

**PAUL'S LETTERS
AND THE NEW SMALL CHURCHES
OF THE EARLY 1ST CENTURY**

A Sabbatical Study

"Paul the Apostle"
by Albrecht Durer c.1527

A short summary of a sabbatical study of Paul's letters

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Dedicated to my wife Gill, who understood and gave me space, and
my Church who generously gave me this time for a sabbatical.

Finally, to mark the Pilgrims who wanted to try to
follow Scripture as far as they understood it, and sailed
on the Mayflower from Plymouth 400 years ago – today – a quotation:

*“To have ye right worship of God & discipline of Christ established
in ye church, according to ye simplicitie of ye gospel”*

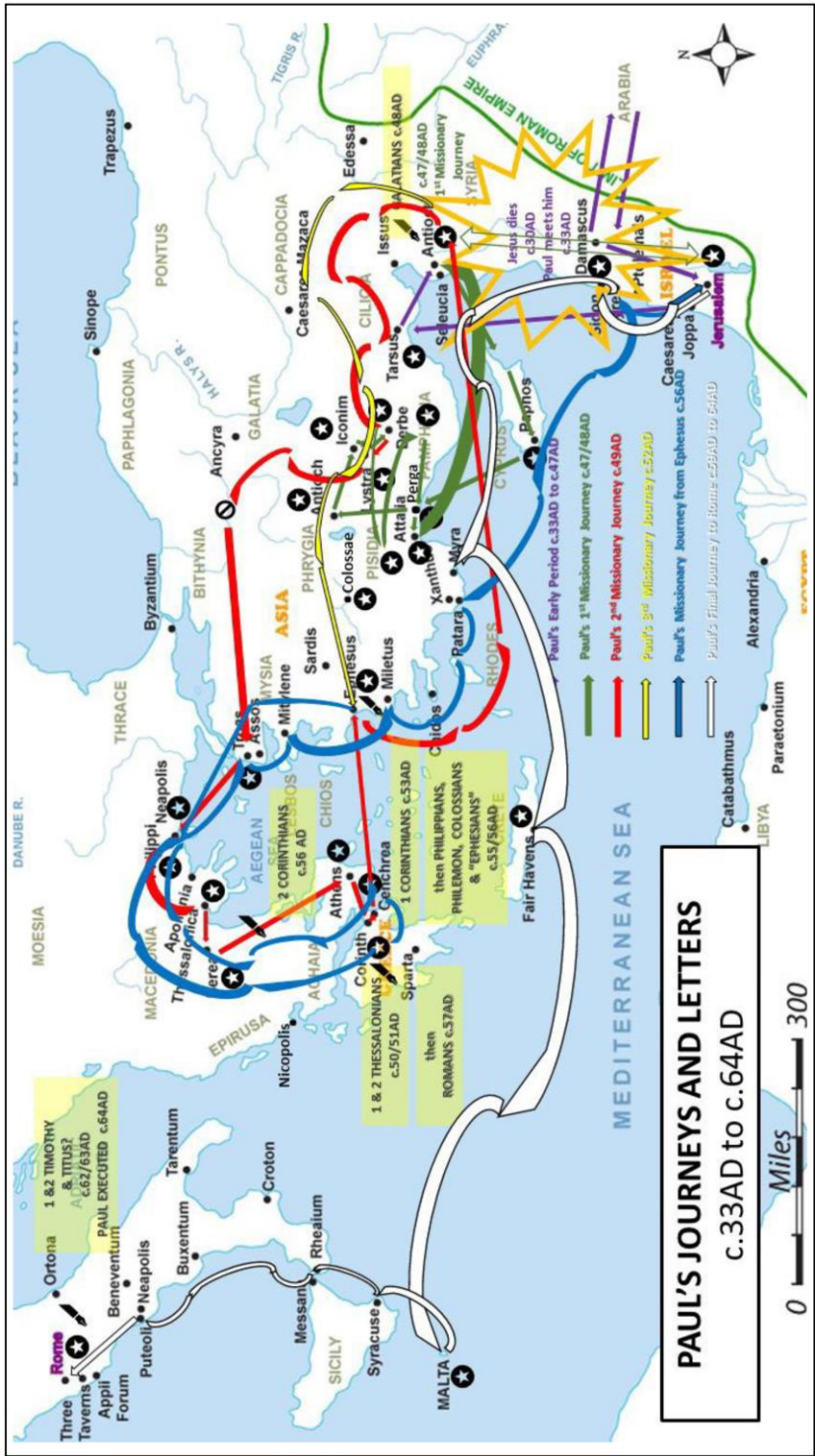
*From the journal of the Pilgrim's leader, William Bradford,
written between 1630 and 1651 in his own hand:*

Of plimoth plantation.

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MAP OF PAUL'S LIFE, JOURNEYS AND LIKELY PLACES OF WRITING

This still image is taken from an animated map presentation that evolved through the Sabbatical. It will hopefully help illustrate when Paul went where, along with the points from which he possibly wrote the different letters, as a helpful visual summary. I found discovering when he probably wrote the different letters helped me understand him more in his greater context.

AN INTRODUCTION

I started out this Sabbatical wanting to try and understand more about the earliest Churches within their surrounding history and culture. It quickly became necessary to concentrate my scriptural reading on the letters of Paul the Apostle. Many agree that his writing is the earliest record we have on those first few decades and that his letters likely all predate other texts, including the Gospels.

This bit of writing is not intended to be a detailed, footnoted thesis – it is just a record of part of a personal Sabbatical – but in a way that:

- a) I hope will help me to not to forget some of what I have experienced and learned and
- b) might help someone else in some small way or prompt a discussion.

The thoughts are mine and may not all be well formed, but they come out of these three months of reading, prayer, reflection and study. I was aware, quite quickly, that the Church of the early 1st century was without modern day complexity, and yet it flourished and became our foundation. Some aspects of current theology, particularly around the Trinity, Baptism and the Eucharist were in a fledgling state as Paul travelled, taught and wrote. This Sabbatical wasn't a time to consider whether the later changes to the wider Church as it evolved from Paul's times were helpful or not: rather I wanted to try and see these early small Churches as they were, through Paul's eyes.

I summarize various themes later on which appeared as I read Paul. Again, they are not intended to be exhaustive. (For that you need to see my handwritten highlighted notes alongside the Bible texts I used throughout my studying period - there were just not enough highlighters or margins available sometimes!) There are also, in the Scripture Appendix at the end of this document, those verses in full that I felt were important from my reading. Please don't read them out of context as 'proof' texts - if I have re-affirmed one thing in reading Paul systematically, it is that context is everything. I came across well-known sections many times to then realise that Paul was possibly just using the topic as an example to make a wider point that he was unfolding over several chapters. One example would be his descriptions of the Last Supper which sit within much larger sections on divisions within the Corinthian Church. Was Paul trying to form a theological view of what we now call the Eucharist or Communion, or might he instead have just been trying to pastor a really difficult congregation?

And so, I wanted to understand Paul – to find the man and the wider geographical and historical contexts he lived in, along with the lives and gatherings of the congregations with which he was engaged.

Therefore, at the beginning of the Sabbatical to get me started, I read the recently published “The New Testament in its World” (by NT Wright & MF Bird). I knew I also needed something else on the early Jewish worship gatherings that were likely the formation of some of the principles behind our earliest churches, so I managed to track down and read “The Origins of the Synagogue” by A Runesson.

Another of the early tasks I set myself was to try and map Paul’s life from meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus (c.33AD) to his death in Rome (c.64AD). Concentrating not just on his journeys, perhaps more importantly, when and where he decided to write to the various infant Christian communities.

