Virtue in the New Testament: The Legacies of Paul and John in Comparative Perspective*

Christopher W. Skinner

In the late fourth century St. Ambrose composed a commentary on the Gospel of Luke in which he referred to four cardinal virtues.[1] While attempting to reconcile Luke's four beatitudes (Luke 6:20–22) with Matthew's eight (Matt 5:3–10), Ambrose wrote, "Hic quattuor velut virtutes amplexus est cardinales."[2] With these words he became the first church father to apply the term *cardinal* to those virtues that would subsequently become a cornerstone of Christian conduct. The four virtues to which he referred—prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance—were eventually incorporated into the thought of Augustine[3] and Aquinas,[4] have been explored by modern theologians,[5] and are today officially included in the

* This essay reflects on issues related to New Testament ethics, New Testament theology, and the application of the diverse witness of the New Testament in society—three abiding interests in the scholarship of Frank Matera. Fr. Matera's scholarly contributions have been substantial and this essay is offered with appreciation for his many years of faithful teaching, advising, and scholarship.

1. The commentary was begun in 377 C.E. and likely completed in 389.

2. Ambrose's discussion of virtue takes place in book 5 of his commentary. He writes, "Now we must discover how Saint Luke manages to condense the eight Beatitudes into four. *There are, as we know, four cardinal virtues*: temperance, justice, prudence, fortitude" (*Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke* [trans. Íde M. Ní Riain; Dublin: Halcyon, 2001], 138).

3. See section 13 of Augustine's *On Free Will*.

4. Aquinas's most substantive exposition of the cardinal virtues is found in the *Secunda Secundae Partis* of his *Summa theologica* (questions 47–170). Aquinas was clearly influenced by the fourfold structure of virtue present within Greek philosophy, and specifically in the writings of Aristotle, whom Aquinas reverently called "the Philosopher." Cf. also Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 2–5.

5. See esp. Josef Pieper, *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (trans. Richard Winston, Clara

Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church.[6] Throughout church history, virtue has been an important element of the Christian conception of both character and behavior.

It is often the case that we find in the New Testament the basis for later Christian reflection and doctrinal development. This is true of foundational Christian doctrines such as the virginal conception, the divinity of Christ, and the Trinity, and applies also to teachings about Christian conduct. These issues are not always made explicit in the New Testament. Rather, with the New Testament writings as their guide, early church fathers and theologians, accompanied by a hermeneutic of belief, engaged in intense theological reflection that helped establish these doctrines as fixed entities. We have already mentioned the rise of virtue in early Christian discourse. What, if anything, does the New Testament have to say on the subject of virtue? That is the question before us in this essay. Before answering that question, though, we must narrow our field of inquiry.

Numerous traditions are reflected in the New Testament, all of which are important for Christian thought. Two traditions in particular stand out for their impact on subsequent doctrinal development. Frank Matera has observed, "The New Testament contains a number of witnesses to Jesus Christ, but it is the testimonies of Paul and John that have most influenced the history of Christian theology."[7] Without these two traditions, one can scarcely imagine a scenario in which foundational Christian doctrines could have emerged in their current forms. Were it not for the Pauline and Johannine corpora, would the church have been able to parse out the implications of a God who shares human sufferings while also overcoming death? Would it have been possible to arrive at the confessions that

---

Wintson, Lawrence E. Lynch, and Daniel F. Coogan; South Bend, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966).

6. Beginning in section 1804, the Catechism reads: "Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason and faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. The moral virtues are acquired by human effort. They are the fruit and seed of morally good acts; they dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love. Four virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called 'cardinal'; all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance."

7. Frank J. Matera, "Christ in the Theologies of Paul and John: A Study in the Diverse Unity of New Testament Theology," *TS* 67 (2006): 237.

provided the basis for the Nicene Creed[8] or the Chalcedonian definition?[9] In short, the theological legacies of Paul and John are practically coterminous with the essential doctrines of the Christian faith.[10] Against that backdrop, in this essay I ask and answer three questions: (1) What do Paul and John have to say about virtue? (2) How does what they say compare with one another? (3) What implications do these findings have for modern discussions of Christian virtue? In the end this investigation will prove to be a study in what Matera has called "the diverse unity of New Testament theology."[11]

The question of Paul's relationship to John, whether historical or literary, will not detain us here, though some have suggested that the two associated historical figures (Paul of Tarsus and John, the son of Zebedee)[12] might have crossed paths in Ephesus in the mid-first century.[13] My goal

8. The Nicene Creed established the doctrine that Jesus was both divine and coeternal with the Father; this debate was part of a discussion occasioned by the theology of the Alexandrian presbyter Arius (ca. 250–336 C.E.).

9. Chalcedonian Christology affirmed that both divinity and humanity existed fully in the person of Jesus Christ. That understanding has been the basis for orthodox expressions of Christology since the mid-fifth century.

10. While I have profound disagreements with Rudolf Bultmann, I recognize that my emphasis on John and Paul is an approach that stands squarely within the Bultmannian approach to New Testament theology. Though Bultmann's magisterial New Testament theology covered issues related to the earliest kerygma and the rise of early church confession, he was primarily concerned with the teachings of Paul and John. Cf. parts II and III of his four-part *Theology of the New Testament* (trans. Kendrick Grobel; 2 vols.; London: SCM, 1951–1955), 1:187–352; 2:3–92, respectively.

11. This phrase appears in a number of his writings and plays a key role in his *New Testament Theology: Exploring Diversity and Unity* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), esp. 423–80.

12. Though he was likely affiliated with the Johannine community, I do not believe that the individual known from the canonical Gospel tradition as John the son of Zebedee was responsible for the composition of the Fourth Gospel or Johannine Epistles. Throughout this essay I will use the designation "John" in keeping with the conventions of contemporary scholarly discourse. The use of this term is not meant to imply anything about the authorship of the Johannine corpus.

13. The subject of Paul's relationship to John is taken up in two essays from a recent volume devoted to the larger question of Paul's relationship to the Gospels. See Mark Harding, "Kyrios Christos: Johannine and Pauline Perspectives on the Christ Event"; and Colin G. Kruse, "Paul and John: Two Witnesses, One Gospel," in *Paul and the Gospels: Christologies, Conflicts and Convergences* (ed. Michael F. Bird and Joel Willitts; LNTS 411; London: T&T Clark, 2011), 169–96, 197–219, respectively. In his

here is to examine the writings attributed to Paul[14] and John[15] in order to pinpoint specific teachings that may have impacted subsequent discussions of Christian virtue, specifically the so-called theological virtues.

