

REFORMED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY – CHARLOTTE

WORKS-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE USELESS CHRIST: ANSWERING THE  
OBJECTION TO JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN GALATIANS 2:17-21.

SUBMITTED TO DR. WILLIAM BARCLEY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

NT 5150 – GREEK EXEGESIS

JOSHUA DUEMLER

MAY 13, 2021

## WORKS-RIGHTEOUSNESS AND THE USELESS CHRIST: ANSWERING THE OBJECTION TO JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IN GALATIANS 2:17-21.

### Introduction

In Gal 2:15-21, Paul provides an initial statement of his doctrine of justification by faith in Christ apart from works of the law. In this paper, we focus on the flow of Paul's argument in Gal 2:17-21 as he responds to an objection to his doctrine of justification. We argue that all of Gal 2:18-21 should be taken as a single response to the question of whether or not Christ is a servant of sin in Gal 2:17. We first provide a translation of Gal 2:17-21, including 2:15-16 because the objection requires Gal 2:15-16 as its context. After establishing the context and the specific nature of the objection raised in Gal 2:17, we show that in Gal 2:18-21, Paul shows that contrary to the thought that Christ is a servant of sin, anyone who sets up the law in place of faith in Christ denies God's grace and makes Christ's death useless, thus making themselves a transgressor. We conclude with reflections on the significance of union with Christ being held together with Paul's doctrine of justification by faith.

### A Translation of Galatians 2:15-21

*We, by nature Jews, and not “sinners from among the gentiles”—knowing that a man is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ—even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law, because by works of the Law all flesh shall not be justified.*

*But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, even we ourselves were found to be sinners, then is Christ a servant of sin? May it never be! For if that which I tore down, this again I build, I show myself to be a transgressor. For I through the Law to the Law I died, in order that I might live to God. With Christ I have been crucified! And I live no longer, but Christ lives in me, and that which I now live in the flesh I live by faith, the “In the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me” faith. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the Law, then Christ died in vain.*

### **Context of the Objection**

#### 1. Antioch Episode (Gal 2:11-14)

Paul has just related the Antioch Incident. Peter (Cephas), on coming to Antioch was fraternizing with the Gentiles, but when Judaizers came, he drew back from eating with them. Paul, seeing that Cephas was not walking in line with the truth of the gospel, chastised him. He relates his words to Cephas beginning in Gal 2:14b. There is no sign that his speech to Cephas ends after Gal 2:14b, as Paul begins Gal 2:15 with “we.” With many commentators therefore we read Paul’s words in Gal 2:15-21 as addressed formally to Cephas, and materially to Galatians.<sup>1</sup> Most accurately, Paul is summarizing<sup>2</sup> or restating the argument he made in Antioch.<sup>3</sup> Thus, as Paul introduces his argument, he also closes the narrated portion of Galatians (Gal 1:12-2:21).<sup>4</sup> Gal 2:15-21 serves as a structural and theological hinge for the epistle.<sup>5</sup>

#### 2. Statement of Justification (Gal 2:15-16)

For Paul, Cephas’ actions did not simply reveal a sectarianism that was “designed to exclude others.”<sup>6</sup> If this were the case, Paul might have much more directly addressed the issue

with words similar to those found in Eph 2:24: “For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” (ESV). Instead, Paul sees a deep theological problem at the root of this outward act of gentile exclusion. So Paul lays out the competing theological systems that are working their way out in practice. There is the one Cephas has exemplified, which is “not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2:14) and there is Paul’s. The former is the “Justification by Works of Law”<sup>7</sup> model (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) while the latter is the “Justification through Faith in Jesus Christ”<sup>8</sup> model (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ). There is no middle ground, no “Faith and Works Justification”.<sup>9</sup> Paul makes abundantly clear that only one reflects reality: he repeats three times the reality that justification is by faith and not works of the law.

