

CHAPTER THREE

The Characteristics of the Christian Ethic in the Teaching of Paul

Most people think of Paul as a theologian, and a difficult theologian at that. Even within the New Testament there are people saying that Paul's letters were anything but easy to understand (2 Peter 3.16). But for Paul every theological argument ended with a series of ethical imperatives. In letter after letter the theological argument, however difficult it may be, ends with an ethical section which is crystal clear. The argument ends in the demand (Romans 12-15; Galatians 6.1-10; Ephesians 5.21-6.9; Colossians 3.18-4.6; 1 Thessalonians 5; 2 Thessalonians 3). In 1 Timothy the object of the letter is to show 'how one ought to behave in the household of God' (1 Timothy 3.15). The New English Bible margin translation of Titus 3.8 runs: "Those who have come to believe in God should make it their business to practise virtue." Paul is every bit as great and earnest an ethical teacher as he is a theologian. Let us then look at the ethical teaching of his letters.

i. For Paul, as for Jesus, the Christian ethic is a community ethic. The great virtues of love and service and forgiveness can only be practised in a society. Involvement, not detachment, is the keynote of the ethics of Paul.

ii. But equally definitely for Paul the Christian ethic is an ethic of difference. Paul's letters are regularly addressed to the people whom the Authorised Version calls the *saints* (Romans 1.7; 1 Corinthians 1.2; 2 Corinthians 1.1; Ephesians 1.1; Philippians 1.1; Colossians 1.2). The Greek word is *hagios*. We have already looked at this word as it is used in the Old Testament of the people Israel. It is the word which in the

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Old Testament is regularly translated *holy*, and its basic idea is the idea of *difference*. That which is *hagios*, *holy*, the Sabbath, the Temple, the Bible, is that which is different. So the Christian is first and foremost to be different. That difference comes from the fact that he is dedicated and consecrated to God; and that difference is to be demonstrated within the world and not by withdrawal from the world.

When Paul does not write to the *hagioi*, the saints, the men and women pledged to be different, he writes to the *ekklēsia*, the church, in whatever place it happens to be (Galatians 1.2; 1 Thessalonians 1.1; 2 Thessalonians 1.1). This word has exactly the same implication. *Ekklēsia* is tied up with the verb *ekkalein*, which means *to call out*, and the church is composed of those who are called out from the world, not to leave the world, but to live in the world and its society, and there to be different.

The Christian, says Paul, is not to be conformed to the world, but transformed from it (Romans 12.2). The Christian lives in the world, but it is not on a worldly war that he is engaged (2 Corinthians 10.3). The Christians must be children of God without blemish, shining like lights in a twisted and perverse society (Philippians 2.15). The Christian must not live as if he still belonged to the world (Colossians 2.20).

That last demand brings us to another of Paul's consistent demands. He is always urging on his people that they should make it clear that they are changed, that they have left their old life behind them, and that they have genuinely embarked on the new way. They must no longer live as the Gentiles do (Ephesians 4.17-24). Once they were in darkness, now they are in light, and their conduct must show it (Ephesians 5.8). Once they were hostile to God and estranged from him; now they are reconciled to him (Colossians 1.21-23). Once they were dead in trespasses; now they are gloriously alive (Colossians 2.13). They must put away the conduct which was formerly characteristic of their lives (Colossians 3.7-10). They

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must not act with the passion of lust of heathen who do not know God (1 Thessalonians 4.5).

It would never have occurred to Paul that it would have been impossible to distinguish between the Christian and the non-Christian. He would have agreed with Richard Glover, who said that there was no such thing as secret discipleship, for either the secrecy killed the discipleship or the discipleship killed the secrecy. For the Christian every moment of life was to be a demonstration that he was a Christian.

How does that work out today? In the present situation a man does not come out of a heathen society into a Christian society, for even when the church is disregarded or ignored, the principles on which society is built are now Christian principles. What should happen now is this. Nowadays a man knows very well what the Christian ethic demands. When he becomes a pledged follower of Jesus Christ, he should move from a theoretical awareness of the Christian ethic to a committed practice of it. Knowledge should turn into action—whatever the cost.

iii. The idea of difference can be taken a step farther and confront us with something of a problem. There are times in Paul's teaching when the difference turns into severance. There are times in Paul's letters when the difference seems to become segregation. In 2 Corinthians 6.14-16 Paul writes: 'Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever?' The Letter to the Ephesians speaks of those who are immoral and impure, and then goes on to say: 'Do not associate with them' (Ephesians 5.7). Paul warns the Thessalonians to keep away from any brother who is living in idleness. If anyone will not accept his authority, the Thessalonians are to note that man and to have nothing to do with him (2 Thessalonians 3.6,14). The Pastoral Letters speak of those whose religion is only a name, and whose profligate lives deny their profession. 'Avoid

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such people' (2 Timothy 3.1-5). If a man is factious, he is to be admonished once or twice. If the warning is ineffective, 'Have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is perverted and sinful' (Titus 3.10,11).

This is a formidable series of warnings. What is to happen to missionary work? Are certain people to be abandoned as hopeless? Is the sinner to be left to his sin? This is clearly something which demands thinking about. Certain points can be made.

(a) We must never forget the general situation. When Paul was writing, the Christian church was no more than a little island in a surrounding sea of paganism. The tempting and the infecting influences were terrifyingly near. These Christians in the early church were only one remove from paganism, and relapse was so desperately easy.

