

Grace in Galatia

*A Commentary on
St Paul's Letter to
the Galatians*

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Propositio: 2.15–21 By the Faithfulness of Christ, not by Works of the Law

We by nature are Jews and not sinners from the [Gentile] nations, and seeing that a human being is not acquitted from works of the Law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ even we began to believe in Jesus Christ, in order that we might be justified by the faithfulness of Christ and not by works of the Law, because 'by works of the Law will no flesh be justified'. But if seeking to be acquitted by Christ we ourselves were found to be at the same time sinners, then is Christ a servant of sin? Absolutely not! For if I build up again what was destroyed, I show myself to be a transgressor. For I through the Law died to the Law in order that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. But now living in the flesh, I am living in the faith – that of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not render invalid the grace of God, for if through the Law [there is] justification, then Christ died for nothing.

It was proper rhetorical procedure for the statement of facts to lead smoothly into the issue to be determined or the statement of the question at issue (the *propositio* – cf. Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 4.2.132) and this is what we find here. At the end of the *narratio* we were left with the poignant question – how can you compel the Gentiles to Judaize? We were left with a picture of Peter and Barnabas impersonating their former selves, by returning to a more Law-observant lifestyle.¹ The question is, should they be doing it, and even more to

1. On impersonation and deliberative rhetoric cf. Quintilian *Inst. Or.* 3.8.49–52. Impersonation involves the assumption of a role or the playing of a part that is not really one's own. This is what Paul is accusing Peter and Barnabas of. They are not acting out of conviction but rather play-acting for prudential or emotional reasons. Paul feels this way because he believes they had previously accepted the 'truth of the Gospel' and had begun to live by it.

the point in this letter should the Galatians be following their example, Judaizing so that they can be considered full-fledged Christians and have fellowship with Jewish Christians? As Quintilian says "deliberation is always concerned with questions where some doubt exists" (*Inst. Or.* 3.8.25), and it is clear from this letter that Paul is trying to persuade his converts not to Judaize, not to follow bad examples and the urgings of the agitators, but rather good examples like his own. This means there was some doubt in Galatia as to what the proper course to take was. The question is not just what arguments Paul will use to convince his audience not to submit to circumcision and the Law, these we will begin to find at Gal. 3.1, the question is – What underlying principle or truth or issue is at stake in the decision? Paul will try to clarify in short form the fundamental issue in 2.15–21.

In order to make a smooth transition, it was proper to make the *propositio* both backward and forward looking in character. "The function of the *propositio* is twofold: it sums up the . . . content of the *narratio* by this outline of the case and provides an easy transition to the *probatio*."² The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* stresses that two kinds of remarks are appropriate in a *propositio*: "we ought to make clear what we and our opponents agree upon, if there is agreement on points useful to us, and what remains contested" (1.10.17). These two sorts of remarks we find enumerated in vs. 15–16 and in vs. 17–18 respectively. Then in very succinct fashion, using brief theological formulae, Paul in vs. 19–21 sums up in advance the terms and ideas to be elaborated upon in these climactic verses, are to follow, in part giving a personal testimony in these climactic verses, and Paul follows the advice that the *propositio* should be brief, concise and relatively complete, providing a preview of what is to come (cf. Cicero *De Invent.* 1.22.32; Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 4.5.26–28).³ The terms and ideas must be unpacked in what follows, they are not explicated at this point, but a clue to how they should be explained is given here.

The insight that an understanding of the rhetorical function of this section brings to the discussion of 2.15–21 is severalfold. In the first place, it

2. Betz, *Galatians*, p. 114.

3. At this point, but not on most others, I must disagree with Kennedy, *New Testament*, p. 148 that what we have here is an epicheireme rather than a *propositio*. It is not so much argumentative, as it provides a preview of the arguments which are to come, which is appropriate in a *propositio*. J. Smitt, "The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: a Deliberative Speech," *NTS* 35 (1989), pp. 1–26, here p. 3, seems to assume that a *propositio* must give a point by point outline in advance of the arguments to come. However, if there is only really one major issue under debate, it was perfectly appropriate to present the basic issue and some of the key terms of the coming arguments rather than summarizing all the arguments to come. The latter is Paul's rhetorical strategy here.

makes clear why there has been debate as to whether this subsection goes with what precedes or with what follows. It is transitional, but it is not simply a continuation of Paul's address to Peter. This *propositio* is addressed to the Galatians, even though it may sum up some of the things Paul said or, with hindsight, would like to have said to Peter when he confronted him. Notice that while this section begins with 'we' as if Paul were still addressing Peter, by vs. 18 we have a series of 'I' statements. Secondly, it makes clear that Paul is assuming he is on common ground in vs. 15–16 when it is stated that 'we know a person is not justified by works of the Law but rather by the faithfulness of Christ.' As Betz says what Paul states here "is thoroughly Pauline, but Paul's claim that he shares this doctrine with Jewish Christianity should be taken seriously."⁴ This is the common ground he believes he stands on with Peter and Barnabas, and also with his Galatian converts. This is surely some of the essence of what Paul means by the truth of the Gospel, a truth which was recognized in the Jerusalem meeting. Paul is assuming his converts will not dispute this proposition.

It is what follows the remarks in vs. 15–16 that is under debate. What are the implications of this belief in being set right with God through Christ's death? If this is true, why then the Law? Does the Law still have a function in the new economy of God? Should one add obedience to the Law to faith in Christ as the agitators were urging in Galatia? Should the Galatians submit to circumcision, and if they do what are the implications of doing so? Are they nullifying the grace of God expressed and given through and because of the death of Christ by submitting to the Law? The *propositio* simply tries to set these kind of questions going in the mind of the Galatians before Paul actually gets to his proper arguments. Notice how some of the key terms and ideas that will be used in the rest of Galatians are introduced here in the *propositio*.

Δικαιοσύνη – 2.21; 3.6, 21; 5.5.

Δικαίωσις – 2.16 (thrice), 17; 3.8, 11, 24; 5.4.

Νόμος – 2.16 (thrice), 19 (twice), 21; 3.2, 5, 10 (twice), 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21 (thrice), 23, 24; 4.4, 5, 21 (twice); 5.3, 4, 14, 18, 23; 6.2, 13.

"Εργον – 2.16 (thrice); 3.2, 5, 10; 5.19; 6.4.

Πίστις – 2.16 (twice), 19 (twice), 21; 3.2, 5, 10 (twice), 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21 (thrice), 23, 24; 4.4, 5, 21 (twice); 5.3, 4, 14, 18, 23; 6.2, 13.

Ζάω – 2.14, 19, 20 (twice); 3.11, 12; 5.25.⁵

4. Betz, *Galatians*, p. 114.

5. I owe this chart to Matera, *Galatians*, p. 98. Ramsay, *Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, pp. 305–6 rightly notes "But the address is practically an epitome of the theme which is set forth in the following chapters . . . in 2.14ff. [one] finds . . . the whole truth in embryo." He does not, however, recognize the rhetorical reasons why this is so and how it functions here.

The issue as raised in the *propositio* is – What should the role of the Mosaic Law be in the life of a Christian believer, whether Gentile or Jew, and as a subset of that question, should the Galatians submit to circumcision and the various other boundary-marking rituals of Judaism? Lying beneath all of this is the question – Who are the people of God, and what constitutes them as such?

It cannot be stressed enough that throughout all of Paul's acts of persuasion that follow, Paul is arguing with *Christians* about the proper and improper ways of getting on with their Christian lives. In other words, even though Paul will at points give his converts a reminder about how they got into the ἐκκλησία of God, this argument is not basically about getting in, nor even about how one stays in, but rather about how one goes on in Christ and with the aid of the Holy Spirit. In fact Paul is concerned about the Galatians crossing the community boundary in the other direction – getting out, or committing apostasy.⁶ The argument is theological, ethical, and social throughout, and at stake is the unity and equality of Jew and Gentile in the church of God, in the new creation that exists in the midst of this present evil age.

The argument is misperceived if it is seen as some sort of general polemic in favor of faith and against 'works righteousness' or a works mentality or a works religion, or the human attempt to feel after God and find God. Paul is not even arguing against the general concept of 'legalism'. He has something much more specific in mind when he speaks of works, namely 'works of the Law', obedience to the Mosaic Law and seeking to be part of the community that relates to God on the basis of the Mosaic covenant. As we shall see Paul is not anti-works, not anti-obedience to God, not even anti-Law, indeed he will argue for the 'Law of Christ' as the guiding principle for Christians. His complaint has to do specifically with the Mosaic Law and the covenant of which it is a part. The Mosaic Law and obedience to it is not, in Paul's view, how one got into Christ, how one stays in Christ, or how one goes on in Christ.⁷ It is no longer what defines and delimits who the people of God are and how they ought to live and behave.