Before we address the objection, we must consider the function of Gal 2:15 in this section. As we have argued, we can read the “we” here as Paul addressing Cephas, and perhaps more broadly in light of 2:16, “a set of Jews who became Christians.”<sup>10</sup> Paul and Cephas are Jews by birth<sup>11</sup> and not “sinners from among the gentiles.”<sup>12</sup> Paul quotes this unflattering gentile appellation to Cephas and Jewish Christians from their Jewish heritage “only to debunk it.”<sup>13</sup> To borrow the metaphor Paul uses in verse 17, Paul is building up a wall between Jews and Gentiles in order to tear it down. According to traditional Jewish thought, gentiles are sinners by nature, outside the covenant.<sup>14</sup> But what Paul shows in Gal 2:16 is that the law does not justify anyone, therefore it must condemn everyone. And if the law condemns, it condemns everyone, including Paul, Cephas, and all Jews as sinners.<sup>15</sup> The objection Paul raises in Gal 2:17 has to do with this issue: that before coming to Christ, while living under the law, Jews were sinners.

## Objection and Argument in Gal 2:17-21

### The Objection

Paul has shown that even Jewish Christians must be justified by faith in Christ, because the law condemns all, both Jew and Gentile, to be sinners. The objection rises out of a Jewish concern for righteousness: *But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, even we ourselves (Jewish Christians) were found to be sinners, then is Christ a servant of sin?* Paul argues that in seeking justification in Christ, Jews are recognized as “sinners” in the same sense as the reference to Gentiles as ‘sinners’ in v. 15.”<sup>16</sup> If seeking to be declared righteous leads to us being declared sinners, how can Paul’s system of doctrine work?<sup>17</sup> It is easy to draw parallels between the objection Paul raises in Gal 2:17 and those raised in Romans 6:1, 15. In all three cases, Paul’s doctrine of salvation is in some way connected to sin, and Paul responds in the strongest terms possible to each: μὴ γένοιτο! In each case, the near context discusses death with Christ. But is it appropriate to read Gal 2:17 as another iteration of the objections in Rom 6, that “Paul’s doctrine encourages sin”?<sup>18</sup> Perhaps this is the general thrust of Paul’s argument, but the focus of the objection is different. In Romans 6:1 and 15, the objections focus on human responses to grace. Here, the objection focuses on Christ being an accomplice to sin. The question is not, “Shall we go on sinning?” but “Is Christ removing the need for personal righteousness, and therefore condoning sin?”<sup>19</sup>

In order to understand Paul’s answer to this objection, one must take into account all of Gal 2:18-21. This answer will take up the remainder of this exegetical section. We will show that 1. Paul explains his initial μὴ γένοιτο! in Gal 2:18 by arguing through his own example that the individual who reinserts the law makes himself a transgressor, 2. Gal 2:19-20 explains Gal 2:18 by showing what tearing down the law as the source of righteousness gets a person: union with

Christ, participation with him in His death and the individual's life, all of which can be summed up as "living to God", and 3. Gal 2:21 makes clear that all of this would be lost if one builds the law back up; God's grace would be nullified, because Christ's death would be useless. To make God's grace null and Christ's death useless, to turn away from God in such a way, would make the individual a transgressor, not Christ. We see then that it is not until Gal 2:21 that the objection raised in Gal 2:17 is completely answered and Christ is vindicated.

### The Counter-Argument

#### ***1. Gal 2:18: Tearing Down and Building Up***

Paul begins to answer the objection by setting up a counter argument. Paul's line of argumentation is not "Is Christ a servant of sin? No, and here are x reasons why he is not a servant of sin," but rather, "No, but I am if I set up the law instead of faith."<sup>20</sup> Later in the argument Paul will show that Christ cannot be considered a servant of sin, but Paul begins by turning the tables on anyone who would make this objection. His argumentation is subtle. Having written in the first-person plural in Gal 2:15-17, Paul switches to the first person singular. It is generally agreed that Paul switches in order to refer to himself as a "representative type."<sup>21</sup> Because Peter's actions at Antioch are in view here, Paul switches the pronoun he uses as an attempt to draw attention away from Peter,<sup>22</sup> and to speak more generally for his whole audience, whether that be in Antioch or in Galatia.<sup>23</sup> Paul uses a first-class condition here, and clearly has real events in mind,<sup>24</sup> or at least wants his audience to be aware of the real possibility of a Christian attempting to build up that which they had previously torn down.

