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# “SEEING THE ERROR OF MY WAYS”. REVISITING PAUL’S PARADIGMATIC, SELF-CRITICAL REMARKS IN 1 CORINTHIANS 15:8-10

## ABSTRACT

In the ancient Mediterranean world any public admission of weakness reflected badly on one’s personal status and honour, as well as the public reputation of one’s group. However, in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 Paul openly admits about being in error in the past regarding the true identity of Christ. Within the larger cultural framework of meaning, the apostle’s graphic confession redefines his prior existence as a form of physical pollution. His open admittance of error also introduces a fresh understanding of God who freely extends grace to the morally impure. Paul serves as the paradigm of the active presence of God’s grace, which ontologically transformed his religious status, as well as his understanding of Christ. In this new relationship, based solely on the grace of God, fitting responses by all grateful recipients entail public confessions of previous error and incessant hard work for the sake of Christ.

Errors do not happen accidentally to people; people make them. The capacity for error is crucial to the human condition, as well as to human cognition. Paradoxically, though most cultures insist that error is embedded in human nature, there seems to be a universal reluctance to admit personal error. At best people commit “unforced errors” or say that they “learned from their mistakes”. They seldom “see the errors of their ways” or acknowledge to be “in error” about anything. Nonetheless, as Nicholas Rescher (2007:2) says:

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Error is commonplace in human affairs because Homo sapiens are limited creatures whose needs and wants outrun their available capabilities.

Stoic philosophers taught that all moral errors are equal, but according to Rescher (2007:53ff.) there are at least three different categories of error of this nature, namely *cognitive* error, which arises from failures to attain correct beliefs; *practical* error, which arises from failures related to the objectives of action, and *axiological* error, which appertains to mistakes in regard to evaluation. These distinctions bring to mind a set of questions regarding the extent and gravity of our moral errors by forcing us to determine how far off the mark we would be when we are wrong, or what scope of efforts would be involved to put matters straight again.

Without any form of awareness of how things, beliefs or ideas go wrong, we probably would not advance too far in our self-understanding, or of our social environments. Knowledge is usually the result of personal struggles and advances "...across a battlefield strewn with eliminated errors...". "We are creatures to whom truth becomes available by risking error. Our knowledge grows only by eliminating error" (Rescher 2007:8, 18). At the very least the ability to err or be wrong threatens our conceptions, which in the end are often presumptive expressions of our incorrectness. Presumptions, while they are based on incomplete facts, could only be partially correct, or, for that matter, partially incorrect. Therefore, we constantly need bigger pictures and larger frameworks of meaning to eliminate error.<sup>1</sup>

One of the chief objects of all human striving is the relief from ignorance and error. To eliminate error, we "internalize" external realities by constantly creating more "truthful" ones. Through meaningful interactions with significant others with whom we share our symbolic universes, we link our words, deeds and beliefs to the realities we inhabit in order to create larger frameworks of meaning and truth. At the same time, we constantly endeavour to limit error by confirming, re-arranging, combining, contrasting or even challenging existing conceptions.<sup>2</sup>

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1 Although incomplete information is not *per se* equal to incorrectness, it does leave wide open the door of error. It does invite erroneous beliefs.

2 The well-known 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, warned against two sources of error, namely false conceptions and false propositions, both of which he referred to as "passions". Reason is our only tool to supervene on these passions. He says that the best way to free ourselves from such errors as arise from natural signs, is first of all, before we begin to reason concerning such conjectural things, to suppose ourselves ignorant, and then to make use of our ratiocination; whereas, errors which consist in affirmation and negation

In this short study the focus falls on Paul's public admittance about being in error in the past regarding the true identity of Christ in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10. The question is why he deliberately framed himself in such graphic language, or as Hendrikus Boers (2006:23) puts it, why "Christ's appearance to him in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 is presented initially with a deep sense of shame". Since people in the ancient Mediterranean world did not generally associate or retain mistakes as a part of their inner being, error was usually interpreted as coming from outside them, as a brief overview of various strategies in the avoidance of error in ancient Greco-Roman society will hopefully show. Therefore, Paul's remarks need to be understood within a larger cultural framework of meaning. The danger of "methodological docetism" always lurks around the corner when beliefs and ideas are separated from the social interactions and structures within which they took shape. Reductionist approaches constantly fail to recognize the constant interplay between "body and soul", between the often unwritten but always implicitly present cultural codes embedded within the deep structure of Pauline texts and the rhetorical strategies and theological discussions presented on the surface level.<sup>3</sup>