Verse 15 begins as if Paul were still addressing Peter, or more generally Jewish Christians. He speaks of those who are 'by nature' Jews. The sentence begins with an emphatic 'we', so here Paul is distinguishing himself and other Jews from the majority of his audience.⁸ The term φύοι is found elsewhere in the Pauline corpus and is used similarly at Rom. 11.21–24 (cf. Gal. 4.8) to refer

to what a person is by physical nature (cf. the more extended sense in Rom. 2.27). As Burton says, this opening clause is concessive 'though we are Jews by nature . . . yet even we . . .'.⁹ This natural condition of Jews is contrasted with what they are not – 'sinners from the Gentiles' (or nations). Is Paul talking about the 'natural' moral condition of Gentiles, or their ritual status of being 'unclean' from a Jewish point of view, or both? Probably he has in mind something similar to what we find in Ephes. 2.12. The idea is that Gentiles by nature are outside the circle of the old covenant, do not have the Law (cf. Rom. 2.14; Ps. 9.17; Tobit 13.6; Jub. 23.23–24; Mt. 5.47), and therefore are by definition (but also by nature and choice), beyond the pale – sinners.¹⁰ Here it is instructive to compare a text like 2 Macc. 6.12–17, that distinguishes the sinfulness of Jews as opposed to the sinfulness of Gentiles, the latter leads to destruction, the former to discipline. Paul, however, though addressing his fellow Jewish Christians in language they would be used to, in fact believes that God takes Jewish sinfulness as seriously as Gentile sinfulness. In either case it can lead to destruction (cf. Gal. 5.17–21; 1 Thess. 2.14–16).

Verse 16 continues this sentence with another subordinate clause about what Paul would take as common knowledge between himself as his fellow Jewish Christians. 'We know' that human beings are not δίκαιοῦται from 'works of the Law'. Notice that Paul here broadens the discussion to refer to what is true of human beings in general. It must be considered unlikely that Paul considers it a common opinion among Jews in general that human beings are not δίκαιοῦται by works of the Law, but rather he assumes it is the proper and normal view of Jewish Christians, in light of what they know and believe about the work of Christ.

The term δίκαιοῦται brings us to the point of discussing one of the more crucial word groups and concepts which Paul will use in this letter.¹¹ The verbal form of this word occurs some eight times in Galatians (2.16 three times, 2.17; 3.8, 11, 24; 5.4),¹² and in addition we also have the noun form δικαιοσύνη at the end of the *propositio* in vs. 21. This language is clearly Pauline, as 27 of the 35 occurrences of the verb in the NT occur in

9. Burton, *Galatians*, p. 119.

10. That it is not just a matter of being ritually beyond the pale is clear enough from the way Paul contrasts Gentile life and behavior before conversion (cf. 1 Cor. 6.9–11; 1 Thess. 1.9–10) to what it is like now.

11. See my longer discussion of this matter in *Paul's Narrative Thought World*, pp. 255–62.

12. It appears some fifteen times in Romans, and only twice in 1 Corinthians, and twice more in the Pastorals. In other words, it is a major theme in two of Paul's letters, but not in all of Paul's letters. However, the importance of an idea to Paul cannot be determined simply on the basis of a word count.

6. This is why one must read cautiously the boundary language in Galatians and not assume too quickly the issue is how one 'gets in'.

7. The latter being particularly at issue in this letter.

8. See Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 137.

Paul's letters. Especially because this word group occurs repeatedly in the *propositio*, the thesis statement of the document, it deserves our close attention, not least because it has been the subject of repeated controversy since at least the Reformation. This word group comes from the Law court,¹³ and if we are looking for OT background we should consider texts which speak of a judge acquitting or vindicating the innocent or righteous (cf. Ex. 23.7; Deut. 25.1, 2; 2 Sam. 15.4; Mic. 6.11). To be acquitted by God in these sorts of texts has to do with being found faithful to the covenant and the demands of its Law. If this, however, is the basic sense in the OT and other early Jewish literature, one must say that the nuances have changed by the time we get to Pauline literature. Here it is the unrighteous and the sinners who are acquitted, because in fact in Paul's view all have sinned and fallen short of God's glory' (Rom. 3.23; cf. 3.9–26), and both Jew and Gentile outside of Christ will be judged for their sin (Rom. 2.12–13). Instead of the translation 'vindicated' we often find 'reckoned as righteous' or 'acquitted' in the Pauline corpus, because the legal judgment stands in variance with the actual fact that all are by nature and choice sinners. 'Vindicated' suggests that one is innocent or righteous and so deserves to be acquitted. It is not, however, the righteous that are being acquitted in Paul's view, for 'none are righteous, no not one.'

Thus the verb δικαιόω is used forensically and relationally by Paul to indicate the status or standing in relation to God of a person who is in Christ. For such a person there is now no condemnation (Rom. 8.1). Paul, however, does not just use the δικαιόω language and related terms to refer to someone at the point of entry into the body of Christ. He will also talk about final justification before the divine tribunal as well (cf. Gal. 5.5 'we . . . await the righteousness [δικαιοσύνη] for which we hope' cf. Rom. 6.16), and it is clear enough that this involves an assessment of the Christian's behavior and works (cf. 1 Cor. 3.12–15; 2 Cor. 5.10; Phil. 3.8–14). He even discusses 'righteousness' or 'right standing' as an ongoing status or relationship (Rom. 5.21). As it turns out, Paul can use the noun δικαιόωσις and the adjective δικαίος with behavioral nuances. Paul then "joins forensic and ethical categories in his understanding of righteousness, with the one always involving the other . . . For while the aorist ἐπιτετεύκαμεν ('we have believed') of vs. 16 refers to a once-for-all response that results in a transfer of status (cf. ἴνα δικαιωθῶμεν) the four uses of the verb in vv. 16–17 and the noun in vs. 21 cannot be treated as simply 'transfer terms' when the

13. This should not be taken to mean that Paul is signaling here that a piece of forensic rhetoric will follow, any more than the prevalence of this term in Romans signals such a thing. Paul is giving advice to his converts about whether or not to follow the Mosaic Law, and this requires the use of some juridical language. It does not mean he is offering a defense here.

issue at both Antioch and Galatia had to do with the lifestyle of those who were already believers in Jesus."¹⁴

I must reiterate here what I have said before. Paul's primary concern in this letter is with how the Galatians will go on in Christ, and indeed he even discusses the possibility of their going out of Christ, committing apostasy. The language about how they entered the Christian community is used in the service of this larger discussion, reminding them how they got in, but also discussing how they should now walk in Christ. Justification is not the main subject of this letter, it is brought into the discussion about how the Galatians should behave as Christians and whether they should 'add' obedience to the Mosaic Law, to their faith in Christ. Paul's response is that precisely because they did not come to be in Christ by obeying the Law (initial salvation and justification was by grace through faith), they should *not* now add obedience to the Mosaic Law to their faith in Christ. Rather they should continue as they started in Christ, walking in the Spirit and according to the Law or Norm or Example of Christ.

To a real extent the question Paul is addressing is a matter of honor. Paul is saying that all Christians have already ascribed honor through justification by faith and therefore they do not need the acquired honor thought to be the result of doing works of the Law. Paul reacts in this letter as one who has been shamed in Antioch, and must re-establish his ethos, especially in the eyes of his converts. He does this not by trying to acquire honor but by stating that he has from God all the honor and status he could possibly need, as do the Galatians themselves.¹⁵

This leads us to discuss another crucial phrase which appears for the first time in Galatians at vs. 16, namely 'works of the Law'.¹⁶ There is little dispute among scholars that when Paul speaks of 'the Law' here he means the Mosaic Law. The debate primarily centers on what sort of 'works' he has in mind. Does Paul mean any and all sorts of 'works of the Law' by this phrase, or some particular subset, say for instance those works which served as boundary markers, those which set Jews apart from others – circumcision, sabbath observance, food laws? Or is in fact Paul focusing in this phrase on some

14. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 85. The definitive study which establishes that while the relational sense and idea is probably primary, there are also behavioral nuances as well, in particular when the noun and adjective are used is J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).

15. See the discussion by W. B. Russell, "Paul's Use of *ἔργα* and *Πνεῦμα* in Galatians 5–6 in light of the Argument of Galatians" (Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, 1991), pp. 113–18.