The main differences between my map overleaf (a still image of an animated map I created for presentation) and many other similar ones, are to do with Paul’s stay in Ephesus (c.53-56AD). As there was a long stay there, I have split in two what is often called his ‘Third Missionary Journey’ – showing it up to Ephesus and then referring to his ‘Missionary Journey from Ephesus’.

In trying to get as many of Paul’s letters to align with Luke’s record in Acts, Wright & Bird make a suggestion that Paul was possibly imprisoned for a while in Ephesus during his years there. Although this imprisonment isn’t mentioned in Acts 19, it also isn’t that unlikely, considering the regular outcries against Paul. This stay in prison may not have been long, but no Roman prison experience would have left anyone unchanged. This one suggestion then enables the thematically linked letters of Philippians, Philemon, Colossians and Ephesians to sit together much more straightforwardly. As Ephesus was the third largest city in the world after Rome and Alexandria, it seems reasonable for it to also have had an Emperor’s Guard stationed there – a ‘Praetorian Guard’. This group are referred to in Philippians 1:13 which then often placed the writing of ‘Philippians’ in Rome. Wright & Bird place it now in Ephesus. I’m not a scriptural analysis scholar, but I found Wright & Bird’s ideas from their own in-depth decades long study quite compelling, especially as I have now read Paul’s letters in a chronological order. I found it helped to maintain a thought pattern across the letters which meant Paul’s circumstances at each point were included.

(NB as you read though, all scripture quotations in this document are, for ease, from the NIV unless otherwise stated)

PAUL

Paul is likely to have been the first to put pen to paper to be circulated in this new world of Christendom - preceding the Gospels and other Epistles. He was also a well placed 'theologian' of his own era to try and figure out what it meant for his, and wider Jewish conceptions of existing scripture, now he had witnessed two specific things – the risen Messiah and the coming of the promised Holy Spirit.

These two occurrences meant he needed to rejig everything.

By placing Paul in a likely order of places and dates, thereby seeing where he may have written from, how long after his visits etc, I then simply allowed the studying to take me where it led without any pre-supposed topics. It is wonderful, when you have the time, to see so many old things anew. For instance, Paul is the first to write of the 'old covenant' in 2 Cor 3:14. (Jesus did of course say 'new covenant' at the Last Supper which is patently in the oral histories that Paul knows - see 1 Cor 11:23). Would any of these many renewed views be important? Maybe, maybe not – but they helped to understand Paul more and I don't believe any have hindered my personal discovery being fruitful. What was unfolding was the recognition that Paul's epistles are uniquely different to almost all other scripture.

For instance, in the main, we know:

- a) They are probably the earliest texts of the new Church we will ever have.
- b) Who has written them (while acknowledging the debates on authorship etc still exist for some).
- c) Who they are written to (though letters like Ephesians were potentially for a wider Asia Minor audience and not just Ephesus – the earliest manuscripts don't include "To God's holy people in Ephesus").
- d) Approximately the date and place of writing of most.
- e) We can understand some of the contexts from reading into the letters (some very likely, others less so).
- f) As a collection, they illustrate there was still a need for some carefully chosen critical descriptions of particular parts of theology - but not in any broad systematic way - while recognising they are primarily still written for pastoral reasons.
- g) They are our window into the early church trying to understand 'the re-creation' - alongside the real problem of not much changing.

- h) Their content, in the main, holds together exceptionally well with the other histories of the era including Luke's 'Acts'.
- i) Paul is an educated scriptural theologian who has been impacted by the Holy Spirit through divine revelation.
- j) He tried to pastor some really difficult congregations! (With some circumstances not really that far from our own sometimes 😊)
- k) In the main, Paul isn't trying to direct how these early small communities of faith should gather (other than a few parts in 1 Corinthians). He seems generally content to let local practice happen. Rather he wants to help them avoid problems by explaining the theology behind why behaviours should change.
- l) Paul knows it is the Holy Spirit who brings about personal and church change. Therefore, he is concerned when behaviour hasn't modified or divisions occur within fellowships. He believes any who have accepted Jesus by faith should be changing through the actions of the Holy Spirit, and therefore Paul seems to emphasize the Spirit significantly across the canon.

In just spending time with him, I felt I was understanding the man more – and I had one surprise - he was a caring Pastor as well as an Apostle. He was thrilled when churches and individuals thrived and he was devastated when he was wrongly criticised or when a church's behaviour was far from what it should have been. He longed to help them grow in Christ and together.

Saul would have found the resurrection claims of 'The Way', before his own eyes were opened and took on the name Paul, contradictory to his own beliefs of the restoration of creation and Israel that he expected from the Law and the Prophets. But, when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus (Acts 9), with what then followed, he had to rethink what he thought he knew. He spent some 14 years reflecting, with time in Arabia, a short fortnight's visit to Jerusalem to meet Peter and James, time in Syria and Cilicia (all mentioned in Galatians 1) and then onto Antioch and the church that met there, prior to his first missionary journey. Paul's time in Cilicia may have been crucial for his reflection. It is very likely to be where he learned his own original faith and studied. We know Saul came from Tarsus and that may be important. Wright & Bird (page 339) write this of the place of Paul's birth and upbringing:

"Tarsus surpassed both Athens and Alexandria as a seat of learning, being particularly known for its schools of philosophy and rhetoric, and for its poets. Numerous Jewish families had settled in Cilicia during the Seleucid dynasty in the 3rd century BC"

He had to re-work everything he knew using only God's personal revelation, 'Old Testament' scripture, some partial oral history that would only later be written down in the Gospels, observation of the actions of the Holy Spirit through others and especially through himself - and discussion, in time, with the other Apostles.

Paul is a window into understanding what was crucial as these early small churches tried, and sometime failed, to be what they needed to be. I began to wonder if revisiting them may help our small churches today as these early congregations are the ancestors of who we are now. What little they had enabled them to take their part in the growth of God's Kingdom. I am hoping this study of Paul will help in later understanding what may be important and what might not, in the end, be really that necessary.

This, primarily from Wright & Bird, is the approximately dated chronology of Paul used throughout this sabbatical:

33AD	Paul meets Jesus on the road to Damascus
33-47AD	Paul thinks and travels
47AD	Paul's 1st missionary Journey from Antioch
48AD	He writes GALATIANS in Antioch on his return
48/49AD	The Jerusalem Conference (Acts 15)
49AD	2nd missionary journey from Antioch
50/51AD	Paul in Corinth (until c.52AD latest)
50/51AD	Paul writes 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS from Corinth
52/53AD	He returns to Jerusalem and Antioch, then 3 rd journey to Ephesus
53 to 56AD	In Ephesus.
53AD	Writes 1 CORINTHIANS early in his stay in Ephesus
55AD	He then writes PHILIPPIANS later in his stay in Ephesus
56AD	Shortly after, he writes PHILEMON, COLOSSIANS and EPHESIANS
56AD	Travels on the Missionary Journey from Ephesus
56AD	Writes 2 CORINTHIANS from Macedonia before reaching Corinth
57AD	Writes ROMANS from Corinth
57AD	Travels to Jerusalem with 'the collection for the poor'
58/59AD	Hearings and imprisonments in Jerusalem and Caesarea
59AD	Voyage to Rome and shipwreck on Malta
60AD	Arrival in Rome – house arrests etc
	The rest is broader conjecture as there is no history or account in Acts, but if written by Paul, we then also get 1 & 2 TIMOTHY and TITUS prior to:
64AD	Paul's execution

A NOTE ON AUTHORSHIP

There is a difficulty that shouldn't be ignored with Paul's letters relating to the Pastoral Epistles – those known as 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus. Some of the other letters of Paul do have scholars asking questions about them - whether he wrote all or parts of them or whether others did it on his behalf etc - but in the main, there is agreement that Paul's hand was behind them all. However, these three letters are different.

