

THE PRACTICE OF GENUINE LOVE: CONCRETE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE ONGOING INCARNATION OF THE GOSPEL

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Abstract

One of the major aspects of Christian witness in our increasingly secular, pluralist and postmodern world is that of an authentic, embodied Christian existence which reflects itself in concrete manifestations of forgiveness, reconciliation, welcome, hope and love – as shown in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This paper offers a biblical/Pauline exploration of this crucial element of Christian witness and argues that the practice of genuine love is both an integral part of the gospel and a concrete manifestation or embodiment of the gospel in tangible life situations. It shows that “the story of Christ” represents the ground for, and the possibility of, the ongoing incarnation of the gospel – by their being incorporated into the same story of Christ and by their participation “in Christ,” Christians become active participants in God’s story of the redemption of the world.

Introduction

It is a truism to say that one of the major aspects of Christian witness in our increasingly secular, pluralist and postmodern world is that of an authentic, embodied Christian presence. Ours is a world of exclusion and conflicts, of confusion and fears, a world of suffering and hopelessness. In such a context, for Christians to have any impact or to make any difference, they have to offer something radically new and refreshing – i.e. alongside their Christian message, they have to offer a new way of living; the message of the gospel has to be embodied in concrete manifestations of forgiveness and reconciliation, of welcome, of hope and of love. This is especially true for Evangelicals who are mostly tempted to

‘resume’ everything to the proclamation aspect of the gospel (the indicative) while not taking as seriously the implications of the gospel for everyday life (the imperative).

In this paper I would like to look closer at a particular aspect of Christian praxis as it is reflected in Pauline theology and argue that, for the apostle Paul, the practice of genuine love is both an integral part of the gospel and a concrete manifestation or incarnation of the gospel in tangible life situations. The paper begins with a brief argument about the way in which the apostle Paul maintains the indicative and imperative together – by showing how the believers are incorporated into “the story of Christ.” The main part of the paper offers an elaboration of the practice of genuine love from Romans 12:9-21.

The Story of Christ as the Grounds for, and the Possibility of, the Ongoing Incarnation of the Gospel

A closer reading of Romans 5-8 reveals that Paul builds his argument with a constant reference to Christ as if that is somehow required by the nature of the arguments that Paul develops here. Commentators usually remark on the density of references to Christ, particularly in chapters 5-8. N.T. Wright, for example, remarks that while in chapters 1-4 Jesus is “hardly mentioned,” in chapters 5-8 he “is everywhere.”¹ He further notes that Paul’s larger argument in 5-8 opens with four paragraphs (5:1-11, 12-21; 6:1-11, 12-23), each ending with a Christological formula that sums up the paragraph, and ends in chapter 8 with another emphatic Christological summary.² Building on the initial Christological statements in 3:24-26 and 4:24-25, in chapters 5-8, Paul elucidates the narrative of salvation in all its dimensions with a constant reference to key Christological features in 5:6-11, 15-21, 6:3-11, 7:4 and 8:3, 31-39.³ There is an overwhelming emphasis on grace and on the free gift within the process of salvation (5:2, 12-21), while at the same time a concern for the serious ethical implications of this grace for the present, ongoing aspect of salvation.

There are several crucial aspects that stand out in Paul’s presentation of Christ in Romans 5-8. The most obvious and repeated emphasis is on the death of Christ as an expression of both God’s *love* and of Christ’s willing *self-giving* for

1 N.T. Wright, *The Letter to the Romans: Introduction, Commentary and Reflection*. In Leander E. Keck et al., eds. *The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 10 (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 508.

2 *Ibid.*, 508-9.

