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THE LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

WALKING IN LINE WITH THE SPIRIT

One of the more pressing sets of questions with which the early church had to wrestle had to do with the requirements for joining the people of God and the ongoing validity of the Torah (the Jewish law) as the code that should regulate the life of the church. The voices of those who argued that circumcision, the rite of entrance into the covenant people since Abraham, remained an essential mark of those who belonged to God's new covenant are not well represented in the New Testament. However powerful these voices might have been, they were pushed to the margins by Paul and his growing influence in the church, Galatians providing perhaps the strongest statement against such voices.

For Paul, circumcision belongs to that limited period of time between the giving of the promise to Abraham and the coming of Jesus, in whom the promised inheritance came to all who believed,

whether Jew (the circumcised) or Gentile (the uncircumcised). The Torah as a whole similarly belongs to that interim period, when humanity was still in its adolescence with regard to its knowledge of the one God. With the coming of Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit into the hearts of the believers, however, humanity came of age in its relationship with God. Galatians bears testimony to the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life and experience of the early church. It is the Spirit, poured out on those who trust Jesus Christ, that makes someone a child of God and therefore part of the one people of God. The Spirit, guiding the believer like a constant friend, leads the believer into conformity with God's righteousness, making Christ take shape in him or her. To seek to bring back the "old ways" of trying to walk in line with God shows an essential failure to grasp the promise and privilege of the new way God has opened up, a failure that brings out Paul's emotions in this letter like no other.

THE HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE GALATIAN CHURCHES

Galatians in the career of Paul. Galatians gives us more firsthand information about Paul's early career as a Christian missionary than any other text. The challenge is to understand how the events described in this account coincide with the events described in the secondhand account by Luke known as the Acts of the Apostles. We have already considered Acts on its own terms and the nature of ancient historiography. While seeking to provide a reliable account of Christian origins, Luke nevertheless is

highly selective: he organizes his material according to the patterns and development he wishes to highlight, and he has his own perspective on and interpretation of the events he narrates. Scholars tend to approach this question from one of three basic positions:

- Acts and Galatians are both completely historically reliable; they can and must be harmonized (i.e., Galatians must be read within the framework of Acts).

- Acts and Galatians are both generally reliable but must be read and evaluated in terms of the authors' different aims, perspectives, knowledge of events and principles of selection. Together, each can *contribute* to a reliable picture of the history of the early church. Privilege of place tends to be given to Galatians as a firsthand testimony to events.

- Acts and Galatians are documents written to tell "history" in a way that supports the authors' agendas. (Usually this is applied far more forcefully to Acts than to Galatians.) The framework of Acts is open to revision because it reflects more of Luke's idealized portrait than the "facts". Privilege is always given to Galatians.

This introduction proceeds mainly from the second theoretical position, although the results suggest that the two texts are highly complementary.

Both Galatians and Acts speak clearly about Paul's former opposition to the Jesus movement in

Palestine (Gal 1:13, 23; Acts 8:3; 9:1–2) and about Paul's encounter with the glorified Christ (Gal 1:15–16; Acts 9:3–6). Both understand this encounter to involve Paul's commission to preach the gospel (Gal 1:15–16; Acts 9:15). At this point, Paul's selectivity is more apparent: he denies conferring with "flesh and blood" (Gal 1:16), by which he means to emphasize the independence of his gospel from the Jerusalem apostles and his utter dependence on God for his message and commission. His omission of any mention of Ananias (see Acts 9:10–19) is therefore understandable as being beside the point and potentially damaging to his claims. Both accounts agree that Paul continued on in Damascus for a time, though Luke gives the impression of a much shorter stay there (Gal 1:17; Acts 9:20–25).

We come, then, to the question of Paul's visits to Jerusalem.[1] Luke speaks of three visits in Acts 9–15: the first occurs shortly after Paul's conversion (Acts 9:26–30); the second occurs in connection with famine relief funds taken up in Antioch (Acts 11:27–30); the third occurs in connection with the "apostolic conference" deciding the question of whether or not Gentile converts need to be circumcised and keep Torah (Acts 15). Paul speaks of two visits in Galatians: the first occurs three years after his conversion (Gal 1:18–20); the second occurs fourteen years after either his conversion or the first visit (Gal 2:1–2). In chapter eight (on Acts) I posed a series of questions with regard to sorting

[1] An excellent review of this problem in Pauline biography can be found in R. P. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990), pp. lxxiii-lxxxiii.

out these data. Here I will lay out my own responses to those questions.

In Galatians 1–2, Paul very carefully lays out a case that demonstrates his independence from the Jerusalem apostles. He is intent on detailing his interactions with them precisely and putting the proper spin on those visits so that no one can accuse him of being a "derivative" apostle, answerable to Jerusalem rather than to God. To omit mention of a visit (e.g., the famine relief visit, if Luke is correct about that visit), especially when he invokes oaths about the truthfulness and completeness of his information (Gal 1:20), would leave Paul open to immediate disconfirmation and loss of the debate in Galatia. Even if Luke had invented the famine-relief visit, it would still be wrong to identify the visit in Galatians 2:1–10 with the apostolic conference in Acts 15:

- The visit Paul narrates was a private meeting that focused mainly on confirming Paul's calling as apostle to the Gentiles; Acts 15 describes a more open meeting, focused mainly on the question of what Gentile converts were required to do to be part of the new people of God.

- The outcome of the visit Paul narrates is the confirmation of Paul and Barnabas as agents of God's gospel (the former being more in doubt than the latter, given Paul's past) and the admonition to "continue to remember the poor" (Gal 2:10); the outcome of the meeting in Acts 15 was the delineation of a minimum number of purity requirements for Gentile converts (abstaining from

food sacrificed to idols, fornication, eating blood and eating meat that had been slaughtered by strangulation).

- The events in Galatians (let alone Paul's activities prior to Galatians) must logically predate any such decision that was reached in the meeting narrated in Acts 15, since that ruling would have direct bearing both on the question of circumcision raised in Galatia and the question of table fellowship with the Gentile Christians raised in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14).

Paul, then, visited Jerusalem for the first time after his conversion/commission by the glorified Christ three years (or in the third year) after that event. Paul speaks of this as a private meeting to get acquainted with Peter and, to a lesser extent, James, staying only two weeks. Since Paul regards himself as "still unknown by face" to the churches in Judea (Gal 1:22), Luke may have colored his depiction of this visit (Acts 9:26–30) with stories of Paul openly preaching and debating in Jerusalem as a means of making his transformation more dramatic and vivid. Luke also suggests that with Barnabas's help Paul was introduced to the whole circle of apostles and was, in effect, incorporated into their group for the duration of his stay in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27–28).

After leaving Jerusalem, Paul returned to work in the regions of Syria (the home of Antioch) and Cilicia (the home of Tarsus), Paul providing a more generalized account of this than Luke (Gal 1:21; Acts 9:30; 11:25–26). The work in Antioch, in particular, sets the stage for a second visit to Jerusalem. Luke looks on this from the outside, underscoring the visit

as part of a famine relief program (Acts 11:27–30). The phrasing of Galatians 2:10, in which the Jerusalem apostles urge Paul and Barnabas to "continue to remember the poor" while Paul asserts that he had already been eager to do this very thing, would complement the "relief fund" aspect of this visit. Paul, however, looks at the visit as an insider, being privy to the meeting with James, Peter and John. While Paul is intent on demonstrating his essential independence from these Jerusalem "pillars", this also affords him an opportunity to affirm the validation of his calling by them at the same time.

Subsequent to this, Paul evangelizes the Galatians. Scholars have endlessly debated whether the Galatian churches were located in south Galatia or north Galatia.[2] Generally, those who favor locating these churches in northern Galatia identify the meeting in Galatians 2:1–10 with the meeting in Acts 15 (if they do not abandon the framework of Acts altogether). Acts gives no details about Paul's activities in the cities of north Galatia (Ancyra, Pessinus and Tavium), merely mentioning that Paul

[2] On locating these churches in the northern territory of Galatia, see J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 10th ed. (1890; reprint, London: Macmillan, 1986); J. Moffatt, *An Introduction to the Literature of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1918), pp. 83–107. W. M. Ramsey made the classic case for locating these churches in the southern cities of Galatia in his *Historical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, 2nd ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1900); see also E. deWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1921); Colin Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1989), pp. 277–307. An exceptional summary of the issues involved and of the positions taken can be found in Longenecker, *Galatians*, lxiii-lxxii.

and his team "went throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia" in Acts 16:6 (the initial, evangelizing visit) and returning to "the region of Galatia and Phrygia" in Acts 18:23) to strengthen the disciples there. According to the "south Galatian hypothesis", the churches addressed by Paul's letter to the Galatians were Derbe, Lystra, Iconium and Pisidian Antioch, an evangelization effort described in detail in Acts 13–14.

Both sides have their merits and difficulties, and they have been championed by careful and astute scholars. The term *Galatians* would be a more appropriate designation for residents in north Galatia, if an ethnic designation (e.g., "Celts") had been intended, but it is also perfectly appropriate for residents in south Galatia given their Roman provincial designation. Indeed, what other single title could unite those south Galatian churches, which ethnically would be quite disparate?[3] Paul himself claims to have preached to these people on account of an illness (i.e., his plans to preach elsewhere were deferred on account of sickness, with the result that he evangelized where he was laid up). This does not fit the picture we find in Acts 13–14 of Paul's ministry in south Galatia, but because Acts is completely silent about (alleged) activities in north Galatia, it would not pose a stumbling block to a north Galatian mission. On the other hand, when we consider Luke's more stylized and secondhand depiction of Paul's missionary work in each city, particularly in south Galatia (that is, prior to Luke's acquaintance with Paul), this discrepancy can be

[3] Burton, *Epistle to the Galatians*, p. xxix.

explained as a result of Paul's intimate recollection of the facts and Luke's inferior access to those facts and other authorial interests.

On balance, I favor locating the Galatians crisis in the south Galatian cities, early in Paul's career and prior to any conference on the topic of Gentile responsibility to keep Torah. Such an agreement would have been the perfect trump card for Paul if the Galatian crisis developed *after* the apostolic conference.[4] Our decision, however, will hardly affect our appreciation of the issues raised in the situation behind Galatians or in Paul's response.

Paul's preaching to the Galatians. In contrast to the narrative of Acts, Paul appears not to have intended to preach to these specific congregations but was impeded from fulfilling his purpose (presumably to go further) and made the best of the limitations imposed on him by his health (Gal 4:13). Here Paul displays a truly positive and Spirit-led response to the frustrations of being hindered in his plans by sickness, seeking out God's provision of

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[4] Longenecker adds several important observations based on Paul's traveling companions, tipping the balance in this direction (*Galatians*, pp. lxx-lxxi). First, he notices the absence of any mention of Timothy, who is linked with Paul throughout the so-called second missionary journey and is mentioned in every undisputed Pauline letter, except Galatians. This suggests that Paul evangelized Galatia *and* wrote Galatians before he teamed up with Timothy. Second, Longenecker observes the prominent role played by Barnabas in Galatians. True, Barnabas was a well-known evangelist in his own right, like James, John and Peter (none of whom the Galatians need have met for those references to be meaningful). However, the inclusion of Barnabas in Galatians 2:9 and, more especially, the climactic nature of Barnabas (of all people!) being carried away in Peter's hypocrisy in Antioch (Gal 2:13) would have more force if he was personally known to the Galatians.

otherwise unexpected opportunities. The Galatians responded favorably to Paul's preaching, despite his bodily ailment. Paul himself regards this to be extraordinary since those brought up in Greek culture came to expect a good show from public speakers. Manner of presentation, physical grace and poise, and vocal beauty were all as important as what was said. Indeed, those who lacked the physical presence, voice and declamatory power could expect to receive ridicule and public scorn rather than an attentive hearing. Rather than despise the speaker, however, the Galatians and Paul formed a deep bond of loyalty and devotion during that visit (Gal 4:15), making their subsequent departure from Paul's message all the more surprising and hurtful for the apostle.