16. We will reserve our larger discussion of Paul's view of the Law for later in the commentary, when Paul discusses at length the question 'Why then the Law?'

particular attitude toward the Law (e.g., legalism)? It would seem clear from the fact that Paul uses the phrase 'works of the Law' interchangeably with just the word 'works' to speak about the same subject (cf., e.g., Rom. 4.2 to Rom. 3.20; or Rom. 4.6 to Rom. 3.28 where 'works' plus the same preposition occurs in both cases), and from the fact that ἔργον is regularly used of actions rather than attitudes,¹⁷ that it is unlikely that Paul is focusing on the problem of legalism when he uses the phrase 'works of the Law', however much he may have disapproved of legalism.¹⁸

Of specific relevance is the use of the phrase 'works of the Law' or closely similar phrases in early Jewish literature. It is interesting on this score that the specific phrase 'works of the Law' is not found in the OT, not even in the Greek translation (the LXX), and for that matter it is not used by any NT author except Paul. There is one clear parallel from the Qumran material in 4QFlor. 1.7, but one must also take into account other closely parallel phrases such as 'his works in the Law' (1QS 5.21; 6.18), or more distantly 'works of righteousness' (1QH 1.26; 4.31) and from 2 Bar. 57.2 'works of the commandments'. It is also of relevance that in the Mishnah and Talmuds the word 'works' most often refers to works of the Mosaic Law.¹⁹

Dunn has tried to argue on the basis of some of the Qumran evidence that a particularly sectarian approach to the Law is implied in the use of phrases like 'works of the Law', and that it particularly refers to the sect's distinctive understanding and practice of the Law. By implication Dunn wishes to argue that the same is true of Paul's use of the phrase (e.g., that it refers to, or at least focuses on, the distinctive boundary-marker practices which are at issue in Galatia).²⁰ He points especially to 4QMMT and to the fact that it includes a series of distinctive Qumran rulings on the Law's disputed points, under the heading 'Some of the Deeds of the Law'. Now the problem with this argument is that the title is 'some of the deeds of the Law'. That the Qumranites took a sectarian approach to the Law is not in dispute, but that they used the phrase 'deeds or works of the Law' to refer particularly to their sectarian views or rulings or attitude about the Law is very doubtful. The phrase 'deeds of the Law' is not a technical phrase in any of these Qumran texts. Certainly, the phrase would include their distinctive practices and ways of doing the Law, but the point is that the phrase was not limited to such distinctive practices, nor is there any evidence that the phrase 'works/deeds of the Law' usually or mainly

referred to those practices *in particular*. I thus conclude that the Qumran evidence does not provide adequate support, indeed it may not provide support at all, for the conclusion that "'works of the Law' . . . was probably used initially in a polemical context . . . to denote particularly those obligations of the Law which were reckoned especially crucial in the maintenance of covenant righteousness. . . ."²¹

Dunn also makes the further claim that at issue is a particular sectarian interpretation of these 'boundary marker' obligations. But there was nothing sectarian about what the agitators were asking the Gentiles to do in Galatia so far as we can tell. Urging them to be circumcised and keep the Law was what God-fearers and proselytes were *normally* urged to do if they wanted full participation in Israel. Nothing is said in Galatians about any peculiar or specifically sectarian practices of some Jews.

There is another line of approach to this question which must be briefly mentioned at this juncture, and dealt with more fully later. It has often and rightly been noted that Paul deals with the Law: (1) as a corporate entity and (2) as connected to a specific covenant which must be evaluated in light of recent salvation historical developments. That Paul deals with the Mosaic Law as a whole when he speaks of it is shown not only by the fact that he never once speaks of 'Laws' (plural) but only of 'the Law' (119 times), but also from such statements as 'the whole Law is fulfilled in one word . . .' (Gal. 5.14), or more crucially all persons being circumcised are under obligation to do the whole Law' (5.3). In other words Paul connects the ritual Law, including the distinctive boundary rituals to the rest of the Law and says that one entails the other. As regards (2) above, it is enough to say at this point that Paul distinguishes being under the Law and being in Christ as having to do with two separate eras of salvation history. This is especially clear in texts like 'When the fullness of time came God sent his Son . . . in order that he might redeem those under the Law' (Gal. 4.4, 5), or 'the Law was our guardian until Christ came . . . but now . . . we are no longer under a guardian' (Gal. 3.24-25). We must thus conclude that by 'works of the Law' Paul means actions performed in obedience to the Mosaic Law, or more specifically acts performed in response to any and all commandments of the Law.²² He is not simply concerned with specific laws, nor with the social function and effect of the Law of separating Jews from Gentiles.²³

21. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 136. To overcome the obvious criticism of this view Dunn adds that while the whole Law was meant in principle by this phrase, that in practice it referred to the test cases or specific laws that set a Jew apart from a Gentile.

22. Cf. the conclusions of Moo, p. 92.

23. Contra Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law*, p. 213 n. 11: "The laws which Paul specifically excludes are precisely those which separated Jews from Gentiles in the Greco-Roman world, which uniquely characterized the Mosaic covenant and the Jews." Now

17. See U. Luz, *Das Geschichtsverständnis des Paulus* (Munich: Kaiser, 1968), p. 147 and n. 3.

18. See the important discussion by D. J. Moo, "Law, 'Works of the Law', and Legalism in Paul," *WestTJ* 45 (1983), pp. 73-100. See especially the chart on p. 93.

19. See Moo, p. 91.

20. See, e.g., most recently, Dunn, *Galatians*, pp. 136-37; and his *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 88ff.

One final caveat. There is in Paul's mind a difference between some essential principle in, or underlying, the Law (and mentioned in the Mosaic Law) on the one hand being fulfilled by a Christian through following the Law of Christ, and on the other hand obeying or being under the Mosaic Law. Fulfillment has to do with a salvation historical argument about the consummation of God's purposes in and for human beings, obedience has to do with being in and under obligation to a particular covenant and its strictures. Paul affirms the former and rejects the latter.

Paul says in vs. 16b that Jewish Christians know that they are not acquitted or given right standing with God by means of doing works of the Mosaic Law. Rather, there is an alternate means. Here again we run into a controversial phrase – ἐν τῇ διὰ νόμου ἰσχύϊ Χριστοῦ. In dealing with this phrase one must bear in mind that Paul is talking about the proper means by which justification or acquittal comes to anyone male or female, Jew or Gentile (ἄνθρωπος), since it does not come by means of works of the Law. The first critical problem one must deal with is whether ἐν τῇ (literally 'if not') should be taken as exceptive in force, as in Gal. 1.19, or as adversative. The former would lead to the translation 'except' or 'but only' the latter to the translation 'but'. It must be said, however, that even in an adversative sense, ἐν τῇ surely must be taken to mean 'but only'²⁴ and so in effect the exceptive sense is the same as the adversative sense. Taking it in an exceptive sense the question becomes whether the exception is to all of what precedes or to some particular part of what comes before.²⁵

The real question is how the phrase 'works of the Law' functions here in regard to the exception. Dunn wishes to argue that the sentence could mean 'a person is not justified by works of the Law except through faith in Christ'. In other words, a person *can* be justified by works of the Law if this covenantal nomism is supplemented with or accompanied by faith in Christ. Dunn admits, however, that Paul goes on in the latter half of this verse to set up a clear antithesis,²⁶ and so this sense is unlikely. In part, Dunn's argument

even under this formulation Dunn's view will not work, because surely part of what most distinguished Jews from Gentiles was not just their distinctive ritual practices, but their strict monotheism and equally strict sexual codes. In other words, it is not just the social, but also the theological dimension that distinguished them. Cf. the more balanced conclusion of Ziesler, *Galatians*, pp. 25–26: "We may therefore agree that two of the identity markers are what spark off the debate behind this letter, but need not go on to accept that the focus is on them throughout the argument. They are the specific cases which lead to the general question and it is the general question which finally dominates *Galatians* (emphasis mine)." *Galatians* (emphasis mine).

24. See rightly Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*, p. 212 n. 9.

25. See Burton, *Galatians*, p. 121.

26. See Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law*, pp. 188ff.

hinges on his view that Paul is here formulating in vs. 16a a statement geared to gain Peter's assent.²⁷ However, whatever the pre-history of this material in Gal. 2.15–21, and it is not at all clear it was ever addressed to Peter (cf. above), its function in this letter is to address the Gentile Galatians, to set forth the essential theological proposition about which he wants them to be persuaded. It is hardly believable that Paul would have said to the Galatians that 'works of the Law' plus faith in Christ could justify. Indeed, it is precisely this sort of combination that he is arguing against in the remainder of this letter! In short, Paul is saying here no justification by works of the Law, only through 'the faith of Christ. This leads us into the next hornet's nest of scholarly contention.

Should the phrase, which if translated literally reads 'faith of Jesus Christ', be taken as an objective genitive or a subjective genitive? This has been a matter of no little scholarly debate in the last fifteen years, and to judge from the recent articles and commentaries on Galatians the debate is not abating. It is fair to say at this point that scholars, at least in North America, are fairly evenly divided on the objective versus subjective genitive issue, whereas it is a minority view elsewhere that we should take the phrase as involving a subjective genitive. Briefly summarized, the objective genitive view involves taking the phrase to mean the faith of which Christ is the object, and so faith in Christ, while the subjective genitive view refers to Christ's own faith or faithfulness. A good deal hangs in the balance of what one decides about this matter.²⁸ On the one hand, the traditional view that Paul is referring to faith in Christ has a long pedigree (cf., e.g., Chrysostom's comment on this verse in his *Galatians commentary*). There is also no doubt that Paul not only affirms faith in Christ, but sees it as an important matter (cf. Rom. 10.14; Phil. 1.29),²⁹ as this very paragraph of Galatians shows.