3 These statements, as Wright points out, are not simply disconnected statements about Christ, but rather key Christological summarizations intended to point further to the entire story of Christ which Paul unfolds in Romans. See Wright, *Romans*, 513.

humanity. The *reconciliation* he thus accomplished was *grace*, a *free gift* offered even to enemies.⁴ Further, with clear and very strong references to *the lordship of Christ* (5:1; 8:39), the beginning and end of this large section show that this aspect is also crucial for Paul's argument.⁵ Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has unambiguously shown his *grace* and *love* and has proven his faithfulness and righteousness. Now, because Jesus is Lord, the entirety of human life and of creation is under the sphere of God's declared love, and nothing can change that state of affairs. This assurance and confidence that the believer can have "in Christ" is one of the main points Paul makes in this section. However, Paul also highlights the implications of the lordship of Christ for the life of each individual believer and of the Christian community in the world: it is by showing their ultimate loyalty to the true Lord of the world, Jesus Christ, loyalty expressed "not least by their unity across traditional ethnic and cultural lines," that the believers in Rome are able to extend the rule of Jesus.⁶

Another crucial aspect which Paul highlights about Christ is his *faithfulness and obedience*. This is indeed very significant and, as we will see, supports our analysis of the story of Christ and of the incorporation of the believers in this story. Paul's intention is to show that the story of Christ is not something that simply happened then and there, but that, in fact, it is a continuing story of God in which the readers themselves play an important role: they continue to live out the story of Christ, with Christ alive amongst them. In other words, Paul is telling a "new story," one in which the believers are included (henceforth the "we" of ch. 5), a story which continually shapes their way of life. By using the story of Christ, Paul is drawing the readers into this new story, not simply into what God has done in Christ, but into what he continues to do with all of those "in Christ." Paul includes the readers and their stories into the larger story of God's decisive reconciliation in Christ; they are themselves an *integral part* of this ongoing story

- 4 For an elaborated argument on the vision and nature of Paul's understanding of God's gift of reconciliation see Corneliu Constantineanu, "Reconciliation, Identity and Otherness: Damascus Road Experience as the Foundation of Paul's Vision of Reconciliation," in Parush R. Parushev, Ovidiu Creanga, Brian Brock (editors), *Ethical Thinking at the Crossroads of European Reasoning: Proceedings of the Third Annual Theological Symposium of the International Postgraduate Theological Fellowship*, (IBTS, Prague, 2007), pp. 69-83.
- 5 A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans: A Narrative Defense of God's Righteousness* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 3.
- 6 N.T. Wright, "Paul and Caesar: A New Reading of Romans." In Craig Bartholobew et.al., ed. *A Royal Priesthood? The Use of the Bible Ethically and Politically* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2002), 181.

of reconciliation.⁷ And this is a point that we can see throughout Romans, but particularly and forcefully in Romans 6, as Paul describes the dynamic by which the believers are incorporated “in Christ” and therefore into his story.

Romans 6 and the Dynamic of Incorporation “in Christ”

In chapter 6, Paul explicitly describes the dynamic by which the believers are incorporated “in Christ” through baptism,⁸ and the implications of this new reality. Before their baptism, the believers were under the power of sin and so were unable to break out of its domain and influence. However, their baptism into Christ’s death meant a “death” to sin and, as a consequence, a breaking out from its power and jurisdiction (6:2). As a result of their being buried with Christ, they share in the effects of his death to sin. They are now free to belong to another, to Jesus Christ.

It is interesting to note that for Paul, since the death of Christ on the cross and his subsequent resurrection, death itself receives a new meaning: it is a gateway to life. By being baptized in Christ’s death, the believers share in it and also in its liberating effects from the reign of sin and unto life – symbolized by their raising from the water. The resurrection was always a sign of the eschatological age to come. Christ’s resurrection thus inaugurated this age to come and so Christ, as the new Adam, has displaced the old Adam. By their dying-and-rising with Christ, the believers have been transferred from the realm of sin (“in Adam”) to the realm of the power of the eschatological new age. They are now “in Christ.” It is here, in its clearest expression, that Paul explains the fact of being “in Christ” as a transmutation from the dominion of sin to the reign of life under the power and lordship of Christ. To be “in Christ” is to have been transferred into a new mode of existence, from sin to righteousness, from death to life – a life within the sphere

7 For a more detailed argument, see Corneliu Constantineanu, “The Social Significance of Reconciliation in Paul’s Theology, with Particular Reference to the Romanian Context,” doctoral dissertation accepted at the University of Leeds, UK, March 2006.

