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Pauline Ethics in Comparative Perspective with Qur'anic Teachings on Mercy, Responsibility, and Moral Transformation[1]

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Abstract

This article presents a critical comparative analysis of Pauline ethics, focusing on its soteriological, pneumatological, sacramental, love-centered, and eschatological dimensions. Utilizing key New Testament texts and scholarly interpretations, it explores how Paul situates moral life within God's saving work in Christ, the empowering presence of the Spirit, participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper, the primacy of love, and the tension between the "Already" and the "Not yet." The book pays special attention to the social orientation of Pauline love as a principle that shapes community life and counters self-centeredness. These

[1]. Author Note:
This article is a revised and expanded version of the original work by Professor Rantoa Letsosa. The revisions include a literature review, a more developed comparative discussion of sacramental ethics with Qur'anic analogues (prayer, fasting, and almsgiving), sustained engagement with Shabbir Akhtar's (2018) *The New Testament in Muslim Eyes*, and a strengthened conclusion on the social orientation of love. The authors thank Professor Letsosa for his foundational work and constructive feedback on this expanded version.

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themes are then examined in dialogue with Qur'anic perspectives on divine mercy, human responsibility, piety, prophetic continuity, and individual accountability. Although both traditions assert that ethical living depends on divine initiative and must be expressed in concrete relationships, significant differences arise concerning the role of Christ's death, the nature of moral responsibility, the function of religious practices, and the trajectory of salvation history. The article argues that a careful comparative reading clarifies both the internal coherence of Pauline ethics and the distinctive theological framework of the Qur'an, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of moral thought in both scriptural traditions.

Keywords: Pauline Ethics, Soteriology, Holy Spirit, Sacramental Ethics, Agape, Eschatology, Qur'anic Ethics, Comparative Theology, Social Responsibility.

Introduction

Pauline ethics occupies a central place in New Testament moral theology. Rather than presenting a systematic ethical code, Paul grounds the moral life of believers in the saving work of God in Christ, the empowering presence of the Spirit, participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper, the primacy of love, and an eschatological tension between the "Already" of the new creation and the "Not yet" of final consummation. These interconnected dimensions, soteriological, pneumatological, sacramental, love-centered, and eschatological, form a coherent vision of Christian existence that has shaped subsequent Christian thought. A further distinctive feature of this vision is the social orientation of Pauline love, which resists self-centeredness and shapes relations within the community.

Although Christian theology has studied Pauline ethics extensively, comparative engagement with Qur'anic moral perspectives remains limited, especially in the Iranian academic context. While Persian scholarship has addressed certain aspects of Paul's thought, sustained dialogue between the

comprehensive structure of Pauline ethics and the Qur'anic understanding of divine mercy, human responsibility, piety, and prophetic continuity is underdeveloped. This gap is significant, as both traditions emphasize the dependence of ethical life on divine initiative, yet differ substantially in their soteriological and anthropological frameworks.

The dimensions of Pauline ethics examined in this study are not isolated themes but interconnected layers of a single moral vision. Soteriological ethics provides the foundation: moral life follows God's prior saving act in Christ rather than preceding it. Pneumatological ethics supplies the power: the same grace that justifies also enables transformed living through the indwelling Spirit. Sacramental ethics links participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper with moral obligation. The social orientation of love extends this ethic beyond the individual to community formation and the pursuit of justice. Love ethics gives the concrete content and criterion of the new life, fulfilling the law and shaping relations with others. Finally, eschatological ethics situates the whole moral existence within the tension between the "Already" and the "Not yet," generating urgency and hope. Together these dimensions form a coherent structure in which divine initiative, empowerment, communal practice, moral content, and future orientation are inseparably related.

