



# *Who Is a Christian?*



# **Zacchaeus Studies: New Testament**



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**General Editor: Mary Ann Getty, RSM**

*Who Is a Christian?*  
*A Study in Pauline Ethics*

*by*

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WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon



Wipf and Stock Publishers  
199 W 8th Ave, Suite 3  
Eugene, OR 97401

Who Is a Christian?  
By O'Toole, Robert F., S. J.  
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ISBN 13: 978-1-4982-9570-3  
Publication date 4/29/2016  
Previously published by The Liturgical Press, 1990

*To my grandmother,  
Margaret Mary Kenny Earner,  
who believed and lived Paul's message.*





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## Editor's Note

*Zacchaeus Studies* provide concise, readable and relatively inexpensive scholarly studies on particular aspects of scripture and theology. The New Testament section of the series presents studies dealing with focal or debated questions; and the volumes focus on specific texts of particular themes of current interest in biblical interpretation. Specialists have their professional journals and other forums where they discuss matters of mutual concern, exchange ideas and further contemporary trends of research; and some of their work on contemporary biblical research is now made accessible for students and others in *Zacchaeus Studies*.

The authors in this series share their own scholarship in non-technical language, in the areas of their expertise and interest. These writers stand with the best in current biblical scholarship in the English-speaking world. Since most of them are teachers, they are accustomed to presenting difficult material in comprehensible form without compromising a high level of critical judgment and analysis.

The works of this series are ecumenical in content and purpose and cross credal boundaries. They are designed to augment formal and informal biblical study and discussion. Hopefully they will also serve as texts to enhance and supplement seminary, university and college classes. The series will also aid Bible study groups, adult education and parish religious education classes to develop intelligent, versatile and challenging programs for those they serve.

Mary Ann Getty  
New Testament Editor



# Introduction

Paul's genuine epistles (1 Thess, 1 & 2 Cor, Gal, Rom, Phil, and Phlm) constitute the basis for the present discussion. These are the letters which the vast majority of scholars attribute to Paul. Consequently, this presentation limits itself to them and strives to bring the reader into direct contact with what Paul himself writes.

Paul, in his letters, does not present either a complete systematic theology nor an exhaustive morality. Of course, "morality" frequently looks to the actual conduct of men and women, while "ethics" determines the principles and judgments which lead to such conduct.<sup>1</sup> But since many authors do not distinguish between these two terms, neither will I. Our interest is, however, in what Paul has to say on either of these levels. These data in Paul can be isolated and summarized. In fact, the scope of this book is to consider mostly those passages

<sup>1</sup>E.g. Robert J. Daly *et al*, *Christian Biblical Ethics: From Biblical Revelation to Contemporary Christian Praxis, Method and Content* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 92f; William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics* (New York: Paulist, 1984) 3. Here, too, the point raised by S. Schulz ("Der frühe und der späte Paulus: Überlegungen zur Entwicklung seiner Theologie und Ethik," *TZ* 41 [1985] 228-36), who contends that some scholars have demonstrated that 1 Thess represents an earlier phase of Paul's theology and ethics and Gal, 1 & 2 Cor, Phil and Romans a second phase which cannot be harmonized with the first, needs to be addressed. Certainly, there is development in Paul's thought, and 1 Thess is significantly different from Paul's other genuine epistles. However, the contention that the comparatively simple theology and ethics of 1 Thess cannot be harmonized with the more complex thought of the later letters is an exaggeration. The student need only remember that Paul's later thought adjusts and develops that which is earlier, but that the reverse is not true. To be sure, 1 Thess plays a comparatively minor role in this present book.

which relate directly to ethical or moral activity; it does not study the whole theological content of Paul's seven epistles. A further presupposition of this little book will be that when we speak of moral theology in Paul, as just explained, what we are really speaking of is Christian living. Any distinction between morality and Christian living in Paul's writings is simply out of place. To be sure, he writes for Christians.

The methodology used in this book is redactional criticism, which might more properly be called composition criticism. Whatever use Paul made of sources, the more basic and determinative factor is that he did compose these letters, even if they were dictated. His composition reveals his ideas and permits us to determine and to summarize his morality. Paul's use of sources is, of course, of interest, but it may not always be possible to determine exactly how he modified or nuanced a source. However, the very fact that he did take over a given source confirms his approval of its thought.

Frequently enough, one hears that Paul's letters were occasional and written to a local church or region to deal with particular concerns, and thus such letters should not be used to establish what the church today should do. But this observation repudiates the fact that the church has read and profited from Paul's letters for more than nineteen hundred years. These letters have had tremendous doctrinal and moral significance for Christians. Nonetheless, an effort will be made at the end of this volume to determine the relevance for us today of Paul's moral teaching. Up to that point, the assumption will be that what Paul writes applies to us, too.

The book is structured in the following manner. It falls into four parts. Part I reviews what Paul writes of God, Christ and the Spirit, and of what God has done in Christ as the reasons and sources of morality. Part II views Paul's moral directives to communities and individuals while Part III treats the way to live awaiting the Parousia, spiritual gifts, and Christian conduct. Finally, Part IV addresses the hermeneutical question of the relevance of Paul's moral teaching for today.

Scripture quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version*; these are modified only when judged to be incorrect or sexist.

I would be amiss if I did not thank a number of persons who were kind enough to help in the preparation of this book. Mrs. Elsie McGrath typed and proof-read a goodly portion of it. My good friends and colleagues, Frs. John J. Kilgallen, S.J. and William T. Miller, S.J., likewise read over the manuscript and made many useful suggestions. My thanks go also to my students and the faculty of the Department of Theological Studies of St. Louis University and to the Jesuit communities at St. Louis University and of the Pontifical Biblical Institute. I enjoyed the hospitality of the latter as I was finishing this undertaking. Professor Mary Ann Getty has been a patient and very supportive editor, and Mr. Michael Glazier, a creative and understanding publisher. Lastly, I thank the Danforth Foundation which funded the Second Danforth Chair in Humanities which I hold and which made possible my sabbatical endeavors.

I trust that in some way I have been able to clarify Paul's thought for the reader. His message has nourished my life for years; may the same experience and blessing be yours.



## Part I

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# Sources of Morality





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## God, Christ and the Spirit: Reason and Source of Morality

For Paul, God achieves our salvation and thus leads us, in cooperation with him, to do good deeds (Rom 7:24-25). The source of everything and of every good action is God (1 Cor 3:21-23; 4:7; 8:6; 15:28; Rom 8:28; Phil 2:13). Our ability to do good comes from him; that is why Paul says to the Philippians that he is sure God, “who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6). God *works* a variety of activities in each of us (1 Cor 12:6). Consequently, human beings cannot boast except in what God has and is achieving in them (1 Cor 1:29; 3:21; Rom 3:27; 4:2).

Paul assures the Corinthians that the God of love and peace will be with them, so they ought to be at peace (2 Cor 13:11). Earlier, they were urged to keep order in their liturgical celebrations because God is not a God of confusion but of peace (1 Cor 14:33). Paul’s wish for the Galatians is that God’s grace and peace be with them (Gal 1:3) and for the Romans that the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant the Christians to think the same thing in Christ so that with one voice they might glorify God (Rom 15:6). God’s peace surpasses all understanding and will keep the hearts and the minds of the Philippians in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:7). Always it is God who brings peace and harmony.

It is common knowledge that the verb, “to walk,” looks to