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THE LANGUAGE OF
UNIVERSAL SALVATION IN PAUL
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The issue is whether or not Paul believed that all persons would ultimately be saved. In this essay "universal" refers to all individuals, not "both Jews and Gentiles" or "all nations" understood in such a way as to leave some individuals damned. "Salvation" refers to future, eschatological restoration to full fellowship with God. By "Paul" I mean the seven undisputed letters.

The problem is posed by the fact that some statements in Paul seem to affirm that only a part of the human community will be saved, namely, those that come to faith in Christ; other statements seem to declare that all persons will finally be saved. An example of the first category is provided by 1 Cor 1:18: "For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." The second category may be represented by Rom 5:18: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men."¹

This essay is divided into two parts. Part I surveys and classifies the efforts of contemporary scholarship to deal with this problem, and Part II proposes an approach to the issue in dialogue with the position that emerges as the strongest option revealed by the survey of Part I.

I

Contemporary studies of Paul that have dealt with this issue fall into two groups, depending on whether or not they conclude that Paul himself articulated a clear position on the subject of universal salvation. On the one hand, a number of scholars conclude that on this issue, for whatever reason, Paul simply lacked conceptual clarity.²

¹ Some additional texts frequently cited as instances of each category: limited salvation, 1 Thess 1:10; 4:13-17; 5:3-9; 1 Cor 1:21-31; 3:16-17; 9:22; 11:32; 15:18; 2 Cor 2:15-16; 4:3; 5:10; Gal 3:10, 23, 29; 5:19-21; Rom 1:16-17; 2:1-16; 3:21-25; 8:5-8; 9:2; 10:1; universal salvation, 1 Cor 15:22-28; 2 Cor 5:19; Rom 5:12-21; 11:26-36; Phil 2:6-11.

² E.g., D. E. H. Whiteley, *The Theology of St. Paul* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964) 271-73; H. M. Shires, *The Eschatology of Paul in the Light of Modern Scholarship* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 21.

One of the most recent full-scale treatments of Paul, that of J. Christian Beker, deals extensively with what he considers to be Paul's ambiguity on this issue. Noting that "there are texts that, when pushed logically, favor universalism, whereas other texts compel a particularist interpretation," he offers seven reflections exploring this ambiguity without claiming to resolve it:³

1. "Paul's contextual arguments cannot be pressed into a systematic-dogmatic construal."
2. Ontological statements that deal with God's cosmic triumph must be distinguished from statements that deal with the destiny of individual human beings (= "anthropological statements").
3. "The final apocalyptic triumph of God does not permit a permanent pocket of evil or resistance to God in his creation."
4. ". . . everything that opposes God will be overcome or taken up in God's glory."
5. ". . . the last judgment is not survival (from a pre-Christian tradition) in Paul's thought, but is integral to it."
6. Paul's thought is corporate and universalistic, but this thrust "cannot be logically pressed, because the context decides at every turn Paul's argumentative stance; he can stress either the universalistic reign of grace or the necessity of faith as the condition for participating in eternal life."
7. "The destruction of the godless and the judgment of unbelievers is the consequence of Paul's insistence on the necessary condition of faith that marks our obedience to Christ. However, the destruction, judgment, or torment of nonbelievers does not mean that God's triumph is ultimately marred by an ultimate resistance to his will."

We will see below that Beker attempts to bring some conceptual clarity from this group of affirmations, all of which he thinks must be made in order to express Paul's view. But Beker's initial point is that Paul's statements do not of themselves form a coherent set, that Paul has no clear view on universal or limited salvation that may be clearly articulated.

Other students of Paul have argued that the ambiguity of Paul's statements on universal salvation is only apparent and that in fact all the Pauline texts on this subject are expressions of one clear position. There are three subgroups within this position.

The first, a mediating position, is affirmed by scholars who explain the apparent variety of Paul's statements by means of a presumed development

³ J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980) 193–94.

in Paul's theology. According to this view, at any given time Paul had a clear position on the subject of universal salvation, but time and experience brought changes in his view. C. H. Dodd is representative of those who saw a clear development from the early Paul, who still expressed his faith in terms of the kind of Jewish apocalyptic found in 2 Esdr, which expected God's wrath finally to fall on the unredeemed, to the later Paul (Romans, Colossians, Ephesians), who clearly affirmed the ultimate salvation of all creation, including all human beings.⁴ Most recent studies of Paul that have concentrated on chronology and development in Paul's thought have not related this perspective to the question of universal salvation.⁵ An exception is the study of Ulrich B. Müller, who argues that Paul's earlier view of eschatological wrath upon unbelieving Jews was changed by his later prophetic revelation that all Israel, along with all humanity, would be saved.⁶ But no recent study known to me has essayed a comprehensive argument that in the course of his theological development Paul changed from one clearly articulated view on the possibility of universal salvation to another.

In the following pages I will argue that the various Pauline texts cannot be placed in a chronological order that sorts all the particularistic ones into an early period and saves all the universalistic ones until Paul's later period. The only remaining possibility of making logical sense of all Paul's statements is to subordinate one group to the other, claiming that Paul "really" meant either particularism or universalism and explaining the other group of statements in terms of what is supposed to be Paul's "real" view. This has been tried both ways.

A minority of recent scholars have argued that Paul was really a universalist, by subordinating the particularistic texts to the universalistic ones. Ernest Best may be taken as an example of those who, though they sometimes may seem to interpret a particular Pauline text in terms of limited salvation, consider Paul's real view to have been universal salvation, or at least always compatible with this view. His exegesis of 1 Thess 5:3, for example, argues that *ἄλθρος* is not a direct reference to the parousia, that it does not imply annihilation; his exegesis of 2 Thess 1:8 (which he regards as Pauline) argues that the fire represents the theophanic glory of the returning Christ rather than the eschatological fire of judgment for unbelievers and that in any case "this passage cannot be used to argue about

⁴ C. H. Dodd, "The Mind of Paul: III," in *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: University Press, 1953) 118–26; idem, *The Gospel in the New Testament* (London: National Sunday School Union, n.d.) 89; cf. idem, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (MNTC; New York: Harper, n.d.) 186–88; idem, *The Meaning of Paul for Today* (2d rev. ed.; London: Collins, 1958) 43.

⁵ E.g., G. Lüdemann, *Paulus, der Heidenapostel* (2 vols.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980–83). The same is true of the earlier work of John Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul* (London: A. & C. Black, 1954).

⁶ U. B. Müller, *Prophetie und Predigt im Neuen Testament* (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1975) 227–30.

the ultimate fate of all non-Christians." Likewise, his exegesis of 2 Thess 1:9 leaves room for ultimate hope even for the unbelieving persecutors of Christians. In a final chapter summing up his study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Best gives a hermeneutical argument (i.e., not entirely a descriptive historical exegesis of Paul) that Paul's real view was universalism, but Best does not make this point absolutely explicit.⁷

Mathias Rissi does make the point explicit, arguing straightforwardly on the basis of 1 Cor 15:21–28, Rom 11:36, Col 1:16, and Phil 2:9–10 that "the whole of mankind will become the body of Christ" and for "the redemption of all creation into God's consummated kingdom," without any indication that there is anything to the contrary in Paul's thought.⁸

It seems, however, that the majority of Pauline scholars from all across the theological spectrum who have given attention to this issue have subordinated the universalistic passages to the particularistic ones and thus have concluded that Paul had one clear soteriological perspective, namely, that only some—that is, believers—are finally saved. R. Bultmann persistently argued the traditional form of this view,⁹ which has been supported by many others.¹⁰

Of late this traditional view has been reasserted with the support of structural exegesis. J. C. Beker, cited above as an example of those who do not believe that Paul's statements may be comprehended in one clear logical position, also argues that the (apparent) antinomies in Paul may be clarified by a structuralist approach. My own summary of Beker's argument is expressed in three points: (1) The "deep" structure of Paul's thought is its "coherent core," the apocalyptic victory of God, apocalyptic being the indispensable means for the interpretation of the Christ-event. (2) This

⁷ E. Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1972) 207–8, 258–63, 368–69. E. Stauffer finds the incidental references to damnation entirely overshadowed by Paul's real view that to the question "will the divine deliverance include all" Paul answers "Yes" (*New Testament Theology* [London: SCM, 1955] 222–25, 318–20; the quote is from p. 223).

