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Christian Spiritual Formation and Divine Love

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Introduction	1
A. Maturity, Growth, Holiness in I Thessalonians.....	3
B. Work of God: Divine Agency	8
C. Human Responsibility.....	10
D. Shared Life of the Christian Community	13
E. Paul and Associates' Personal Responsibility in Converts' Growth	16
F. Definition of Paul and Spiritual Formation	17
G. Divine Love and Christian Spiritual Formation.....	18
Conclusion.....	22

Introduction

In this article, the topic of Christian spiritual formation and divine love will be surveyed. Neither topic is devoid of scholarship but the two topics are seldom discussed in tandem. To have a full discussion would require a monograph discussing issues like election, predestination, glory, Trinitarian theology, etc. The focal point will be narrowed to Paul. This article will first converse about Paul's view of Christian spiritual formation, then speak about how divine love interacts with Christian spiritual formation.

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Paul writes much on Christian spiritual formation like in Galatians 4:19, “Until Christ is formed in you.” His desire is to see his converts mature in Christ.² The issue of Divine love is also thoroughly discussed like in Ephesians 3:14-21,³ but the two mentioned together in Paul comes up only in Ephesians 1:4.

We must begin by stating what spiritual formation is in Paul. This will help not only our discussion of Christian spiritual formation and divine love but it will also aid in providing a definition for spiritual formation. Surveying today’s understanding of spiritual formation, one will see that not all are in agreement.⁴ Because spiritual formation can function within an ecclesiastical structure, a common and agreed upon definition will have benefits.

The Bible is acknowledged both in the churches and in the academy as a foundational resource of Christian thought and life, a definition of Christian spiritual formation that is drawn from a close examination of Scripture — or at least a significant part of it (the letters of Paul) — is likely to be taken seriously. Since many of the writers implicitly appeal to Scripture as a basis of their teaching, it is important to look at what Paul, as a major New Testament writer, has to say about this issue. We will begin with Paul and 1 Thessalonians.

² See also James Samra, *Being Conformed to Christ in Community* (London: T&T Clark, 2006).

³ On the issue of Pauline authorship of Ephesians, see Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 2-60. Hoehner argues that Ephesians is indeed Pauline but many scholars hold to Ephesians being a disputed letter of Paul.

⁴ I will look at the first two volumes of the *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care*. One of the first articles written by Dr. Evan Howard defines spiritual formation as referring “to the human side of the equation; those means by which we seek to “work out” the transformation that the Spirit ‘works in’” (Howard, *JSFSC* [1], 13). Steve Porter continues the discussion in volume two of the journal by stating that “spiritual formation within evangelicalism is simply the Protestant doctrine of sanctification in a new key” (Porter, *JSFSC* [2], 129). This understanding of spiritual formation is very concise compared to the other viewpoints in the journal. Porter himself cites Louis Berkhof to define sanctification as “that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works” (Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1938], 532).

Porter’s understanding would be at odds with the definition of Howard’s, who emphasized “the human side” of the growth process. Porter’s understanding emphasizes the divine side without mention of the human side. Though they are defining the same term, the method of the process is entirely different. This is one issue facing the term spiritual formation.

A. Maturity, Growth, Holiness in I Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians is generally considered to be Paul's first letter so it would be a logical place to start.⁵

Acts gives an account of Paul being forced to leave Thessalonica under external opposition (Acts 17:1-9). From the tone of the letter, Paul is concerned about his Thessalonian converts' well-being in their new life (1 Thess. 3:6-10).⁶ With his concern for their well-being and the early date of the letter, 1 Thessalonians serves as a good starting point.

Chapter 1 of the letter (1:1-10) is predominantly one where Paul reminds his converts of how they changed from an old way of life to a new one. Paul prays with thanksgiving for their continued growth in faith, hope and love, which are "visible signs of a holy life that testify to their salvation in Jesus Christ" (1:3),⁷ that God has changed them through his choice (1:4), through his gospel (1:5-6). Their change was evident to those around them (1:7-10).⁸

In Chapter 2, Paul focuses more on himself and his associates and how they related to their converts. Paul reminds them of the difficult circumstances he and his associates faced in order to come to the Thessalonians (2:1-6), their care for the Thessalonians (2:7-12),⁹ the

⁵ Galatians is also considered by some to be Paul's first letter. See F.F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word Books, 1982), 55, n. 56, for a list of scholars who hold to Galatians being before 1 Thessalonians, but the majority of modern Pauline scholarship acknowledges the primacy of 1 Thessalonians. See also Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. revised (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 465-74.

⁶ T. J. Burke, *Family Matters: A Socio-Historical Study of Kinship Metaphors in 1 Thessalonians* (JSNT Sup., 247; London, New York: T&T Clark International, 2003), 149, says that this section is part of "the most emotive pericopes in the Pauline writings ... where he writes of his 'intense longing' to see his offspring." Burke's statement linking Paul with "emotive passages" leads to a further question about Paul's own emotional needs. Paul expresses positive emotive statements like joy (e.g. 1 Thess. 2:20) and negative emotive statements like fear (1 Thess.3:5). Can these passages unlock Paul's own emotional/inner needs?

⁷ J.A.D. Weima, "'How You Must Walk to Please God': Holiness and Discipleship in 1 Thessalonians," in R.N. Longenecker (ed.), *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 99. Also, this is the first of many references to work in the letter, see (1:3; 3:2, 5; 5:3, 12). See also Burke, *Family Matters*, 148, 228-229. The theme of work throughout the letter is more evidence that 1 Thessalonians was one missive.

⁸ For Paul's role in regards to the Thessalonians new faith and conversion, see Wanamaker "Like a Father Treats his Own Children": Paul and the Conversion/Resocialisation of the Thessalonians' *Journal of Theology for South Africa* 92, (1995) 46-55. See also Weima "How You Must Walk," 99.

⁹ On whether or not the pericope of 1 Thess. 2:1-12 is of an apologetic or parenetic genre see Weima "An Apology for the Apologetic Function of 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 68 (1997), 73-99 and Malherbe "Exhortation in First Thessalonians." *Novum Testamentum* 25/3 (1983), 238-256. I am in agreement with Malherbe that the section resembles more [Footnote continued on next page ...]

