CHAPTER 19

The Old Realm: The Context for the Good News

A THEOLOGY OF PAUL AND HIS LETTERS

The Gift of the New Realm in Christ

BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

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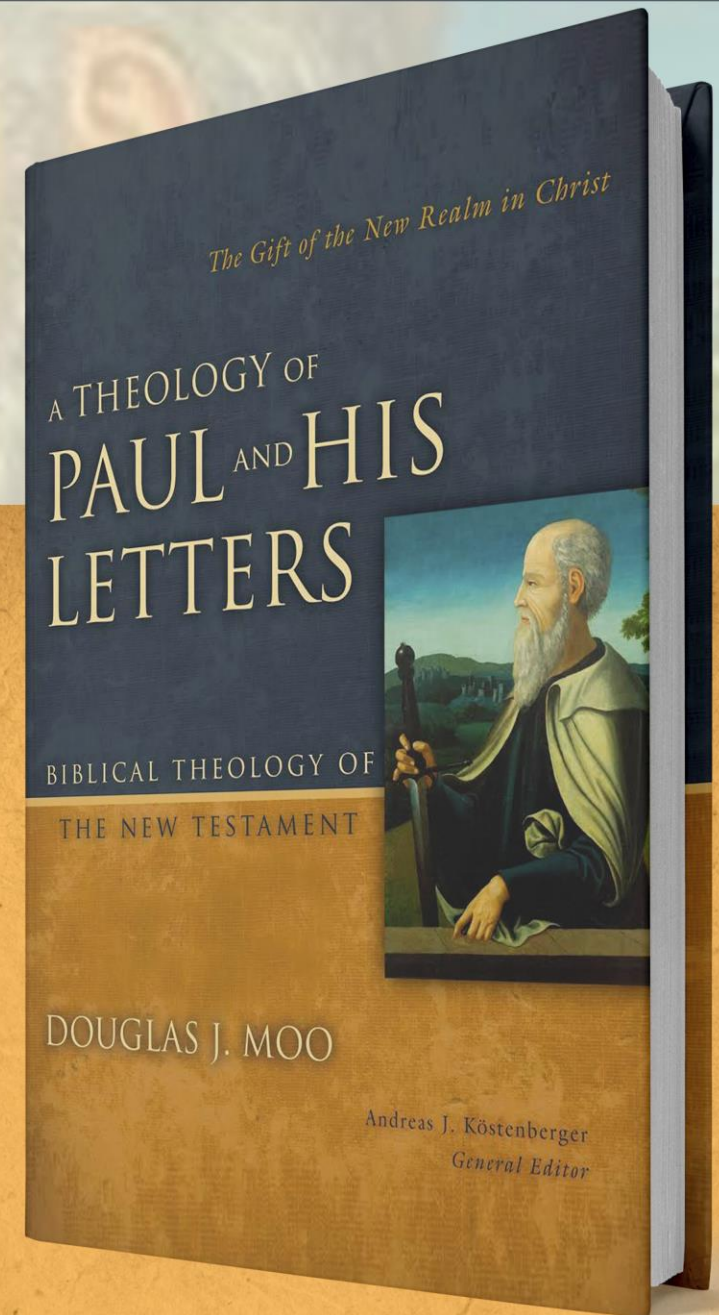
- There are two perspectives about Paul's conversion:

  1. He was a struggling, sinful Jew who found the solution in Christ.

  2. He was a self-satisfied Jew who reevaluated his pre-Christian situation when confronted with the resurrected Christ.

     - This is referred to as the "solution-to-plight" reading of Paul's conversion.

     - The author believed that while there are flaws to this perspective, it is the most accurate.

The Fundamental Nature of the Old Realm

- The Vocabulary of Sin
  - "Sin"
  - "Sinned"
  - "Commit sin"
  - "Sinner"
  - "Trespass" (can be used interchangeably with "sin")
  - "Transgression" (a blatant violation of God's command; related to Mosaic law)
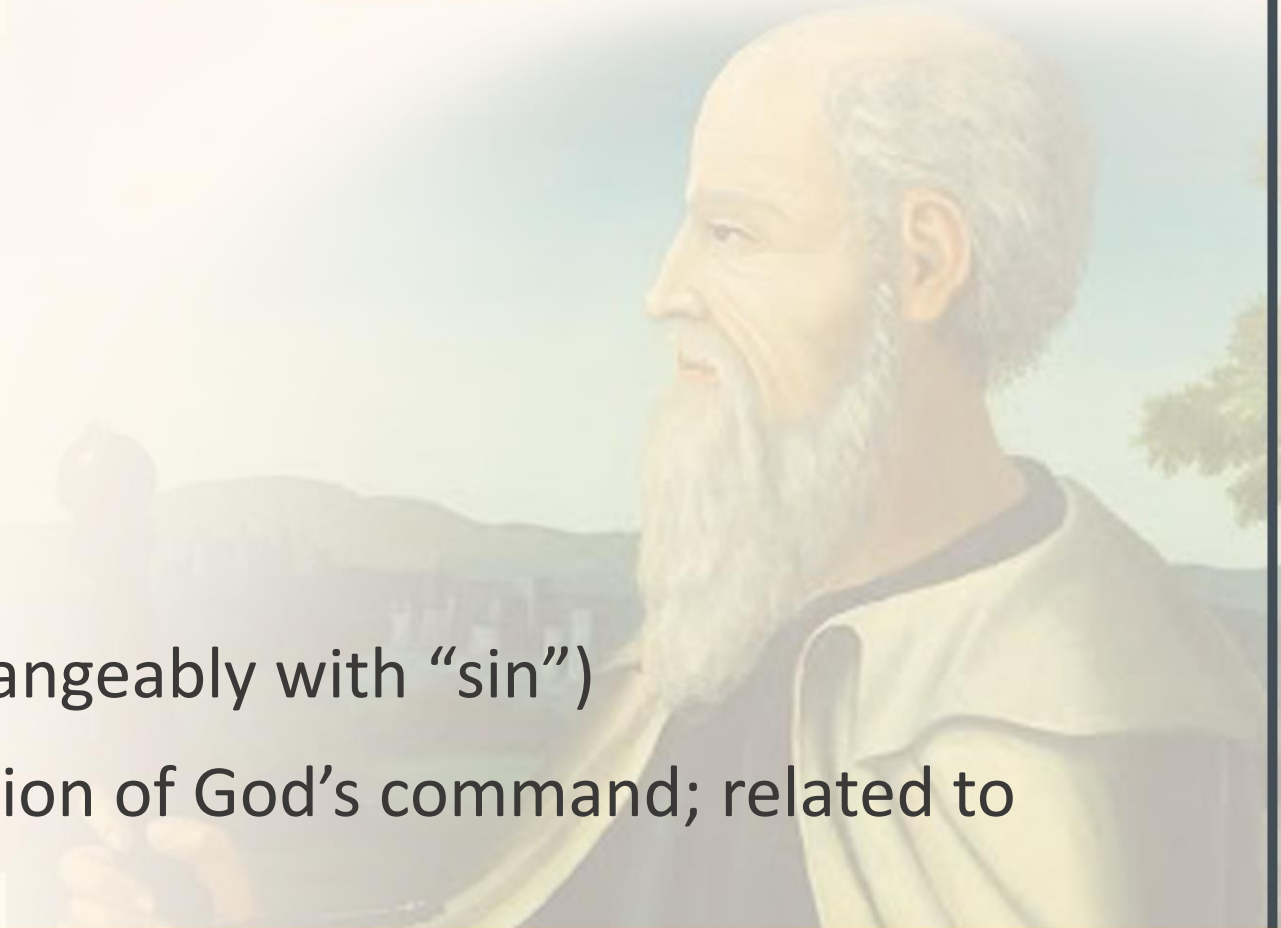
- Paul also used the words "desire" and "passion" to describe the tendency to choose sinful behavior.

- There are many other words that Paul used with the prefixes "un" and "dis" to denote the way sin can be committed.

- The Nature of Sin

  - Sin is rooted in thoughts.

  - Paul taught that believers must focus on changing their mindsets.

  - Sin is a refusal to honor God and his lordship.

    - This indicates a failure to believe.
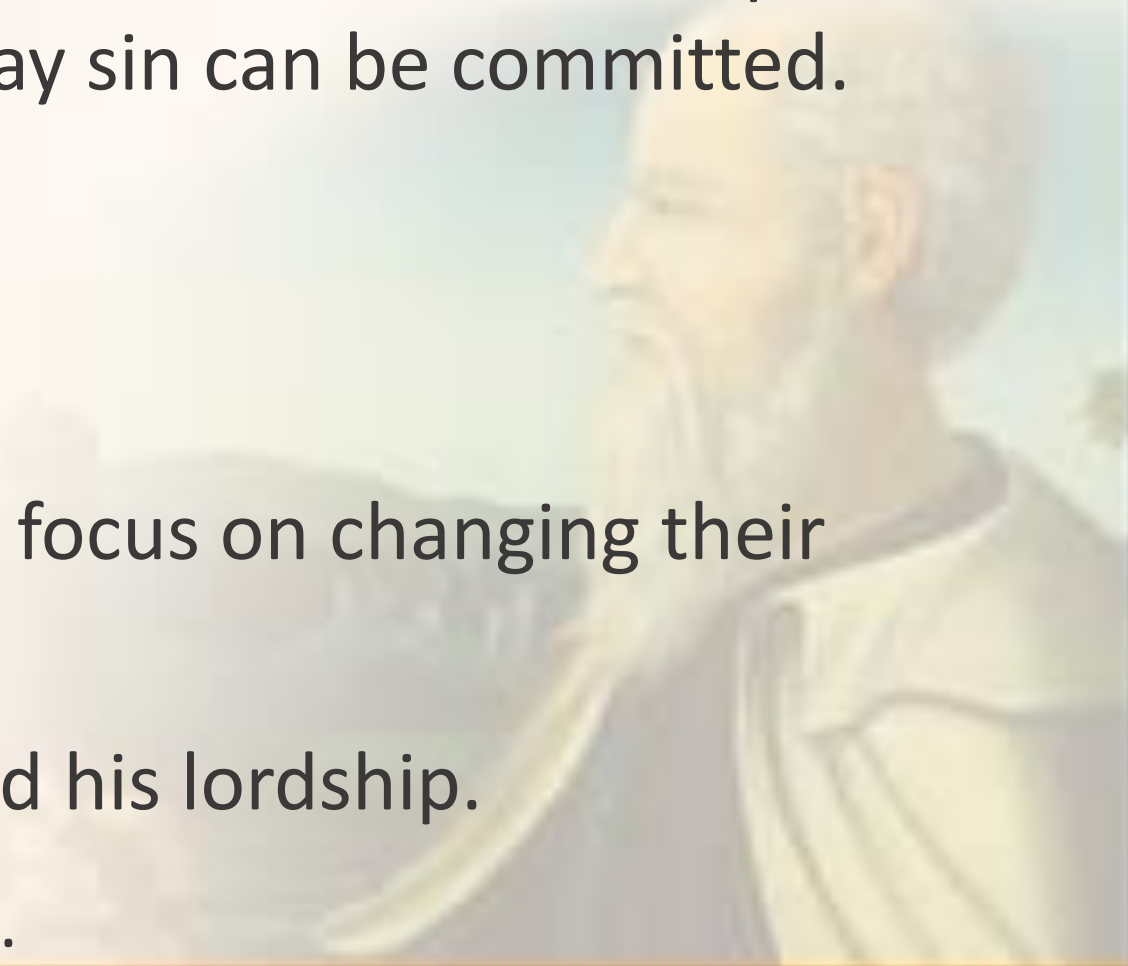
- Sin as Power
  - Paul characterizes sin as having power and control through disobedience.
  - Sin reigns in the old realm.
  - Individual acts of sin determine a person's destiny.

- The Consequences of Sin
  - Death
  - Wrath
  - Condemnation
  - Trouble and distress
  - Curse
  - Punish/punishment
  - Destroy/destruction
  - Perish

- Death is the immediate consequence of sin.

  - He viewed spiritual death and physical death as intertwined.

  - Believers have been rescued from spiritual death but must experience physical death.

- God's wrath is the second consequence.

