

The so-called ethical sections of Paul's letters are not loosely tacked on to the weightier theological parts, as concessions to the practical needs of the less than ideal Christians in his congregations. Rather Paul's ethical admonitions are closely and significantly related to his preaching of the gospel, and thus to his fundamental theological convictions. What matters most, he insists, is faith enacted in love (Gal 5:6), and by this he means, in the present life of the believer and of the believing community. Virtually all of his concrete moral instructions are intended to specify the forms that faith's enactment in love should take in specific cases.

Therefore, we should not expect to find in his letters clear and specific answers to *our* particular ethical questions today. His instructions were shaped to meet the situations that confronted him and his congregations in *their* world, and their relevance for his first readers must be distinguished from their relevance for us. Their importance for us lies less in the particular patterns of conduct they recommend than in the underlying concerns and commitments they reveal. They show us faith being enacted in love, and love seeking to effect its transforming power in the midst of the present age. Thus they require us to reformulate every question about our life in the world into the question about our common life before God; they require us to understand that faith is not faith until it is enacted in love; and they require us to find out what this means concretely given the realities of our place and time, and to do it.

As for Paul's eschatological expectation, it fully supports his ethical appeals. Thus in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, he is very much concerned with the future, the destiny of believers under God, although it is also clear that the decisive eschatological event has already occurred for them in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Whether the final end is near or delayed for a little while, the most important thing is for the Thessalonians to know that, through faith in Christ, they already belong to the new age, are already God's people. In 1 Th 5:5, then, Paul points out that the expectation of the Lord's return marks out Christians as "sons of light and sons of the day," who "are not of the night or of darkness." Since they belong to the future, they are not ultimately of this world. Whereupon Paul immediately draws the practical

ethical conclusion: "So then let us not sleep, as the others do, but let us keep awake and be sober" (vs. 6).

The same conclusion is confirmed by the long section of ethical appeals in Romans 12-13. This section is prefaced in 12:1 f. and concluded in 13:8-14 with eschatological references: "Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed . . ."; and "The night is far gone, the day is at hand," etc. Similarly, in his letter to the Philippians, Paul climaxes his particular admonitions with the reminder that believers are citizens of a heavenly commonwealth, from which they await their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (3:20). Thus their citizenship status in no way undercuts their present ethical responsibilities, but only makes them the more urgent.