We can see the thing coming to a head in 1 Corinthians chapters 8 to 10. There the point at issue is whether or not a Christian can eat meat that has been offered to an idol, that is, meat which has formed part of a heathen sacrifice. The problem arose in this way. In the ancient world it was only in the very rarest cases that a sacrifice was burned entire. In by far the greater number of cases only a token part of the sacrifice was burned on the altar, sometimes no more than a few hairs cut from the forehead of the beast. Part of the meat then became the perquisite of the priests, and part was returned to the worshipper. With his part the worshipper gave a feast, a party, a celebration for his friends. And—and here is the point—that feast was given in a temple. Just as we might give a party in an hotel or restaurant or club, so the Greek gave it in the temple of his god. The invitation would run: 'I invite you to dine with me on such and such a date and at such and such a time at the table of our Lord Serapis,' Serapis being the host's favourite god. Could the Christian go to such a party? Paul is clear that he cannot. Paul is clear that no man can be a guest at the table of Jesus Christ and then a guest at the table of Serapis. He cannot have it both ways. He

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must be off with the old love before he is on with the new (1 Corinthians 10.21,22). To try to act like this was to court infection. It could mean that a man's social life came to an abrupt end, but that was part of the price that he had to pay for being a Christian.

(b) The second thing that emerges when we consider these passages is that the person who is being condemned is the person who is deliberately and open-eyed flirting with temptation. What is being insisted on by Paul is that in that precarious situation no man should voluntarily go into company which would endanger his life as a Christian.

(c) And most of all it is the misguided Christian brother who is to be avoided. It is not a case of the Christian cutting himself off from the world and from all the missionary opportunities life in the world gave him; it is a question of cutting himself off from the Christian brother who was hell-bent on folly. Paul makes this quite clear in 1 Corinthians 5.9-13. In the church at Corinth there was a man who had been guilty of sexual misconduct with his step-mother, conduct which would have shocked a heathen, let alone a Christian. Paul insists that the congregation must take action. The man must be ejected. They are not to associate with immoral men. But, says Paul, this does not mean out in the world, or they would have to leave the world altogether. It is not outsiders they are to judge; it is their own members; and if a man claims the name of brother and behaves shamelessly, he must go.

From this certain things emerge. It is the pledged Christian who is in question. The church dare not adopt an easy-going attitude to the man who is guilty of flagrant misconduct. It is a matter of discipline, and Paul holds that if a pledged Christian refuses to accept the ethical standards of the church, then the church must in self-defence take action.

(d) But that is not the end of the story. It is discipline that is in question. Even if excommunication means apparently delivering a man to Satan, the ultimate end is to save his soul alive (1 Corinthians 5.5), and in one case at least we find Paul

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pleading for the receiving back of the sinner into the fellowship before his spirit is altogether broken (2 Corinthians 2.5-11). The whole process is for cure and not for destruction.

What it all means is that the church cannot continue to be the church and refuse to exercise discipline. The Christian is a man under pledge, a pledge voluntarily given, and he cannot with impunity deliberately break his pledge. And the word *deliberately* is to be stressed. All the way through it is clear that Paul is not thinking of the man who on the impulse is swept into sin and who has never ceased to repent. He is thinking of the man who, deaf to appeal and blind to duty and oblivious to love, has callously and deliberately gone his own way.

iv. A community ethic is bound to be an ethic of responsibility. The Christian is characteristically the responsible man.

(a) The Christian is responsible to the society of which he forms a part. Here Paul uses an analogy which many of the classical writers had used before him, the analogy of the body. The most famous instance of it in the classical writers is in the parable of Menenius Agrippa (Livy 2.32). There was an occasion in Rome when there was a split between the common people and the aristocrats. The split grew so wide that the common people marched out and withdrew from the city. The life of the city came to a standstill. So the rulers of the city sent an orator called Menenius Agrippa out to the people to see if he could persuade them to return. He told them a parable which ran something like this. There came a time when the members of the body grew very annoyed with the stomach. There the stomach sat, they said, doing nothing, and they had all to labour and to combine in bringing food to the stomach which itself did nothing to procure it. So the members of the body decided that they would no longer bring food to the stomach; the hands would not lift it to the mouth; the teeth would not chew it; the throat would not swallow it; and by this they hoped to have their revenge on the stomach. But the only result was that the whole body was in danger of

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starving to death, and thus the members of the body learned that the only way in which the body can maintain its health and well-being is for every part of it to do its share, and not to be envious and jealous of any other part.

This is exactly the picture that Paul uses in Romans 12.3-8. They are one body in Christ, and each a member of the body. Grace has given them different gifts and all these gifts must be used for the good of the whole. 'No man is an Island, entire of itself,' as John Donne said. No man lives to himself and no man dies to himself (Romans 14.7). We are, in the vivid Old Testament phrase, bound up in the bundle of life (1 Samuel 25.29). A man cannot do without society, and society cannot do without him. If a person 'drops out' from society, he does not really do so. He withdraws himself and his labour and his contribution from society, but if he is to live and eat he has to take what society still gives him. He has chosen to retain his rights and to abdicate from his responsibilities.

