

- **Galatians 2:14-21: A New Covenant Perspective**
- ***Galater 2, 14-17: Eine 'Neuer Bund' Perspektive***
- ***Galatiens 2. 14-17: Une 'Nouvelle Alliance' perspective***
- **William Dumbrell**

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der Hintergrund von Paul's Betrachtungen über die Beziehung zwischen Recht und Bund ist das Treffen von Peter und Paul in Antioch. Peter war von James und der 'Beschneidungspartei' unter Druck gesetzt worden, den Ungläubigen gegenüber weniger entgegenkommend zu sein. Paul's Hinweis in Galatians 2 auf 'Cephas' (Fels / Stein) ist ironisch gemeint. Rechtfertigung benötigt Erneuerung des

Geistes und daraus folgenden Glauben. Das Neue Testament, entgegen der Meinung vieler Forscher, wertet den Bund nicht ab, sondern sieht Rechtfertigung und Errettung in seinem relationalen Sinn. Seit dem Kreuz gibt es nur einen Weg der Errettung, aber 'sich in Rahmen des Gesetzes bewegen' bedeutet jetzt innerhalb des Messias-Bundes-Leuten bleiben. Traurigerweise hat Peter, in den Augen jüdischer Christen, die Auseinandersetzung in Antioch wohl gewonnen.

RÉSUMÉ

La réflexion paulinienne sur le rapport entre la loi et l'alliance a pour arrière-plan l'incident d'Antioche. Jacques et le 'parti de la circoncision' faisaient pression sur Pierre pour qu'il se montre moins accommodant envers les non Juifs. C'est par ironie que Paul mentionne le nom de Céphas ('pierre') en Gal. 2. La justification depend de la regeneration par l'Esprit et de la foi qui en découle.

Contrairement à ce qu'affirment de nombreux spécialistes aujourd'hui, le Nouveau Testament n'accorde pas moins d'importance au thème de l'alliance, mais considère la justification et le salut en termes relationnels. Depuis la croix, il n'y a qu'un seul moyen de salut, et l'observation de la loi consiste maintenant à demeurer dans le peuple de l'alliance du Messie. Malheureusement, Pierre semble l'avoir emporté aux yeux des Chrétiens d'origine juive.

The controversy described between Paul and Peter in vv. 11-14 developed in clear stages. The purpose of Peter's visit to Antioch was almost certainly pastoral and the controversy which it engendered was clearly well and widely known and its significance understood in Galatia. Presumably Peter had come as a result of normal Jerusalem practice to visit contiguous developing Christian centres. Hellenistic Jews¹ had commenced the mission to the Gentiles at Antioch, Acts 11:20, and the names of the early Antioch leadership (Acts 13:1-3) are all Jewish. Peter would

have stayed at the home of one of the Jewish Christian leaders in Antioch having little opportunity apart from fixed occasions for fellowship with Gentiles.²

If Tarazi's³ suggestion of a Lord's Supper setting as providing the occasion to which Paul is referring is plausible, it would have made the offence of Peter all the more calculated and distressing. But probably a more normal table fellowship occasion is in view. At first in coming to Antioch, Peter began to eat (v. 12 imperfect) freely with Gentile Christians in line with his own indicated stance in Acts 10:1-11:18, when

impelled by the activity of the Spirit he had witnessed in the Cornelius incident (Acts 10:44-45). Later after this incident, Peter freely endorsed the merger of Jews and Gentiles in the one faith, a merger which had already taken place in Antioch and elsewhere (Acts 15:7-11). Then, after the arrival of a delegation from James,⁴ Peter took note of himself as a Jew bound by culture and convention, and separated himself gradually.⁵ Perhaps he had in mind withdrawing from sharing fellowship with Gentiles by degrees. This was not only inconsistent with his confessed convictions (Acts 11:1-18) but it was to treat the Gentiles at Antioch as second class Christians.⁶

The purpose of the arrival of delegates from James or merely some belonging to his party is not easily explained. Peter as an eminent Jerusalem representative was already in Antioch, presumably requiring no more support. Since the position of the group from James needs to be correlated with James' later attitude in Acts 15 to Jew/Gentile fellowship, we may suppose that Peter had gone beyond the limits of permitted Jewish-Christian toleration in his relaxation of strict torah conformity. It is hard to imagine that in the volatile situation in Antioch, in the presence of many Jewish Christians and on a matter on which feelings were running high, Peter would have totally abandoned Jewish food law practice.

Concerning the application of the food laws generally, matters of interpretation of what later came to be the Jerusalem concordat would no doubt have lead to ready tensions on both sides.⁷ Peter was conceivably under great pressure, fearing the reaction of the influential circumcision party in Jerusalem. Their sensitivity to the question may have been communicated to Peter by the dispatch of the group, but at the same time Peter would have been subject to pressure from the Judaizers at Antioch itself. The reason presented for Peter's change of heart was his fear of the circumcision party. This must represent the group from Jerusalem and James, since Peter's defection follows upon their arrival. The other less likely possibility for 'the circum-

cision faction' of v. 12 was Jews generally in Palestine whose reaction to the emerging Christian movement in the tense political times was well known.⁸ No doubt, however, elements of the dispute would have reflected the fierce Jewish nationalism of the forties and fifties which led to harsh treatment of a Jew who associated with Gentiles.⁹ Perhaps the Jerusalem sentiments were that while Gentiles were free to forego law obedience, Jewish Christians were not. Under pressure from the Jerusalem group, and since *ap' Iakobou* suggests sent by James, Peter gradually withdrew from fellowship with Antioch Gentile Christians.