## 1. THE AVOIDANCE OF ERROR IN ANCIENT GRECO-ROMAN SOCIETY

"*Cogito ergo sum*". Rene Descartes famously remarked. Twelve centuries before him St. Augustine stated in similar fashion: "*Si enim fallor sum*" (*Civ. Dei* II.26). However, as Luca Castagnoli (2010:196) tells us, the seeming parallelism between Augustine and Descartes ought to be resisted with resolve. Still, from antiquity up to our day reality hovers on a continuum between the deterministic view that "everything is true" to its absolute refutation: "everything is untrue". No wonder the well-known ancient philosopher, Epicurus, in his Letter to Menoeceus (133) said that some things "are by necessity (*ἀνάγκη*), others by chance (*τύχη*), and others depend on us" (*τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς*). In other words, in terms of moral responsibility, this belief in causal accountability (*τὸ παρ' ἡμᾶς*) provided the rational basis

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(that is, the falsity of propositions) proceed only from reasoning amiss (quoted in Kassler 1991:68).

- 3 Biblical documents seldom refer to these social contexts directly. They are taken for granted since their authors assume that their readers/hearers also shared these meanings that were embedded in different ancient social institutions and relationships. Therefore, in order to address the dangers of ethnocentrism, scholars need to address the mismatch between our own cultural experiences and that of the ancients. Obviously, studies of this nature would focus more on the general than the particular, and on the typical than the unique.

for holding people responsible for their actions. In Epicurus' eyes the belief that everything is necessitated (κατ' ἀνάγκην), equalled determinism, which left nothing to chance or as the result of people's own doing.<sup>4</sup> In modern terms, such a way of thinking would turn us into prisoners of our own genetics and our social environments.

Although ancient philosophers constantly speculated about the nature of social responsibility, the startling deficiency of the ancient Greco-Roman world was a deep reluctance to accept personal responsibility for error. Most people chose not to acknowledge their errors as their own, due of the importance of the pivotal values of honour and shame in those "face-to-face" cultures (Watson 2010:13). In these group-oriented cultures, where one's words and deeds were seen as direct, one-to-one windows into one's inner character, any admission of personal error reflected badly on the individuals in question as well as on their groups. The avoidance of personal responsibility was more or less a given, since the social construction of ancient Mediterranean communities was maintained by means of the fundamental activities of praising and blaming. Stanley Stowers (1989:77), correctly points out that:

(P)raise legitimated and effected social structures and constructions of reality... Whatever one praised, whether it be the character of a friend, the cosmic rhythms of nature, or the virtues of Rome, that thing or person was affirmed, legitimated, and objectified.

Praise and blame served to locate people and objects in their proper places through the bestowal of honour or the causing of shame. Jerome Neyrey (1998:78ff.) also points out that epideictic rhetoric, or the rhetoric of praise and blame, formed one of the three species of public discourse in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

Praise in antiquity was closely associated with virtue (ἀρετή), which was not so much synonymous with morality as with outstanding qualities of the virtuous in agonistic contexts. The challenge to all in the public arena was to acquire more "excellence". Praise was reserved for those who made liberal contributions to their communities, or who performed courageous deeds in times of danger. Praise went hand in hand with elevated public honour. The reputations, worth and respect which individuals held in the eyes of their peers found expression in various forms of public admiration

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4 Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* also characterised a mistake as some form of a mishap that could not be too surprising since we are prone to errors.

and recognition of their virtues. No wonder φιλοτιμία, “the love of honour”, gave rise to numerous agonistic contests for honour and praise.<sup>5</sup>

Any public admission of weakness, particularly within the orbit of these ancient challenge-riposte dynamics, would reflect badly on one’s worth, public status and reputation in any community. One way of defending one’s public honour, apart from various agonistic challenge-riposte interactions, was secrecy. In these “high-context” cultures,

in which people are deeply involved in the everyday activities of those around them and in which information is widely shared (Watson 2010:25),<sup>6</sup>

personal boundaries and group identities had to be protected at all times. In this regard secrecy served as an important defensive mechanism for avoiding challenges that could result in a loss of public reputation. Secrecy also safeguarded individuals and communities against admitting to failures and mistakes.