Preliminary Considerations

At the outset of this examination several interpretive challenges arise. First, both the Pauline and Johannine writings were meant to address specific concerns and were occasioned by events within particular communities of faith. Practically, this means that neither Paul nor John wrote to provide a detailed exposition of Christian behavior. Their materials were written in the context of and in response to conflicts, controversies, and misunderstandings. It naturally follows that neither corpus provides a comprehensive or systematic exposition of Christian virtue. Thus most of what we discover will necessarily arise by implication.

Second, neither author wrote to a general Christian audience. Paul was writing to a number of different churches, most of which he founded; those churches were spread throughout Asia Minor. Most scholars agree that John's Letters, as well as the Fourth Gospel, were written for a specific group—the so-called Johannine community.[16] Therefore, not everything in these works is regarded as universally binding for the Christian reader.

Finally, John's writings have remarkably few statements about moral behavior,[17] which makes it necessary to read between the lines. On the other hand, Paul is very concerned with moral behavior, and the *Haupt-*

---

essay, Harding raises the possibility of Paul and John interacting with one another in Ephesus during Paul's ministry there. See pp. 170–71.

14. I will limit myself here to those letters that are regarded as authentically Pauline by a consensus of scholars.

15. My consideration of Johannine material will focus on the Fourth Gospel and the Johannine Epistles. Issues related to date, genre, and authorship complicate the decision to include the book of Revelation. Though it is often grouped with the Johannine writings, I will not discuss it here.

16. This idea has been met with increasing resistance in recent years. See, e.g., Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospel for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998); and Edward W. Klink III, *The Sheep of the Fold: The Audience and Origin of the Gospel of John* (SNTSMS 141; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); idem, *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity* (LNTS 353; London: T&T Clark, 2010).

17. On this issue see Wayne A. Meeks, "The Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist," in

briefe contains several lists of vices and virtues, though no two lists are identical. An awareness of these factors both complicates our task and establishes the parameters of our method in approaching the Johannine and Pauline writings.

Love: The Johannine Imperative

Though not universal, there is wide agreement that the Gospel and Epistles of John were written for a community that was undergoing theological controversies and ecclesiastical conflicts. The Johannine community seems to have been dealing with internal theological disagreements related to the humanity and divinity of Jesus[18] as well as a struggle to maintain fellowship with those in the synagogue who were not followers of Jesus.[19] When reading the epistles, it is easy to get the impression that one is listening to one side of an extremely contentious debate. The opponents are denigrated as those who do not know or remain in the truth (e.g., 2 John 9–11), those who like to be first (3 John 9), or simply as "antichrists" (1 John 2:18–19). In the Gospel the opponents are a group consistently referred to as "the Jews" (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι).[20] These conflicts form the backdrop for much of the content of the Johannine literature; and, unlike Paul, the writings attributed to John are not concerned with lawsuits, the

Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith (ed. R. Alan Culpepper and C. Clifton Black; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 317–20.

18. Numerous indicators in 1 John point to the emergence of an incipient Docetism within the Johannine community. The letter appears to have been written, at least in part, to encourage its readers to adopt the position that Jesus actually existed in human flesh.

19. The two scholars most associated with this proposal are J. Louis Martyn (*History and Theology in the Fourth Gospel* [New York: Harper& Row, 1968]) and Raymond E. Brown (*The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* [New York: Paulist Press, 1979]). While many have undertaken a revision of the thesis that John's community was at odds with the synagogue leadership, the foundational assumptions remain in place among a large segment of Johannine scholars.

20. Few issues within Johannine scholarship have occasioned as much discussion or controversy as the identity of "the Jews" in the Gospel of John. Too much has been written on the topic to provide a comprehensive bibliography here. For a relatively recent treatment, see Reimund Bieringer, Didier Pollefeyt, and Frederique Vandecasteele-Vanneuville, eds., *Anti-Judaism and the Fourth Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

mediation of conflicts, household relationships, or sexual ethics. Neither do they provide a list of vices to avoid. For John, one virtue rises above all others—love.[21] Many who have written on the subject of Johannine ethics are curiously united in their denouncement of the Gospel and letters as repositories for a universal Christian morality.[22] The command to "love one another" is especially regarded by scholars as sectarian and exclusive.[23] Matera has summarized this concern:

> Many of the ethical debates found in the Synoptic Gospels concerning Jesus' observance or interpretation of the Mosaic law and the Sabbath, for example, are absent from John's Gospel. Moreover, the most explicitly ethical teaching of the Fourth Gospel—that Jesus' disciples should love one another as he has loved them—raises a series of questions. What is the content of this love? How do disciples exercise this love in real-life situations? Whom does this love include? Is this a universal love such as is found in the Gospel of Luke, or has love become exclusive and sectarian in the Fourth Gospel? In a word, there appears to be remarkably little

21. John P. Meier has commented, "Apart from the love that imitates Jesus' love for his own, John's Gospel is practically amoral. We look in vain for the equivalents of Jesus' teaching on divorce, oaths and vows, almsgiving, prayer, fasting, or the multitude of other specific moral directives strewn across the pages of Matthew's Gospel. Everything comes down to imitating Jesus' love for his disciples; what concrete and specific actions should flow from this love are largely left unspoken" ("Love in Q and John: Love of Enemies, Love of One Another," *Mid-Stream* 40 [2001]: 47–48). Similarly, Meeks notes, "Even in the Johannine Jesus' private teaching of his disciples, 'his instructions lack specificity.' The only rule is 'love one another,' and that rule is both vague in its application and narrowly circumscribed, being limited solely to those who are firmly within the Johannine circle" ("Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist," 318).

22. On the moral bankruptcy of the Johannine writings, see Mary E. Clarkson, "The Ethics of the Fourth Gospel," *AThR* 31 (1949): 112–15; Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament: Change and Development* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 91–100; Meeks, "Ethics of the Fourth Evangelist," 317–26.

23. But see the dissenting comments of John W. Pryor: "we ought to avoid concluding that the love command represents a narrowing of the broader neighbour love of the synoptic tradition. There is simply no evidence that this is so. It derives from the experienced love of Jesus for the community of disciples, and there is no indication that it implies a rejection of obligations to outsiders" (*John: Evangelist of the Covenant People. The Narrative and Themes of the Fourth Gospel* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1992], 163).