Firstly, while the other Pauline letters appear early in collections from the end of the 1st century, these three haven't got such good provenance. They don't seem to have circulated until later in the 2nd century, though of course, that might just be a coincidence of them having been misplaced.

Secondly, many scholars struggle with the change of vocabulary in these when compared to all Paul's other letters – there are a lot of words here that do not appear anywhere else and some of the grammar is different in places when compared to Paul's normal 'voice'.

Lastly, these three letters refer to occasions and things that are hard to get into journeys linked with Acts. Some theories, to enable their inclusion, need Paul to have been released from prison in Rome (post Acts), gone on some further significant journeys and then been re-imprisoned in Rome. Of course, none of this is impossible. I also recognise, to help the Ephesian collection make more sense, a smaller justification is being made (by scholars like Wright & Bird) for a short, unrecorded in Acts, prison term in Ephesus where he is acknowledged as having lived for c.2 to 3 years.

Biblical scholars seem to be very wary of ever saying directly that they are not by Paul, especially as the worldwide church has a 'canon' of scripture which includes them. While many do make allowance that these three letters are potentially by him, it is obvious there is also some discomfort as there are three very real categories of difficulties mentioned above. Some refer to these letters as the 'Catholic Letters' as they bring into being, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries and later, much of what follows and becomes the Church as we see it today.

But, it is the early small churches I've been interested in trying to capture in some way through Paul. Personally, I came to the point in my reading, especially in trying to find the humanity of the man called Paul, that these just didn't 'feel' like him. However, I won't dismiss them as I may be wrong – but I also wouldn't 'go to the wall' over anything within them either. In the end, Paul himself says something about 'disputable matters' – just read Romans Chapter 14.

SOME REGULAR PAULINE THEMES

As I read the letters, I found a few themes that seemed to repeat, and so I have grouped them below. As I mentioned in the Introduction, my aim was never to create a “detailed, footnoted thesis – it’s just a record of part of a personal sabbatical”. Therefore, all that follows is what came from my reading, study, prayer and reflection. It can’t be comprehensive, and it could well be wrong in places, but it’s a record - initially for myself. I might not hold some of the thoughts too strongly yet as there is still a lot of pondering and prayer to happen. These are just a partial record of a three-month internal conversation that I’m also happy to share with anyone who wants to engage in this journey with me.

After these summaries, within the Scripture Appendix, there are the related sections containing some of the Bible verses that stood out - among many more. So again, these are not meant to be exhaustive but rather illustrative. There are also, within that latter section of scripture quotations, a few more detailed notes on specific thoughts of mine, or quotes from others, related to the particular verses.

The themes following, that caught my attention, with no particular importance necessarily allocated to their order, are:

1. Jesus
2. The Holy Spirit
3. Resurrection and Re-Creation - The passing of the Temple and the Old Covenant for the New
4. Repentance and Transformation
5. Unity & Love in community
6. Church Order

1. JESUS

Was this the first thing written and distributed within Christendom?

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—² and all the brothers and sisters with me,

To the churches in Galatia:

³ Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, ⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, ⁵ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Galatians 1:1-5)

If so, Paul had a high view of Jesus from the start and this does not let up throughout his letters. Here, at the very beginning of his ministry he is affirming not just his own ‘apostleship’ (‘apostolos’ - one who is sent with the authority of the ‘sender’), but that Jesus:

- a) is Lord
- b) is the Christ – or Messiah,
- c) was raised from the dead
- d) was raised by God the Father and
- e) gave himself for our sins to rescue us.

Wow! Not a bad first thing to write to the world about Jesus.

Paul writes Christology and tells us that his primary source is the risen Jesus himself, which he quickly confirms to the Galatians in this, his first ever (possibly) letter:

¹¹ I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. ¹² I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12)

He has a few occasions within his letters, which I have called his ‘creeds’. They’re not formally what we today call those collected agreed beliefs, but he puts so much into them they feel like they could carry the title. He seems to have felt these collected sets of information were crucial for the communities he wrote to for their understanding of who Jesus was, and why Jesus must be central to their congregations.

The earliest potential 'creed' might be:

1 Cor 15:3-5

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

Secondly, a very well-known passage - and another 'creed'?...

Philippians 2:5-11

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

And could this be a third Pauline 'creed'?...

Colossians 1:15-23

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to

himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Paul sees Jesus as supreme and 'head' over all things including the church (Colossians 2:9-10 & Ephesians 1:22) and that he is central - and the reason - for the 'Good News', the 'euangelion', the Gospel that God '*promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures regarding his Son*' (Romans 1:2-3)

For salvation, Jesus is the linchpin for Paul. We see, most directly in Romans 3:21-22b that '*righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe*'.

Lastly, Paul states information within this doxology what others would later try to define (which Paul doesn't seem to try to define at any point in his letters), the Trinity:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all (2 Corinthians 13:14)

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT

If you were to flick to the Scripture Appendix you will find this is the most populated section for selected verses – some eight pages of them. If nothing else, it suggests Paul refers to the Holy Spirit a lot! This in turn might suggest the Holy Spirit is important for Paul if he emphasises him so much to the churches he cares about.

So, what does Paul have to say (in a truncated, very non-complete summary form) about the Holy Spirit? Well here goes - and you will find it all emphasised by texts within the Appendix...

In Galatians 3:3 Paul sort of states the obvious – we need the Holy Spirit to start and therefore, we also need him to keep going:

Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Paul knows the Holy Spirit is God's communicator, the Spirit affirms our 'sonship': he creates both unity and fellowship, he removes the need of 'the Law' because he enables our transformation to know how to live our lives, clothed in Christ. And Paul also confirms that life lived by 'the flesh' won't end well, but life lived with the Spirit will gain 'eternal life'. (Galatians 6:8 below)

Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

The Holy Spirit enables conviction of the truth on hearing the Gospel - and clarifies our consciences. He enables joy within suffering, because he lives within us – which is why a) our behaviour is crucial and b) why it should, over time, change.

We see in 1 Corinthians 2:11 that the Holy Spirit helps us to understand all that God has given us and in 1 Corinthians 12 he enables our unity with a wide diversity of giftings - he creates our 'family'.

Through the Holy Spirit we gain access to the Father (Ephesians 2:18) and we can't grasp the sheer breadth of God's love for us (Ephesians 3:18) without him. He will also 'seal' us in safety until the 'day of redemption'. (Ephesians 4:30)

If you read my notes on the Armour of God passage in Ephesians 6 in the Scripture Appendix, you will find that I also think Paul affirms the Holy Spirit as our enabler in standing against the powers of this world – so we can then - stand.

The Holy Spirit is essential for our life and freedom, to help us individually and as a community of faith, while we wait in hope for the day when we will meet Jesus.

3. RESURRECTION AND RE-CREATION - THE PASSING OF THE TEMPLE AND THE OLD COVENANT FOR THE NEW

Paul had to 're-jig' his view of the Old Testament texts of the return of Israel and the re-creation of the world when he met Jesus and saw the 'promised' Holy Spirit was now active widely among God's people. Thus, his 'new' theology had to make sense of everything he already knew, not dismissing any of it, but he did have to change his perspective. For Paul, the Temple (still standing throughout his lifetime until 70AD) and the Old Covenant had now passed away in importance. What was now recognisable to him was that the new creation had begun, though had not yet been completed. This meant the law and its requirements had now ended, and we were now in the era of the new creation. (Galatians 6:15):

Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

The Temple was now replaced spiritually by us.