⁸ M. Rissi, *Time and History: A Study on the Revelation* (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1966) 124–28.

⁹ Salvation is for those who "accept it" (*Theology of the New Testament* [2 vols.; New York: Scribner, 1951–55] 1. 294). Since it is absolutely necessary that one *decide* for the new possibility of existence offered to all in the kerygma in order to be saved, this possibility is in fact realized only for some, so that universal salvation is clearly excluded (pp. 302–3).

¹⁰ In addition to those already mentioned, see R. P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 100, 126, 134, 149, 189, 232. Rom 5:12–21 is not discussed in the entire book. G. E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 568; W. G. Kümmel, *The Theology of the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973) 243–44; K. Stendahl, "Justification and Last Judgment," *LW* 8 (1961) 7; W. Sanday and A. C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907) 138, 335, 336, *et passim*; C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Epistle to the Romans* (2 vols.; ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1975–79) 1. 290 (on Rom 5:18), 2. 577 (on Rom 11:26), though he waffles a bit on the *πάντας* of Rom 11:32 (588).

coherent deep apocalyptic core of Paul's thought is expressed in its surface structure, a plurality of symbolic pictures that cannot be reconciled, so that there is no way to harmonize Paul on this level, which makes him seem vague, confused, or contradictory. (3) This deep structure is available to us only in its surface manifestations, so that the coherent center cannot be stated by us, as it could not have been stated by Paul, in terms of one noncontradictory set of propositions.¹¹

I find this a helpful approach. Beker himself applies this approach constructively to various topics, for example, Paul's pneumatology, of which he says, "We conclude, then, that Paul's hermeneutic is characterized by the deliberate use of a 'mixed language' that ultimately defies logical precision."¹² One would expect Beker then to apply this approach to Paul's mixture of inconsistent statements on universal salvation, but he does this only to a limited extent. On the one hand, Beker, following Gerd Theissen, does consider the variety of soteriological metaphors used by Paul to "interact and interweave to form an organic whole" so that these metaphors, which represent the surface structure of Paul's thought, "cannot be hierarchically structured."¹³ On the other hand, Beker seems both to regard it as an absolute that for Paul "faith and endurance are indeed the necessary prerequisites for participation in God's kingdom," which has as its necessary consequence "the destruction of the godless,"¹⁴ *and* to consider the deep structure of Paul's thought to affirm the apocalyptic triumph of God, which is not "marred by an ultimate resistance of evil to his will."¹⁵ According to Beker's presuppositions and using his method, one could affirm that what Paul "really" thought was that in the end God's triumph includes all in his salvation, as implied by the deep structure of his thought, subordinating the particularistic texts to this deep universalism. Beker does not do this. He seems rather to utilize a structuralist approach to account for the tensions in Paul's statements on salvation, but finally to locate what Paul "really" thought in one manifestation of its surface structure, namely, that salvation is dependent on faith and endurance.

What is still somewhat vague in Beker becomes explicit in the work of Daniel Patte, when he applies this method to the question of universalism in Paul. Like Beker, Patte handles some of the seeming contradictions in Paul by assigning some statements to Paul's "convictional" logic, that is, the deep structure of his thought, and other statements to his argumentative logic, that is, his thought's surface structure, so that "contradiction" appears when the convictional logic forces its way to the surface and is included in

¹¹ Beker, *Paul*, 16–19.

¹² *Ibid.*, 286.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 193–94.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 194.

the argumentative logic.¹⁶ Like Beker, Patte helpfully applies this approach to some topics in Paul's theology, explaining how Paul could simultaneously affirm two opposing views without ultimately contradicting himself.¹⁷ Unlike Beker, Patte clearly identifies Paul's affirmations of particularistic salvation as expressions of his convictional logic, that is, the deep structure of his thought and, thus, what Paul "really" thinks.¹⁸ Patte uses his structuralist analysis of Paul's thought to keep Paul from contradicting himself, the result being that in Paul's view the potential for salvation is universally available, "but the believers alone discover and take hold of these interventions through faith, . . . and thus can hope to be saved."¹⁹

In my opinion the most cogent arguments for the view that Paul's "real" view was that only believers will finally be saved has been made by E. P. Sanders, and without structuralist methods.²⁰ Sanders considers soteriology to be the central theme of Paul's theology, and he stresses throughout that salvation for Paul means primarily participation in the new reality created by the advent of Christ.²¹ Sanders develops this view, which he calls "participationist eschatology," in contrast to the type of religion that formed the common denominator of practically all the literature representing Palestinian Judaism, which he calls "covenantal nomism." Palestinian Judaism generally thought of being born within the covenant people of God, so that salvation was a matter of "staying in."²² For Paul, on the other hand, no one is "in" the new eschatological reality created by Christ by virtue of his or her birth, but must be converted, must "transfer" from the old reality to the new by an act of belief and commitment.²³ Thus, Paul's view, according to Sanders, is that *only* those who "transfer" (become Christians) will be saved. All others will be destroyed at the eschaton.²⁴

II

With Sanders as my principal dialogue partner, I would like here to attempt a new approach to the issue. My central thesis is that the range of

¹⁶ D. Patte, *Paul's Faith and the Power of the Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983) 193, 254–55 *et passim*.

¹⁷ For example, the sovereignty of God and human responsibility are handled in this way (*Paul's Faith*, 252–53), as are the two different views of Jesus' death as both a necessary salvific event of the past and merely a prefiguration of Christ-like events in the believer's experience (*Paul's Faith*, 191).

¹⁸ *Paul's Faith*, 207.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977); *idem*, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983).

²¹ Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 434–35, 438–40, 453–63, 520–23, 549–52.

²² *Ibid.*, 17, 180–82, 233–38, 422–23, 546–49.

²³ *Ibid.*, 463ff., 500, 507, 547–48.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 473, 515, 519.

Paul's soteriological language—that is, how inclusive it is—is not determined by propositional systematic consistency, nor by his developments in his theology, nor by the tension between depth and surface structures, but by the demands of the central encompassing images within which his language functions, images that necessarily involve him in conflicting language games.²⁵ I will begin by inquiring into the soteriological language of Paul's earliest extant writing. 1 Thessalonians was written in the light of the dawning eschatological salvation. The viewpoint of the whole letter comes to expression in 5:9: "For God has not destined us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." There are two, and only two, groups in this picture, "we" and "they." "We" have been chosen (1:4); "we" have been delivered from the wrath to come (1:10); "we" live in hope (4:13); "we" will be raised from the dead or caught up to meet the returning Lord in the ἀήρ, to be with the Lord forever (4:16–17); "we" are not in the darkness, but are sons of the light and sons of the day (5:4–5); "we" belong to the day (5:8).

"They," or οἱ λοιποί, do not have hope (4:13), and belong to the darkness (5:5–6). It is specifically said that at the eschaton they will meet destruction (ὄλεθρος) (5:3), and "they" are apparently not delivered from the wrath from which Christians are said to be delivered (1:10; cf. 2:16b). The present division of humanity into two groups—saved Christians and unsaved non-Christians—is confirmed, not altered, by the eschaton. Although eschatological salvation is the explicit subject matter much of the time in 1 Thessalonians, and is always in the background, there are no statements in this letter that affirm or imply universal salvation. The one picture is consistent throughout.