This study addresses the comparative gap by critically analyzing these dimensions in relation to relevant Qur'anic themes. It investigates how Paul connects salvation, the Spirit, the sacraments, love, and eschatology to moral transformation, and juxtaposes these elements with Qur'anic teachings on faith and righteous deeds, individual accountability, divine assistance, and the continuity of revelation. The objective is not to impose artificial

harmonization, but to clarify both the internal logic of Pauline ethics and the distinctive theological contours of the Qur'anic moral vision.

The article first outlines the soteriological foundation of Paul's ethics, and then examines the role of the Spirit, the ethical significance of the sacraments, the social orientation of love, the centrality of love ethics, and the eschatological orientation of moral life. Each section incorporates a comparative discussion with Qur'anic perspectives. The study concludes by reflecting on the points of convergence and divergence identified through this dialogue.

1. Review of Related Literature

Research on Pauline ethics has consistently emphasized that Paul's moral vision is not an independent ethical system but a theological framework grounded in God's saving action in Christ, the work of the Holy Spirit, participation in the life of the Church, and the eschatological hope of the new creation. Among the most influential studies, Matera (2012) presents Pauline ethics as an integrated theological vision in which salvation, grace, the Spirit, and ethical transformation constitute inseparable dimensions of Christian existence. Likewise, Furnish (2009) argues that Paul's ethical exhortations derive their authority from the indicative of God's saving act rather than from an autonomous moral code. Hays (1996) further highlights the centrality of the cross, community, and new creation as the primary hermeneutical framework of Pauline moral reasoning.

Persian scholarship has explored several individual aspects of Pauline ethics without offering a comprehensive account of its theological structure. Arsanjani and Zarvani (2019 AD/1398 SH) interpret Paul's ethics through the

lens of Christ-mysticism and emphasize the Spirit's transformative role in mediating divine love. Sadeghiyan and Amir Yazdani (2016 AD/1395 SH) compare Pauline ethics with Aristotelian virtue ethics and conclude that the two traditions rest upon fundamentally different anthropological and theological assumptions. Safaei Sadegh and Haj Ibrahimi (2022 AD/1401 SH) investigate the relationship between law and salvation in Paul's thought, arguing that his critique of the Mosaic Law is inseparable from his understanding of justification through Christ.

Comparative studies between the Qur'an and Pauline thought remain relatively limited and have generally focused on particular theological questions rather than the overall ethical structure of Paul's thought. Ismaeili, Fathollahi, and Rahmati (2020 AD/1399 SH) identify several common ethical principles shared by the Qur'an and the Bible, including justice, compassion, and responsibility. Still, they do not examine the theological foundations that generate these moral values. Bayati and Ismaeili (2019 AD/1398 SH) analyze the portrayal of Peter and Paul in Islamic exegetical literature, concentrating on historical and interpretive traditions rather than ethical theology. Khani et al., (2022 AD/1401 SH) likewise investigate the historical image of Paul in the New Testament, the Qur'an, and hadith without addressing the internal coherence of Pauline ethics.

Among English-language comparative studies, Akhtar's "The New Testament in Muslim Eyes" (2018 AD) represents one of the most substantial Muslim engagements with Pauline theology. Through a close reading of Galatians, Akhtar analyses Paul's understanding of faith, grace, the law, and justification from an Islamic perspective and demonstrates important theological differences between the two traditions. Nevertheless, his

discussion concentrates primarily on soteriology and the doctrine of justification rather than providing a systematic comparison of the broader ethical architecture of Pauline thought.

The preceding review highlights two significant gaps in the literature. First, most studies have examined isolated aspects of Pauline ethics, such as justification, the law, or love, without analyzing the interrelationship among its soteriological, pneumatological, sacramental, love-centered, and eschatological components as a unified ethical framework. Second, comparative scholarship has seldom engaged this integrated structure in sustained dialogue with the Qur'anic understanding of divine mercy, piety, moral responsibility, prophetic continuity, and eschatological accountability. To address these gaps, this study undertakes a comprehensive comparative analysis aimed not only at identifying similarities and differences, but also at clarifying the distinct theological logic by which each scriptural tradition conceptualizes moral transformation and ethical responsibility.