As Ronald Y. K. Fung says, "Two questions arise in the interpretation of this verse: What is meant by the 'system which I have pulled down' ... [and] In what sense do I then 'show

myself up as a transgressor of the law?”<sup>25</sup> The first can be answered easily: the law is ἡ κατέλυσα.<sup>26</sup> The latter question is less settled amongst commentators. It is suggested that in building up the law, those who, like Peter, had formerly been eating with Gentiles, would make themselves transgressors by their previous “infringements of torah or its contemporary application.”<sup>27</sup> In light of Paul’s sparse language, F. F. Bruce’s more general comment is helpful: “One way or another, someone who builds up what he formerly demolished acknowledges his fault, explicitly in his former demolition or implicitly in his present rebuilding. If the one activity was right, the other must be wrong.”<sup>28</sup> Better yet, this ought to be read in light of Gal 2:19, where Paul speaks of “dying to the law”.<sup>29</sup> If a person has torn down the law in dying with Christ, how can that person set the law back up? We suspect παραβάτην is used as a synonym for “ἀμαρτωλοί” that avoids the pejorative connotations of the latter term.<sup>30</sup> The overall message of Gal 2:18 is that as opposed to Christ, who justifies sinners, one is a servant of sin if they set up the law to do what it was not designed to do.<sup>31</sup> To do so ignores the monumental development that Christ’s coming represents in redemptive history.<sup>32</sup>

## 2. *Gal 2:19-20: What Tearing Down Gets You*

Another postpositive γὰρ fronts Gal 2:19, linking Gal 2:19-20 somehow into Paul’s continuing argument. As we argued above, Paul means to link the “tearing down” and “building up” of 2:18 with “dying to the law” in 2:19. For this reason, it is better to read the γὰρ in Gal 2:19-20 as beginning an explanation of Gal 2:18,<sup>33</sup> than providing a second counter-argument of Gal 2:17.<sup>34</sup> Paul explains how building back up the law shows oneself to be a transgressor, because a believer’s death *to the law* was accomplished *through* or *according to* the law.<sup>35</sup> Paul explains when death *to the law* and death *through the law* occurs when he declares, “*With Christ I have been crucified!*” Death is *through* the law in that Christ was born “under the law” (Gal

4:4),<sup>36</sup> and “the vicarious death of Christ for sinners was exacted by the law” (Gal 3:13).<sup>37</sup> Notice how effectively dying *through* the law plays into Paul’s argument. By putting faith in Christ, a believer dies not only to the law (which may yield the objection that Christ is a servant of sin), but in accordance with it. Thus, building up the law in the place of faith in reality *breaks the law*. Paul, and anyone who follows him in putting faith in Christ, keeps the law by dying to it. J. Andrew Cowan expresses the effect of this upon Paul’s argument well:

[R]eturning to the law would be a transgression through highly ironic logic: in order to return to the law, one must transgress a separation that the law itself established, and thus returning to the law makes one a transgressor *of the law*. Paul’s argument at this point is essentially, ‘What the law has put asunder, let no man join together’.<sup>38</sup>

In dying *to* the law, Paul means that he has died in relation to the law,<sup>39</sup> especially as Christ’s death “spelled the end of the reign of the law, signaling the arrival of a new era in the history of salvation.”<sup>40</sup> This all comes about through one being crucified with Christ. Again, just as one keeps the law by dying to the law, so one lives *to* God by being crucified with Christ. The compact phrase ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω holds a wealth of implications, not the least of which is that those who do *live to God* also “bear fruit for God.”<sup>41</sup> Dying *to* the law then also builds up Paul’s argument against building up the law: the clear contrast of dying νόμῳ is living θεῷ. If anything reflects true righteousness in a person, it is living to God, and so dying to law must be a necessary step in having true righteousness in one’s life.