> ethical content in the Gospel according to John, and its most explicit ethical teaching raises a host of questions.[24]

Similar concerns have been voiced by Ernst Käsemann,[25] J. L. Houlden,[26] and Jack T. Sanders.[27] As it relates to the subject of virtue, the Johannine emphasis on love begs for further examination.

Love in the Johannine Writings

Even a superficial reading of the Johannine literature reveals an abiding emphasis on love. Together, the various terms for love (ἀγάπη, ἀγαπάω, φίλος, φιλέω)[28] appear a total of 117 times in the Gospel and letters.[29] Fernando Segovia has argued that love is the key component to four rela-

---

24. Frank J. Matera, *New Testament Ethics: The Legacies of Jesus and Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 92.

25. Ernst Käsemann, *The Testament of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 59–70.

26. J. L. Houlden, *Ethics and the New Testament* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 36.

27. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament*, 100; Sanders's denunciation of John's vision of love is particularly harsh: "Precisely because such [socially disinterested Christian] groups, however, now exist in sufficient abundance to be visible, perhaps the weakness and moral bankruptcy of the Johannine ethics can be seen more clearly. Here is not a Christianity that considers that loving is the same as fulfilling the law (Paul) or that the good Samaritan parable represents a demand (Luke) to stop and render even first aid to the man who has been robbed, beaten, and left there for dead. Johannine Christianity is interested only in whether he believes. 'Are you saved, brother?' the Johannine Christian asks the man bleeding to death on the side of the road. 'Are you concerned about your soul?' 'Do you believe that Jesus is the one who came down from God?' 'If you believe, you will have eternal life,' promises the Johannine Christian, while the dying man's blood stains the ground."

28. Even though the two terms have a long history of distinct and separate semantic domains in the Greek language, there can be little doubt that ἀγαπάω and φιλέω, and their respective cognate groups, are used interchangeably in the Fourth Gospel. For more on this, see Francis T. Gignac, "The Use of Verbal Variety in the Fourth Gospel," in *Transcending Boundaries: Contemporary Readings of the New Testament. Essays in Honor of Francis J. Moloney* (ed. Rekha M. Chennattu and Mary L. Coloe; Biblioteca di Scienze Religiose 187; Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2005), 193–95. See also the related comments in Dorothy Lee, "Friendship, Love and Abiding in the Gospel of John," pp. 57–74 of the same volume.

29. Ἀγάπη appears 7 times in the Gospel and 21 times in the epistles. The verbal form, ἀγαπάω, appears 37 times in the Gospel and 31 times in the epistles. The verb

tionships in the Johannine writings: (1) God's love for the disciples; (2) Jesus' love for the disciples; (3) the disciples' love for God; and (4) the disciples' love for one another.[30] While Segovia's observations are valid, there is little doubt that the clearest and most direct statements about love concern Johannine disciples (or believers, in the case of the epistles) and are directly related to the seemingly sectarian concern that they love one another. In this study I will concentrate on these specific statements.

Several times in the Farewell Discourse, the Johannine Jesus encourages his disciples to demonstrate a love for one another that imitates his own love for them. John 13:34–35 reads, "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." Three times in the span of these two verses, John's Jesus encourages his disciples to demonstrate love for one another. According to the Johannine vision of love, this practice is an imitation of Jesus himself and will serve as a source of broad external witness. The notion of love in the proximate context is related to *service*; one might even argue that service is the very content of the love Jesus commands.

At the beginning of this literary unit, Jesus has performed the highly symbolic task of washing his disciples' feet (cf. 13:1–17). The scandalous nature of this action astonishes the disciples, arresting their sense of social order.[31] During the footwashing, Jesus demonstrates the type of service he wants his disciples to imitate (vv. 3–5), and then attempts to explain the significance of what he has done (vv. 12–17). While Jesus notes that Peter—who likely represents the group in this context—will not understand what he has done until later (v. 7),[32] the implied reader understands

---

φιλέω appears 13 times in the Gospel; the nominal form, φίλος, appears 6 times in the Gospel and 3 times in the epistles.

30. See Fernando F. Segovia, *Love Relationships in the Johannine Tradition: Agapē/Agapan in 1 John and the Fourth Gospel* (SBLDS 58; Chico, Calif.: Scholars Press, 1982), 194.

31. It is often suggested that washing another's feet was a task reserved for servants. However, Mary L. Coloe ("Welcome into the Household of God: The Foot Washing in John 13," *CBQ* 66 [2004]: 408) asserts that, as a rule, servants merely provided a basin of water while the washing of one's feet was left up to each individual to perform; this would suggest that Jesus' actions subvert the social order even more than is usually thought.

32. This motif of "now" and "after" pervades several episodes in the Gospel and creates a tension between the time of Jesus' ministry (the "now") and the postresurrec-

that this act of service is meant to anticipate Jesus' impending death, which further associates this love with sacrifice. It is significant that this act is referred to as an "example" (ὑπόδειγμα, v. 15). On this point, R. Alan Culpepper notes:

> one of the established contexts in which [this term] was used was in accounts of exemplary deaths which served as models for others to follow. This connotation of the term *hypodeigma* further links the footwashing with Jesus' death, but more significantly the term appears in vv. 12–17, which have customarily been read as a second interpretation of the footwashing which treats it not as an interpretation of Jesus' death but as an example of humble service for others to follow.[33]

The ὑπόδειγμα Jesus displays is not solely concerned with death but with humility and servitude. Together, service and sacrifice represent the heart of what it means for Johannine believers to love one another.

As the Farewell Discourse advances, we come to John 15:12–13: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Here Jesus reiterates what he has earlier commanded—that the disciples display a love for one another that imitates his love for them. In addition, the sacrificial element of this love is much more clearly stated than before. The assertion about laying down one's life for a friend is significant for at least two reasons. First, the allusion to sacrifice functions proleptically. The implied reader is ever aware of the looming threat of Jesus' execution. Here Jesus makes the implied element of sacrifice explicit by connecting his love command to the voluntary laying down of one's life. Though it has not yet

---

tion situation of the disciples (the "after"). Throughout the story the reader observes the disciples' lack of understanding in the "now" and is informed by the narrator of their remembrances and understanding in the "after." Richard B. Hays ("Reading Scripture in Light of the Resurrection," in *The Art of Reading Scripture* [ed. Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 224) argues that the narrator's report of these postresurrection remembrances of the disciples provides the reader with a hermeneutical lens through which to read the entire Gospel. He writes, "Thus in John 2:13–22 the story of Jesus' death and resurrection is posited as the key that unlocks the interpretation of Scripture. Retrospective reading of the Old Testament after the resurrection enables Jesus' disciples to 'believe' in a new way both the Scripture and Jesus' teaching and to see how each illuminates the other."