Thessalonians' continued faith in persecution and acceptance of the gospel (2:13-16),¹⁰ and in turn, their desire to revisit the young church (2: 17-20).¹¹

Chapter 3 continues his desire to see his converts. Paul is thinking about them (3:1) and dispatches Timothy to them in order to help them in their faith (3:2-5). Paul is then overjoyed by the report of Timothy that his converts are continuing in the faith (3:6-9)¹² but Paul continues to emphasize that they still need to grow and prays for their growth and expresses a desire to see them himself (3:10-13).¹³

Chapter 4 and 5 are dominated by Paul's exhortation to live a life pleasing to God as well as dealing with issues regarding the eschaton; the exhortation to holiness is very clear in these two chapters.¹⁴ The holiness language is very strong in chapter 4 where Paul emphasizes that it is God's will for them to live a holy life (4:3), especially in the realm of intimate physical relations (4:3-8) and the area of work (4:9-12). Weima writes that the strong holiness/ethical purity language "suggest that holiness is the most important theme of 1 Thessalonians."¹⁵

exhortation than personal defense. Paul had just commended his converts in the previous section about how their new faith was an example to those around them. He then describes his own experience of life as a believer when he was among the Thessalonians and Paul reminded his converts of how he focused on their growth in their new faith. Paul also appeals to himself as a model in the first part so he can exhort his converts to holy living in chapters 4 and 5 of the letter.

¹⁰ The question of the authenticity of 1 Thess. 2:13-16 has been discussed by many scholars. I am in agreement with Still, *Conflict at Thessalonica. A Pauline Church and its Neighbor* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 24-45 that though it cannot be proven that the passage is authentically Pauline, there is no compelling arguments against the passage's authenticity. For a bibliography on the pericope's inauthenticity or the pericope as interpolation, see Still, *Conflict*, 24-25, n. 2. For bibliography concerning the authenticity of 2:13-16, see Still, *Conflict*, 25-26, n. 4.

¹¹ See Burke, *Family Matters*, 149-151.

¹² On the issue of whether or not Paul was responding to a letter or to the Thessalonians' question via Timothy see C. R. Nichol (*From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 50, who states that it is not necessary to presume that his converts wrote a letter to Paul and that he was responding to Timothy's report. From 1 Thessalonians, the latter is more likely.

¹³ Some see 3:11-13 as a transition from the *narratio* to the *probatio*. See C.A., Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 50. But R. Winter "Revelation v. Rhetoric: Paul and the First-century Fad" in C.J. Collins, W. Grudem, V. Poythress, L. Ryken, *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 137-138, disputes whether or not Paul is using rhetoric at all and concludes that Paul is not.

¹⁴ See J.A.D. Weima, "How You Must," 99.

¹⁵ Weima, "How You Must Walk," 98. He also writes, "this concern for holiness comes to the fore most clearly in 4:1-12, where Paul deals with two specific problems that were apparently threatening the Thessalonian church: sexual immorality and idleness."

The importance of holiness is also clear in the eschatological section of 4:13-5:11. Weima writes,

In this section Paul reminds his converts that . . . they need not fear that day nor be caught unaware—for they are “children of the light and children of the day,” in contrast to those who “belong to the night or darkness. . . . The metaphors of light and day versus night and darkness, which are common to the literature of the Old Testament and Second Temple Judaism, are used here . . . to refer to holy living among believers. The return of Christ, which is also a key theme in the letter, is intimately connected with Paul’s preoccupation with holiness throughout 1 Thessalonians.¹⁶

This broad survey of the letter reveals a concern for his disciples to continue in the faith that prompts Paul to: write a letter, pray, dispatch Timothy, continue to teach them and exhort them, expressing a desire to be with them again. His converts’ growth in holiness is a key theme in the letter.¹⁷ We will now look more closely into the nature of the development Paul desires to see in them.

1. Terms in 1 Thessalonians Relating to Spiritual Formation

Within the letter there is frequent usage of holiness terms: ἁγιάζω sanctify—5:23), ἁγιασμός (sanctification—4:3, 4, 7), ἅγιος (holy—1:5, 6; 3:13; 4:8; 5:26), ἁγιωσύνη (holiness—3:13). 1 Thess. 2:10 contains the New Testament’s only use of the adverb ὁσίως (holily). Let us look at the meaning of these terms.

- Ἀγιάζω means “1.) set aside something or make it suitable for ritual purposes, consecrate, dedicate. 2.) include a person in the inner circle of what is holy, in both cultic and moral associations of the word, *consecrate, dedicate, sanctify*. 3.) to treat as holy, 4.) to eliminate that which is incompatible with holiness.”¹⁸ In 1 Thess. 5:23 Paul writes that he wishes for God to ‘sanctify [them] entirely (ὁλοτελής),’ communicating that Paul wants the converts’ entire essence (spirit, soul, body) to be changed by God.¹⁹
- Ἅγιασμός means personal dedication to the interests of the deity, *holiness, consecration, sanctification*.²⁰ Procksch writes “The term ‘sanctifying’ fits better than ‘sanctification’, in accordance with its construction.”²¹ In

¹⁶ Ibid., 100.

¹⁷ Ibid., 98-118.

¹⁸ BDAG, 9-10.

¹⁹ This section will be discussed more when the section dealing with letter closings is discussed.

²⁰ BDAG, 10.

²¹ Procksch ἁγιασμός TDNT (1964), 1:113.

regards to 1 Thessalonians, “ἁγιασμός is the will of God (1 Thess. 4:3), and it consists again in purity of physical life, so that marital fellowship is fulfilled ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ (4:4).”²² The fact that it is used three times in 4:3-7 shows Paul’s emphasis to his converts that God desires a holy life, particularly in the sexual and matrimonial area.²³ Still says that this is an example of Paul wanting his converts to alter their lives to be holy.²⁴

- Ἅγιος means 1.) pertaining to being dedicated or consecrated to the service of God.²⁵ In 1 Thess. 1:5, 6; 4:8 the usage of ἅγιος pertains to the Holy Spirit; in 5:26, it is in reference to a greeting or ‘holy kiss.’ In 3:13 it is used in the plural as a reference to the saints or holy ones who will accompany Christ at his return.
- Ἁγιωσύνη means holiness.²⁶ Paul’s use of ἁγιωσύνη is a clear reference to his desire for his converts now as well as the ultimate goal of holiness at the eschaton. Paddison writes, “The Parousia, and the final judgement which Paul associates with it (3:13), are the definitive unveiling of who, in life, we are and were.”²⁷ But the Parousia, for Paul, is also definitive in unveiling who his converts will be: hearts without blame in holiness. Paul uses ἁγιωσύνη in Romans 1:4 referring to the Holy Spirit and in 2 Cor. 7:1 as the outcome of cleansing from physical and spiritual defilement.²⁸ Procksch writes that ἁγιωσύνη is a quality rather than a state.²⁹ He goes on to write in regards to 1 Thess.3:13 that the “aim of God is strengthening of the heart in holiness. . . . holiness shows itself in purity of heart; it is the ἁγιωσύνη which is completed in ethical dedication and the origin of which is found in the atonement.”³⁰
- Ὅσιως is used only in 1 Thess. 2:10 and means pertaining to a manner pleasing to God, devoutly.³¹ Hauck writes that ὁσίως (related to ὅσιος) is “what is right and good before God and man.”³² This strengthens the fact

²² Ibid.