For Peter, of course, as the preeminent figure in Jewish Christianity, much depended upon Jewish goodwill. But other Jewish Christians (v.13), in fact all the other Jewish Christians at Antioch, followed him. They must have looked to his leading since, if they had previously condemned him, they took no action themselves until he himself had moved. As a result the church split into factions, with even Barnabas defecting v. 13.

This dissimulation that some who were Jews by race were requiring Gentiles to live like Jews, finally occasioned Paul's confrontation of Peter directly (face-to-face), perhaps when Peter's gradual withdrawals had reached a decisive point. Gal. 2:14b, reporting the Jew to Jew exchange before the Antioch congregation (v.14) for Peter's inconsistency, indicates that Peter, as a result of the Cornelius incident, normally lived non-Jewishly when in Gentile contact. Paul was incredulous: 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?.' (v.14)

Paul's intervention was critical and directed at keeping the Gentile mission on course. He knew the point which was involved, from his own Jewish past. He recognized that as a result of Peter's encounter with Cornelius, Peter intellectually must concede his point. He was also conscious of the pressure under which Peter laboured. But Paul saw precisely that the character of the gospel was at stake¹⁰ and this led to the open confrontation which

v.14 reports. Peter is referred to extraordinarily by the Greek dative as *toi Cephas*, the Cephas. Paul must, as Tarazi¹¹ suggests, be insinuating acidly here that Peter has belied his position of Christian pre-eminence as the Rock, the champion and inaugurator of the gospel at Pentecost. Paul, however no doubt understood the issues involved on both sides. From v.15 onward, when the issue is continued, it moves beyond the personal.

Paul's Personal Affirmations: 2:15-21

Paul in v.15 seems not to continue the controversy since the verse lacks a connective with v. 14 and Paul in vv. 15-21 does not to refer specifically to the debate with Peter which now serves as a background to what follows. Paul with his 'we' of v. 15 is continuing a Jewish perspective. He is probably, bearing in mind the nature of the table fellowship controversy, continuing to refer to Jewish Christians also in vv.15-21 about the changed theological position for Jews consequent upon the death and resurrection of Christ.

The understanding of Paul's audience here is critical to the interpretation of what follows and the details of v.16 particularly, cannot be treated as if they were a general theological pronouncement on the question of works versus faith. Paul is here speaking to Jews whose Christian faith is the logical and necessary extension of their Jewish faith.¹² Paul is discoursing inner-Jewishly and the terms in the critical verses which follow must be understood in that light. He will defend the position arrived at in 2:15-21 in detail in Galatians 3. Verses 15-16 establish points of agreement between him and Jewish Christians generally (and Peter!) while vv. 17-18 indicate the points of disagreement which will be taken further in argument, particularly in ch. 3.

The past situation is put succinctly by the introductory phrase of v.15. Paul and his addressees were Jews by nature i.e., by birth. Jews by birth were deemed members of the Mosaic covenant, cut off later in life only by unconfessed premeditated sin and then, although the position is uncer-

tain, reinstated by the national sacrifices offered on the Day of Atonement, presumably if contrite and confession and personal sacrifice for sin followed. Acceptance within the Mosaic covenant was understood to provide assurance of eternal life in the world to come. The other great division of humanity were Gentiles, who, cut off from the Mosaic covenant, the law and the system of atonement, in eyes of the Jews were unrighteous, and thus sinners. We are not, says Paul, as he uses the contemporary labels of Mosaic covenant membership, lawless people, covenant outsiders, i.e., Gentile sinners (v.16). In the Synoptic Gospels, the term 'sinner' is often used culturally as a description of persons whose conduct or manner of life causes the opponents of Jesus to put them out of covenant connection.¹³ In the established parlance of the day, the 'sinner' was one who forsook the law and who did not seek God's statutes.¹⁴

But, v. 16, the situation has now changed with the death of Christ. Here a difficulty for interpretation is posed by Paul's use of Greek *dikaïoutai* 'is justified', 'is right-wised'. The relevant verb *SDQ* in the OT means 'be righteous' (Qal); to declare righteous (Hiphil).¹⁵ It is widely agreed that justification or righteousness in the Old Testament is a relational term referring to conformity to a norm. In the OT this norm, most usually, is the covenant relationship. When the covenant relationship is correctly expressed by Israel or by individuals within Israel then the respondent concerned is said to be righteous or to have acted righteously. Consequently, righteousness in theological use in the OT has reference to a status of standing within the Sinai covenant relationship. God's righteousness is his fidelity to the same relationship expressed either in blessing or judgment. In Gen 15:6 a major point of Pauline reference, Abraham's relationship was right when he trusted God's promises. He was thus justified or declared to be righteous, i.e., his conduct was evidence of a continuing covenant relationship. Though the covenant was not formally and reassuringly affirmed until Gen 15:18 its promise structure had begun with

Abraham's call and commission in Gen 12:1-3. Paul in his use in v. 16 of the verb *dikaioo* in the three occurrences, clearly refers to new covenant standing for which the verb may speak. Additionally, he is speaking within the framework of a post-cross situation since the problem in the section concerns the relationship of Gentiles generally to Jewish law.