8 A brief history of the interpretation of this chapter, particularly of the first 14 verses, reveals the multifaceted and complex issues being raised vis-à-vis the theme of baptism as it relates to other important themes in Paul’s theology. For an excellent presentation of the issues involved, see Boers, “The Structure and Meaning of Romans 6:1-14,” in *CBQ* 63 (2001): 664-682; and A. Petersen, “Shedding new Light on Paul’s Understanding of Baptism: a Ritual-Theoretical Approach to Romans 6,” in *Studia Theologica* 52 (1998): 3-28.

of the power and lordship of Christ.⁹ Paul describes the event of baptism – with immersion into water and the rising from it – as signifying a death “with Christ” and a rising “with Christ.” But, as Nygren points out, for Paul, the significance of baptism cannot be limited to its symbolical representation.¹⁰ It also points to something that *really happens*: “we have been united” with Christ “in a death like his ... and a resurrection like his” (6:5). Being united with Christ, in his body, whatever is true of him is also true of those “in Christ.”

In chapter 6:1-11 Paul presents, both in a negative and positive way, two inherent implications of baptism into Christ’s death, of this new reality of being “in Christ.” First, because they are united with Christ in a death “like his” and because through his death Jesus has conquered and has broken the power of sin, the believers have been taken out of the power of sin and have entered another dominion, that of Jesus Christ. Second, being buried with Christ into his death, their rising means a radically new way of life, a “walk in newness of life” (6:4): the *mode* and *nature* of life in the new age inaugurated by Jesus’ resurrection has been radically changed. Paul showed in the previous chapter that as humanity shared “in Adam,” so now it shares or participates “in Christ” in a real sense. And further, as God has made Christ the head of a new true humanity, to participate “in Christ” means to share in this new humanity, to live a life appropriate for the new age inaugurated by Christ’s death and resurrection. Not being enslaved to sin any longer (6:6), they are free to act in accordance with their new master. Paul is resolute: “So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (6:11). It is here that we can see most clearly that by retelling the story of Christ, Paul intends to show that those “in Christ” share in the same story by virtue of their union with Christ. The story of Christ is their own story in which they participate as “obedient from the heart” (6:17) and “slaves of righteousness” (6:18). Christ is not only the basis for their new life, but also the model.

The discussion on baptism in chapter 6 seems to play a crucial role in Paul’s larger argument of the ethical seriousness of the Christian life under grace. Paul starts from the significance of baptism: it represents the dynamic of incorporation into Christ. For Paul, it is precisely the believer’s participation “in Christ” that

9 Commenting on the meaning of the expression “in Christ” in Romans 6 and in Paul in general, Ziesler equates this expression with “in Spirit” and so “being in the Spirit is in effect being in Christ, and *vice versa*.” John Ziesler, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans* (London: Trinity Press International, 1989), 163.

10 Nygren, Anders, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974) 233-4.

represents the basis for Christian ethics – both as its possibility and necessity.¹¹ And, as Paul showed in Romans 5, this is all based on the continuing power of the grace of God, operating through Christ and the Spirit – grace which acts both to rescue people from their totally alienated situation of sin (5:1,6-10) and also to guide and empower them to “reign in life” (5:10, 17, 20-21).