Paul could see, in places, that God was dwelling by his Holy Spirit within his people. We no longer required the Temple or the Priests to engage with our loving God – he will now dwell within his people (1 Corinthians 6:19):

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God?

Jesus' resurrection is the key identifier for Paul of the beginning of the re-creation and wider resurrections. So much so, that without it, we might as well all go home...

And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins (1 Corinthians 15:14-17)

And the new Church, as the Body of Christ, is the head with him over this new creation:

And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. (Ephesians 1:22-23)

That's another reason why we need the Holy Spirit: we have a huge new responsibility.

The passing of the 'old covenant' is stated by Paul (the phrase 'old covenant' is a Pauline original, first used in 2 Corinthians 3:14) as he referred to the 'veil' that dulled Israel's mind when the Law and the Prophets were read - and that only Christ now removes it. As we take on Christ, we affirm, each time, the new creation:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)

Finally, it is in Romans 8:19-25 that we see the now and not yet of re-creation. Creation itself 'groans', waiting for its 'liberation' by the 'children of God', in the same way that we 'groan inwardly' for the 'redemption of our bodies'.

When we read the Gospels today, it can feel as if the Temple was a central part of all Jewish life as so much of the story of Jesus within the Gospels is recorded in and around Jerusalem. However, historically, it doesn't appear to have been as important as we might have expected. For most of those of Jewish faith, the scriptures and the synagogue were the faith centres of their lives. There is apparently no historical evidence for any change to the synagogues or their practices from before the destruction of the Temple in 70AD to after it – a catastrophic event, of course, but one that Paul would know nothing of.

4. REPENTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

As mentioned already, Paul expected to see transformation in the lives of those who had placed their faith in Jesus - accepting Jesus as well as the indwelling Holy Spirit. It is because these things weren't universally happening in the churches Paul visited and corresponded with, that he says so much about personal behaviour, which I won't repeat as we can easily discover the areas of our own lives which still need transformation through our own Spirit led consciences.

Ephesians 1:11-14 gives some sort of order to the events leading up to our redemption, starting with election and predestination – everything is in God's plan and is his to reveal. However, for our practical purposes (unless God wants to act sovereignly for some reason), we start with hearing then believing before being marked or sealed until the day of redemption. For many today this is how churches work – come, hear, believe and be saved. But this short 'easy' list misses an important step mentioned later by Paul.

In writing to Corinth (2 Corinthians 4:1-2 and 7:10), he gives us the missing stage...

¹ Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

and...

¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

This is 'repentance' fully described.

Not only did Paul see a need for us to accept that our past behaviour towards God and others has been wrong, but that the interaction with the Holy Spirit within us should bring about 'godly sorrow' at times. The first is necessary, knowing we've done something wrong, but we also need to – our words of 'apologise' or 'saying sorry' don't really help – to have that deep inner voice of sorrowful regret at some point as we accept Jesus - and at later times of sin. As we hear the Good News, the Holy Spirit can interact with us and we can either believe it or not. But if we have heard the full gospel, then hearing of God's love and care for us should bring us to repentance, or as Paul wrote in Romans 2:4...

Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

5. UNITY & LOVE IN COMMUNITY

I'm not sure this is something we can ever achieve under our own steam without the Holy Spirit. It is equally important to think about the need for unity when we see so much 'church-hopping' today over disagreements, or even not 'liking' a particular church anymore. Just from a practical perspective, in the 1st century, unity was crucial - there wasn't another church nearby you could 'hop' to!

Paul does not see unity everywhere, but he longs to. I think it is in those moments of frustration that I saw 'Pastor Paul'. He knows if they continue to 'bite and devour' each other they will be 'destroyed by each other' (Galatians 5:15). Paul can see that any extended time of a lack of unity will be destructive. 'Pastor Paul' (in 1 Corinthians 1:10) finds himself having to 'appeal' to his family...

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

He knows that divisiveness, lack of hospitality, judgementalism and lack of humility can all lead to failure. In fact, he goes further – it is not just that these things won't help, they will actively harm. Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11 about their shared meals at which they break bread and share wine. These meals at their meetings are just an indicator of their wider church issues and Paul says this startling thing of them in verse 17: '*Your meetings do more harm than good.*'

It is within a church's 'common sharing' of the Spirit that we can find unity and joy, humility and care for others (Philippians 2:1-5):

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:... who, being in the very nature, God...

Church should be about the 'other', our neighbour, just as much as it is about our relationship with our Father in heaven through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. The unity within the Godhead should be reflected in the church. Just see how many times the word 'one' appears in Paul's plea to all in the letter to the Ephesians (4:1-6):

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

This unity and love within our communities should not need regulation, just true faith in the full Gospel with the help of the Holy Spirit. In Romans 14:17-19 we see Paul writing about disagreements regarding eating and drinking, but in reality we could enter our own local issue of legalism in the [] brackets below...

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of [eating and drinking], but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. ¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.²

I was grateful for Douglas Moo's "Romans" commentary during my Sabbatical. Regarding a similar topic area in Romans 7:7-25 he wrote this (page 467) which seems very relatable to the above:

"We are warned that the Mosaic law, and, hence, all law, is unable to deliver us from the power of sin; the multiplication of 'rules' and 'commands', so much a tendency in some Christian circles, will be more likely to drive us deeper into frustration than to improve the quality of our walk with Christ."

Maybe the blessing from the end of 2 Corinthians (13:14) gives us our theological clue to the action of the Holy Spirit and his ability to engender true fellowship, as it is his gift:

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

As so much of Paul's letters are about disunity and infighting, lack of grace and love, his opening into this last section from 2 Corinthians 13:11 — his 'Finally brothers,' - shows Paul still hopes they will be in fellowship with himself and Jesus in time.

But, perhaps here at the end, he is also confirming a theological truth, that the Holy Spirit is the one to bring true fellowship. It is the Holy Spirit who can both encourage and enable us to become loving, whole community fellowships – if we will take the Holy Spirit seriously - and let him lead us.

6. CHURCH ORDER

It may be surprising, as it was to me, but Paul doesn't really speak into this much apart from 'behavioural' issues that he sees as reflections of individuals or communities not accepting the Holy Spirit's lead and guidance. I'm confident Paul saw bad behaviour and division within communities as a reflection of ill formed faith, a lack of openness to the Holy Spirit and poor acceptance of the Spirit's lead. Hence, while he does speak about not doing 'this or that' a lot, I'm not going there as we know we can easily make up our own lists. Rather, I want to try and pick up some areas from these early small churches which later on would modify into what we today might call 'Church Order'.

Paul has some asides within 1 Corinthians regarding, for example, the Lord's Supper and Tongues, but they are in the context of disunity. He also relates theology to Baptism (mainly in Romans) - but he doesn't seem to talk about its practice - he even admits to only baptising two people in Corinth. It is almost as if local practice is not really that important to Paul. And he talks about what we might now call 'Church Officers' - Deacons, Presbyters and Overseers (or Deacons, Priests and Bishops) - but primarily these are within the sometimes 'disputed' letters to Timothy and Titus. (See my notes on this topic in the Appendix on whether they were what we may call 'offices')

Paul is seemingly far more interested in the churches being Christ centred, reliant on the Holy Spirit and operating as unified gatherings with love for each other, rather than how they gather or what they do.

Local practices in these early small churches would have mainly evolved from whatever had been in each of the different synagogues, which is why I found looking further into the synagogues of the 1st century BC and early 1st century AD using Runesson's, "The Origins of the Synagogue" helpful in getting a handle on the early Church. Much of what follows is, I know, a move away for a brief while from the topic of Church Order, but many of us don't know this historical context, so it feels right to say some more about the early synagogues to help understand our earliest churches and Paul's interactions with them.