The following remarks are not intended to weaken these clear statements that some will be saved and some will be lost. Before proceeding to other, later statements that will complicate the picture, however, some important aspects of this language and imagery of particularist salvation need to be noted in order to evaluate it properly.

1. Paul does not elaborate the fate of the damned. The statements picturing the hope for the saved do not always have corresponding statements portraying the fate of the damned. What happens to the Christians is spelled out; what happens to the lost is not. What will happen to the unsaved is not only not dwelt on; it is not mentioned. ὄλεθρος (5:3) remains a cipher. The reference to ὀργή in 1:10 comes into view with reference to what the Christian is saved *from*, not as a description of what is inflicted on non-Christians. (The other reference to ὀργή in 2:16b is problematic in any case, but it is clear that it is not used by Paul to fill in the picture of what will happen to unbelievers at the eschaton.) Although throughout

²⁵ My thanks to an anonymous reader of an earlier draft of this article for helping me clarify this thesis.

1 Thessalonians, Paul's thought is expressed within a framework that presupposes two groups, "saved" and "lost," his salvation language does not give them equal time.

2. A related aspect of Paul's soteriological language in 1 Thessalonians is that it functions in terms of "soft" implication. Not only is there not nearly so *much* said about damnation as about salvation; what *is* said is not said for its own sake but serves as a foil for the affirmations of salvation. Statements about eschatological wrath and destruction are present not because Paul has positive affirmations about damnation that he wishes to make; they come into being as the necessary by-product of statements about salvation. This is what I mean by "soft" implication. It is the kind of implication that obtains whenever one wishes to affirm something by using words and concepts that function only in contrast to their polar opposites. "Win" and "lose" are such words. To some, there may be no "thrill of victory" without the "agony of defeat" for the opponent; but, unless one is something of a sadist, one would say that it is the nature of the game that for winners there have to be losers, that it is the nature of the language game that even if what we want to talk about is *winning*, we cannot do so without at least implying that somebody lost. We can celebrate at a victory party after the game; we can even urge *our* team to win, without explicitly intending to say anything about *their* team losing. We do, necessarily, say such things because "win" always implies "lose." But this can be the soft implication of our language, the result of its underlying or overarching imagery, not its intent. Thus, some contemporary discussions reject the idea of universal salvation on the basis that the term itself is meaningless, supposing that to talk of "salvation" at all means entering into a language game in which "salvation" implies something to be saved from which does not exist unless others are not saved from it. "If everyone *must* be saved, can anyone be *saved*?"²⁶ The language of salvation and its underlying imagery does seem to involve one in a "win/lose" language game whether one intends it or not. But this is just the point here: it must be asked whether Paul's talk of ὄργη and ἄθετος for the unbelievers is the result of his intent to affirm their damnation or only the soft-implication of his talk of salvation for Christians, the built-in by-product necessitated by the language game within which Paul's talk of *salvation* is played out.

3. A third aspect of Paul's soteriological language in 1 Thessalonians: Paul not only thinks in terms of two groups, insiders and outsiders; he also thinks *from within* one group—he writes to and for those who are insiders. What he says about salvation is not a third-party observational statement from some transcendent perch in which *pronouncements* about both groups could be made but *confessions* of the faith of the in-group. Thus 1:4, "he has chosen you," is the insider's confession that the salvation he/she has

²⁶ J. A. T. Robinson, "Universalism—Is It Heretical?" *SJT* 2 (1949) 146.

and anticipates is not his/her own doing but is the grace of God, not the kind of statement that pronounces something about the outsider: “he has not chosen you”—though this is the inevitable soft implication of such a statement. “Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come” (1:10) is a *confession* of being saved by God’s act in Jesus, not a *pronouncement* that others are *not* delivered from the wrath to come. And so on.

The preceding observations on Paul’s language about eschatological salvation in 1 Thessalonians reveal that all three features are manifestations of the encompassing image *within* which they are expressed. This encompassing image is the image of two groups, insiders and outsiders. This image itself rests upon two pillars of Paul’s Jewish faith which he never gave up: God-who-elects and God-who-judges. God-who-elects involves an image of a group of insiders, recipients of the gracious action of God, the soft implication of which is a group of outsiders, οἱ λοιποί. Forensic talk of God-who-judges involves a picture of separation, sorting out, some on the right hand and some on the left. When God is spoken of as the judge, the hope is expressed that at the eschaton he will decide for and vindicate “my” group or, said individualistically, that he will place *me* in the group that receives eschatological salvation. Or the imagery may function as an exhortation or warning, urging the hearer to conduct himself or herself responsibly in view of the great separation which is to be finalized at the eschaton. The judgment-scene imagery makes the two-group imagery of election obvious, and final. The soft implication of all such talk within this encompassing image is that there is a group that receives a negative judgment, for inherent in the very idea of judgment is the picture of two parties or groups standing before the judge, who decides for *one* of them.²⁷

This encompassing image, so apparent in the first of Paul’s letters, is found throughout Paul’s correspondence to the very end, whether Philipians or, as in my opinion, Romans be considered Paul’s latest extant writing. An exhaustive list of Pauline texts that affirm or imply that only some are saved would make a long list. Some that would certainly be included are 1 Cor 1:18; 9:22; 11:32; 15:18; Gal 2:15–16; 5:19–21; Phil 1:28; 3:19–20; 2 Cor 2:15–16; Rom 1:16–17; 3:21–25; 8:5–8.

There are some texts in which the encompassing image of Paul’s thought on this point becomes clearly evident. In Rom 3:6, for example, Paul is pressed by his imaginary opponent, who argues that Paul’s doctrine of grace implies that God is unjust if he punishes for sin. Paul responds: μή γένοιτο· ἐπεὶ πῶς κρινεῖ ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον; The line of argument Paul carries through in this paragraph has been variously understood, but one thing is clear: for him God, as judge of the world, is not one item of his theology

²⁷ The idea of separating, parting, or sifting is the basic meaning of κρῖνω, and the judicial picture of deciding for one party in a dispute is an important aspect of κρῖνω. Cf. F. Büchsel and V. Hertrich, “κρῖνω, κρῖσις, κρῖσις,” *TDNT* 3. 921ff., esp. 922–23.

among others which he might need to argue for but is a given, absolutely axiomatic, a fundamental image *from* which he could always argue. It would thus appear that the encompassing image of *judgment*, far from being an unassimilated relic in Paul's thought, is even more basic—or comprehensive—to understanding one aspect of Paul's thought than is *justification*, which is a doctrine thought through *within* this encompassing image.

I would thus understand those texts in which Christians appear in the judgment (1 Cor 3:16–17; 2 Cor 5:10; Rom 14:10; cf. Rom 2:1–16; 1 Cor 9:24–10:13)²⁸ as meaning that, in Paul's thought, for Christians too the possibility still exists of being ultimately saved or lost in the last judgment. The two-group conceptuality of the judgment scene functions even when it deals entirely with Christians. It is not merely a matter of receiving more or fewer stars in one's crown as one moves up or down the scale of insiders. In such statements, Christians too are brought before the either/or possibility of the last judgment, where a final separation is made.