²³ K.P. Donfried “The Cults of Thessalonica and the Thessalonian Correspondence,” *New Testament Studies* (31) 1985, 337-342 places this exhortation with the background of the excessive sexual emphasis of the Dionysus cult as well as the cult of Cabirus.

²⁴ Still, *Conflict in Thessalonica*, 238 and 243.

²⁵ *BDAG*, 10.

²⁶ *BDAG*, 11.

²⁷ A. Paddison, *Theological Hermeneutics and 1 Thessalonians* (SNTSMS 133; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2005), 173.

²⁸ For the unity of the letter of 2 Cor., see D. R. Hall, *The Unity of the Corinthian Correspondence* (JSNT Sup., 251; London, New York: T&T Clark, 2003).

²⁹ *TDNT* (1964), 1:114.

³⁰ *TDNT* (1964), 1:115.

³¹ *BDAG*, 728.

³² Hauck, ὁσίως, *TDNT* (1967), 5:492.

that Paul wants his converts to live a holy life and that 1 Thess. has it as an important theme of the letter.

2. The Letter Closing: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Another aspect of 1 Thessalonians that may offer us an idea of its emphasis is the letter closing. The two prominent descriptions of 1 Thess. 5:23-24 are that it is a wish prayer³³ or a benediction.³⁴ Though the two are not synonymous, both can be attributed to 1 Thess. 5:23-24 and a demarcation between the two would not be necessary. It is clear that Paul is trying to express a wish and a blessing to his converts. A brief exegesis of the text should shed light on this.

1 Thessalonians 5:23, 24 Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς τῆς εἰρήνης ἀγιάσαι ὑμᾶς ὀλοτελεῖς, καὶ ὀλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη. πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὃς καὶ ποιήσει.

Αὐτὸς is an adjectival intensive³⁵ modifying and giving emphasis to ὁ θεός. The phrase means “God himself.” The apostle is stressing to his converts how God will bring about sanctification to give them encouragement and understanding, since spiritual growth cannot be achieved purely by one’s own efforts. Paul brings reassurance that God is the one bringing about the growth.

Paul goes on to express this desire to them with ἀγιάσαι and τηρηθεῖη. The two verbs are in the optative mood expressing Paul’s desire in the prayer to see his converts sanctified by God. The optative mood is used to denote possibility. The mood “may be used to appeal to the volition.”³⁶ When the optative mood is used without ἄν, a wish is indicated. So it is used to express an “obtainable wish or a prayer” and is often “an appeal to the will.”³⁷ This clearly expressed Paul’s desire to see his converts sanctified wholly and his confidence in God.

³³ See Wanamaker, *1 Thessalonians*, 205.

³⁴ See A. J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (NY: Doubleday, 2000), 461.

³⁵ See W.D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 102 for a discussion on the adjectival intensive. “Adjectival intensive” is not the standard term used but it is the term used by *Gramcord*. It is usually just referred to as an intensive pronoun or an emphasizing pronoun.

³⁶ D. Wallace Greek, *Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 480.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 481.

The totality of the sanctification is also expressed by ὁλόκληρον ὑμῶν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ καὶ τὸ σῶμα ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθείη. By using spirit, soul, and body, Paul is communicating to his converts the entirety of the process, how his desire is for a complete and thorough growth on all levels — physical and metaphysical.

This complete sanctification also is expressed by the similar roots and similar meanings of the words ὁλοτελείς, meaning complete in every way, and ὁλόκληρον, meaning whole and complete. Paul has placed the cognates in close proximity as an alliteration to emphasize his desire for their sanctification to be complete, wholly throughout their being, and not partial. He wants his converts to view growing into holiness as crucial in their life and that it will be complete at the Parousia. We already discussed earlier the eschatological aspect of the letter. Here, Paul connects holiness with eschatology.

Πιστὸς ὁ καλῶν ὑμᾶς, ὃς καὶ ποιήσει. Paul ends the section by repeating the essence of the prayer and placing the emphasis on God and assuring his converts that this process will be finished by Him in the future.³⁸

It is clear that the heart of the prayer is for the convert's growth and maturation.³⁹ We are now ready to study 1 Thessalonians and come up with how Paul saw the spiritual formation process.

B. Work of God: Divine Agency

Paul expresses this to his converts by saying that God is the one who makes individuals complete. It is a work that is holistic, encompassing the individual at a spiritual and physical level.

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς, εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἀγίων αὐτοῦ.

³⁸ Similar expression in Phil 1:6.

³⁹ See also J. A. D. Weima *Neglected Endings: The Significance of the Pauline Letter Closings* (JSNT Sup., 101; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1994). Weima argues that the letter closings of Paul's letters reflect the main purposes of his letters. In our case, the letter closing makes reference to holiness which supports our discussion that holiness was a main theme of the letter.

Paul saw the divine agency as a primary agent, able to form the individual through God's working. Paul petitions God in this section to grow his converts, trusting the divine agency in the formation process.⁴⁰

The two optative verbs, *πλεονάσαι* and *περισσεύσαι* give prominence to Paul's wish for his converts to grow by the work of God. *πλεονάζω* is used six other times in the undisputed letters (Rom 5:20[2x]; Rom 6:1; 2 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 8:15; Phil 4:17) all with the meaning of 'to increase,' abound.⁴¹ In 2 Cor 8:15 *πλεονάζω* carries the meaning of 'have too much.'