What exactly did Paul preach when he was in Galatia? The central feature of his gospel here, as in Corinth, was Christ crucified (Gal 3:1; see 1 Cor 2:2). What significance could this possibly have had for the Gentile Galatians? Jesus as the Christ, or Messiah, was a foreign concept, and crucifixion a sign of utter degradation. Greek culture, however, could envision a divine being suffering excruciating torments, and this specifically on behalf of humanity. The myth of Prometheus, for example, typifies this pattern. Throughout Galatians, Paul refers to Jesus as one who, in death, "gave himself on behalf of our sins" (Gal 1:4), who "loved me and gave himself up for me" (Gal 2:20), who rescues believers "from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4). The condensed, formulaic nature of these verses suggests that Paul had used them before and could assume the Galatians' familiarity with these

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concepts from his earlier visit. Paul presented Christ's crucifixion in terms of a benefactor who poured himself out completely in order to bring benefit to his clients. This terminology of "giving oneself", or "pouring oneself out", is frequent in inscriptions honoring benefactors. The shameful death of the cross was thus transformed into a noble act of supreme generosity and benefit.

Dying "for our sins" (Gal 1:4), Christ removed the obstacles to standing before a favorable God rather than an angry Judge. The thought of dying to "rescue us from this present evil age" introduces Paul's apocalyptic framework into his message early and forcefully. An apocalyptic worldview tends to see this world and its history as a temporary phenomenon, one in which the justice of God and the rewards of God for the righteous cannot fully be manifested. The death and resurrection of the Messiah signaled, for Paul, the beginning of the end of this current age and the imminence of the inception of the "age to come", a better, eternal age in which God's purposes are completely fulfilled and God's people enjoy their full reward. Christ's death was therefore an act that brought rescue *from* this world and its fate (judgment) *for* the benefits of living with God in the age to come.

The way to join oneself to this Christ was by "faith", trusting in the efficacy of his death on behalf of others to connect people with God. Those who are "of faith" trust that Jesus is a competent patron, able to procure the favor of the ultimate Patron, God. They trust that the provisions they receive by virtue of their association with Christ (for example, the

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Holy Spirit) are sufficient to bring them where God wants them to be. Comprehended within this faith is uncompromising loyalty and obedience to Jesus. The response of gratitude toward Christ and the God he makes known would require a complementary turning away from idols and all their trappings (as in 1 Thess 1:9–10), and Paul would have had a wealth of anti-idolatry polemic at his fingertips from the writings of Hellenistic era Jews (for example, the Letter of Jeremiah, the Wisdom of Solomon and the like). Moreover, Greek and Roman philosophers had long emphasized the essential oneness of God, who was worshiped imperfectly under a vast array of partial guises and inadequate representations. Paul could connect this with his own understanding that the one God of the Jews was also the one God of the Gentiles. His cosmopolitan approach would certainly have been more appealing than the traditional Jewish appeal that stressed the ethnic particularity of the one God and the way of life by which one could please him.

The indisputable sign for Paul of the efficacy of Jesus' work is the Galatians' reception of the Holy Spirit. Their response of trust on hearing Paul's preaching of the gospel resulted in the pouring out of God's Holy Spirit on them (Gal 3:1–5). By all accounts of the human exuberance and divine manifestations that this entailed, the Galatians would have been quite aware that a decisive change had occurred, that they had in fact received the Spirit of God. This should have been enough to show that God had approved them as part of God's family. These Gentile converts were no longer unclean, no longer outside the people of promise, since God had

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made known God's own acceptance of them into that household.

The rival teachers and their mission. Paul left Galatia with the conviction that his work among the Galatian converts rested on a firm foundation. What happened to shake that foundation in the months that followed his visit? On the one hand, we cannot assume that Paul had left every question answered. As the Galatian converts continued in their new life, reflecting more on their experience and, as is quite likely, on the Scriptures, new questions would have emerged. On the other hand, it is apparent that other teachers encountered the Galatian Christians, raising new questions and addressing other questions in a way that called Paul's work among them into question. Paul never names these rival teachers, but he speaks frequently of "those who are upsetting you" (Gal 1:7; 5:10), who "pervert the gospel of Christ" (Gal 1:7), who "court" them (Gal 4:17), who "trip you up from obeying the truth" (Gal 5:7), whom Paul wishes would go ahead and castrate themselves (Gal 5:12). Paul ascribes to these rival teachers the base motives of wanting to make the Galatians dependent on them for their inclusion into God's people (Gal 4:17), of seeking to make a good showing to enhance their own honor in certain circles by getting the Galatians to accept circumcision (Gal 6:12–13), and of being too cowardly to endure the opposition that preaching the true gospel brings (Gal 5:11; 6:12).

Who then are these rival teachers? Scholars are almost unanimous in affirming that they represent another mission by Christian Jews to Gentiles, one

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that taught Torah observance as a corollary to coming to Christ.[5] This mission may have begun independently of any concern for what Paul was doing, but it appears in Acts and Galatians largely as a cleanup mission, whose teachers followed along Paul's tracks trying to bring Gentile Christians into conformity with Torah and circumcision. In effect, they wanted to preserve fully the Jewishness of the new Christian movement and keep it firmly anchored within Judaism. Judaism, after all, could tolerate messianic sects—just not the negation of its most central identity markers (like circumcision and Torah obedience).

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[5] The other options in the history of scholarship are that the rival teachers are Gentile Christians who have adopted the Jewish way of life, or that they are non-Christian Jews. The latter position has recently been revived by M. D. Nanos (*The Irony of Galatians: Paul's Letter in First-Century Context* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002], p. 193), though it renders Gal 6:12 difficult to explain. The Gentile and Jewish Christians are still attached to the synagogue, he postulates, with the non-Christian Jews calling the Gentile Christians, who laudably seek to be "righteous", to take the necessary step of circumcision so as to separate themselves from the pagan world to which they still belong (pp. 317–18). Nanos still understands, like those who regard the "influencers" to be Jewish Christian teachers, the Gentile Christians to regard circumcision and full inclusion into the Jewish people as complementary to their faith in Jesus (p. 227).

[118]deSilva, D. A. (2004). *An introduction to the New Testament : Contexts, methods and ministry formation* (491). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

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Figure 12.1. A beautiful mosaic from the floor of the synagogue in Tiberius, dating from the fourth or fifth century C.E. The iconography depicts central cultic symbols: the ark where the Torah scrolls were deposited, the seven-branched *menorah*, a knife for sacrifices, a shovel for incense and a *shofar*. (Photo courtesy of Todd Bolen [BiblePlaces.com])

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The activity of this mission is reflected in Acts 15:1–4, which tells of Jewish Christians from Judea coming to the churches served or founded by Paul and Barnabas, and seeking to impose circumcision and Torah observance on the converts there. Paul refers to this rival mission in Philippians 3:2–21 as a foil for his own, positive model of discipleship. Galatians, however, provides the fullest picture of the rival mission, together with the fullest refutation of their gospel. They were no doubt motivated theologically. The rival mission wanted to preserve the integrity of the covenant, setting the work of Christ within the context of this covenant (Torah). Christ would still be the one who brought light to the Gentiles, who effected the ingathering of the nations in the end time, but Christ would accomplish this by bringing the Gentiles into the Jewish people wholesale through circumcising them and getting them to take on themselves the "yoke of Torah". They were also concerned about the unity of the church. Like Paul, they sought to enable Jew and Gentile to come together in Christ in one worshiping body, the one body of the redeemed. Unlike Paul, they believed it was essential that the Gentiles, not the Jews, alter their behavior to make that fellowship possible.

[119]deSilva, D. A. (2004). *An introduction to the New Testament : Contexts, methods and ministry formation* (498). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

The rival teachers were socially motivated by their zeal for the Torah and their commitment to keep God's people distinct from all the other peoples of the earth—to enact the Levitical standards and definitions of holiness, in other words. The rumor about Paul in Jerusalem (see Acts 21:20–21) is that he leads Jews to abandon the Torah and forsake the covenant. This is not entirely inaccurate. Paul himself became a Jew to Jews and a Gentile to Gentiles, violating Torah's standards of purity (especially the pharisaic interpretation of these standards) by eating with his Gentile converts, perhaps even eating food improper for Jews. He encouraged his Jewish coworkers to do the same, setting aside for the sake of the mission and the gospel those restrictions within Torah designed to keep Jews from freely associating with Gentiles, and hence being polluted by those contacts. Moreover, he encouraged his Jewish converts to do the same with regard to his Gentile converts, to "welcome one another as Christ welcomed you" (Rom 15:7). Paul might well have been seen to promote apostasy from the covenant. While he lacked the political power of a Jason or Menelaus to enforce Hellenization, he appeared to be succeeding in loosening Torah so that Jews and Gentiles were freely mingling together. The boundaries were threatened, and those wishing to preserve the integrity (the wholeness) of the organism of Judaism had to act decisively.

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The "New Perspective" on Paul and Early Judaism

Pauline studies have undergone something of a paradigm shift during the last quarter of the twentieth century, principally thanks to the insights and energies of those who promote a "new perspective" on Paul and early Judaism. This new perspective grows out of a recognition that much interpretation of Paul and Judaism in the modern era has been distorted through the ongoing influence of Luther's interpretation of Paul against the backdrop of a Catholicism that called for meritorious works as the means of achieving salvation. In Luther's writings Judaism became the graceless, externalistic, legalistic foil to Paul's religion of grace, the Spirit and love. The caricature of early Judaism fed the caricature of the Jewish people, and the extreme end of such denigration manifested itself in the Holocaust.

The horrors of the Holocaust precipitated a reevaluation of the perception of Judaism in the New Testament texts and their interpretation. Although several scholars had urged already that Judaism was also a religion of grace, it was E. P. Sanders who forcefully brought widespread attention to this understanding. He showed consistently that in all its diversity early Judaism was a religion of grace. The election of Israel was

an act of divine grace; the giving of the Torah, the covenant that bound God and Israel to one another, was an act of divine grace. Doing the law was not understood as the means by which God's favor could be earned but as the proper response to God's favor already given in election and in the covenant. It had to do with the maintenance of an elect status bestowed by God, not with the acquisition of such status. Moreover, God had generously made provisions for failure to observe the covenant in the form of sacrifices, so that forgiveness and reconciliation remained available. Such provisions show that flawless performance was not expected. Sanders described Judaism as a religion of "covenantal nomism", the regulation of life by a law (*nomos*) within the framework of a graciously bestowed and maintained covenant relationship.

How, then, can we understand Paul's polemics against Judaism if the "new perspective" is correct thus far? An important insight that has emerged is that Paul does not oppose "grace" to "good works" in any way.[a] Rather, the works that are the target of Paul's polemic, often more fully expressed as "works of the law", involve those covenant obligations that pertained strictly to Israel under the Torah—the pedagogue and guardian whose time

[a] See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8*, WBC 38 (Dallas: Word, 1988), pp. lxvii-lxx; *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 354–59, 365.

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is past (Gal 3:23–4:7). Persevering in "works of the law" is a problem because the purpose of these laws was largely to mark off the Jewish people from the nations (see the powerful expressions of this in *Jub* 22.16 and *Letter of Aristeas* 139, 142). Remaining holy to the Lord entailed remaining distinct and separate from people who did not live by Torah, which meant the Gentiles and, quite often, unobservant Jews. A corollary of distinctiveness was ethnic pride in Torah as a sign of God's special favor toward the Jews (thus Paul's castigation of "confidence in the flesh" and of "boasting" in the law). This was a problem for Paul since, with the death and resurrection of Jesus, God had manifested God's desire to extend the promise and the blessing to all the nations, something that "zeal for the Torah" quite thoroughly inhibited. At such a stage in salvation history, insisting on the "works of the law" ran against God's purposes for the present era. In trying to remain "true" to the law, non-Christian Jews (and Judaizing Christians) had in fact betrayed the Law, not observing that its goal had been reached in the coming of Christ. Insisting on "works of the Torah" meant trying to reerect the "dividing wall of hostility" at a time when God tore it down in Christ and in the outpouring of the Spirit (cf. Gal 2:18; Eph 2:11–16), thus acting in open defiance of God.