Through their union with Christ, the believers are able to live out their new existence “in Christ”: to “walk in the newness of life” (6:4c), to “no longer be enslaved to sin” (6:6), to “live with him” (6:8). And this living with him is climactically described in verses 10 and 11: as Christ “lives to God” so the believers, who live “in Christ” are to consider themselves “dead to sin” and “alive to God.” It is clear now that those who are “in Christ” are becoming part of Christ’s continuing life for God and so they are, in a sense, active participants in the same story of Christ by their continuation into a similar life for God. It will now be more clearly understood what this “life for God” means for the believers since Paul’s point about Christ’s life to God in chapter 5 is fresh in their minds: it is a life of total submission and obedience to God, a life of self-giving for the other, a life of righteousness and reconciliation. A key feature of the life of Christ that Paul describes in chapter 5 is his voluntary self-giving, in love, for others – a life that led to death on the cross, but was followed by resurrection, i.e., a new life given by God, totally transforming the old existence into a new dimension. Through baptism, believers are incorporated “in Christ” and so in their new life they are animated by the same life of obedience to God manifested through a renunciation of their own desires and a concern for the needs of others.

And this is exactly what Paul is saying next: “present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments of righteousness” (6:13b); “But thanks be to God that you ...have become obedient from the heart ... and ...slaves of righteousness” (6:17,18). So, while the grace of God is the foundation for the new ethical life of the Christian (6:14), this does not mean a life devoid of ethical specifications. On the contrary, it is a life of obedience and righteousness – life which is totally

11 Such a thesis is put forward by Byrne (“Living out the Righteousness of God,” 557-581), where he shows that there is an intrinsic link between righteousness and obtaining eternal life. Byrne states: “The saving righteousness of God proclaimed in the letter (1:16-17) operates precisely in and through this link: through association with Christ by faith and baptism the Christian is drawn into the sphere of the righteousness of God; it is through living out or, rather, allowing Christ to live out this righteousness within oneself that eternal life is gained” (558). Even though this position is very close to an “ethical” view of righteousness, by pointing clearly to its Christological substance and foundation, Byrne is careful to avoid a sense of righteousness as a human accomplishment. But he is right to emphasize the crucial point Paul is making in Romans 6-8 concerning the living out of the righteousness of God, a dynamic participation of the believer in the life of faith “in Christ.”

defined and shaped by their union with Christ, in the power of the Spirit. Indeed, Paul concludes his argument, as one might expect, with the strong affirmation of the necessity and possibility of a new life of righteousness: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (6:14).

The Practice of Genuine Love: Romans 12:9-21

As a missions theologian, Paul was convinced that to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ is to acknowledge and accept the truth it proclaims *and* to live it out in everyday life. Thus, in Romans 12-15 Paul explicates in concrete ways what the implications of the gospel are for the believers’ everyday life within and outside of their own community.¹² Thus, Romans 12-15 is not an “ethical appendix” to his theological argument, but rather a further elaboration of the gospel Paul presented in the previous chapters. More specifically, this section represents a working out of the implications of being “in Christ,” which commits those who respond to the gospel to a transformed and renewed life in obedience to Christ. In other words, indicative and imperative are intrinsically related. Or, as Moo puts it, “[i]ndicative’ and ‘imperative’ do not succeed each other as two distinct stages in Christian experience, but are two sides of the same coin.”¹³

Because Paul’s ethic has a fundamental theological/Christological basis,¹⁴ the ethical responsibility to which he turns in these chapters is a constitutive and necessary element of his gospel.¹⁵ As pointed out earlier, God’s intervention to redeem the world in Christ not only represents the basis for justification and reconciliation but it also gives a particular shape to the lives of those who have been reconciled. They are now “in Christ” and so through their death and raising with Christ at baptism, they now share in the reality of a new life. Christ, as their Lord, is their ultimate point of reference, to whom they give total allegiance in a new life of obedience and righteousness.¹⁶ Paul makes a thematic link with

12 I have argued elsewhere that Paul was constantly preoccupied with the missiological implications of the gospel, especially with the concrete elaboration of reconciliation in specific contexts. See Corneliu Constantineanu, “Reconciliation as a Missiological Category for Social Engagement: A Pauline Perspective from Romans 12:9-21.” In Rollin G. Grams, I. Howard Marshall, Peter F. Penner and Robin L. Routledge (editors), *Bible and Mission*. Editura Neufeld Verlag, Schwarzenfeld, 2008, pp. 134-161.