(b) The Christian has a responsibility to the weaker brother. He is well aware that he is his brother's keeper. This is true both mentally and physically. What may be perfectly safe for one person may be highly dangerous for another. Paul reminds us that arguments and debates which may be for one man a pleasant mental hike or an intellectual stimulus may be for another man the ruin of his faith (Romans 14.1). And the strong must always bear with the weak, for we are in this world, not to please ourselves, but to strengthen our neighbour (Romans 15.1,2). A man must always remember the effect on others of that which he allows himself. Twice Paul lays this down most practically and explicitly. 'It is right not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that makes your brother stumble' (Romans 14.13-21). 'If food is a cause of my brother's falling, I will never eat meat, lest I cause my brother to fall' (1 Corinthians 8.13). Saul Kane in John Masefield's poem *The Everlasting Mercy* was haunted by 'the harm I've done by being me'. The New Testament is quite clear that the

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Christian must always ask not only: 'What will this do to me?' but also: 'What will this do to the brother who is not as strong as I am?'

(c) The Christian has a responsibility to the state, but that we will leave for future discussion, when we come to talk about the Christian and the community.

(d) The Christian has a responsibility to the man who is going astray. He must gently restore him to the right way (Galatians 6.5). The Christian is conscious of the sin of looking on; he knows that a man can sin just as badly by doing nothing as by doing something.

(e) Three times in the New Testament there is laid down the simple, human duty of providing hospitality for the traveller and the stranger (Hebrews 13.2; 1 Peter 4.9; Romans 12.13). 'Practise hospitality,' says Paul. And little wonder. In the ancient world inns were notoriously bad. In his *Pagan Background of Early Christianity* W. R. Halliday has a vivid chapter on 'Communications' in which he describes travel. He cites a charming but very apocryphal story from the apocryphal *Acts of John* (M. R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament*, p. 242). John and his disciples came to a deserted inn and settled down for the night. The bed proved to be infested with bugs. Whereupon John addressed them: 'I say unto you, O bugs, behave yourselves one and all, and leave your abode for the night and remain quiet in the one place, and keep your distance from the servants of God.' On the next morning when the servants opened the door 'we saw at the door of the house which we had taken a great number of bugs standing.' John then 'sat up on the bed and looked at them and said: "Since you have well behaved yourselves in hearkening to my rebuke, come into your place." And when he had said this, and risen from the bed, the bugs running from the door hastened to the bed and disappeared into the joints.' The innkeeper's terms were extortionate. Seneca writes (*On Benefits* 6.15): 'How glad we are at the sight of shelter in a desert, a roof in the storm, a bath or a fire in the

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cold—and how dear they cost in inns.' Many of the inns in the cities were no better than brothels, although of course in the great resorts there were palatial inns for the wealthy; but few Christians were wealthy. So the simple duty of keeping open door for the young person away from home and for the stranger in a strange place is a part of the Christian ethic.

(f) The Christian has a responsibility to Jesus Christ. The church is the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.27; Ephesians 1.22). That phrase may mean many things; but it means one simple and practical thing. Jesus is no longer here in the body; he is here in the Spirit. But that means that, if he wants something done, he has to get a man or a woman to do it for him. There is a helplessness of Jesus as well as a power of Jesus. Nothing can teach his children unless a man or woman will do it for him. The help which he wishes the aged, the weak, the suffering, the sorrowing to have must come through human means. He needs men to be hands to work for him, mouths to speak for him, feet to run on his errands. The Christian cannot forget his responsibility to Jesus Christ. It is no small part of the Christian ethic that the Christian is the representative of Jesus Christ.

v. The Pauline ethic is an ethic of body, soul and spirit. It is quite convinced of the importance of the body. The body can be presented as a living sacrifice to God (Romans 12.1). The body is nothing less than the temple in which the Holy Spirit can dwell (1 Corinthians 3.16; 6.19). The body can therefore neither be despised nor misused. It must be used for what it is, and the Pauline ethic has no use for the asceticism which despises marriage and refuses the good gifts of God (1 Timothy 4.1-5). This is in line with Judaism, for there is a rabbinic saying that a man will have to give account for every good thing that he might have enjoyed and did not enjoy.

This has to be seen against a background of Gnosticism. Gnosticism was a type of thought very prevalent in the time of the New Testament. It had not yet developed into the

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elaborate systems into which it later flowered, but it was deeply ingrained into Greek thought. It came from a desire to explain whence came the sin and the sorrow and the suffering of this world. It began with the principle that from all eternity there have been two principles—spirit and matter. God is spirit and spirit is altogether good. Matter was there from the very beginning, and matter is the stuff out of which the universe is created. But—and here is the essential point—the Gnostic believed that from the beginning matter is essentially flawed; it is evil; the universe is made out of bad stuff. But if matter is bad, then the God who is altogether pure spirit cannot touch it. The real and the true God cannot be the creator. So, according to the Gnostic belief, the true God put forth a series of emanations, each one farther from himself, each one more ignorant of himself, and in the end culminating in an emanation who was not only ignorant of, but hostile to, the real God. It was this distant, ignorant, hostile emanation who was the creator. There is only one conclusion to be drawn from all this—that the body and all that has to do with it is essentially bad. And that gives rise to two possible ways of life. The one way demands complete asceticism, where a man despises and neglects the body and stifles all its instincts and impulses. For him, sex, marriage, everything that has to do with the body is incurably evil and must be abandoned. The second way argues that, since the body is in any event evil, it does not matter what you do with it. Let it have its way; sate its impulses and glut its appetites. It does not matter what happens to it. This leads to complete immorality and to the abandonment of life to life's physical instincts. As Augustine said, he could find parallels in the Greek philosophers for everything in the Bible except the words: 'The Word became flesh' (John 1.14). Flesh, a body, was the one thing that God could never take upon himself.