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The new perspective has certainly brought many benefits to the study of the New Testament and early Judaism. It has taught us to try to understand early Judaism on its own terms as a prerequisite to interpreting Paul. It has given us good cause to reexamine some long-held views of Pauline theology that may have more to do with Reformation-era debates than with Paul's challenge to some streams of Jewish Christianity. Even though some of the statements that have come out of the new perspective are more extreme than the evidence necessitates, this is exactly what we would expect—and should be prepared to allow—after the pendulum has been swinging so long and so hard in the opposite direction. Nevertheless, its leaven, with some modifications, will be evident throughout our discussions of Galatians and Romans.

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The rival mission considered Paul's activity as a threat to the larger group (the Jewish people), which had to be preserved. These teachers were also acutely aware that apostates could be persecuted by the zealous (as Paul himself had done prior to his conversion; Gal 1:13–14, 23). Such zeal was firmly rooted in the tradition of Phinehas, who struck down an Israelite and his Moabite concubine and so won for himself a covenant of priesthood and saved Israel from being destroyed by a plague for its apostasy (Num 25:1–13). It was rooted in the tradition of Mattathias and his sons at the outset of the Maccabean Revolt, as they purged apostates from the midst of Israel and thus "turned away

wrath from Israel" (1 Macc 2:15–28, 42–48; 3:6, 8). A significant movement within Jewish Christianity, therefore, wanted to make it clear to both non-Christian and Christian Jews that the Jesus movement was in no way a movement that promoted apostasy. By reinforcing Jewish (Christian) adherence to the Torah, and all the more by bringing Gentiles to the light of the Law, the rival teachers could save themselves, the church in Judea, and the churches in the Diaspora where Jewish communities were strong, from the intramural persecution that perceived apostasy could invite. We see evidence for this clearly in the references to persecution throughout Galatians (1:13–14; 4:29; 5:11; 6:12). Where the word of the cross causes persecution while the preaching of circumcision relieves persecution, only Jews could be doing the persecuting, and the rival teachers would certainly alleviate pressures from that quarter.

The "gospel" of the rival teachers. What was the content of the rival teachers' corrective message? They have left no testimony of their own, but we can reconstruct likely elements of their message from two sources. First, Paul's response to their message surely highlights the topics (like circumcision or the value of Torah observance) and the specific positions (like circumcision as the manner by which one joins the family of Abraham, or Torah as the divinely given means for mastering the passions of the flesh) that his rivals used in their presentation of their case. Second, this information can be supplemented by investigating primary texts that display Jewish reflection about these topics or that

advance positions similar to those Paul feels compelled to address in Galatians. There are many texts that bear witness to Hellenistic Jewish attempts to build bridges with Greek culture, explaining the benefits and wisdom of keeping Torah, of circumcision and the like. It is likely that the rival teachers would have drawn on such well-articulated and widely attested arguments as resources for their own attempts to bring Gentiles over to the Jewish way of life.

1. The fuss about foreskins. For Gentiles the Jewish rite of circumcision was not one of the more admirable features of that way of life, though it was certainly the best known (alongside avoidance of pork and avoidance of all work on the sabbath). It amounted to a mutilation of the human form and was often disparaged as barbaric.[6] Why would circumcision suddenly be so appealing, so pressing an option, for the Gentile Christians in Galatia?

According to the Jewish Scriptures circumcision was an immensely positive and powerful ritual. The Galatian Christians no doubt encountered these Scriptures first in Paul's own instruction of his converts, teaching them that these texts were an essential resource for knowing the one God and for understanding the believer's place in God's family. The rival teachers would have been able to ground their message in the sacred Scriptures themselves. After all, did it not say that the promises were given to Abraham and his children? And how did one become a part of the family of Abraham? How does

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[6] See Philo *Spec. Leg.* 1.1.1–2.

one become an heir of the promises given to Abraham? The Scriptures are unambiguous on this point—through circumcision.

When God made the covenant with Abraham, promising him that he would be the "ancestor of a multitude of nations", God commanded circumcision as the absolute, unavoidable and essential sign of that covenant.

This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised….Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant. (Gen 17:10, 14 NRSV)

Those Gentiles who wish to join God's people must likewise circumcise themselves: this was the means by which the Gentile sojourner was made fit to participate in the life and worship of the community of Israel (Ex 12:48–49). Moreover, one must be circumcised to have any part in the heavenly Zion, the life of the age to come, for it is written:

Awake, awake,

put on your strength, O Zion!

Put on your beautiful garments,

O Jerusalem, the holy city;

for the uncircumcised and the unclean

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shall enter you no more. (Is 52:1 NRSV)

Likewise Ezekiel, speaking of the heavenly temple, says:

Thus says the Lord GOD: No foreigner, uncircumcised in heart and flesh, of all the foreigners who are among the people of Israel, shall enter my sanctuary. (Ezek 44:9 NRSV)

God's own word demonstrates that circumcision is the means of joining the family of Abraham and the people of God. Indeed, it is key to participation in the age to come. Circumcision, however, has great moral significance as well, as do all of the Jewish laws and customs when viewed symbolically and observed in both mind and both (see Philo *Migr. Abr.* 89). Circumcision "is a symbol for the cutting away of pleasures and the passions" of the flesh that lead the reason astray from its proper course, as well as an acknowledgment that the human male is not capable of producing offspring without the help of God, and therefore also a remedy for pride (Philo *Migr. Abr.* 92; *Spec. Leg.* 1.2.9–11; *Quaest. in Gen.* 3.48). The rite may also be seen as a symbolic initiation into a way of life that will make for mastery of the passions—those desires, sensations and emotions that belong to our human nature and so often hinder us from following the dictates of virtue and righteousness.

2. Torah as the way to perfection. Circumcision is a good beginning, but it is only an initiation. God's covenant was made with Israel in the Torah, and all

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who hope to share in the blessings of Israel and avoid the curses on the disobedient must submit to the yoke of Torah, as it stands written, "Cursed be everyone who does not walk in all the things written in the book of the law, to do them" (Deut 27:26). The person who keeps the commands of Torah will live to God by means of Torah (Lev 18:5).

The way of life prescribed by Torah, however, is far from a collection of barbaric, ethnocentric rules. For the person who is confused about how to make progress in living a God-pleasing life of virtue, as the newly converted might certainly be, Torah provides the God-given guide for the perplexed. Jewish apologetic for the Torah focused on the virtues that a Torah-observant way of life nurtured. Although there are many texts that speak to this topic (*Letter of Aristeas* and the works of Philo being among the more famous), 4 Maccabees provides perhaps the most informative background.

Four Maccabees presents itself as a philosophical "demonstration" of the thesis that the mind that has been trained by following Torah masters the passions of the flesh(4 Macc 1:1, 13–17). Rising above these passions was a central topic of Greco-Roman philosophical ethics, since the passions—whether emotions like fear or anger, sensations like pleasure or pain, or desires like greed or lust—were deemed the most potent enemy of living a virtuous life. Unchecked, the passions of the flesh would clamor louder than the reasoning faculty, derailing a person's commitment to virtue and ability to walk in

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line with virtue.[7] The battle against these forces became the true battle for honor, the truly noble athletic competition. The Jewish law, however, provides a complete exercise regimen for the strengthening of the rational faculty and the subduing of the passions. The dietary laws and prohibitions against coveting teach self-control (4 Macc 1:31–2:6); the regulations concerning debt release and leaving the gleanings of the harvest subdue greed (4 Macc 2:7–9); limits on vengeance and actions against enemies subdue the passion of enmity or hate (4 Macc 2:14). Torah is lauded as that which "teaches us self-control, so that we master all pleasures and desires,…courage, so that we endure any suffering willingly;…justice, so that in all our dealings we act impartially, and…piety, so that with proper reverence we worship the only living God" (4 Macc 5:23–24 NRSV).

This is precisely the kind of argumentation that the rival teachers would have had ready at hand to use when they encountered the Galatian converts, still painfully at the mercy of their fleshly impulses and desires. The final chapters of Paul's letter, far from being an appendix providing some moral guidance, is a necessary part of his counterargument.[8] Indeed, the whole driving force of the situation behind Galatians may have been the believers' quest for a reliable guide to virtue and for the discipline that would develop virtue in their lives

[7] See David A. deSilva, *4 Maccabees*, Sheffield Guides to Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), pp. 52–58.

[8] This is the central thesis of J. M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: Paul's Ethics in Galatia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1981), an exceptionally well-written and helpful investigation of this question.

and inhibit vice. The rival teachers presented the Torah as the best trainer in virtue, the way to perfection in terms of ethical progress, a proven discipline for mastering the "passions of the flesh". Paul then would have to demonstrate that the Galatians had already received all that they needed to rise above the passions and embody the virtues that God sought for in God's people.

3. Whom should the Galatians trust? Both Paul's defensive mode in Galatians and the time-honored practice of attacking the credibility of rivals in order to make room for one's own position make it highly likely that the rival teachers had also called Paul's authority and reliability into question. Judging from Paul's response, their attack on his credibility probably contained the following elements:

- The rival teachers came representing the Jerusalem apostles, who supported a much stricter observance of Torah than Paul. James was well known for his piety, even among non-Christian Jews. Peter had wavered on this issue, but the rival teachers might even have cited the Antioch incident to prove that Peter had come to his senses and remained true to the original, Torah-observant gospel (Gal 2:11–14).

- Paul's apostleship and knowledge of the gospel are dependent on the Jerusalem pillars, and his travels to Jerusalem demonstrate his dependence. If Paul's message differs from what the rival teachers claim to be the message of the Jerusalem church, then it is Paul who has been an unreliable and unfaithful messenger (Gal 1–2).

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- Paul preaches to suit the audience—he is a people pleaser (Gal 1:10). He preaches circumcision in other instances, but he probably thought that would make his message less welcome or successful here, so he left it out (Gal 5:11; 6:17).

Unlike Paul, the rival teachers would give the Galatians the whole truth about the gospel. Even though it involved difficulties, like the rite of circumcision, they would not keep anything back from the Galatian Christians just to win their assent or avoid more difficult arguments. The Galatians could trust them to bring them the next step in their journey toward righteousness.

PAUL'S RESPONSE IN GALATIANS

What is at stake in Galatia? The rival teachers present circumcision and some degree of Torah observance as completely complementary with the Galatian converts' trust in Jesus. Indeed, it is the next step forward in their spiritual journey to becoming full-fledged children of Abraham and in their ethical journey to a transformed life of virtue. What the rival teachers would join together, Paul radically rends asunder as he opens his letter.

After his customary expansion of the epistolary greeting formula ("Sender to Recipient, greetings"), Paul usually opens a letter with a thanksgiving or benediction (cf. Rom 1:8; 1 Cor 1:4; 2 Cor 1:3; Phil 1:3; 1 Thess 1:2; Philem 4). Here, however, he opens with an expression of shock and amazement (Gal 1:6). For him, the course of action they are contemplating is not a complement to their faith in

Jesus but an act of desertion and repudiation of their divine Benefactor. The message of the rival teachers is not a second installment of the gospel but a different gospel, which is not truly another gospel at all but a perversion of the true gospel (Gal 1:7). With two solemn curse formulas (Gal 1:8–9) Paul underscores the complete incompatibility of the message they are hearing with the gospel they had received. This opening is rhetorically effective indeed. It captures the hearers' attention (the main goal of the exordium, or opening of a speech) by presenting their situation as one of the gravest peril, forcing them to be open to reconsidering the relationship between faith in Jesus and circumcision.

