from sin. Thus, the Law cannot restore people to righteousness and life.

- The Law is good, but it cannot do the job. The power of sin is simply too great. God's teachings cannot transform – only God. The problem is not ignorance, but sin.

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## ***The Righteousness of God Faithfulness to Israel and Mercy to the Gentiles***

- ❖ Romans 3:3-4a
  - “What if some were unfaithful? Will their faithlessness nullify the faithfulness of God? By no means!”
- ❖ Galatians 3:29
  - “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.”

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## ***How do we know God is righteous?***

- ❖ Romans 3:21-26
  - “But now, apart from law, the righteousness of God has been disclosed, and is attested by the law and the prophets, the righteousness of God through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ for all who believe [have faith]. For there is no distinction [between Jew and Gentile], since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God; they are now justified [righteoused] by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through his faithfulness. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies [righteouses] the one who has faith in Jesus [i.e., the one who trusts in the faithfulness of Jesus].”

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## Romans 3:21-26 (NT Wright's translation)

<sup>21</sup>But now, quite apart from the law (although law and the prophets bore witness to it), God's covenant justice has been displayed.

<sup>22</sup>God's covenant justice comes into operation through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah, for the benefit of all who have faith. For there is no distinction: <sup>23</sup>all sinned, and fell short of God's glory – <sup>24</sup>and by God's grace they are freely declared to be in the right, to be members of the covenant, through the redemption which is found in the Messiah, Jesus.

<sup>25</sup>God put Jesus forth as a seat of mercy, through his faithfulness, by means of his blood. He did this to demonstrate his covenant justice through the passing over (in the divine forbearance) of sins committed beforehand. <sup>26</sup>This was to demonstrate his covenant justice at the present time: that is, that he himself is in the right, and that he declares to be in the right everyone who trusts in the faithfulness of Jesus.

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## The Righteousness of God

### ❖ God's Righteousness

- It is God's *saving power* (Romans 1:16-17)
- It is also God's *covenant faithfulness*, his *covenant justice*. How can God keep the covenant with Israel, despite their sins? How can he do it without being unjust (playing favorites), for Jews and Gentiles alike are in bondage to sin.

### ❖ For Paul, Jesus' faithfulness to the cross demonstrates God's faithfulness to the covenant. The promise made to Abraham has been kept in and through Jesus.

- Jesus is the faithful Israelite who offers faithful covenant obedience to God. Jesus is the faithful remnant of one. God's work here is not a new plan. It is the old plan focused on one faithful Jew who will represent everyone else – this is key to understanding Paul.
- The faithful death of the Messiah reveals to the world that the one true God has been good to his promises, rescuing a world gone wrong.

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