This is far from the thought of Paul. But it did deeply affect Christian thinking. And the matter was complicated by a misunderstanding of the Pauline use of the word *flesh*. In Paul

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flesh does not mean the *body*. When Paul speaks of sins of the flesh he is far from meaning only physical and sexual sins. Sins of the flesh include strife, jealousy, anger, dissension, party spirit, envy (Galatians 5.20,21). What Paul means by the *flesh* is human nature apart from God. It is what man has made himself in contrast with what God meant him to be. But from the beginning this was misunderstood, and the feeling has lingered on that the body and its desires are something to be regretted, that sex is something dirty and something to be ashamed of, that the instincts of the body are something over which a veil must be drawn. It has been this which has been the cause of that sexual ignorance which has brought sorrow and disaster to so many, and which has put a muzzle on things like proper sex education.

The Christian ethic accepts the body and all that has to do with the body. The Christian ethic believes that the body is God's, and that we can dedicate it to God just as much as we can dedicate heart and mind to him.

vi. The Christian ethic is an ethic which goes beyond this world and beyond time. For the Christian life is lived out against a background of eternity.

(a) The Christian ethic is a resurrection ethic. It is quite clear that, wherever Paul started out to preach, he finished up with preaching the risen Christ (Acts 13.30-37; 17.18,31). All life is lived in the presence of the Risen Lord. All life is meant to stand the scrutiny of his eye.

(b) The Christian ethic is an ethic of judgment. As Paul saw it, all life is on the way to judgment. The destination of every man is the judgment seat of God and Jesus (Romans 14.10-12; 2 Corinthians 5.10). Anyone who continues to be guilty of the sins of the flesh will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5.21). What a man sows he will reap (Galatians 6.7,8). To be disobedient is to be doomed to the wrath of God (Ephesians 5.6). To continue to live a life of immorality and impurity is to incur the wrath of God (Colossians 3.6).

To remove the idea of judgment from Christianity is to

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emasculate it. No honest presentation of Christianity can remove from it the ultimate threat.

(c) The Christian ethic as Paul presented it is never allowed to forget the coming again in judgment and in glory of Jesus Christ. The New Testament is peopled by men and women who are waiting. Nothing must be allowed to interfere with the intensity of that expectation, not even the closest relationships of life (1 Corinthians 7.25-35). The Christians wait for their blessed hope (Titus 2.13). There comes a day, and the Christian must so live that that day will not surprise and shock him (1 Thessalonians 5.2-7, 23; Philippians 2.16; 3.20; Colossians 3.4; 2 Thessalonians 1.5-10). It may be that that coming is long delayed, but however long it is delayed, it does not alter the basic fact that the Christian, as Cullmann put it, is always living in the space between the *already* and the *not yet*. The Christian is the man for whom something has happened, and for whom something has still to happen.

It is clear that all these things will have a tremendous ethical effect. To live in the presence of Christ, to see in life a journey to judgment, to rejoice in the *already* and at the same time to expect the *not yet*—these are things which are bound to give life a certain quality, and a certain ethical strenuousness, which can never be forgotten.

vii. For Paul the Christian ethic is an ethic of imitation.

(a) To begin with the highest form of it, the Christian is called upon to do no less than to imitate God. 'Be imitators of God,' says the Letter to the Ephesians, 'as beloved children' (Ephesians 5.1). Startling as this may sound, it is a summons to which man is called by the great teachers of both Greece and Israel. Plato says in the *Theaetetus* (176) that a man ought to fly away from this earth to heaven as quickly as possible, and to fly away is to become like God, so far as this is possible for a man. Before Plato, Pythagoras had taken as his maxim: 'Follow God.'

The same idea was there in Jewish thought. In the second

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series of *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels* Israel Abrahams has an essay on 'The Imitation of God'. There he quotes from one of his best loved books, a Jewish classical devotional work by Cordovero, called *Deborah's Palm Tree*. The book begins: 'Man must liken himself to his Master.' Cordovero then quotes Micah 7.18-20:

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again and have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities under foot: and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn to our fathers from the days of old.

Abrahams tells us that in that passage Cordovero sees the thirteen divine attributes, every one of which man must copy. 'He takes the clauses one by one, explains God's method, and then calls on his reader to go and do likewise. Thus man must bear insult; must be limitless in love, finding in all men the object of his deep and inalienable affection; he must overlook wrongs done to him, and never forget a kindness. Cordovero insists again and again on this divine patience and forbearance, on God's passing over man's many sins and on his recognition of man's occasional virtues. So must man act. He must temper his justice with mercy, must be peculiarly tender to the unworthy. His whole being must be attuned to God's being. His earthly eye must be open to the good in all men, as is the heavenly eye; his earthly ear must be deaf to the slanderers and the foul, just as the heavenly ear is receptive only of the good. For God loves all men whom he has made in his very image, and how shall man hate what God loves?' (I. Abrahams, *Studies in Pharisaism and the Gospels*, second series, pp. 145, 146). Abrahams goes on to tell how the Talmud (*Sota* 14 a) on Deuteronomy 13.4 calls on man to imitate God who clothed the naked (Adam and Eve), who visited the sick (Abraham), and who buried the dead (Moses).