But why should Paul consider these so fundamentally at odds? The answer seems to lie in Paul's understanding of the universal scope of God's new outpouring of favor. God was at last bringing together Jew and Gentile into one, united people (Gal 3:28)—the oneness of the God who is God both of Jew and Gentile (Rom 3:29) being reflected in not only the new people being formed in the name of Jesus but also the single basis on which both Jew and Gentile were brought into that united people (Gal 2:15–16). That basis is not Torah, the observance of which had functioned to keep Jew separate from Gentile for a limited amount of time, for "*all* flesh shall not be justified by works of law" (Gal 2:16), which pertains only to Israel. Rather, that basis is God's generosity toward all as expressed in Jesus' death on behalf of humanity, and that death fulfills the promise made to Abraham at last by making him the spiritual ancestor of many nations.

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Paul consistently sets "grace" in opposition to "works of Torah"[9] at key junctures throughout Galatians (Gal 2:21; 5:4), in part because Torah was a necessary trapping of human "immaturity", and in part because what God has graciously done in Jesus *for all* now makes possible what Torah had not made possible, namely, a life lived truly to God, for God and in the power of God. Paul's own story is a living example of this premise, for it is precisely when he was most fully engaged in the works of Torah that he was God's enemy, and it was precisely then that God graciously transformed Paul into an apostle of God's righteousness in Christ. After Jesus' death a *return* to works of Torah as if they could *add* to what Jesus had done would amount to a repudiation of Jesus' ability to connect us to God and an insultingly low evaluation of the potential of the Spirit, the promised gift won for us at such cost, to transform our lives.

The "Faith of Jesus Christ" in Galatians

[9] Paul's polemic against "works of the law" is not a polemic against "good works", as this is commonly but erroneously understood. Rather, Paul opposes the continued observance of a boundary-maintaining code, not only in the observance of the more obvious differentiators like circumcision, kosher laws and sabbath, but also as an entire body of laws given to *Israel* as a mark of her distinctiveness and separation from the Gentiles (see Dunn, *Theology of Paul's Letter*, pp. 354–59). It is not in maintaining the ethnic identity of Israel (through such "works of Torah") that we are conformed to God's character or brought in line with God's purpose, but only through faith in Jesus, which results in the life of the Spirit being born in us so that we are born to life before God. Paul certainly expects the Spirit to produce all manner of "good works" in the life of the disciple (Rom 2:6–11; 6:12–13; Gal 5:13–25; Eph 2:10).

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The phrase "the faith of Jesus" or "the faith of Christ" or some equivalent appears at several crucial points in connection with how Paul understands justification to come to human beings (see Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; Phil 3:9). In Galatians we find it in the following contexts:

Knowing that a person is not justified by works of law except through *the faith of Jesus Christ*, even we [Jewish Christians] have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified on the basis of *the faith of Christ* and not on the basis of works of law. (Gal 2:16)

But Scripture has shut all things up together under sin, in order that the promise might be given on the basis of *the faith of Jesus Christ* to those who trust. (Gal 3:22)

The traditional Protestant interpretation of this phrase has been to read it as "faith in Jesus", so that the Christian's faith is what is operative at every turn.

A careful study by Morna Hooker, however, brought the grammatical ambiguity of the phrase forcefully to the attention of scholarship, and an endless string of articles and books now sport the words "the faith of Christ—in the title in response to this question. According to her, and to many who have accepted her conclusions, Paul uses this

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phrase to draw attention to Jesus' own faithfulness toward God as the effective cause by which the possibility of justification has come into the world. This is certainly brought to the fore in Romans (see Rom 3:22–26; 5:18–19) and so deserves careful consideration as an option here as well. This has the advantage of avoiding the redundancy inherent in the traditional interpretation: for example, "in order that the promise might be given on the basis of believing in Jesus Christ to those who believe [in Jesus Christ]" (Gal 3:22). It also has the advantage of observing the parallelism between "faith of Jesus" and "faith of Abraham" in Galatians. No one would suggest that we translate the latter as "believing in Abraham". And to the incredulous question of James Dunn—"Did Christ also 'believe' as Abraham did?"[a]—we would have to answer, Yes, in fact Christ did believe in the God who gives life from the dead and walked forward in obedience accordingly.

Taking issue with Hooker, Dunn noticed that *pistin theou* unambiguously means "faith in God" in Mark 11:22—the context clarifies the grammatical ambiguity.[b] He finds similar contextual clues in Galatians that would lead him strongly to affirm "faith in Christ" as the proper understanding. Thus in Galatians 2:16, Paul

[a] Dunn, *Theology of Paul's Letter*, p. 382
[b] Ibid., pp. 379–85.

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speaks of himself and other Jewish Christians "believing in Christ Jesus" as a contextual indicator that "faith of Jesus Christ" must also denote the believers' faith. Stuhlmacher also claims this to be "unambiguously" the meaning of "faith of Christ" in this passage.[c] For this to be true, however, we have to accept the redundancies of both Galatians 2:16 and 3:22 as Paul's desire to repeat himself and make his emphasis clear,[d] rather than connect the references to "believing" to the Christians and the references to "faith/faithfulness" to Christ—an equally plausible and certainly a more rhetorically elegant solution.

The problem is largely solved if we are willing to see an emphasis both on Jesus' faith/faithfulness and our trust in and faithfulness toward Jesus. Dunn, in fact, admits that there is more cause for reading both Jesus' faith/faithfulness and our trust in Romans 3:22–26.[e] All of this is also perfectly in keeping with the kinds of patron-broker-client relationships being articulated in these passages. Jesus acted in faithful obedience toward God and secured benefits for those who, in turn, trust Jesus' efficacy as a mediator of God's benefits and walk forward faithfully in that trust. We will return to this important theological question in chapter sixteen (on Romans), the other text in which the phrase

[c] Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification*, p. 65.
[d] Dunn, *Theology of Paul's Letter*, p. 381.
[e] Ibid., p. 383.

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plays a prominent role in Paul's explanation of how God's righteousness is revealed.

What is at stake for Paul, then, is ultimately the meaningfulness of Jesus' death on the cross, "for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died gratuitously" (Gal 2:21). The very "grace/favor/gift of God" extended through Jesus is at stake (Gal 2:21). Will the Galatians appreciate and accept what God has done for humanity in the cross of Christ? Will they trust the efficacy of that single act of costly obedience to join them to the family of Abraham and the family of God without trying to turn the clock back to a time before Jesus' death? Will they place sufficient value on the resource God has provided in the Spirit—ever so much more effective and empowering a guide to the heart of God than Torah—to lead them into righteousness? All of these questions are wrapped up in the catchwords *grace* and *trust* that so dominate this letter.

Whom should the Galatians trust? Paul is mainly occupied in the first two chapters of Galatians with explaining why he should be trusted, most likely because he has learned that his rivals have suggested that he is not entirely trustworthy. He spends a great deal of space recounting his own direct commissioning by God and affirms his refusal to adapt his message out of a desire to "please" people, which he considers incompatible with being

Christ's slave (Gal 1:10). The narrative that he crafts in Galatians 1:11–2:14 is not an attempt at autobiography. Rather, it is Paul's attempt to restore his credibility in the eyes of his converts. To do this he turns to a narrative demonstration, setting the facts of his past conduct and interaction with the Jerusalem apostles straight and giving these facts their proper interpretation. In this defense Paul is intent on demonstrating the following:

- His commissioning and message come directly from God, and so they must be deemed more authentic and authoritative than all rivals.

- His authority is not dependent on or derivative from the Jerusalem apostles.

- Nevertheless, he has worked collegially with them and his apostleship has been recognized as valid by them.

- He is the one who, in the face of any and all pressures, has walked "straightforwardly in line with the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14), the truth God revealed to him and reveals through him, and so he is most plausibly the one doing that now in the Galatian situation.

EXEGETICAL SKILL

Rhetorical Criticism (2)—Appeals to "Ethos"

As he analyzed effective oratory, Aristotle discovered that effective speakers would use three different kinds of proof. One, of course, is proof of

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a more formal and logical kind—the examples, analogies and supporting arguments marshaled in support of a position defended or course of action urged. The other two kinds of proof might seem less obvious. A speaker could enhance the persuasive effects of an address by "putting the hearer into a certain frame of mind" (*Rhet.* 1.2.3), that is, arousing emotions in the hearers that will move them in the direction the speaker wishes them to go. These are called appeals to pathos, or emotion. Of paramount importance, however, is the speaker's demonstration of his or her "moral character":

The orator persuades by moral character when his speech is delivered in such a manner as to render him worthy of confidence.…But this confidence must be due to the speech itself, not to any preconceived idea of the speaker's character.…Moral character, so to say, constitutes the most effective means of proof. (*Rhet.* 1.2.4)

This observation would still hold true four hundred years later, as Quintilian compiled his compendium of wisdom and technique learned from a lifetime of successful public speaking:

But what really carries greatest weight in deliberative speeches is the authority of the speaker. For he, who would have all men trust his

Rhet. Rhetorica

judgment as to what is expedient and honourable, should both possess and be regarded as possessing genuine wisdom and excellence of character. (*Inst. Orat.* 3.8.13)

These rhetorical theorists are only recording what, on reflection, all would recognize as common sense. A speaker must have our trust and confidence if she or he is to persuade us to do anything; conversely, questions about a speaker's credibility prove the quickest and most effective means to undermining his or her message.

A speaker should show throughout a speech that he or she possesses "good sense, virtue, and goodwill" (Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.1.5). We trust those whom we deem well-disposed toward us, rather than those who seem antagonistic or derogatory; we trust those who embody the values we hold dear; we trust those who speak and reason sensibly, and who seem knowledgeable about those matters they speak of. In an environment of competing speakers (like Galatians), calling the credibility of the rival speakers into question also contributes to effective persuasion, since a speaker is as much concerned to defuse the persuasive power of opponents as to enhance his or her own. As we probe the rhetorical strategy of texts more deeply, therefore, we will attend not only to the logical arguments advanced but also to the ways a

Inst. *Institutio Oratoria*

speaker establishes his or her own credibility within the speech and, where applicable, seeks to erode the credibility of rival speakers in that situation.

While these appeals to ethos can and do appear throughout an address, rhetorical theorists suggest that we should be especially alert to them at the beginning (the *exordium*) and at the end (the *peroratio*) of an address. While the main purpose of the opening of an address is to announce the theme and to capture the hearers' attention, showing that the question at hand is one of importance, the speaker will also address "all that helps to destroy or create prejudice" (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.14.6–7; see also *Rhet. ad Alex.* 1436a33-37). Similarly, a conclusion to an address should "dispose the hearer favourably towards oneself and unfavourably towards the adversary", while also providing a summary statement of the speech and arousing the appropriate emotions in the audience (Aristotle *Rhet.* 3.19.1).

As we turn to Galatians 1:1–10 and 6:11–18, undisputedly the opening and closing of this address, we find Paul attending rather closely and extensively to appeals to ethos.

Rhet. ad *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*

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Galatians 1:1: As Paul expands his self-designation as the sender of the letter, he emphasizes his direct authorization by God to act as an apostle of the gospel, denying that he relies on any human authorization. It is highly likely, given the extensive treatment of this subject in Galatian Galatian 1:11–2:10, that Paul is already working to "destroy prejudice" against himself.

Galatians 1:7: Paul begins to create prejudice against the rival teachers by referring to them as "agitators" among the Galatians and perverters of the Gospel (see also Gal 5:7, 10), going so far as to call down a curse on them (v. 8). Creating distance between the hearers and these rival speakers will continue to be a major goal throughout Galatians.

Galatians 1:10: Paul concludes the *exordium* by affirming his freedom from courting human opinion, and therefore he affirms his complete reliability as a proclaimer of truth. Unlike his opponents (see below), he will not be swayed from holding to the true gospel because that gospel might make him unpopular or even bring him hardship. He understands that being a people-pleaser is incompatible with being a reliable servant of Christ.