33. R. Alan Culpepper, "The Johannine *Hypodeigma*: A Reading of John 13," *Semeia* 53 (1991): 143.

occurred, Jesus describes his sacrifice with the phrase καθὼς ἠγάπησα ὑμᾶς ("as I have loved you"). In using an aorist verb, he seemingly announces the imminent completion of what has yet to occur.

The second reason this clause is significant is that the sacrifice Jesus describes is said to be for one's friends (ὑπὲρ τῶν φίλων αὐτοῦ). For some, this emphasis confirms the impression that John's concerns are sectarian rather than universal. I will say more about this issue at the conclusion of my examination of the Johannine literature.

In addition to these two passages from the Gospel, there are four instances in 1 John in which readers are encouraged to love another. As noted above, the Johannine community was experiencing a division over the confession that Jesus actually existed in the flesh. For John, the orthodox confession[34] is that Jesus Christ "came in the flesh" (cf. 1 John 4:1–3) and was also the representative and revealer of the Father to humanity (cf. John 1:1–18).[35] The epistles give the strong impression that those who rejected this confession were no longer welcome in the Johannine community. Further, Christology and ethics are intertwined in the Johannine Epistles, with the result that action and confession cannot be separated in direct affirmations about ethical behavior.

In 1 John there is a strong connection between knowing Jesus, keeping his commands, and loving one's brother or sister (1:5–7; 2:3–11; 3:11–18; 4:7–23). There is also a subtle but ever-present subtext that connects knowing and following God with the appropriate Johannine christological confession; one cannot exist without the other. This connection is clearly seen in 2:10–11 (NRSV): "Whoever loves a brother or sister lives in the light, and in such a person there is no cause for stumbling. But whoever hates another believer is in the darkness, walks in the darkness, and does not know the way to go, because the darkness has brought on blindness." Inasmuch as "walking in the light" is John's shorthand for following Jesus, it seems clear that loving one's brother or sister as a byproduct of following

34. I recognize the problematic nature of the term *orthodox* as it applies to the development of early Christian doctrine. I am using the term here to refer to that which the Johannine community regarded as orthodox and not to some nebulous idea of orthodoxy within nascent expressions of Christianity.

35. Together, these two ideas provided a seedbed for later christological developments within early Christianity. The formulation that identifies Jesus as both fully human and fully divine is derived from such statements and helped to lay the foundation for Chalcedonian Christology.

God is the essence of Johannine discipleship. We see this same emphasis in a longer passage from 3:11–18 (NRSV):

> For this is the message you have heard *from the beginning* [ἀπ' ἀρχῆς], that we should love one another. We must not be like Cain who was from the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not be astonished, brothers and sisters, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death. All who hate a brother or sister are murderers, and you know that murderers do not have eternal life abiding in them. We know love by this, that he laid down his life for us—and we ought to lay down our lives for one another. How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help? Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action.

All three aforementioned emphases—knowing Jesus, keeping his commands, and loving one's brother or sister—are present here, as is the earlier Gospel emphasis on sacrifice. Several other insights can be gleaned from this passage.

First, the "beginning" (ἀρχή) of verse 11 is probably not the same as the ἀρχή described in John 1:1 (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος). There the evangelist is harkening back to the beginning of time as depicted in Gen 1:1 LXX (ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν).[36] Rather, the phrase "from the beginning" (ἀπ' ἀρχῆς)—which also appears in 1 John 1:1; 2:7, 13, 24; 3:8; and 2 John 5, 6—is likely meant to refer to the "person, words, and deeds of Jesus as this complexus reflects his self-revelation (which is also a revelation of his Father) to his disciples."[37] In other words, according to John, as far back as the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry, the command to love one another has been a component of a distinctly Christian ethic.

Second, according to verse 14, this display of love within the community is an outward sign that Johannine believers have been transferred from the realm of death to the realm of life. The content of this love is not expressly communicated; but based upon other statements in 1 John, one can assume it relates to the confession that Jesus Christ "came in the flesh"

36. Hebrew: בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֵת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֵת הָאָרֶץ.

37. Raymond E. Brown, *The Epistles of John: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB 30; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1982), 158.

(1 John 4:3; 2 John 7), along with a concern to meet the needs of others within the community. This much is confirmed by 1 John 3:17–18, where the Torah ethic of caring for those who cannot care for themselves comes into sharper focus.[38] Orthodox Johannine confession is once again intimately connected to how one behaves, and vice versa.

Third, verse 16 again confirms the Johannine stress on sacrificial love as a means to imitating Jesus' love for his own. According to John, sacrificial self-giving is the necessary result of knowing God and is the basis for virtuous behavior within the community of faith.

Two final passages from 1 John 4 encourage believers to love one another. The first, 4:7–11, notes that God is the source of the commanded love (v. 7) and explicitly mentions sacrifice (v. 10), lending further credence to the notion that Johannine love is sacrificial service undertaken in the context of the appropriate (viz., orthodox Johannine) confession:

> Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love. God's love was revealed among us in this way: God sent his only Son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be *the atoning sacrifice for our sins* [ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν]. Beloved, since God loved us so much, we also ought to love one another. (NRSV)

By now, John's flare for the redundant should be clear to the reader. Since God is the source of love, those who know God must necessarily demonstrate love toward others in a spirit of sacrificial self-giving. Of particular importance to our discussion is the use of ἱλασμὸν περὶ τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ἡμῶν in verse 10. The term ἱλασμός is found only twice in the New Testament—here and 1 John 2:2. In the LXX, the ἱλασμός word group translates Hebrew כִּפֶּר (to cover over, pacify, make propitiation),[39] a term that, along with its cognates, appears in cultic contexts related to animal sacrifice (cf., e.g., Exod 30:10; Lev 7:7; Num 5:8; Ezek 43:20). The use of this term further advances the idea that John's servant love is characterized by sacrifice. Jesus gave his life as an act of propitiation for his followers. Thus they should follow his example by loving one another sacrificially.

