

"THE PROFIT AND THE LOSS" FOR PAUL THROUGH THE PROCESS OF ENCOUNTERING JESUS

By Dr. Chul Hae Kim¹

INTRODUCTION

Most scholars agree that the main factor that changed and dominated the life of Paul was his *encounter with the Son of God, Jesus Christ*. Witherington emphasizes its importance in Pauline theology and calls Jesus "a dominant sun" for Paul's ministry.² However, we need to understand the specific realm in which the change happened and how his value system had been changed by encountering Jesus. What was the most valuable thing for Paul before the encountering? What does it mean "*to consider everything a loss* compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus" (**Phil 3:8**)? The answer for this question will clarify not only his value system but the characteristics of his ministry philosophy and goal in relation to his background, both Hellenistic and Jewish. However, this study does not put emphasis on the relationship nor on "the encountering itself" but rather on the process and the nature of the shift of his world-view through his conversion and his value system as the result. Especially the Philippians passage (3:2-11) will help to understand the previous values of Paul and their shift to "**the resurrected value,**" together with other bio-graphical passages of Paul (Gal 1:11-16; 2 Cor 11:16-22) and those of Acts (9:1-19; 22:1-16; 26:1-18), describing His change from a Pharisaic Jew to a Christian, even an apostle to the Gentiles. One thing that makes it clear is that, when one mentions Paul's conversion, it does mean a whole, on-going process, not just a momentary event. That process started from the basis of Paul's previous knowledge of the Old Testament, as well as of the historical Jesus, plus the following meditations and further revelations from Jesus after the encounter (2 Cor 12:1).

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²Ben Witherington, III, *Paul's Narrative Thought World* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1994), 81. For further information on the impact of Paul's conversion, see Richard N. Longenecker, ed., *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought, and Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

HIS EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

His Birth: Hellenistic Influence

HELLENISTIC INFLUENCE

In searching for the origin of Christianity, one of the major issues is to trace the background of the Apostle Paul, whether from Judaism or from Hellenistic culture. Paul was born in Tarsus (Acts 22:3), which was the capital city of the Roman province Cilicia. In the city of Cilicia "the Greek and the Oriental peoples and cultures met and mixed."³ Born as a descendant of a Hellenistic Jew who was a Roman citizen, Paul was bi-cultural, both Jew and Greek. Getting inside Paul, a perfect Jew in his own testimony (Acts 21:39; Phil 3:6), the Hellenistic aspect of his life must not be ignored. Man cannot be free from his environment, especially from the language he is using.⁴ Considering Paul's "good knowledge of Greek and preference for the Septuagint over the Hebrew Bible,"⁵ he cannot be exempted from the influence of Hellenistic culture. In this sense, we cannot deny the Hellenistic influence in Paul's life,⁶ even though there is no consensus as to the extent of Hellenistic influence upon him. Whiteley points out that we need to be very careful in defining what is or is not Hellenistic.

It is clear that the thought-world of St. Paul and that of contemporary Hellenistic culture had much in common. But when all is said and done, though there is much that *could* have been derived from Hellenistic sources, there is hardly anything which could have come *only* from Hellenistic sources: what the Apostle shares with the Gentile world is for the most part not *peculiar* to the Gentiles; it is found in that large area of belief and language which was shared by Jew and Gentile alike.⁷

³Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1981), 32.

⁴Concerning the Hebrew knowledge of Paul, see F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 236.

⁵Seyoon Kim, 32.

⁶Concerning the extent of Hellenistic influence upon Paul's life, it is different from scholar to scholar. See Seyoon Kim, 32-33. Also, see D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell, 1964), 3-4.

⁷Whiteley, 3.