2. Dimensions of Pauline Ethics

Paul’s ethical vision is not organized as a systematic moral code but as interconnected theological dimensions that together shape the believer's moral life. The following sections examine these dimensions in turn: the soteriological foundation of ethics in God’s saving work in Christ; the pneumatological empowerment provided by the Spirit; the ethical significance of baptism and the Lord’s Supper; the social orientation of love; the centrality of love ethics as the fulfillment of the law; and the eschatological tension between the "Already" and the "Not yet." Each dimension is first presented in its Pauline context and then brought into

comparative dialogue with relevant Qur'anic teachings on mercy, responsibility, and moral transformation.

2.1. Soteriological Ethics

Paul's moral teaching is fundamentally soteriological. It is grounded in God's saving work in Christ rather than in human effort or the observance of the law (Matera, 2012). According to Paul, believers receive justification, reconciliation, and sanctification through Christ's death and resurrection. As a result of this divine action, they become a "New Creation" (2 Cor 5:17) and are empowered to live in a manner consistent with their new identity. Ethical living is therefore not the means by which salvation is earned, but the consequence of a salvation already accomplished by God.

This logic is visible throughout the Pauline corpus. In Romans, Paul insists that all have sinned and fall short of God's glory, and that justification comes "By his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." (Rom 3:23-24) Believers are not justified by works of the law but through faith in Christ (Gal 2:16; Rom 3:28). Once justified, they are called to "Walk in newness of life" (Rom 6:4). Divine grace thus plays a double role: it is both the cause of salvation and the source of power that enables ethical living (Matera, 2012; Furnish, 2009). Pauline ethics, therefore, rests on God's prior saving action in Christ rather than on human will or the performance of the works of the law.

A further implication of this framework concerns the relationship between divine grace and human moral agency. While Paul insists that salvation is entirely God's work, he does not portray the believer as passive. The indicative of what God has already accomplished grounds the imperative of what the believer is now called to do. Both Western and Persian scholarship

have noted this dynamic as a distinctive feature of Pauline thought (Matera, 2012; Safaei Sadeghi et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH).

From a comparative perspective, the Qur'anic vision configures the relationship between divine mercy and human action differently. While the Qur'an emphasizes God's mercy and guidance as essential, it consistently links faith with righteous deeds (Quran 2:25; 4:124; 16:97; 103:1-3). In this framework, good actions are not merely the fruit of a completed salvation but form an integral part of the believer's path of guidance and accountability before God. Persian scholarship has also noted the distinctive way in which Paul relates faith, grace, and moral transformation (Asadi, 2019 AD/1398 SH).

Moreover, two fundamental Qur'anic principles stand in clear tension with the soteriological foundation of Pauline ethics. First, the Qur'an explicitly rejects the crucifixion and death of Jesus, stating that he was neither killed nor crucified, but that it was made to appear so to them, and that God raised him to Himself (Quran 4:157–158). Second, the Qur'an strongly affirms the principle of individual moral responsibility: no soul bears the burden of another (Quran 6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7). Consequently, the Pauline idea that believers are saved through the vicarious death of Christ conflicts with the Qur'anic understanding of both the fate of Jesus and the nature of human accountability before God.

Both traditions affirm that genuine moral transformation ultimately depends on divine assistance rather than unaided human effort. The Qur'an states that success comes only from God (Quran 11:88). This emphasis resonates with Paul's insistence on grace-enabled ethics. Yet the frameworks differ: "In Paul, enablement is mediated through union with Christ; in the

Qur'an, it is located within the direct relationship between the believer and the one God. These differences indicate that while both traditions emphasize divine initiative, their underlying soteriological frameworks diverge significantly."