38. See the similar comments in Jas 2:14–17.

39. BDB, 497, s.v. כִּפֶּר.

The final passage under consideration in this section is 1 John 4:20–21 (NRSV): "Those who say, 'I love God,' and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen. The command we have from him is this: those who love God must love their brothers and sisters also." As regards the command for believers to love one another, there is nothing new here. Those who know God have a duty to let their faith and confession produce a genuine response. These elements of Johannine discipleship necessarily go hand in hand.

Love as Sacrificial Self-Giving

This examination of love passages in the Johannine writings has shown that John's vision of love is characterized by two things: service and sacrifice. This love is said to be an imitation of Jesus' love—a sacrificial self-giving in the context of an all-encompassing orthodox confession. Johannine orthodoxy requires that confession, service, and sacrifice work in concert with one another; to omit one of these elements is to dishonor the spirit of Johannine virtue. The following propositions summarize John's understanding of love: (1) love comes from God; (2) God's love was on display to the world through the sacrificial self-giving of Jesus Christ for humanity; (3) believers (or disciples) must follow Jesus' example (ὑπόδειγμα), and their lives must be characterized by sacrificial self-giving toward others.

Before moving on to discuss Pauline virtues, I must raise one more time the important question of whether Johannine love is to be envisioned as extending beyond those who share the same confession. Is the sacrificial self-giving John commands intended only for those within the Johannine community or can this virtue be applied as broadly as the love of one's neighbor or even the love of one's enemies? I have already identified a number of critics who decry the supposedly sectarian nature of Johannine morality, but are there alternative ways to read these passages? Is it possible to understand this love as something intended for a wider group than simply those called "friends"—as in the Fourth Gospel—or those who share the same confession that Jesus has "come in the flesh"—as in 1 John?

It is true that the Johannine worldview with its attendant polarities (light vs. darkness, truth vs. lie, etc.) precludes any accommodation to the κόσμος on the part of Jesus followers. The alienation of the Johannine community from those in the synagogue (οἱ Ἰουδαῖοι) and the seceding "antichrists" (cf., e.g., 1 John 2:18–23) would suggest that this was historically

true in the interpersonal dealings of its members. The radical, countercultural vision of Johannine spirituality calls believers to reject sin (however that is to be understood) and imitate Jesus' own example, though this does not demand that love be exclusive or sectarian. As discussed above, the Johannine passage most closely associated with providing an example for readers to follow is the aforementioned footwashing scene in John 13, but this is not the only place where an inclusive self-giving love can be found in the Fourth Gospel.

The most poignant example of the intended breadth of this sacrificial self-giving is Jesus' display of love and friendship toward those who continually fail him. Friends who consistently disappoint, deny, and even betray can hardly be called "friends." Yet Jesus treats his closest followers as friends despite their failings. Peter consistently misunderstands Jesus' message, mission, and identity, and when faced with the opportunity to display his loyalty to Jesus, he denies knowing him three times (18:15–26). Nevertheless, Jesus tenderly reinstates Peter with a symbolic reversal in the form of a threefold question-and-response sequence (21:15–19).[40]

Save for the Beloved Disciple, all of Jesus' closest followers abandon him and are absent from the scene of his crucifixion, yet he reveals himself to them, offering them an opportunity to continue in the unity that he and the Father share. The love Jesus displays toward his failing disciples reaches outside the bounds of what one would do for a friend, and in that way the sacrificial self-giving envisioned by the Johannine tradition is far from exclusive.

In light of everything we have considered here, I find the sectarian critique of Johannine love lacking in both nuance and interpretive imagination. It does not seem impossible for the Johannine vision of sacrificial self-giving to be applied broadly, and with benefit, to those who do not share the same confession or community ties as the Johannine believer. However, for this to happen, interpreters of the Johannine writings must approach the material with an appropriate level of caution. For those interested in the application of a genuinely *Christian* ethic, a nuanced appropriation of the Johannine command to "love one another" through sacrificial self-giving can prove beneficial. However—and this cannot be stressed

40. Most scholars regard John 21 as a later addition to the original Gospel. This is not problematic for my approach, however, since I am concerned with the final form of the narrative as it was used in performative and liturgical contexts by the Johannine Christians.

strongly enough—those with a concern to apply the ethical teachings of the Johannine literature must remain ever aware of and keep in balance the diverse voices operative within the New Testament as a whole; this final observation brings us to the study of Paul's understanding of virtue.

Virtue in Paul—Where to Start?

When we make the move from the Johannine corpus to the Pauline we are presented with at least three potential challenges. First, since John is less concerned than Paul with moral instruction, it was not necessary for us to examine the concept of virtue in great detail when approaching the Johannine literature. An exploration of the writings of Paul, however, necessitates some familiarity with basic ethical concepts, as well as a rudimentary understanding of the more specialized areas of virtue ethics[41] and Christian ethics/moral theology.[42] A second challenge is related to the sheer volume of Paul-related material that exists. Year after year sees the production of a seemingly inexhaustible supply of studies focusing on the life, letters, and theology of Paul. This creates a situation in which one must sift through a great deal of material to find insightful treatments of

41. Virtue ethics have played an important role in the Western philosophical tradition, from the early Greek philosophers—most notably Aristotle—to the medieval Christian period, finding their fullest Christian expression in the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The basic concept behind virtue ethics is that virtues are morally valuable character traits or dispositions firmly entrenched in a given individual. For more on this subject as it relates to New Testament studies, see Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., and James F. Keenan, S.J., *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Lanham, Md.: Sheed & Ward, 2010).

42. Some regard Christian ethics and moral theology as the same enterprise with different names. Typically Protestant scholars engage in the study of Christian ethics, while Roman Catholic scholars do moral theology. There is some truth to this dichotomy, though a more careful distinction should be made. Among Protestant theologians, there is no standard, widely accepted definition of Christian ethics. Stanley Hauerwas argues that "ethics is theology," and that as such it is quite naturally an enterprise of the church (see *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983], xv–xxvi). In Roman Catholic circles, moral theology is a subdiscipline within Catholic theology that addresses ethical issues, including those related to social justice, sexual and medical ethics, and moral virtue. For more on the history and practice of moral theology, see James F. Keenan, *History of Catholic Moral Theology in the Twentieth Century: From Confessing Sins to Liberating Consciences* (London: Continuum, 2010).

a given topic. Third, unlike John's letters, Paul's letters are infused with moral content interwoven into complex theological argumentation; there are also several vice and virtue lists in the undisputed letters,[43] and these lists differ according to the situations faced by the intended recipients of each letter. In short, Paul has a great deal to say about moral behavior, and commentators have a great deal to say about Paul. It stands to reason, then, that when we approach the subject of Paul's understanding of virtue, especially in an essay of this length, it can be difficult to identify a launching point in either contemporary scholarship or in the Pauline corpus. In light of these challenges, I will attempt to identify a helpful construct from contemporary Pauline studies and use that as my basis for exploring two passages from Paul's undisputed letters.