13 Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (NICNT. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 745.

14 Wolfgang Schrage, *The Ethics of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988), 164-186.

15 Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1968), 225. Wright also notes that “Paul’s theology is always ethical, and his ethics are always theological,” *Romans*, 702.

16 Schrage, *Ethics*, 172.

his previous discussion on the believers being gathered “in Christ,” both at the beginning of the section (12:5) and at the end where we find a strong sequence of references to Christ in 15:2-3, and 7-13. With these strong allusions to Christ, which bracket this section, Paul intends for the readers to understand the specifics of Christian life in close correlation with Christ, from whom they constantly draw, as both source and form.¹⁷ These chapters are therefore an integral part of the overall structure and argument of the letter. Through them, Paul wants to communicate to the believers in Rome that the appropriate conduct he demands is rooted in God’s mercy¹⁸ and that his concrete exhortations follow from and are closely interrelated with his previous argument of the story of Christ and the believers’ incorporation into it.

Ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος “Let love be genuine,” (v. 9), represents the heading statement for the entire passage of Romans 12:9-21 where genuine love, as the fundamental norm of conduct, is given concrete meanings. It is here that Paul shows what it actually means “to present their bodies as a living sacrifice” (12:1): it is the realization of genuine love through a life of harmony, hospitality, peace, renunciation of vengeance, and overcoming evil with good. These are indeed concrete and explicit practices of genuine love, “the reality of embodied existence,”¹⁹ both within and outside the Christian community, practices that would represent an adequate response to the gospel of God’s grace. Further, in order for them “not to be confirmed to this world” (12:2), the believers are to live in constant care and concern for “the other” – not looking to their own interest, not suspicious, not expecting to receive love in return.²⁰ It will be, of course, as the believers experience that radical “transformation and renewal of their mind” that they will be able to “discern” the will of God and incarnate it in their daily conduct.

Ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος. “let love be genuine” (v. 9). As seen in the Greek, the construction of the opening sentence does not have a connection particle, but in the sequence of participles and adjectives that follows in verses 9-13, Paul qualifies

17 See Schrage, *Ethics*, 174.

18 This, of course, must be understood within the larger framework of δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ which Paul defends throughout the letter, as Wilson correctly points out. Walter T. Wilson, *Love without Pretence: Romans 12:9-21 and Hellenistic-Jewish Wisdom Literature* (WUNT 2/46. Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1991), 128.

19 Michael Barram, “Romans 12:9-21,” *Interpretation* 57.4 (2003), 424.

20 We could call these “practices of exclusion.”

what genuine love²¹ means: “hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lack in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers” (vv. 9b-13). The believers are to understand that by showing affection, honoring the other, rejoicing, sharing with the needy, and offering hospitality, they “serve the Lord” (v. 11). These should apply to all people, inside and outside of the community without any differentiations, and even towards persecutors: “bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them” (v. 14).

In expounding “genuine love,” Paul emphasizes its implications for everyday life by highlighting that it brings about a specific conduct towards *all* people. It is exactly these practices of reconciliation that Paul wants to inspire and cultivate among the believers in Rome, practices that will give evidence of their new life in Christ and enable them to be a witness to the world for the lordship of Christ over all reality. Paul stresses again and again that this transformation of their lives and the renewal of their minds are not about an ethical theory or abstract principles, but are realities they have experienced and which they must embody in concrete manifestations of love, peace, reconciliation, harmony, tolerance, and consideration for the other.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep, live in harmony with one another ... associate with the lowly” (vv. 15-16). Paul is urging believers in Rome not to retreat from interactions with their unbelieving (and even hostile) neighbors, but to instead look for ways to establish a common ground, to understand their condition, “to live imaginatively into the situation of the other,”²² to make friends even with the lowly – thus discouraging any arrogant and superior attitude.²³ The apparent return to issues dealing with the internal affairs of the community in a context which addresses the relationship of the churches with the wider world is a strong indication that for Paul there is no

21 Even though no verb appears in Greek in the first sentence – it simply reads ἡ ἀγάπη ἀνυπόκριτος “love-genuine” – grammatically the succession of participles and adjectives seem to modify this opening phrase. So, Wright, *Romans*, 711.