HELLENISTIC JUDAISM

When we mention Hellenistic influence on Paul, it is quite a complicated form. Even though the Apostle Paul was under the influence of Hellenistic culture, that influence was hidden inside of his Jewishness in a form of Judaism. Paul was a Jew who had lived in the midst of Gentile races, of Greek culture. Even Palestinian Judaism itself was in the context of Hellenism under the rule of Rome. Thus, it is not wise to dichotomize between Judaism and Hellenism concerning the influence on Pauline theology. Furnish is correct to warn that any "one-sided decision about Paul's background . . . is bound to result in a one-sided interpretation."⁸ Therefore, we must accept the possibility of both Jewish and Hellenistic influences on Paul in a mixed form.⁹ This trend of amalgamation of Jewish and Greek elements can be found not only in Paul's letters but in the Diaspora synagogues themselves.¹⁰ To have the right understanding of Paul, we should analyze Hellenistic Judaism itself, where the Septuagint and Greek philosophical terms were used in a unique way.¹¹ Furnish characterized Hellenistic Judaism by illustrating Hellenistic terminology, style and concepts¹² that can be found in Paul's writings. He points out that even the Hellenistic terms and concepts used by Paul are decisively redefined and need to be interpreted "within the context of the Pauline letters."¹³

Heritage from His Ancestors: Jewish Influence

HIS JEWISHNESS: "CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH" (PHIL 3:4)

Paul never mentioned his formal training under the Hellenistic system. As we can find in his own words (Gal 1:14), his educational

⁸Victor Paul Furnish, *The Theology & Ethics in Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press), 50.

⁹Witherington mentions even Roman influence as well, 215f: "Paul was the product of the confluence of three cultural orientations--Jewish, Hellenistic Greek, and Roman."

¹⁰Hartwig Thyen, "Der Stil der jüdisch-hellenistischen Homilie," 119-20, FRLANT, n. F. 47 (1955); quoted by Furnish, 50.

¹¹Victor Paul Furnish, 44f. He states the ultimate relationship of Paul's theology with the Hellenistic influence: "No one really concerned about *communicating* to his contemporaries can afford to ignore or remain indifferent to the jargon of his day or the meaning of established terms and concepts."

¹²*Ibid.*, 45-49. He admits the "Hellenistic 'sources' in a more general sense," illustrate possible references from the Bible, and mentions the style of handling of scriptural texts and his oral preaching style are to be related to "the Cynic and Stoic street preachers of his day."

¹³*Ibid.*, 47.

background was not Hellenistic but more Jewish. As W. C. van Unnik insists on the basis of Acts 22:3, it is possible that Paul, similar to most Jews of the time, would have been taught in the synagogue, which acted as the school in his day.¹⁴ Even though Paul was a qualified and well-equipped Roman citizen who could enjoy its legal and cultural privileges, his pride was not in that but rather in his Jewishness--i.e., his being a Jew. Paul had cherished this Jewishness even when he had been called to be the apostle to the Gentiles after his conversion. He emphasized his Jewishness in the opening of three consecutive chapters (9-11) of the epistle to the Romans where he explained the relationship of Gentiles and Israel in God's redemption plan. In the ninth chapter, he confessed his compassion for his fellow people Israelites: "For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race, the people of Israel" (v. 3). In the tenth chapter, "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved" (v. 1). In the eleventh chapter, before mentioning God's plan for Israel he confessed his Jewishness: "I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin" (v. 1). In his ministry, this Jewishness had special meaning even to serve as the apostle to the Gentiles.¹⁵

"A HEBREW OF HEBREWS" (PHIL 3:5)

His confidence in the flesh rested not only on his tribal origin, "of the tribe of Benjamin," but on his being different from other Jews of his time. Paul specialized the term "Hebrew" to "Israelite" or "Jew" in his writings, which can be found in the writings of Luke as well.¹⁶ Similar descriptions to this Philippians passage can be found in two more passages related to Paul in the New Testament. The second Corinthian passage had been written with the same situation as that of Philippians. Both passages were given in targeting against Paul's opponents, who had boasting of confidence in their bodies. Even though R. C. H. Lenski considers "Hebrews," "Israelites," and "Abraham's descendants" as close synonyms,¹⁷ they need to be

¹⁴W. Schrage, _____, *TDNT*, vii, 824f.