Περισσεύω is more common in Paul, appearing twenty-four times in the undisputed letters, and three times in 1 Thessalonians (Rom 3:5; 5:15; 15:13; 1 Cor 8:8; 14:12; 15:58; 2 Cor 1:5[2x]; 2 Cor 3:9; 2 Cor 4:15; 2 Cor 8:2; 8:7[2x]; 9:8[2x]; 9:12; Phil 1:9; 1:26; 4:12[2x]; 4:18; 1 Thess. 3:12; 4:1; 4:10). It also carries the meaning of increasing, abounding, having more than enough.⁴² In 1 Cor. 8:8 it means 'to be better off' and in 1 Thess. 4:1, 10 there is the notion that more can be done or to excel even more. Paul's wish was for his converts to grow into maturity and he emphatically appeals to God to grow the disciples.

The prepositional phrase, *εἰς τό* connects verse 12 to 13 so neither stands alone. The purpose of his prayer is for the converts to grow in their love for others, linking a growth in love with a growth in holiness. *Στηρίξαι* shares the subject *ὁ κύριος* with the two optative verbs linking the clauses together.⁴³ Paul prays for his converts that their love for each other and all people will be increased by God (3:12). Not only does Paul pray for God to increase his converts' love, but he also adds in the prayer for God to cause their hearts to be blameless and holy in regards to the eschaton of Christ. A result of a growing love is a heart that is pure. Love is a quality that measures

⁴⁰ B. Rigaux, *Saint Paul: Les Épîtres aux Thessaloniens* (Ebib: Paris: Lecoffre, 1956), 360, says the use of *προσευχη*, tends to be associated with prayers of petition.

⁴¹ See also *ANLEX*: T., Friberg, B. Friberg, N.F., *Miller Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 315.

⁴² See *TDNT* (1968), 6:58-63.

⁴³ See also T. Holtz, *Der erste Brief an die Thessalonicher*, (*EKKNT*, Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1986), 145.

progress. Paul believes that the divine agency has a significant forming aspect in his converts.⁴⁴ We see this elsewhere in the letter.

1 Thess. 5:23-24. Paul uses αὐτὸς in the predicate position as an emphasizing pronoun drawing attention to ὁ θεὸς as the one who is doing the forming. God is described as the God of peace (also in Rom 15:33; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 4:9). Wanamaker writes, “For Paul divine peace ultimately refers to eschatological salvation, as is indicated by such passages as Rom. 2:10; 5:1; 8:6; 14:17; Phil 4:7. To describe God as the God of peace as 1 Thes. 5:23 does is to view God as the source of well-being for the people of God.”⁴⁵ Paul appeals to this source of well-being to help the converts in the maturation process.

We have already seen that growth in holiness was at the heart of Paul’s prayer in 3:11-13 and at the heart of 5:23-24. The two sections taken together form a bracket around Paul’s exhortation in 4:1-5:22 for the converts to live in holiness.⁴⁶ It is a continual process that has its ending at the eschaton (1 Thess. 5:23-24). So in two places, Paul links the divine agency with the eschaton in forming the individual.

Paul communicates the totality in 5:23. It is not just physical (τὸ σῶμα), or meta-physical (τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ). Paul is indicating that the totality of growth influences and forms the whole person. And the totality of maturation culminates at the eschaton; ἀμέμπτως ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ τηρηθεῖη shows that Paul clearly desires the Lord Jesus to find his disciples complete and blameless in the totality of their being at the eschaton. Hence, Paul makes his appeal to the Lord to accomplish this.

C. Human Responsibility

1 Thessalonians 2:12. παρακαλοῦντες ὑμᾶς καὶ παραμυθούμενοι καὶ μαρτυρούμενοι εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ βασιλείαν καὶ δόξαν.

⁴⁴ J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on Epistles of St. Paul* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980 [1895 first pub.]), 49, writes, “The whole point of the passage requires that Christ should be regarded as the sole author of the spiritual advancement [development] of the Thessalonians.” But in 1 Thess. 3:10, Paul states that he and his associates pray for the disciples and desire to see them so that they can “complete what is lacking in their faith.” So according to Paul, the divine agency is not the “sole author” but Paul and his associates have a hand in the “spiritual advancement of the Thessalonians.

⁴⁵ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 205.

⁴⁶ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 206.

There are three specific aspects of walking in a manner worthy of God that Paul mentions in this verse: he and his associates teach and exhort the converts, the converts have their own responsibility to walk in a worthy manner, and God calls them into his kingdom and glory. We have discussed the divine agency above and will discuss Paul and his associates later. Here, we will focus on the responsibility of the converts.

What specifically is this περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως⁴⁷ τοῦ θεοῦ referring to? Is it an appeal to obey the ethical implications of Christian conduct or is there a deeper aspect of relationship involving experience of the glory of God, the Spirit?⁴⁸ Dunn would favor the latter.⁴⁹ Vang agrees with Dunn and writes,

The “worthy walk” is qualified and motivated by three essential experiences or theological foundations: Call, Kingdom and Glory. God remains at the center of Paul’s charge as the one calling and empowering for life in the Kingdom. The primary issue is one of relationship. The meaning of the word worthy (axios) receives its content from God who has called believers to a present tense participation in the life of his kingdom (basileia) and to a present tense experience of his glory or presence (doxa).⁵⁰

Vang also writes, “In substance, therefore, Paul’s statement on the worthy walk fits well with the Old Testament conception of walking with God as expressing ‘intimate relationship.’”⁵¹ In a relationship there is a responsibility between multiple groups to each other, usually between two. If this is a relational term, then Paul charges his converts with the responsibility of maintaining an intimate relationship with the Lord.

But not all hold to the relational aspect. Wanamaker holds that it is an appeal to Christian conduct, “For Paul, this undoubtedly had great significance and was intended not only to demarcate or define Christian conduct over against non-Christian or pagan conduct, but

⁴⁷ In *ANLEX*, 60, the adverb ἀξίως means *worthily, suitably, in a manner proper*.

⁴⁸ Περιπατέω is used 18 times by Paul (Rom.6:4; 8:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Co 3:3; 7:17; 2 Co. 4:2; 5:7; 10:2,3; 12:18; Gal. 5:16; Phil 3:17,18; 1 Th. 2:12; 4:1 [2x]; 4:12. In Romans, the usage of περιπατέω is in the context of Paul exhorting his converts to live holy lives. The dominant usage in Paul is that of living a life that is honoring to God.