There were some differences between the synagogues in Israel and those in the Asian and European Diaspora. By the 1st century BC in Israel, in the main, they were village (or town) community buildings with varied purposes. In the Diaspora, where other religious observances and cults were also happening, they were more akin to local associations, some with buildings to meet in, some without.

The origins of the synagogue in Israel undoubtedly came from the gatherings of village elders etc at the town gates. Then, as Eastern society in general was moving to municipal buildings across the 2nd century BC, they began to create community buildings. For the Jewish faith requirements, these included the need for ritual washing, blessings, reading of scripture (seemingly by anyone) and exposition (by almost anyone). This would then lead to discussion. Other than religious uses, they were also a primary community building for political or village matters etc.

Historically, it seems they may also not have been as closed to guests or visitors as I had previously thought, but rather open to almost anyone. Within the New Testament we see parallel hints with this history in two passages:

In Acts 13:15, in Psidian Antioch:

"¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the leaders of the synagogue sent word to them, saying, "Brothers, if you have a word of exhortation for the people, please speak."

or Jesus in Nazareth in Luke 4:16:

"He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read...)

Within the Diaspora, the origins would have been from these sorts of contexts. Neither there, nor in Israel, was there seemingly any centralised governing of the synagogues. They were the local expression of their faith within their communities. However, in the Diaspora, there wasn't the centralising effect of a town, as was the case in Israel. Here, it was just for those who wanted to associate together or who were curious enough to go along.

In some places where there was no building (either not yet fundraised or maybe not ten men yet as was the number generally needed for a synagogue to be formed), we see the alternative. An example is recorded in Acts where instead of a 'Synagogue' we find a 'Proseuche' (Greek for 'a place of prayer'). These would be outside a town or city's gates and would also be near a river or the sea so that ritual washing could be carried out. (It is described in Acts 16:13 with Lydia etc at Philippi that Paul and his team found). It could be translated that they went: "where it was customary to find a 'proseuchen' – a place of prayer". As the groups moved from Jewish to Christian faith, homes also became important as places to gather, as the needs for bathing, or of ten men got put aside.

The Jewish faith had both ritual washing as part of its preparation for worship (not unlike modern churches having a moment of reflection and repentance with some affirmation of God's forgiveness at an early stage of a gathering), and a practice, akin to baptism, of Tevilah (immersion) in a Mikveh (ritual bath) as part of their initiation for a convert into Judaism.

This may explain how Baptism practice evolved so easily in the early churches for new initiates, one Paul is fairly obviously happy to accept, undoubtedly linked with other local expressions in how they gathered. Paul doesn't seem to see baptisms as 'salvation' events, rather he expounds on *'the philosophical and theological thoughts around the event of our full union in the 'death' of Jesus – a putting on of Christ'* (My own quote. See my notes on Romans 6:3 in the later Appendix under the Church Order section if you want to see why this feels a reasonable thought). Paul significantly and fully, in several places, refers faith to salvation and it feels that it would be anathema for Paul to have seen baptism as such.

A second common area of modern-day Church Order contention is Communion or the Eucharist, or as Paul called it, the Lord's Supper. Paul describes both the bread and the cup in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 with the Greek word 'koinonia' – 'fellowship'. (Oddly, these are translated as 'thanksgiving' and 'participation' in the NIV - see again in my later detailed notes). In context, it just feels like he is reinforcing unified fellowship and avoidance of idol worship issues within the factionalising Corinthian church rather than giving detail on 'how to celebrate' Communion. In 1 Corinthians 11 we also find Paul re-describing Jesus' Last Supper. Again, he tells it within a context of them needing to care for each other in the unity in a loving fellowship, which for the Corinthians is patently not always easy. These two 'communion' passages, within their contexts, seem to be more about fellowship and unity than they are about 'how we break bread' or what we believe about the bread and wine.

In so many instances, Paul seems to have been far more interested that these new small churches understand who Jesus was and why the Holy Spirit was crucial for them to find fellowship and unity and that the Spirit would enable later behavioural change, after repentance and the 'putting on' of Jesus. This just seems to be how Paul sees the 'route' to salvation, not how we 'do' things. They were all originally local, undoubtedly varying expressions of worship, and he doesn't seem to be that bothered about their specific 'practices'.

Oddly, and something I found surprising, Paul never really seems to speak of 'mission' either. He does however expect new people to just turn up at the

gatherings. They must have been open for others to come in or listen or his comments in 1 Corinthians 14:23 on tongues being confusing to newcomers wouldn't make sense.

He expects folk to be gentle with those new to faith, not critical (see Romans 14) and that in time they would learn more – which of course, was also the purpose of a synagogue. The early and later synagogues all seem to have had this feature of scripture reading and this later then translated to the churches – of it being read and expounded by a few and then discussed by the congregation (or maybe testing - see 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21), as in Paul's 1 Corinthians 14:26b-40 suggestions on gatherings.

So, the priorities for Paul, rather than 'Church Order' seemed to be:

A) Christ Centeredness. A church had to be Christ-centred. The centrality of the risen Jesus was their reason for being. If it wasn't, I'm not sure Paul would have considered it a church.

Then, this Christ-centredness required recognition of personal sin with 'godly sorrow' bringing repentance (2 Corinthians 7:10), leading to salvation, via 'calling on the name of the Lord' to be saved. (Romans 10:13)

This transition (modelled in Paul's baptism analogies) should then naturally show itself in changed behaviour. This is why he struggles so much with the Corinthians – the behaviour of some seemingly just would not change.

B) Welcoming of the Holy Spirit. For Paul, after meeting Jesus, the activity of the Holy Spirit as the 'promise', from all of his Old Testament scripture knowledge, was the second principle of the passing of the 'old covenant'. This meant he had to rethink what the 'new' age was. The Holy Spirit has to be a part of the new. In Paul's eyes, the Holy Spirit is undoubtedly the most important encourager. The Holy Spirit for Paul is central and crucial for healthy churches.

If all of the above are constantly enabled by the Holy Spirit, love and unity should naturally be identifiers of the community and the lack of the Spirit's presence should raise questions.

These attributes, when we gather, should be attractive for unbelievers. Paul was called to mission as an Apostle and an Evangelist, he brought the 'euangelion' – the Good News, the Gospel - but he doesn't really talk about these churches needing to be 'missional' in the way we find in so much church literature today.

It seems, in Paul's eyes, that the churches are primarily called to faith and transformation. That should then, through attractiveness and sheer curiosity lead to enquiry and conversions. We do know some are called to be Evangelists (along with the apostles, prophets, pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11 to *"equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up"*), but on page 250 of his commentary on Ephesians, Lincoln says of this 'title':

'It is likely that here "evangelists" are to be seen as those engaged in mission and the founding of churches and, therefore, as having responsibilities beyond the local congregation.'

Christ-centredness and welcoming of the Holy Spirit's lead feel, through Paul's eyes, as if they are a local church's primary role within God's Mission to restore and re-create His World. Everything else, to Paul, just seems secondary – and by its absence from his writing, they don't seem to have been that important for our 1st century predecessors.

This then leaves something to ponder – they still thrived without all of Christendom's later changes...

A SUMMARY

Is a summary even possible yet? Probably not if I was to try and do justice to all I have read and pondered.

This Sabbatical has been a generous gift from my Church of a wonderful bit of time away from the day to day work of a Vicar that has enabled long spells of reading and reflection on scripture and other sources that would just not be possible within the busyness of today's churches. It has been 20 years since I left my previous career and entered Theological College and the first proper opportunity to truly sit back and reflect in a way that I hope will help me finish well over the last years I'll be leading a church before I retire.