Galatians 6:12: Paul suggests that the rival teachers are operating out of selfish and cowardly

motives, not because they are well disposed toward the Galatians. A desire to avoid persecution (from non-Christian Jews) motivates them to circumcise the Galatians in order to make both the Galatians and the gospel palatable to other human beings. They are conforming the gospel to what will look good to the people they fear. Acting from selfish motives rather than for the good of the Galatians, the character of the rival teachers will be diminished in the church's eyes.

Galatians 6:13: Moreover, the rival teachers are themselves insincere, failing to keep the Torah themselves even as they attempt to fasten this yoke upon the Galatian converts.[a] They are promoting circumcision not because they are wholeheartedly devoted to Torah, but because this will enhance their prestige in the eyes of their significant others, the larger Jewish population. (They want to "boast in your flesh".)

Galatians 6:14: Paul, however, is free from such selfish motives as trying to make the Galatians into a trophy for himself.

[a] Exactly what Paul has in mind here is unclear. Nanos suggests that Paul refers to the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself (*Irony of Galatians*, pp. 227–28). It is not that the rival teachers are lax in their Torah observance but that they are seeking their self-interests as they pressure the Galatian Gentile Christians to do what is against their own best interests in Christ.

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Galatians 6:17: Finally, Paul points to his own scars as proof of his sincerity and reliability. Unlike the rival teachers, he is willing to suffer beatings and whippings for telling the truth about what God has done in Jesus, however unpopular this has made him with those same people whom the rivals fear.

Before reading the remainder of "Whom should the Galatians trust?" experiment with identifying appeals to ethos in the body of the letter (Gal 1:11–6:10), especially in Galatians 1:11–2:14; 4:12–20; 5:2–12. Where does Paul speak about the rival teachers? What motives does he ascribe to them? Are these motives noble or base? Where does Paul speak about his own motives? How does he convey a sense that he can be trusted to tell the truth, even when others are lying? How does he impress on the hearers that his gospel is authoritative? Why, in a situation of conflicting messages about the gospel, should the Galatians trust Paul's version? How does Paul convey a sense of goodwill toward the hearers so that they will know he is well-disposed toward them? How does Paul render the hearers well-disposed toward him as well? As you engage any text from the vantage point of such questions, you are exploring a fundamental aspect of that text's persuasive strategy and power.

Paul begins the body of his letter with the customary verb "I want you to know" (*gnōrizo*, Gal 1:11). The first major point he must stress is the divine origin of the gospel he originally brought to the Galatians (Gal 1:11–12). The first and best reason they should resist the leading of the rival teachers is that Paul brought them exactly and fully the message God had for them. As proof of this bold claim, he reminds them of the encounter that turned his own life around. Paul had been more on fire for the Torah than his rivals could ever be. He was so zealous for the covenant that he persecuted Jewish Christians as threats to that covenant (in the tradition of Phinehas and Mattathias). Paul emphasizes his former self to make two points: first, no one can pretend to know more about the Torah-observant way of life than Paul; second, only God indeed could have turned such a person into what he is now, a preacher of a Torah-free gospel (Gal 1:15–16, 23–24).

The revelation of Jesus Christ that God granted Paul was all at once a conversion, a commission and a communication of the gospel. While Paul doubtless would continue to work out the implications of that communication for decades, he insists that the whole gospel was given to him there *in nuce*. He did not rely, in other words, on any human being teaching him about God's plan in Christ. As support he asserts that he neither "conferred with flesh and blood" nor "went up to Jerusalem" to consult the human leaders of the Jesus movement; instead he spent three years on his own (Gal 1:16–17), preaching the gospel in the Nabatean kingdom. Only then did he go to Jerusalem to make Peter's acquaintance, meeting James the Lord's

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brother as well (but no other!), staying a mere two weeks. Paul went not as a schoolboy but as a fellow apostle and preacher of the gospel. At this point Paul invokes a solemn oath (Gal 1:20), alerting us again to the fact that he is making a quasi-formal case and not merely sharing his faith journey. The next eleven to fourteen years (depending on how we count the "fourteen years" in Gal 2:1) are spent preaching in Syria and Cilicia, so that he remained "unknown" by face to the Christians in Judea.

The narrative thus far shows Paul's independence of the Jerusalem leadership and dependence on God for his commission and for the message he proclaimed (the first two points listed above). As Paul recounts at length this private meeting between James, John and Peter on the one hand, and himself and Barnabas on the other hand, Paul moves to the third point, namely, the Jerusalem apostles' validation of his apostleship and message.[10] Paul insists that he goes to Jerusalem at the behest of God ("according to a revelation", Gal 2:2), rather than as a lackey of the Jerusalem apostles. There he lays out the gospel he had been preaching (Gal 1:21–24), bringing along an uncircumcised Gentile convert named Titus (Gal 2:1, 3). If the Jerusalem apostles felt the need to correct or supplement any aspect of Paul's gospel, that would have been the occasion. Instead, seeing the hand of God to be at work in Paul and Barnabas's missionary endeavors just as in their own (Gal 2:8), and understanding this to be an outworking of God's favor (Gal 2:9), the Jerusalem

[10] For a fuller investigation of this tightrope Paul is walking, see James D. G. Dunn, "The Relationship Between Paul and Jerusalem according to Galatians 1 and 2", *NTS* 28 (1982): 461–78.

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apostles affirmed Paul and Barnabas as partners in mission and "added nothing" to Paul's message (Gal 2:6). Why, then, should anyone be calling for circumcision of Gentiles now? The Galatians should take this as evidence that Paul's gospel has the recognition of the Jerusalem apostles, whatever the rivals may have said to the contrary.

Where then comes the impetus toward Torah-observance or bringing the Gentile converts under the strict tutelage of that outmoded guardian? According to Paul, "certain false brothers" already made their presence and wishes known at that private meeting with the apostles (Gal 2:4), presumably raising the suggestion that Titus needed to be circumcised. Paul paints these people as enemies of the "freedom" that Christ has brought to Paul's converts, wishing to "enslave" them afresh. Paul, however, firmly resisted them at that time, emerging as the champion of the "truth of the gospel", preserving that truth for the Galatians to enjoy subsequently. Because Titus went away uncircumcised, the Jerusalem apostles would be understood to concur with Paul, not the false brothers.

The narrative demonstration concludes with the painful "Antioch incident". Paul must display his own constancy by describing the inconstant behavior of his apostolic colleagues. Both Jewish and Gentile Christians were part of the church in Syrian Antioch, and they displayed their unity, among other ways, by eating at a common table. Peter himself appears to have understood that such an arrangement, though in violation of Jewish purity

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regulations, was perfectly in keeping with the purity of the new people God had formed from Jews and Gentiles. The "truth of the gospel"—the "one body" fashioned by God out of Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female, all of whom are equally acceptable to God on the basis of Jesus' death—was being lived out as Peter, Paul, Barnabas, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians all shared the common life of the Spirit and had fellowship at table as one people, one body.

At some point people from James (or claiming to be from James) arrived at Antioch and pressured Peter to return to a more respectable way of life for an "apostle to the circumcision". It is clear from this that the "agreement" described in Galatians 2:6–10 did not settle the issue of how Jews and Gentiles were to regulate their behavior in a mixed congregation. From the perspective of the "people from James", the gospel did not free Jewish Christians from keeping kosher, whatever else it might mean for their lives. Peter yielded to their pressure and began eating at a separate, kosher table.[11] This withdrawal apparently stung the conscience of the Antiochene Jewish Christians, who all gave in to the pressure to observe kosher laws and eat separately from the Gentile converts.

The people from James were concerned only about the Christian *Jews'* adherence to Torah, and quite possibly only Peter's behavior. It was not their

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[11] J. L. Martyn suggests that Peter did so out of regard for his own mission to the Jews in Antioch, the people from James having pointed out how detrimental to his witness his nonobservant lifestyle would be (*Galatians*, AB 33A [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1997], p. 242).

intent to make the Gentiles into Jews. The message this sent to the Gentiles, however, was quite clear: You are not really acceptable to God on the basis of your trust in Jesus and your reception of the Spirit; if you want to find acceptance before God, and enjoy fellowship with God's people, you must make yourselves clean by circumcision and Torah-observance. Paul confronts Peter (and the other Jewish Christians as well), accusing them of not living in line with "the truth of the gospel" (Gal 2:14). Paul understood that the Christian Jews' action placed an unspoken requirement on the Gentiles, undermining the sufficiency of the saving act of Jesus. Once again Paul courageously and uncompromisingly stands up for the truth of the gospel—at a time when even Peter and Barnabas had been pressured by concern for human opinion to depart from walking in line with that gospel. Other than Paul, then, whom can the Galatians trust to tell them the truth of God, unaffected by concern for human approval?

The Antioch incident provides a close analogy to the Galatian situation (though it does not make any statement about the identity of the rival teachers).[12] Paul avers that the rival teachers, like Peter, seek to uphold the old boundaries drawn around the Jewish people by the Torah because they are afraid to tell their fellow Jews the truth about God's abolition of those boundaries in his new outpouring of favor in Christ. They do not, in other words, "walk in line with the truth of the gospel". Just as Paul spoke the truth in Antioch—quite

[12] Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), p. 24.

possibly to his own hurt in terms of losing that argument—he will speak the truth in Galatia, without consideration for his own advantage or what is politic.

Who is the heir of the divine promises? Abraham was regarded as the common ancestor of the Jewish people, the people of God. To be a child of Abraham, then, was to be part of God's people. The rival teachers had a strong argument in favor of circumcision, insofar as this was prescribed in Scripture as the prerequisite for being part of Abraham's family. For Paul, however, it was Abraham's trust in God and not his circumcised flesh that made him the recipient of God's promise and resulted in his being accounted "righteous" in God's sight. In this way Abraham could indeed become the ancestor of many nations, the vehicle for God's blessing "all the nations" (Gal 3:8). Circumcision marked a person as a Jew; trust marked a person as an heir of Abraham, whether Jew or Gentile.

Paul invokes the strongest proof for this claim at the outset of his body of proofs (Gal 3:1–4:21), pointing to the Galatians' own reception of the Holy Spirit. Theorists advised that a strong argument, if not the most compelling, should be placed up front. This way the speaker would convince the audience early on, with all following proofs serving to confirm the hearers in their decision. The Galatians had received the Holy Spirit on the basis of their response of trust to the hearing of the gospel (Gal 3:2–5). This proves God's complete acceptance of them as Gentiles purely on the basis of their

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commitment to Jesus.[13] Their trust in Jesus was enough to render them holy to the Lord; there was no need to perform the traditional rites by which Jews had kept themselves holy to the Lord and distinct from the Gentile nations.

Paul, moreover, identifies this Holy Spirit as the very content of the blessing of Abraham that was promised to the nations, the promised gift (Gal 3:14). On what basis could Paul make this identification? First, in the experience of the early church, the Spirit came to all who trusted in Jesus, whether Jews or Gentiles. It was as universal in scope as had been the promise to Abraham: "in you all the nations will be blessed" (Gen 12:3; Gal 3:8). Second, the Spirit signified the believers' adoption by God as sons and daughters (Gal 4:6–7). The phenomenology of being filled with the Spirit led the early Christians, who thereafter called on God as "Abba, Father" (Gal 4:6), to understand this as a spiritual begetting by God's own self, making them spiritual children of Abraham (Gal 3:26–29; 4:21–28) just like Isaac was the spiritual child of Abraham, having been born on the basis of God's promise rather than the deeds of flesh. Paul draws on the powerful image of the ritual of baptism, asserting that in that ritual Christ covered them like a garment and former distinctions were no longer of any value, any meaning (Gal 3:26–28). Humanity was no longer to be divided into opposing dyads—Jews on the one hand, Greeks on the other; slaves on the one hand, free on the other; male on the one hand, female on the other. People were no longer to relate

[13] A similar point is made by the extensive episode of Cornelius and its interpretation in Acts 10–11; 15.