⁴⁹ J. D. G. Dunn, “Spirit and Kingdom,” *ExpT* 82 (1970), 36.

⁵⁰ P. Vang, “Sanctification in Thessalonians,” *SWTJ* 42 (1999), 54.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

also to distinguish the Christian convert from those who had not received the gospel.”⁵² Is a middle position possible?

Beale writes, “he expended himself for the readers in order that they would live in a manner pleasing to God. If God has truly called us into his kingdom and glory, then we will live in a manner delighting him in order to be qualified to enter into that ‘glorious kingdom.’”⁵³ The motivation for Christian conduct is driven by the desire to please God. So it is not necessarily an appeal to conduct or relationship but could be both, a conduct driven by relationship.

The context of the letter would suggest that it is driven by a relationship with God. As in 1 Thess. 4:1-2, the context of the exhortation is to please God. This implies relationship within the context of obedience. So writers like Beale who argue that it is both relational as well as an exhortation to Christian conduct are right. Paul writes to his converts explaining to them that they have a responsibility to walk with God in a worthy manner that emphasizes human responsibility and relationship with God, but the encouragement to live a good Christian life does not end here.

In 1 Thess. 4, Paul makes his paraenesis of individual responsibility more clear. There were exhortations that Paul left his converts to obey which may or may not be the specific exhortations Paul highlights in chapter 4, but it is clear that there are exhortations that have been taught to his converts with the expectation of their obedience. To please God means to obey him.

Does the τοῦτο in 4:3 link γάρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν with 4:1-2?⁵⁴ Usually, τοῦτο is thought of as part of the construct of 4:3 and linking it with 4:1-2 is not the primary thought on its usage. But to be sexually pure is a clear exhortation to obedience in a specific area of life; obedience and maturity are linked together.

Paul starts out by encouraging his disciples to maintain sexual purity. Given the circumstances of the society with its promiscuity and cultic practices based on sexual rituals, there was great temptation

⁵² Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 107.

⁵³ G. K. Beale, *1-2 Thessalonians*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 75.

⁵⁴ See E. J. Richard, *Sacra Pagina Series 1&2 Thessalonians* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1995), 187, 195.

to engage in sexual relations outside the boundaries of Paul's exhortations.⁵⁵ Then Paul switches to a general commandment to love each other and humankind (4:9-12), and then Paul lays out a series of commandments that he expects his converts to follow (5:6-8; 12-22).

It is clear from Paul that he saw human responsibility in the process of growing in holiness.

D. Shared Life of the Christian Community

Chapter 5:11-15 gives us a glimpse into the interactions of the community.⁵⁶ The leaders, in 5:12-13, have charge over the community and offer instruction to them but in 5:14, there is a communal admonition/correction tone where everyone has responsibility and not just the leaders.⁵⁷ The lazy are to be prompted, *νουθετεῖτε τοὺς ἀτάκτους*. Paul uses *νουθετέω* in 5:12 to describe the 'instruction' the leaders offer the community. *νουθετέω* usually conveys a sense of admonishing or exhorting adding to the mutual admonition/correction language.⁵⁸ Paul comes back with *νουθετέω* in 5:14 to describe the members' responsibility to 'admonish, exhort, instruct' the lazy. Paul and his associates modeled hard work and expected the converts to live a life of work and production (also 4:11-12). *νουθετέω* is used two other times in the undisputed letters (Rom. 15:14; 1 Cor. 4:14) and three times in the disputed letters (2 Thess. 3:15; Col. 1:28; 3:16) all being used with the idea of admonishment for improvement.⁵⁹ Paul wanted his disciples to mildly and kindly but earnestly reprove one another. Cautionary advice and warnings were good things for the community members to have in their development. There were clearly stronger and weaker members of

⁵⁵ K. P. Donfried, (*Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 21-48.

⁵⁶ R. Jewett, *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 103, 175-176, 178, believes Paul is only addressing the weak. But Nicholl, in *Hope to Despair* (105), writes that Jewett's thesis cannot be plausible as it is based on many dubious propositions like: the problem of the 'unruly,' lack of respect of the pastors rooted in eschatological falseness, the leaders being anti-charismatic, and those submitting to them were charismatic. See also note 93 and note 121.

⁵⁷ See Still, *Conflict*, 270-271.

⁵⁸ *BDAG*, 679.

⁵⁹ *BDAG*, 679, "to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct, admonish, warn, instruct."

the community. The stronger ones were to strengthen the weaker ones.

The terminology shifts in 5:14 from *νουθετέω* to *παραμυθέομαι*. Again, a member is displaying issues that are in need of assistance from other community members. The members interact with one another on such a level that awareness of less desirable traits is more easily observed and can be improved on from the encouraging or *παραμυθέομαι* of another community member. *Παραμυθέομαι* can also mean to console someone,⁶⁰ but the other occurrence is in 1 Thess. 2:12 also carrying a sense of exhortation to improve. Paul uses both *παραμυθέομαι* and *παρακαλέω* in 2:12. It can be difficult to distinguish the two terms. Both can convey an aspect of admonition and comfort. Stahlin suggests that *παρακαλέω* carries the ‘exhorting’ aspect and *παραμυθέομαι* has the connotation of comfort but the contexts of the usages in 1 Thessalonians suggest a more encouraging/admonitional usage over consolation.⁶¹

It is clear from 5:14 that members are asked to comfort and encourage those who are timid/faint-hearted. Who are the fainthearted? The precise reference of *ὀλιγοψύχους*⁶² is unspecified but could have aspects of worry, fear, and discouragement displayed by members.⁶³ It could have been those who were discouraged by the suffering (2:14) or those who were mourning the dead (4:13). Paul demonstrates a concern for those who may have been affected negatively by the suffering, persecution, doubt and worry with a new faith and wants the less fearful, stronger members to help the more timid ones persevere.

Next are those who are weak, *ἀσθενῶν*. These weak could be those who are ‘suffering from a debilitating illness, sick, ill,’ or ‘experiencing some incapacity or limitation.’⁶⁴ Best understands the weak as believers who desired guiding principles on how to express their rejection of paganism.⁶⁵ Marshall suggests that the weak are

⁶⁰ *BDAG*, 769.

⁶¹ *TDNT* (1967), 5:821.

⁶² *BDAG*, 703, “faint-hearted, discouraged.”