The complaints against the subjective genitive view have been recently ably summarized by Dunn: (1) to take Paul to mean 'the faithfulness of Christ' by this phrase requires a great deal of further explanation that Paul never gives; (2) one would expect the verbal form of πιστεύω (i.e. πιστεύω) to function in equivalent fashion to the noun, but what we find, for example, here in 2.16ff. and in 3.5–9, 22 is Paul speaking about believing in Christ, not Christ's own faith or faithfulness. In fact we never read about Christ himself believing (verbal form) in the Pauline corpus; (3) the issue here and in other texts where this 'faith of Christ' phrase arises is about how a person is justified or acquitted, and the key background text for this discussion is clearly Gen. 15.6 (Gal. 3.6;

27. See Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 138.

28. See my discussion of this matter in *Paul's Narrative Thought World*, pp. 268–71.

29. Despite the exegetical gymnastics of S. K. Williams, "Again Pistis Christou," *CBQ* 49 (1987), pp. 431–47, Christ is seen as an object of faith by Paul.

Rom. 4.3) which refers to Abraham being justified by his own faith in God; (4) finally, as an antithesis to works of the Law one would naturally expect Paul to pose an alternative human response to God's gracious initiative.³⁰

Let us consider each of these objections by Dunn in turn. The first objection in fact fails almost immediately because Paul does indeed unpack what he means by this phrase, not only in this very context but in other texts where the phrase arises. He refers to the crucifixion of Christ not only in Gal. 2.19, but also again in 2.21. Compare also for example Phil. 2.5–11 where we hear of the faithful obedience of Christ even unto death, after which Paul uses the phrase in question in Phil. 3.9 to refer to this very event. Furthermore, just as no one would dispute that Paul uses the OT in an allusive or echo fashion, one also should not dispute that Paul could use the story of Christ in a similarly allusive fashion, and allude to that familiar story of the death and resurrection with a catch phrase like 'the faithfulness of Christ', especially when there are hints in the context that this is what he is alluding to by using this phrase.

The second objection seems at first more substantive, that is until we realize that it often happens that a noun and a verb get used in somewhat different ways in the very same sentence. Suppose a fifth-century Greek-speaking Christian had wanted to say 'I trust that you will be faithful to affirm the faith when we next recite the Symbol (Apostles' Creed) in church, saying 'I believe in . . .' What words would he have used? Certainly he would have used πιστεύω/πίστις and done so drawing on the full semantic field of these words so he could speak of trusting (an act of faith in someone or something), 'believing', 'the faith' (something believed), and finally being trustworthy or faithful. The verbs would refer to actions and the nouns would refer to things or concepts which are the subject or object of actions. In other words, the verbs and nouns would often carry different though related nuances. Paul is certainly not compelled to use the noun and the verbal form of this key word 'faith' in the same fashion even in the same text. Indeed what we know of Paul suggests that he was quite capable of using the same root word in a variety of ways. His Greek was not merely of the rudimentary sort with limited vocabulary. The question is whether Paul was simply being redundant in some of these key texts and speaking in two different ways about faith in Christ, or whether the difference between the noun phrase and the use of verbs signals a difference in ideas. I suggest the latter is more plausible.

Another objection along this sort of semantic and grammatical line has also been raised in regard to the use or rather absence of the definite article before the noun πίστις in our key phrase (cf. Gal. 2.16; 3.22; Rom. 3.22, 26; Ephes. 3.12; Phil. 2.9). Before considering this argument it must be kept

steadily in view that elsewhere we do find in Paul a phrase like τὴν πίστιν τοῦ Θεοῦ (Rom. 3.3), which surely must be seen as a subjective genitive and translated 'the faithfulness of God'. Paul can certainly use πίστις to mean faithfulness in such a phrase with a subjective genitive.

A. J. Hultgren has argued that it is notable that in contrast to the phrase just quoted from Rom. 3.3 and elsewhere where there is a subjective genitive following the word πίστις and Paul speaks of Christ, he never uses the definite article to begin the phrase, he never says ἡ πίστις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.³¹ As Williams has shown, however, in the NT while a noun with a following genitive pronoun is normally articular, the rule is generally observed that when governed nouns are articular so are the governing ones, and when the governed nouns are not articular neither is the governing noun.³² Thus, since 'Christ' has no article before it in our key phrase, we would not expect one before 'faith' either.

In fact, we find anarthrous and articular nouns used interchangeably to refer to the same thing. For example, in Rom. 3.3–7 the phrases 'the faithfulness of God' and 'the truth of God' are the functional equivalent of θεοῦ δικαιοσύνη in 3.5. Furthermore, we also find δικαιοσύνη θεοῦ at 3.21 and Rom. 1.17, but in Rom. 10.3 we find the very same phrase with the definite article – 'the righteousness of God', *without a difference in meaning*. If one examines other similar phrases in Paul's letters where both nouns lack the article but which require a translation with a definite sense, we will see that it is perfectly feasible for Paul to mean 'the faithfulness of Christ' by πίστις Χριστοῦ. For example, consider the phrases 'the power of God', 'the righteousness of God' and 'the wrath of God' in Rom. 1.16–18, or more importantly 'the grace of Christ' in Gal. 1.6 (χάρις Χριστοῦ),³³ or 'children of the slave woman' at Gal. 4.31. All of this leads to the conclusion that if Paul wanted to speak of 'the faithfulness of Christ' he certainly could have done so using either πίστις Χριστοῦ or ἡ πίστις τοῦ Χριστοῦ.³⁴

In response to Dunn's third objection, what he states here is true. Paul is concerned with how one is justified or acquitted. Unfortunately Dunn does not mention that there is both a subjective and an objective component to how this happens. It happens through faith on the subjective side, but on the objective side it happens through or because of the death of Christ. The Abrahamic text of course speaks to only one side of this faith

31. A. J. Hultgren, "The *Pistis Christou* Formulation in Paul," *NovT* 22 (1980), pp. 248–63.

32. There are a few exceptions to this rule: cf. Gal. 3.29.

33. Cf. this phrase to that at the end of Gal. 1.7 – the Gospel of Christ, where the governed noun is articular so the governing one is as well.

34. See the helpful discussion by Williams, pp. 431–33.

30. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 139.

equation.³⁵ The question is which side of the discussion is being focused on by 'the faith of Christ'.

Finally, Dunn argues that the natural antithesis to works of the Law is faith in Christ. This, however, is debatable. If Paul were only interested in the subjective side of this issue, then yes faith in Christ is a natural antithesis to works of the Law. But this overlooks that the larger antithesis which stands behind works versus faith, is Law versus Christ. Paul's emphasis when he discusses justification, as vs. 21 makes clear, is on what Christ accomplishes on the cross, namely what the Law could not accomplish. The Law could not give life, it could not make a person good, it could not sanctify or empower the believer to do God's will. It could only inform a person of God's will. Paul's basic concern, as is shown by the climactic sentence in the *propositio* is to make clear that if justification could have come through the Law, Christ died for nothing. Thus for Paul, the objective means of justification is Christ's death on the cross, not the Law, and the subjective means of appropriating justification or right standing with God is faith in the faithfulness of Christ, not works of the Law. I conclude, not least because of where the emphasis lies in Paul's thought when he discusses justification (namely on the Godward side of things, not on the side of the human response), that the phrase 'faith of Christ' is a shorthand allusion to the story of the faithful one who was obedient even unto death on the cross, and so wrought human salvation.³⁶

Paul, still speaking as and for a Jewish Christian perspective, says in vs. 16b that 'even we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that our acquittal might come from the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not from works of the Law.' The *xai* *ἡμεῖς* needs to be properly translated. Here we have the explicative use of *xai* which makes *ἡμεῖς* emphatic.³⁷ Paul, going back to his opening clause in this complex sentence, is saying that even we Jews have obtained right standing with God through the finished work of Christ

35. One might want to argue that Paul actually means at Rom. 4.12 'the faithfulness of our father Abraham', in which case he might be thinking of the Akedah. He would see Abraham, presumably in his offering of his son Isaac, as the prototype of Christ, of one being faithful and obedient even unto death. I think, however, in light of Rom. 4.3 this is probably not a correct translation here.

36. Further support along these lines can be found in R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Structure of Galatians 3.1-4.11* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1983); and more recently his *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996), pp. 27 ff.; M. D. Hooker, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ ΧΡΙΣΤΟΥ" NT 5.35 (1989), pp. 321-41; Longenecker, *Galatians*, pp. 87-89; Witherington, *Paul's Narrative Thought World*, pp. 268-71. For the evidence from the Greek church fathers, who were rather unanimous in interpreting the phrase to mean faith in Christ, see now R. A. Harrisville, "Πιστις Χριστοῦ: Witness of the Fathers," *NovT* 36 (1994), pp. 233-41.

37. Cf. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 88.

on the cross. The premise behind this of course is that Jews needed to be put in right standing with God just as Gentiles did. The verb 'believed' is in the aorist and refers to the initial response of a person to the Gospel message.