In understanding Paul’s argumentation, we should not fail to notice the positive content Paul develops in these two verses. In fact, the depth of his theology here contributes to his argumentation, as does his personal experience of it. While dying to the law through the law, being crucified with Christ, and living to God all reflect the objective position of a believer in Christ,<sup>42</sup> one cannot deny that Paul’s first-person ἐγώ here is based in deeply personal experience.<sup>43</sup> He has experienced, in coming to Christ, a total transformation of life. His old self,

under the law, led to persecuting the church of God. His adherence to the law “had led him into sin,”<sup>44</sup> but now he has “experienced a reorientation of values so radical that it can only be compared to death and new life.”<sup>45</sup> Union with Christ, Christ living in me, while an objective reality, is also an experienced, awe-inspiring reality. When Paul describes the faith he lives by in his new life, it is faith characterized by “the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.”<sup>46</sup> The very Son of God loves *me*, gave himself *for me*. This is personal, experiential faith, imbued with thankfulness. Even this furthers Paul’s argument. Paul says in effect, “Consider what I’ve gained through justification by faith in Christ:<sup>47</sup> union with Christ, participating in his death, living to God, having Christ’s life in me, and trusting in a savior who loves me sacrificed himself on behalf of me. Can the law give me more than all this?” To set up the law instead of this rich experience and status is to tear down what God has built up. To the explicit “if I build up the law-righteousness that I tore down I prove myself to be a transgressor” of Gal 2:18, in Gal 2:19-20 Paul adds the implicit “if I tear down the benefits of life by faith in Christ that had been built up in place of the law, I prove myself to be a transgressor.”

### **3. *Gal 2:21: A Useless Cross?***

Paul has shown in Gal 2:18 that as opposed to Christ being a servant of sin, the one who rebuilds the law is a servant of sin. To argument this point, Paul shows in Gal 2:19-20 that 1. The way of faith in Christ is in accordance with the law and produces a life lived towards God, and 2. The monument of benefits of justification by faith in Christ are so wonderful and rich that tearing down such a monument and erecting the law in its place could not be an adequate substitute. Gal 2:21 reinforces this argument by showing the logical conclusion of those who wish to keep a place for the law in their justification schema. While he may be responding to an objection “that he makes the grace of God null and void,”<sup>48</sup> it is more likely that Paul again uses the first-person

singular to implicate Peter, as well as any Christian tempted to return to the law for righteousness, but to do so “tactfully without a direct attack.”<sup>49</sup> In doing so, Paul concludes his argument that he has developed in Gal 2:18-21.<sup>50</sup> Paul says, “I do not nullify the grace of God, but those who set up the law as a means of righteousness do!” How do they nullify God’s grace? If someone upholds the law as a means to gain righteousness, then Christ’s death has no meaning. God’s grace is found in “Christ’s justifying action in handing himself over to be crucified and the Christian’s participation in that event.”<sup>51</sup> To deny this is to deny God. To seek righteousness by the law is to take all of the riches found in Gal 2:19-20 and call it worthless. Paul’s argument delivers the full force of its blow upon any followers of Christ. If they wish to have even some aspects of the law remain, then Christ will be useless to them. Paul conveys this more explicitly to the Galatians in Gal 5:2-3: “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law” (ESV). Seeking righteousness by the law is to make Christ’s death a waste.

This emphatic statement wraps up all the strands of Paul’s argument. First, it concludes the objection that Christ is a servant of sin. Christ has brought people from death to life, and lives in them. Through their participation in his death, believers now live to God. This is emphatically not the action of a servant of sin. Rather than being a servant of sin, Christ has been shown to be a servant of us by giving himself ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ, and now he is shown to be a servant of God’s grace through his death. Second, Paul shows that those who build up the law are the transgressors. Taken alone, the wording of Gal 2:18 provided little light as to what it meant for someone to make themselves a transgressor. Now the meaning is clear: one transgresses not only by failing

to live out their identity as one who died διὰ νόμου νόμῳ, but by making denying and making futile the blood of Christ.