2.2. Pneumatological Ethics (Spirit Ethics)

In Paul's letters, the Holy Spirit plays a central role in believers' moral life. The Spirit enables the transition from life according to the flesh to life according to the Spirit (Gal 5:16–25). Ethical transformation is not achieved by human effort alone; the Spirit's empowering presence makes it possible (Matera, 2012). Paul presents a sharp contrast between two ways of living: one dominated by the "Flesh" (*sarx*), characterized by self-centered desires and moral failure, and another guided by the Spirit, which produces a transformed character.

The Spirit does not abolish human responsibility. Rather, it creates in the believer the capacity and courage to act according to the divine will. Believers are exhorted to "Walk by the Spirit" and not to gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). Paul presents the Spirit as both the source of moral power and a guide that orients the believer toward holiness and love. The visible result of this Spirit-enabled life is the "Fruit of the Spirit": love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23; Matera, 2012). These qualities are not merely human achievements but the outcome of the Spirit's work within the community of believers.

Thus, Pauline ethics is not only soteriological but also pneumatological: the same grace that saves also empowers moral living through the indwelling Spirit. The indicative of salvation (you have received

the Spirit) grounds the imperative of ethical living (walk by the Spirit). For Paul, the Spirit is not merely an external guide but an indwelling power that reorients the believer's desires and capacities. Walking by the Spirit means participating in the new creation that has already begun, even while the final consummation remains future (Rom 8:9-11; 2 Cor 5:17).

From a comparative perspective, the Spirit's role in Pauline ethics both resonates with and diverges from Quranic concepts of divine guidance and moral transformation. In Paul, the Holy Spirit is the indwelling power that liberates believers from the dominion of the flesh and enables them to produce the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:16-25; Matera, 2012).

In the Qur'anic worldview, moral guidance and transformation are closely linked to divine assistance, piety, and the soul's purification. The Qur'an speaks of a "Spirit" that is sent by God's command (Quran 16:2; 40:15; 17:85), yet this Spirit is generally understood as a created entity rather than a co-equal divine person. Ethical transformation in the Qur'an is achieved through faith, righteous deeds, and continuous piety, which functions as an internal moral compass (Quran 2:197; 49:13; 91:7-10). Persian studies of Pauline ethics have likewise noted the close connection Paul draws between the Spirit and the possibility of a new moral existence (Arsanjani et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH).

While both traditions affirm that genuine moral life depends on divine enablement rather than unaided human effort, the mechanisms differ significantly. Paul locates moral power in the personal indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a consequence of union with Christ. The Qur'an emphasizes human responsibility under divine guidance and the cultivation of piety, without positing an indwelling divine person. These differences reflect the distinct

theological anthropologies of the two traditions and different understandings of how divine power operates within the moral agent.

2.3. Sacramental Ethics

Paul's occasional remarks on baptism and the Lord's Supper also illuminate the connection between salvation and moral obligation. Participation in these practices brings believers into the sphere of God's grace and carries ethical implications for how they are to live. Baptism is associated with the washing away of sins, sanctification, and the call to walk in newness of life (cf. Rom 6:1-4; 1 Cor 6:11). The Lord's Supper, likewise, is not merely a ritual but a participation in the body and blood of Christ that demands consistent moral conduct and excludes behavior incompatible with the community of the new covenant (1 Cor 10:14-22; 11:17-34).

In Matera's analysis, these sacramental references underscore that the experience of grace is inseparable from a transformed pattern of life (Matera, 2012). The believer who shares in the death and resurrection of Christ through baptism, and who partakes of the Lord 's Table, is thereby claimed for a life of obedience and mutual responsibility within the community. This close link between sacramental participation and ethical obligation reveals that, for Paul, religious practice is never merely symbolic; it both expresses and actualizes the new existence made possible by Christ. In comparative perspective, this integration of ritual and ethics differs from the Qur'anic framework, where prescribed practices such as prayer, almsgiving, and fasting function as direct responses to divine guidance rather than as mediations of a prior salvific event.