⁶³ Best, *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977, 1986), 230.

⁶⁴ *BDAG*, 142.

⁶⁵ Best, *Thessalonians*, 230-231.

those more susceptible to temptation and sin.⁶⁶ Wanamaker writes that it could be intentionally vague, but those reading the letter would be clear as to who the weak were, and the whole community would have a sense of pastoral responsibility toward them.⁶⁷ The weak are clearly exhorted by Paul to have the community care for them. So Wanamaker's assessment would be the one most agreeable to the context of community helping each other in their new faith.

Since there are weaker members in the community, then logically there should also be stronger members. Paul writes that they are to be esteemed (1 Thess. 5:12-13).⁶⁸ Holtz acknowledges that Paul distinguishes the leaders in the community,

bestimmte Funktionsträger sollen anerkannt werden. Benannt werden sie mit drei Partizipien, die durch den Artikel vor dem ersten zu einer Gruppe zusammen gefasst sind. Sie alle sind durch das hinzugefügte Personalpronomen der 2. Pers Pl (ἐν ὑμῖν, ὑμῶν, ὑμᾶς) der Gesamtgemeinde zugeordnet, werden von ihr aber als an ihr Handelnde unterschieden. Benannt werden sie nur durch die Partizipien, die verbalen Charakter haben. Ein zusammenfassender technischer Begriff taucht nicht auf; sie sind gänzlich von ihrer Funktion her definiert.⁶⁹

Paul highlights these people with three participles denoting their work: κοπιῶντας, προϊσταμένους, νοθετοῦντας.⁷⁰ The participles indicate the leaders' function in the community: to labor for, protect, and morally guide the community.⁷¹ Paul had already singled out the

⁶⁶ I. H. Marshall, *New Century Bible Commentary, 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 151.

⁶⁷ Wanamaker, *Thessalonians*, 198.

⁶⁸ See also Nicholl, *Hope to Despair*, 104-106.

⁶⁹ Holtz, *Thessalonians*, 241-242. Translation: special people in a position of power are to be accepted/approved/recognized. Those people are labeled/termed by three participles, those people are grouped together by an article that stands before the first participle. Due to a personal pronoun (in 2nd person plural) those people are part of the entire community/ group. However, those people differ from the group/community due to their position of power. The participles (which have a verbal character) identify/label those people. A combining/comprehensive technical term is not present; those people are entirely defined by their functions/powers.

⁷⁰ Nicholl, *Hope to Despair*, 104, n. 62, writes, "Note the single article covering three participles. Whether the last two explain the first or whether all three are coordinate is difficult to determine." Granville Sharp's rule could aid Nicholl. Sharp's rule states that in a series of words, a single article denotes conceptual unity whereas the repetition of the article denotes particularity. Since there exists one article for the three participles, Sharp's rule would state that the three participles constitute a unified concept instead of three particulars.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 104, n. 61, writes that the usage of προϊστημι combines its two meanings of caring for in Rom. 12:8 and "authority over." But in Rom. 12:8, the sense is more of leading than caring in the usage of προϊστημι.

‘weak’ so he may have distinguished specific groups of people within the community.

Paul empowered some individuals to labor in and admonish the community,⁷² and may have empowered them with a responsibility of leadership or these leaders may have emerged and were affirmed by the community. Since the Thessalonian church was young, the time span that people would have believed is similar. One thing is clear, Paul did acknowledge that, within the community, there are those who are further along and have the responsibility of providing leadership to the community.⁷³ These stronger members or “leaders” carried a status of authority in the community to care, labor, and protect the community.

Members of the community offered another perspective on individuals’ lives and provided a means for deficiencies to be noticed. Encouragement to improve on these deficiencies could be employed. The community was not just to be encouraged, but community members needed to accept constructive criticism from other members, with a special responsibility of moral guidance from appointed leaders in the community.

E. Paul and Associates’ Personal Responsibility in Converts’ Growth

Reading the text of 1 Thessalonians, one can notice that Paul places responsibility for his converts’ growth not only on the divine agency, the converts themselves and the community members but also on himself and his associates. 1 Thessalonians 2:8 reads εὐδοκοῦμεν μεταδοῦναι ὑμῖν οὐ μόνον τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰς ἑαυτῶν ψυχάς. We have come across the verb μεταδίδωμι.⁷⁴ Paul uses it in 1 Thess. 2:8 to describe how he wanted to teach them the

⁷² Ibid., 105-106, writes, “It is notable that the eschatological problems would have made this problem of lack of respect/recognition of the leaders more critical, for a lack of deference to the leaders would have obstructed an important potential avenue of encouragement and correction.”

⁷³ Nicholl, *Hope to Despair*, 112, writes that these bands of leaders could have been Jewish people who had not yet commanded the respect of the community. This cannot be proven based on the textual evidence but could be an explanation, given that the church was young. The Jewish leaders would have had a greater command of the scriptures and in turn could pass on the knowledge to those who converted from a more pagan background.

⁷⁴ BDAG, 638, “give (a part of), impart, share.” For a detailed discussion of impartation, see M. Chung, *Paul’s Understanding of Spiritual Formation: Christian Formation and Impartation* (PhD diss., University of Nottingham, 2009), 133-143, 207-297, or M. Chung, “Paul the Apostle as Pastor,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 47:1.

gospel as part of imparting his life because he had great affection for the Thessalonians. Moore writes on its use in 1 Thess. 2:8,

To share with you: some scholars regard the Greek word used here (*metadidōmi*) as a synonym for the simple verb *didōmi* used with ‘own self’ (as here) in e.g. Mk.10:45. But the compound verb actually introduces an idea of mutuality into the giving, which RSV ‘share’ helps to translate. (One is reminded of the mutuality of ministry, somewhat laboriously expressed, in Rom. 1:11f.)⁷⁵

I will label Paul’s work in young believers’ lives for the purpose of their growth as impartation based on the verb μεταδίδωμι. There are not many instances of μεταδίδωμι in the New Testament (5x: Luke 3:11; Romans 1:11; 12:8; 1 Thess. 2:8; Eph. 4:28). 1 Thess. 2:10-12. ὑμεῖς μάρτυρες καὶ ὁ θεός, ὡς ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως καὶ ἀμέμπτως ὑμῖν τοῖς πιστεύουσιν ἐγενήθημεν, καθάπερ οἶδατε, ὡς ἕνα ἕκαστον ὑμῶν ὡς πατήρ τέκνα ἑαυτοῦ παρακαλοῦντες ὑμᾶς καὶ παραμυθούμενοι καὶ μαρτυρόμενοι εἰς τὸ περιπατεῖν ὑμᾶς ἀξίως τοῦ θεοῦ. We see the missionaries doing their work of impartation expressed by the participles ‘exhorting, encouraging and imploring.’ The εἰς τό structure links the participles with the exhortation to walk in a manner worthy of God. This is one way the missionaries formed their disciples.