As Paul argues with Peter, the Jewish Christians in Antioch, and those affected by the Judaizers in Galatia, one can forget that he was still arguing with followers of Christ. It is unlikely that any of Paul's opponents "thought that Christ's death accomplished nothing."<sup>52</sup> They would have considered the cross important, even if they looked to law-keeping for their righteousness. Paul makes clear, however, that if the cross of Christ is not everything to a follower of Christ, then cross of Christ must mean nothing. Christ's death must be useless. And if Christ's death is useless, then no one has been crucified with Christ and died to the law and no one now lives to God. If Christ's death is useless, there is no way for anyone to now live to God, because one cannot through the law. This is the full implication of "through the law is righteousness."<sup>53</sup> The objection in Gal 2:17 has been resolutely answered: Christ is not a servant of sin, and if I set up the law in place of faith in Christ, I make Christ's death vain, and am myself the servant of sin.

### **Conclusion: Union with Christ and Justification by Faith**

As we have seen, one of Paul's great concerns in his response to the objection of Gal 2:17 is to show what is lost if the doctrine of justification by faith in Christ alone is abandoned. The riches described in Gal 2:19-20, of union with Christ, and participation in his life and death are at stake in one's doctrine of justification. Often, however, Gal 2:19-20 are not considered inside their context, and their connection to Paul's doctrine of justification goes unnoticed.<sup>54</sup> But as Scott Shauf recognizes, these verses should be read in light of the broader context, and "being crucified with Christ" must find a touch point with "being justified by faith in Christ". The

connection is easily made in 2:21 alone: “When Paul states in 2.21 that if righteousness comes through the law then Christ died needlessly, the logical inference is that Christ’s death and not the law is the source of righteousness.”<sup>55</sup> Paul’s dying to the law through the law through being crucified with Christ must be read in terms of Christ’s death being the source of righteousness. To participate in that death, one must put their faith in Christ in order to be justified in Him.

It may be easy to apply the highly experiential language of Gal 2:19-20 to our being free in Christ or to the mystical union between Christ and the believer, but these verses must be applied also to the context of our justification, our being declared righteous and given Christ’s righteousness. Some might be loath to bring such experiential language under the banner of such a legal doctrine as justification. The language of the courtroom may sound “stuffy.” But Gal 2:19-20 teaches us that this is not the case. Justification is not a dry, “stuffy” doctrine. We are not declared righteous by a cosmic old man in black robes with a heavy gavel. We are declared righteous by, and given the righteousness of the one who loved us, gave himself for us. This is the language of romance! Our standing justified before God is one and the same with our standing with Christ our bridegroom. The marriage union is a fitting illustration to bridge union with Christ and Justification by faith. Jonathan Edwards made use of it in explaining justification by faith alone: the relationship of the wife to the husband “is the ground of her joint interest in his estate; they are looked upon, in several respects as one in law. So there is a legal union between Christ and true Christians, so that … one, in some respects, is accepted for the other by the Supreme Judge.” Because we are legally one with Christ, we legally have a right to “Christ’s merits and benefits” because Christ Himself belongs to us.<sup>56</sup> This intimate legal union reflects the reality of Gal 2:15-21. We are justified by faith in the one who loved us and gave himself for us to make us his bride. This is the grace of God that we must not nullify or take for granted.

<sup>1</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia, ed. Helmut Koester et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 114. See also Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 150; Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 112. Against this, see Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 83.

<sup>2</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle To The Galatians*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 136; David E Garland, “Paul’s Defense of the Truth of the Gospel Regarding Gentiles (Galatians 2:15-3:22),” *RevExp* 91.2 (1994): 167.