¹⁵Concerning his Jewishness and mission for the Gentiles, see Terence L. Donaldson, "Israelite, Convert, Apostle to the Gentiles: The Origin of Paul's Gentile Mission," *The Road from Damascus*, 62-84.

¹⁶F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 42.

¹⁷*The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937),

distinguished not only by linguistic but cultural differences.¹⁸ They all refer to the Jewishness, but their emphases are different. As used in the sixth chapter of Acts, "Hebrews" stands in contrast to "Hellenistic Jews." Philo, an Alexandrian Jew and Paul's contemporary, employed the word "Hebrews" to denote those Hebrew-speaking Jews.¹⁹ Through its painful history, the Hebrew language could not be kept pure but had moderated to a form of Aramaic which had been used in Palestine--including Jerusalem, the city of God. In that sense, the emphasis of the phrase "a Hebrew of Hebrews" is on the purity of the identity as a covenant people chosen by God. That identity of Jewishness had been characterized by language and rituals, including circumcision. That is why Paul mentions his circumcision experience: "circumcised on the eighth day" (Phil 3:5). What Paul wanted to say through the passage was to show the purity of his identity in contrast to his opponents by verifying his Jewishness in its utmost purity.²⁰

WAY OF LIFE IN JUDAISM²¹

Not only had Paul cherished his Jewishness, but he was also raised in strict conformity with Jewish ideals. Paul himself stated his "previous way of life in Judaism" to defend his apostleship to the churches in Galatia: "I was advancing in Judaism beyond many Jews of my own age and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14). To have such firm confidence in Judaism, he was sent to Jerusalem, the center of Judaism in his early age,²² and trained under the best teachers of his time, including the well-known Gamaliel, who

1268-69.

¹⁸Seyoon Kim, 35. He defines this phrase to be "nothing beyond that coming from the family which had a close connection with Palestine or even had only recently immigrated into the diaspora he maintained the Aramaic language and the Palestinian custom even in the Greek-speaking environment."

¹⁹Quoted in F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, 42f.

²⁰Interestingly, he describes himself as "an Israelite," not as "a Hebrew" in the Epistle to the Romans: "I am an Israelite myself, a descendent of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin" (11:1). There was no assumed party who was criticizing him, his apostleship, nor his Gospel at that time.

²¹See James D. G. Dunn, (*The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, 348). Concerning Judaism at the time of Paul, Dunn gives a clear definition of it: "The term 'Judaism' seems to have been coined as a means of giving focus to the determination of the Maccabean patriots to defend the distinctive national identity given them by their ancestral religion. It was not simply a neutral description of 'the religion of the Jews,' as we might wish to use it today."

²²Concerning the possibility of Paul's stay in Jerusalem in his early age, see Seyoon Kim (33-34), where he supports W. C. van Unnik who has shown it to be probable, as well as points out the weakness of the opposite view of R. Bultmann.

was "the successor of Hillel as head of his school."²³ Paul writes, "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city. Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today" (Acts 22:3). In this sense, Judaism for Paul had been more than learning. **It had been his life style and a way of life; knowledge developed into his behavior, into a way of life, life itself.** That was why Paul mentioned his educational background, including his teacher Gamaliel, with pride.

Paul as a Pharisee Eager in Judaism: Pauline Pride in the Law

"A PHARISEE" WITH PRIDE

Paul called himself "a Pharisee," in regard to the law (Phil 3:5), "the strictest sect of their religion" (Acts 26:5). In the Gospels, we hear of the Pharisees with bad connotations. However, as E. P. Sanders describes the limitation of the study of Judaism in the time of Jesus and Paul because of the lack of surviving Jewish literature,²⁴ we need to be cautious to have a right understanding of Paul's pride as a Pharisee. The "Pharisee," as Paul called himself, was quite different from the Pharisee in the Gospels, a term which had bad connotations. Sanders defines the main flow of Palestinian Judaism as a "**covenantal nomism**" which had been the common pattern of Palestinian Judaism "from early in the second century b.c.e. to late in the second century c.e."²⁵ As T. W. Manson points out, the Pharisees became the living branch of Judaism and had been "the upholders of 'tradition.'"²⁶ However, they were not only orthodox in the sense of holding to the old ways and the central doctrines of the religion of Israel, they also became receptive to new ideas. In this way, the Pharisees took the role both of preserving the tradition as well as developing new ideas, which became "the background for the earliest Christian theology."²⁷ In this sense, Paul proudly called himself a Pharisee, not as a shameful thing.