In the final clause of vs. 16, Paul provides a warrant for the *propositio* he has just put forth, by quoting Ps. 143.2 (142.2 LXX), though clearly Paul has modified it for his own purposes.³⁸ This obviously is an important text for Paul as he cites it again in Rom. 3.20 in a similar context. It is in order to remind ourselves that in a rhetorical piece such as Galatians is, it was important to cite external authoritative sources.³⁹ This was not just any sort of text, but a text recognized by both Paul and his audience as a sacred text, one which had inherent authority. If Paul is still having his imaginary conversation with Peter here, the citation would presumably have even more clout.⁴⁰ The source Paul is drawing on reads 'because every living being shall not be acquitted/justified before you.' Paul has modified his source in three ways: (1) Paul substitutes 'all flesh' for 'every living being'; (2) he omits the phrase 'before you'; (3) he adds a clause about means - 'from works of the Law'. The emphasis on 'flesh' is probably intentional. Paul is suggesting that humans by their nature (perhaps Paul means by their fallen nature) cannot justify or acquit themselves before God. Obviously the most important change here is the addition of the phrase 'from works of the Law'. This addition shows the importance of the phrase for Paul (on its meaning cf. above). Works of the Law are works done by humans who are 'flesh', and precisely because of this they do not produce justification. Paul's form of argument suggests that this would be a new insight for Jews. Non-Christian Jews, and presumably the agitators as well, would not have read Ps. 143.2 in the way Paul does, as making a comment on lack of efficacy of works of the Law. In Rom. 3.20 and elsewhere in Romans Paul will attempt to explain more fully why no one is justified by works of the Law.

It must always be kept steadily in view that Paul is concerned not only with initial justification (as seems to be the *main* emphasis here), but also with the final verdict of God on human life and human works at the return of Christ. I would suggest that since the verb 'justified' in the quotation is in the future, that Paul has at least in part this final justification in view here.⁴¹ This is

38. "On here could be *recitativum*, functioning as a veritable quotation mark, but probably we should see it as in the main causal 'because...'

39. On the use of documentary evidence in or as support for proofs cf. Quintilian, *Inst. Or.* 5.7.1ff.

40. See rightly, Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 115: "This sentence indeed would be an unmeaning repetition of what had gone before, unless the Apostle were enforcing his own statements by some authoritative declaration."

41. Notice that final justification or acquittal is not surprisingly the subject of such discussions in early Jewish literature since non-Christian Jews by and large did not agree with Paul that the eschatological age had already dawned. There was rather widespread

important because it gets at the heart of the problem in Galatia. Paul is addressing those who are already Christians and have already passed across the boundary into the Christian community. Initial justification has to do with that crossing. The problem for them was how they should go on in their Christian life, whether or not they should add works of the Law to faith in Christ in order to gain the final approbation or acquittal of God in the future.⁴³ Christ is concerned both with the social effects on the community of following Paul is concerned both with the final approbation or acquittal of God in the future. The agitators' (or Peter's) approach, and with the theological underpinning that supports such an approach. He is assuming that if carefully explained with proper acts of persuasion, fellow Christians would agree with Paul's understanding of justification.⁴⁴

In his helpful study of Paul's autobiographical remarks, G. Lyons argues that what we are dealing with in 2.15–21 is a continuation of Paul's attempts to present both negative and positive paradigms to his audience. He does this by way of a comparison (συζήσις) of Paul's and Peter's behavior in 2.11–14, and more generally by speaking about Paul and Jewish Christians in 2.15–21.⁴⁵ Furthermore, the function of this material is not to defend Paul against charges, but to make clear how he has experienced and embodied the Gospel of divine grace which he preaches and therefore is worthy of imitation by the Galatians. It is interesting that if one reads 2.19–21 in conjunction with 1.13–16a that we see some rather striking similarities to the pattern of autobiographical remarks in Phil. 3.4–22. There too, Paul begins with his Jewish past and ends with his renunciation of all privileges for the sake of Christ.⁴⁶ This reminds us that we must take the 'I' (vs. 18ff.) seriously here, even if Paul is speaking on behalf of Christians or Jewish Christians generally, and we must also take very seriously the 'formerly'/'now' language by which Paul emphasizes the notable changes in his life caused by his conversion. It will be noted that

agreement that no one could claim to be sinless and so worthy of final acquittal by God; cf. Job 9.2; Ps. 14.1–3; Is. 59.2ff.; 1 En. 81.5; 1QH 9.14–15. Cf. Betz, *Galatians*, p. 119 on the future reference in vs. 16.

42. I take seriously the suggestion by Ziesler, *Galatians*, p. 27 that the agitators and indeed even Peter and other Jewish Christians in Antioch may well have not understood the implications of their behavior in terms not only of its social effect on the Christian community (creating division) but also in terms of its theological implications (namely that Christ's death was at best insufficient in itself for justification, and at worst was for nothing). In other words, they may have been more guilty of a sort of unreflective partisanship for a Jewish way of viewing things, than of malice aforethought.

43. See Betz, *Galatians*, p. 115 who rightly stresses that justification by grace through faith was not only a Pauline idea in early Jewish Christianity. Cf. Jan. 2.14–26; Justin *Dial.* 46.1; 47.1; 116; Mt. 12.57; Lk. 15.11–32; Acts 13.39 Pseud. Clem. 8.5–7.

44. Lyons, *Pauline Autobiography*, p. 135.

45. See Lyons, p. 147, who is following N. Dahl at this point.

these changes have to do chiefly, though not solely, with Paul's relationship to the Law, which he 'died' to, through his encounter with Christ.

As Betz suggests, we should probably see vs. 17 as the beginning of a brief section where Paul discusses matters about which various others, in particular other Jewish Christians, would not agree with Paul.⁴⁶ There are in essence three propositions here, one to do with seeking to be justified in Christ, one about being found sinners, and one about Christ as a servant or minister of sin. The first two are part of the protasis of this conditional sentence. By type we are dealing with a first class condition with εἰ, which normally means we are meant to assume that both of these two propositions are true.⁴⁷ Paul's point seems to be this – if one grants that we Christians are seeking to be justified in Christ (locative sense)⁴⁸ and not elsewhere, and in the process even we Jewish Christians are found to be operating and acting outside of the sphere of the Law, living and acting beyond the pale and so subject to the complaint that we are like Gentile sinners (cf. 2.14), then the question becomes, is Christ a minister of sin?

Close attention needs to be paid here to the καὶ αὐτοὶ, 'even ourselves' which strongly suggests Paul is still speaking as and for Jewish Christians like himself and Peter. In view of this, it is likely that we should take the word 'sinners' in the same sense as at vs. 15, which is to say that it is a comment more on a person's position (outside the Law, and so lawless), than on a person's condition (immoral), though the latter is certainly not excluded.⁴⁹ The terminology here is important because Paul is going to go on to use a very different term in vs. 18. Paul will go on to say that if one re-establishes the Law as the basis of Christian community then he himself and many others will be found to be not merely beyond the pale, but actually lawbreakers, 'transgressors'. In a tour de force argument, he will contend that those who try to rebuild or re-establish the Law as that which defines and confines the Christian community are in fact the ones who are committing sin. They are sinning against the finished work of Christ on the cross, by suggesting it was insufficient to justify and define a people.

Verse 17b gives us the apodosis of this conditional sentence, and there is a question as to whether or not we should take the ἄγα as having a circumflex

46. Betz, *Galatians*, p. 119.

47. See Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 89.

48. It is true that Paul could be using εἰ to mean 'by' here, but the εἰ Χριστῷ formula normally carries a locative sense, and Paul is here contrasting life within two spheres – the sphere of the Law and the sphere of Christ.

49. The logic here is similar to what one finds in places like Rom. 3.9–26 and Rom. 11.32, where Paul is arguing that all have been placed into the category of sinner, all have been imprisoned in disobedience, all have sinned and fallen short so that God may have mercy on all through Christ. The righteousness of God has now been manifested apart from the Law, and in Christ.

making this an interrogative particle here. Against the notion is the fact that nowhere else in Paul do we find the interrogative particle, whereas ἄρα as an inferential particle ('then') is quite common in Paul's letters including in Galatians (cf. Gal. 2.21; 3.7, 29; 5.11; 6.10). Thus the inferential particle is more likely, but it is still probable that we have a question here rather than a statement as follows – 'Is Christ, then (in that case), a minister/servant of sin?'⁵⁰ The vast majority of translations and commentators assume that the sentence is in fact a question for the very good reason that it is followed by μὴ γένοιτο. These words regularly follow a rhetorical question (cf. Gal. 3.21; Rom. 3.4, 6, 31; 6.2, 15; 7.7, 13; 9.14; 11.1, 11; 1 Cor. 6.15, though see Gal. 6.14 where nonetheless it still sets up a sharp contrast), and 2.17b should surely not be seen as an exception to this rule.

Rhetorical questions are, according to Quintilian, the most common of rhetorical 'figures' and are used not to seek information but rather are intended as devices to enhance the cogency of one's argument (*Inst. Or.* 9.2.6ff.). In this case Paul is throwing odium on his opponents' point of view or shaming them, by showing the absurd conclusions that their sort of approach leads to (cf. *Inst. Or.* 9.2.9).⁵¹ The phrase 'Christ, a minister of sin'⁵² should be compared to the objection raised elsewhere that Paul, by his Gospel of grace, is promoting sin (cf. Gal. 5.13; Rom. 3.7–8 and 6.15).