Justification or righteousness in the Old Testament and Paul is a statement of divine acceptance. The change of status to which justification in the initial sense of covenant entry refers, depends upon the prior work of the Holy Spirit in regeneration. Justification in New Testament terms thus becomes the descriptive term which recognizes the change of status brought about by the action of the Holy Spirit in rebirth. To judge by the word use, justification does itself not refer to the act of rebirth; simply to the change of status acquired by rebirth. But justification may be used by Paul in the more general sense of the continuing or even of the final relationship resulting from the Parousia judgment. Paul thus uses the term to accommodate all three aspects of the continuing salvation process. The Pauline view is that justification is not simply a past or present event but embraces also the future¹⁶. Strictly, justification is the verdict to be pronounced at the last judgment brought forward. God declares in advance that those who are in Christ are in the right. Justification is not forgiveness, but a favourable verdict pronounced as a result of forgiveness. The justified are those in the new covenant and those in the covenant have been forgiven. For Paul, justification recognizes what has taken place on the basis of faith and faith is the evidence of the Spirit's work having begun in the life. The continued biblical emphasis is that faith is not something that the sinner initiates but is the evidence that grace has already been received. Irrespective of the fact that the New Testament language in regard to faith is often instrumental (*diapisteos*) the united biblical witness is that faith is not a human initiation. Conceptually then faith precedes justification. Justification declares that regeneration has had

its effect and sanctification completes the work of regeneration. Justification is the declaration that the believer is regenerate and regeneration is the means whereby I become 'in Christ'. Justification is not a legal fiction, it is neither imputed nor imparted but is a declaration that I am in the covenant.

Paul in Gal. 2:16 by the tenses and content of the verse is pointing to the post-cross situation, and drawing on the reality and logic of the course of salvation history. He is speaking, as the tone of the verse and the context implies, to Jewish Christians in terms of what is generally accepted and understood and he is speaking of what it now means to have new covenant membership. It was understood by Paul (and Peter?) that there was no automatic transference from Sinai to the new covenant. The Christian understanding was that with the rending of the veil precluding entrance to the Holy of Holies at the moment of the death of Christ (Mark 15:38), the Temple and Jewish institutionalism had been divinely discarded and the new covenant, the covenant of the new age had been inaugurated. Covenant access was no longer a matter of racial privilege but now entirely through grace revealed in faith. The old world-system with its values had collapsed and now in Christ there was admission to a new world, a new creation.

There is a reluctance, however, in New Testament studies to give the covenant notion its full New Testament due and a tendency perhaps to suppose that Biblical covenants more regulated Old Testament experience than New. But the covenant notion is basic to the whole Bible, not just the Old Testament and the distribution of the word covenant within the New Testament documents compares very favourably with the Old Testament where, as we know, it was a largely assumed and seldom articulated concept.

Jesus instituted a new covenant in his death (Luke 22:20), i.e., to come into being as a result of that death. When giving his most extensive definition of his ministry, Paul declares that he is a minister of the New Covenant (2 Cor 3:6). This supposes that his offer of the gospel means an offer

of entrance into the New Covenant. The most extensive treatment of the New Covenant is in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the expression 'first' covenant (9:15) presupposes the operation of an analogous 'second..'. Within the same verse this 'second' covenant is called the new covenant again supposing that the first is the 'Old Covenant'. The expectation under the original Abrahamic Covenant was the inclusion of all the families of the earth. It is to these expectations that Galatians 3 responds.¹⁷ Covenant always remained for Paul an unquestioned assumption through which everything else was experienced. Paul had belonged to a covenant community. He had been circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel of the tribe of Benjamin a Hebrew born of the Hebrews Phil 3:5. As touching the law, Paul was Pharisee, a son of Pharisees Acts 23:6. Circumcision, Hebrew, Torah, Sabbath, Food Laws, Works of the Law, are all terms only understandable within an assumed covenant framework. Paul tells us that he had advanced in Judaism beyond his contemporaries, Gal. 1:14, and this must have been in Torah understanding, commitment to it and expression of it. Torah, the standard for God's people Israel, and covenant were inextricably related terms. The one demanded and presupposed the other. The community of the covenant embraced those who accepted the Torah and whom the Torah bound to God. But the new covenant structure had not been built around the Torah but around Christ. The new covenant community of faith was now those whom Christ had called. Paul understood his missionary role from Isa 49:6 where the servant ministry was to raise up the tribes of Jacob and also to be a light to the Gentiles so that the salvation of God might be reflected to the ends of the earth. Covenant in fact could be claimed to have provided the centre for Paul's theology since his ministry was to the Jew first, and then to the Greek (Rom 1:16, 2:9,10.) in theological dependence to the OT charge to the servant (Isa 42:6, 49:6).