  - This wrath is future oriented (as happening on the day of the Lord).
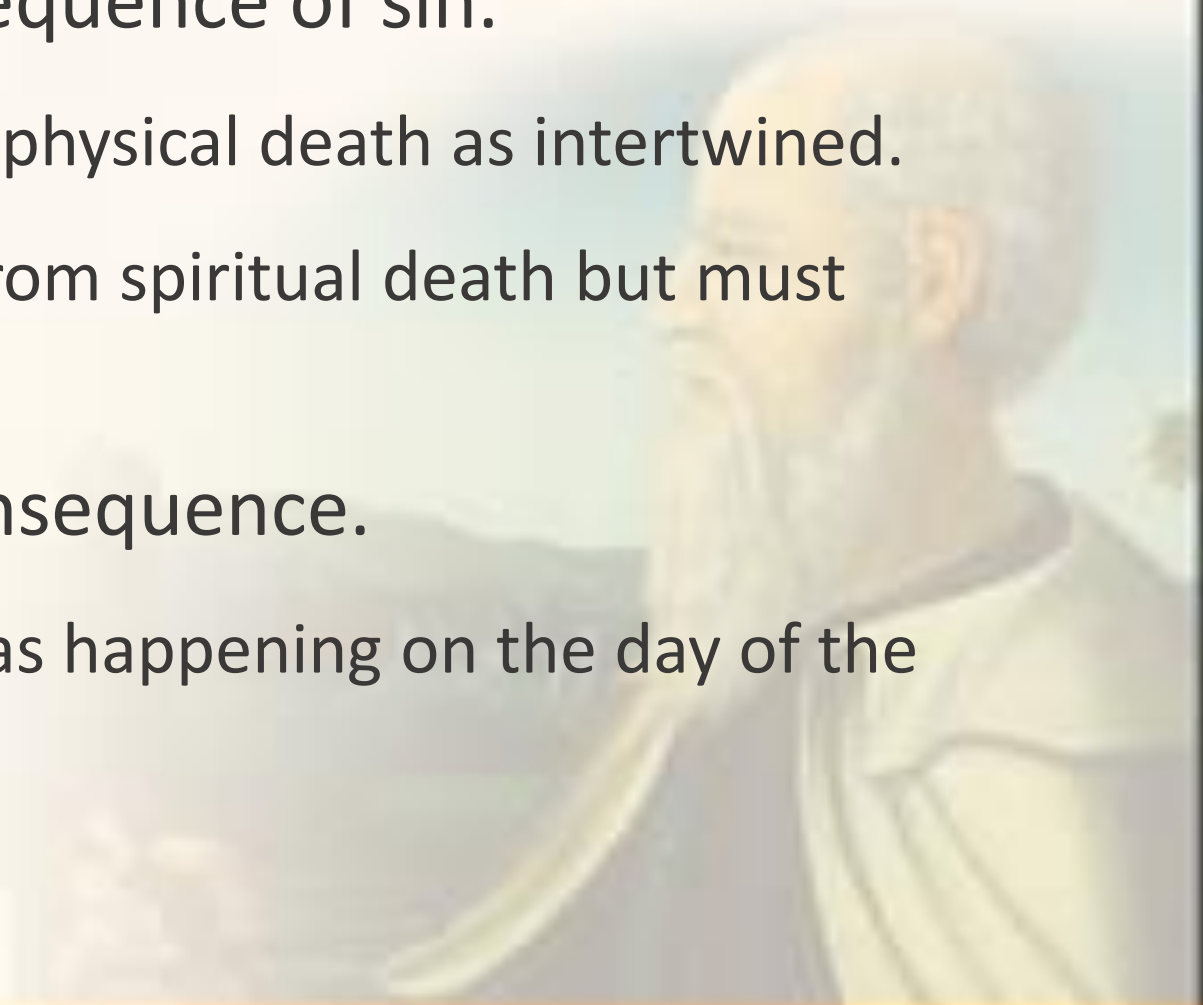
- The Cosmic Dimension
  - Paul recognized that the old realm is inhabited by and influenced by cosmic powers such as the devil and evil angels.
  - These spiritual powers are defeated in Christ but are still active.
  - Human sin is influenced by these spiritual powers.
 - Human sin has impacted all creation.

The Story of the Old Realm: Underlying Narratives

- The Story of Humankind

  - Paul referred to Adam only four times, but he may have implied reference more often.

  - Paul focused on the entrance of sin and death in Adam, as well as the victory over them through Christ.
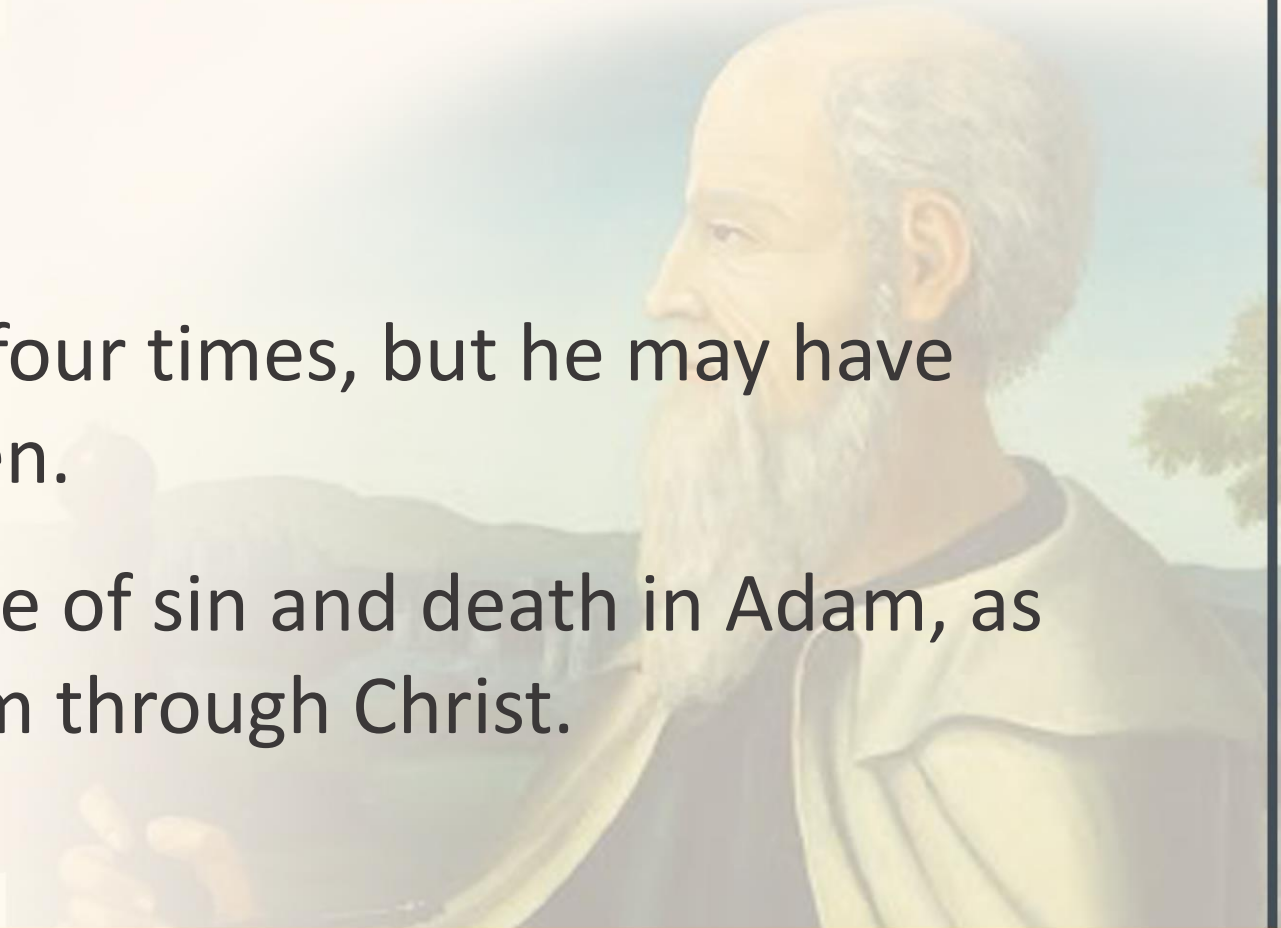
- Romans 5:12–21 sets forth the basis of the assurance of salvation.
  - The translation of certain parts depends on one's interpretation of clauses and structure.
  - The author believed Paul was stating that sin produces death, and all die because all sin.
  - Sin and death are both universal.
  - Paul appeared to contradict himself in verse 12:
    - Each human dies because each human sins.
   - Each human dies because Adam sinned.