From a comparative perspective, the Qur'an does not develop an equivalent sacramental framework. Instead, moral transformation is linked to

faith, repentance, righteous deeds, and the observance of divinely prescribed practices such as prayer, almsgiving, and fasting, all understood as expressions of submission to the one God. While both traditions link participation in communal religious life to ethical responsibility, their underlying logic differs: in Paul, the sacraments mediate and actualize Christ's saving work; in the Qur'an, prescribed practices form part of the believer's direct response to divine guidance and covenant.

2.4. Love Ethics (Agapē)

Love (*agapē*) stands at the heart of Paul's ethical vision and functions as the integrating center of his moral thought. It is grounded in God's love and in Christ's self-giving (Rom 5:8; 2 Cor 5:14-15). Paul teaches that God pours this love into believers' hearts through the Holy Spirit (Rom 5:5). Consequently, love is both a divine gift and the obligatory shape of Christian existence. It is not primarily an emotion or a spontaneous feeling, but a deliberate, sustained orientation of the will toward the other's good, even when that orientation involves cost or self-denial.

For Paul, love is the fulfillment of the law: "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law." (Rom 13:8; cf. Gal 5:14) The individual commandments are summed up in the single command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Rom 13:9-10). In this sense, the "Law of Christ" (Gal 6:2) is essentially the law of love. Believers are called to imitate the self-sacrificial pattern of Christ in their daily relations, serving neighbors, bearing one another's burdens, and placing the needs of others above their own (Gal 6:2; Phil 2:1-5).

A distinctive feature of this ethic is its concrete social orientation. Love is not presented as a purely private or inward disposition; it is the

principle that shapes how believers relate to one another and to the wider society. Paul repeatedly exhorts the communities to put the interests of others above their own, to pursue what makes for peace and mutual up building, and to care for the vulnerable (Phil 2:1-5; Rom 14:19; Gal 6:2). When understood as a deliberate commitment to the welfare of the other, love challenges patterns of exclusion, exploitation, and indifference, and extends beyond interpersonal kindness to the formation of a community characterized by mutual responsibility.

The centrality of love is expressed with particular force in 1 Corinthians 13. Even the most impressive spiritual gifts are declared worthless without love. Acts of extreme generosity or self-sacrifice likewise profit nothing if they are not animated by love (1 Cor 13:1-3). Love is patient and kind; it is not envious, arrogant, or rude; it does not insist on its own way; it rejoices in the truth and endures all things (1 Cor 13:4-7). In this description, Paul presents love as a concrete pattern of relational behavior that builds up the community and reflects the character of God revealed in Christ.

Thus, love integrates the various dimensions of Pauline ethics. The grace that saves and the Spirit that empowers are practically expressed in a life shaped by *agapē*. In the absence of love, the believer's new identity and the Spirit's power remain incomplete in their moral realization.om a comparative perspective, Paul's ethic of *agapē* invites dialogue with Qur'anic teachings on mercy, love, and compassion. In Paul, love is grounded in God's prior self-giving in Christ and is poured into believers' hearts through the Spirit (Rom 5:5, 8; Matera, 2012). It fulfills the law and shapes life in community (Rom 13:8-10; Gal 5:14; 6:2).

In the Qur'an, "*Raḥma"* occupies a central place in the divine character, and human beings are called to embody mercy, kindness, and justice in their relations with others (Quran 2:177; 4:36; 30:21; 90:12-18). The Qur'an repeatedly links belief with practical care for the vulnerable, the orphan, the needy, the traveller, and the captive, and presents such care as an expression of true righteousness. Comparative studies have noted that both traditions emphasize love of God, concern for the neighbor, and the rejection of pure self-interest (Abdullah et al., 2020). At the same time, important differences remain. Pauline *agapē* is Christological determined and presented as the fulfillment of the law through union with Christ. Qur'anic *raḥma* and *maḥabba* are rooted in monotheism and are closely linked to faith, righteous deeds, and piety. The Qur'an often portrays divine love as relational and morally evaluative, while divine mercy is more expansive (Abdullah et al., 2020).