The real issue in this is whether all of Paul's statements about eschatological judgment and salvation should be understood as propositions from within the same logical system. The chief objection to interpreting texts that seem to speak of Christians losing their salvation in the last judgment is this purported logical, systematic thinking of Paul on the subject. Karl Donfried's article "Justification and Last Judgment in Paul" illustrates the difficulty of trying to understand all Paul's statements on eschatological judgment and justification as fragments of one coherent system.²⁹ On the one hand, he realizes that if he denies two-group judgment thinking to Paul—so that, although Christians may receive relatively better or worse grades in the last judgment, nothing ultimate is at stake for them—faithfulness and obedience seem not to be taken seriously. He thus rightly insists that for Paul human faithfulness and obedience are to be taken with ultimate seriousness. On the other hand, Donfried realizes that to posit a Pauline view of the judgment in which Christians who are unfaithful and disobedient are finally rejected logically ends up with a salvation $\kappa\alpha\tau\grave{\alpha}$ $\epsilon\rho\gamma\alpha$.

²⁸ 1 Cor 3:10–15 does not deal with the possibility of a final rejection for Christians at the judgment but with the destruction of inadequate *works* by the eschatological fire—though the Christian *workers* themselves shall be saved. Thus, Christian workers such as Paul and Apollos should build carefully on the one foundation. I thus accept K. P. Donfried's argument that vv 5–15 have "nothing to do with the sins of individual Christians nor with their consequent salvation in spite of their sins" ("Justification and Last Judgment in Paul," ZNW 67 [1976] 105). But the specific point Paul here makes leads him to the more general point of vv 16–17, which does portray a final separation between good and bad Christians.

²⁹ "Justification and Last Judgment in Paul," ZNW 67 (1976) 90–110. The carefully measured study of Calvin Roetzel, *Judgment in the Community: A Study of the Relationship Between Eschatology and Ecclesiology in Paul* (Leiden: Brill, 1972) also finally concludes that for Paul the possibility of receiving either salvation or eternal ruin in the last judgment is a universal possibility that includes Christians.

Donfried does not want this but prefers it to the first alternative. So he argues that Paul's view was that Christians can indeed lose their salvation in the last judgment, but only those are rejected who "make a mockery of God's gift by [their] gross abuse and disobedience."³⁰ But this has now placed his argument on the slippery slope, where not all the disobedient but only the grossly so are condemned.

If Roetzel and Donfried are correct, as I believe they are, in understanding Christians too to be included in Paul's scenes of eschatological judgment, then the two-group schema is not dissolved even when filled with entirely Christian content. On the other hand, the juristic framework within which all such language functions allows Paul to make such statements as we find in Rom 2:1–16, where the God-as-judge image is abstracted from all particular historical content and can thus be seen in its abstract and hypothetical purity: the impartial judge rewards those who have done good and inflicts his wrath on those who have done evil. This encompassing image of the judgment scene in which there is an ultimate separation is a constant in all Paul's thinking, Jewish and Christian, abstract and concrete, from his earliest to his latest writing. But is this the only image within which Paul's language of salvation comes to expression?

We now consider another group of texts, in which this two-group image does not disappear but another image appears alongside it.

As the first such text, we may consider 1 Cor 15:20–22: "But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive." This last statement, neatly parallel, can easily be taken as a proof text for universal salvation, as indeed it has been.³¹ Both "death" and "life" are eschatological terms, referring to more than physical death and life. The word appears on both sides of the equation. But this text as such should not be understood in the sense of universal salvation—not because it conflicts with Paul's two-group schema expressed elsewhere, the reason given by Sanders in his earlier work,³² but because in the context it is clear that πάντες in the first instance means "Adam and all those related to him" (= all humanity) and in the second instance "Christ and all those related to him" (= all believers). The two instances of πάντες are parallel only as they are qualified by ἐν τῷ Ἀδάμ and ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ, respectively, so that in fact the contrast in v 22 is between all who die and some who are raised in Christ.³³ Thus, the importance of this text for our subject is not that Paul

³⁰ Donfried, "Justification," 102.

³¹ Wilhelm Michaelis, *Versöhnung des Alls* (Gümligen [Bern]: Siloah, 1950) 122–24.

³² *Palestinian Judaism*, 473. See also C. K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (HNTC; New York: Harper & Row, 1968) 352.

³³ See Jean Héring, *The First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians* (London: Epworth, 1962) 165–66; Hans Conzelmann, *A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*

here explicitly teaches universal salvation but the way in which it is developed; for Paul develops only the ἐν Χριστῷ side of the parallel, giving the τάγματα of the resurrection.

And again, the importance of this text for the topic of universal salvation is not that there are three orders of resurrection: Christ, Christians, and τὸ τέλος, with τὸ τέλος understood in the sense of οἱ λοιποί.³⁴ There are two orders of the resurrection, Christ and οἱ τοῦ Χριστοῦ at his parousia. The importance of this text for our topic is, rather, that this elaboration of what will happen at Christ's parousia is developed within a fundamentally different encompassing image from the image of the judgment scene with its two groups that we have seen heretofore. In this text, the future resurrection inaugurates the absolute end and goal of God's history with his creation, τὸ τέλος. This τέλος, this ultimate scene, is portrayed as Christ handing over the kingship to God the Father, a kingship that he has been exercising on God's behalf, a kingship in which he has subjugated all hostile powers so that he now reigns supreme throughout the universe. This Christ who has defeated all enemies then subjects himself to God the Father, so that God is τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν. The convoluted order in which items are introduced in vv 24–28 indicates that Paul has no interest in charting the *chronology* of post-parousia events. Rather, he is concerned with portraying the *character* of the τέλος of history brought about by Christ's parousia.

The important thing for our subject is that in this text the eschaton is here portrayed in ultimately monistic terms rather than in dualistic terms. Rather than there being two groups at the end, there is one, and it includes all. This is because the encompassing image of this passage is not that of God-the-judge who separates but God-the-king who unites all in his kingly reign. Thus, though the πάντες of v 22 is not explicitly universal, the τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσιν of v 28 is. This is not because Paul changed his mind between vv 22 and 28 concerning how many would ultimately be saved (for Paul never poses the question in terms of "how many?") but because another encompassing image became operative when he developed the portrayal of the eschaton in terms of kingly conquest rather than courtroom decisions.

Just as the encompassing image of God-as-judge has two-group thinking built into it, so one-group thinking is inherent in the image of God-as-king. One could object that the image of God's finally reestablishing his kingship over his rebellious subjects could include the imprisonment,

(Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975) 269; Barrett, *Corinthians*, 32; Robin Scroggs, *The Last Adam* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 83; Tashio Aono, *Die Entwicklung der paulinischen Gerichtsgedankens bei den Apostolischen Vätern* (European University Studies, Series 23, vol. 137; Bern: Peter Lang) 22; H.-A. Wilke, *Das Problem eines messianischen Zwischenreiches bei Paulus* (ATANT; Zürich: Zwingli, 1967) 74–75; Whiteley, *Theology of Paul*, 271.

³⁴ Contra, e.g., Albrecht Oepke, "ἀνάστασις," *TDNT* 1. 371; Rissi, *Time and History*, 120–21, 126–27; cf. Hans Lietzmann, *An die Korinther I/II* (HNT 9; 4th ed.; Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1949) 80–81.

torture, or destruction of those rebels who had refused reconciliation.³⁵ But this is precisely what we do not find in this text. It seems, rather, that the juridical way of thinking with its two groups drops out entirely. This indicates that the two-group imagery was there in the other texts not because it was important for Paul in itself but because the encompassing image required it.