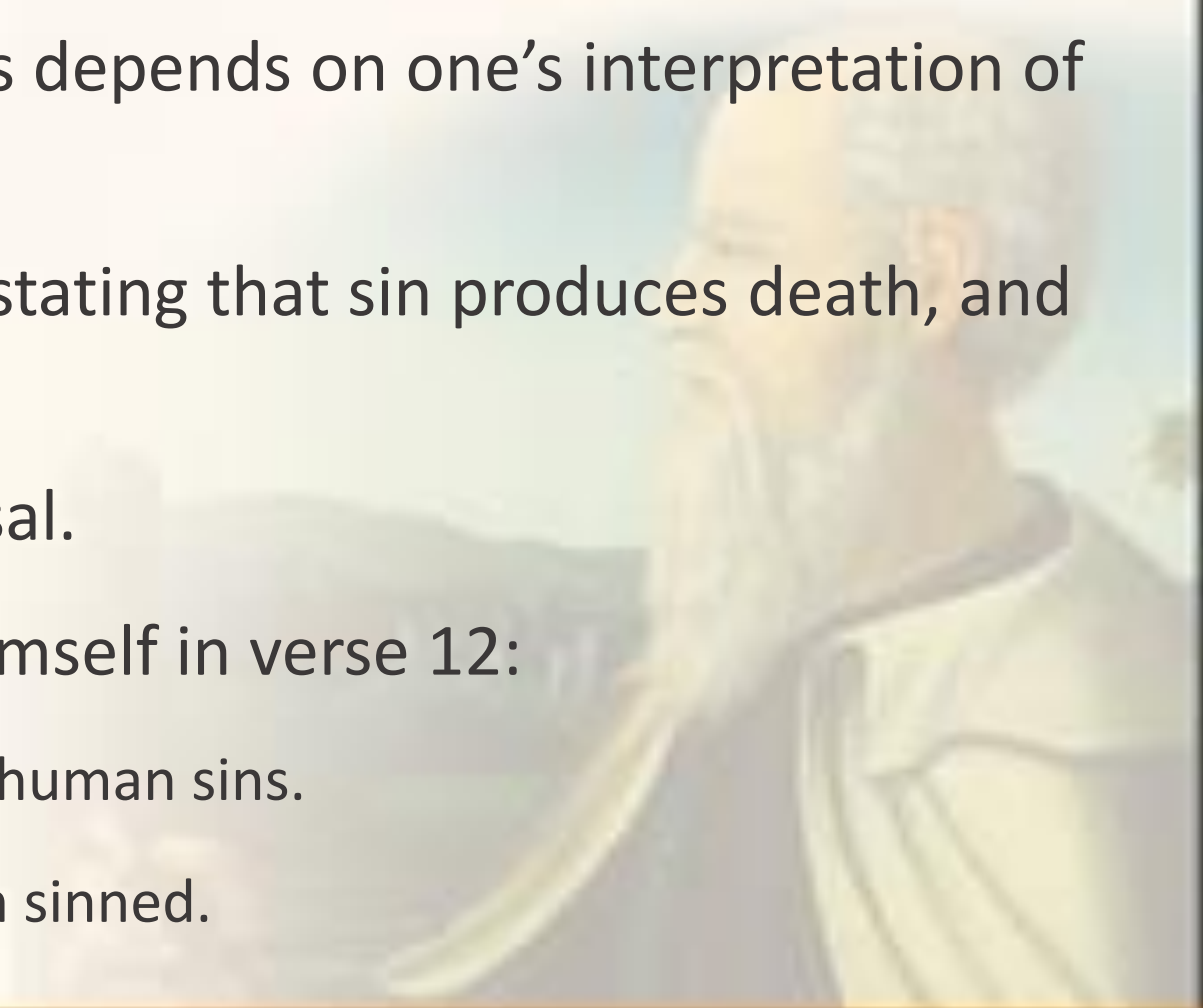
- The author believed three options for should be considered:
  - We should not force a resolution between these two statements because Paul never resolved them.
  - We could conclude that each human dies because each human sins, and each human necessarily sins because of a sin nature inherited from Adam.
  - We could view Adam as a representative figure whose sin is the sin of all people. (The author preferred this view.)
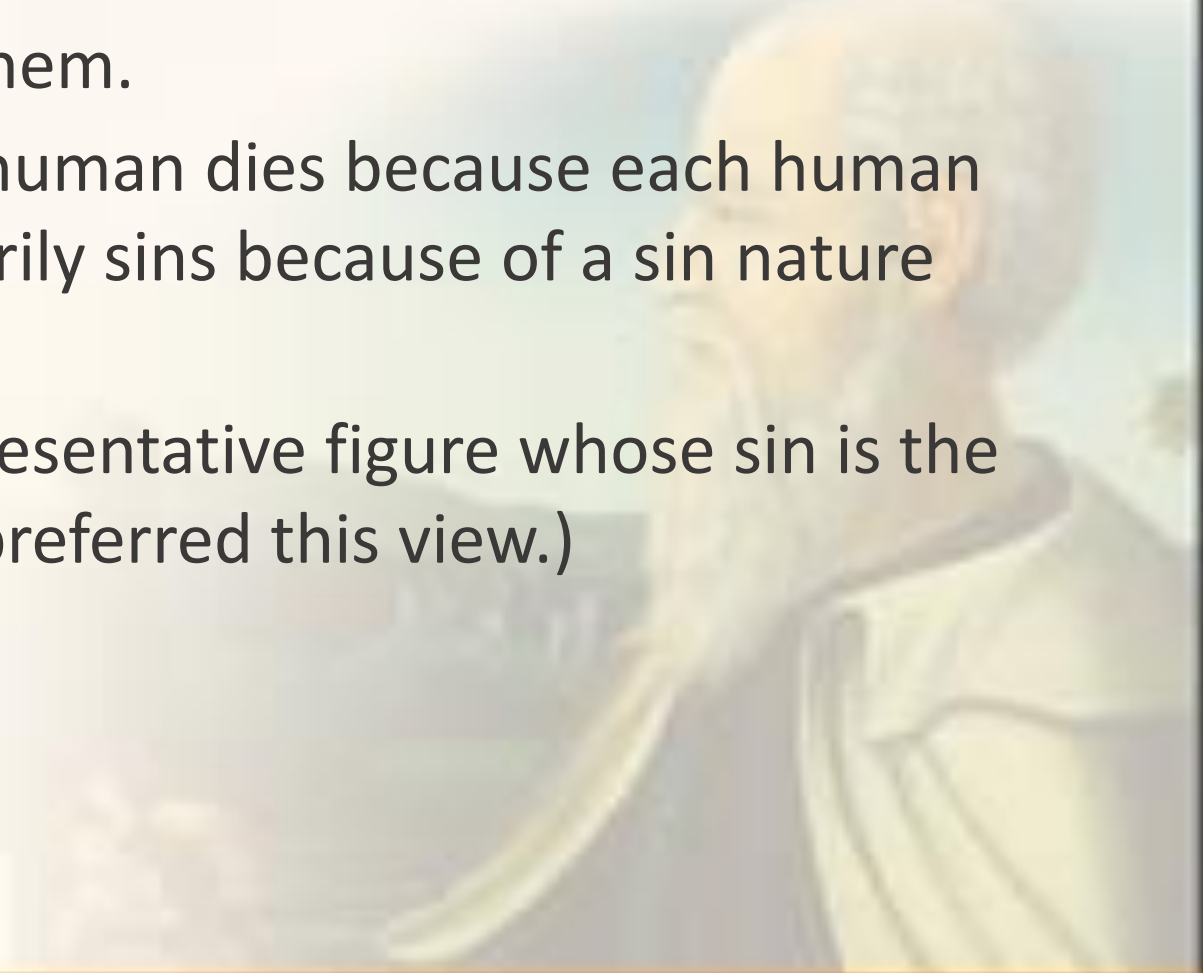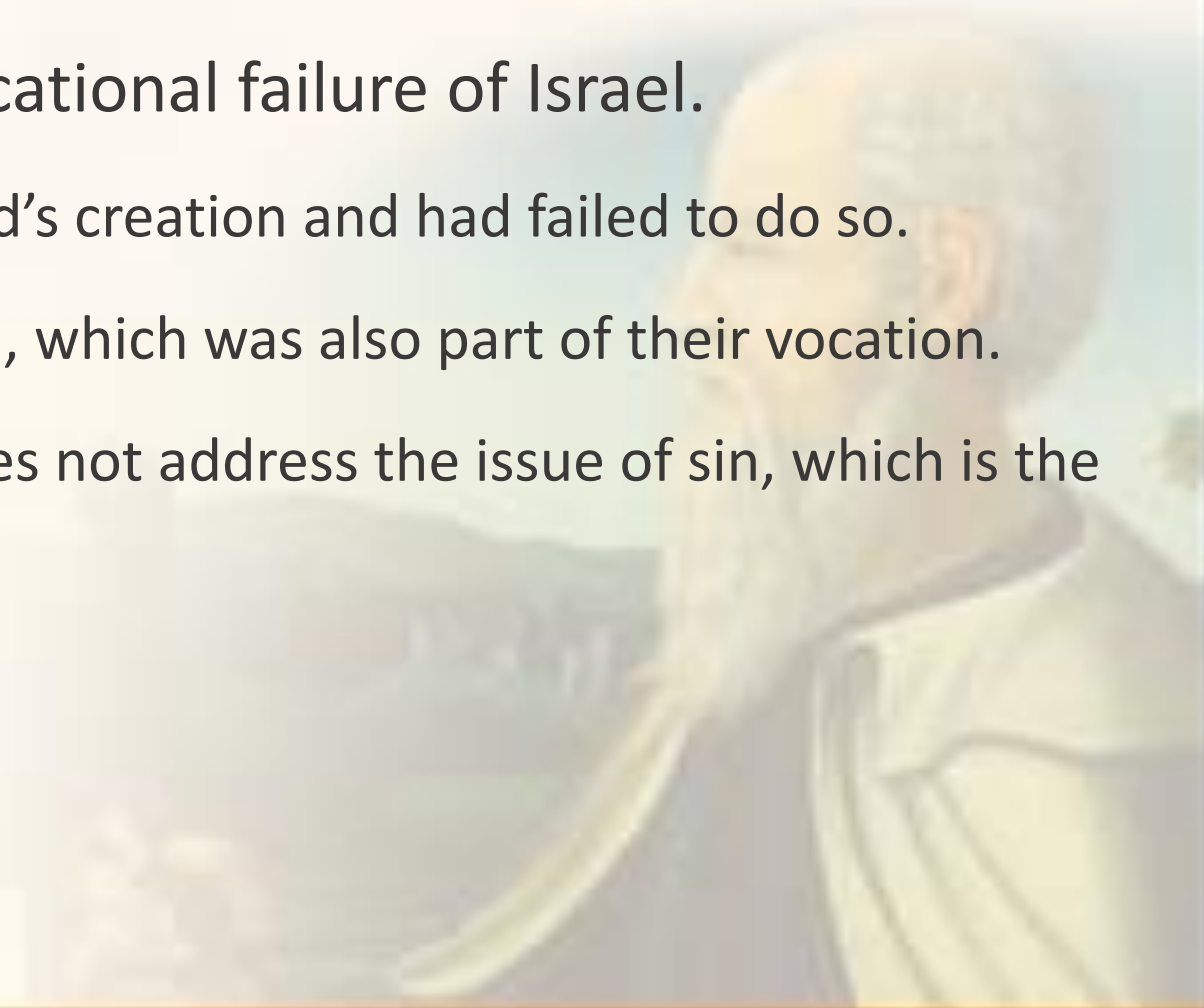
- The Story of Israel
  - Israel's Plight
    - Paul viewed Israel's plight in terms of "exile" and "vocation."
    - Some scholars believe that Israel followed a sin-exile-restoration pattern and still continues do so.
      - The author believed there are flaws in this perspective:
        - Paul never used the term "exile."
        - Paul taught that some restoration prophecies have yet to be fulfilled.
        - Paul emphasized that sin was a problem for each individual, not just in relation to Israel as a whole.
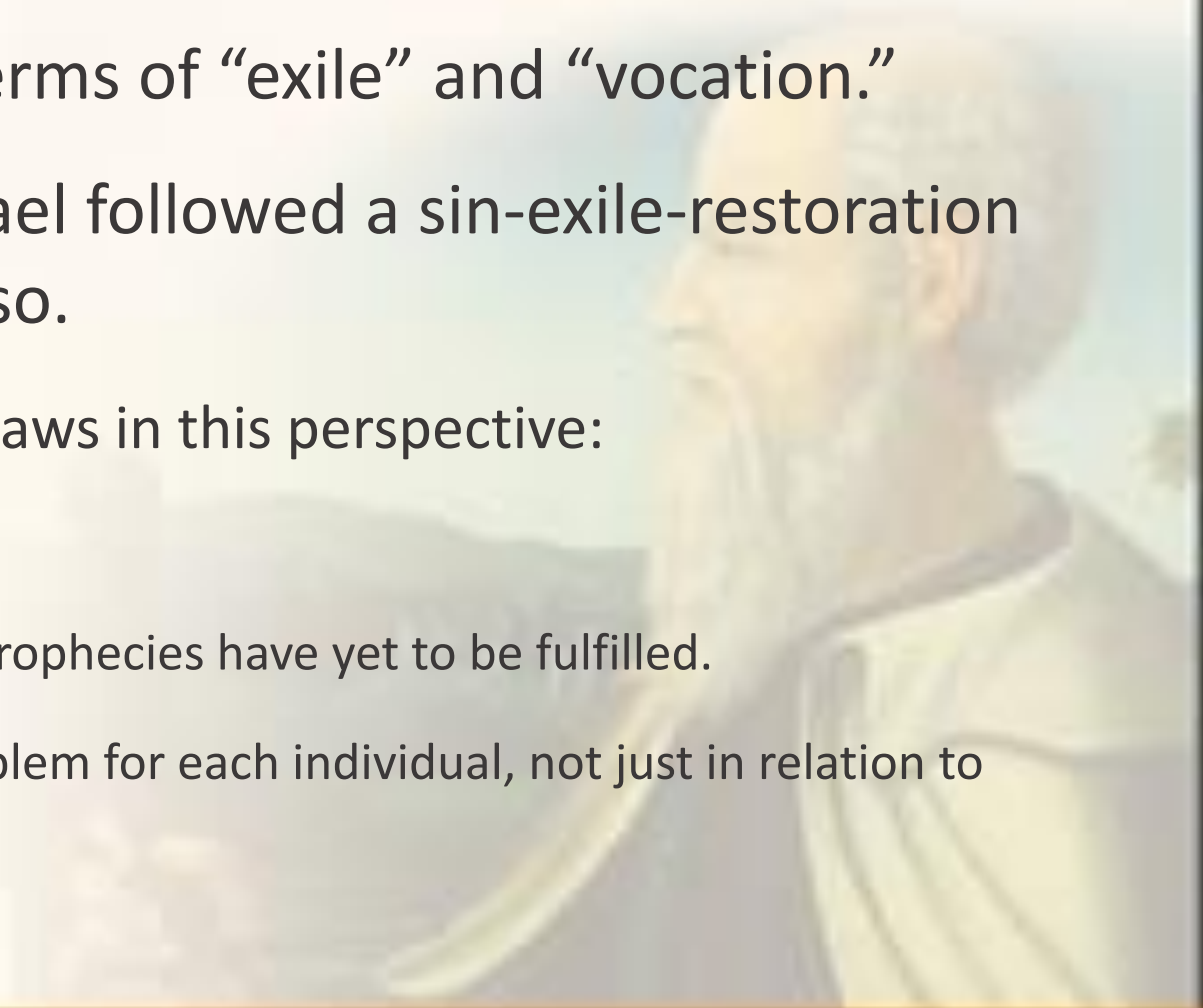
- Another perspective is the vocational failure of Israel.