<sup>3</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, BNTC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993), 132. As Dunn notes, “the readers of the letter could hardly understand the ‘we’ of ii.15 as other than a reference to Peter and Paul.” Dunn’s further speculation that Paul “failed to carry the day at Antioch” is just that: speculation.

<sup>4</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 16, 114, assigns Gal 1:12-2:14 to the *narratio* of Paul’s letter, and marks out Gal 2:15-21 as the *proposito*, the section of Paul’s letter that “sums up the legal content of the *narratio* by this outline of the case and provides an easy transition to the *probatio*.” The terms *proposito*, *narratio* (the “statement of facts” (cf. p. 58)) and *probatio* (the proof section of the letter (cf. p. 128)) are terms Betz derives from ancient rhetoricians, such as Quintilian, Aristotle, and Cicero (cf. p. 44). I use “narrated portion” as a far less technical term. Paul describes things that happened in 1:12-2:21, and then again begins addressing the Galatians directly in 3:1.

Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 154, offers a helpful comment regarding the function of our section in the structure of Galatians: “The problem is the nature of our outlines, which tend to force us to put a set of verses in one section or another. In reality, as most scholars also recognize, 2:15-21 is a transitional paragraph. We cannot be sure how accurately Paul quotes the actual ‘speech’ that he made before everyone in Antioch. But it is clear that Paul wants to apply the content of that speech to the Galatian situation.”

<sup>5</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 153–54: “if this key paragraph looks backward to the Antioch incident, it also looks ahead to the argument that Paul will be making to the Galatians.” Moo then lists seven “key words that are central to that argument”: *νόμος*, *ἐργα νόμου*, *δικαιόω*, *δικαιοσύνη*, *πίστις*, *πιστεύω*, and *ζάω*, all words being key theological terms for Paul.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn, *Galatians*, 137.

<sup>7</sup> We cannot lay out the entirety of the debate surrounding *ἐργων νόμου* and its relation to the New Perspective on Paul (NPP), but we will outline it in brief. E. P. Sanders has argued that Judaism of Paul’s day was not a works-based religion but rather a grace-based type of religion, which Sanders terms “covenantal nomism.” See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 422, for his eight-point description of covenantal nomism. In light of Sanders, many have begun to read Paul’s discussion of “works of the law” in Gal 2 and elsewhere as referring not to “all the works prescribed by the Mosaic law” (Schreiner, *Galatians*, 161), but to “boundary markers” such as circumcision and food laws that established “Jewish distinctiveness over against Gentiles.” Such issues “were in danger of splitting the Jesus movement” (Dunn, *Galatians*, 137). Paul then is only arguing against this form of Jewish exclusivity. While much could be said about this issue, it is worth noting that the context of Gal 2:16 alone makes the NPP interpretation unlikely. In Gal 2:21, it is clear that Paul has in view “not that the Law limits righteousness to the Jewish Law observant, but rather that the Law simply does not convey God’s righteousness, whether for gentile *or for Jew!*” A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, ConcC (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 274–75. Schreiner also points to Gal 3:10b where Paul emphasizes “the obligation to do all that the law requires” and Gal 5:3 where Paul says “that those who adopt circumcision are required ‘to do the whole law,’ not just part of the law” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 161. NPP cannot explain away these clear indications that Paul, while concerned with the exclusiveness of Peter’s actions, is concerned because of the deeper theological problem that they reflect: that one is denying the grace of God and acting as though Christ died in vain. For the most excellent treatment of NPP possible, see William B. Barclay with Ligon Duncan, *Gospel Clarity: Challenging the New Perspective on Paul* (Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> As with the debate surrounding *ἐργων νόμου*, the debate concerning *πίστις Χριστοῦ* could be the topic of a paper all to itself. It is claimed by some that instead of faith *in* Christ (Χριστοῦ being an objective genitive), what is in view here is the faith(fulness) *of* Christ (Χριστοῦ being a subjective genitive). In favor of the latter are, among many, J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, AB 33A, ed. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 246, 251; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 81; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 115–16; N. T. Wright, *Paul In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 111–12. In opposition to those who say that the subjective genitive is better Greek, Roy A Harrisville, “Before Πίστις Χριστοῦ: The Objective Genitive as Good