Ancient deities such as *Tuche* (“Chance”) or *Moira* (“Fate”) also came to the rescue of individuals when errors were at stake. Many believed that *Tuche*, being capricious and irrational (and often represented with a blindfold because of her blind, arbitrary decisions, or with the wheel of fortune), and *Moira*, the dark superhuman goddess in Homer’s *Iliad*,<sup>7</sup> control people’s lives and fate. These goddesses released them from personal responsibility. People’s allotted destiny was either the result of some form

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5 One of the surest ways to accrue honour and shift responsibility was through the “game” of challenge and riposte. “In the ancient world, enemies engaged in verbal challenges in order to expose their opponents and shame them publicly” (Horsley 2004:52). The purpose of any public challenge was to humiliate or offend others in order to harm their reputation “so to level them or at least reduce their prestige to an acceptable level” (Neyrey 2009:217). Now, inasmuch as honour also comprised the ability to defend one’s good name, as well as one’s property and family members, a riposte always had to be given to challenges by those of equal social standing, lest the ones challenged be dismissed as less honourable.

6 Watson (2010:26) quotes the following from a study by Martin on ancient Hellenistic associations: “The doing of secrecy, in other words, is not primarily a concealing of some knowledge, but rather embodies the ritual procedures necessary for the formation and maintenance of social boundaries.”

7 According to Lawson (1994:8), in Homer’s works: “*Moira* then can be seen as a force which stands alongside the gods, is a god herself and, perhaps most importantly, is a power which is itself beyond the gods”. He continues: “...it is clear that fate is very often depicted as a power separate from the gods, but not finally dependent upon the gods” (1994:10).

of a divine decree, or divine anger, or both mixed together. When fate, either in the form of these deities or in impersonal form, was present, any event or interaction was looked upon as significant and unavoidable. Thus the idea of predestination, that one's personal fate and the course of one's life was determined from birth to death, existed in various rudimentary forms in antiquity (cf. Lawson 1994:10ff.).<sup>8</sup>

## 2. PAUL'S ADMISSION OF ERROR

Since the public admittance of personal error and negative self-evaluation was intentionally avoided in the ancient Greco-Roman world, Paul's graphic confession of his radical unworthiness in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 is surprising. After his statement that Christ appeared to Cefas, the Twelve and James, he recalls how Christ lastly appeared to him as the untimely born. Since  $\acute{\omega}\phi\theta\eta$  is often used in theophanies in the LXX (Gen. 12:7; 18:1; 35:9; etc), and elsewhere in the New Testament (cf. Mark 9:4; Matt. 17:3), the four appearances of Christ depicted here in 1 Corinthians 15 are also most likely also intended as theophanies<sup>9</sup>.

Nothing concerning the nature of Christ's appearance is shared by Paul. Still:

the number of appearances and the great number of people who encounter the risen Jesus at once makes Jesus' resurrection more than the internal psychological experiences of grieving individuals: The reality of this event is thereby emphasized (Crocker 2004:64).

Although we do not know "was Paul gesehen hat, kann als sicher gelten, dass er Jesus als einer ihm von Himmel her Erscheinenden bzw. als eine himmlische Gestalt wahrgenommen hat" (Wolter 2011:25-26).<sup>10</sup> At

8 Lawson (1994:16) concludes: "regarding fate and humanity in Homer, it is clear that an individual's fate is largely beyond personal control. The terms *kata moiran* and *hyper moiran* suggest the possibility for mortals to transgress fate, but only to a limited degree – and even then only with certainty of punishment from the gods. Thus they are still within the boundaries and control of fate."

9 According to Smith (2010:15) 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 applies the same type of language. Therefore, "it seems appropriate to infer from the way theophanies are described in the Septuagint that the risen Jesus was thought of as belonging to that realm from which theophanies and angelophanies originate".

10 The testimony of the large group of witnesses referred to in verse 5-7 implies a personal, bodily appearance. Therefore I concur with Thiessen (2009:53) who, in quoting Kessler and Schweizer, states: "Somit ist  $\acute{\omega}\phi\theta\eta$  in 1 Kor 15:5-7 nicht nur 'Reflex und Ausdruck einer sehr inhaltsreichen Erfahrung, welche die Wurzel des Osterglaubens bildet,' sondern 'im Vollsinn des Wortes zu

the same time Paul's experience of the risen Christ in the same manner as that of the other apostles (cf. his use of the aorist passive and dative), qualifies him to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Smith 2010:34). The temporal sequence of the appearances in no way diminishes the point he is trying to make regarding the fact that the same risen Christ appeared to all of them in similar manner.