²³F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977), 50.

²⁴E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 426-28.

²⁵*Ibid.*, 426. Concerning the definition of covenant nomism see pp. 419-26 of the same book.

²⁶T. W. Manson, *The Servant-Messiah: A Study of the Public Ministry of Jesus*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953-1977), 17-21.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 21.

"FAULTLESS (**a nemptoV**)"

Paul further described himself with pride to be "faultless as for legalistic righteousness" (Phil 3:5). This did not mean that he was blameless before God, for he himself confessed that there was no one who could be found righteous before God (Rom 3:9, 23). His insistence upon being "blameless" equals the statement that Zechariah and Elizabeth had been blameless for "observing all the Lord's commandments and regulations" (Luke 1:6). If Paul had been faithful and dedicated to the teaching of Judaism, Paul's pride included his obedience to the minutiae of the law on the basis of the larger principles of religion and had committed himself to God in a humble attitude on the basis of Jewish covenantal nomism. As the origin of the term "Pharisee" shows,²⁸ when Paul mentioned himself to be "faultless," it meant that he must have exercised great care in matters of ritual purity, in food laws, the sabbath law and other ceremonial requirements which were in both the written and oral law, and had not violated anything according to the standards of the Pharisees of his time. In this sense, his moral standard had been external and based on the human institution of Pharisaism which, while demanding to be divine, was, in fact, not.

BOASTING (**kaucaomi**) ABOUT

Normal Jews at the time of Paul boasted about God and the law as well as about Judaism (Rom 2:17, 23). It is natural to think that Paul was one of the Jews of the time. Paul's boasting rested upon the same basis or stronger than others: "If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have **more (mallon)**" (Phil 3:4); "I was **advancing in Judaism** beyond many Jews of my own age and was **extremely (perissoterwV) zealous** for the tradition of my fathers" (Gal 1:14). But the question about Paul is his attitude toward the Law and Judaism. How was it possible for Paul to boast of past things, even after his conversion? Although he pointed out his own attitude to be foolish, he still continued boasting or being confident: "though I myself have reasons for such confidence" (Phil 3:4); "What anyone else dare to

²⁸Possible explanations on the origin of the term Pharisee are either "separatists" in the sense of "breaking away from the Hasmonaean alliance" or "expounders of the divine law." Also, another explanation is "Persianizers," which is a taunt flung at them by their theological opponents. For more explanations, see F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History* (Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1971), 71-72. Also, see T. W. Manson, 19-20.

boast about--I am speaking as a fool--I also dare to boast about" (2 Cor 11:21). There must be some reason for his boasting. One thing clear on this aspect is that his boasting is compared with his opponents whose insistence was on Judaism and its requirements.

His Early (Jewish) Ministry: Practitioner in Zeal

"ADVANCING IN JUDAISM," AS A JEWISH MISSIONARY

Paul had been eager not only in observing the law as a Pharisee but also in the Judaism of his time. He had been quite different from his fellow Jews (Gal 1:14). The struggle that Paul had against his opponents was severe because of his past practice in Judaism (Acts 9:26). There is no exact record of Paul before conversion. However, many scholars have suggested that Paul was a Jewish missionary before his conversion, on the basis of Gal 5:11, "Brothers, if I am still preaching circumcision, why am I still being persecuted?"²⁹ The main issue raised against the Galatian opponents was the dispute on circumcision. The use of ετι (still) with κηρυσσω (proclaim) implies that there was a time when he preached circumcision. If we accept this interpretation,³⁰ it is possible to call Paul a Jewish missionary. Since there was no record of a formal, regular, professional missionary enterprise in the days of Paul in Judaism, Seyoon Kim denies the possibility of calling Paul a missionary in the sense of one who is sent out by a religious community to proclaim their faith.³¹ However, if we consult the Gospel where Jesus mentioned Jewish leaders, "You travel over land and see to win a single convert" (Matt 23:15), it is possible that Paul could have been a private missionary for Judaism.