I know I may yet change my mind on some things, consider some new areas, and I have written a lot, but what are my current big 'take-aways'?

1. That Paul, while called to be an Apostle, was a Pastor at the centre of the new heart created within him by the Holy Spirit to replace his heart of stone that had been the Law. He cared for those for whom he felt a responsibility. He was devastated by unfair criticisms, often by those with another agenda.

His ‘heart’ was fragile, but it didn’t stop him from some moments of ‘tough love’.

2. That those early gathered believers were just trying to figure out, along with Paul, what it meant to be a community of faith in their locality. Paul seemingly wasn’t wanting to interfere or direct the ‘hows’. He just, in the end, seemed to want to give them enough to understand, and for them to then work out the local practice themselves. His theological interest, above everything else and simply put, looks like he is just trying to ensure they knew Jesus fully and continually welcomed any action of the Holy Spirit.

3. The outcome of a Spirit led, Jesus-centred local church should be a unified one, in close fellowship, which leads to supportive relationships, and doesn’t need lots of regulation or rules. This after all, was why the Holy Spirit was promised, to remove our ‘hearts of stone’ and avoid all the difficulties of the Law. Now it was faith and not works – the works should just be an outpouring from the grace we have been shown.

4. In the end – it feels like church should be uncomplicated and local. The primary driver for mission is just such a church – an attractive body of people that others would be curious about because they have a common true faith in Jesus, accompanied by the Holy Spirit through both prayer and gift. A church should be people who care for each other, enjoy life and reflect regularly on the scripture we have so generously been left by our church ancestors. For Paul, everything else would seem to have been secondary.

SCRIPTURE APPENDIX

1. JESUS

Galatians 1:1 & 4 - The opening sentence and fourth verse of the first letter:

¹ Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead

⁴ who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father

1 Cor 15:3-5 – The first ‘Creed’?

³For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve.

1 Corinthians 15:11 – the common denominator for all the Apostles etc?

¹¹Whether, then, it is I or they, this is what we preach, and this is what you believed.

Philippians 2:5-11 – a second ‘creed’?

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death - even death on a cross!

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Colossians 1:15-23 – a third ‘creed’?

¹⁵The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

²¹Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behaviour. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight,

without blemish and free from accusation—²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Colossians 2:9-10 – Jesus the ‘head’ of everything...

⁹For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.

Ephesians 1:22 – and also in Ephesians...

²²And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

2 Corinthians 13:14

*¹⁴May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. ^{*1}*

*^{*1} “Normally, the creeds have the sequence: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But this is not Paul’s understanding. It would be for the church of later times to hammer out the details of the doctrine of the Trinity.*

But this is not to deny that what we have is the “starting-point” for the development of the creedal statement of a Trinitarian confession (see 1 Pet 1:2). It was inevitable that the church should seek to develop a doctrine that expressed (as best it could) its understanding of God. Paul never confounded the distinction between God and Jesus Christ (see Phil 2:11). Maybe this caution is seen in the balanced clauses of 13:13. True, Paul was not writing in an attempt to defend the concepts of ‘tres personae et una substantia’, “three persons and one substance”; in this sense Paul was still a long way from the Trinitarian doctrines of the church councils. Paul’s purpose is not to stress the individual hypostases of the Godhead; rather, his emphasis is on the grace, love, and fellowship/participation that are available to the Corinthians” (RP Martin – 2 Corinthians)

Romans 1:1-6 – the centrality of Jesus within the Good News – the Gospel

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God—² the gospel he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures³ regarding his Son, who as to his earthly life was a descendant of David,⁴ and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.⁵ Through him we received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith for his name’s sake.⁶ And you also are among those Gentiles who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

Romans 3:21-22b – the centrality of Jesus for righteousness

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

2. THE HOLY SPIRIT

Galatians 3:3

³ Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?

Galatians 4:6

⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father."

Galatians 5:15-18

¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. ¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

Galatians 5:22-23

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Galatians 6:8

⁸ Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-6

⁴ For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, ⁵ because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. ⁶ You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21a

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all

2 Thessalonians 2:13

¹³ But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as first fruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power, ⁵ so that your faith might not rest on human wisdom, but on God's power.

1 Corinthians 2:6-16

⁶ We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. ⁷ No, we declare God's wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. ⁸ None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. ⁹ However, as it is written: "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived" - the things God has prepared for those who love him - ¹⁰ these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit.

The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. ¹¹ For who knows a person's thoughts except their own spirit within them? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. ¹² What we have received is not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, so that we may understand what God has freely given us. ¹³ This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, explaining spiritual realities

with Spirit-taught words. ¹⁴ The person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit. ¹⁵ The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments, ¹⁶ for, “Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ.

1 Corinthians 6:19

¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.

1 Corinthians 12 – for a ‘unified’ church within diversity

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ² You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues,^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

¹² Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³ For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. ¹⁴ Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.

¹⁵ Now if the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? ¹⁸ But in fact God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. ¹⁹ If they were all one part, where would the body be? ²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, but one body.

²¹ The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!" ²² On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and the parts that we think are less honourable we treat with special honour. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, ²⁴ while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has put the body together, giving greater honour to the parts that lacked it, ²⁵ so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. ²⁶ If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.

²⁷ Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. ²⁸ And God has placed in the church first of all apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, of helping, of guidance, and of different kinds of tongues. ²⁹ Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? ³⁰ Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? ³¹ Now eagerly desire the greater gifts.

1 Corinthians 14:2-3

² For anyone who speaks in a tongue does not speak to people but to God. Indeed, no one understands them; they utter mysteries by the Spirit. ³ But the one who prophesies speaks to people for their strengthening, encouraging and comfort.

1 Corinthians 14:22-25

²² Tongues, then, are a sign, not for believers but for unbelievers; prophecy, however, is not for unbelievers but for believers. ²³ So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind? ²⁴ But if an unbeliever or an inquirer comes in while everyone

is prophesying, they are convicted of sin and are brought under judgment by all,²⁵ as the secrets of their hearts are laid bare. So they will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, “God is really among you!”

Ephesians 1:13-14

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit,¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession—to the praise of his glory.

Ephesians 1:17

¹⁷ I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Ephesians 2:18 – 3 19 (excluding Paul’s ‘sojourn’ in 3:2-13)

¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

¹⁹ Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God’s people and also members of his household,²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. ²¹ In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. ²² And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

¹ For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for the sake of you Gentiles...

...¹⁴ For this reason I kneel before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. ¹⁶ I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 4:30 (Reminiscent of priorly noted 1 Thessalonians 5:19)

³⁰ And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

Ephesians 6:10-18a

*¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, **which**² is the word of God.*

¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.

² Sometimes in the sabbatical, my attention was caught by particular moments in the Greek text. In this instance, it was the “ὅ” below in Ephesians 6:17:

καὶ τὴν περικεφαλαίαν τοῦ σωτηρίου δέξασθε καὶ τὴν μάχαιραν τοῦ πνεύματος ὃ ἐστὶν ῥῆμα θεοῦ

Most translations make it ‘which’: “the sword of the Spirit(comma), which is the word of God”. But, as in Greek it can be either ‘which’ or ‘who’ – I reflected on what change it may create if here it was ‘who’ – i.e. ‘the sword of the Spirit who is the word of God?’ (no comma)

As I read Paul, I saw a lot of need for the new churches to be open to the Holy Spirit, to be enabled to become who they need to become, a unified collective to find their way forward together and avoid disagreement – all of which can only be achieved by the Spirit. But I did not see any suggestion of ‘proactive evangelism’ – of taking the gospel actively out, which is often a use of this particular ‘sword’ verse.