Much has been written about the expression ἔκτρομα in verse 8. This *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament usually has the meaning of a miscarriage due to having a stillborn child, or an abortion.<sup>11</sup> Here Paul does not use ἔκτρομα in a temporal sense, but rather as an expression of personal unworthiness (e.g. Lindemann 2000:334; Boers 2006:23). The fact that he explicitly states that he did not in any way deserve to be an apostle also serves

to highlight one of his constant themes: God's surprising and unreasonable grace, in this case that remarkable grace shown particularly to him in his apostolic calling (Ciampa & Rosner 2010:751).

Paul does not describe the appearance of the resurrected Christ as a conversion experience. Although this encounter embodied a radical shift in his understanding of the nature and content of his loyalty to God, typical "conversion" terminology is absent in 1 Corinthians 15.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Paul's existential experience of the resurrected Christ is about

his entering into a new form of relationship with a patron, since in this case he did not change patrons (Crook 2004:255).

In other words, he forged a new relationship with his divine benefactor, one in which Christ now became his new master as well as the sole

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nehmen.' Womit kein Zweifel bestehen kann, 'dass die, die dort genannt waren, überzeugt waren, den Auferstandenen [mit ihren physischen Augen] gesehen zu haben'."

- 11 According to the fifth century CE lexicographer Hesychius, this word means "a child born dead, untimely, something cast out of a woman" (quoted in Collins 2008:121). However, many scholars think that in Paul's case it may also refer to him as an untimely born who was not worthy of this personal experience of Christ's appearance (e.g. Peerbolte 2003:164).
- 12 Beverly Gaventa (1986:13) understands conversion as something different from alteration (the change that grows from any individual's existing conduct) or transformation (a reinterpretation of previous behaviour and identity on the basis of a newly acquired perception). Conversion, according to her definition, is a radical change, which also implies the rejection of previous allegiances for new ones. Cf. also Méndez-Moratalla (2004:15ff.).

broker of the beneficial relationship with God.<sup>13</sup> This radical shift is boldly expressed in terms of Paul's admittance of his ignorance and consequent shameful behaviour regarding the true identity of Christ.

Verbal praise and prayers of gratitude, typical of beneficiaries and clients' grateful responses to the beneficence of their divine benefactors, are absent in verse 8-10. No wonder Seyoon Kim (2002:233) notes that:

of all the references to the Damascus event, 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 is rather distinctive in that only here does Paul apologetically refer to his past persecution of the church, explicitly admitting it as his guilt.

Instead of lavishing verbal accolades on his benefactor within this context (which Paul does elsewhere, particularly in his letter openings), the apostle opts to openly admit his previous erroneous behaviour due to his flawed understanding of the true nature of his divine benefactor. However, the question still remains why he followed this route in a culture highly resistant to any form of public admittance regarding personal weaknesses or shameful behaviour.

### 3. *Χάρις* HOLDS THE KEY

According to Gupta (2009:40): "One cannot hope to grasp the ancient Mediterranean world without an understanding of its concern for purity and holiness".<sup>14</sup> Although the obsessive preoccupation with pollution and impurity, whether moral or physical, was not peculiar to ancient Judaism, Jacob Neusner, in a formative study in 1973, points out that ritual purity was of enormous importance to the various Jewish groups and individuals during Second Temple Judaism. Numerous purity laws helped to define the collective identity of the Jewish people.<sup>15</sup> These laws were intended "to

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13 I am not convinced that patronage was an all-pervasive phenomenon in antiquity. There are sufficient differences between Roman *patrocinium* and Greek *euergetism* on various levels of literary, historical and cultural abstraction to warrant not bundling them together under the generic rubric of "ancient patronage". *Patrocinium* was a distinctly Roman institution, and *euergetism* suited the interchange between Greek benefactors and their communities much better. From this perspective, Paul would probably have thought along *euergetistic* lines when reciprocal relationships were at stake (cf. Joubert 2000).