PERSECUTING MISSIONARY

In fact, Paul was more than a private missionary. Paul was worthy to be called a formal, regular missionary for Judaism even if we define a "missionary" as one sent by a certain institution with a special task. Paul had this call from the institution of Judaism. In this case, he

²⁹See Seyoon Kim, 39-44.

³⁰Concerning the usage of the conditional clause in this sentence, see Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark Ltd., 1980), 280f.; see also p. 32.

³¹Concerning the possibility and the nature of Paul's situation, see Seyoon Kim, 39-40.

got his own call through his self-demanding. He had a public and formal call from the high priest, after he had stoned Stephen to death, to persecute Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1-2). It was not the only case according to his own confession. Even before he went to Damascus, he had persecuted the "followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison" (Acts 22:4), concerning which even "the high priest and all the Council can testify" (Acts 22:5).

THEOLOGICAL ZEAL FOR PERSECUTION

Paul described his hatred toward the church as "zeal" (ζήλος: Gal 1:14; Phil 3:5; Acts 22:3,4). However, the "zeal" that Paul mentioned had to be understood in the context of the history of Israel. K. Haacker is right when he infers that "zeal" signifies not merely a psychological state but a theological category and connects the pre-conversion Paul with the spiritual tradition of the Maccabees and the Zealots who showed violent religious intolerance.³² According to Haacker, the Maccabean uprising (1 Macc 2:23ff.), inspired by the zeal for the law, was compared with Phinehas, who slew an apostate Israelite out of his zeal for God (Num 25:1-18) and became the prototype of the "zealot." Seyoon Kim calls Paul the "zealot" for the Mosaic law and the ancestral tradition.³³ James D. G. Dunn characterizes the "zeal" here in three points: Firstly, the zeal was an unconditional commitment to maintain Israel's distinctiveness. Secondly, there was a readiness to do this by force. Thirdly, this zeal was directed not only against the Gentiles but against fellow Jews, too.³⁴ It is interesting that this kind of zeal can be found in the opponents of Paul who chased him everywhere, all the way to Jerusalem until they had him arrested in the temple. When Paul arrived from his third journey, the people in the Jerusalem church advised and warned him: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are **zealous for the law**" (Acts 21:20). Some of them made a plot to kill Paul. More than forty people formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until

³²K. Haacker, "Die Berufung des Verfolgers und die Rechtfertigung des Gottlosen," *Theol. Beiträge* 6 (1975): 5-10; quoted in Seyoon Kim, 41f..

³³Seyoon Kim, 46.

³⁴James D. G. Dunn, 350-54.

they had killed Paul (Acts 23:12-13). This former zealot (Paul) was in danger from other zealots because of his being "apostate from the law" which they earnestly supported. The zeal of Paul followed the position of the Pharisaic tradition of his time--i.e., "the radical wing of the Pharisaic movement."³⁵

CHURCH-PERSECUTING MISSIONARY JOURNEYS

The target of Paul's persecution was the church, and the goal of his persecution was to destroy the church (Gal 1:13). In fact, his persecution was persecuting Jesus. He tried all possible ways (killing, imprisoning, threatening, and blaspheming) "to oppose the name of Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 26:9-11). His persecution was not a one-time-event. The number that he had killed, because of the way of cross, was not limited to Stephen only. He put many of the **saints (plural)** in prison; and, when **they (plural)** were put to death, he cast votes against them (Acts 26:10). Even his persecuting missionary journey was not just one single trip to Damascus. **Many times** he traveled from one synagogue to another. He even traveled to many foreign **cities (plural)**, and the journey to Damascus was one of the **many journeys (plural)** (Acts 26:11-12).