This in turn indicates that the numerical superiority of texts implying limited salvation to those implying universal salvation does not settle anything theologically. The juridical image, though statistically more frequent, does not thereby dominate. There is something yet more fundamental. Within another encompassing image where it is not necessary, it drops out. Those who are pictured as the enemy subjugated by the assertion of God's eschatological kingly power are not one of the two groups into which humanity is ultimately divided, not a group of nonelect or nonbelieving human beings, but superhuman powers, every ἀρχή, ἐξουσία, and δύναμις that has kept God's creation from being what it was intended to be, such as θάνατος, the last enemy. They are defeated; their power is taken away. All creation becomes subject to the gracious kingly rule of God. Not only is there no room left for hell in this picture; there is no room for destroyed, annihilated creatures who have been defeated by sin and death.

The most common view of Paul's eschatological salvation seems to boil down to this: most of humanity is left in the grave.³⁶ 2 Thessalonians being un-Pauline, there is no eschatological fire for unbelievers; Paul has no doctrine of hell. But there is no doctrine of salvation for them either. The conventional understanding has affirmed that Paul was no universalist, though we may have wished that he were, but at least he did not consign the majority of humanity to everlasting torment. They just cease to exist. This view of Paul's eschatology has supposed that Paul always operated with only one encompassing image and that everything Paul says must be fitted within that framework.

Is it not better to allow texts that seem to presuppose another encompassing image to be developed within the framework of thought that they presuppose? It is not so much a matter of clashing texts, all of which need to be reconciled within one systematic structure; nor is it the case that the failure to do so shows Paul to be a sloppy thinker. The question is whether Paul can be allowed to operate with more than one encompassing image

³⁵ That the image can be developed in that direction is clear from Luke 19:27.

³⁶ See, e.g., Kümmel, *Theology*, 243; Eduard Lohse, *Grundriss der neutestamentlichen Theologie* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1974) 110; Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 306–13; Bernard Allo, "Saint Paul et la double résurrection corporelle," *RB* 29 (1932) 187–97; Whiteley, *Theology of Paul*, 248–73; Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 447–48; idem, *Law*, 7; Martin, *Reconciliation*, 232; Beker, *Paul*, 36; Patte, *Paul's Faith*, 207, 257, 264, 281.

without this being considered a defect. This issue is illumined by the examination of additional Pauline texts.

The concluding lines of the christological hymn in Phil 2:6–11 read: “Therefore God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” It is a christological hymn, but these concluding lines have more than an incidental relevance for soteriology. Although neither the original hymn nor Paul’s use of it addresses the question “How many will ultimately be saved?” the “universalism” of vv 11–12 is clear.

It may well be, however, that if we are to use salvation language in regard to such passages at all, a better way of grasping the whole issue would be in terms of “conditional” and “unconditional” salvation rather than “limited” or “universal.” This latter set of terms tends to focus quantitatively on the question “How many?” whereas posing the issue in conditional/unconditional terms focuses qualitatively on “How?” and receives two Pauline answers: “by grace” (= unconditional, royal, one-group imagery—therefore “all”) and “through faith” (= conditional, juridical, two-group imagery—therefore “some”). With regard to Phil 2:6–11, the approach suggested here would then indicate that we should neither add this passage to our list of proof texts for universal salvation nor hasten to explain why for Paul it could not mean what it seems to mean and attempt to fit it into the schema of two groups, saved *and* lost. We might better ask what encompassing image is operative here. The acclamation from every creature in the universe that Jesus Christ is Lord comes as the final scene of the christological drama. It is a coronation scene, at which Christ’s kingly rule is acknowledged by all the cosmic spirit-powers of the universe. These once-hostile powers have been overcome and now render homage to their conquerer. It is universal, but is it *salvation*? The language is not the language of salvation, nor of reconciliation, but of lordship. Thus, those who are reluctant to find universal salvation in Paul are able to interpret the text as a hymn that the church militant hears sung in its worship, a hymn in which they overhear the acclamations made in the heavenly world in which Christ is already universally acknowledged as king by all the spirit-powers of the universe. So understood, it is a hymn of encouragement to the struggling church to keep on struggling, because the victory is already realized and acknowledged in the transcendent world. The hymn can be discussed and interpreted with no reference to the subject of universal salvation, as, for example, by Ernst Lohmeyer and R. P. Martin.³⁷

³⁷ Ernst Lohmeyer, *Der Brief an die Philipper* (MeyerK 9/1; 11th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1956) 90–99; R. P. Martin, *Carmen Christi* (SNTSMS 4; Cambridge: University Press, 1967) esp. 264, 279.

On the other hand, the proponents of universal salvation can argue that the hymn does indeed point beyond the present earthly scene in which there are saved and lost, believers and unbelievers, to a scene in which all confess Christ as Lord and join in worship to him; and that it is utterly alien to the text and its Pauline context to read between the lines something like, "Yes, but some of those who bow the knee and acknowledge Christ as Lord are only doing so grudgingly and will finally be cast into the abyss," or "All the cosmic powers have been forced to accept Christ as Lord, but human beings are free to accept or reject him."³⁸ That is, if the question of salvation for human beings is imposed upon the text, it can be answered in universalistic or particularistic terms, but either way it does violence to the text because it forces the text into an alien frame of reference. In my opinion, understanding this text as affirming universal salvation does less violence to it than the alternative, but it still wrenches what the text wants to say out of its own encompassing image and forces it into another. This text is conceived within the encompassing image of God-the-king and its one-group eschatology rather than God-the-judge and its two-group eschatology; *salvation* language is more appropriate to the latter than to the former.

The most extensive single text in Paul that relates to our theme is Rom 5:12–21. No full-scale exegesis will be attempted here, but I will try to indicate what I think would be the proper perspective with which to view this text in relation to the issue of universal salvation in Paul's theology. We obtain this not by listing Paul's statements in Romans 5 and trying to harmonize them with what he says elsewhere but by inquiring after the encompassing image within which these statements are made. When we do this, it is apparent that the fundamental image is that of God-as-king. The action of the passage is carried by forms of the word βασιλεύω, which occur five times.³⁹ The question of the passage is: Who is in charge? Who is in control of the world and humanity? And the answer: *At first*, sin and death reign, reign over all human beings. But, then, in Jesus Christ the kingly power of God is asserted, and the final picture is that of God-the-king who has *replaced* the reign of sin and death with the reign of righteousness and

³⁸ Best rightly rejects any interpretation of Phil 2:9–11 that understands the final lordship of Christ in such a way as to leave defeated enemies in hell who are forced to acknowledge the lordship of Christ: "This is not so, for (i) It operates with a wrong conception of victory; for a man to stand on another's neck and to compel him to confess he has been vanquished is not a victory compatible with the God of the cross. (ii) The text makes no distinction between the ways in which those in hell and those who have been redeemed by Christ would hail him as Lord, and surely they would not do it in the same way" (*1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 368; see also Beker, *Paul*, 194).

³⁹ E. Käsemann properly calls attention to the *royal* imagery of Romans 5, which should not be surrendered for an abstract anthropological image or any other (*Commentary on Romans* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980] 142–43, 155–56, 158) though Käsemann himself inappropriately inserts the "judge" imagery into the discussion (p. 154).

life, and has done so for all human beings.⁴⁰ Some of the juridical terminology of the preceding sections is still there (κρίμα, κατάκριμα, κτλ.), but the two-group imagery is not. The picture is not the juridical picture of two parallel groups that extend into the eschaton when one is saved and the other destroyed, salvation coming by the transfer from one group to the other before it is too late.⁴¹ Rather, the picture here is of one group containing all human beings, ruled over by sin and death, which are then conquered, the rule of sin and death being replaced without remainder. A “change of lordships” takes place, but it is not the action of some human beings who decide to “transfer” from the rule of sin and death to that of righteousness and life. The “change of lordships” is the unilateral act of God, who conquers the realm of sin and death, destroying their lordship by establishing his own. The picture of royal conquest does not allow for two competing parallel lordships; it is ultimately monistic, not dualistic. In the image of royal conquest, there are no remaining pockets of resistance, no punishments for the recalcitrant. All welcome the conqueror as the liberator from an alien tyrant. It is sin and death, not the majority of human beings, who are destroyed.