The Old Testament covenant affiliation in its commencement was presumed by birth into Israel, later to be confirmed and main-

tained by conduct. In the New Testament, the New Covenant position becomes a little more complex. The Greek verb *dikaioo* is correspondingly used to refer to both covenant entry where it would normally be rendered 'justify' and continuing covenant status where the noun *dikaiosisune* would customarily be referred to as 'righteousness'. In Paul's argument in Galatians he will refer to both covenant entry and continuance and the use of the same verb to do this. This can and has lead to confusion. While the noun *dikaiosisune* 'righteousness' is normally used in an ethical sense, we must be careful to understand that it is a reference to conduct which may be otherwise described (good, just, compassionate etc.—the normal components of the fruit of the Spirit). Such conduct provides the Christian subjective assurance of continuing New Covenant membership. However, *dikaiosisune* 'righteousness' itself is not strictly an ethical term but a relational term and refers to conduct appropriate to and indeed required by the covenant relationship. We are not perhaps accustomed to thinking of ourselves as members of the new covenant and we need to remind ourselves that the Bible is structured in its history of salvation presentation by a series of covenants. Such covenants form the progressive promise structure by which finally the advent of the New Creation, the kingdom of God, the New Jerusalem, the New Eden, all figures for the same reality viewed from different aspects, is realized. It is rather an unhappy historical accident that the biblical nomenclature stands at Old and New Testaments instead, or rightly in terms of the biblical background and Latin options, of Old and New Covenants.

Paul, 2:16 says that new covenant acceptance is not maintained at any stage (*dikaioantai*, present,) by 'works of the law'. It is tempting in a flat non-contextual reading to take this Pauline statement as a recognition of the general biblical truth that salvation is by faith and not by human effort. But biblical interpretation is wedded to the use of words and phrases in social and historical contexts, understanding by the term context all the factors which bear

upon a context. The phrase of extreme importance to Paul 'works of law', is insistently repeated three times in v.16. 'Works of the Law,' a phrase met in Paul for the first time, does not refer to human effort in general. It has been correctly identified by Thomas Schreiner¹⁸, as works done in conformity to the demands of the Jewish Torah, i.e., expressions of requirements within the framework of membership the Sinai covenant. So far as the content of 'works of the law' is concerned, Schreiner¹⁹, points out that an understanding of it cannot be solely focused on the Jewish identity markers of circumcision, food laws and Sabbath as James Dunn has suggested for Galatians. But in this inter-Jewish Christian context by which the Pauline meaning for the phrase in its first Pauline use must be established, a general debate between two Jews on works versus faith for covenant entry or covenant continuation would seem to have no point. The clear Old Testament position is that law responds to grace but does not initiate it, and there is nothing to indicate that this position changed between the Testaments. The place of Jewish law performance, even the most misguided legalistic law performance and certainly very much of Jewish torah performance was legalistic, was to respond to grace by maintaining the covenant. What upholds justification as well as initiating it will be faith. Admittedly faith will show itself in 'works' of the 'law' since under the new covenant as well as under the old covenant what demonstrates faith is obedience to the will of God. In both old and new covenants what facilitated obedience, in my judgment, was the law in the heart of the believer, put there by the Holy Spirit in both Testaments. Of course, this last assertion needs to be explicated but that requires another occasion.²⁰

It is possible to argue that the dispute in 2:11-14 was clearly about conduct within the sphere of grace, about covenant retention, not about the basis of entrance. Indeed within the context of this inner Christian dispute about table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians this view would make better sense. The present passive of the verb in 16a permits this. Our

difficulty in being absolutely certain as to what Paul is referring to, is occasioned by our lack of knowledge of what is in Paul's mind by 'might be justified', i.e., by the use of the aorist passive infinitive in v. 16 after his use earlier in the verse of the present passive. After the sequence of the durative present *dikaioutai* and the constative aorist indicative of *episteusamen* the future passive in 2:16c *dikaiothesetai* might refer to the final result and thus to final justification as opposed to initial covenant (*episteusamen / dikaiothomen*) entry and its maintenance (*dikaioutai*). In this case we would have all three aspects of the Pauline approach to justification surfacing in the verse with finally the future passive of the verb *dikaiothesetai* operating as a summarizing statement.

Works of the law, however, do not win grace, at best they are simply the evidence of a grace impelled life. They cannot thus be a condition of covenant entrance which is by grace. The place of the law in both Testaments is ideally in the heart and in the few occasions in the nationalistic Old Testament when attention is drawn to the conduct of the pious, this is clearly attested.²¹

Thus the phrase 'works of the law' is not a generalized term for self-effort. It has a definite reference to a Sinai covenant connection and membership²². This is what we might expect in the continuing discussion of the fall-out from Antioch. Paul does not feel any need to particularize *nomos*, since for Paul there is only one law, the Mosaic law. It is extremely doubtful whether Paul ever uses *nomos* other than in that sense. In the course of time obvious markers of Jewishness such as food laws and circumcision and Sabbaths became the flag leaders for law observance, but the ongoing concern of Galatians is directed towards whether Mosaic covenant legal obedience is required of Christian believers for entry or continuance in the covenant. This is a question which Paul will take up in detail in Galatians 3.