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“Thus the whole *torah* (the law) from Genesis to Deuteronomy bids Israel imitate God.”

To talk of man imitating God is neither blasphemous nor impossible, for God made man in his own image (Genesis 1.26,27), and the imitation of God is therefore the very function of manhood.

(b) The Christian must imitate Jesus Christ. He can be said to learn Christ (Ephesians 4.20). The Christian is the follower of Jesus.

(c) The Christian is urged to imitate the heroic figures of the faith. The writer to the Hebrews commands his readers to remember their leaders. ‘Consider the outcome of their life, and imitate their faith’ (Hebrews 13.7). They are to be imitators of ‘those who through faith and patience received the promises’ (Hebrews 6.12). Paul praises the Thessalonians because in their suffering for their faith they became imitators of the churches of Judaea who suffered before them (1 Thessalonians 2.14).

This is why a man should know something of the history of his church. This is why Oliver Cromwell, when he was arranging for the education of his son Richard, said: ‘I would have him know a little history.’ History, as it has been said, is ‘philosophy teaching by examples’. This was indeed the very aim and object of the ancient historians. It was the aim of Thucydides not to compose a book which was a prize essay, but which would abide for all time, so that, when the same kind of events happened again, as he was certain they would, men would find guidance for the present from the examples of the past (Thucydides 1.22). Lucian in his essay on *How History ought to be Written* (44) says that the historians must above all aim at accuracy and usefulness, so that, when similar events occur and similar circumstances arise, the record of the past may teach us how to act in the present. Livy in his *Preface* writes: “This is the most wholesome and faithful effect of the study of history; you have in front of you real examples of every kind of behaviour, real examples em-

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bodied in most conspicuous form; from these you can take, both for yourself and the state, ideals at which to aim; you can learn also what to avoid because it is impious either in its conception or in its issue.'

A. L. Rowse, a modern historian, makes exactly the same claim. For him the prime use of history is that 'it enables you to understand, better than any other discipline, the public events, affairs and trends of your time. . . . History is about human society, its story and how it has come to be what it is; knowing what societies have been like in the past and their evolution will give you the clue to the factors that operate in them, the currents and forces that move them, the motives and conflicts, both general and personal, that shape events' (A. L. Rowse, *The Use of History*, p. 16). By the study of the examples of the past we gain guidance for the present.

The Christian must know the history of his church that he may imitate its heroisms and avoid its mistakes.

(d) But by far Paul's most astonishing invitation to imitation is his repeated invitation to his converts to imitate himself. 'I urge you,' he writes to the Corinthians, 'be imitators of me' (1 Corinthians 4.16). Again he writes to the same people: 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ' (1 Corinthians 11.1). 'Brethren,' he writes to the Philippians, 'join in imitating me' (Philippians 3.17). Again he writes to them: 'What you have learned and received and heard in me do' (Philippians 4.9). He writes to the Thessalonians: 'You became imitators of us and the Lord' (1 Thessalonians 1.6). 'You yourselves know you ought to imitate me,' he writes again to them. His life and work in Thessalonica were designed 'to give you in your conduct an example to imitate' (2 Thessalonians 3.7,9). (This is to some extent obscured in the Authorised Version which translates *mimēsthai* by *to follow* rather than *to imitate*; it is from *mimēsthai* that the English word *to mimic* is derived.)

There are any number of preachers and teachers who can say: 'I can *tell* you what to do.' There are few who can say: 'I can *show* you what to do.' There are any number who can say:

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'Listen to my words.' There are few who can say: 'Follow my example.' It was Paul's astonishing claim that he taught by being, even more than he taught by speaking or by writing.

viii. The Christian ethic demands that all Christians should not only accept an example to imitate but should also provide an example to imitate. It has been well said that 'everyone pipes for the feet of someone to follow'. In the days when I write this a little episode is being shown on television as part of the propaganda to deter people from smoking. A father and son are out fishing; they sit down to eat and to rest; the father produces a cigarette and lights it; the young boy plucks a blade of grass, puts it in his mouth, and puffs at it in imitation of smoking. The father sees what is happening, and he extinguishes his cigarette, for he suddenly realises that his son will imitate him, in the wrong things as well as in the right things.

This Paul well knows. He knows what you can only call the propaganda value of a really Christian life. And so the Christian ethic, as Paul sees it, insists that the Christian must produce an example to attract and not to repel. Paul is very conscious of the Christian duty to the 'outsider', to the man outside the church. The Thessalonians are urged to live a life of honest toil 'that you may command the respect of outsiders' (1 Thessalonians 4.12). One of the qualifications of the bishop is that he must be 'well thought of by outsiders' (1 Timothy 3.7). The Colossians are urged to conduct themselves wisely towards outsiders (Colossians 4.5). Peter is equally insistent on this. He urges Christians to 'maintain good conduct among the Gentiles' so that all malicious charges and all ill-natured slanders may be seen to be demonstrably untrue (1 Peter 2.12; 3.16). Loveliest of all is Peter's advice to a Christian wife married to a heathen husband. She is to live so beautifully that her husband will be brought to Christianity without a word being spoken (1 Peter 3.1).