Paul emphatically denies such a suggestion by means of μὴ γένοιτο. This phrase is interesting and also difficult to translate. It is a very strong exclamation, not dissimilar to the modern slang 'No way!', or to use more proper English 'Absolutely not!' It is interesting that the positive γένοιτο is found in the LXX to render the Hebrew 'Amen' (cf. Ps. 72.19; 71.19 in the LXX), and thus the negation of 'Amen' would mean something like 'I strongly disagree' or even 'may it certainly not be so'. As Bruce says, Paul seems particularly prone to say μὴ γένοιτο when it is suggested that freedom from the Law will encourage people to sin (cf. Rom. 6.1ff.; 6.15).⁵³ This suggests two things: (1) Paul was certainly one who thought that Christ had set his people free from observance of the Mosaic Law; and (2) he was rather regularly having to fend off suggestions that this made his Gospel anti-nomian, or that his message fostered immorality.

50. See the helpful discussion by J. Lambrecht, "The Line of Thought in Gal. 2.14b–21," *NTS* 24 (1978), pp. 484–95, here pp. 489ff.; cf. also Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 141. Materna, *Galatians*, p. 95, seems to assume that for there to be a question here, the interrogative particle is required, but that is not so.

51. Quintilian also speaks of rhetorical questions functioning as a way of making an assumption of that which in a dialogue would take the form of a question (*Inst. Or.* 5.11.5).

52. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 141 may be right that οὐκ ὀφείλει here carries the overtones of one who wants at table, in light of the previous discussion in 2.11–14.

53. Bruce, *Galatians*, p. 141.

In vs. 18 Paul turns, not for the first or last time, to a metaphor about constructing and demolishing buildings (cf., e.g., 1 Cor. 3.10–15; 2 Cor. 10.4). The metaphor is important in deliberative rhetoric where the ultimate issue is what makes for the building up of community and what makes for its destruction. What produces concord or unity, and what does not?⁵⁴ Here Paul is using the metaphor negatively to speak of the reconstruction of a Torah-observant lifestyle and community, after that sort of approach was dismantled by the death of Christ, or more to the point (since Paul will speak in the first person here), dismantled by his encounter with the crucified and risen Christ on Damascus Road. Scholars have puzzled over why we have here not a contrary to fact condition, but rather a first class condition which would suggest that this is actually being done by the speaker. Is Paul thinking here of what Peter and other Jewish Christians were doing in Antioch, building up again a Law-observant Christian community?⁵⁵ If Paul is speaking here for his fellow Jewish Christians in Antioch as a group and as a member of that group, then we must bear in mind that apparently all of them except Paul had in fact capitulated to the pressure or request that came from the men from James. Paul then would be the lone exception, but otherwise, for members of this group, this statement would be true. Paul wishes them to see the consequences of such actions for *him*. 'If I rebuild what I once destroyed then I demonstrate or reveal myself to be a 'transgressor' or 'Law-breaker'.

The word παραβᾶν does not just refer to a sinner, but to a transgressor, one who stands within a community bound by a particular form of Law, and violates that Law.⁵⁶ It is in fact a legal term, as is true of many terms in this subsection (e.g., 'annul', 'acquit').⁵⁷ Paul in Rom. 2.25 closely connects circumcision with being bound to obey the Law (writ large), and says that if you are circumcised, this is of value if you obey the Law, but if not you are a Law-breaker. Notice also Rom. 4.15 where the statement is made that where there is no Law there is no transgression (cf. below on Gal. 3.19). Paul is not speaking of being lawless here but of violating the Mosaic Law, which assumes it is in force on the Christian. The word order in the apodosis is intentionally dramatic – 'a transgressor myself I demonstrate'.

Notice that the verb 'destroy' is in the aorist, referring to an event which was done or happened in the past. Probably Paul is alluding to the point of conversion when the Law was set aside as either a means of justification or a *modus vivendi*, though it is just possible this is an allusion to the point in time when it was decided to have table fellowship with Gentiles and to allow them

54. See the discussion by Mitchell, *Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, pp. 99ff.

55. Cf. Lambrecht, "The Line," p. 493; Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 90.

56. Lightfoot, *Galatians*, p. 117.

57. Betz, *Galatians*, p. 121.

to participate fully with Jews in the community of Christ without requiring them to be Law-observant. In any case, as Lambrecht says the "transgression consists precisely in the act of building up again; the restoration of the Law is the negation of God's initiative in Christ (cf. vs. 21a)."⁵⁸

Verse 18 should be seen as transitional to the final section of the *propositio*. It was in the first person, but it was Paul speaking as a member of a group. Beginning in vs. 19, however, things appear to become more personal, with Paul giving something of a testimony about his own experience. This is signalled by the emphatic ἐγὼ which begins the verse.⁵⁹ What follows is about 'I myself'. The rhetorical function of this material is not defense, but rather to provide Paul's converts with an example of how they too should interpret their conversion experiences. Paul knows of course that the unique and peculiar experiences Paul has recounted in Gal. 1.1–2.11 cannot be reduplicated in the lives of his converts, but what he says in 2.19–21 is of another and more universalisable character. Gaventa puts the matter aptly:

What the Galatians can imitate is Paul's single-minded response to the gospel that was revealed to him. When he 'immediately' returned to Damascus (1.17) he also discarded his Zeal for maintaining the Law and the tradition. He died not only to the Law but also to the traditions and customs he had previously served. It is the reversal of those prior commitments that the Galatians are to imitate, although their commitments may be of a quite different sort (cf. 4.1–11). To become as Paul means to allow Christ to live in oneself (cf. 2.20) to the exclusion of the Law or of any other tradition or category (cf. 3.27–28).⁶⁰

On any showing, vs. 19a is difficult – 'for I myself through the Law died to the Law, in order that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ'. It is perhaps helpful if we consider for a moment Paul's discussion in Rom. 7.1–4 about dying to the Law. There Paul reminds his audience that the Law is binding on a person so long as they live. Verse 4 is crucial where Paul says that his audience has died to the Law (cf. vs. 6 discharged from the Law) through the body of Christ, so that they might belong to another (i.e., to Christ) in order that they might bear fruit.

58. Lambrecht, *Galatians*, p. 494.

59. It is in my judgment in the main a mistake to read this section of Galatians in the light of Rom. 7, or vice versa. In the latter text Paul has not just offered an autobiographical *narratio* as is clearly the case in Gal. 1–2. One can say this about both texts, however: in each case, Paul writes as a Christian describing a pre-Christian state of affairs that led to conversion. Rom. 7 is in all likelihood not a description of the Christian life, especially in view of what Paul goes on to say in Rom. 8.1ff.

60. Gaventa, "Galatians 1 and 2," p. 322. As we shall see, Gal. 3.27–28 stands at the very heart of Paul's deliberative case for concord and unity in Christ, as he argues against the fragmentation of the Galatian community which will happen if they take up the yoke of the Law.

Some commentators have suggested that Paul's argument here in Gal. 2.19a is rather strictly personal. Paul was a persecutor of the church because of his zeal for the Law, and it was precisely that zeal which led him down Damascus Road to his head-on collision with Christ. This is what 'through (my zeal for) the Law, I came to die to the Law' is sometimes thought to mean.⁶¹ I would suggest that we must take seriously the parallel in Rom. 7.4, and the fact that Paul is speaking here as a paradigm.⁶² Even more importantly the statement 'I have been crucified with Christ' is probably part of vs. 19, and provides a clue to Paul's meaning.⁶³ The place where the Law was abolished or set aside was on the cross of Christ. It was Christ himself, taking on the curse of the Law who died to the Law for all, through the execution of the Law's curse on him. Inasmuch as Paul or any Christian was crucified 'with' Christ on that occasion (Christ being both representative and corporate head of his group of followers), he or any Christian also as a result died to the Law. This meant they were no longer under the Law's jurisdiction, no longer obligated to keep the Law, no longer under the Law's power, free from the Law's curse and its demands. It also meant that the "distinction between sinner and righteous is no longer determined by Torah."⁶⁴ They now lived in a new sphere of influence, namely Christ, or to put it another way they were now part of the eschatological new creation. They were now under a new mandate, namely the Law of Christ, which meant first and foremost following the example of Christ, of his self-sacrificial community-creating obedience and faithfulness expressed pre-eminently on the cross.

Verse 19b suggests that one must die to the Law, in order to live to God. This no doubt would be seen as a paradoxical statement by the agitators in Galatia or the false brothers in Jerusalem, or the men who came from James. After all, there are statements in early Judaism such as we find at 4 Macc. 7.19 and 16.25 where 'living to God' refers to life beyond death, namely life beyond the grave. Yet Paul is speaking about having this life while still in the flesh, and having it quite apart from the Law.⁶⁵ For the normal Jew, life comes through or

61. See, e.g., Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 143.

62. The reference to the body of Christ in Rom. 7.4 may indeed be a reference to Christ's crucifixion.

63. See rightly, Matera, *Galatians*, p. 103: "But since the Law is binding only during a person's lifetime (Rom. 7.1), Paul concludes that Christ and those in Him are free from the Law because of Christ's death . . . Paul has died to the Law through the Law by his co-crucifixion with Christ. He is dead to the Law because he is alive to a new eschatological reality."