Cruciform Spirituality and the Pauline Virtues

In his book *Cruciformity*,[44] Michael J. Gorman explores at length Paul's understanding of the drama of salvation history that culminates in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, paying special attention to how this shapes Paul's vision of a spirituality that is conformed to the cross of Christ. For Gorman, Paul's "narrative spirituality" is corporate and inclusive, and helps form communities in which cross-shaped faith, hope, love, and power produce mutual commitment among believers and preclude all allegiances except to the God who was revealed in Jesus Christ. To speak of "conformity to the cross" is more than simply to assert the soteriological efficacy of Christ's sacrifice—a concern commonly emphasized by certain traditions within modern Christianity. It moves beyond an understanding of the cross as the source or means of one's salvation to a more complete understanding of a lived, cross-shaped spirituality. Gorman provides the following definition:

> Cruciformity is Paul's all-encompassing spirituality. It is the *modus operandi* of life in Christ. It is fellowship or communion with the Lord Jesus

43. Vice lists are found in AQ: why not use canonical order? Gal 5:19–21; 1 Cor 5:9–11, 6:9–10; 2 Cor 12:19–21; Rom 1:29–32; there are also vice lists in the disputed letters: Col 3:5–6; 1 Tim 1:9–10; 6:4–5; 2 Tim 3:2–5. Lists of virtues are found in Gal 5:22–23; Phil 4:8; and 1 Cor 13:1–13.

44. Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

> (1 Cor 10:16–17), sharing the "mind of Christ" (Phil 2:5; 1 Cor 2:16), and conformity to the image of God's Son (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; cf. Phil 2:5–11), which is a process of conformity to his death (Phil 3:10). This conformity is not merely a conformity to his suffering—though it includes that (e.g., Rom 8:17; Phil 3:10)—but conformity to his cross-shaped narrative more broadly, the narrative of self-giving loyal obedience to God (faith) and self-giving love of neighbor. It is thus a life of ongoing co-crucifixion with Christ (Gal 2:19–20) that, paradoxically, is life-giving, both to those who live it and to those affected by it.[45]

Paul's cruciform spirituality, then, is about (1) communion with Christ through orthodox confession,[46] (2) self-giving obedience to God, (3) self-giving love to others, and (4) co-crucifixion with Christ. The first three of these features are consistent with the Johannine vision of sacrificial self-giving. Pauline ethics are ultimately more extensive and diverse than their Johannine counterpart, though these foundational elements of the Johannine approach are present in Paul. Here we have an example of the diverse unity of New Testament theology as it relates to the moral life of the community of faith.[47]

There is no approach to Paul that stands unmediated by multiple layers of interpretation. James D. G. Dunn has provided a detailed discussion of the difficulties involved in constructing a theology of Paul, and they are many.[48] Like any good theological construct, Gorman's cruciform spirituality synchronizes complex and diverse ideas into a mosaic that more or less represents the major movements in Pauline theology. As such, cruciformity is not perfect (what theological construct is?), though it does provide a helpful starting point for approaching Paul "from above." Now I will

45. Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Paul* (Cascade Companions; Eugene, Ore.: Cascade, 2008), 147. In a follow-up book to his volume on cruciformity, Gorman writes, "Christ's love, freedom, self-giving, humility, and so on become for Paul the standard for life in Christ, embodied in all of life's contingencies" (*Inhabiting the Cruciform God: Kenosis, Justification, and Theosis in Paul's Narrative Soteriology* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 32).

46. Here again I want to be clear that my use of the term *orthodox* is intended as a specific reference to that which Paul would have considered orthodox, just as I earlier considered Johannine orthodoxy (cf. n. 34 above). It is conceivable that one could devote an entire monograph to a comparison of Johannine and Pauline views on what constitutes orthodoxy.

47. For more on this, see Matera, *New Testament Theology*, 458–68.

48. See *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 1–23.

attempt to approach Paul "from below" by examining two passages concerned with moral behavior in which virtue lists also appear. My exegetical considerations will be filtered through the grid of Gorman's understanding of cruciform spirituality.

Life by Means of the Spirit (Gal 5:16–26)

In Gal 5 Paul addresses their misunderstanding of freedom in Christ (5:1–15) followed by a discussion of life by means of the Spirit (vv. 16–26).[49] For Paul it is impossible to legitimately appropriate one's freedom in Christ apart from the enabling of the Holy Spirit. He asserts that the freedom brought about by the cross of Christ is not about a new kind of legalism (v. 1)—that is, being enslaved to a new set of laws—or a license to live without moral boundaries (v. 13). Rather, freedom in Christ is the freedom to do what one ought to do, which can only be accomplished by means of the Spirit.

In verse 16 Paul establishes his thesis for this section: "Walk by means of the Spirit and you will never gratify [οὐ μὴ τελέσητε] the desires of the flesh." In Hellenistic Greek, οὐ μή combined with an aorist subjunctive—also known as emphatic negation—is the strongest way to negate something that could potentially occur in the future.[50] Even though human experience would tend to disagree with the content of Paul's thesis, the presence of this construction speaks to the intended rhetorical force of his argument. From here Paul uses the images of battle (vv. 17–18) and bearing fruit (vv. 22–23) to discuss fundamental spiritual realities.

The ongoing battle between flesh (σάρξ) and spirit (πνεῦμα) described in verses 17–18 does not depict a proto-gnostic dichotomy between the body—constructed of "evil" matter—and the "good" inner being, though it is possible that some early interpreters of Paul misunderstood his teaching on this point. Rather, σάρξ is used metonymically as a symbol for the powers of human unrighteousness that oppose the works of God, while

49. Paul's use of the dative in the phrase πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε is likely meant to indicate means, agency, or instrumentality. In order to make this nuance clear I have chosen to translate the term with the phrase "by means of the Spirit."