  - Israel was called to steward God's creation and had failed to do so.

  - They also failed to worship God, which was also part of their vocation.

  - The author argued that this does not address the issue of sin, which is the root of vocational failure.
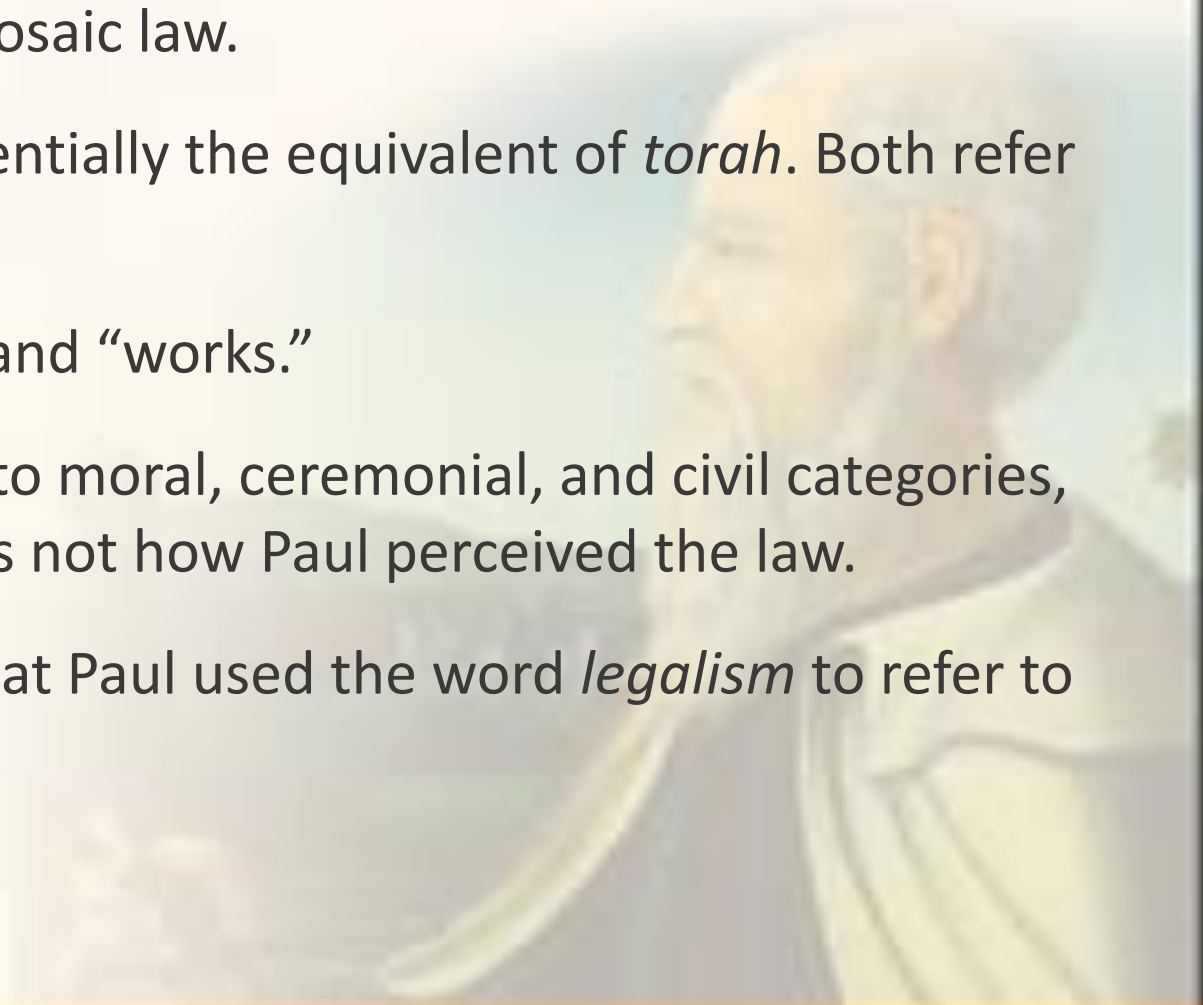
- The Law (Torah)
  - God's law is part of the old realm.
  - It is good, holy, righteous, and spiritual.
 - It also brings wrath, increases with sin, and arouses sinful passions.
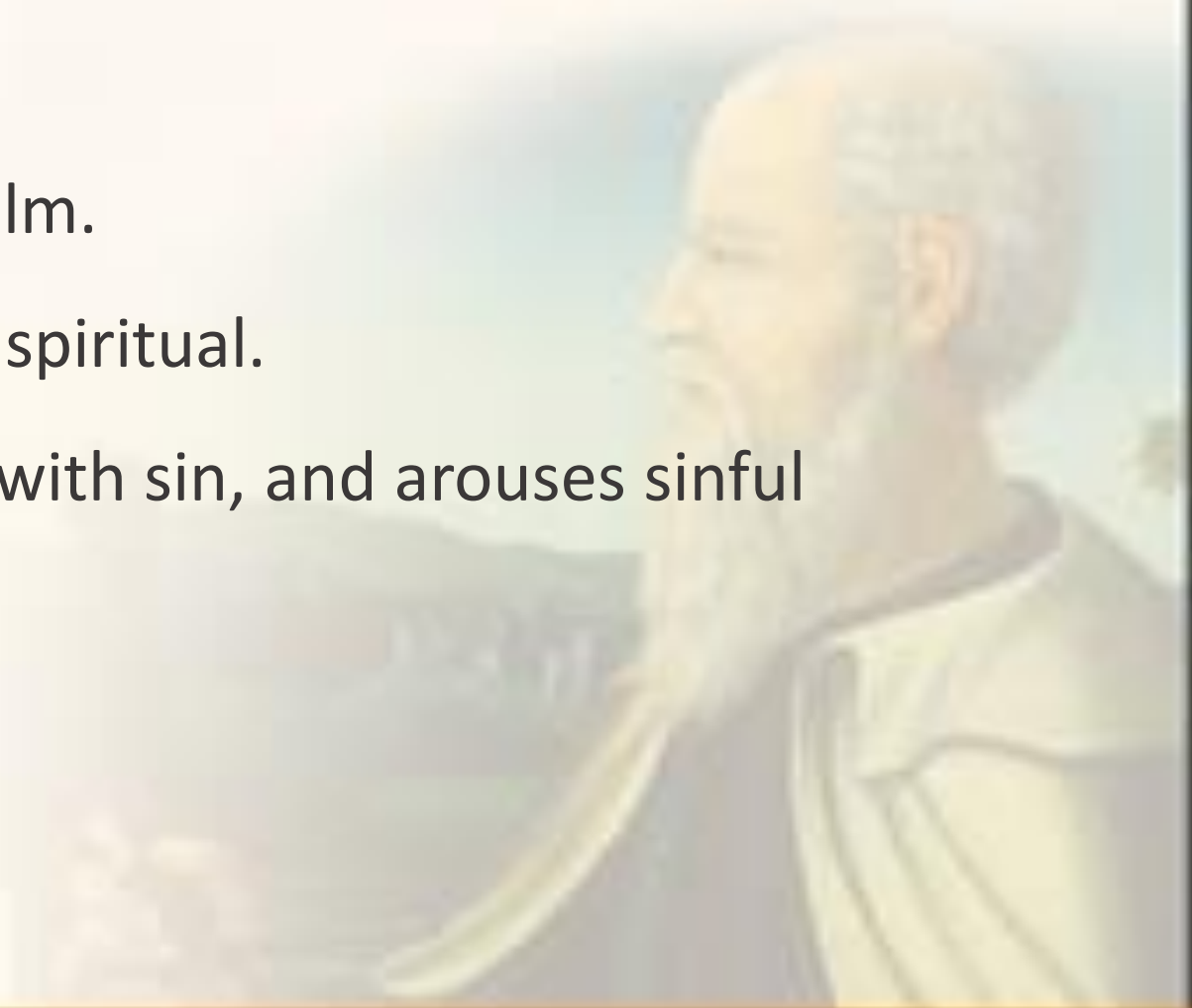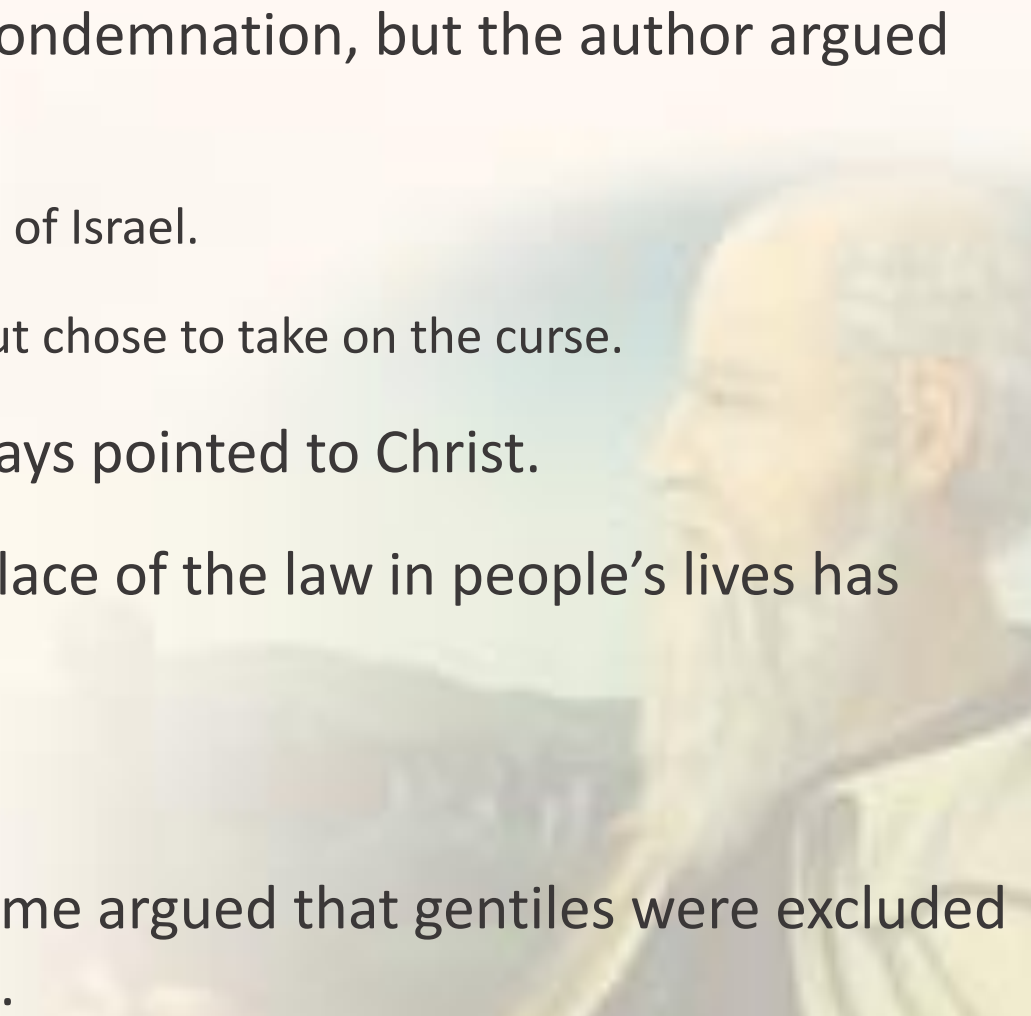
- Definition: Law and Torah

  - Paul taught frequently about Mosaic law.

  - The Hebrew word *nomos* is essentially the equivalent of *torah*. Both refer to Mosaic law.

  - Paul equated this with "doing" and "works."

  - Some scholars divide the law into moral, ceremonial, and civil categories, but the author believed this was not how Paul perceived the law.

  - There is insufficient evidence that Paul used the word *legalism* to refer to the law.

- The Law as Torah: Fundamental Salvation-Historical Perspective

  - The law was delivered after God's promise to Abraham.

  - It was meant to increase sin in order to show just how much sin violates God's goodness.

  - Paul taught that humans were "under the law."

  - The article is sometimes left out, but the author didn't believed it changed which law Paul was referring to.
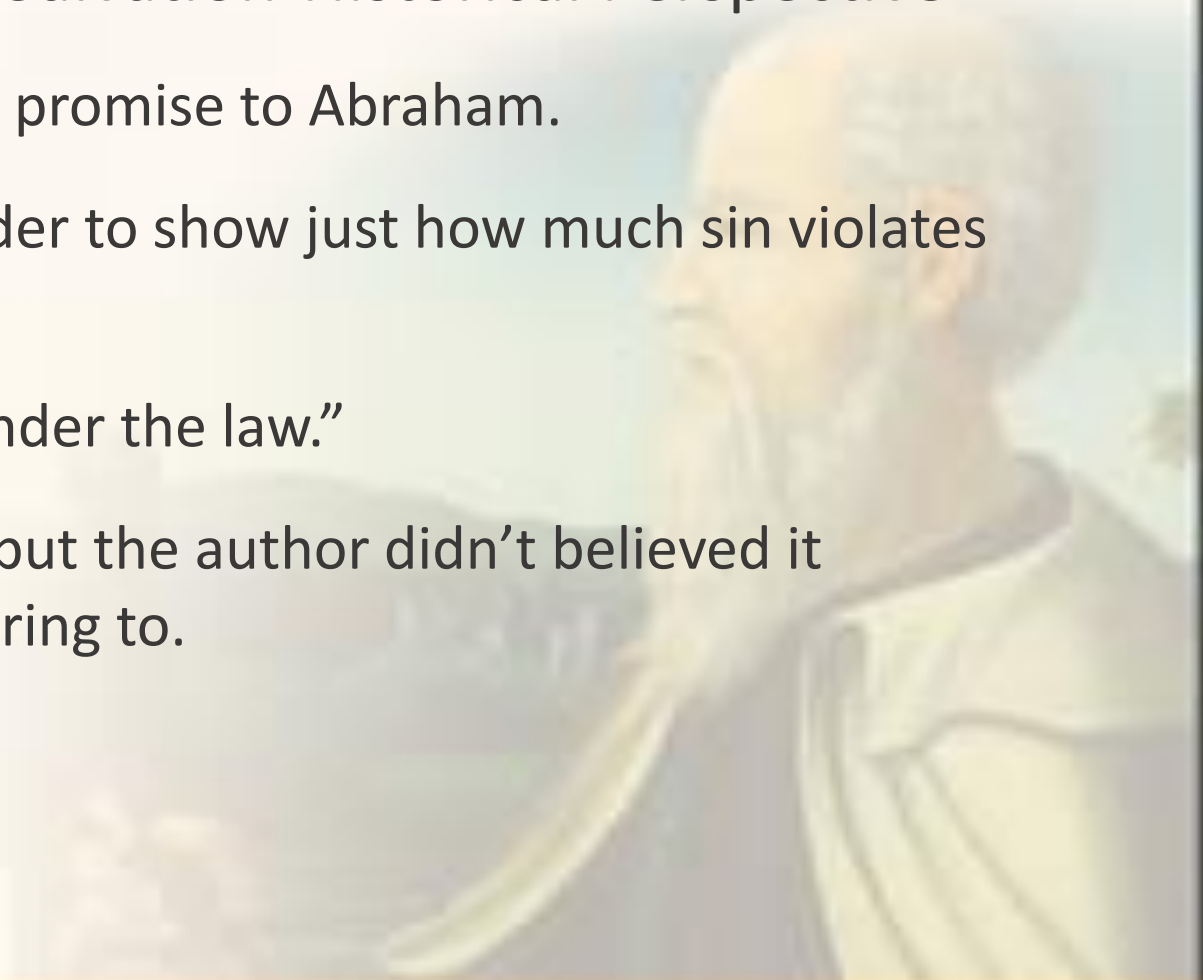
- "Under the law" could refer to condemnation, but the author argued against this with two points:

  1. It refers to the law's custodianship of Israel.

  2. Jesus was "born under the law" but chose to take on the curse.

- Paul taught that the law has always pointed to Christ.

- Now that Christ has come, the place of the law in people's lives has changed.

- The Problem with the Law

  - The Jewish-Christians of Paul's time argued that gentiles were excluded from being God's chosen people.
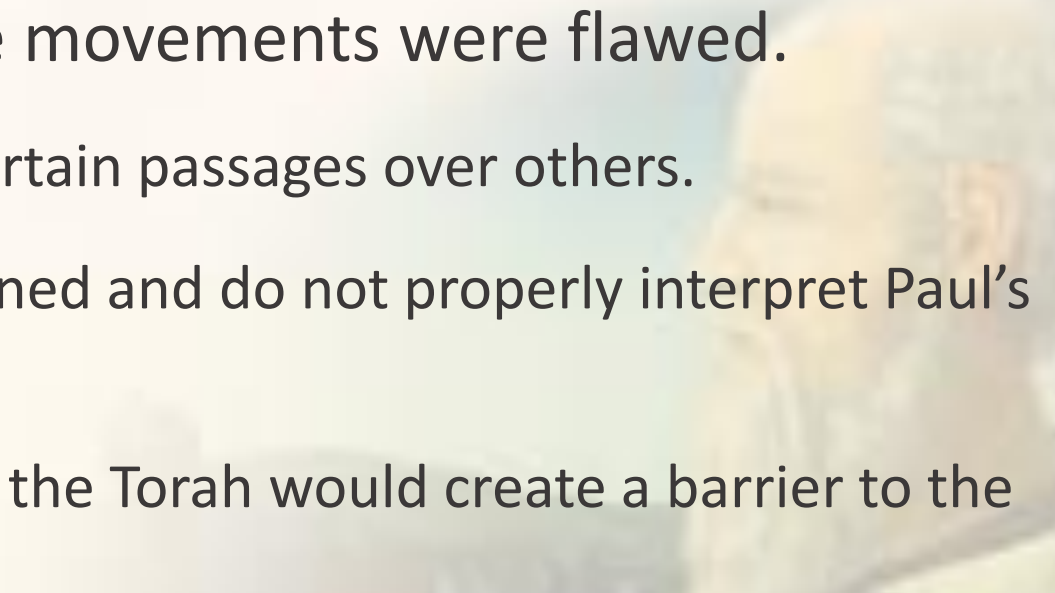
- The New Perspective
  - The New Perspective on Paul is rooted in Judaism.
  - It is based on the history of Jewish practices.
  - The defining characteristics of the New Perspective:
    - Jews were legalistic, and this affected Paul's theology.
    - A new stage of salvation history dawned with the death and resurrection of Christ.
    - This new stage included gentiles as a part of salvation history.
    - Jews rejected this, which was ethnic exclusivism, not personal legalism.
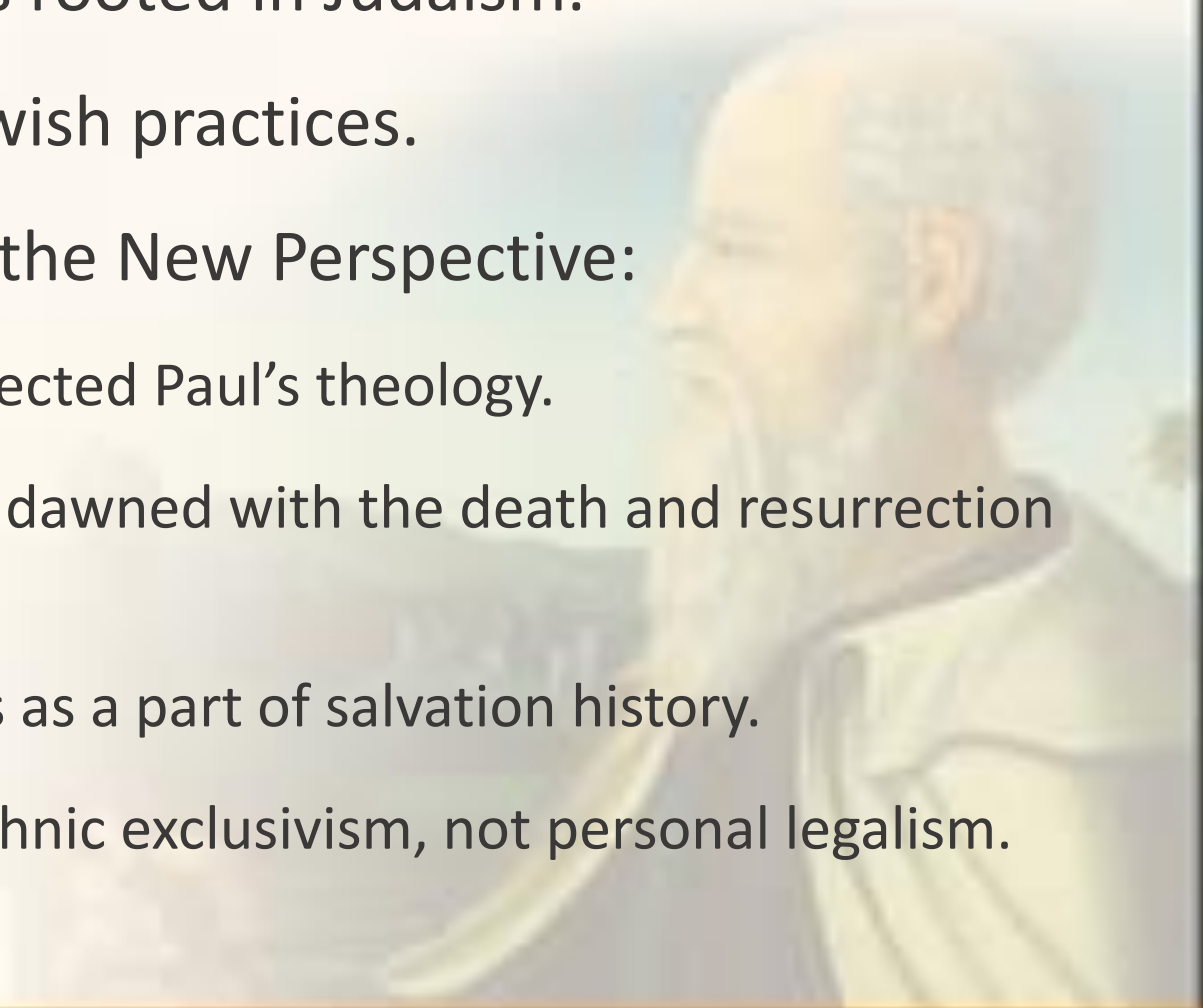
- Beyond the New Perspective
  - There are different movements within the new perspective:
    - "Paul within Judaism" states that Paul only opposed the law being applied to gentiles but still observed the Torah.
    - Messianic Judaism states that Christ is the Savior of both Jews and gentiles.
    - The "bi-covenantal" movement states that Paul believed that only gentiles were saved but that Jews still needed to obey the Torah.