Paul in 2:16 is thus referring to the covenant transformation now being expressed by Jewish Christians and now required by Jews, the move in the light of the death

of Christ from Sinai to the new covenant. Such a move may not have been a matter of considered personal reflection for early Jewish Christians and the issue would not have arisen until the question of Gentile acceptance had to be faced. Paul's point is a simple one but a vital one. In an era when by virtue of the continued existence until September AD 70 of the Jerusalem Temple and the Jewish covenantal institutions, Paul is arguing that no connection with the Mosaic covenant and its very specific intentions, in a new Christian era, is either legitimate nor necessary. One gathers from Galatians 3 specifically that Jewish Christians were placing undue emphasis upon continuity and seeing Jesus and his work as extending the legitimacy of the Sinai Covenant and its institutions. The profound appeal of the continuing Jewish Temple cult is clear from the Epistle to the Hebrews where the author lays heavy stress upon the present Christian blessings of sanctuary, altar, priesthood, Day of Atonement and sacrifice as alternatives to Jerusalem.

Paul is not generalizing in Gal. 2:16a about salvation in Christ, but is specifically referring to a post-cross issue which has come to light in his difference with Peter at Antioch. What is in Paul's mind is the divorce which must be made between the old age and the new. Jews and Gentiles under the new covenant are saved in precisely the same way, by faith in the person and work of Jesus. Salvation is no longer assumed as a result of race. Since the death of Christ, no longer was it necessary for Gentiles to be incorporated into Israel's institutions and culture to be covenant members. It is in this sense that Paul speaks about the impermissibility of justification being linked to the works of the law. Nothing for covenant entry is to be added to the sole requirement of faith in Christ. Forgiveness and the consequent justification must now come through the acceptance that Jesus in his death provided by his great Day of Atonement into which (cf. Rom 3:25) all of Israel's yearly legitimating Days of Atonement had been incorporated. The preliminary step for Jews of faith in Christ must now be made for there

was no automatic progress from the old Covenant to the new. Jews ('even we', v.16) as well as Gentiles must now come into covenant connection by the way of faith in Jesus Christ.

In Paul's second reference to justification in 2:16b and its basis, *pistis* lacks the definite article indicating the probability that the following genitive is objective since the article before *pistis* invariably denotes a subjective genitive if the genitive case of the noun follows the article. I. Y. Hong²³ rightly suggests that there is no clear reference to Christ's faith in Galatians in *pistis Christou* phrases but only to Christian faith. All the *pistis Christou* phrases in the letter lack the definite article. A subjective genitive for *Iesou Christou* is not called for here since the issue is the necessity of Jewish belief in Christ ('even we believed on Christ' RV). It may be that in 2:16c in the third reference to justification, Paul looks at the whole salvation process from inception to final reception. In any case his general statement of the works of the law playing no part in justification is true. More probably his phrase, however, is the reiteration of emphasis to conclude the verse.

The Old Testament position on the relationship of law and covenant entry is clear. Since the Mosaic Law came initially as a response to the relationship concluded on the basis of grace extended by God no one could be (or ever was) justified before God on the basis of the law. Grace operative in the exodus redemption had led to covenant entry or justification. Likewise the Christian new exodus, the death of Christ had been productive of a new covenant in which apart from law (Rom 3:21), covenant entry was offered on the basis of belief in the deity of Christ and in his finished work (Rom 10:9). In any case, it was never the Old Testament case that one could rely on the works done in response to the law alone for covenant membership since the presence of the system of sacrificial atonement underlined the personal reality that perfection under the law was never attainable. Israel always understood that obedience needed to be supplemented by the continued grace of forgiveness. The situa-

tion is precisely the same under the new covenant (cf. 1 John 2:2). James Dunn has rightly stated that the argument in Romans and Galatians is not about how salvation can be had but about how Gentiles can be included in the Messianic community.²⁴ Paul knew, as well as Judaism at large did, that the law under the Mosaic arrangement was easily and readily infringed.

The altercation at Antioch was caused by Jews who had refused to see the work of Jesus Messiah as terminating the Sinai covenant and as determinative of a new covenant relationship. Indeed they had probably endeavoured to fit Jesus into the Sinai compact which they saw as continuing. The Judaizers who were extremely active in Galatia probably saw Christ as affirming the law and strengthening Sinai. But both Judaism and the Christian Jews in Galatia as opponents failed to appreciate that the crucifixion of Jesus irrevocably ended the Mosaic covenant. For Christ by his atonement had removed the curse of the law from Israel, had established the nucleus of a restored Israel though whom the inaugurated New Covenant could be offered to all humankind. Still attempting to live under the Sinai arrangement but with no arrangements now for the remission of sins, Jews who refused, in effect, to come across to the New Covenant from the Mosaic are all under the curse invoked in Deut 27.26.²⁵