22 Grieb, *Story of Romans*, 121.

23 It is possible that in these chapters Paul is also trying to respond to charges brought against him that his law-free gospel of grace and of the abundance of the Spirit leads to moral negligence, arrogance, immorality, even apostasy and that it encourages a stance of indifference and contempt for others and disengagement from the world at large. Paul's response cannot be stronger in his emphasis that a life lived in the Spirit of Christ is indeed a life of total freedom, but that this freedom cannot be exercised to the detriment of others and in a detachment from the outside world. See further Calvin Roetzel, “Sacrifice in Romans 12-15” *Word & World* 6 (1986), 419-20.

double standard of behavior: the same norm of love, as exemplified in the life of Jesus, applies to their integrated life both within and outside of the church, towards the “insiders” and “outsiders” alike, despite their differences, ethnicity, or social and economic status.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (vv. 17-18). The appeal here is for believers “to pursue a behavior that will have a positive impact on ‘all people.’”²⁴ With this, Paul repeats one of the main points of the paragraph, that is, defining the relationship of the believer with outsiders: “repay no one evil for evil.” And this should not be just sporadic, spontaneous reactions, but rather a constant, thoughtfully cultivated attitude “*take thought* for what is noble in the sight of all” – as the prefix to the participle προνοούμενοι (“thinking beforehand”) indicates.²⁵ This is indeed the clearest point Paul makes regarding the need to consider in advance, thoughtfully and explicitly, the social implications of the gospel for a particular context. To respond to the gospel is to commit oneself to a particular way of being *in* the world and *for* the world. This is further confirmed by the phrasing that they “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all” (v. 17b) where we detect an acknowledgment from Paul of at least some acceptable moral considerations in the wider world,²⁶ thus discouraging a total negative view of the outside world or a withdrawal from it. To be sure, Paul had just asked them not to conform themselves to this world; that remains true in as much as there are cultural values that they should resist, since they come in opposition to a gospel of love and reconciliation. Yet, Paul’s point here (v. 17) is that wherever there is good in a culture which is universally recognized, they should be committed to that good.

Having an adequate grasp of reality around him, Paul is aware that living with a “renewed mind” “according to the Spirit” will inevitably bring opposition and hostility from the world. And yet, he admonishes the believers to make every effort from their side to “live peaceably with all” (v. 18b), as Paul sees this as one of the

24 Moo, *Romans*, 785.

25 Wright, *Romans*, 714.

26 So James D.G. Dunn, *Romans*. Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 38 a,b. (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988. CD-Rom, Electronic edition. Libronix Digital Library, 2002).

most important practical outworkings of the gospel of love and reconciliation.²⁷ The double qualification that Paul uses in v. 18a, (“if it is possible”) and (“so far as it depends on you”), does not limit the believers’ pursuit of peace. On the contrary, they should do everything that depends on them to live peaceably. The qualifications may indicate the inevitability of the tension, even conflict caused by the nature and the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the Lord of the world to which Christians bear witness! But it is clear from the context that Christians are themselves not only to refrain from *any* action that may cause, maintain, or intensify the conflict, but are also to bless when persecuted, to return good for evil, and to live peaceably with all.