14 Gray (2004:219) thinks that in the ancient Mediterranean world there was a general perception that anything which pollutes "is an impediment to purity, and that which purifies does away with pollution".

15 Although he stresses the constant relationship between purity and the Jerusalem temple, Neusner thinks that groups such as the Pharisees, before and after the destruction of the temple, believed that one must also keep purity

separate the clean from the unclean and, ultimately, the sacred from the profane, in religious ritual observances" (Scholtz 2009:19).

Jonathan Klawans identifies two forms of impurity in the Hebrew Bible, namely moral and ritual impurity. Whereas ritual impurity is associated with defilements linked to childbirth, skin diseases, genital discharges and contact with corpses (2000:23ff.), moral impurity relates to aspects such as Jews taking foreign women as wives in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah (2000:43ff.). Other forms of sexually defiling behaviour also cause moral impurity and even defile the land of Israel.<sup>16</sup> In view of recent research we would probably be close to the point to state that the Hebrew Bible in general and Torah in particular articulated moral and ritual impurity as "two recognizable concepts of impurity" (Haber 2008:29).

According to Ascough (2009:38):

Systems of purity and pollution were also in place in the Greek and Roman world, not perhaps as elaborate as that of the Israelites, but nevertheless important, particularly in cultic contexts.

Purity and cleanness in the ancient Mediterranean context were closely related to what is whole, complete and physically perfect.<sup>17</sup> Paul's public admittance of error after Christ appeared to him and his consequent shift from disbelief, fear and the humiliation of being wrong, to one of bafflement, gratitude and, ultimately, lifelong loyalty, should be understood against widespread ideological framework of impurity in the ancient Mediterranean world.<sup>18</sup>

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rules outside the temple. Therefore, the Pharisees' adoption of strict purity laws outside the temple gave expression to their desire to live like priests.

- 16 In the same vein, Millgrom, in his monumental commentary on Leviticus, shares the idea that sexual offences and murder could cause pollution of the land and even the exile of its people. However, Susan Haber (2008:21) points out that whereas Millgrom offers a highly systematized analysis of ritual defilement, the same cannot be said with regard to the category of moral defilement. Although he discusses the main sources of moral impurity – idolatry, murder and sexual sin – on their own terms, he makes no significant attempt to show the relationship among them.
- 17 In this regard the cultural anthropological research of Mary Douglas (1966/2003) and her group-grid model has become well-known amongst biblical scholars (cf. Neyrey 1998; Carter 2002).
- 18 Within the textual context of 1 Corinthians these remarks could also have functioned as part of Paul's rhetorical defence against opponents who brought his apostolic ministry in disrepute, but the general understanding of impurity and the avoidance of personal responsibility for errors in the ancient Mediterranean

Here in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 Paul reinterprets his old way of life as a form of physical pollution. He refused to reciprocate the munificence of his divine benefactor in the worst possible way by rejecting Christ and persecuting the church of God. As indicated above, the term ἔκτρομα forcefully captures the nature of the apostle's former impurity. Although the idea is still popular in theological circles that ἔκτρομα was a form of slur directed against Paul by his adversaries who thought he was unfit to be an apostle due to his persecuting activities (cf. Collins 2008:120-121; Witherington 2010:148), the textual context points us in a different direction. Here Paul follows a personal and consistent line of argumentation suggesting from various angles that he did (not?) have the necessary moral qualifications to be apostle on the basis of his past behaviour.<sup>19</sup> He was

only able to become an apostle by God's favour (χάρις), implying that severe punishment would in fact have been the only reaction to be expected (Buitenwerf 2008:71).

In 1 Corinthians 15:5-7 Paul offers a short narrative outline as part of his consistent argument that he was a moral outcast who did not fit the profile of the list honourable persons to whom Christ appeared before him (vv 5-7). Cefas, the Twelve, the more than 500 brothers, James and all the apostles were persons of high repute in the Christian movement from the very beginning, whereas Paul was an abortion of sorts (cf. also Mitchell 2003:469ff.). He was impure and out of place. The only grounds on which Paul could refer to himself as an apostle, albeit ὁ ἐλάχιστος τῶν ἀποστόλων (v 9), was on the basis of the unlimited goodness of God (v 10).<sup>20</sup> Contra Schrage (1999:61), who is of the opinion that this statement should only be understood in a temporal sense and not as if Paul refers to himself as "Geringster von allen",<sup>21</sup> he also deliberately puts himself last in the line and as the least of those who saw Christ.