CHANGING PROCESS: HIS CONVERSION EXPERIENCE

The Profit of the Conversion Event

WAYS OF INTERPRETATION

Concerning the conversion of Paul, there have been various theories in the history of New Testament interpretation. Interpretation of his conversion experience has been multifaceted and cannot be defined neatly. Bruce Corley's proposal, offered after surveying the history of New Testament interpretation, is helpful in understanding the theological meaning of Pauline conversion.³⁶ Even the term

³⁵Seyoon Kim, 43.

³⁶Bruce Corley, "Interpreting Paul's Conversion--Then and Now," *The Road from Damascus*, 1-16. He illustrates four different models of the impact of Paul's conversion on his theology. The soteriological model interprets the conversion of Paul as revealing Christ as the end of the law (Rom. 10:4). The Christological model interprets Damascus as revealing Jesus as the Messiah of Israel (Gal. 1:12). The missiological model sees Damascus as revealing the divine intention to

"conversion" itself is getting attention. Sociologically and psychologically, three different terms are illustrated: "alternation," "conversion," and "transformation."³⁷ Any one term cannot explain the full meaning of the great change which happened in Paul.

GRACE-EVENT

Besides the three terms which have been introduced, we need to use other terms which refer to his conversion. The first term is "grace-event." One of the key issues for understanding the change that occurred in the life of Paul is to see the grace aspect both in his life and in his theology. Concerning his own conversion, he called it a grace-event when God "set me apart from birth and called me **by his grace**" (Gal 1:15). Because of his persecution of Christians, he indicated he was not worthy to be called an apostle. That is why he called himself "the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle" (1 Cor 15:9). In that sense, he was the right person who could preach God's grace all over the world. This grace-event stands in contrast to his former boasting (καυχομαι) in the law as well as in Judaism. As an extreme Jew, the best way to crush his boasting is by grace only. That is why his confession of human transformation in Christ, which is the vital core of Christianity, **includes grace and excludes boasting**: "For it is **by grace** you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God--not by works, so that **no one can boast**" (Eph 2:8,9; cf. Rom 3:24,27). The grace and faith principle goes together in Paul.³⁸

Change of Christology

REVELATION-EVENT

Another term that characterizes Paul's conversion is "revelation," which is a key element of Paul's theology. Paul describes his encountering event as God's special purpose "to reveal his Son in me" (Gal 1:16). Paul's view of Jesus had been changed. Before

incorporate the Gentiles into the people of God by faith (Rom. 1:5). Lastly, the doxological model sees Damascus as revealing Jesus as the Lord of Glory (2 Cor. 4:6).

³⁷Ibid., 15.

³⁸Concerning Paul's understanding of grace as well as faith, see Ben Witherington, *Paul's Narrative through World*, 249-55. He writes, "Paul's gospel is assuredly *charis* from start to finish, and few had personally experienced more of the reality of how gracious God is and how much it is an undeserved favor, than this former persecutor of the church" (p. 255).

encountering Jesus, Paul had difficulty understanding Jesus as well as His Gospel. After the conversion, the last and perfect revelation from God (Heb 1:1-2), Paul's Christology had been changed. After comparing the ministry of Moses, which "brought death" (2 Cor 3:7), to "the ministry of the living God," which "brings righteousness" (2 Cor 3:8, 9), Paul declares the glorious ministry of reconciliation with the right view of Christ: "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do no longer" (2 Cor 5:16). As a result, man becomes a new creation in Christ (2 Cor 5:17).³⁹