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to one another based on the divisions and prejudices inherent in these divisions. Rather, these oppositions and dyads have been resolved in Christ, with whom each Christian has been clothed, so that "Christ's" becomes the only term of significance to define the identity and belonging of each. The Galatians may be sure, therefore, that they are Abraham's children and heirs of the promise since they have been fully immersed in Christ.

Paul reminds the Galatian converts of these formative experiences (which probably also entailed their ongoing awareness of the operation of the Spirit in their lives and in their congregational life), asking them what more they could possibly hope to gain by attending to such material concerns as circumcision or food regulations (Gal 3:2–5). Paul relegates the realm of Torah's efficacy to the sphere of the "flesh", which is a catchword throughout Galatians for all that is impotent to effect God's righteousness (as in Gal 4:21–31) and even all that actively opposes the realization of God's righteousness (as in Gal 5:13–25). He presents them with the absurdity of their situation: they have already received the Spirit and can only make progress by heeding the Spirit, not by submitting to something of merely fleshly power.

Paul's argument proceeds by creating a matrix of antinomies, of contrasting irreconcilable pairs. The first of these focuses on the "blessing" versus the "curse" (Gal 3:6–14). Abraham is identified as the vehicle for God's blessing for all people (Gal 3:8), and Abraham's "trust" in God and "faithfulness" toward God qualify him for "blessing". All who show

the same trust in God's ability and desire to bestow favor rather than by performing some ritual act on the flesh of the foreskin share in the "blessing" together with "faithful Abraham" (Gal 3:9). The Torah, on the other hand, becomes the vehicle for "curse". Here, Paul may well turn a verse used by the rival teachers—"Cursed be everyone who does not remain in all the things written in the book of the law, to do them" (Deut 27:26)—on its head. This text would more naturally be read to promote Torah-obedience, threatening the curse on those who neglect its decrees.[14] Paul uses it, however, to

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A major crux of interpretation emerges here as one must decide if those who rely on works of the law are "under a curse" because it is categorically impossible for anyone to do all the commandments without misstep (the traditional interpretation, recently upheld by Seyoon Kim (*Paul and the New Perspective* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001]. pp. 141–43) or for some other reason. According to the proponents of the new perspective, Jews did not understand Torah as a collection of laws that they had to fulfill perfectly or else fail to attain God's favor. Rather, the commandments of Torah constituted the way of life they were to embody in response to God's favor, and the sacrificial system was God's provision for imperfect people trying to live out this pattern of life. The "curse" of the law did not fall on those who failed to do everything perfectly but on those who sinned willfully, or committed idolatry—in short, those who turned away from the covenant God.

Against this new perspective Kim argues that Jewish rabbis did indeed think that failing to keep one commandment would result in the curse, or in death. Kim refers the reader to Rabbi Gamaliel's weeping at the implications of "he that does them shall live", that one must do *all* the commandments in order to live, and not just one (*b. Sanhedrin* 81a.). Of course, Rabbi Akiba later retorts that in doing each one individually is life. Even if Gamaliel's response is to be interpreted as Kim suggests, then, it is countermanded within the tradition itself.

In invoking Deuteronomy 27:26; 28:58, Paul may be thinking beyond the performance of individual commandments and considering the observance of the entirety of the Law. This would include heeding the prophet whom God would "raise up" after Moses

assert Torah's essential character as "curse" rather than "blessing", which in any case belongs to the promise and to trust. As support for this assertion, Paul brings together two Scriptures that (somewhat artificially) drive a wedge between "trust" and the Torah. Habakkuk 2:4 bears witness that "the righteous person will live on the basis of trust", which is a different mode of living than found under Torah, where "the one who does them [the works of Torah] will live by means of them" (Lev 18:5). If someone hopes to be a "righteous person", then, he or she is compelled to look to the path opened up by trust in Jesus and by the gift of the Spirit.

The death of Jesus removes humanity from the sphere of the curse. The Messiah himself died under Torah's curse as a sinner, since "cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Deut 21:23),[15] but he did so in obedience to the God who raised Jesus and thereby showed Torah itself to be out of alignment with God's righteousness. This decisive act brought to an end the period of the Torah's authority, and it

(Deut 18:18, understood in early Christian discourse to refer to Christ, as in Acts 3:22–23), and the model of Abraham, whose trust in God the readers of Torah are taught to imitate. Through their zeal for the Torah and their resistance to what God was doing in Christ in the new phase of salvation history, Israel had made itself an enemy of God (Rom 10:2–4; 11:28), refusing to submit in obedience to God. As such, their "doing" of Torah was only partial and misguided, so they did not in fact "observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law" (Deut 27:26; 28:58, as given in Gal 3:10 NRSV). In trying to keep the Sinai covenant alive after Christ in the way that was appropriate before Christ, they actually turned away from the covenant and fell under the curse.

[15] Martin Hengel, *The Pre-Christian Paul* (Valley Forge, Penn.: Trinity Press International, 1991), p. 83.

is this topic that dominates the remainder of the proof section of the letter.

The promise given to Abraham and the fulfillment of that promise in the pouring out of the Spirit on all who are "in Christ" (Gal 3:14) make the promise, and not the law, the central focus of Paul's model of salvation history. For Paul, the period between the giving of the Torah and the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4), when Christ came and died, constituted a great parenthesis in the plan of God. With regard to its ultimate value, Paul poses an argument from analogy. Once a person's will is made and ratified, no one can add to it. Therefore, when God bequeathed his inheritance to Abraham and his "seed", the Torah that was added 430 years later cannot be taken as an amendment to that promise. It must have some other, more limited role. The promise, however, comes independently of Torah to Abraham and to his "seed", which Paul takes not in the collective sense (the many "offspring") but in a singular sense (the one "offspring", Christ). All who are in Christ therefore are incorporated into the promise quite apart from Torah's stipulations.

The period of the Law, then, is likened to the time during which an heir is a minor child. The Torah pressed on Israel like a pedagogue—a household slave in charge of disciplining his master's young children, escorting them back and forth from their lessons, and the like—corraling and hemming in the children under his care. For such children life is no different from the life of a slave. At this point two more antinomies are introduced that will be used to much effect throughout the remainder of the letter:

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"slavery" versus "adoption", and "slavery" versus "freedom". At the same time the non-Jews were "slaves" as well to the "elemental principles (or spirits) of the cosmos" (Gal 4:3, 9), powers that pose as gods, or at least exercise that level of power over human beings, but are none at all (Gal 4:8). What Paul has in mind by these "elemental principles" (*stoicheia*) is a matter of some debate: at least the term denotes that which guides, limits and constrains human beings in their thoughts, behaviors and interactions, keeping them in a form of ideological and systemic bondage.

A decisive turning point in history has already passed, however—the "fullness of time" (Gal 4:4) when "faith came" (Gal 3:23, 25). Genesis 49:10 speaks of a critical juncture in the shepherding of the people of God: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah *until he comes* whose right it is". This coming one, for Paul, was Christ, whose coming spelled the end of the period of Torah ("until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made", Gal 3:19 NRSV).[16] Drawing on these traditions of the advent of a particular figure whose coming would signal a decisive shift in salvation history, Paul declares that Jesus' death and resurrection mark a kind of rite of passage from which there is no turning back. Wherever the gospel is preached and received in faith, and wherever the Holy Spirit is poured out by God on the converted, people come of age, as it were. Their time of minority, when they are subject to these slavish pedagogues and stewards, comes to an end, and they receive the freedom of children

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[16] N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), p. 54.

who have reached their maturity and enter into their inheritance. A new relationship opens up between humans and God through Jesus, the relationship based on the Spirit of God dwelling in the human heart.

In light of this model of history, Paul's indignation at the thought of imposing Torah observance on Gentile converts becomes more comprehensible. Such a move would amount to a retroversion to a bygone era. Just as the adult cannot again be a child, the person who drinks deeply of God's Spirit cannot again look backward to the Torah for the way forward. More insidiously, turning back to the "works of Torah" would repudiate the freedom, the new and glorious status of "heir" and "son or daughter", that Christ won for the believer through his death "under the Torah" (Gal 4:4–5). In light of these considerations, it is incomprehensible to Paul that his Galatian converts would seriously contemplate taking on the yoke of Torah, that passé pedagogue.

Paul may have encountered the charge that to neglect Torah on account of Christ is to make Jesus into an agent of transgression (Gal 2:17). Paul asserts that this would only be true if someone were to reestablish Torah as the guiding principle of his or her life after coming to faith (Gal 2:18). Only the return to Torah makes a person a sinner. In Christ, however, a person is dead to Torah. For Paul, all that matters now is cultivating the life of the Spirit within us, or as he puts it, all that matters is Christ living in and through the believer—this is the new creation (Gal 2:20; 4:19; 6:15; cf. 2 Cor 5:16–18).

Paul concludes his proof from scriptural arguments with an allegorical reading of the Sarah and Hagar episodes of Abraham's story (Gal 4:21–31), thus returning to the theme of Galatians 3:6 (Abraham "believed God" with regard to God's promise of offspring) and to the question of who is the heir of the divine promises. Abraham sired Ishmael with his wife's female slave, Hagar. Later, he sired Isaac with his wife Sarah. Paul aligns Ishmael, the enslaved child born by fleshly power, with the earthly Jerusalem and all that belong to her, and Isaac, the freeborn child conceived by the power of the Spirit and promise, with the heavenly Jerusalem and all that belong to her. In so doing he has radically rewritten the genealogy of the Jewish people, who trace their lineage naturally from Isaac, not Ishmael. He contends, however, that the lesson to be learned from the story is that those who are born on the basis of God's promise and the Spirit are the ones who inherit the blessing of Abraham (Gal 4:30–31), which corresponds to the Gentile Galatian Christians, and *not* to the rival teachers, who still labor in slavery and seek to enslave the converts as well.

This may seem like a bit of fast and loose exegesis—one that would have earned low scores in an introductory course on the Old Testament. Yet there is actually a high level of sophistication in Paul's use of the Scriptures, especially in his choice of Isaiah 54:1–2 as the "confirmation" of his reading. Sarah, the freeborn woman, was barren and could be understood at one level as the one addressed by the quotation from Isaiah. This text from Isaiah, however, follows immediately after the famous

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Servant Song (Is 52:13–53:12), in which the righteous one bears the sins of many, ransoms many, makes many righteous and sees his offspring despite being cut off from the land of the living—indeed, engenders offspring precisely in being offered up for sin. Thus it is Jesus, the servant who brings blessings to many, who are then accounted his offspring, who permits this flourishing of offspring for the barren one, multiplying endlessly the children and heirs of Abraham. Paul brings this argumentation back to bear on the immediate situation: the Galatians must expel the rival teachers along with their "other gospel", and so continue to walk in "the freedom for which Christ has set them free" (Gal 4:30; 5:1).

How do we now live to please God? However much some scholars are skeptical about the application of rhetorical criticism to Pauline letters, it is clear that Galatians is meant to affect what the Galatians are about to do in their situation, and thus it serves a "deliberative" purpose. That purpose is stated negatively in Galatians 5:1, dissuading the Galatian converts from the course of action the rival teachers promote: "For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery" (NRSV). The philosopher and statesman Dio Chrysostom defined freedom as "the knowledge of what is allowable and what is forbidden, and slavery as ignorance of what is allowed and what is not" (*Or.* 14.18). Freedom is not autonomy or absolute license to do what one wishes in every situation (*Or.* 14.3-6), rather it is an

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opportunity to conform to the absolute law of God. Slavery, on the other hand, consists in being unclear about the laws God has laid down for humankind, being bound instead by ever-multiplying human-made laws (*Or.* 80.5-7). For Dio, following local, ethnic or national laws while remaining ignorant of "the ordinance of Zeus" is "the grievous and unlawful slavery under whose yoke you have placed your souls" (*Or.* 80.7). Paul now classes the Torah with such second-rate law codes, calling it also a "yoke of slavery", relegating it to the period of humanity's ignorance of the law of God written on the heart by the Spirit.