Paul uses the imagery of a father encouraging his children. Just as parents exhort their children to become better, the missionaries here resemble very much a parent’s exhortation. The converts were able to witness the missionaries’ lives (2:10-11), and saw an example of how to live a life that pleases God. The imagery resembles a family. The role of parent is evident in 2:7-12 as Paul uses both father and mother in the section to describe the relationship bond between him and the converts.⁷⁶

F. Definition of Paul and Spiritual Formation

From these insights we can develop our own Pauline definition. Spiritual formation can be defined as the maturing process where growth in holiness is accomplished by:

1. The divine agency (the power of God);

⁷⁵ A. L. Moore, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (NCB, London: Nelson, 1969), 39.

⁷⁶ 1 Cor.14:20 contains a good summary of his attitude about the heart of his parenthood. He wants them to be mature but in evil be infants. Also, see Burke *Family Matters* for a deeper discussion of familial metaphors in 1 Thessalonians.

2. Human responsibility (the disciples' active participation and free choice to participate in the Christian formation process);
3. The shared life of the Christian community, and
4. The agency of impartation; which has a mentor/protégé aspect (Paul imparting to younger believers), and an aspect of a multiplicity of mentors (his associates).

Now with this concept of how Paul viewed spiritual formation, we will discuss how it relates to Paul's notion of Divine love.⁷⁷

G. Divine Love and Christian Spiritual Formation

Ephesians 1:4 καθὼς ἐξελέξατο ἡμᾶς ἐν αὐτῷ πρὸ καταβολῆς κόσμου εἶναι ἡμᾶς ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους κατενώπιον αὐτοῦ ἐν ἀγάπῃ,

Many modern translations do not translate 1:4 correctly. Translations like the NIV, NASB and ESV have a full stop after the reference to being “holy and blameless before him” and begin a new sentence with the ἐν ἀγάπῃ, for example, “that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love . . .” (ESV). This misses the connection between divine love and Christian spiritual formation. The New Revised Standard Version has it right: “to be holy and blameless before him in love.” Literally translated, there is no full stop in Greek and therefore, should be translated like NRS.

The issue of the meaning of ἐν ἀγάπῃ has three dominant views. The first view is that ἐν ἀγάπῃ is link to ἐξελέξατο, “he chose,” in 1:4.⁷⁸ This links the idea of predestination and God's love. The second view also links predestination with love but instead of linking with ἐξελέξατο in verse 4, commentators join ἐν ἀγάπῃ with προορίσας in verse 5. Wood writes, “If it is attached to ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους, then the reference is to love Christians are to display . . . In the context, however, it is preferable to assume that it qualifies προορίσας . . . since it was Paul's aim to show that the divine

⁷⁷ See Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 180-182, on the overall meaning of love in the Bible. Hoehner writes, “a proper concept of love (for both ἀγαπάω and ἀγάπη) is based on God's love in that he extends it to the undeserving and unloving as seen in his continuing love for the sinner and the wayward believer. Love, then, is seeking the highest good in the one loved. Ultimately, for the believer the highest good is the will of God for him or her.

⁷⁸ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 182, also see footnote 2.

predestination is motivated by love.”⁷⁹ Again, the idea is conveyed that God’s predestination is rooted in his love. We have discussed before that some modern translations interpret it this way but grammatically, there can be no full stop after verse 4. Syntactically, if one wants to link ἐν ἀγάπῃ with the notion of predestination/choosing, then ἐξελέξατο would work better or one needs to retranslate the verse linking to προορίσας without the full stop. In context, there is a clear relation of ἐν ἀγάπῃ with the election and predestination of God.

The third view is that ἐν ἀγάπῃ is linked to ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους , syntactically, this flows the best. Hoehner writes, “within the present context the verbs and participles describing God’s actions *always* precede the qualifying phrases.” Hoehner goes on to cite the pattern in 1:3-11, e.g. v.3 “the one who blessed us . . . with every spiritual blessing” and on down through v.11. Hoehner goes on to write, “ in this passage holiness and blamelessness are effected by love. To have love without righteousness is to have love without a standard of right and wrong, and to have righteousness without love lacks warmth and personal interest.”⁸⁰ Grammatically, this is the best option. “Holy” and “blameless” are the direct object of God’s choosing. The use of ἐν is causal or instrumental or can express the manner in which God makes believers holy and blameless, in love.⁸¹ So the reason for believers being holy and blameless is caused by the love of God which leads us to our next discussion.

Some argue that ἐν ἀγάπῃ is not referring to divine love but love displayed between humankind. Hoehner writes,

Although both the verb and noun speak of God’s love for a human being and a human being’s love for God, the predominant use is love between humans. Such use for the verb in Paul’s letters is fourteen out of thirty-five times and in Ephesians it is six out of ten times, and such use for the noun in Paul’s letters is fifty-seven out of

⁷⁹ A. Skevington Wood, “Ephesians” in Frank Gaebelein (general editor) *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (vol.11; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 28.

⁸⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 184.

⁸¹ See Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1996), 372-375, for the syntactical usage of ἐν.

seventy-five and in Ephesians it is six out ten times . . . It seems best to view it in this context as love exhibited between humans.⁸²

Though frequency can be used to support Hoehner's statement, it should be secondary in context. Linking ἐν ἀγάπῃ with ἁγίους καὶ ἀμώμους does not necessitate the love to be between humans. With such strong emphasis on God choosing and predestining as the main thrust of the section, the context would suggest the ἐν ἀγάπῃ as from God and not between humanity.