REVELATION OF THE GOSPEL

Encountering Jesus has more meaning for Paul than just meeting a special person. It is a special revelation from God to Paul, much like the incarnation of Jesus which gives a special meaning to human history. The revelation of Jesus is the revelation of the Gospel itself (Gal 1:11,12,16) by shedding the light of Christ upon the darkness of the human heart (2 Cor 4:1-6). We cannot tell exactly what God revealed to Paul in Damascus, but we can tell that that event was the starting and foundational point for all of the revelation Paul received from God.⁴⁰ Paul describes the Damascus experience as a revelation of the resurrection (1 Cor 15:8), which becomes the evidence of the resurrection of the saints. Also, he sees the Damascus experience as a revelation of the mystery (Rom 16:25; Eph 3:3). However, one thing that is clear about the content of the Gospel that Paul received through the revelation of Jesus was that his prior knowledge of the Messiah or knowledge of the Old Testament prophets helped him. They all worked together with the encounter and made it a perfect revelation of God, of the Christ. That was how he could preach that "Jesus is the Son of God" only a few days after his encounter on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:19,20). In this sense, Paul was not a convert from Judaism to Christianity but a Pharisee who accepted Jesus as the

³⁹Seyoon Kim gives a detailed explanation on this passage (2 Cor. 5:11-21) in relation to the Damascus experience of Paul in "God Reconciled His Enemy to Himself: The Origin of Paul's Concept of Reconciliation," *The Road from Damascus*, 107-13.

⁴⁰Concerning the nature and extent of revelation through Paul's encountering Jesus, see Seyoon Kim, *The Origin of Paul's Gospel*, 67-99. Seyoon Kim suggests the possibility of receiving revelation from God not only through a one-time Damascus event but through many other revelations: "Paul could have received the revelation of the mystery either through one of the 'visions and revelations' that he experienced (2 Cor. 12.1ff.) in much the same way as the Jewish apocalypists did" (pp. 86f.).

Messiah for whom he had waited.

Conversion of World-view: The Loss and the Gain

RECOVERY FROM THE "TERRITORIAL DIMENSION" OF JUDAISM

The evidence that Paul had been changed was the new goal of his ministry. W. D. Davies points out that the heart of Judaism is the Torah, as well as "The Land."⁴¹ Even Paul could not free himself from Jewish particularism. However, after he had the revelation from Jesus on the road of Damascus, he should cease his boastings of his Judaism--i.e., particularism as a Jew. He lost all of the significance that he had boasted about: "the people of Israel," "the tribe of Benjamin," and "the descendant of Abraham." He confessed that "there is no difference between Jew and Gentile" (Rom 10:12; cf. Gal 3:28). This oneness in Christ is the core of the Gospel and is a revealed mystery through the coming of Christ: "This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body" (Eph 3:6). The best way to show God's grace through Jesus was, after calling Paul, commissioning him to be the apostle to the Gentiles: "so that I might preach him among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:16).

RECOVERY FROM SELF-RIGHTEOUSNESS

The second boasting that Paul had as an extreme "zealot" for the law had been crushed as well. If a Jew at the time of Paul was compelled to choose either the Torah or the Land, the Torah was the ultimate choice, according to the history of Israel. In that sense, Paul had been faithful to the Law and could be described as "faultless" in terms of legalistic righteousness. This pride as a perfect Pharisee yielded to the righteousness from God, which became the main theme of the Epistle to the Romans. His boasting of being righteous transferred into the confession of universal sin over human beings (Rom 1:18-3:20). His boasting changed into the confession that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the worst" (1Tim 1:15).

⁴¹W. D. Davies, *Jewish and Pauline Studies* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 71.

RECOVERY OF THE IDENTITY

Paul had been boasting of his Jewishness. This boasting was all the mixture of the other boastings, such as his tribal, national, cultural and family origin. Not only did he have a special background, but also he did his best to keep his purity as a Jew, as a Hebrew, as a Pharisee, and as a perfect legal man. He had been full of boastings. That was his identity of Jewishness as well as Phariseeness. However, in his encounter with Jesus, all of the reasons for his boastings had had been crushed. His identity as a Jew, as a Pharisee, and as a perfect man, had been broken into nothing. At the moment Jesus revealed Himself to Paul, his identity of Jewishness had been replaced with the identity of Christness--i.e., being one in Christ. He confessed, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE LOSS AND THE GAIN

Paul pronounced that Christ became the end of the law (Rom 10:4). Before encountering Jesus Christ, Paul's utmost goal was to maintain the basis for his boasting. But once he received the revelation of Jesus on the way to Damascus, all of his world-view had been changed. All his boastings had changed into a *σκαυδαλον* (stumbling stone). Because of this boasting, the Israelites stumbled against the rock of boastings. The main reason that Israel failed was as follows: "For I can testify that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge" (Rom 10:2). Paul confessed this change, "But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil 3:7). Paul's value system changed to the opposite of what it had been before he met Christ.