Paul will draw out the illogic of the Judaizing position, in Gal. 3. In acknowledging the need for justification in Christ but at the same time by endeavouring to impose Mosaic covenant law on the Galatians, the Judaizers were given impetus by positions such as Peter's at Antioch. At the same time, apart from anything else, on the best construction possible, the Judaizers are shown by Paul in Gal. 3 to be in serious theological confusion. By their demand for the imposition of the Mosaic Law on Christian converts they were in fact making a demand for Christian incorporation into the Mosaic and Sinaitic structure. In their particular demands in Galatians for circumcision, food laws Sabbath keeping etc., they were not merely making

demands for the acceptance of Mosaic law in terms of ethical principles. They were assuming the continuance of the Mosaic covenant and insisting upon its continued recognition. This was a serious category mistake which presumed the continued existence of institutions whose validity had been decisively ended by the Cross. That is why in Galatians 3 the Abrahamic connection and a requisite understanding of what Abrahamic sonship meant was so critical to Paul's presentation.

Paul does not deny the place of law as God's revealed will to which new covenant obedience, prompted by the gift of the Spirit, must respond and this becomes clear in his treatment in Galatians 5-6 of the ethical response required to sustain New Covenant membership. In Gal. 3.12 Paul makes it clear that the law and faith belong to different orders and have different roles. Paul points in Gal. 3 to what had been the role of the Mosaic Law as assuming prominence in covenant maintenance, not in covenant entrance. In terms of the Christian analogy which may be drawn from this, the order is the same. Faith indicates the fact of new covenant membership, law-keeping through faith the subsequent response to covenant membership. Faith not only makes possible the onset of the relationship but then provides for the obedience which stems from faith itself (Rom 1:5), an obedience mandatory for covenant continuance.

Gal. 2:17-18 then proceeds to cover what will be the points of contention in the ongoing covenantal argument. Paul states the charge levelled against him v. 17 and then v. 18 refutes it. 'If in our effort to be justified by Christ' is the first clause, the second is 'we ourselves have been found to be sinners' with the conclusion; 'is Christ then a servant of sin?' Again this verse must be interpreted within the flow of the context. Paul now is talking about life within the Christian covenant moving on from its reception, discussed in v. 16. This assertion that Christ becomes under the Pauline doctrine of justification a servant of sin seems to have been the substance of a serious charge that Paul's gospel leads to disregard of the law and thus to antinomian-

ism. The key to the interpretation in V.17 is the meaning of the word 'sinners'. Paul is not speaking of an initial response to the gospel here, which places Jews on the same footing as Gentiles for acceptance, as sinners. He is not looking back to a conversion experience. Again it would hardly be the case that in that regard, Christ could be thought of as a minister of sin. Rather as redeemer, he was a revealer of sin and its forgiver. Christ on this level receives sinners but does not promote sin, which the phrase 'servant of sin' naturally might suggest. Only on a biased ethnic point of view could the charge be levelled that faith in Christ provided a stimulus to covenant-breaking. For the noun 'sinners' in v. 17 has covenant connection in mind. The text supposes a judgment on faithful Jewish Christians who are now members of the new covenant. They recognized that they could not find Christian justification in their continued membership of the Mosaic covenant. As a result of relinquishing strict adherence to the Mosaic law, perhaps in table fellowship association with Gentiles, they had in strict Jewish eyes had placed themselves in the position of Gentiles who were, on a Jewish construction, outside of the Mosaic covenant. On such a strict Jewish view, Peter's action in eating with Gentiles put him on their level, as outside of the covenant and thus a sinner. If the then Jewish cultural definition of sin and sinners as non-Jews is on view, then Paul's answer at the end of v. 17 is absolutely correct and covers both clauses of the verse. It is the stock one which Paul applies to a theological question whose conclusions must be rejected. Of course not! (v.17), absolutely not! It is not the case that we are sinners nor that Christ is the minister of sin! We are only so in terms of ethnic presuppositions!

Verse 18 is Paul's countercharge. What is torn down is not the law but the old covenant. The allusion to Jeremiah's key motif in Paul's 'building and tearing down' is unmistakable. For Jeremiah, in plucking up and breaking down, destroying and overthrowing, building and planting (cf., Jer 1:10,12:16-17, 18:9,24:6,38:4,28, 40:7,49:10, 51:34), God was at work in the

Israel of Jeremiah's time to establish a new covenant community through exile and restoration.²⁶ Paul's vision like Jeremiah's rejection of the royal priestly ideology of the Jerusalem establishment, anticipates the end of one age and the emergence of a new.. Jeremiah anticipates the change that judgment and exile must bring to Israel, Paul looks back to Israel's theological exile ended by the incarnation, death and resurrection and to a new period of restoration through a restored Israel having emerged.

Jeremiah's use of the metaphor also appears in Jer 31:28 a context contiguous and closely parallel to the new covenant context of Jer 31:31-34²⁷ The exile of Judah begun in 587/6 B.C., was the beginning of the tearing down of the old community completed at length by the cross. The 'planting' or 'building' of the new community in Christ continued on the OT foundations of remnant Israel and took eschatological shape with the resurrection of Jesus. By the death of Jesus the new covenant has replaced the old and the old cannot now be revived. To attempt to revive the old is to transgress the new.