50. "οὐ μή is the most decisive way of negativing someth. in the future" (BDAG, 646, s.v. μή). See also the helpful treatment of this construction in Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 468–69.

πνεῦμα seems to be a clear reference to the Holy Spirit. Gorman notes that a similar contrast describing human life as a choice between two avenues, life and death, has a long history within Judaism, as exemplified in Deut 30:15–20.[51]

After an initial introduction to the conflict between flesh and Spirit, Paul further describes the flesh-directed way of life by providing a list of fifteen vices: "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these" (vv. 19–21). The first three terms in Paul's list (πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια) are related to sexual excesses or other sexually immoral behavior. The next two terms (εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία) are related to the practice of false religions. These first five vices are followed by a grouping of eight terms, all of which are directly related to propriety in interpersonal relationships within the community (ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος, θυμοί, ἐριθεῖαι, διχοστασίαι, αἱρέσεις, φθόνοι). The final two terms, "drunkenness" (μέθαι) and "carousing" (κῶμοι), are difficult to categorize and likely reflect Paul's desire to be as thorough as possible, even in light of his statement that his is not an exhaustive list (καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις, v. 21). There is no way to determine the logic behind this specific ordering of vices. It may be that the list has been crafted to address specific concerns within the Galatian community, though we know comparatively little about the moral life of the Galatian believers. From here, Paul contrasts these "deeds of the flesh" with a more universally applicable list of fruit—not fruits—of the Spirit.

The concept of bearing fruit as practicing or producing righteous deeds appears in multiple Matthean contexts (3:8–10; 7:16–19; 12:33; 21:43), but shows up only three times in Paul's undisputed letters.[52] Though ignored by earlier commentators, more recent works have suggested that Paul is drawing upon Old Testament imagery for the concept of fruit bearing.[53]

---

51. Michael J. Gorman, *Apostle of the Crucified Lord: A Theological Introduction to Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 219.

52. In Gal 5:22 Paul speaks of the "fruit of the Spirit" (καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός); in Rom 6:22 he writes that being enslaved to God brings "fruit unto sanctification" (ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν); in Phil 1:11 he affirms that the Philippian believers have been "filled with the fruit of righteousness" (πεπληρωμένοι καρπὸν δικαιοσύνης).

53. Siegfried Wibbing (*Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament: Und ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte* [BZNW 25; Berlin: Töpelmann, 1959], 83) earlier suggested that the source and order-

Among the passages listed as possible source material are portions of Lev 26; Deut 7; Isa 5; 27; 32; 37; 57; Jer 38; Ezek 17; 34; 36; Amos 9; Joel 2; and Zech 8.[54] In addition to this Old Testament material, virtue lists similar to the material in Gal 5:22–23 are also found in Pseudo-Crates (*Ep.* 15) and the Qumran document, *The Rule of the Community* (1QS III, 13–IV, 25). It is more likely that Paul is drawing from Old Testament tradition, though identifying precise intertext(s) proves to be difficult.

The list Paul provides includes love (ἀγάπη), joy (χαρά), peace (εἰρήνη), patience (μακροθυμία), kindness (χρηστότης), goodness (ἀγαθωσύνη), faithfulness (πίστις), gentleness (πραΰτης), and self-control (ἐγκράτεια). That these virtues are described as the "fruit" (καρπός) rather than "fruits" of the Spirit is significant. Matera notes that the singular noun is used because "the ethical life of the Christian is the singular fruit of the Spirit rather than the attainment of a series of virtues."[55] The virtues themselves are witness to one reality—the Spirit-directed life. Paul concludes his list by asserting that "against such things there is no law" (κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος). In verse 23 νόμος is clearly used in the narrower sense of *statute*, making the statement ironic, since the Mosaic law (νόμος) and its relationship to justification has been a prominent theme to this point in the letter.

If Paul's cruciform spirituality is indeed characterized by co-crucifixion (v. 26; cf. 2:20) and conformity to God's Son, these nine virtues are rightly understood as a manifestation of the very nature of God as revealed in Christ. This does not mean that one can attain to the fruit of the Spirit through imitation or effort alone. The Johannine and Pauline approaches differ on this point. Rather, one must be empowered by the Spirit, and to

---

ing behind Pauline *vice lists* (esp. those in the Pastorals) derived primarily from the Decalogue.

54. Among others, G. Walter Hansen (*Galatians* [IVPNTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994], 178) cites Isa 32:15–17 and Joel 2:28–32; John M. G. Barclay (*Obeying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatians* [Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005], 121) argues for a combination of Isa 5:1–7; 27:2–6; 37:30–32; Sylvia C. Keesmaat (*Paul and His Story* [JSNTSup 181; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999], 207–8) cites Isa 27:6; Jer 38:12; Ezek 17:23; 34:27, 36:8; Amos 9:14; Zech 8:12. Examining this synthesized research, G. K. Beale ("The Old Testament Background of Paul's Reference to 'the Fruit of the Spirit' in Galatians 5:22," *BBR* 15 [2005]: 1–38) argues that Isa 32 and 57 are the primary sources for Paul's fruit-bearing imagery.

55. Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (SP 9; Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992), 202.

be so empowered one must belong to the realm of the Spirit. Paul does not encourage his Galatian audience to pursue these virtues; he speaks not in the imperative but in the indicative. These virtues are the natural outworking of walking by means of (v. 16) and keeping in step with (v. 25) the Spirit. As such, the various manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit are not ideals to which the Galatian believers should endeavor to attain, but rather outward signs that they have already been transformed by the faith(fulness) of Christ (cf. Gal 3:22).

A Still More Excellent Way (1 Cor 13:1–13)

Paul's great hymn to love is one of the better-known New Testament passages even among those outside the Christian tradition. Often read in the context of romantic love, 1 Cor 13 is more properly understood as a response to the Corinthians' abuse of spiritual gifts and disorderly, self-indulgent worship. Having discussed at length the edification of the community (chs. 8–11), Paul advances his argument by addressing unity and diversity in the use of spiritual gifts (12:1–31), the definition and exercise of love (13:1–13), and propriety in worship (14:1–40). Falling as it does in the middle of this broader discussion of worship in the Spirit-directed community, chapter 13 serves as the fulcrum of Paul's argument. Without the existence of love, the Corinthians will neither legitimately appropriate their spiritual gifts (ch. 12) nor conduct orderly worship (ch. 14). In other words, love is essential to the proper use of spiritual gifts, which is itself an integral part of worship and life in the community of faith.