- The author believed all these movements were flawed.

    - They depend on privileging certain passages over others.

    - Many of the theories are strained and do not properly interpret Paul's texts.

    - To insist on the observance of the Torah would create a barrier to the unity Paul worked toward.

- Works of the Law

  - Scholars have debated the meaning of the "works of the law."

  - Some believe it is restricted and teaches that reliance on the law is dangerous and fruitless.

  - Others believe it was speaking of Jewish conformity to the law, which separated Jews from gentiles.
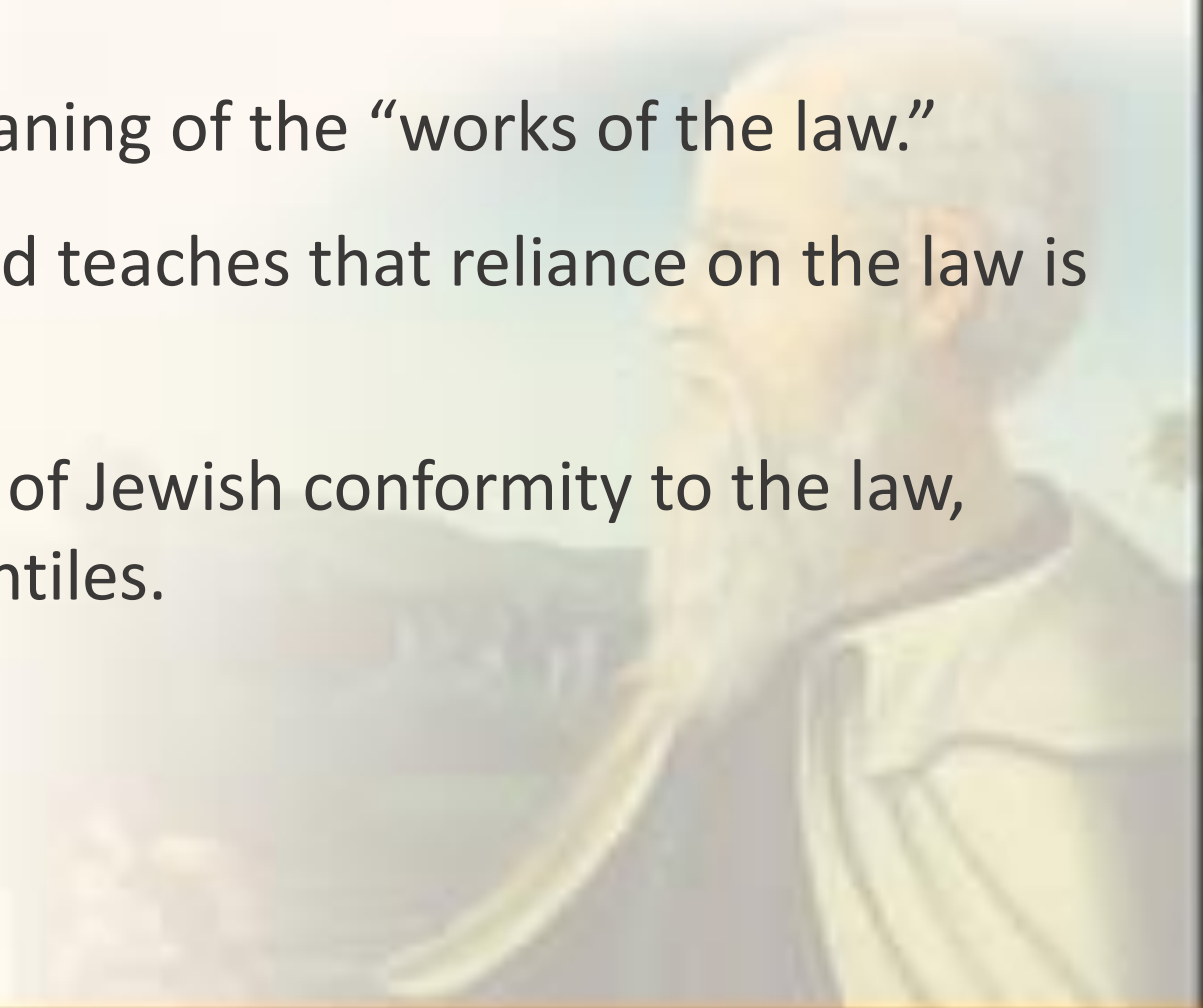
- The author believed the question was more about the significance of the phrase "works of the law" rather than the meaning of it.
  - Jews used the law to establish their own status and to exclude gentiles.
  - Obedience to the law also had significant intrinsic value as being the source of maintaining covenant membership.
  - The equivalents of the phrase from Paul's world do suggest what the New Perspective followers have stated.
  - "Works of the law" and "works" should be viewed as interchangeable.
  - The Jews possessed the law but did not perform it.
 - Humans cannot be justified through their works.
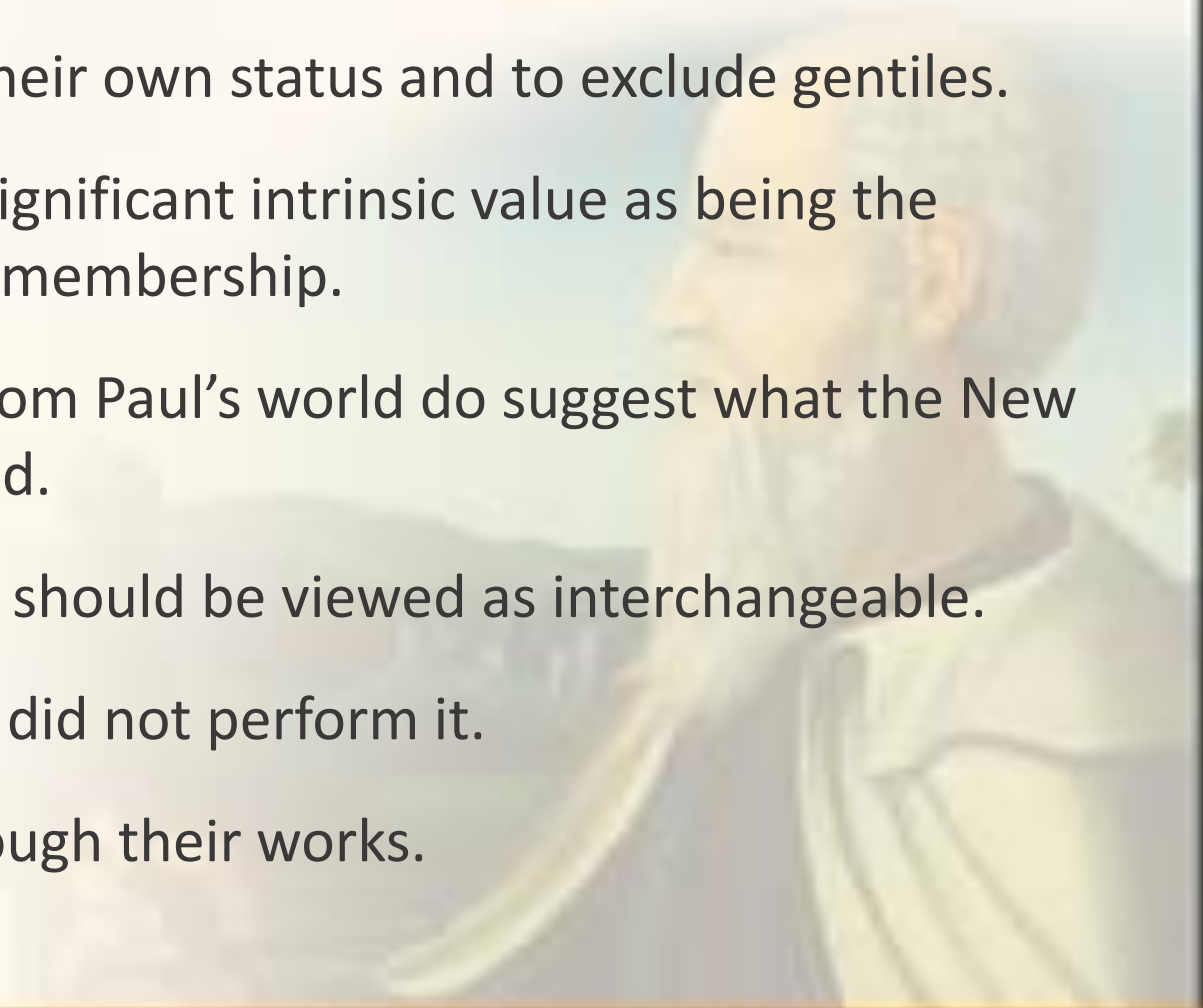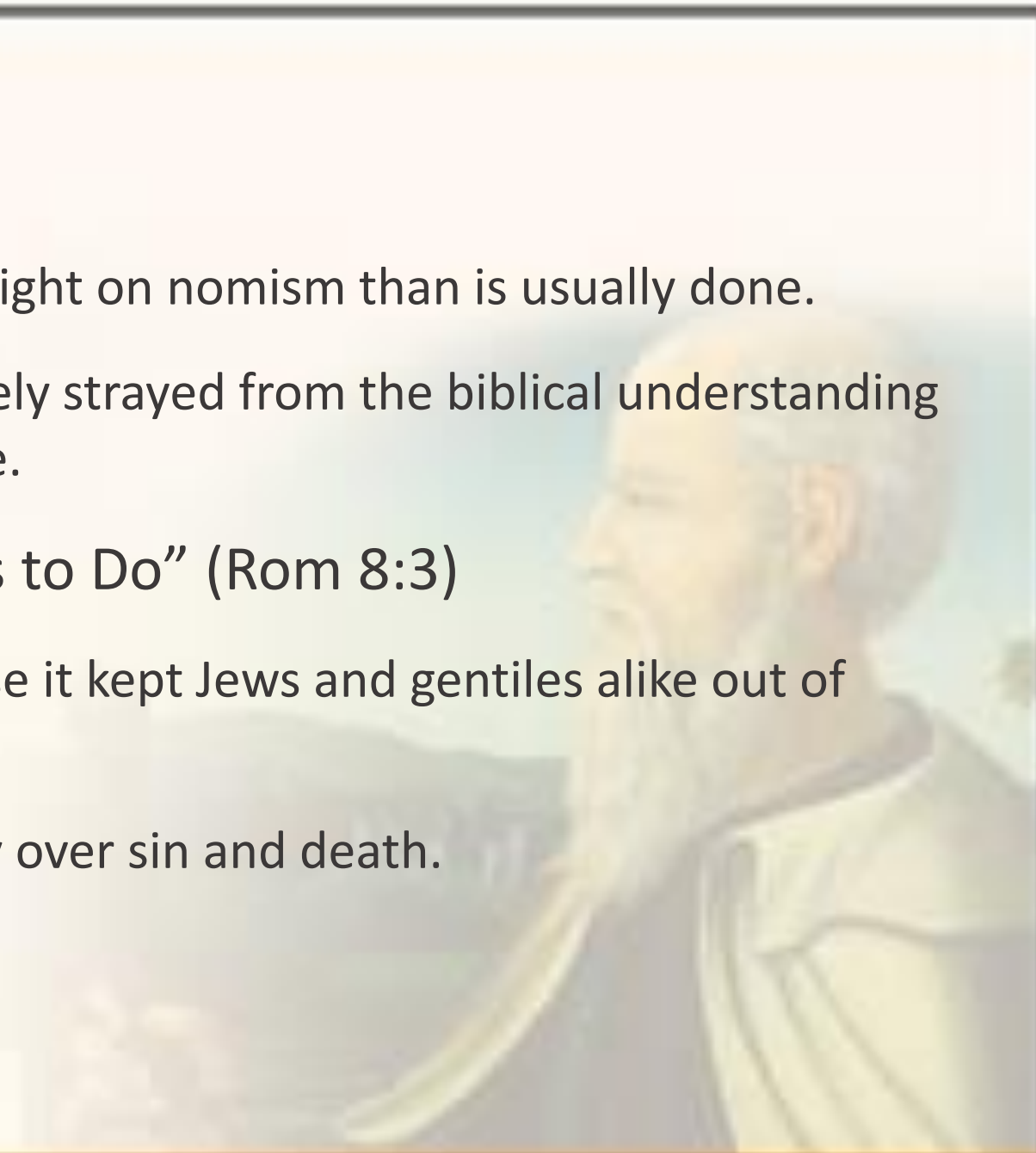
- The New Perspective Again

  - The author believed there are portions of New Perspective that should be adopted, and this should be used to add to and qualify Reformative teaching.