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world could take us a step further in our search for an interpretative framework for these remarks.

- 19 Sellin captures the essence of what Paul is trying to communicate: "In der Person des Paulus, in seiner Bekehrung und Berufung, hat Gott durch seine Gnade einen Toten lebendig gemacht" (quoted in Thiessen 2009:128, 679ff.).
- 20 Paul wanted his readers to comprehend "...that his apostolate had its origin in an act of God's grace: he did not deserve it, nor did he ask for it, for in his own eyes he was no more than 'a miscarriage'" (Hollander & Van der Hout 1996:224ff.).
- 21 So also Thiessen (2009:125) who notes that Paul's use of "eschaton bringt zum Ausdruck, dass diese Erscheinungen des Auferstandenen zum Abschluss gekommen sind".

Over against the dominant ancient perspective that benefactors, divine and human, should always be aware of the disposition of beneficiaries before bestowing benefits upon them in order to circumvent the humiliation of an unworthy response, God did not take such precautions in Paul's case. His actions were entirely motivated by grace, not reciprocity (cf. Harrison 2004:227). *Χάρις*, as God's active power, freely and unreservedly transferred Paul to a radically new way of life and an entirely different understanding of Christ. Within this new relationship, based solely on the grace of God and unconditioned by any form of personal loyalty on Paul's side, the only "honourable" response from his side entailed a public confession of his previous error. While the active presence of God's grace prompted this public recognition of his prior failure to recognise Christ as Lord, at the same time it activated him to work harder for Christ than all the other "worthy" witnesses mentioned in verse 5-7. In other words, only by *retrospectively* seeing the error of his old ways after the encounter with the risen Christ, could he come to terms with the nature of God's boundless grace and could he *proactively* express his new loyalty to Christ through hard work (v 10).

#### 4. PAUL'S PUBLIC ADMITTANCE OF PERSONAL UNWORTHINESS IN THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST AS PARADIGM FOR A NEW LIFE IN GRACE

Out of this paradigmatic encounter with the risen Christ Paul's new theology and ethics of grace were formed. Given the pedagogic nature of Paul's letters and his emphasis on instruction, the churches under his supervision would have probably been taught by him to associate *χάρις* with undeserved divine favour. They also would have been aware of the fact that God's goodness laid them under obligation to respond with fitting expressions of gratitude. In a nutshell, Paul's teaching on *χάρις* made it clear that:

- a. God's *χάρις* has a specific content, namely the giving of Jesus as a sacrifice for the sins of all, Jews and non-Jews ("grace as event").
- b. God's *χάρις* has a specific ontological effect in the symbolic world, namely the radical transformation of the recipients' religious status before God.
- c. God's *χάρις* also includes the gift of his Spirit to believers, as well as their transference into the sphere of his *gratia continua* ("grace as process") (Joubert 2005:207).

In 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 Paul elaborates on this understanding of χάρις by adding two significant insights in his short paradigmatic narrative, namely:

- a. The public admittance of moral error (due to ignorance concerning the true identity of Christ) is not considered as shameful behaviour any longer. By means of the process/event of discovering, admitting and “seeing the error of one’s ways”, a new world of grace is opened up before the εκκλησία of God, which entails a retrospective awareness of personal unworthiness to gain divine favour, as well as a collective testimony of being “ein Fehlgeburt” (Wolff 2000:379). In other words, this new way of life is associated with the right knowledge that the redemptive power of God’s grace changes even the most shameful persons into loyal followers of Christ.
- b. Personal gratitude for God’s benefactions is not only expressed through public praise and prayers, but, importantly, also through the public admittance of one’s prior moral impurity and incessant hard work for the sake of Christ.

Paul’s purpose in 1 Corinthians 15:8-10 (as a paradigmatic narrative) is not merely to describe his prior life or defend his apostolic ministry in the face of accusations by opponents, but also to bring about change in the hearts and minds of his readers. In this process, his open admittance of error introduces a fresh understanding of God who freely extends grace to the morally impure. “Seeing the errors of one’s previous ways”, as well as hard work for the sake of Christ, would, therefore, be fitting expressions of gratitude to God’s ever present and “amazing grace”.

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