Greek has two words for *good*. *Agathos* simply describes a thing as being good; *kalos* describes a thing—or person—as

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being, not only good, but also winsome and lovely. And it is *kalos* which in the New Testament is more frequently used (cf. Matthew 5.14-16). The Christian dare not say: 'I don't care what people say or think of me.' He must care, for his life is a sermon for or against his faith.

ix. One of the most widespread demands of Paul's ethical teaching is that Christians should live at peace together. There is hardly anything about which Paul has more to say than the danger of disharmony and the necessity of harmony.

Division has always been a disease of the church. Even at the Last Supper the disciples were disputing about which of them should be greatest (Luke 22.24). The Corinthian church had its partisan support for different leaders, a situation for which the leaders themselves were in no way to blame. Paul's rebuke is that, so long as there is jealousy and strife in their society, they have no right to call themselves Christians at all (1 Corinthians 3.1-4). The Love Feast, which should have been the sign and symbol of perfect unity, has become a thing of divisions and class distinctions. And here there is something which only the newer translations reveal. In the older translations it is said that to eat and drink at the sacrament without discerning the Lord's body is the way to judgment and not to salvation. But in the best Greek text the word *Lord's* is not included. The sin is not to discern the body; that is to say, not to discern that the church is a body, not to be aware of the oneness of the church, not to be aware of the togetherness in which all its members should be joined (1 Corinthians 11.17-32). That disunity is described in verses 17-22; to it Paul describes the illness and the weakness which have fallen upon the congregation (verse 30). The danger in question is not that of not discerning that the bread and wine stand for the body of Christ; the danger is that in a church where there is no harmony and peace between Christian and Christian the sacrament of the Lord's Supper becomes a blasphemy. In Philippi there are preachers whose aim is rather to embarrass Paul than to preach Christ (Philippians 4.2). Paul fears that,

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when he arrives in Corinth, he may find quarrelling and jealousy (2 Corinthians 12.20). He talks about the possibility of the Galatians biting and devouring one another (Galatians 5.15). In the Pastoral Letters there is a warning to those who 'have a morbid craving for controversy', and a warning against 'wrangling among men who are depraved in mind' (1 Timothy 6.4,5).

Again and again Paul appeals for harmony. 'Live in harmony with one another,' he writes to the Romans more than once (Romans 12.16-18; 15.5,6). The Ephesians are urged to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4.2,3). One of the greatest hymns to Christ in the New Testament is written not as theology but as an appeal to have that mind of Christ, and so to be in unity and humility of mind (Philippians 2.1-11). The hands that are lifted in prayer should be pure, without quarrelling and without anger (1 Timothy 2.8). Titus is to tell his people always to avoid quarrels and always to show courtesy (Titus 3.2).

The ethic of Paul demands that Christians should solve the problem of living together—or stop calling themselves Christians.

x. For Paul the Christian ethic is an ethic of humility. This quality of humility is stressed all over the New Testament. In the teaching of Jesus it is the proud who will be brought low and the humble who will be exalted (Matthew 23.12; Luke 14.11; 18.14). The way into the Kingdom is the way of a child's humility (Matthew 18.4). Both James and Peter quote the Old Testament saying that God gives grace to the humble and resists the proud (James 4.6,7; 1 Peter 5.5,6; Proverbs 3.34). But the great passage on humility is the passage in which Paul draws the picture of the humility of Jesus, who gave up the glory of heaven to come and to live, not only as a man, but also as a servant, and not only to live, but in the end to die, and not only to die, but to die on a cross. The perfect pattern of humility is to be found in Jesus Christ (Philippians 2.1-11). Lowliness and meekness, says the Letter to the

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Ephesians, must be the hall-marks of the Christian life (Ephesians 4.2).

This was one of the new things in Christianity. It has been pointed out that in secular Greek there is no word for humility which has not got something mean and low in it. Nowhere can the difference between the Christian and the Greek ethic be seen better than in the comparison between this Christian humility and Aristotle's picture of the great-souled man, who for Aristotle is the finest character of all (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 4.3.1-34, 1122 a 33-1125 a 17).

Aristotle's picture is as follows. The great-souled man is the man who claims much and who deserves much. The man who claims little may be modest and temperate, but he can never be great. The man who claims much without deserving it will be merely vain, not great. To be great-souled involves greatness just as to be handsome involves size. 'Small people,' says Aristotle, 'may be neat and well-made, but they cannot be handsome.' The one thing at which the great-souled man will aim is honour. It is necessary that he should be a good man. To be great-souled is the crown of the virtues, and it cannot exist without them. When persons of worth offer the great-souled man honour, he will deign to accept it; but if honour is offered to him by common people, he will utterly despise it. He will not rejoice overmuch at prosperity, and he will not grieve overmuch at adversity. He will be largely indifferent even to honour, for nothing really matters to him. This is why great-souled people usually give the impression of being haughty. The great-souled man has a contempt for others, and he is justified in despising them.