- The author also disqualified portions of the New Perspective on Judaism (covenantal nomism).
  - There was a great deal of diversity in Jewish soteriology, and this should be taken into consideration.
  - "Covenant" may not have had the significance in early Jewish theology that it has now.
  - "Election" was viewed more as an individual or community election rather than as national election.
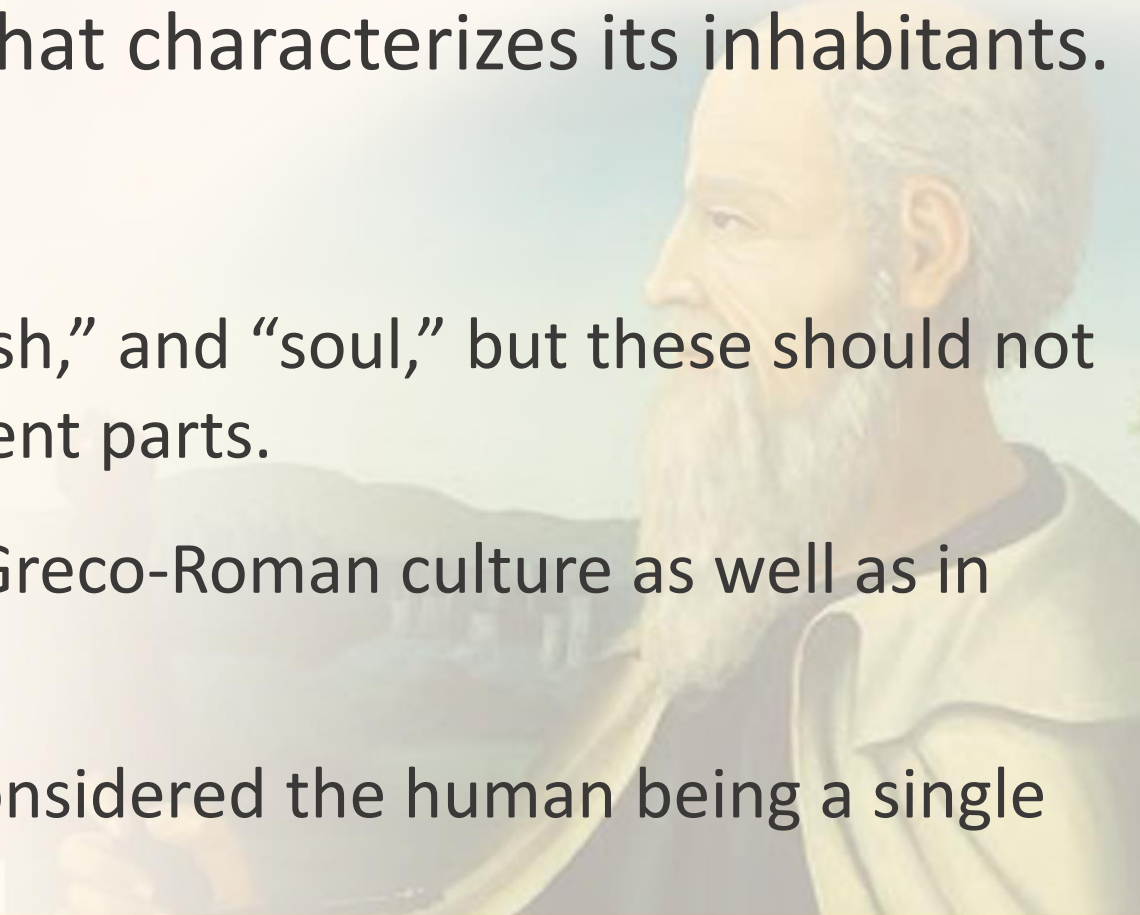 - "Grace" is a strong element of Jewish faith and is not something that differs between Judaism and Christianity.
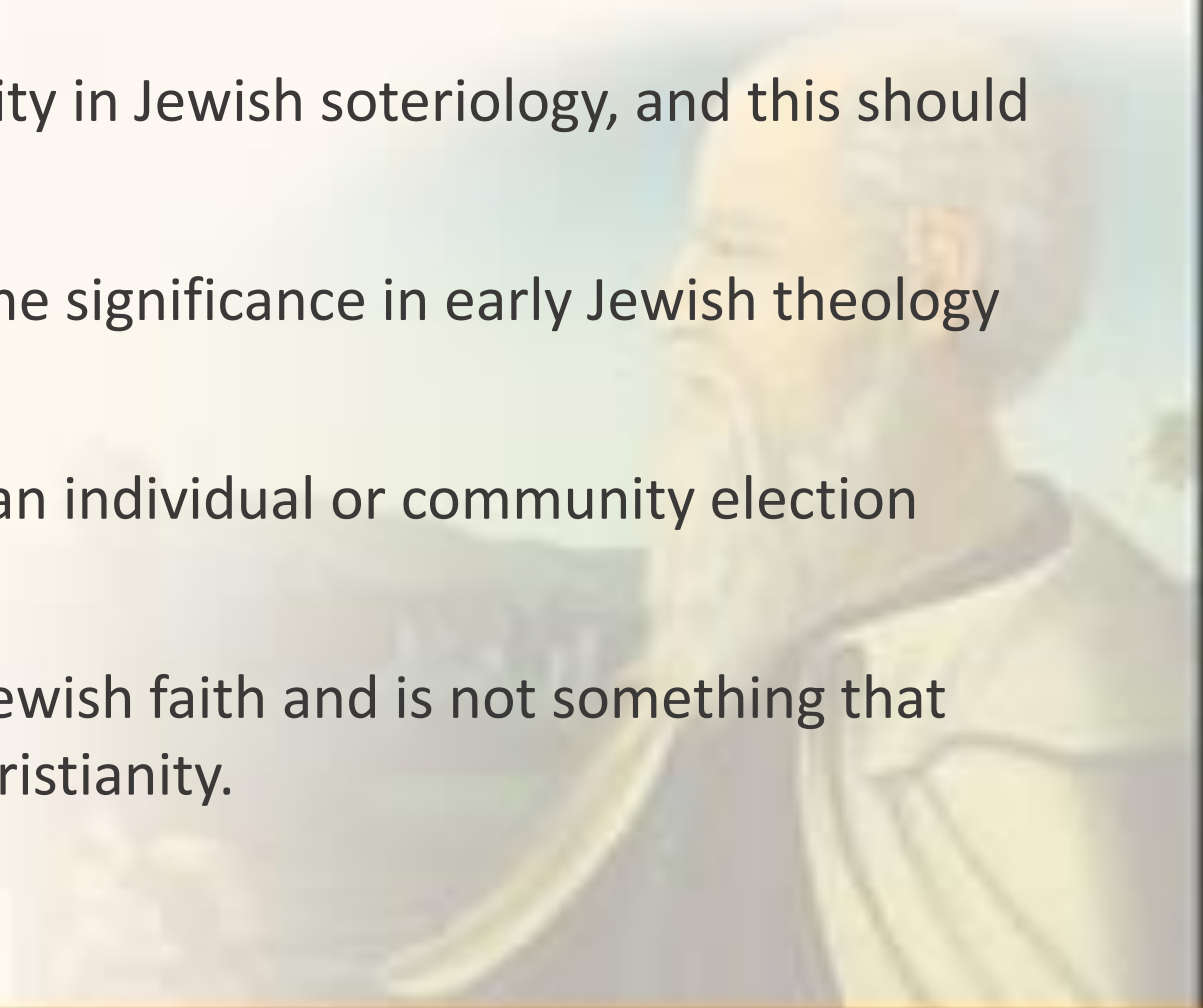
- The movement places more weight on nomism than is usually done.

- Some first-century Jews had likely strayed from the biblical understanding of the sufficiency of God's grace.

- "What the Law Was Powerless to Do" (Rom 8:3)

  - Paul questioned the law because it kept Jews and gentiles alike out of God's favor.

  - The law could never win victory over sin and death.

- Torah and "Law"
  - Paul used the salvation-historical narrative as a paradigm.
    - He used the Israelites' experience to help readers understand the human condition.
  - Paul referred to the concept of divine commandments that are accessible by all humans (natural law).
    - This provides the basis for the universal ethic that shapes a nation's positive laws.
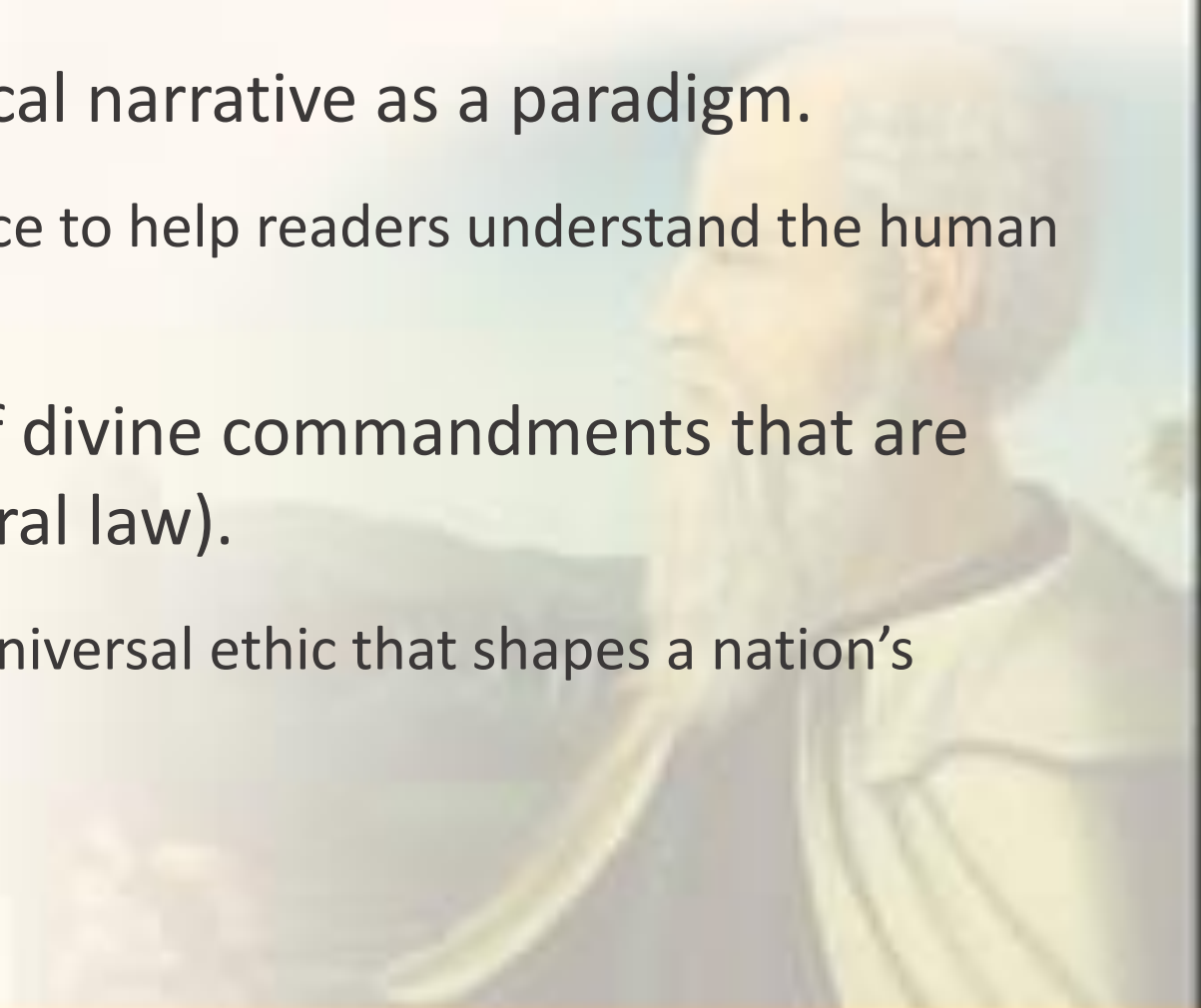
The Nature of Human Beings

- The old realm is a form of life that characterizes its inhabitants.

- Preliminary Points

  - Paul referred to the "body," "flesh," and "soul," but these should not be considered as defining different parts.

  - The "body-soul" was rooted in Greco-Roman culture as well as in Christianity.

 - Paul had a monistic view that considered the human being a single entity.

- Paul contrasted Adam and Christ.

  - Humans bear the image of God, but Christians can grow in their potential to manifest God.

  - This is also apparent in the terms "old man" and "new man."