Lincoln agrees with Hoehner and argues for ἐν ἀγάπῃ as a reference to human love over divine. Lincoln writes that in Ephesians,

With reference to love, its human associations predominante . . . More decisively, when ἀγάπῃ occurs in the introductory section of Pauline letters in intercession or thanksgiving it has a human reference (cf. Col 1:4, 8 and Phil 1:9, 10 where it is associated with being pure and blameless), and in Paul's prayer of 1 Thess 3:12, 13 the three qualities asked for the believers are love, blamelessness, and holiness. In addition, construing ἐν ἀγάπῃ in this way fits the pattern of the rest of the eulogy where the various sections conclude with a prepositional phrase with ἐν.⁸³

Lincoln goes on to write,

In Phil 1:9, 10 and 1 Thess 3:12, 13 Paul prays for these same features to characterize believers' lives—love in the present and holiness and blamelessness in view of the Parousia. . . . holiness, blamelessness and love are complementary terms. On its negative side, holiness is the absence of moral defect or sin . . . while on the positive side, as moral perfection."⁸⁴

Like Hoehner, Lincoln supports his argument with Pauline texts outside the immediate context of Ephesians 1:4 appealing to texts outside Ephesians as support for his argument. The historical context and purpose of Paul's letter to the Ephesians would be different than those of Philippians and 1 Thessalonians.⁸⁵ Ephesians 1:4 lies within the broader pericope of 1:3-14. Εὐλογητὸς marks the focus of the

⁸² Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 182.

⁸³ Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas, Word Books, 1990), 17.

⁸⁴ Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 24.

⁸⁵ For a good discussion of the historical context of Philippians, see P.T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3-42; for Thessalonians, see C.A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 3-66. Lincoln also mentions Colossians, see Murray Harris, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 3-7.

section. The pericope gives us a glimpse into how the divine agency benefits those who believe in him. God is the one “who has blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing” (1: 3), “chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (1:4), “predestined,”(1: 5), lavished redemption and forgiveness (1:7-8), “making known to us the mystery of his will” (1:9), prearranged an inheritance, (1:11), sealed with (1:13), and given the Holy Spirit (1:14).

Though some scholars attribute “holy” and “blameless” as human activity, it can also be viewed as a believer’s position in Christ.⁸⁶ Crawford writes,

The issue here is how Paul is using these two terms with reference to election. The clause in which they occur expresses purpose, completing the meaning of *exelexato*, but the exact meaning of the terms is debated. There are two possibilities: election has the purpose of bringing the elect to full justification, so that these terms describe the believer’s position; or, election has the purpose of sanctifying the elect, so that these terms describe the believer’s practice.⁸⁷

Crawford goes on to write, “The contextual emphasis is on position and not practice, focusing on what God alone can provide, apart from the believer’s activity. The subsequent use of these terms in Eph 5:27 is clearly positional, referring to final perfection.”⁸⁸

Scholars have discussed much on the meaning of ἐν ἀγάπῃ, it has been shown by the context that ἐν ἀγάπῃ is attached to the divine agency.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Leslie James Crawford, “Ephesians 1:3-4 and the Nature of Election,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 11/1 (2000), 75-91.

⁸⁷ Crawford, “Ephesians and Election,” 86.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 87.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 87, n. 90, it is possible to connect this phrase to ἀγίους καὶ ἀμώμους. This is argued by Lenski in *Ephesians*, 359; Westcott, *Ephesians*, 9; and J. Armitage Robinson, *Commentary on Ephesians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1903), 27. Most commentators dismiss a connection to ἐξελέξατο on the grounds that it is too remote, but Alford (*Greek Testament*, 71), considers it no more remote than the previous relationship of εὐλογήσας τοῦ ἐν Χριστῷ. Others such as Meyer, *Ephesians*, 314; Eadie, *Ephesians*, 28-31; Abbott, *Ephesians*, 8; and Ellicott, *Ephesians*, 7, attach ἐν ἀγάπῃ to προορίσας. This last connection best harmonizes with the contextual emphasis, that focuses on God’s activity and not man’s activity. An opening statement concerning God’s love provides a fitting motivation for His act of predestination, which in this context has adoption as its goal. Paul’s other connections of ἐν ἀγάπῃ (in Ephesians 3:17; 4:2, 15, 16; 5:2), although standing in an antecedent relationship to what is modified, do not militate against a differing connection here. They are remote from this context and in each case the emphasis is on the believer’s actions, not those of God, which is the emphasis in 1:3-4.

Crawford goes on to write,

The associated term *proorisas* also has a positional goal as its focus, the adoption of the elect. God predestined the elect for the purpose of bringing them into a filial relationship with Himself, which grants each believer the position and full rights appropriate to a natural son. In addition, the subsequent blessings of redemption and forgiveness are associated with initial salvation. This understanding and emphasis fits well with the positional connotations of *hagious* and *amōmous*. In light of the evidence, it seems best to understand *hagious* and *amōmous* in a positional sense, referring to the justification of the elect. This is critical since it defines the purpose of election as including justification, which is the primary blessing leading to all others.⁹⁰

Carey Newman supports Crawford and writes,

“In love” points to the means/mode of God’s predestining work and marks the cross (x) for some future event (y), namely, our final and complete adoption as children. *Like election, predestination occurs only through the historical events of Jesus’ life and is an expression of God’s love and promise for our future.* In this sense, both election and predestination have more to say about the certainty of believers’ future than about their past.⁹¹

There has been much written about the issues of sanctification and divine love, here in Ephesians 1:4, we have seen that the means/mode of being holy and blameless is through the divine love of God supporting the divine agency in Christian spiritual formation and linking love with sanctification.⁹²

Conclusion

From our Pauline definition of Christian spiritual formation—the divine agency: God working in a believer(s) life to produce holiness—is a key component. One of the modes the divine agency uses in spiritual formation is divine love. From the above discussion, the syntactical linkage of ἐν ἀγάπῃ will influence how one interprets its meaning. Since there is strong contextual evidence that ἐν ἀγάπῃ is reference to God’s love, spiritual formation from Paul’s perspective can also factor in the ἀγάπῃ love of God with his plan to predestine not only one’s justification but sanctification as well. Therefore,

⁹⁰ Ibid., 88.

⁹¹ Carey C. Newman, “Election and Predestination in Ephesians 1:4-6a: An Exegetical-Theological Study of the Historical, Christological Realization of God’s Purpose” *Review and Expositor* 93 (1996), 241.

⁹² Ibid.

Testamentum Imperium – Volume 3 – 2011

eternal security via the love of God is linked with the predestined sanctification of the believer when divine love and Christian spiritual formation are discussed.



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