The word *parabates* is important here. Its meaning refers to a transgression of some moral standard or expectation.²⁸ 'Transgression' is an offence against some understood relationship, here in Paul's mind the new covenant relationship established by God's eschatological purpose having been advanced in Jesus. When *parabates* refers to the transgression of the law it is completed by the addition of the word *nomos*. Peter's transgression was not against law but against God's gospel of free grace. Paul is saying that to revert to what has been torn down would make him a transgressor of the changed shape of God's new covenant purposes. So to revert to the keeping of the nationalistic Jewish law for Peter in this new Christian age is what really breaks the new covenant as Peter's 'transgression' in v.14 had done.

In v.19 (cf. *gar*), Paul explains the logic behind both v. 17 and v. 18. He is still speaking of Jewish Christian faith and sets forth his own example of the Jew now in Christ. Since he is in Christ, Christ's abolition of the Mosaic covenant by his

death meant Paul's (and Jewry's) death to the law. So he can say I through the law's exacting in the cross the penalty of its transgression, have died to the law. I no longer have an obligation to Mosaic Torah.. Paul is not referring to a subjective experience of his realized inability to meet the law's demand. The terminology is not figurative but literal. Paul's death took place in Christ through Christ's crucifixion which exhausted the curse of the law placed upon Judaism and upon the human race. In Christ who died as Israel and Adamic humanity condemned by the law as sin-bearer, Paul also had died. But all in Christ are now made alive, in Christ as the Second Adam and life-giving Spirit (1 Cor 15:45) for risen with Christ Paul had died to the past with all its claims. For Jews, the law proclaimed the death of all those who stood under the old covenant. The building of the new age meant the tearing down of the old covenant. This is the narrower point that Paul is making in this inner Jewish argument. The Law pronounced a curse on all Jews but Christ bore the curse (Gal. 3:13) for them all. In the larger sense Paul represents the new covenant community whose restoration had been accomplished through Israel's death in exile since the Deuteronomic promise/threat of blessings and curses was expressed in terms of Israel's life in the land or death through expulsion by exile.²⁹

Paul and Jewish Christians were bound up in the eschatological dimension of the cross. Through his incorporation into the body of Christ, Paul had become a participator in all that Christ had done and all that Christ now was (cf. Romans 7:4 'Wherefore, my brethren, ye also were made dead to the law through the body of Christ' RV).. The perfect tense of 'have been crucified' v.19 points to the permanent position of the Jewish believer as regards law under the Old Covenant.

Verse 20 continues the thought of v. 19 and explains what it means to live to God. Paul now lived a new life, the communicated spiritual life of the Second Adam, expressing by faith the new life of Christ within him. But he needs to add that the life which he now lives is still life within

the sphere of flesh, in all its weakness and fallibility, in all its proneness to sin. The power of the cross has not removed that but has counteracted it. The new life comes to Paul communicated as it must be by faith in the Son of God, since the total reality of the new life awaits the transformation at the Parousia. Again the 'faith of the Son of God,' in which he lives *en pistei zo tei tou huiou tou theou* refers to Christian faith exercised, not Christ's faithfulness since the relative clause 'who loved me and gave himself for me' which immediately follows defines the content of the faith.³⁰

No connective introduces Gal. 2:21 which, as *asyndetos* sums up the entire discussion. The grace of God has been strikingly demonstrated in the cross. Paul's conduct and his gospel proclaim that, they do not nullify it. 'Through (the) law' of v. 21 is to be identified with the 'works of the law' in v.16. Paul is summing up the Jewish Christian position under covenant in this verse. As Paul has pointed out elsewhere a true covenant connection (righteousness) could not be maintained by legal obedience to the law but always by faith in God's provision consequently expressed in obedience (Romans 3:27). It is the attempt to attain continued righteousness/covenant membership through the now defunct Mosaic covenant that nullifies grace (21b).

Peter's confusion at Antioch had given support to the attempt to continue a way of life whose base had been entirely removed. If covenant membership in the post-cross age came through what had already been revealed prior to the incarnation, then Christ's death had been irrelevant. It is upon this carefully argued base that Paul will proceed to argue for Christians in Christ as heirs of the Abrahamic Covenant in Gal. 3

Paul must be read from the dimension of the flow of salvation history. It seems to me, however, that no great final damage to the faithful believer is done if this caution is not observed. But a flat reading of Scripture fails to reveal the intense inner connections between the Testaments and the wonderful coherence of the careful biblical presentation of the divine purpose to move

humanity from Eden to the New Eden. This movement is the concern of the chain of covenantal promises given in Scripture and it is to this consistency that Paul is appealing in Gal. 2:14-21.

The fact that Paul does not mention the outcome of the dispute with Cephas suggests that he did not win the day. The Jerusalem pressure on Jewish Christians to exercise strict legal obedience when eating with Gentiles probably prevailed. Jewish Christians probably followed Peter's example. Jewish Christians also still continued to recognize the final doctrinal and legal authority of the Jerusalem church. The controversy at Antioch logically sets the scene for the doctrinally critical covenant chapter of Galatians 3 where the Jewish Christian/Gentile relationship is finally reviewed.