What is the divinely ordained norm for living and the divinely given means to attain a righteous life (to be "justified" against the margin of God's righteousness)? Those who seek "to be justified (*dikaiousthe*) by law" (Gal 5:4), to be "brought in line with God's standards" by performing circumcision and observing other "works of Torah", have grossly undervalued God's gift of the Spirit. This affront to the Giver stands behind Paul's dramatic language of the grace relationship between the believer and Christ being broken. Righteousness remains God's goal for the believer (Gal 5:5), but righteousness (*dikaiosynē*, a word closely related to *justification*) does not come through Torah. God is One, but Torah had not brought humanity together to reflect the oneness of God. It had not effected God's purpose for humanity as expressed in the promises given to Abraham, that God's blessing should extend to all nations. Now God effects justification—God makes people righteous—through the Spirit. God sends the Spirit into Jew and Gentile alike to

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bring all who believe into conformity with God's character and will, transforming them into the image of the righteous One, Jesus himself (Gal 2:20; 4:19) and causing the people of God to reflect the unity of the one God (3:28).

In a second thesis statement, written in conscious imitation of the first (Gal 5:1), Paul speaks of the proper, positive use of this freedom: "You were called to freedom, brothers and sisters: only not freedom to give the flesh an opportunity; rather, through love serve one another" (Gal 5:13). The freedom Christ gives is not an occasion for the flesh to take control, leading a person deeper and deeper into vice, but an occasion for the Spirit to guide the believer into all virtue.

As Paul weaves together topics of freedom and slavery, flesh and Spirit, he creates adiscourse that is very much at home in Hellenistic Jewish ethics. Philo, for example, also regarded "flesh" and "Spirit" as two guiding principles that competed for the allegiance of human beings: "the race of humankind is twofold, the one being the race of those who live by the divine Spirit and reason; the other of those who exist according to blood andthe pleasure of the flesh. The latter species is formed of earth, but the former is an accurate copy of the divine image" (*Who Is the Heir of Divine Things* 12.57). Like Paul, Philo understood "freedom" to be realized as an individual lived according to the divine Spirit and leading of God, which puts "a check upon the authority of the passions", while "slavery" exists wherever "vice and the passions have the dominion" over the person (*Every Good Person is*

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Free 17). A major difference between the two authors is the role of Torah: for Philo, the study and doing of Torah was the path to freedom; for Paul, the death of Jesus and the gift of the Spirit made this freedom possible apart from Torah.

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Criticisms of the "New Perspective"

The "new perspective" has not been greeted with unanimous support and approval. Indeed, some have regarded it as a dead end in the study of Paul, leading many astray from the time-honored truth about Paul. Some basic cautions raised by a number of scholars are well worth considering.

First, Sanders's characterization of the various Judaisms of the first century as "covenantal nomism", with its emphasis on grace rather than performance of works with a view to earning justification, has come under fire. There are some stunning examples of a doctrine of earning justification (acquittal at the judgment) by the doing of works, where the individual earns eternal reward or punishment by doing or transgressing God's law. *Fourth Ezra*, as Sanders already knew, explicitly affirms that having "a storehouse of works" with God brings a reward (*4 Ezra* 7:77; 8:33). When Ezra claims that God will show his righteousness and goodness by showing mercy to those who "have no store of good works" (*4 Ezra* 8:32, 36), he is soundly corrected by God (*4 Ezra* 8:37–40). A text from Qumran, 4QMMT, explicitly

4QMMT *Miqs.at Maʾasʿeh ha-Torah* (4Q394-399)

claims that doing the "works of the law" as outlined by the author of this text leads to justification before God "at the end time" (4QMMT 30): "It will be reckoned for you as righteousness when you perform what is right and good before Him" (4QMMT 31).[a] Moreover, *m. Aboth* 3:16 declares that "the world is judged by grace, yet all is according to the excess of works". Critics therefore claim that it simply will not suffice to characterize Judaism in all its diversity as "covenantal nomism".[b]

This is an apt critique, but it begs the question of what we are to do with New Testament texts that affirm that works matter at the judgment and are determinative for eternal destiny. The visions of the last judgment in Matthew 25:31–46, Romans 2:5–11, 2 Corinthians 5:9–10 and Revelation 20:12 all say that people will be judged according to their deeds. Paul also speaks of (bad) works resulting in exclusion from the kingdom (e.g., Gal 5:19–21; 1 Cor 6:9–11). Of course, there are ingenious ways of explaining each of these as not affirming judgment on the basis of works (at least, not for Christians), but this comes across as special pleading. While Sanders's claims require

[a] Geza Vermes, *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Penguin, 1997), p. 228.

[b] See D. A. Carson, P. T. O'Brien and M. A. Seifrid, eds., *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1, *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*, WUNT 2/140 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

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some nuancing, the attempts to redraw a picture of Judaism as at least semi-Pelagian *in contrast to Christianity* (that is, to serve once more as a foil to Christianity) seem to be fueled by ideology rather than critical assessment.

Second, many scholars take issue with the tendency of some proponents of the new perspective to regard the doctrine of "justification by faith" not as a core element of Paul's theology but as an argument that Paul developed to explain the specific question of how "Gentiles can be equally acceptable to God as Jews".[c] While it is true that the topic and language of "justification by faith" comes to the fore only in Galatians and Romans, where the question arises concerning how the new people of God should be defined, Stuhlmacher points out that Paul's doctrine of justification grows out of the early Christian confession of Jesus' death as a death "for our sins" (1 Cor 15:3), an interpretation based on Isaiah 52:13–53:12, where the Messiah bears the sins of many and "shall make many righteous" (Is 53:11 NRSV).[d] The confrontation with Jewish Christians in Antioch and Galatia certainly contributed to Paul's teaching on justification by faith, but this was not its origin and exhaustive purpose.

[c] See Dunn, *Theology of Paul's Letter*, p. 340.
[d] Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul's Doctrine of Justification*, pp. 21–22.

This criticism reflects a longstanding debate in Pauline studies about the "core" of Paul's gospel. Already in the early twentieth century Albert Schweitzer had relegated justification by faith to the status of a "secondary crater" at the edge of the main impact of Paul's message, which was "participation in Christ". Attempts to absolutize the doctrine of justification by faith as the core of Paul's thought, however, suggesting that it emerges complete from the Damascus Road encounter without further development,[e] seem to be another case of special pleading—again in favor of recovering a central tenet of Reformation theology.

A more significant problem emerges from the new perspective on justification, however, where "justification by faith" is understood to be a matter of relevance for Gentiles only, and not for Jews as well. This extreme line of argument tends to be pursued in support of a "two covenant" theology, according to which Jews do not need the gospel but only to be faithful to Torah. Such a view is an understandable development as scholarship seeks to undermine anti-Semitism at every turn, but it is certainly not true to Paul's theology (see Gal 2:15–16).

Third, but closely related to the first and second criticism, many scholars react against Dunn's

[e] Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective*, pp. 56–57.

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suggestion that "works of the law" refers specifically to "boundary markers" that separate Jews from Gentiles (e.g., circumcision, sabbath, dietary laws). Rather, these scholars insist that Paul's attack on "works of the law" should continue to be seen as an attack on human achievement in general, against all attempts to establish our own righteousness by measuring up to some set of expectations in which individuals could "boast". To be fair, Dunn does in fact consider "works of the law" to include the ethically relevant precepts of Torah, but he sees Paul reacting against Torah as the Jewish law as opposed to the norm God now provides in the Spirit for both Jews and Gentiles. Dunn also believes that the broader understanding of the failure of all human attempts to achieve righteousness before God on human strength represents a viable outgrowth and application of Paul's critique of pursuing works of Torah and boasting in ethnic privilege. This is just not Paul's original sense.

From such debates it becomes clear that the new perspective has reopened several historical and theological questions of the highest importance, and in which many scholars have a considerable personal and theological investment.

FOR FURTHER READING

arson, D. A., Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Seifrid, eds. *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Vol. 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism*. WUNT 2/140. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001.

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By means of the Spirit the death of Jesus becomes something in which the believer can participate. Paul declares that he was "crucified together with Christ", with the result that Christ now lived in him (Gal 2:19–20). Similarly, the disciple who belongs to Christ crucifies the power of "the flesh with its passions and desires" and thus is mastered by them no longer (Gal 5:24). The infusion of the Spirit into the life of the believers brings Christ's life into theirs, which mystically effects their dying to the power of the flesh and their living to God. With Paul they are crucified to this present evil age, and the power of

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the present evil age is crucified to them (Gal 6:14), and they come to life as part of the new creation of God. As they fall in line with the Spirit, like soldiers marching according to the orders prescribed by their general, they find the power of the flesh nullified and the fruits of righteousness multiplied in their lives (Gal 5:16, 18–23, 25).[17]

The stakes and risks of such an approach remain very high. The absence of written laws does not mean that a person can fool God, using the freedom from law as an opportunity to "sow to the flesh", finding room for self-indulgence and the temporary pleasures of sin (Gal 6:7–10). Those who abuse their freedom to indulge the flesh (whether in terms of indulging our bent toward strife and divisiveness in community, toward sexual indiscretions or any such thing) "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:19–21).[18] In the absence of the "guard rails" of Torah, the life of the Spirit calls for complete honesty with ourselves, our Christian family and God if we are truly to follow the Spirit and move forward into the righteousness that God would form in us. It requires a heart that wishes to go where and as the Spirit directs, that does not resist the Spirit in order to protect some areas of fleshly indulgence.

The risks of such a walk, however, are the risks that attend maturity. In our childhood, our guardians

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[17] Martyn makes the important observation that it is the Spirit's war against the "impulsive desire of the flesh", not the believer's war (*Galatians*, pp. 530–31, 534–35). The Spirit is not a resource that can help us in our battle, rather we have been drafted to fight in the Spirit's battle, to "fall in line" with the Spirit as with a commander (Gal 5:25).
[18] See also Jas 1:14–15 on the importance of not allowing desire to come to full term and give birth to death for the person.

keep us from danger and make many moral decisions for us; as adults, we must find that moral faculty fully formed within us and be responsible before our own conscience for our actions. So now, Paul's analogy would affirm, Christians are entrusted by God to be responsive to the Spirit and responsible to the Spirit. They no longer need to be hemmed in by rules like children but are free to seek righteousness in the context of their mature relationship with God through the Spirit. This corresponds to the "writing of the law on the hearts" of God's people that was the burning hope of prophets like Jeremiah (Jer 31:31–34), and to the "circumcision of the heart" (Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4) that symbolized obedience from the inner person in response to God's favor and fellowship.

The focal point of the Spirit-led ethic is clearly "love". Rather than being circumcised or not, what ultimately counts is "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6), the use of freedom to "serve one another through love" (Gal 5:13). Paul elevates the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; Gal 5:14) as the sum total of the law. To walk in love toward others is to fulfill all that is enduring about Torah, indeed, to fulfill the "law of the Messiah" (Gal 6:2). Paul may have known of Jesus' famous summary of the law as love for God and love for neighbor (see Mt 22:36–40). Following the Spirit, Christians will be transformed into a community of mutual investment, care and support rather than mutual hostility and detraction (Gal 5:15), where members are poised against one another in pride, envy and provocation (Gal 5:26). As we examine the specific "works of the flesh" that

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Paul has selected to exemplify that way of life, we find that most if not all of these display an absence of love for the other. Unsanctified sexual indulgence objectifies the other, using him or her for self-gratification rather than serving God's desires in dealing with the other; strife and competition tear down the other rather than seek his or her good; drunken parties and revels stupefy the individual to the needs of the other and anesthetize them to the prompting of the Spirit to build up the other (Gal 5:19–21).