If the question is nevertheless posed in the conventional way, “Does this text affirm universal salvation?” the universalist clearly has the edge. Here, unlike 1 Corinthians 15, the Adam/Christ parallel is self-consciously developed in relation to *all* humanity, and this is made explicit in 5:18: “As one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” Thus Bultmann, for example, does not deny that the universalistic affirmations are really *there* in Romans 5; he argues that they are there only because Paul has taken up a Gnostic idea, the Adam/Christ parallel, and the analogy has proved to be too powerful for him, temporarily obscuring his “real” view, so that under its spell he makes confused statements that he does not mean.⁴² Sanders’s view is similar, though unlike Bultmann he regards Paul as having gotten back on the track in 5:19 by modifying the πάντας of 5:18 to οἱ πολλοί in 5:19.⁴³ A weakness of this view is thereby revealed, for on the point under discussion Rom 5:19 is absolutely parallel to 5:18, rather than a modification

⁴⁰ Hans Schmidt, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Römer* (THKNT 6; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1972) 99–100.

⁴¹ As we have seen, there is no doubt that in some passages Paul does think in terms of two concurrent groups, lost and saved, and that salvation comes by “transferring” from one to the other. The issue is whether all that Paul says must be forced into this one framework or whether all of Paul’s language functions within a plurality of encompassing images.

⁴² R. Bultmann, “Adam and Christ according to Romans 5,” in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation* (ed. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder; New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 154.

⁴³ Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 473.

of it.⁴⁴ *Each* verse affirms that whatever *humanity* lost in Adam *humanity* (more than) gained back in Christ. Throughout vv 12–21 the confessional first-person language of 5:1–11 has become descriptive third-person language, indicating that Paul is not only confessing his faith from the insiders' point of view but intends to describe the objective reality. The thrust of the passage as a whole points to universal salvation, for Paul repeatedly makes the point that Christ is not simply parallel to Adam but his deed is *much more* significant than Adam's.⁴⁵ Paul's main point would be wiped out if, in fact, the "real" meaning of the passage as a whole is that sin and death ultimately prevail over most of humanity, for in that case the saving deed of Christ would be "much *less*" than the condemning deed of Adam.

Yet the view continues to be argued that the contrast made in this text is between Adam and those in him (= all human beings) and Christ and those in him (= all Christians, a minority of human beings). Thus, according to Sanders's earlier work, what Paul really meant in 5:18 is "As one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for *some* men."⁴⁶ I think something like this was the soft implication of Paul's confessional, motto-like Adam/Christ

- ⁴⁴ A ὡς δι' ἐνὸς παραπτώματος/ εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους/ εἰς κατάκριμα
 A₁ οὕτως καὶ δι' ἐνὸς δικαίωματος/ εἰς πάντας ἀνθρώπους/ εἰς δικαιοσύνην ζωῆς
 B ὡς περὶ γὰρ διὰ τῆς παρακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς ἀνθρώπου
 ἁμαρτωλοὶ καταστάθησαν οἱ πολλοί,
 B₁ οὕτως καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑπακοῆς τοῦ ἐνὸς
 δίκαιοι κατασταθήσονται οἱ πολλοί

⁴⁵ The free gift is *not like* (οὐχ ὡς) the trespass, v 15; the grace of God is *much more* (πολλῶ μᾶλλον) than the sin, v 15; the *not like* is repeated in v 16; *one* sin brought condemnation, but the gift of God brings justification from *many* sins (ἐξ ἐνός/ἐκ πολλῶν), v 16; the reign of life through Christ is *much more* (πολλῶ μᾶλλον), as in v 15) than the reign of death through Adam; where sin multiplied, grace super-multiplied (ἐπιπλέονασεν/ὑπερεπερίσσευσεν), v 20.

⁴⁶ Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 473, with Sanders's statement incorporated in Paul's text. Sanders explicitly rejects the semitizing inclusive use of πολλοί despite the evidence given, for example, by J. Jeremias ("πολλοί," *TDNT* 6. 536–45), and the evidence of the parallelism in this passage. In a letter of 10 June 1980, Sanders supports his position further: "I do not dispute that, particularly in later semitic usage, 'many' can mean 'all'. What I cannot find is evidence in *Paul's* language that he employed semitic idioms in this way at all. He keeps them when he finds them in the LXX, but I do not know of a single true semitism in Paul's usage. Thus I do not know why here, when no LXX passage is in view, one should look for one. Further, I regard Paul as frequently arguing in a way which reflects common Jewish modes of argument. The *qal vahomer* argument in this passage is not especially rabbinic, although the closest single parallel is the passage in Sifra to which I refer. The mode of argument is liable to lead one to a stronger conclusion on all points than the one true point of comparison, and thus I think it easy to see Paul as lapsing into this form of argument here and to falling into one of its weaknesses. That point impresses me a good deal more than a general point about the possibility of using 'many' to mean 'all'. Thus I think that Paul has used a Jewish form of argument which has led him to say more than he intended and that he backs away from it by using 'polloi' to mean precisely what it usually means."

Sanders's later view in *Law* (57 n. 64) concedes that there are passages in Paul that envisage universal salvation, but is unclear whether Rom 5:18 is one of them.

statement (1 Cor 15:22) in its 1 Corinthians context. But not here, where it is no longer a brief motto-statement used in the service of another argument but has itself become the subject of reflection and elaboration. And the elaboration has gone in the direction of *all humanity*, not of two humanities, Adamic and Christic, or of a humanity parceled out between Adam and Christ. Here both Adam and Christ are understood universally. In vv 12–14 what happened in Adam happened to and for all human beings, without their personal act of decision and participation, it being explicitly pointed out by Paul in v 14 that the Adamic deed changed the situation of those who did *not* sin as Adam did, because they were in a situation in which sin as a power nonetheless reigned over them.⁴⁷

It appears that the only phrase in Rom 5:12–21 that might have a particularist rather than a universalist meaning is the *οἱ . . . λαμβάνοντες* in v 17. It is supposed that *οἱ . . . λαμβάνοντες* refers to the active decision of faith which only a fraction of human beings make and that this group is referred to throughout as “all” who are affected by Christ’s saving act. Bultmann expresses this point of view clearly:

The transformation which the Gnostic categories have to undergo comes to light in Rom 5:12–19. Since in mankind after Adam there is *no choice* but to be like Adam fallen under the power of sin and death, the logical consequences would be that after Christ, the second Adam, there is also no choice but to be like him under the power of “obedience” and “life.” In point of fact, however, after Christ *the necessity to decide* between the two possibilities exists—and the reservation “those who receive” (v. 17) in the Christ-aeon has and can have no correlative limitation in the Adam-aeon (for the participle *λαμβάνοντες* implies a condition: if, or in so far as, they receive).⁴⁸

“The necessity to decide” is the ultimate category for Bultmann and all existentialists.⁴⁹ Though the text says nothing about decision, the participle *οἱ . . . λαμβάνοντες* leaves enough room for Bultmann to find it there

⁴⁷ Bultmann has persuasively elaborated this point of Paul’s understanding in *Theology*, I, 249–53.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 302–3 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ Bultmann here expresses an important point which Paul preserves and which must be preserved in any description of Pauline theology, namely, the freedom and responsibility inherent in human existence as such and in particular the freedom that belongs to the Christian life. But existentialism in general and Bultmann in particular made human freedom and decision into a nondialectical absolute. A more dialectical approach is discernible in Käsemann’s struggles with Rom 5:12–21. Käsemann properly wants to understand Paul as affirming salvation as universal, just as the human fall in Adam was universal, but not as making salvation into a *fate* like Adam’s fall, but somehow bound up with the *ἐλευθερία* which Adam surrendered (see *Romans*, 156, 159). Käsemann rightly wants to understand Paul’s affirmations about universal salvation in such wise as not to take away human freedom and responsibility, turning salvation into a “fate.” But, as we shall see below, this “fatalistic” understanding of salvation occurs only when universal salvation is asserted undialectically, within a single encompassing image taken as an absolute.

and then to make it the controlling element of his exegesis, even though in practically every other instance of λαμβάνω in Paul it has its passive meaning “receive,” not its active meaning “take.”⁵⁰ Sanders, though he is critical of other instances in which Bultmann permits his existentialism to dominate his understanding of a text, joins him here in seizing upon this participial phrase as containing Paul’s real view.