NOTES

- 1 Paul Nadim Tarazi, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Orthodox Biblical Studies; Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994) 75.
- 2 Tarazi, *Galatians* 75.
- 3 Tarazi, *Galatians*, 75.
- 4 Page 46 reads *tina* which could be neuter plural and thus a reference to the decrees of Acts 15. The decrees, however would call for some compromise on the part of the Gentiles in table fellowship but not a Jewish withdrawal. If the Antioch incident is post Acts 15 however, Peter's withdrawal seems all the more perplexing. I retain tines and suggest the incident occurred before Acts 15.
- 5 *Hupestellen* — withdrew by degrees or by stealth.
- 6 Tarazi, *Galatians* 78.
- 7 J.D.G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Black's New Testament Commentaries; Peabody: Mass: Hendrickson, 1993) 122.
- 8 R.N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Word Biblical Commentary 41; Waco: Word Books, 1990) 74.
- 9 R. Jewett, 'Agitators and the Galatian Congregation' *NTS* 17 (1970-71) 204-206.
- 10 The fact that he can allege this seems to point to an agreement with Jerusalem on the substance of the gospel. Cf. J.D.G. Dunn, *Galatians* 127.
- 11 Tarazi, *Galatians* 82.
- 12 J.D.G. Dunn, *Galatians* 133.
- 13 The well-established character of this understanding is reflected in Luke 6:33 'even sinners do the same,' when compared with Matt 5:47 'even the Gentiles do the same'.
- 14 J. D. G. Dunn, 'The Incident at Antioch (Gal. 2:11-18)' *JSNT* 18 (1983) 27. Dunn cites Ps 118:53, 155 LXX and notes the parallelism in 1 Maccabees between sinners and lawless men (1 Macc 1:34, 2:44). On sinners as a synonym for Gentiles, cf. Isa 14:5, 1 Macc 2:44 Pss Sol 1:1, 2:1 Matt 26:45, Longenecker, *Galatians* 83.
- 15 K. L. Onesti and M. T. Brauch, 'Righteousness, Righteousness of God', *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Leicester: IVE, 1996) 829. Only rarely does the Hebrew verb mean 'make righteous' and when it does it means to restore to a position within the covenant.
- 16 See James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids/Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998) 386.
- 17 N.T. Wright has suggested, on Old Testament analogies, that the best rendering of Paul's *dikai*—language in the New Testament is membership within the (New) Covenant). N. T. Wright, 'Curse and Covenant: Galatians 3: 10-14' in *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991) 154.
- 18 Thomas R Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 44-59, especially 41-45.
- 19 Thomas Schreiner, 'Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible? A Re-Examination of Galatians 3:10', *JETS* 27 (1984) 264.
- 20 The evidence for this assertion is marshalled in my *Covenant and Creation, A Theology of Old Testament Covenants*, Exeter: Paternoster, (1984), 180.
- 21 See my *Covenant and Creation* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) 179-180 and the texts there cited.
- 22 A. del Caneday, 'Redeemed from the Curse of the Law: The Use of Deut. 21:22-23 in Gal. 3:13', *TrinJ* 10 (1989) 194 commenting upon the analogous phrase in Gal. 3:10 notes, 'as many as are of the works of the law' does not emphasize doing but a relationship of identification with the Mosaic covenant and cites the evidence BAGD 225 The equivalent phrase 'deeds of the law' at Qumran (1QS 5:20-24, 6:18 4QFlor 1:1-7) is used to describe the obligations laid on the member of the community.

- 23 I. Y. Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, JSNTSup 81 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993) 129. See also J.D.G. Dunn 'Once More'. PISTIS CHRISTOU' *SBL 1991 Seminar Papers* (ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991) 730-744
- 24 Dunn, 'Incident at Antioch' 5.
- 25 My forthcoming article on Gal. 3:10 deals with the dilemma in which the Judaizing Christians of the period found themselves.
- 26 After completing this article I discovered Roy E. Ciampa's valuable work on Galatians 1 and 2, *The Presence and Function of Scripture in Galatians 1 and 2*, WUNT 102/2 (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck 1998), pointing to the undertones of Jeremiah imagery in 2:18 and conforming but expanding my own view of Gal. 2:18. On the particular significance of the Jeremiah background for this passage Ciampa, 203-207 refers to Walter Brueggemann. *To Pluck Up, To Tear Down: A Commentary on the Book of Jeremiah 1-25*, International Theological commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 16,24.
- 27 Ciampa, *Galatians 1 and 2*, 205
- 28 The meaning of *parabates* is wider than that of the normally assumed covenant breach of law and refers to a transgression of some moral standard or expectation (Ciampa, *Galatians 1 and 2*, 207, n.174).
- 29 Ciampa, *Galatians 1 & 2*, 208-209 notes that the concepts of death/resurrection, tearing down and building up, exile and restoration are now expressed by Paul in terms of two ways of seeing things.
- 30 Ciampa, *Galatians 1 & 2*, 210 notes that only LXX text where *pistis* and *zao* are in close relationship is Hab 2:4. Except for Gal. 2:20, when these two Greek terms appear in close syntactic relationship they are citations of Hab 2:4. See also n. 23 above.

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