Although both traditions identify love and compassion as indispensable foundations of moral life, they assign them different theological functions. In Pauline ethics, love is the ethical expression of participation in Christ's self-giving love and therefore fulfills the law through union with Christ. In the Qur'anic framework, mercy emerges from devotion to the one God and is cultivated through piety and obedience to divine guidance. Consequently, the difference is not merely terminological. Still, it reflects two distinct conceptions of moral transformation: one grounded in participation in the redemptive work of Christ and the other in the covenantal relationship between God and the morally responsible human being.

2.5. Eschatological Ethics

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Pauline Ethics in Comparative Perspective with Qur'anic Teachings on Mercy, Responsibility, and Moral Transformation

Pauline ethics is deeply shaped by an eschatological tension commonly described as the "Already/not yet." Through Christ's death and resurrection, the new age has already begun: "Believers are a new creation and have received the Spirit." (2 Cor 5:17; Rom 8:9-11) They already participate in the life of the risen Christ and are no longer under the dominion of sin and death in the same way. At the same time, the final consummation, the resurrection of the body, the last judgment, and the complete realization of God's kingdom, has not yet arrived (Rom 8:18-25; 1 Cor 15). Believers still live in a world marked by suffering, weakness, and moral struggle.

This tension generates a distinctive moral urgency. Believers are called to live in the present as those who already belong to the new age, while remaining alert and prepared for the future appearing of Christ (1 Thess 5:1-11; Rom 13:11-14). Paul exhorts the communities to "Wake from sleep," to cast off the works of darkness, and to put on the armor of light, because "Salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers." (Rom 13:11-12) Ethical living is therefore neither a purely present-oriented project nor a postponement of responsibility until the end; it is the responsible existence of those who stand between God's decisive act in Christ and the still-awaited completion of that act.

From a comparative perspective, the Qur'anic vision of history and moral responsibility differs in significant ways. The Qur'an also emphasizes accountability before God and the reality of the Last Day as a motivation for righteous conduct (Quran 2:281; 3:185; 99:6-8). It further presents steadfastness and fidelity to one's covenant with God as a central moral ideal, praising those who remain true to their pledge even at the cost of their lives

(Quran 33:23). The awareness of final judgment and the meeting with God functions as a powerful incentive for moral seriousness and perseverance.

Two further points of divergence are particularly noteworthy. First, the Qur'an situates Jesus within an ongoing prophetic history: he is presented as giving glad tidings of a messenger to come after him, whose name is *Aḥmad* (Quran 61:6). This claim places Jesus in a continuing line of revelation rather than as the final figure of salvation history. Second, as noted earlier, the Qur'an rejects both the crucifixion as a salvific event and the idea that one person can bear the moral burden of another. Consequently, the eschatological framework that undergirds Pauline ethics, centered on Christ's decisive death and future return, stands in clear tension with the Qur'anic understanding of prophetic continuity and individual responsibility before God.

These differences indicate that while both traditions link moral seriousness to an ultimate divine accountability, their underlying conceptions of the direction and completion of salvation history remain distinct.

3. Points of Convergence and Divergence

The comparative analysis reveals a complex pattern of convergence and divergence between Pauline ethics and Qur'anic moral teachings. Both traditions affirm that authentic moral life depends on divine initiative rather than pure human achievement. In Paul, this initiative takes the form of God's saving act in Christ and the gift of the Spirit (Matera, 2012; Furnish, 2009). In the Qur'an, it appears as divine mercy, guidance, and success (Quran 11:88). Both also insist that genuine faith must express itself in concrete behavior, through the fruit of the Spirit and love (Gal 5:22–23; Rom 13:8–10), or through righteous deeds and *piety* (Quran 2:25; 16:97; 49:13). These

shared convictions provide a meaningful basis for dialogue (Abdullah et al., 2020). Akhtar (2018) corroborates this foundational commonality, noting that "Both Christians and Muslims concur on the need for God's grace, an essential condition of success in the life of faith" (p. xx). This observation matters for the present comparison, as it shows that the divergence between Pauline and Qur'anic ethics is not merely a difference of emphasis but reflects two distinct ways of relating divine grace, human responsibility, and the law's role in moral life.