The great-souled man is fond of conferring benefits, but he dislikes receiving them, for to confer is the mark of superiority, and to receive is the mark of inferiority. If he does receive any service, he will return it with interest, for thus he will continue to be the superior party. If he gives a benefit, he will remember it; if he receives a benefit, he will prefer to forget it. He will never, or at least only with the greatest reluctance, ask

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for help. To those above him he will be haughty; to those beneath him he will be condescendingly gracious. The ordinary objects of ambition will have no attraction for him. He will give the impression of being idle and slow to act, for he will be interested in nothing less than great enterprises. He can never live at the will of another, for that would be slavish. He regards nothing as great; nothing to him is to be admired. He will not bear grudges, but only for the reason that he is too superior for that. He will have no interest in receiving compliments. He will like things which are beautiful and useless rather than things which are useful; he will have a slow walk, a deep voice, and a deliberate way of speaking.

Here is the picture of the conscious aristocrat, whose characteristic attitude is contempt. The Greek picture of a great man is the picture of a man who is conscious of nothing so much as of his own superiority, a man to whom a confession of need would be a confession of failure. The blessings of the Christian view are for the man conscious of his own poverty, the man sad for his own sins, the man hungry for a goodness which he is sadly conscious that he does not possess (Matthew 5.3,4,6). The Greek great man was the man who stood above and looked down. In the Christian ethic the great man is the man who looks up to God, who knows nothing so much as his own need, and who sits where his fellow men sit.

xi. It is basic to the ethic of Paul, as it is to the ethic of the whole New Testament, that the Christian ethic is an ethic of love. That love is not an easy-going, emotional, sentimental thing. It is not something subject to impulse and motivated by passion. It is not something which flames and then dies, at one time a burning passion, at another time almost non-existent. It is not something which depends on our likes and our dislikes for other people. It is the steady, unvarying, undefeatable determination to love men as Jesus loved them, and never, no matter what they do in response, to seek anything but their highest good. It is the goodwill that cannot be quenched. This kind of love is going to have consequences.

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(a) It will dominate the attitude of the Christian towards insult and to injury. Revenge will be something which—if it enters into the picture at all—will be in the hands of God. As for us, even for the man who counts himself our enemy, there will be nothing but concern (Romans 12.19,20). The pattern of human forgiveness is the divine forgiveness. As Christ forgave us, so must we forgive others (Ephesians 4.32; Colossians 3.13). He who has been forgiven must be forgiving. This will mean that a Christian will never try to return evil for evil. He will always try to overcome evil with good (Romans 12.21; 1 Thessalonians 5.15). The Christian will practise not so much a negative policy of non-retaliation as a positive policy which by its kindness shames men into response (Romans 12.20; Proverbs 25.21,22).

(b) This Christian love will bring into personal relationships a new tolerance. Forbearance is characteristic of the Christian attitude to others (Ephesians 4.2; Philippians 4.5). Paul was well aware that different people can quite honestly hold different points of view (Romans 14.5,6). Of this tolerance two things have to be said.

First, it is the tolerance not of indifference but of love. It is tolerant not because it does not care, and not because it thinks that it does not matter, but because in sympathy it tries to understand why the other person thinks and behaves as he does. It is the tolerance which knows that there is a great deal of truth in the saying that to know all is to forgive all.

Second, a wide tolerance in non-essentials does not at all preclude the determination to take an immovable stand, when such a stand is necessary. No one would ever dare to say that Paul was a weak character. But this inflexible Paul was able to yield on matters which he regarded as non-essential or for the greater good of the community. Everyone knows what Paul thought of circumcision, yet he circumcised Timothy simply because he knew that Timothy circumcised would find opportunities for the spread of the gospel which would be closed to Timothy uncircumcised (Acts 16.3). We

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know what Paul thought of the Jewish law and all its ceremonial, yet Paul was entirely willing to finance those who were taking the Nazirite vow, when James suggested that he should do so, as a demonstration that he was by no means a renegade from Judaism (Acts 21.17-26). To be inflexible and to be stubborn are by no means the same thing. To be a man of principle and to be the victim of prejudice are very different things. Christian tolerance knows the difference between principle and prejudice.

(c) Christian love is the control and the condition of Christian freedom. The Christian is free, free from the tyranny of law, free from the obligations which governed the food and the drink of the Jew, free from a legalistic slavery. But that freedom must never be used as an excuse for licence. It is the freedom of a man who loves his neighbour and who will never do anything to harm his neighbour (Galatians 5.1,13,14). It is, as Peter said, the freedom of the servant of God (1 Peter 2.16). There is in one of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas a song, 'Free, yet in fetters bound to my last hour'. The Christian is free; but the Christian is bound by the fetters of responsibility and the obligation of love.

We can see this very clearly if we set side by side two different pieces of instruction by Paul regarding food and drink. In the Letter to the Colossians he insists that the Christian must never be bound by the laws of the ascetic which tell him that he must not taste this, and he must not touch that, and he must not handle the other thing. The Christian is free to eat and drink what he likes (Colossians 2.16,21). And yet when he is writing to the Romans and to the Corinthians Paul issues the warning that a man must never claim the right to eat and to drink those things which may be the ruin of his neighbour (Romans 14.21; 1 Corinthians 8.13). The Christian is free, but that freedom is controlled by responsibility and conditioned by love. Freedom without responsibility, liberty without love are not Christian freedom and liberty, for they can do nothing but harm.