Greek,” *NovT* 48.4 (2006): 353–58; Roy A Harrisville, “Πιστις Χριστου: Witness of the Fathers,” *NovT* 36.3 (1994): 233–41, has shown that the objective genitive reading is good Greek grammar that was used by Greek writers before Paul, and that the church fathers took this phrase exclusively to be an objective genitive. For an excellent (and rather witty) treatment that clears away some of the lexical and semantic arguments made by supporters of the subjective genitive reading, see R Barry Matlock, “Dethologizing the Πιστις Χριστου Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective,” *NovT* 42.1 (2000): 1–23. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 164–65, lists arguments for both the subjective and objective readings, and sides with objective, as do I. Again, the near context defeats arguments for the subjective, since Paul says “knowing that a man is... justified... through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus.” Paul does not mean to move from the concept of the faithfulness of Christ to the concept of faith in Christ so immediately. It is best to follow the principle of *maximal redundancy*, which suggests that “in cases of doubt, the most likely meaning is not one that adds something new to the context but one that supports—and is in turn supported by—that context” Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*, Second. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 58.

<sup>9</sup> The translation of ἐὰν μὴ is crucial here. According to John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians* (Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005), 165, ἐὰν μὴ is exceptive of the partial phrase. It “refers only to the οὐ δικαιοῦται —a man is not justified by the works of the law, or a man is not justified except by faith in Jesus Christ.” But Dunn finds that this is exceptive of the entire phrase: one cannot be justified by *works of the law* “except” through faith in Christ. See James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 195, 212. But Debbie Hunn, “Ἐὰν Μή in Galatians 2:16: A Look at Greek Literature,” *NovT* 49.3 (2007): 281–90, shows that there are examples in the wider Greek literature of ἐὰν μὴ being used as a partial exceptive or in an adversative way. All examples of partial exceptive uses, however, only have relatively insignificant words being excepted. In Gal 2:16, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου are incredibly significant words, so it is better to find an adversative case here. Even though it is the only such usage in Paul, it reflects him using ἐὰν μὴ “according to the proper, albeit infrequent, practice of his day” (p. 290).

<sup>10</sup> Debbie Hunn, “Christ versus the Law: Issues in Galatians 2:17–18,” *CBQ* 72.3 (2010): 538.

<sup>11</sup> This is the meaning of φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι. Similar uses are found in Gal 4:8 and Rom 2:14. See Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, SP 9 (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 92.

<sup>12</sup> So Moo, *Galatians*, 156. ἐξ ἔθνῶν reflects source here: Paul and Cephas do not come from among the gentiles, who are “de facto sinners.” See David A. deSilva, *Galatians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, BHGNT, ed. Martin M. Culy (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 41.

<sup>13</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 156.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 137, “‘Sinners of the Gentiles’ may be a quotation from the vocabulary of law-abiding Jews.”

<sup>15</sup> Hunn’s writing is instructive on this point: “[L]aw, any law, condemns exactly those who break it. The law ‘do not steal’ must call ‘sinner’ one who has stolen... The Jewish Christians, therefore, knowing that the law of Moses did not justify them, should have known that they became sinners while they were still under it... [in v. 15] Paul appeals to beliefs that he and Peter had held in common as Jews under the law: gentiles were sinners; Jews were not. Peter’s post-conversion return to the law implies that he either forgot or never fully understood his own standing before God under it.” Hunn, “Christ versus the Law,” 542.

<sup>16</sup> Scott Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” *NTS* 52.1 (2006): 90.