Significant divergences, however, shape the underlying logic of each vision. Pauline ethics is organized around a Christological soteriology, an indwelling pneumatology, a love that fulfills the law through union with Christ, and an eschatology directed toward Christ's return (Matera, 2012). The Qur'anic framework rejects the crucifixion as a salvific event (Quran 4:157-158), upholds strict individual responsibility (Quran 6:164; 17:15; 35:18), situates Jesus within a continuing prophetic line that includes the announcement of *Aḥmad* (Quran 61:6), and locates moral transformation in the interplay of faith, deeds, and God-consciousness. Persian scholarship has likewise noted the distinctive relation Paul draws between grace, faith, and moral effort (Safaei Sadeghi et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH; Asadi, 2019 AD/1398 SH).

Akhtar (2018) provides a particularly illuminating analysis of these divergences by examining the role of the law and works. He argues that the divergence "emerges in the role of the law and works, where Paul's "Justification by faith alone" stands in contrast to an Islamic framework that sees faith and righteous deeds as integral to the path of guidance and accountability before God." For Paul, as Akhtar demonstrates through his

commentary on Galatians, the law functions as a pedagogue that leads to Christ, and works are excluded from the act of justification to preserve the gratuity of grace (Gal 2:16; 3:24). The believer is justified apart from the works of the law, and ethical behavior follows as the fruit of union with Christ and the indwelling Spirit (Matera, 2012). In this framework, the law is not abolished but fulfilled through love (Rom 13:8-10), yet its role in salvation is radically relativized.

In the Qur'anic framework, by contrast, the law (in its broad sense of divine commandments) remains integral to the path of guidance. Faith and righteous deeds are consistently paired as inseparable conditions for divine favor and salvation (Quran 2:25; 4:124; 16:97). As Akhtar (2018) observes, in the Islamic view, "Faith and righteous deeds" are "Integral to the path of guidance and accountability before God." There is no rupture between faith and works; rather, they constitute a unified response to divine guidance. The law is not a temporary pedagogue but a permanent expression of God's will, and human beings are held individually accountable for their observance of it (Quran 6:164; 17:15). The concept of divine assistance ensures that God enables human effort, but it does not replace the necessity of personal striving and moral responsibility (Quran 11:88).

This divergence in understanding law and works reflects broader differences in theological anthropology. In Pauline thought, human nature is so corrupted by sin that only an external, forensic act of justification, apart from human contribution, can restore the sinner (Rom 3:23-24; 5:12-21). The Spirit then empowers a new life of love, but Christ's finished work remains the foundation. In the Qur'anic perspective, human beings are created with a primordial nature that inclines them toward God (Quran 30:30). Sin does not

corrupt this nature irreparably; rather, it obscures it, and the path of repentance, faith, and righteous deeds restores the human being to their original state of submission. The law, therefore, serves as a guide and criterion, not as a curse from which one must be redeemed (Akhtar, 2018).

These differences generate distinct understandings of moral agency, the source of ethical power, and the direction of salvation history. In the Pauline vision, participation in Christ's death and resurrection enables moral agency, experienced through faith and baptism and sustained by the indwelling Spirit. The believer is "In Christ" and thus participates in a new creation that has already begun (2 Cor 5:17). Moral power comes from the Spirit, who produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Salvation history culminates in the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, when the "Not yet" of the new creation becomes fully realised (Rom 8:18-25; 1 Cor 15).