CONSIDER THEM RUBBISH

All of Paul's reasons for boasting before encountering Jesus were considered as "rubbish" (*ζημιον*) after meeting Him. In this practice of Paul, we can relate his attitude to the tradition of Israel. Moses gave prescriptions for dealing with idols: "This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire. For you are a people holy to the Lord your God" (Deut 7:5). The reason for this

command was to prohibit the idols from becoming a possible σκανδαλον (stumbling stone) for the people of God: "For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession" (Deut 7:6). Some Kings of Judea, when they had returned from the wrong ways of worshipping idols to the right way of worshipping God, followed this command. They removed all the articles made for Baal and Ashera and all the starry hosts, and burned the Ashera pole. In 2 Kings 23, we see how king Josiah not only burned it, he "ground it to powder and scattered the dust over the graves of the common people" (23:6). Also, he "desecrated Topheth, which was in the Valley of Ben Hinnom, so no one could use it to sacrifice" (23:10). Concerning the altars his fathers had built, "He removed them from there, smashed them to pieces and threw the rubble into the Kidron Valley" (23:12). What Paul had done in addition was that he "considered them [whatever was profit] rubbish" to gain Christ (Phil 3:8). That had happened in the value system of Paul. Previous boastful things Paul now considered as rubbish, much like King Josiah put the smashed idols into the tombs and "covered the sites with human bones" (2 Kings 23:14), for the sake of worshipping the true God.

SUMMARY

Through the process of encountering Jesus, very important changes occurred in Paul. Paul's message and his value system did not form during his ministry, but it was mostly transformed through his encounter with Jesus on the way to Damascus.

Paul had both Hellenistic and Jewish backgrounds in a mixed form which was a common characteristic of Judaism at the time. However, through his training at home and through the Jewish educational systems, he grew up to be the consummate Jew, developed into an extreme Pharisee who tried to maintain purity. As a Jew, he sought satisfaction by doing his best to observe all the requirements of the Law of Moses, according to human tradition. He lived what he taught--i.e., the way of Judaism. He thought of himself as acceptable before God and was boastful about his successes.

His extreme convictions concerning Judaism led him into the extreme practice of persecuting the church. He was a "zealot" among the Pharisees and worked as a missionary of Judaism with a theological

zeal. He faithfully persecuted any opposition to Judaism on those journeys.

However, the ministry of Paul was changed dramatically by the revelation of the Son of God. Paul found what was wrong with his previous practice of Judaism. It was not by man's practicing the law but by God's grace that man was to be saved and have a right relationship with God. God caused Paul to experience what salvation by grace means through special revelation on the way to Damascus.

Through the perfect revelation that God gave to Paul, his world-view was changed, as was his value system. All of Paul's previous reasons for boasting were suddenly seen as having no value. The way of salvation was neither because of his Jewishness nor his Phariseeness but through the grace which was given by God. All of the things that God had planned for him were revealed through His Son. God made his pursuit of salvation turn from one extreme (total self-reliance) to another (total God-reliance). Paul recovered from the territorial, tribal particularism of Judaism and turned to the universality of Christianity and became an apostle to the Gentiles. He found his own true identity, not from his fleshly pride nor tribal, religious particularism, but from the encounter with the Son of God which formed in him the identity of Christness.

He gave up all of his previous boasting and followed the Gospel of the cross. What he formerly considered as profitable, he came to see as rubbish that might be a *σκανδαλον* (stumbling stone) to the right worship of God. The conversion experience on the way to Damascus transformed Paul and made him a totally new creation in Christ, which produced a perfect grace-ministry of Christianity in church history.