Similarly, the "fruit of the Spirit" manifests itself relationally as well. Several of the virtues listed in Galatians 5:22–23 have direct bearing on relationships between believers and those outside the community of faith, especially *love, kindness, goodness, faithfulness* (the more likely sense of *pistis* in this context, rather than "faith" or "belief" toward God), and *gentleness/meekness*. The first three orient the disciple beneficently toward others, teaching them to seek the good and serve the interests of their neighbors, and to restrain their aggressive and self-assertive tendencies ("gentleness"). *Peace* is something of a transitional virtue, combining the ideas of harmony and concord between people and the idea of well-being and wholeness within a person. The other manifestations of the Spirit's fruit are, perhaps, more personal than relational virtues. *Joy* springs from an awareness of God's love and beneficence toward the believer whose grateful heart remains mindful of God's gifts in the midst of all circumstances. *Patient endurance* bespeaks the courage of the disciple, both in the face of the rigors of discipleship (e.g.,

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resisting temptation, seeking steady and sure growth toward the likeness of Jesus) and in the face of the hostility of unbelievers. *Self-control* involves the mastery of the passions and is often seen as the foundation for all the virtues since the passions of the flesh are the primary hindrance to every virtue (as in 4 Macc 1:30–31).

Paul certainly does not intend to offer a new Torah in these chapters, but he focuses on how the Spirit transforms human community, what the signs are of the Spirit's work in producing a community where the ideal of love is realized, and what the symptoms are when the "flesh" exerts its power again. Love shows itself where the sinner is gently reclaimed, where believers invest in one another enough to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:1–2); love shows itself where believers refuse to regard a sister or brother as a spiritual trophy of any kind, as if the conversion or transformation of another person could become a claim to honor for oneself (as the rival teachers are doing, in Paul's mind; Gal 6:4–5, 13). Love manifests itself in the sharing of resources between believers who bring more of the truth of God to light for one another (Gal 6:6). Where love is made real, God's transforming Spirit is truly at work, bringing believers into conformity with God's righteousness.

Paul gives a summation of his position in Galatians 6:14–16. The boundaries of Israel, the people of God, have been redrawn by the decisive act of God in Christ at the close of this present evil age. Among the children of Abraham inclusion in the household of God does not happen through

circumcision. What matters is the emergence of the new creation in each person and in the community of faith: a dying to the world with Christ and rising to new life, the life of the Spirit reforming the person, forming Christ within the believer.

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GALATIANS AND MINISTRY FORMATION

Integrity: Walking in line with the truth. Paul's authority is rooted in the message itself and his faithfulness to that message. Human credentials or legitimation by some governing body add nothing to this root authority. Moreover, Paul presents a living example of the courage of the genuine minister of the gospel, who refuses to conform the gospel to the expectations or demands of church or society, who refuses to avoid confrontation where the truth of the gospel is not being lived out in the church.

Following Paul's pattern, we are instructed that our own persuasive power and authority likewise come from our fidelity to that message, and we must refuse to accommodate that message to suit the tastes of our congregations or the society around us. If we did accommodate the message, we would preach a merely human gospel, one that has been circumcised and emasculated of its transformative power. Rather, we are called to

[120]deSilva, D. A. (2004). *An introduction to the New Testament : Contexts, methods and ministry formation* (498). Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press.

preserve the challenge that the gospel poses to the world and call our constituencies to conform to the gospel, not vice versa. This is the gospel that has power from God to transform, to justify, to bring us in line with God's own righteousness.

We must seek to please God, not people. Here is a great challenge to ministry, for in the day-to-day practice of ministry, in the week-to-week business of running a church or performing a teaching ministry or even engaging in pastoral counseling, the temptation will always be present to please people—those people who employ us, who pay us, who recommend us, who use their influence for us. Paul challenges us to remember that in every encounter, in every decision, in every intervention there is One whom we must please, there is One to whom we, as slaves of Christ, are answerable.

Finally, if we are to have powerful ministries, we must walk straight in line with the gospel, conforming our own conduct to the message. Paul consistently measured himself *and* his fellow apostles by whether or not they were walking toward the truth of the gospel, or behaving in ways that were out of line with that gospel. Our congregations and constituents will do the same. Nothing can undermine a minister's credibility faster and more completely than merely "talking the talk" while not "walking the walk". There are

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two main stumbling blocks to integrity at this point: the double heart that still makes room for the flesh (Gal 5:13–26) and the cowardly heart that shrinks back from living by the gospel, yielding instead to the expectations and pressures of other people (Gal 2:11–14; 5:11; 6:12–13). Paul's example encourages us that it will never be truly inexpedient to walk in line with the truth of the gospel, even if it should entail persecution in some form.

The importance of the experience of God. Paul's argument stands or falls depending on his converts' awareness of the Holy Spirit in their hearts and their awareness of the Spirit's work within them and between them (Gal 3:1–5). In our endeavors to know the truth and make it known, Paul reminds us not to neglect the surpassing importance of the experience of the holy One. This is the bedrock of Paul's proof, and it is often the bedrock of our personal perseverance in faith. In my own experience of the academic study of religion—first in seminary, then in graduate studies, then as part of the guild of biblical scholarship—it is ultimately not the "facts" I knew or even the "faith convictions" that I had, but the experience of a relationship with God and the awareness of God's Spirit at work within me that provided a center for my faith, that, at times, even kept me "in the faith". In the face of the challenges posed to faith throughout the course of a life, faith

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must be more than doing the right rituals and knowing the right doctrines: it must be grounded in a living, ongoing relationship with God through the Spirit.

Paul's reliance in Galatia on the converts' awareness of this Spirit urges us to value the experience of God in our times of worship and to cultivate in individuals an awareness of God's presence and of God's hand at work in our lives. Minister and parishioner, counselor and counselee, teacher and student alike must be able to find the irrefutable signs of God's love, acceptance and favor in their lives, and our life together as a Christian community should be directed toward cultivating transforming encounters with the living God. Without the active presence of God's Spirit in our lives, we lack, in Paul's view, the very inheritance promised in Christ and the key to our transformation into the likeness of Christ.

The hope of righteousness: God's norms versus human regulations. God yearns to impart God's righteousness to God's children, having given the Spirit to bring us fully in line with God's character and goodness. Paul draws our attention in Galatians to three principal hindrances to attaining the hope of righteousness. There are the "elementary principles of this world" (*ta stoicheia tou kosmou*, Gal 4:1–11), the imposition of a

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religious law code, religious rites and other regulations (Gal 3:3, 21; 4:21–31; 5:1–6), and the "flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal 5:19–21, 24).

The last of these is perhaps the most obvious, since it is the most close at hand for each of us. Every disciple is familiar with the impulses of the flesh. When another person affronts us somehow or hinders our plans, the impulse of the flesh orients us toward that person as an enemy or obstacle and sparks anger and conflict rather than cooperation and resolution. Trained to value self-gratification, especially the gratification of sexual impulses, the flesh looks for opportunities at every turn. The flesh leads us to overindulge in food and material comforts, to seek our own comfort before the very survival of others. In short, the flesh insists on its own way, placing its desires above the needs and welfare of the other and the group, and above the just requirements of God.

By *flesh*, Paul does not simply mean the "meat" of our physical person. He recognizes it as a powerful force in the life of a human being that can manifest itself in thought, word and deed, with the mind and soul as well as the body. He also recognizes that it is not identical with the person; it is not the whole person, and it is not even the part that is the person in the truest sense (that part that can assent to the flesh or yield to the Spirit). The

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power of the flesh is probably what makes the removal of the bridle of law (in some form) all the more frightening and risky. What is to save us from being swallowed up by our own desires, passions and impulses if not rules carefully laid out? Paul confidently speaks, at this point, of the Spirit, the divine Spirit poured into our hearts. Regulations could never tame the passions of the flesh, but the Spirit of God can. Yielding to this Spirit in each new moment is now the divinely prescribed path to righteousness.

Larger, more systemic hindrances to walking in line with God also confront the believer. Paul names the *stoicheia* as spiritual forces exercising authority over the human race. These *stoicheia* masquerade as absolutes, thus enslaving people. They represent the power of the basic principles of the world's way of doing things, the domination systems that we take for granted and deem irreplaceable realities. They represent the ideologies of nationalism, of militarism, of economics (whether capitalism, socialism or communism), even of religion and its limits, and the ways these ideologies shape our society and control and constrain us.

Sociologist Peter Berger describes with remarkable perspicuity how people are programmed from birth (socialized) in their society's self-preserving values, ideals and

behavioral norms, so that each individual member of society will do his or her part to keep that society functioning more or less without question.[a] Indeed, there are social and internalized constraints against even raising those questions. This socialization limits the options we perceive for our responses, our relationships, even our ambitions. Paul was indeed perceptive to describe our condition as human beings in society as a kind of slavery or as that of children under various disciplinarians and guardians (Gal 4:1–11). We are presented with the challenge of discerning how these *stoicheia* (we could think of these glibly as whatever "isms" are relevant to our particular social context) have been operative in our lives *and* in the life of the church, so we can become ever more free to respond to one another and to the world from the ideals and values taught by God. The importance of the Spirit here cannot be overestimated: only by hearing and following the Spirit, often in conjunction with studying the Scriptures, can we break out of the boxes our society constructs around our minds from birth.

The final hindrance, and the one treated most prominently in Galatians, is the tendency of religious-minded people to replace (or at least

[a] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1967), chaps. 1 and 2; *Invitation to Sociology* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), chaps. 4 and 5.

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"supplement") the living, vibrant relationship with God and the direction of the Holy Spirit with a code of laws, regulations and traditions, exchanging the power of godliness for the outward forms of "righteousness". This is righteousness with regard to human norms, however, which is not the same as being righteous with regard to God's norms. It is all too easy to add our own agenda and our own requirements to the gospel and thus pervert the gospel. Good motives may stand behind this endeavor, usually the desire to "certify" that people are indeed part of God's family by some means that can be observed or spoken, or to "ensure" that Christians live in line with God's requirements. Many believers, congregations and whole denominations have willingly exchanged the state of having come of age for a return to old (or newly invented) pedagogues.

The rival teachers have not been alone in deeming trust in Jesus to be inadequate proof that someone belongs to God's people, or deeming the Spirit to be an insufficient guide to righteousness. Church history is full of examples of attempts to circumscribe the people of God in ever narrower circles, developing new lists of requirements for belonging to the "true" church or being "true" Christians, erecting more and more boundaries between people in the name of preserving the truth and the sanctity of the people of God. If a divinely sanctioned boundary marker like

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circumcision, however, was rendered invalid by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on those who trusted Jesus, how much less valid will be the boundary markers that divide Christian from Christian today. "Hold to these beliefs, not those; be baptized this way, not that; associate with these people, not those; behave this way, not that". The Spirit will direct our beliefs, our practices, our relationships, our behaviors, to be sure, for the Spirit wars against the flesh and its designs for our lives. We cannot, however, codify the Spirit—that is, generate a list of requirements that can functionally replace the Spirit—any more now than Paul's rivals could then.

Paul challenges us to embrace the freedom of living by the Spirit, trusting this gift of God to bring us fully in line with the character and standards of God, to transform us into the likeness of Jesus, the image of the Father. He challenges us to use this freedom responsibly as spiritual adults. Christian freedom is never an occasion for self-service but always an occasion to serve and to love beyond the limits set on us by our upbringing, socialization and customs. The righteousness that God imparts will be manifested in the character of our Christian community. Are we other-centered or self-centered? Are we marked by cooperation or competition? Do we accept one another on the same basis that God accepts us—trusting Jesus—

adding nothing as a requirement for fellowship in the one body? Do we live out the vision where ethnic, social and gender distinctions—and the hierarchical evaluations, limitations, abuses or avoidances that are fostered by such distinctions—are transcended in the one family of God's children and heirs? Only by following the Spirit will we, as a Christian community, arrive at the full freedom and glorious inheritance of the sons and daughters of God.

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CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly
NTS New Testament Studies
WBC Word Biblical Commentary