   - Those who are "in Adam" exist as the "old man" and live under sin and death.
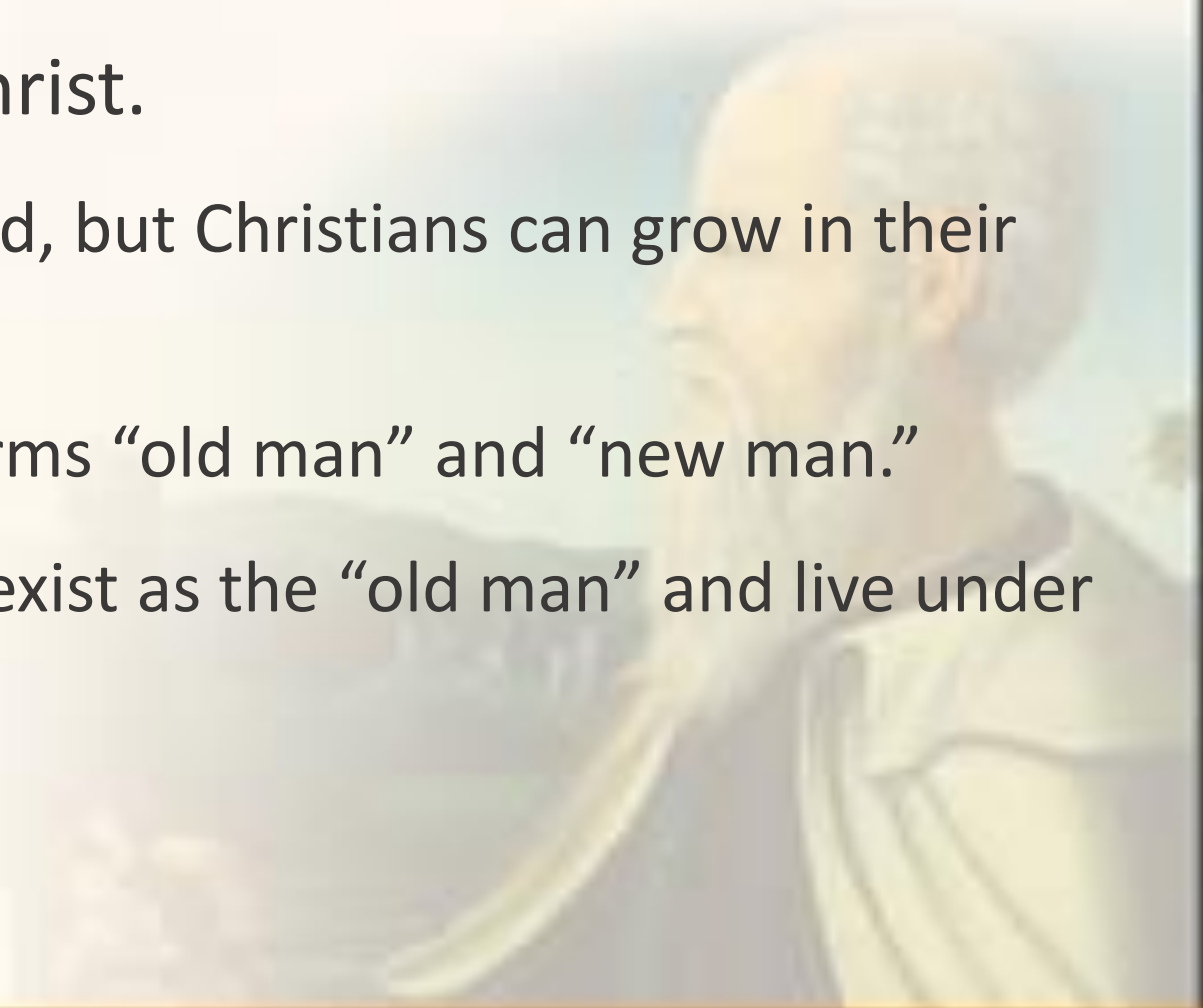
- Paul's Anthropological Terms
  - Flesh (*sarx*)
    - This is one of Paul's most difficult words because it is complex.
    - It has multiple references:
      - The part of the body that covers the bones of a body.
      - The human body as a whole.
      - The human being in general.
      - The human condition.
   - The fallen human condition.
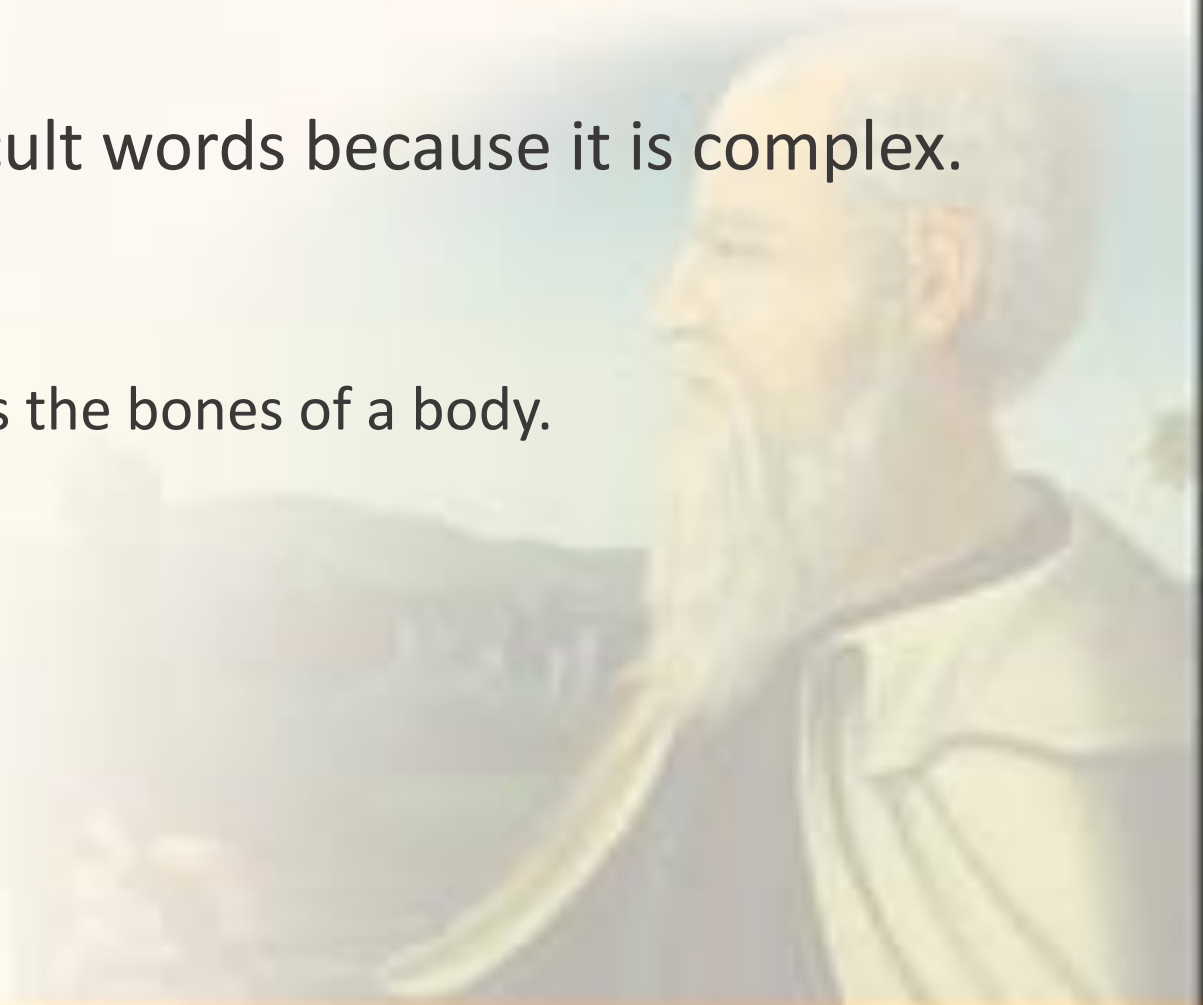
- "Flesh" has a negative connotation even when it is used neutrally.

- It is important to view "flesh" as being connected to sin.

- Spirit (*pneuma*)

  - Paul primarily used this to refer to the Holy Spirit.

  - Paul preferred "spirit" to "soul."

  - Paul also used the term for:

    - An attitude shared by people

    - Spiritual beings

    - A rhetorical contrast with the Holy Spirit.
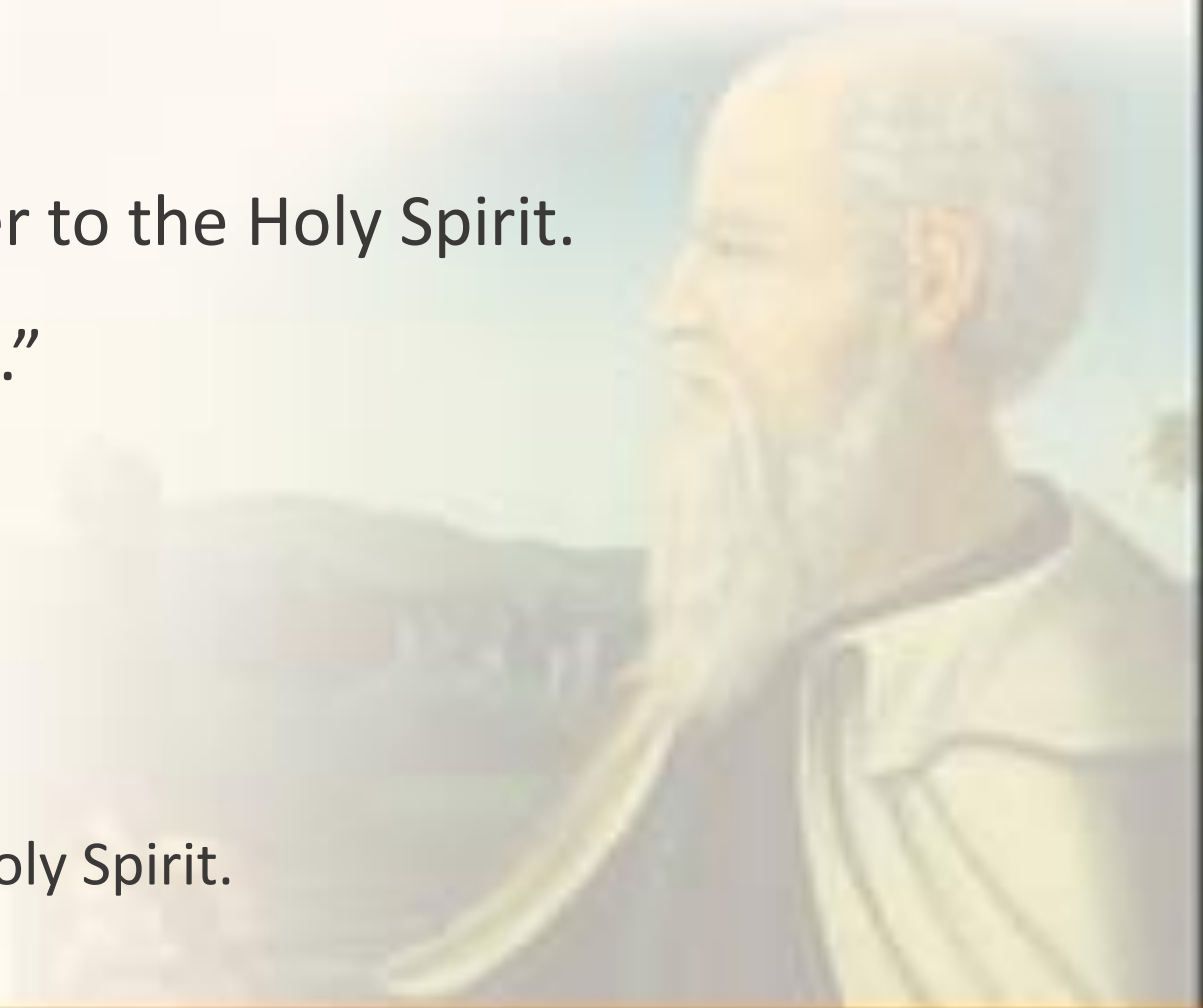
- Soul (*psychē*)
  - Paul used it to refer to the inner part of the human being.
  - He also used it to refer to a person as a whole as viewed from one's inner life.
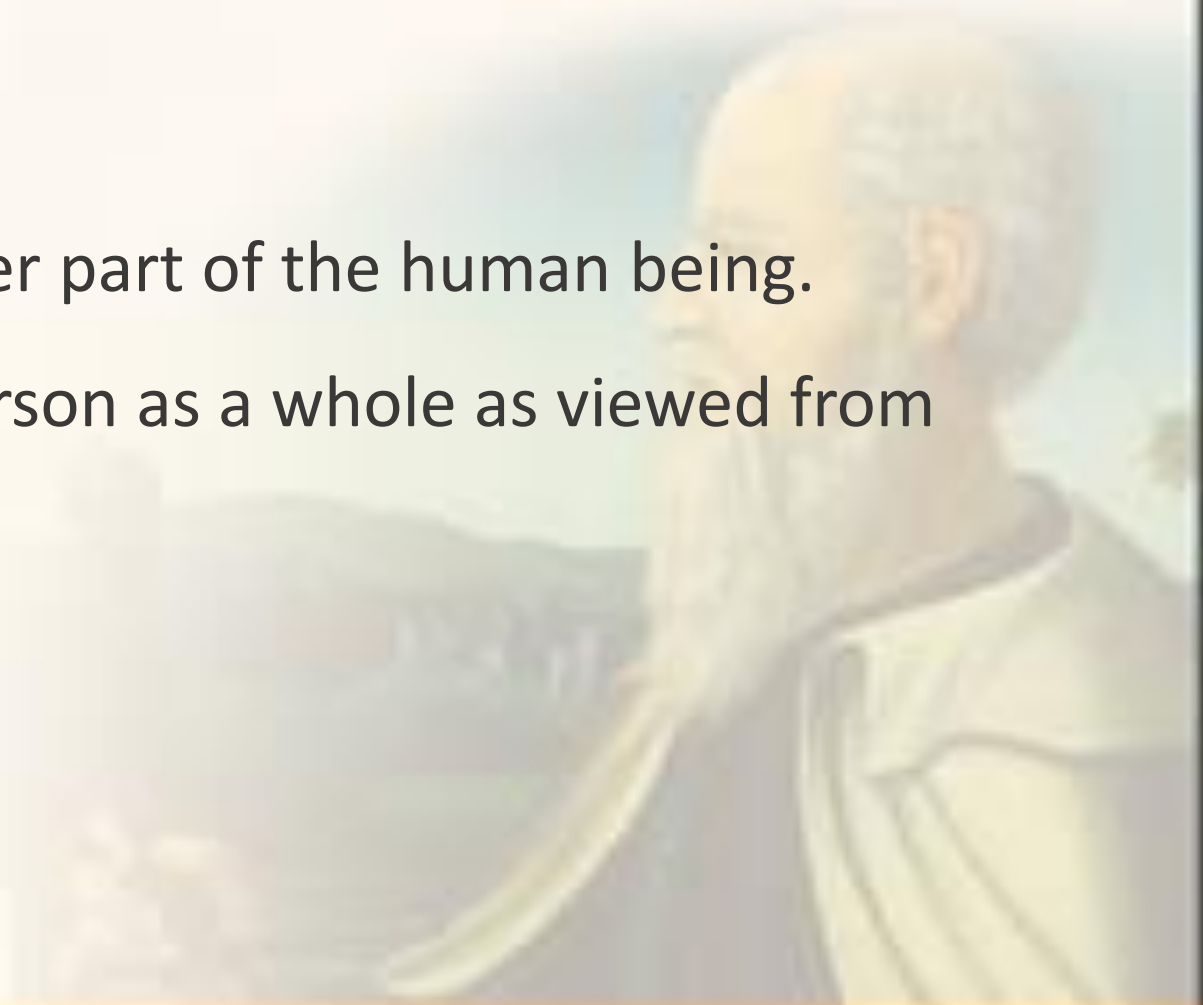
- Body (*sōma*)
  - Paul used this term frequently as a theological theme:
    - Honoring God in our bodies
    - Refraining from practices that ignore the importance of Christ's physical body
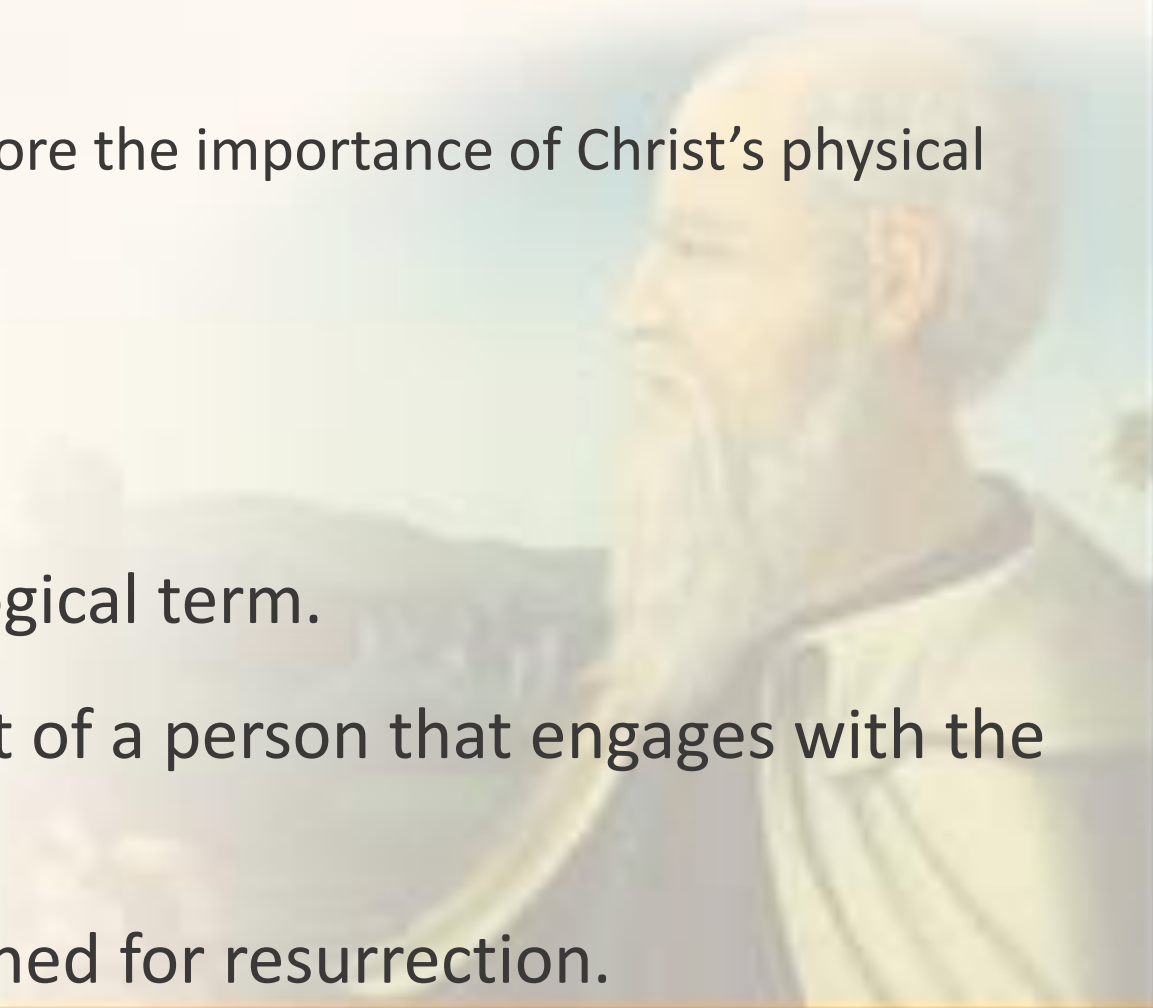   - The church
    - The resurrection body
  - He also used it as an anthropological term.
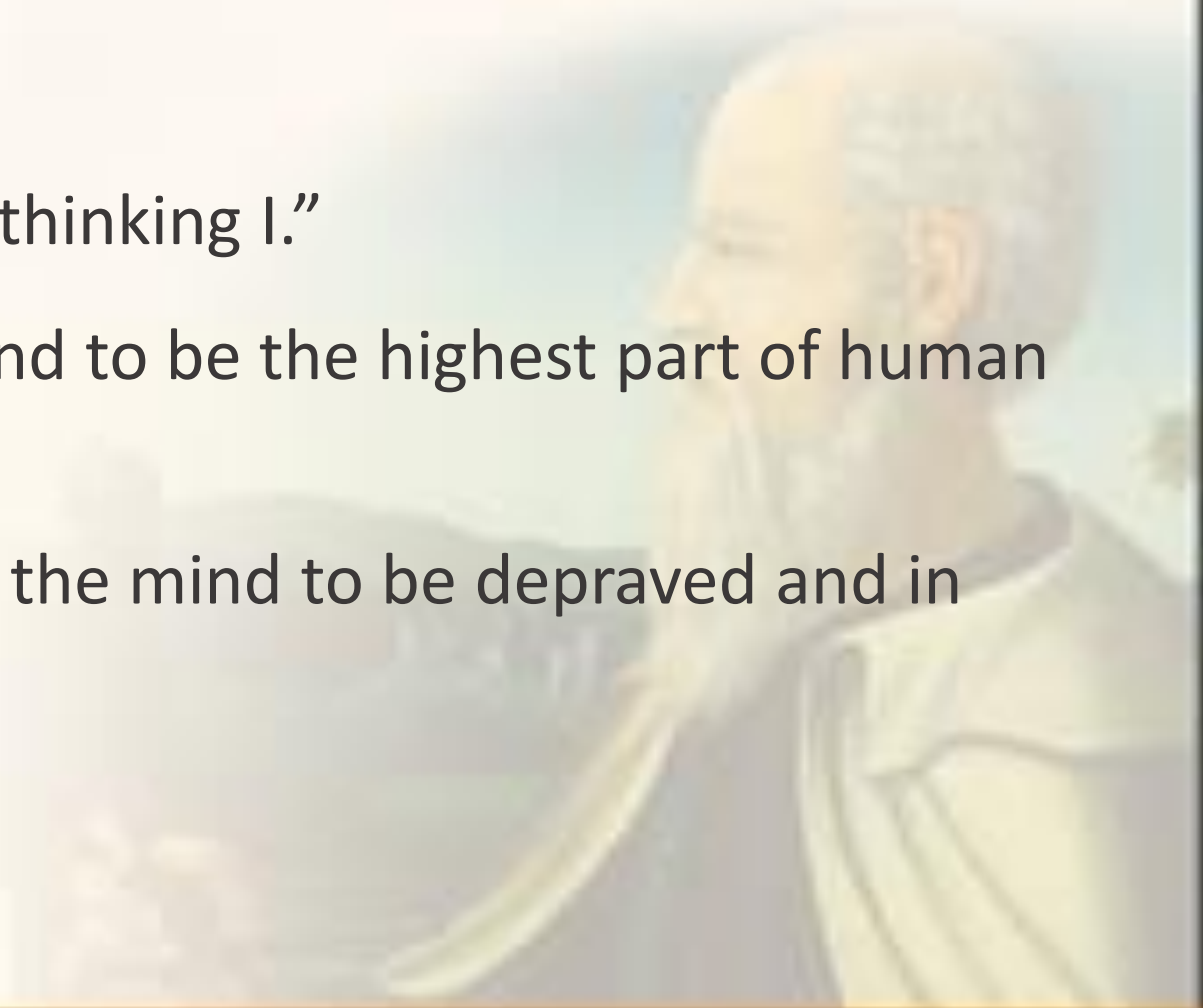 - His usage of it indicated the part of a person that engages with the world.
  - He taught that the body is destined for resurrection.

- Mind (*nous*)
  - Paul used this to refer to the "thinking I."
  - The Greeks considered the mind to be the highest part of human beings.
  - Paul disagreed; he considered the mind to be depraved and in need of renewal.
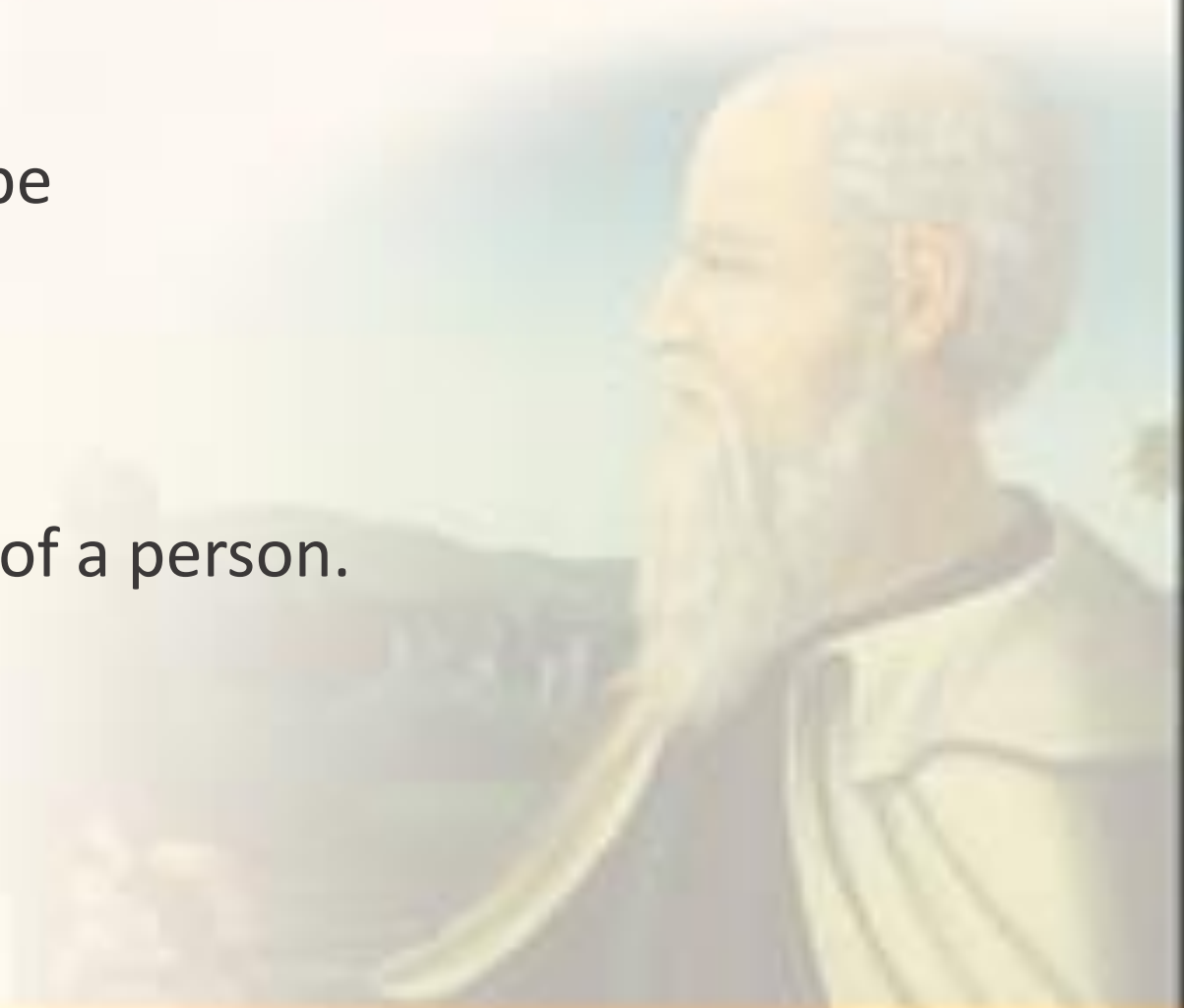
- Heart (*kardia*)
  - Paul considered the heart to be
    - The seat of emotions;
    - The center of a person's being.
  - It determines the orientation of a person.

- Human Incapacity

  - Paul believed humans are unable to please God.

  - He noted that both Jews and gentiles are capable of refusing the knowledge of God given to them.

  - This returns to "solution-to-plight."

    - Because humans are under the power of sin, only God's grace can save them.