Rather, as this passage follows the context of Ephesians 1-3 where Paul unfolds God’s great purposes through Jesus for his newly gathered unified Jewish/Gentile people as the Church - and then his switch at Chapter 4 to the standards now expected of this new Body of Christ – then it makes sense that the ‘armour’ is to enable the people to ‘stand’ against persecution. (Paul does, after all, repeat the word ‘stand’ here four times) Paul’s urges (4:1-6) the churches to become humble, gentle, patient and bear with one another, keeping unity through peace as one body with one Spirit. He does not seem to be moving from ‘standing firm’ to actively having the ‘sword’ for anything other than defence of themselves. They (and us) need God’s words, brought by the Holy Spirit, to be able to ensure they remind each of us regularly of the Good News - and be ready to explain it to any who join them.

Thus, instead of empowering a ‘sword’, might alternatively this, by thinking of the personal ‘who’ instead of the impersonal object linked ‘which’, be a more helpful way to define the Spirit? (Instead of having a ‘sword’ as the primary object) With a bit of cheek, could a paraphrase of verse 17 instead be:

“And finally, to stand firm, take the Helmet of salvation – oh, and you’ll also need a sword, i.e. the Holy Spirit, who by the way is the one who speaks to us words from God making him ‘the word of God’.”

2 Cor 3:17-18

¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

Romans 8:1-17 – of life in the Spirit

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do because it was weakened by the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind governed by the flesh is death, but the mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace. ⁷ The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸ Those who are in the realm of the flesh cannot please God.

⁹ You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ. ¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, then even though your body is subject to death because of sin, the Spirit gives life because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you.

¹² Therefore, brothers and sisters, we have an obligation—but it is not to the flesh, to live according to it. ¹³ For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.

¹⁴ For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. ¹⁵ The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, “Abba, Father.” ¹⁶ The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. ¹⁷ Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

Romans 8:22-27

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God’s people in accordance with the will of God.

Romans 9:1

I speak the truth in Christ—I am not lying, my conscience confirms it through the Holy Spirit

Romans 15:13 – so that...

¹³ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

3. RESURRECTION AND RE-CREATION - THE PASSING OF THE TEMPLE AND THE OLD COVENANT FOR THE NEW

Galatians 6:15

¹⁵ Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.

1 Thessalonians 2:12 (first mention of God's 'Kingdom' by Paul?)

¹² encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory

I Corinthians 6:12-20 (the new 'temples')

¹² "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but I will not be mastered by anything. ¹³ You say, "Food for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy them both." The body, however, is not meant for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. ¹⁴ By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. ¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh." ¹⁷ But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:3-5 and 12-17

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve....

...¹² But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? ¹³ If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. ¹⁴ And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. ¹⁵ More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. ¹⁶ For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. ¹⁷ And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins... (and the rest of Chapter 15)

Philippians 3:10-11 – the cruciality of the resurrection

¹⁰ I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

Ephesians 1:13 – the arrival of the ‘promised’ Holy Spirit

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 1:22-23 – of the Church in the new creation

²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

2 Corinthians 3:13-14 – only in Christ is the old ‘taken away’

¹³ We are not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away. ¹⁴ But their minds were made dull, for to this day the same veil remains when the old covenant is read. It has not been removed, because only in Christ is it taken away.

2 Corinthians 5:4-5 – made for a new eternal life

⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

2 Corinthians 5:17

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come:^[a] The old has gone, the new is here!

Romans 3:20-26 – righteousness through faith in Jesus prophesied

²⁰ Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin.

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Romans 6:6-10 – the resurrection means eternal life

⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. ¹⁰ The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

Romans 8:19-25

¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God.

²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.

4. REPENTANCE AND TRANSFORMATION

Ephesians 1:11-14 – in order: predestination, election, hearing, believing, marked (sealed) – until redemption.

¹¹ In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, ¹² in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory.

2 Corinthians 4:1-2a

Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. ² Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God.

2 Corinthians 7:10 – 'Godly' sorrow brings repentance

¹⁰ Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.

2 Corinthians 13:10 – it's to help build up, not tear down

¹⁰ This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down.

Romans 2:4

⁴ Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repentance?

5. UNITY & LOVE IN COMMUNITY

Galatians 5:13-15

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbour as yourself." ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

1 Corinthians 1:10

¹⁰ I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

1 Corinthians 11:17-20— of the Lord's Supper

¹⁷ In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,

Philippians 1:27 - a lot of this letter is about unity

²⁷ Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in the one Spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel

Philippians 2:1-5

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-

minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:... who, being in the very nature, God...

Ephesians 4:1-6

As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. ² Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. ³ Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism; ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

2 Corinthians 13:14

¹⁴ May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.³

³ As so much of Paul's letters are about disunity and infighting, lack of grace and love, his opening of this last section at v11 – 'Finally brothers,...' shows he still hopes for them to be in fellowship with himself and Jesus. But, maybe here at the end, he is also confirming a theological truth, that the Holy Spirit will both encourage and enable true, loving, whole community fellowship within any church– if we will take him seriously and let him.

Romans 12:3-21 – note the 'action' bullet * points! (Also, with repentance leading to faith we should see a change in behaviour...)

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

⁹ *Love must be sincere. *Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ *Be devoted to one another in love. *Honour one another above yourselves. ¹¹ *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. ¹² *Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ *Share with the Lord's people who are in need. *Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ *Live in harmony with one another. *Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. *Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. *Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

* "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 14:17-19 – Insert your own 'human' regulation [here]...

¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of [eating and drinking], but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, ¹⁸ because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. ¹⁹ Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.⁴

⁴ From D. Moo's "Romans" commentary (page 467) on Romans 7:7-25 he wrote on that similar topic area: "We are warned that the Mosaic law, and, hence, all law, is unable to deliver us from the power of sin; the multiplication of 'rules' and 'commands', so much a tendency in some Christian circles, will be more likely to drive us deeper into frustration than to improve the quality of our walk with Christ."

Romans 15:1-2 – 'ditto' to the above?

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. ² Each of us should please our neighbours for their good, to build them up.

Romans 15:5-7 – and once more?

⁵ May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, ⁶ so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

6. CHURCH 'ORDER'

1 Thessalonians 5:19-21 – on prophecy

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹ but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²² reject every kind of evil.

1 Corinthians 1:13-17 – on baptism

¹³ Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized in the name of Paul? ¹⁴ I thank God that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, ¹⁵ so no one can say that you were baptized in my name. ¹⁶ (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) ¹⁷ For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with wisdom and eloquence, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power.

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 – on 'factionalism'

²¹ So then, no more boasting about human leaders! All things are yours, ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, ²³ and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God.

1 Corinthians 10:16-17 – on the Lord's Supper

*¹⁶ Is not the cup of thanksgiving*⁵ for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation* in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.*

⁵*The original Greek for both of these two differently translated words, 'thanksgiving' and 'participation', is a single word - 'Koinonia' – or 'fellowship'.

1 Corinthians 11:22-27

²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.⁶

⁶Thoughts on Paul's text related to the Lords Supper:

Firstly, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 seems to be more about reinforcing our fellowship with Christ - i.e.: "Is not the cup of fellowship for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break fellowship in the body of Christ?"

Then in 1 Corinthians 11 above, Paul references the activity at the Last Supper within the context of unity in loving fellowship, which for the Corinthians is sadly, not always the case. These two 'communion' passages seem to be far more about church order and unity than they are about what we do with, or believe about, bread and wine.

1 Corinthians `14:26b-40

^{26b} When you come together, each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. ²⁷ If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. ²⁸ If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and to God.