In response to an earlier form of this essay, Sanders explains that, though he agrees with the Bultmannian exegesis of this passage, he goes beyond Bultmann in that he does not rely on the active meaning of the participle οἱ λαμβάνοντες and by giving his view additional support from the *qal vahomer* structure of Paul’s argument. Sanders takes Paul’s *qal vahomer* argument “to be determinative in the sense that it indicates that Paul is going to reach a stronger conclusion than he can consistently maintain. . . . The argument leads Paul into a confusing statement, and we should focus attention on the intention of his argument, namely that all the more is life available through Christ.”⁵¹

Sanders’s earlier work was more candid than most in acknowledging the controlling factor in his exegesis of this passage: “There is, however, a fatal objection to this view.” (He means the view that, as he says, “Paul meant precisely what he wrote” in Rom 5:18.)⁵² The objection: “Paul too often mentions those who are perishing or those who will be destroyed on the day of the Lord.”⁵³ There is no question that these references to the destruction that awaits those outside of Christ are present fairly often in Paul as the soft implication of his affirmations of salvation for those in Christ. The case seems to be somewhat overstated, however, when Sanders writes that Paul’s *dominating* conviction was “that *only* those who belong to the Lord [= professed believers] will be saved in the day of the Lord,” or that “salvation is *only* in Christ,” by which he means only for those who are professed believers⁵⁴ [emphasis mine]. These additions of the word “only” make explicit what Paul left as a soft implication of his affirmations made within the juridical encompassing image that salvation is through Christ.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ The 26th edition of the Nestle-Aland Greek text contains 31 instances of λαμβάνω in the seven undisputed letters of Paul. All of these are to be understood in the passive sense except 1 Cor 11:23–24, Phil 2:7, (both pre-Pauline tradition) and 2 Cor 11:20, 12:16, where the word has the bad sense of “take” (someone). In particular, it is to be noted that all usages with πνεῦμα, τὸ βραβεῖον, χάρις, κτλ. as object are clearly passive.

⁵¹ Sanders, *Law*, 57 n. 64, and letter to me dated 10 June 1980.

⁵² *Palestinian Judaism*, 473.

⁵³ *Ibid.* This approach is classically illustrated by W. Schlatter’s small book, *Ist die “All-versöhnung” gesunde Lehre?* (Bern: Buchhandlung der Evg. Gesellschaft, 1941); see also Kümmel, *Theology*, 244.

⁵⁴ Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 515, 519. See now Sanders’s revised view in *Law* (57 n. 64), in which he agrees that “one does not derive Paul’s ‘true’ view by counting passages.”

⁵⁵ I would be more in agreement with the way Sanders has expressed the point in his concluding lines, *Palestinian Judaism*, 523: “What he really thought is just what he said: that

With this qualification, Sanders's point is valid: the universal-salvation passages cannot be understood in some way that ignores or does not do full justice to the limited-salvation passages. Sanders follows the well-trodden path of making the former subordinate to the latter, whereas the minority of writers who have seen Paul as a universalist have attempted to subordinate the particularist passages to the universalist ones.⁵⁶

What other options are there? We have already seen that a theory of *development* from particularism to universalism does not work: the particularist passages are both early and late; Paul's last letter contains both kinds of passages.⁵⁷ *I propose that the real issue here is whether Paul can be allowed to operate with more than one encompassing image without it being considered a defect, without having to judge Paul incoherent.* I would further suggest that within Sanders's understanding of Paul as a coherent, but not a systematic, thinker, Paul can be heard as making logically inconsistent, but not incoherent, statements. Sanders points to the organic thinking of the rabbis as a model for this kind of thinking. He quotes M. Kadushin's definition of organic thinking with approval:

Organic concepts are concepts in a whole complex of concepts none of which can be inferred from the others but all of which are so mutually interrelated that every individual concept, though possessing its own distinctive features, nevertheless depends for its character on the character of the complex as a whole. . . . It happens not infrequently that the same or a similar situation may be given several interpretations "contradictory" to each other. . . . [Organic thinking] renders the rabbis indifferent to logical contradictions.⁵⁸

Christ was appointed Lord by God for the salvation of all who believe, that those who believe belong to the Lord and become one with him, and that in virtue of their incorporation in the Lord they will be saved on the Day of the Lord." Sanders actually makes three kinds of statements expressing the same point: On p. 485, he summarizes: "This logic—that God's action in Christ alone provides salvation and makes everything else seem, in fact actually *be* worthless—seems to dominate Paul's view of the law." Then there are statements such as his from p. 523, quoted above, that those who believe will be saved, and then statements such as on p. 515, that *only* those who believe will be saved. These cannot be used as equivalents, especially if the exclusive formulation such as found on p. 515 be considered "dominating." I would call Sanders's formulation on p. 485 Paul's "dominating" form of expression, that God's action in Christ alone provides salvation, and I would regard the formulation on p. 523 as representing Paul's *confessional* language, the soft implication of which Sanders expresses on p. 515 and *Law*, pp. 30 and 57 n. 64 ("only"), though Paul himself never makes this explicit.

⁵⁶ E.g., Michaelis, *Versöhnung des Alls*.

⁵⁷ If 2 Thessalonians be considered genuine, and early, and if Colossians be considered genuine, and late, more of a case could be made for development, although it still would be a matter of a shift of emphasis, not of replacing an early particularism by a later universalism.

⁵⁸ Max Kadushin, *Organic Thinking* (New York: Bloch, 1938) 184, 13, 77; quoted in Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 73.

This does not mean for either Kadushin or Sanders that the rabbis are given a license to talk nonsense. Rather, this discussion makes a certain kind of sense of why it is necessary to affirm contrary statements in order to do justice to what must be said. Sanders's discussion of the way sets of rabbinic statements that affirm the conditional nature of the covenant were properly held together with statements affirming the unconditional nature of the covenant is somewhat analogous to the view argued here concerning statements of limited salvation and statements of universal salvation in Paul.

Sanders's earlier work on Paul utilizes these insights from Kadushin in his discussion of conflicting statements in Paul (e.g., on predestination and human freedom); and, although it affirms Paul as a coherent thinker, the earlier work is critical of efforts to reduce Paul's thought to a logically consistent system.⁵⁹ At that time, Sanders did not apply this approach to Paul's soteriological statements.⁶⁰ His later work, in response to an earlier form of this article, specifically applies this mode of thought to the issue of universal salvation in Paul.⁶¹ But, as we shall see below, Sanders has other grounds on which he is still hesitant to affirm universal salvation in Paul. Sanders seems to me still to be oriented primarily to trying to make conceptual sense of the conflicting *statements* in Paul, or "convictions" that are expressed in such statements. I am suggesting that the issue is better posed not in terms of conflicting *statements*⁶² but in terms of the legitimacy of operating with more than one encompassing image which generates conflicting statements. Just as I have not tried to deal with all the passages in Paul that affirm or imply universal salvation, so I am not suggesting that everything Paul says about salvation fits into just these two images, God-as-judge and God-as-king. But I am arguing that everything does not fit into *one* picture, that Paul functions with *more than one* encompassing image (though not a very large number).