64. Ziesler, *Galatians*, p. 27.

65. See Ziesler, *Galatians*, p. 29: "What is remarkable here is that instead of seeing the Law as representing the regime or power of God Paul sees it as an alternative . . ."

at least consists of obeying Torah (cf. Gal. 3.12), but Paul now believed that the Law could not give life or make one alive (Gal. 3.21). Only God in Christ could do that. In short, the death and resurrection of Christ has put to death all old means of trying to live or obtain life, here or hereafter, and has offered a new means of life and living.

It is important to note the tense of the verb 'crucified with' at the end of vs. 19. It is in the perfect, suggesting an action which began in the past and has continuing and ongoing effects in the present.⁶⁶ Paul is not merely taking about imitating Christ here, though that is a part of the matter, nor even just that Paul suffered in Christ, when Christ died on the cross. Had the latter been the sole focus here we might have expected an aorist verb here. Paul is suggesting that he is now being conformed to the sufferings of Christ in his own person when he is now being conformed for Christ's sake (cf. Gal. 6.17) and so depicts the suffering Christ in his own life and person. Furthermore, he can even speaking in Phil. 3.10–11 of sharing in common Christ's suffering and becoming like him in his *death*. As was the case with the Master, so will be the case with his servants.

Furthermore, it is not just that outwardly in the events and pattern of his life that Paul is being conformed to the image of Christ. Verse 20 says that Paul can no longer speak about himself living (it is not 'I' who live), rather it is Christ who lives in Paul. In short there is also *inward conformity* to the life and nature of Christ as well. As Hansen says, this does not amount to a loss of human personality but rather a Christological renewal of true personality.⁶⁷ Paul usually speaks of being in Christ, rather than the reverse (Christ being in him), but the latter idea is found from time to time in his letters (cf. Rom. 8.10; 2 Cor. 13.5; Col. 1.27; Ephes. 3.17). A good deal more frequent is the notion that the Spirit indwells the believer (Rom. 5.5; 8.9, 11, 15, 16, 23, 26).⁶⁸

Lest all this 'in Christ' and 'Christ in me' mysticism sound totally otherworldly, Paul quickly adds that all this is true while he is still living in the flesh. The *viv* here speaks of what is true of the believer after conversion and before physical death. The believer still lives in the body though he or she may be full of Christ and the Spirit (cf. 2 Cor. 4–5). Not only is the world in a dialectical tension between already and not yet, but so is the believer by the very fact that the believer is still in the undecimated and unrenewed human

66. As Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 144 says, it is hardly likely this is a reference to baptism. Paul means he was nailed to the cross with Christ and he is still hanging there, not that he is still immersed. This is what comes of reading Gal. 2 in light of the later material in Rom. 6, as H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), pp. 99–101 does.

67. Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 76.

68. See rightly, Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 145.

body he or she always had.⁶⁹ This verse also means, as Longenecker points out that Paul is referring to what is true after he has died to the Law and while Christ lives in him.⁷⁰

In vs. 20b we have another phrase where we must decide whether we are dealing with an objective or subjective genitive. Hays suggests we translate here 'I live by the faith of the Son of God who loved . . .'.⁷¹ On the other hand, even Longenecker who elsewhere is an advocate of the subjective genitive approach to 'the faith of Christ' thinks that here we have an objective genitive.⁷² The following factors must be taken into consideration. Here *πίστις* is preceded by the preposition *ἐν*. Secondly, while the reading 'Son of God' here is likely to be preferred, there are various good witnesses that support the variant reading 'God and Christ' (p46, B, D*, G and others), and certainly this is the more difficult reading, for it is not found elsewhere in Paul.⁷³ Whatever the origin of this variant, it appears clear that these scribes did not understand the subject here to be 'the faithfulness of God or Christ, but rather faith in them. A sort of combination view is suggested by Williams who

69. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 146 wishes to read the term 'flesh' here as a reference to Paul's ethnic origin, his Jewishness (citing Rom. 1.3; 4.1; 9.3, 5, 8; 11.14). This is because Dunn wishes to stress that Paul does not renounce his continued Jewishness in order to live as a Christian. I doubt that Paul's Jewishness is at all alluded to here, especially since he is presenting himself as an example of and paradigm for all Christians, including his Gentile converts in Galatia. As for Paul not renouncing his continued Jewishness, while he certainly does not deny his Jewish origins, he says very clearly in Phil. 3.7–10 that he counts his Jewish credentials in the loss (and gone) column, and indeed he even says that he regards them as *σκατά*, 'crap'. Cf. Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 30.

The question that must be raised is – What does Jewishness mean for Paul the follower of Christ if he is prepared to say that circumcision counts for nothing, and he himself is prepared to live without regard to things like the food and sabbath laws? Can he really be said to be in continuity with early Judaism under these circumstances, or is he a sectarian person, who has taken on a new identity which leaves behind various things the vast majority of early Jews would see as essential to one's Jewish identity? I would suggest that the latter is a fairer assessment of where Paul is when he writes Galatians; cf. H. Räisänen 'Gal. 2.16 and Paul's break with Judaism,' *NTS* 31 (1985), pp. 543–53, here p. 53: "Paul's attack on covenantal nomism – largely implicit but nonetheless real – signals such a discontinuity or such a change of values that it is hardly too much to speak of a break." (Cf. E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, London: SCM Press 1977), p. 551). Dunn's assessment sounds more like a description of the agitators, or the men from James, or perhaps even of James himself at this juncture, though I would suggest that if James had accepted 'the truth of the Gospel', namely that all were given right standing with God through faith in the faithful work of Christ, he too might have been considered beyond the pale by many if not most early Jews.

70. Longenecker, *Galatians*, p. 93.

71. Hays, *Moral Vision*, p. 32.

72. Longenecker, *Galatians*, pp. 93–94.

73. See Metzger, *TC*, p. 593.

translates here 'I live in faith – that of the Son of God who loved me ...'.⁷⁴ If *ἐν* is taken as instrumental here ('by') then one could translate 'I live by the faithfulness – that of the Son of God'. Perhaps a slight preference should be given to this last reading in view of the presence of *τῇ* after 'I live' and the presence of the following qualifying clauses which follow it, where it is clear that the action of Christ is in view.⁷⁵

Verse 20c affirms that the Son of God 'loved' me and 'gave himself' for me. These participles are in the aorist suggesting a particular event in the past, namely the death of Christ. This is where Christ's faithfulness (obedience) and faith and love were fully and climactically shown. Dunn may well be right that the main inspiration for these phrases comes from the Jesus tradition (cf. Mk. 10.42–45; Jn. 10.11; 15.13). In any case, it is right to emphasize that Paul has personalized things in a radical way here – Christ gave himself over to death for me, hence the intimacy of the connection between Christ's death, the believer's life, and also the cruciform shape of the believer's life.⁷⁶ There is, as Lategan says, a clear echo of Gal. 1.4 in Gal. 2.20. Furthermore, it is this echo and vs. 19–20 which more than any other part of this *propositio* prepare the way for what is to follow in Gal. 3–4.⁷⁷

In vs. 21 Paul makes a simple assertion. He is not going to say or do anything to 'nullify' the grace of God. The language here is legal (cf. 1 Macc. 11.36; 2 Macc. 13.25; Gal. 3.15; 1 Cor. 1.19; 1 Tim. 5.12), coming from the realm of wills, testaments, and covenants. Paul's view is that a new covenantal situation has been set up by the death of Christ (cf. 2 Cor. 3), and this covenant is based on God's gracious work in Christ. Anything which compromises or constricts the efficacy or character of that work is seen by Paul as an attempt to invalidate or annul this new gracious covenant. Paul's implication is that there are those who are annulling the grace of God, by insisting on Christians, in particular Gentiles in this case, keeping the Mosaic Law. This is why the *propositio* ends with a bang in the form of a conditional statement. Here again we have a first class condition – 'for if righteousness/justification [comes] through the Law, then Christ died for nothing!' It is, however, in view of vs. 16, surely not a real condition.⁷⁸ It must be said on this score that by Paul's day,

74. Williams, p. 445.

75. The issue must remain uncertain, not least because of the placement of *ἐν* between 'in faith' and what follows. But, on the other hand, the *τῇ* after *ἐν* seems resumptive (i.e., 'By faith I live, that faith of the Son of God ...').

76. Dunn, *Galatians*, p. 147. While the Gospel cannot be reduced to Paul's own experience, and it can be said that Paul reads his biography in light of the Gospel, there is some sort of symbiotic relationship between Paul's reading of his own experience and Paul's understanding of the Gospel.