²⁹ Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. ³⁰ And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. ³¹ For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. ³² The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. ³³ For God is not a God of disorder but of peace—as in all the congregations of the Lord's people.

*(³⁴ Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. ³⁵ If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.)^{*7}*

³⁶ Or did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anyone thinks they are a prophet or otherwise gifted by the Spirit, let them acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ But if anyone ignores this, they will themselves be ignored. ³⁹ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. ⁴⁰ But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.

^{7}These verses are very unusual as the only ones in Scripture that 'move'. Some early copies of the letter have them after verse 33, others after verse 40. Of course, they may be genuinely Pauline, but that degree of copying error would be very odd and here it is unique. It is more than likely this is a 'marginal gloss' – an annotation in a margin by an early transcriber of their own thoughts, which as their document passed to others to then copy, they then chose to insert it into the main text, but differed on where to put it.*

Philippians 1:1

Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all God's holy people in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons*⁸*

^{8}First mention in Paul of 'episkopos' (overseer) and 'diakonos' (deacon or servant) – and not again until 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:7 when 'presbuteros' (elder) are also mentioned. (See notes later on how 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus relate to this topic. n.b. These three words are the foundation of the three forms of the more 'catholic' ordained ministries of Bishop, Priest and Deacon.*

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists^{9a}, the pastors^{9b} and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

^{9a} From "Ephesians page 250: "It is likely that here "evangelists" are to be seen as those engaged in mission and the founding of churches and, therefore, as having responsibilities beyond the local congregation.

*^{9b}*Greek word here is 'poimenas'- otherwise a shepherd*

Ephesians 4:20-24

²⁰ That, however, is not the way of life you learned ²¹ when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. ²² You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.

Romans 6:3

³ Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ¹⁰

¹⁰In this wider section, I'm unsure whether Paul is really talking about the action of Baptism, rather the philosophical and theological thoughts around the event of our full union in the 'death' of Jesus – a putting on of Christ (as in Galatians 3:27 – “for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ”) There is an interesting excursus on this topic and the origins of the words Baptizo in the online NAS New Testament Greek Lexicon, quoting Bible Study Magazine, James Montgomery Boice, from May 1989:

*“**Baptizo - Not to be confused with 911, bapto.** The clearest example that shows the meaning of baptizo is a text from the Greek poet and physician Nicander, who lived about 200 B.C. It is a recipe for making pickles and is helpful because it uses both words. Nicander says that in order to make a pickle, the vegetable should first be 'dipped'(bapto) into boiling water and then 'baptised' (baptizo) in the vinegar solution. Both verbs concern the immersing of vegetables in a solution. But the first is temporary. The second, the act of baptising the vegetable, produces a permanent change. When used in the New Testament, this word more often refers to our union and identification with Christ than to our water baptism. e.g. Mark 16:16. 'He that believes and is baptised shall be saved'. Christ is saying that mere intellectual assent is not enough. There must be a union with him, a real change, like the vegetable to the pickle!*

Romans 7:7-25

⁷ What shall we say, then? Is the law sinful? Certainly not! Nevertheless, I would not have known what sin was had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, “You shall not covet.” ⁸ But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of coveting. For apart from the law, sin was dead. ⁹ Once I was alive apart from the law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. ¹⁰ I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. ¹¹ For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. ¹² So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good.

¹³ Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! Nevertheless, in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it used what is good to bring about my death, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

¹⁴ We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. ¹⁵ I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. ¹⁶ And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. ¹⁷ As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. ¹⁸ For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot

carry it out. ¹⁹ For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. ²⁰ Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it.

²¹ So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ²² For in my inner being I delight in God's law; ²³ but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. ²⁴ What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? ²⁵ Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! ¹¹

¹¹ This quote from D. Moo's "Romans" commentary (page 467), mentioned earlier within the Unity section, is actually commenting on this section of Romans 7 :

"We are warned that the Mosaic law, and, hence, all law, is unable to deliver us from the power of sin; the multiplication of 'rules' and 'commands', so much a tendency in some Christian circles, will be more likely to drive us deeper into frustration than to improve the quality of our walk with Christ."

And finally, several passages on Deacons, Elders and Overseers. (Greek: Diakonos, Presbuteros and Episkopos) – regularly seen as part of modern 'Church Order' as Deacons, Priests and Bishops, from the sometimes 'disputed' letters of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus...

1 Timothy 3:1- 2, 8 & 12 –

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. ² Now the overseer* is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, ...*

...⁸ In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.*

...¹² A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well.*

1 Timothy 5:1-2

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ² older women* as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*

1 Timothy 5:17

¹⁷ The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching.*

Titus 1:5-7

⁵ *The reason I left you in Crete was that you might put in order what was left unfinished and appoint elders* in every town, as I directed you. ⁶ An elder* must be blameless, faithful to his wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. ⁷ Since an overseer* manages God's household, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.¹²*

¹²**We see a strong suggestion within 1 Timothy 3 that Overseers (Greek: 'episkopon') and Deacons (Greek: 'diakonous') are male - while in Romans 16:1, we find Phoebe lovingly described by Paul as a 'sister' and as a 'diakonon' of the church.*

In 1 Timothy 5:1, the Greek word behind 'older man' is 'presbuteros' and in verse 2 behind 'older woman' is 'presbuteras', while in v 5 the Greek word behind 'elders' is the plural version of that same word – 'presbuteroi'. Now see Titus 1:5-7. We see the same Greek word, now consistently translated as elder – variants of 'presbuteros', but then, in verse 7 we still seem to be talking about the same individuals, though now they are called 'overseers' (in Greek 'episkopon'). The tendency to be intransigent on the meanings of these three Greek words has caused many issues in the modern church. Gordon Fee, in his commentary on 1 Timothy, of verse 3;1 (page 79) on 'aspiring to be an overseer' says that it:

"...appears to lend some credence to the commonly held view that people were 'running for office.' But there is no evidence in the NT that people 'aspired to' positions of leadership in the church. The little evidence we do have implies that heads of households from among the earliest converts were normally appointed to such positions."

A SHORT BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following books were of the greatest help, among many others, during my period of Sabbatical study:

- "The New Testament in its World" NT Wright & MF Bird (2019 – Zondervan Academic, Grand Rapids Michigan)
- "The Origins of the Synagogue" A Runesson (2001 – Almqvist & Wiksell International, Stockholm, Sweden)
- "The Epistle to the Romans" D Moo (1996 Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan)
- "The First Epistle to the Corinthians" GD Fee (1987 Wm B Eerdmans Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan)
- "2 Corinthians" RP Martin (2014 Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan)
- "Ephesians" AT Lincoln (1990 Word Books, Dallas, Texas)
- "Pastoral Epistles" WD Mounce (2000 Thomas Nelson Inc, USA)
- "1 and 2 Timothy, Titus" GD Fee (1988 Hendrikson Publishers Inc, Peabody, Massachusetts)
- Online: Bible Hub's Interlinear Greek and English Bible resource (<https://biblehub.com/interlinear/galatians/1-1.htm>)

On Bible Reflection

I have a belief that individual Bible Reflection (i.e. not just reading) is one of the most important things we can do to maintain our relationship with God, along with prayer. It is why I wanted my Sabbatical to have such a large amount of it.

Within this Sabbatical Summary you will find I don't unpack every verse referenced. Patently, I have my reasons for selecting each text, but when a reader also has to ponder a little, I think we can get more from it.

(Also, if I were to expand, on each occasion, why I feel they relate when many are fairly obvious, this would be a much larger piece of work - and I didn't want to write a thesis.)

If you are a member of my church - thank you for giving me the time for this Sabbatical - I hope you find this summary helpful.