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’ No, ‘if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads’” (vv. 19-21). Here are two very significant points for our understanding of the social meaning of the gospel. First, the believers are never to avenge themselves (v. 19a), or try to bring their own justice. It is not that they should not be concerned with justice and its pursuit. Rather, Paul prohibits personal vengeance and emphasizes that they should “leave room for the wrath of God” (v. 19b), who will bring justice. This point has two practical implications: a) it is a strong incentive to resist the natural impulse of revenge which is so easily and so often hidden under the disguise of “justice,” and b) by leaving the issue of justice to God, there is a strong sense that “justice will be done” rather than being left with a feeling of despair and hopelessness, especially in extremely difficult situations where there may not be an easy, concrete and foreseeable solution of justice at hand. In fact, as Paul will show in chapter 13, it is not that justice will need to wait until divine intervention, but that the government, as an instrument of God, is in the business of bringing justice by commending the good and punishing the wrong.

Second, Paul goes much further in suggesting a radically different way of action which should replace private vengeance. Not only are the believers to refrain from retaliating, but they should actively look for the good of those who have harmed them: “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink” (v. 20a). Moreover, as Cranfield remarks, “to fail to do to our

27 It is somewhat puzzling that Moo is wondering as to the reasons why Paul included this admonition here. He states, “we do not know whether there was any special need to exhort the Roman Christians to live at peace with their fellow-citizens!” *Romans*, 785. However, he rightly insists that given the unavoidable conflict and tension that the Christians may find themselves in with the world, they should not use such situations “as an excuse for behavior that needlessly exacerbates that conflict or for a resignation that leads us not even to bother to seek to maintain a positive witness.” *Ibid.*, 786.

enemies the good they stand in need of, when it is in our power to do so, is a 'kind of indirect retaliation.'"²⁸ In a sense, this might well be a concrete application of the appeal Paul made a little earlier in verse 14: "bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them."²⁹ To feed your enemies, to be good to them, is indeed to overcome evil with good, as Paul concludes this subsection in verse 21.

Paul goes yet a step further and hints beyond a simple concern with the appropriate behavior of the believer to a real care for the enemy. Thus, he points out that the result of their totally surprising goodness towards their enemies will "heap burning coals on their heads" (v. 20b), which is "almost certainly intended as the burning shame of remorse for having treated someone so badly."³⁰ By their appropriate behavior, by their love towards the enemy, the victims may cause repentance and reconciliation.³¹

"Do not to be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21), concludes the entire section, reinforcing the thought that the believers are to respond to the evil in the world with the same love and goodness they have themselves been shown by God in Christ. But this verse also points to the possibility that evil will prevail if believers give in to patterns of actions characteristic of "this age," such as returning evil for evil or vengeance for persecution. The only way to overcome evil is by responding with good. In line with the possible positive effect one's goodness may have on the enemy in v. 20, here Paul expresses a fundamental

28 Cranfield, Cranfield, C.E.B., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1979), 648.

29 While we agree with Dunn's suggestion that Paul advocated a "policy of prudence," being aware of how small, insignificant, and vulnerable churches in the Roman Empire were, we also think one should not limit the force of Paul's advice by arguing that his "first concern [was] ... to urge a policy of avoiding trouble by refuting retaliation." Rather, we take the position that while Paul would indeed be the first one to advise the churches not to go into unnecessary and futile provocations, his appeal is fundamentally based on the very nature of his gospel of sacrificial love and peace manifested in everyday life, following the pattern of Jesus, whatever the actual historical, political and social circumstances. Thus, Paul's first priority was that the believers in Rome would embody the gospel in active, positive ways, particularly through acts of goodness, love, and peace.

30 Wright, *Romans*, 715.

31 Cranfield, *Romans* II, 648-50. It is almost certain that Paul is thinking back to chapter 5 at God's unilateral love, manifested in Christ's self-sacrifice which made it possible that "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God" (5:10). Similarly, one may trace here impulses from the teaching and example of Jesus. Finally, this may also be a tacit allusion to Paul's personal experience in the encounter with Christ, when even while he was a persecutor of the church and an enemy of Christ he found himself embraced, forgiven, and reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:11-21).

conviction in the power of goodness and self-giving love to be effective in a world of violence and domination. It is a pointer to Christ, who has conquered evil not by fighting back or responding in kind, but by showing love and goodness in his self-sacrifice. It is by resisting evil, by breaking the cycle of violence, that the believers actually embody the gospel of Christ and make it effective in the world. Doing otherwise means letting themselves be “conformed” to this world and be changed by the evil of one’s enemy,³² a situation which is the opposite of being “transformed” and renewed by the mercies of God in giving themselves as “living sacrifices.”