I find the structuralist approach of Gerd Theissen a helpful statement on this very point. Theissen argues not only that Paul's soteriological

⁵⁹ *Palestinian Judaism*, 433, 446–47; cf. 501, 506, 518–20.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 473.

⁶¹ *Law*, 57 n. 64.

⁶² I have used the term "encompassing image" throughout, rather than the similar terms and concepts of A. N. Whitehead ("systematic universe") and Patte ("semantic universe") precisely because it connotes something less logically "systematic." On such issues, it is more helpful to see that it is a *picture*, or plurality of pictures, rather than a *proposition*, which lies at the base of, or serves as the framework for, our language. This is the principal point at which I would demur from the constructive essay by Russell Pregeant, "Grace and Recompense: Reflections on a Pauline Paradox," *JAAR* 47 (1979) 73–96. Pregeant clearly sees that all Paul wants to say does not fit within one logical system, and thus he speaks of "two lines of logic." I suggest that if one sees that it is an *image*, rather than a proposition, which *encompasses*, rather than forms the major premise for, each "line of logic," we will be less inclined to construct inferential systems that cancel each other out or compete for our support as representing Paul's "real" view.

language functions with an unreconcilable plurality of images, each of which has its own internal logic, but also that the whole field of such differing pictures has its own “logic,” that is, that one cannot determine what Paul “really” thought by constructing a chain of inferences which functions in relation to only one such image.⁶³ The hermeneutical danger inherent in failing to recognize the plurality of encompassing images within which Paul’s language—and ours—functions is well described by Anthony Thiselton:

We have seen that Wittgenstein lays down a very solemn warning about the power which a *picture* possesses to seduce us, to lead us astray, or at the very least to dictate our way of marking out the terms of a problem. He writes concerning the spell of a picture over his own earlier work: “A picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it” [*Philosophical Investigations*, 115]. “The picture was the key. Or it *seemed* like a key” [*Zettel*, 240]. What misleads us is not simply the power of a model or metaphor as such, but the fact that all too often *our way of seeing a particular problem is wholly dictated by a single controlling picture which excludes all others*. [Emphasis mine.] In these circumstances it exercises a spell over us, which bewitches our intelligence and blinds us to other ways of seeing the problem.⁶⁴

This seems to me to be the key. Paul has statements in which salvation is limited to a fragment of the human community and conditional on faith in Christ. And Paul has statements in which, if salvation language is used at all, we must say that salvation embraces the whole human community and is unconditional. The presence of these universalistic statements does not mean that, for Paul, some are saved “without Christ.” I agree with Sanders’s statement that “the real coherence [of Paul’s soteriology] is precisely that everybody had a plight from which only Christ could save him.”⁶⁵ But this affirmation need not be understood in the sense that only those are saved by Christ who come to faith in him, as Sanders, even in his latest work, seems to do⁶⁶—a kind of thinking that is unnecessarily wedded to the one encompassing image of God-the-judge and its two-group imagery. Rather, this fundamental conviction that salvation is only through Christ is pictured in more than one way and thus generates more than one kind of language. The juridical encompassing image pictures two groups, those who have faith in Christ and are thus accepted in the judgment, and those who do not and are thus condemned. Salvation is effected by a voluntaristic transfer, which not all make, from the group of unbelievers under the

⁶³ Gerd Theissen, “Soteriologische Symbolik in den paulinischen Schriften” *KD* 20 (1974) 282–304.

⁶⁴ Anthony Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 432.

⁶⁵ *Palestinian Judaism*, 508–9.

⁶⁶ *Law*, 57 n. 64 presents Sanders’s present understanding of Paul’s christological exclusivism and its implications for universal salvation.

dominion of sin-death-Satan to the group of believers under the dominion of righteousness-life-Christ. (But even this “voluntaristic” transfer is seen in retrospect as the gift of God—hence the language of election, calling, and predestination.) On the other hand, the encompassing image of royal conquest pictures one group, once enslaved to sin but now liberated and restored by God’s act in Christ to their place in God’s kingdom. (Paul, of course, affirms this “now” only with his eschatological reservation.) Within this encompassing image of the royal conquest in which the language of universal salvation is generated and functions, there is one group—salvation is for all—because Christ conquers all; but salvation is, nonetheless (or all the more, *πολλῶ μᾶλλον*), only through Christ. Statements within this encompassing image that affirm universal salvation do not deny the exclusivism of salvation “only” in Christ, but affirm it.

Paul has statements of conditional, limited salvation, and statements of unconditional, universal salvation. Neither of these can be reduced to the other. Neither is what he “really” thought. Neither should be subordinated to the other. Each set of statements, to use Kadushin’s language, “depends for its character on the character of the complex as a whole.”⁶⁷ These sets of statements need each other in Paul’s organic complex of underlying encompassing images.⁶⁸ The limited salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up,⁶⁹ the image of God-the-judge and its corollary, human responsibility. Without these statements, the affirmation of universal salvation could only be heard as a fate; evangelism loses something of its urgency, and Paul’s hecklers would be justified in saying that we can and even should go on sinning because it magnifies God’s grace (see Rom 3:5–8, 6:1). The universal-salvation statements proceed from, and conjure up, the image of God-the-king, who finally extends his *de jure* gracious reign *de facto* to include all his creation. Without *these* statements, Paul’s affirmations of a salvation limited to Christian believers must be heard as affirming a frustrated God who brought all creation into being but despite his best efforts could only salvage some of it, and as claiming that it does not ultimately matter that Christ has come to the world if the apostle or evangelist does not get the message announced to every individual. Paul had an evangelistic urgency, but he never placed his own ministry on a par with the Christ-event itself. A Pauline theology of evangelism will refuse to reduce human responsibility and will thus always contain the urgent call to decision; but it will also refuse to reduce the sovereignty of the gracious God who has already decided and acted for all human beings.

⁶⁷ *Organic Thinking*, 184, quoted by Sanders, *Palestinian Judaism*, 73.

⁶⁸ See the analogous statement by Sanders concerning “juristic” and “participationist” language in Paul (*Palestinian Judaism*, 520).

⁶⁹ By such expressions, I intend approximately the same as Norman Perrin when he speaks of a symbol such as the “kingdom of God” having the function of evoking a myth; see *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 5–6, 20–22, etc.

Paul affirms *both* limited salvation *and* universal salvation.⁷⁰ Because they are affirmed together, the ultimate logical inferences belonging to each are never drawn. Paul affirms both human responsibility and the universal victory of God's grace. As propositions, they can only contradict each other. As pictures, they can both be held up, either alternatively or, occasionally, together, as pointers to the God whose grace and judgment both resist capture in a system, or in a single picture. And this is ultimately what Paul did.

⁷⁰ The both/and is important. Both kinds of statements are there, fully there. This way of stating the matter is preferable to "neither/nor" terminology. Some scholars who have seen the universalist statements in Paul have been hesitant to call them that, because they properly realized that Paul cannot be understood simply as a universalist (e.g., Cranfield, *Romans*, 1. 269–95). The matter must be understood dialectically, in accord with the presence of both kinds of statements. But dialectic proceeds in terms of both/and, not neither/nor. The analogy of christological language comes appropriately to mind; see my discussion in *Truly Human/Truly Divine: Christological Language and the Gospel Form* (St. Louis, MO: CBP Press, 1984).