Verses 1–3 address the relationship between superior spiritual ability and love. If one is able to speak in tongues (v. 1), prophesy (v. 2a), fathom mysteries (v. 2b), exercise extraordinary faith (v. 2c), and give all one possesses to others (v. 3), but does all of these things without love, such abilities are an exercise in futility (lit. "nothing"; οὐδέν, vv. 2, 3). Some commentators assume that these are the very abilities the Corinthian believers claimed to possess, though Carl Holladay suggests that Paul demonstrated each of these abilities inasmuch as they were "anchored in his own apostolic behavior."[56] If this were true, it would strengthen Paul's point in moving the application of his argument beyond the notion that love is

56. Carl Holladay, "1 Corinthians 13: Paul as Apostolic Paradigm," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham Malherbe* (ed. David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 89.

solely the result of Spirit-enablement (as in Gal 5). It would actually serve as an exhortation to imitate Paul, the paradigm for apostolic ministry.

Paul goes on to define love through a series of affirmations—both in the affirmative and in the negative—that essentially amount to a list of vices to avoid and virtues to pursue.[57] The list begins with two one-word affirmations: love is patient (μακροθυμεῖ) and kind (χρηστεύεται). The nominal forms of these two verbs appear fourth (μακροθυμία) and fifth (χρηστότης), respectively, in Paul's list of fruit of the Spirit. From here Paul shifts from a definition of what love *is* to a discussion of what love *is not*. The next eight descriptions are phrased in the negative: love does not envy (οὐ ζηλοῖ), the eighth word in Paul's list of deeds of the flesh (Gal 5:20); love does not boast (οὐ περπερεύεται); it is not proud (οὐ φυσιοῦται); it does not dishonor others (οὐκ ἀσχημονεῖ); it does not seek self (οὐ ζητεῖ τὰ ἑαυτῆς); it is not easily angered (οὐ παροξύνεται); it keeps no record of wrongs (οὐ λογίζεται τὸ κακόν); it does not delight in evil (οὐ χαίρει ἐπὶ τῇ ἀδικίᾳ). The list ends with six descriptions of this enduring love: it rejoices with the truth (v. 6b), always protects (v. 7a), always trusts (v. 7b), always hopes (v. 7c), always perseveres (v. 7d), and never fails (or "falls," πίπτει, v. 8a). This list is characterized by an avoidance of earlier vices and an others-oriented focus. This love seeks first and at all times to benefit the other.

In verses 8b–12 Paul returns to prophecies, tongues, and knowledge. Each of these, Paul says, will cease to exist. This stands in stark contrast to the affirmation with which he began in v. 8a: love never fails. The love Paul describes is enduring because at its most basic level it is self-giving, sacrificial, and oriented toward others. It is a love counterintuitive to the habits of the self-centered and fully amenable to those in need.

Paul closes his exposition by mentioning three abiding virtues: faith, hope, and love.[58] These three are "the enduring character marks of the Christian life in the present time, in this anomalous interval between the cross and the *parousia*."[59] The greatest of these, according to Paul, is love.

---

57. Hans Conzelmann provides several ancient parallels to the list Paul provides in this chapter. See *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (trans. James W. Leitch; Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975), 219–20.

58. Aquinas referred to these as the "theological virtues." See question 62 in the *Prima Secundae Partis* of his *Summa theologica*.

59. Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians* (IBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 230–31.

That love holds primacy of position in this brief list and in the list of fruit of the Spirit speaks to its importance in Paul's ethical teaching.

Conclusion

The foregoing considerations have yielded a number of insights into the individual presentations of John and Paul. The question of how to relate these two approaches to one another remains. Where and how do the Pauline and Johannine presentations of virtue cohere and where do they diverge?

First, it seems clear that both John and Paul (at least in these two passages) regard love as the highest virtue. In the Gospel and Letters of John, love is the only virtue worth pursuing. In the Pauline passages examined above, love appears first in the list of fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22–23) and is itself the subject of a lengthy, virtue-laden exposition (1 Cor 13:1–13). Though they share this common emphasis, the Johannine literature and Paul's Letter to the Galatians differ on the means by which this love is manifested. John regards love as something to be pursued as an imitation of Jesus. Johannine believers are explicitly instructed to love one another as God has loved them in the sacrificial self-giving displayed by Christ. In contrast to John, Paul's instruction to the Galatian church indicates that love is to be a natural outworking of their newfound relationship to God through the faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ. They remain unable to display this love on their own, apart from their status "in Christ," which has been established by the enabling Spirit. On the other hand, Paul's instruction to the Corinthians is not as clear-cut on this point, and he does appear to be exhorting them to pursue upright behavior, perhaps by imitating his apostolic paradigm. Similar to the exhortations in 1 Cor 13 are other instances where Paul encourages his audience to pursue righteousness and behave uprightly (e.g., Rom 6; 1 Thess 5:16–18).

Second, for Paul as for John, confession and virtuous behavior are interrelated. One cannot hope to display virtue apart from the enabling work of God and, in the case of Paul, the Holy Spirit. Each has a specific but complementary understanding of what constitutes a transformative orthodoxy. According to both traditions, virtuous behavior can be exhibited only by those who have been transferred into the realm of life through a correct confession.

Third, the concept of virtue in each corpus is related to sacrifice and service. For John, sacrificial self-giving is exemplified in the voluntary

giving of one's life for another. This self-giving is an imitation of Jesus, who demonstrated his love for humanity by voluntarily laying down his own life (e.g., John 12:26–28). For Paul, the self-giving is twofold: one must engage in self-giving obedience to God and self-giving love toward others, both of which are an extension of one's co-crucifixion with Christ (Gal 2:20; 5:24).[60] This self-giving is an outworking (or fruit; 5:22–23) of the Spirit.

John and Paul together present virtue as necessary for the expression of the real transformation effected by God in Christ. For both traditions "'the indicative of salvation' (what God has done in Christ) grounds 'the moral imperative' (how believers ought to live in Christ). The community of those who have been sanctified in and through Christ ought to live in a way that corresponds to the gift they have received."[61]

60. For more on this, I refer back to the definition of *cruciformity* provided above.
61. Matera, *New Testament Theology*, 458.