Conclusion

We have tried to show that it was Paul’s appeal to the story of Christ that enabled him to address and hold together the indicative and imperative, theology and ethics, doctrine and life. Christ’s story is not only his own story but it includes the story of believers. By virtue of their participation in Christ, believers can live rightly and be active actors as the same story of Christ is being unfolded in their midst. The logic of the story requires a particular way of living, a “walk in the newness of life” (6:4), meaning concretely a life of peace, love, welcome, reconciliation and hope in the midst of suffering and difficulties. Indeed, such a stance is to be manifested both within the community of believers and towards outsiders, including the governing authorities of the Roman Empire.

The mechanism of this incorporation “in Christ” with all its implications was explicitly described by Paul in chapter 6 under the rubric of baptism. By their dying-and-rising with Christ, believers have been transferred into a new eschatological reality “in Christ” which is a real transfer into a new mode of existence, from sin to righteousness, from death to life – a life within the sphere of the power and lordship of Christ. Being buried with Christ into his death, their rising means that the *mode* and *nature* of their present life in the new age inaugurated by Jesus’ resurrection has been radically changed. To participate “in Christ” means to share in his new and true humanity, to live a life appropriate for the new age inaugurated by the resurrection of Christ. We concluded that Paul retold the story of Christ with the purpose of showing that those “in Christ” share in his story, their new life being a manifestation of their intimate union with Christ.

Paul urged his readers to live out the practices of genuine love as an integral part of the gospel, an inherent aspect of their being “in Christ.” Indeed, we have

32 Wright, *Romans*, 722; Cranfield, *Romans II*, 650.

seen that Romans 12-15 could be understood as a working out of the implications of being “in Christ,” a position which commits those who respond to the gospel to a transformed and renewed life in obedience to Christ. These practices of reconciliation are anchored in, and presuppose, the story of Christ both as the ground and the paradigm for a reconciliatory way of life. We have argued that, for Paul, to respond to the gospel is to acknowledge and accept the truth it proclaims, *and* to live according to the logic of the gospel, the logic of the kingdom of God, the logic of the vision of the new creation. Thus, the radical transformation and renewal of the self is *both* enabled *and* required by the gospel. But to live according to the logic of the gospel and in the light of the life of Christ also means to be community oriented; and that is a community where everyone is to nurture and embody reconciliatory practices which enhance and enrich life together: harmony and solidarity, peace, love, and regard for others.

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Sažetak

U našem sve sekularnijem, pluralističnijem postmodernom svijetu, jest istinska utjelovljena kršćanska prisutnost koja se odražava konkretnim očitovanjima oprostjenja, pomirenja, dobrodošlice, nade i ljubavi koje se očituju u utjelovljenju, životu, smrti i uskrsnuću Isusa Krista. Ovaj članak istražuje što Biblija/Pavao kažu o ovom bitnom čimbeniku kršćanskoga svjedočanstva te pokazuje da je činjenje djela istinske ljubavi istovremeno sastavni dio Evanđelja i konkretno očitovanje ili utjelovljenje Evanđelja u st-

varnim životnim prilikama. On nadalje pokazuje da je "pripovijest o Kristu" temelj i mogućnost trajnoga utjelovljenja Evandjelja. Svojim uključivanjem u istu tu pripovijest o Kristu i svojim sudjelovanjem "u Kristu", kršćani postaju djelatni sudionici Božje pripovijesti o otkupljenju svijeta.