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(d) There is one other sphere in which love dominates and controls. Love must dominate the presentation and the defence of the truth. It is true that the truth must be spoken, but it must be spoken in love (Ephesians 4.15). The truth can be spoken with an almost sadistic cruelty; it can be spoken to hurt and not to cure. It is true, as the Greek philosopher said, that truth can be like the light to sore eyes, but the hurt must never be deliberate. The Christian teacher, say the Pastoral Letters, must not be quarrelsome but kindly; he must be 'an apt teacher, forbearing, correcting his opponents with gentleness' (2 Timothy 2.23-25). As Peter had it, the Christian must always be ready to defend and commend his faith, but always with gentleness and reverence (1 Peter 3.15). It is perfectly possible to win an argument and lose the person. But when the teaching and the argument are carried on in Christian love, this will not happen.

xii. There remains one last area in which the ethic of Paul has something significant to say, something which is also said in the ethic of Peter. Included in the moral literature of the ancient world there were what were called House Tables, in which the duties of the members of the family to each other were explained and codified. The New Testament has its own form of these House Tables. They deal with three relationships.

1. The relationship between husband and wife (Ephesians 5.21-33; Colossians 3.18,19; 1 Peter 3.1-7).
2. The relationship between parent and child (Ephesians 6.1-4; Colossians 3.20,21; 1 Timothy 5.4,8,16).
3. The relationship between master and servant or slave (Ephesians 6.5-9; Colossians 3.22-4.1; Philemon 16; 1 Timothy 6.1,2; 1 Peter 2.18-25).

From these passages certain things emerge.

First, in life Paul sees a natural series of subordinations—wife to husband, child to parent, servant to master. These subordinations are not in the least tyrannies or dictatorships. They are simply the inbuilt mechanism without which life

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cannot go on and without which it would become a chaos. Christianity is not anarchy. It is based on love; it introduces a relationship of love between people; but it sees that, unless certain leaderships are accepted, life cannot proceed. This is not feudalism, or paternalism, or the maintaining of class distinctions. A man need not always be a servant, nor for that matter need he always be a leader. But the acceptance of leadership, both in the sense of exercising it and obeying it, is part of life.

Second, Paul's ethic of personal relationship is always a reciprocal ethic. This is the other side of the subordination. Paul never lays down a right without assigning a duty to it. The duty of the leader to the subordinate is every bit as clearly stated as the duty of the subordinate to the leader. The wife must be subject to her husband, but the husband must treat her with constant kindness and courtesy and consideration (Ephesians 5.22,25,28; Colossians 3.18,19; 1 Peter 3.1,5-7). The child must obey the parent, but the parent must never by unreasonable demands drive the child to resentment or to despair (Ephesians 6.1-4; Colossians 3.20,21). The servant must give obedience and service to the master, but the master must never forget the rights of the servant (Ephesians 6.5,9; Colossians 3.22-25; 4.1; 1 Peter 2.18-25). Privilege is never all on one side. Simply to possess the leadership is to be involved in responsibility for those who are led. The ethic of Paul would bind all together in a mutual responsibility in which no man would ever make a claim on any other man without at the same time recognising his duty to that man.

Third, the whole matter is dominated by the presence of Jesus Christ and by our responsibility to God. It is to please the Lord that children must obey (Colossians 3.20). The relationship between husband and wife is like that between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5.21-33). The servant works as if he was going to take his work and offer it to Christ (Ephesians 6.6-8; Colossians 3.23,24). The master must always remember that he is not his own master, but that he

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has a master in heaven (Ephesians 6.9; Colossians 4.1). Earth is always related to heaven; time is always related to eternity; the simplest thing becomes a religious thing. As George Herbert had it:

*Teach me, my God and King,
In all things thee to see;
And what I do in anything,
To do it as for thee!*

*A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine,
Who sweeps a room as for thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine.*

Work and worship have become one and the same thing.

Fourth, the new situation had its problems. It may at first sight surprise us that in the New Testament nothing is said about emancipating the slaves. Two things are to be said. First, to have suggested the emancipation of the slaves would have produced a chaos, and in the end nothing but mass executions; and even if a move for emancipation had succeeded there was no free market for labour. The time was not ripe. Second, when Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, he sent him back no longer as a slave only, but also as a brother beloved (Philemon 16). This is to say that Christian love and fellowship had introduced a new relationship between master and slave in which these terms ceased to have any relevance at all. So much was this the case that in the congregation the master might well find himself receiving the sacrament from the hands of his slave. If men are together in Christian love, it does not matter if you call one servant and the other master, for they are brothers. True, the time will come when that very situation will make slavery impossible, but it had to come in its own time, or there could have been nothing but trouble.

Fifth, one last thing is to be noted. The servant is now a brother beloved; master and servant may both be Christians. There is a passage in the First Letter to Timothy which in-

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dicates that there were servants who tried to take advantage of that new relationship. "Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brethren; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their service are believers and beloved" (1 Timothy 6.1,2). There were clearly some servants who used the new relationship to attempt to slacken discipline and to get away with idleness and shoddy work. But the Christian ethic teaches that the relationship of brotherhood should make us better and not slacker workmen, for now we work not by compulsion but in partnership with each other.

The Pauline ethic may be nineteen hundred years old, but it is still as valid as ever, and not even yet have its implications been completely worked out.