In the Qur'anic vision, moral agency is exercised within the framework of piety, a constant awareness of God's presence and judgment. Revelation guides the believer, divine assistance empowers them, and they are held accountable for individual choices. Salvation history is the history of prophetic revelation, from Adam to Muḥammad, with Jesus as a prophet in this continuous line, who foretold the coming of *Aḥmad* (Quran 61:6). The final consummation is the Day of Judgment, when every soul will be recompensed for what it has earned (Quran 99:6-8). There is no single, decisive salvific event analogous to the cross; rather, salvation unfolds through a lifetime of faith, repentance, and righteous deeds, all sustained by divine mercy.

A balanced comparative reading avoids both artificial harmonization and exaggerated opposition. It acknowledges shared moral seriousness, the conviction that authentic faith must manifest in love and justice, that divine grace is essential, and that human beings are accountable to God, while clarifying the distinct theological frameworks in which this seriousness is articulated. Akhtar's (2018) work exemplifies this approach by offering "An Islamic view of Christian origins" that contributes "To building bridges between the two religions." (p. xxi) Such clarification is particularly valuable in the Iranian academic context, where sustained dialogue between the comprehensive structure of Pauline ethics and Qur'anic moral teachings is still emerging. Careful comparison of the roles of grace, law, works, and moral agency not only elucidates the internal coherence of each tradition but also fosters more nuanced and respectful interfaith engagement.

Conclusion

This study has examined the principal dimensions of Pauline ethics, soteriological, pneumatological, sacramental, love-centered, and eschatological, and placed them in dialogue with selected Qur'anic themes. The analysis demonstrates that Paul's moral vision is coherent and theologically integrated: "Ethical life is grounded in God's prior saving act in Christ, empowered by the Spirit, marked by participation in baptism and the Lord's Supper, shaped by love, and oriented toward the still-awaited consummation. In this framework, love is not merely an individual virtue but a social principle that forms community and resists self-centeredness. Moral transformation is therefore neither a human achievement nor a mere response

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to external commands; it is the fruit of divine initiative." (Matera, 2012; Furnish, 2009)

These dimensions function as interconnected layers of a single vision. Soteriology provides the foundation, pneumatology the power, the sacraments the link between grace and communal obligation, love the concrete content and social criterion, and eschatology the temporal urgency and hope. Together they constitute a structure in which divine initiative, empowerment, communal practice, moral content, and future orientation are inseparably related.

Comparative engagement with the Qur'an reveals both significant resonance and profound divergence. Both traditions affirm that genuine moral life depends on divine assistance rather than unaided human effort, and both insist that authentic faith must express itself in concrete responsibility toward others. The Qur'an emphasizes divine assistance (Quran 11:88), the inseparability of faith and righteous deeds, cultivating piety, and care for the vulnerable. At the same time, the Qur'anic rejection of the crucifixion as a salvific event (Quran 4:157-158), the principle that no soul bears another's burden (Quran 6:164; 17:15; 35:18), the absence of a comparable sacramental framework, the placement of Jesus within a continuing prophetic line that includes the glad tidings of *Aḥmad* (Quran 61:6), and the dynamic interplay of faith, deeds, and God-consciousness form a distinct theological architecture. These differences shape the underlying logic of moral agency and salvation history in each tradition.

Persian scholarship has begun to explore individual aspects of Paul's thought (Safaei Sadeghi et al., 2022 AD/1401 SH; Asadi, 2019 AD/1398 SH; Arsanjani et al., 2019 AD/1398 SH), while broader comparative efforts such

as Akhtar's (2018) reading of Galatians have opened important avenues for Muslim engagement with Pauline theology. Nevertheless, a sustained dialogue with the full structure of Pauline ethics remains limited. This study contributes to this emerging conversation by clarifying both the internal coherence of Paul's moral vision and the alternative theological anthropology and soteriology articulated in the Qur'an.

The comparative reading presented here does not seek to eliminate these differences or to privilege one tradition over the other. Instead, it aims to elucidate the distinct frameworks within which moral seriousness and social responsibility are articulated. This clarification contributes to a more precise understanding of both scriptural moral visions and creates opportunities for further scholarly dialogue between the two traditions, especially within the Iranian academic context.

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