77. Lategan, "Is Paul Defending," p. 428.

78. See Betz, *Galatians*, p. 126.

contrary to fact conditions in the indicative with *εἰ* did not require an *ἀν* in the apodosis to signal this fact. We see examples of this sort of phenomenon for example in Gal. 4.15 and also in Jn. 15.24, and I would suggest that Gal. 5.11 is simply another example of the unreal or contrary to fact condition with *εἰ* and without *ἀν*.⁷⁹ The grammarians agree that though it is rare, there are occasions where the indicative can be used in a protasis without *ἀν* in the apodosis to refer to an unreal condition.⁸⁰ It is clear from vs. 16 that Paul does not think Christ died for nothing and consequently he does not think righteousness or justification comes through the Law. Christ's action (not our faith) is here set over against the Law as that which puts the believer in right relationship with God, and in fact one has this ongoing relationship with God because of what Christ did.⁸¹

The word *δόσεν* has as its basic meaning gift. One may wish to compare Rom. 3.24 and 2 Cor. 11.7. The accusative form here is used as an adverb meaning 'in vain' or 'for nothing'⁸² or 'to no purpose' or 'without a cause' (cf. Job 1.9; Ps. 34.19, i.e., 35.19 in the LXX; and on the last meaning Jn. 15.25). In Paul's view, any idea or any practice which takes away from or seeks to eclipse or to invalidate or to suggest the insufficiency of what Christ did on the cross, must be countered and rejected. If grace and the cross and being in Christ are the basis and guiding principles of the new covenant, then Mosaic requirements are not, not least because in Christ there is meant to be a unity of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female. "The unity and equality of all believers in Christ is the foundational principle and overarching aim of Paul's entire argument."⁸³

That is to say, Galatians is one large deliberative act of persuasion for the unity of the body of Christ in Galatia, with the theology of freedom from the Law and freedom in Christ found here and in Gal. 3–4 preparing for and providing a basis for the exhortations and ethical advice that follows in Gal. 5–6 about factionalism and divisive behavior and practices (such as, for instance, circumcision), and about walking in the Spirit as opposed to doing works of the flesh, or attempting works of the Law.

Paul has established his ethos and identity in Gal. 1–2 as a trustworthy paradigm for his converts to imitate, in contrast to Peter, Barnabas, the

79. On this latter text see pp. 372ff. below.

80. See BDF no. 360.

81. In other words *δικαιοσύνη* is not just about how the relationship began, but about its continuance as well. This is why Ziesler (*Galatians*, p. 30) plausibly suggests the translation righteousness here, meaning living as God's people ought to live. Cf. above pp. 173ff.

82. I.e., *gratis*, as J. Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), p. 44. Chrysostom suggests translating it something like 'superfluous'.

83. Hansen, *Galatians*, p. 73.

agitors, and others. His story since conversion shows, as he is conformed to the image of the crucified Christ, that he embodies the truth of the Gospel, that he models non-factions self-sacrificial behavior. Paul must go on to unpack the *propositio*, providing arguments to support the assertions he makes here. Most of all he must not only emphasize the great freeing and equalizing capacity of grace and how it creates community in the midst of diversity, but he must explain why the Law existed before Christ came. We must begin to examine his λόγος or arguments at this juncture.

Bridging the Horizons

For some today the entire discussion in Gal. 2:15–21 will seem a bit esoteric or far too legal to be interesting to anyone but lawyers. For others, it will appear from this passage that God is not the loving God we otherwise have been led to assume exists. What kind of God requires his only son to die a hideous death on a cross? I have even heard of one case of a seminary professor arguing that the cross is evidence that God practiced child abuse! All of these attitudes grow out of fundamental misunderstandings about the human condition and also about the nature of God.

It was Paul's belief that all human beings had sinned and fallen short of God's will for human life and behavior. More than this, he believed that without divine help, human beings could not be extricated out of the quicksand of their fallen condition. This was one side of the divine-human equation. The other side is that Paul believed that God was both righteous and merciful, both just and loving, both holy and prepared to forgive. We often have trouble with holding these concepts together, but hold them in tension we must if we are to begin to understand how Paul could have thought that it was God's plan that his Son should die for the sins of the world.

In Paul's understanding, God could not simply forgive sin, both the reality and the effects of sin had to be countered if there was to be reconciliation between God and human beings. The big question was how God could both be just, not renouncing the divine character, and still be the justifier of sinful human beings. Paul's answer was that God must provide an atonement for sin in the person of his Son who was born as a human being for this very purpose. He was, as Dorothy Sayers used to say, the man born to die. Once sin was dealt with effectively and definitively on the cross, then the door was open to the possibility of normalizing relationships between God and humankind.

The story is told of William Herschel. As a young boy he loved military music, and growing up in Hanover in Germany he joined a military band. When his nation went to war, he was one of those leading the military band. As a young man he was totally unprepared for the horrors of war, and the result was that before long he deserted his military unit and fled the battle scene during an intense period of fighting.

He fled to England, and began to pursue further training in both music and science. Thinking he was in the clear, he grew and prospered in his new country. In fact he made various scientific discoveries that made him famous, and he gained great renown for his musical abilities. However, after Herschel came to the British Isles, another Hanoverian also came to live there – George who in fact became the King of England. King George knew of Herschel's past desertion of the army and summoned the great musician and scientist to appear before the royal court. Herschel went with fear and trembling, and when he arrived in the palace he was told to wait a considerable time in an ante-chamber to the throne room. Then finally, one of the King's servants came to Herschel and handed him a document and told him to read it. He opened it with fear, only to discover that it read 'I George pardon you for your past offenses against our native land! George had pronounced the verdict of no condemnation on William Herschel, and in fact the document went on to say that for his outstanding service to humankind as a musician and a scientist, he was now to become Sir William Herschel: he was to be knighted! He had gone from criminal to honored dignitary in an instance, quite apart from what he might have deserved according to German law (the penalty for desertion was death). Paul is saying that this is what God's pronouncement of pardon does for all of us who accept it. It not only removes the source of alienation, it places us in a favored relationship with God.

This story perfectly illustrates Paul's concept of justification – it is a matter of God pronouncing a verdict of no condemnation on the sinner, or, put positively, it is a matter of declaring that the person in question was justified, in right relationship to the Law and the Law giver, even though he was in fact far from perfect. With the legal judgment of no condemnation (cf. Rom. 8.1ff.) comes the implication that sins have been forgiven, and so one need no longer be estranged from God. Yet estrangement is not overcome merely by a pronouncement from above. One must respond in faith to such a pronouncement. One must accept forgiveness. Forgiveness offered is not the same as forgiveness received.

Of course there are many people today who think we live in a no fault world, a world where no one is to be blamed for anything, no one need take responsibility for anything they have done wrong. From this point of view, there is no sin to atone for, only guilt feelings that need to be assuaged. The human problem is not that we are sinful, we just struggle with feelings of low

self esteem! But it is worth asking why we have guilt feelings at all if there is no such thing as sin, or absolutes in matters of right and wrong. Why has God created human beings with the capacity of having a conscience unlike all other creatures? Perhaps then there is such a thing as accountability for human actions. Perhaps we really do live in a moral universe where it is true ultimately that what a person sows, that also shall they reap (Gal. 6). Perhaps there really was a need for God to provide a means of salvation and forgiveness; perhaps Christ's death really was both the necessary and sufficient means to atone for and deal with the sin problem and human estrangement from God.

If this is so, then it is understandable why Paul felt that nothing should be allowed to compromise the importance of or annul the effects of the death of Christ. Not even things that were good in their time, namely the Mosaic Law, should be allowed to obscure the sufficiency and importance of Christ's death for humankind. Paul believed that he had expressed the heart of the Gospel in 2.15-21 and nothing should be allowed to compromise it, not even well meaning attempts to help Gentile Christians be more moral persons. This explains both Paul's earnestness and his sense of urgency as he sums up in advance the heart of his Gospel. The question is whether we also are prepared to hear and receive this message as the Galatians originally did, hear and receive it as Good News.

Probatio: 3.1-6.10

Argument I: 3.1-18

THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM AND THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE GALATIANS

O foolish Galatians! Has someone cast the evil eye on you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as having been crucified? This only I wish to ascertain from you: was it from works of the Law or from hearing (that is, faith) that you received the Spirit? Thus you are foolish, you began with the Spirit, now will you be completed in the flesh? Have you experienced so much for nothing, if indeed it was even for nothing? So then the One bountifully supplying you the Spirit and doing mighty works among you, [was it] from works of the Law or from hearing (i.e., faith)?

Just as 'Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him for righteousness'. For you know that those [living] from faith, these are children of Abraham. But [because] the Scripture foresaw that by faith God would justify the [Gentile] nations, it gave the good news before hand to Abraham that all the nations will be blessed in you' so that those from faith are blessed with the faithful Abraham.

For those who are [living] from works of the Law, are under a curse. For it is written that 'Accursed are all who do not persevere in all the things written in the Book of the Law, those putting it into practice'. Because from works of the Law no one shall be justified before God, it is clear that 'the righteous one from faith will live'. But the Law is not from faith, but 'those doing it will live in them'. Christ ransomed us from the curse of the Law being for us a curse, because it is written 'Cursed be all those hanging upon a cross', in order that the blessing of Abraham could be extended to the Gentile nations in Christ Jesus, in order that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.