<sup>17</sup> Paul uses a first-class condition here, assumed true for the sake of argument (Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 690–94.). Paul and Cephas (and other Jewish Christians) are, so the objection goes, found to be sinners, and this charge is in fact true. To be “found” sinners is a judicial term denoting that God has “found them guilty.” See Schreiner, *Galatians*, 167–68. For the view that Paul constructs a false argument here, see Betz, *Galatians*, 119–20.

<sup>18</sup> Fung, *Galatians*, 119. Similarly Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, ed. N. B. Stonehouse, trans. Henry Zylstra (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 101, “The objection has reference to the seeming ethical danger of the doctrine. Does it not make for godless and normless living?”

<sup>19</sup> Morris, *Galatians*, 87, formulates the objection thus: “Since Christ does not insist on good works as a condition of salvation, does that not mean that he encourages sin?” While it is right to see a pre-conversion state of sinfulness in view here (So A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, ConcC (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014), 235; Hunn, “Christ versus the Law,” 538–40), and not a post-conversion state (So Moo, *Galatians*, 164), Hunn, 543, goes too far in insisting that Paul’s objection refers to Christ causing their sinful state. In light of Christ’s receiving sinners, the objection is geared towards Christ’s general condonement of sin, both respecting the person’s past and their future.

<sup>20</sup> This is opposed to Das, *Galatians*, 262–63, who sees a different unspoken step in the logic: “Christ is certainly *not* a servant of sin; one can so regard him only if the Law remains the definer and arbiter of sin, and that is exactly what I [Paul] refuse to do. ‘Indeed (*gar*), if I build back what I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor.’”

<sup>21</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 166; Bruce, *Galatians*, 142. But see John W Taylor, “Demonstrating Transgression by Building up the Faith: Argumentation in Galatians 2:17–18,” *BBR* 22.4 (2012): 557–59, who argues that Paul is the “primary subject of the verbs in 2:18.” Taylor argues that Paul’s building up the church he previously sought to destroy is in view in 2:18. He cites Bruce’s suggestion that 2:18 “could refer to Paul’s now preaching the gospel which he had once tried to eradicate, in the sense of 1:23” but ignores Bruce’s recommendation that we “be guided by the sense which his language most naturally bears in the context of his present argument.” See Bruce, *Galatians*, 142. In light of the near context, it is difficult to construe ἡ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ in terms of Paul’s previous animosity towards the Christian faith.

<sup>22</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41, ed. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1990), 90, “The use of the first person singular suffix (“I”) in the three verbs of the sentence …, as opposed to the first person plural (“we”) of v 17 …, is a rhetorical feature that allows Paul to make his point in more diplomatic fashion—i.e., by applying to himself a charge really directed against others.

<sup>23</sup> Scott Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” *NTS* 52.1 (2006): 91; Ridderbos, *Epistle of Paul*, 102: “Paul speaks in the “supra-individual first person” because “Paul is not now speaking for himself, but in using the first person has others (Peters, the Galatians) in mind” (102, and note 28).

<sup>24</sup> deSilva, *Galatians*, 46; Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 690–94.

<sup>25</sup> Fung, *Galatians*, 120.

<sup>26</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 179; Martyn, *Galatians*, 256. Possibly “the dietary legislation which separated Jew and Gentile by forbidding table fellowship” (Matera, *Galatians*, 95) is in view here, but it is more likely that with Schreiner, the OT Law more generally is in view here, with its stricture “cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” (cf. Gal 3:10).

<sup>27</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 167.

<sup>28</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 142; Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 91.

<sup>29</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 170.

<sup>30</sup> So Longenecker, *Galatians*, 91. Against this view, see Fung, *Galatians*, 121.

<sup>31</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 170.

<sup>33</sup> J Andrew Cowan, “The Legal Significance of Christ’s Risen Life: Union with Christ and Justification in Galatians 2.17–20,” *JSNT* 40.4 (2018): 466; Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 92.

<sup>34</sup> So Fung, *Galatians*, 122; Garland, “Paul’s Defense of the Truth,” 169. But, as Shauf notes, by explaining Gal 2:18 “there is still a connection to v. 17, because w. 18–19 together form a response to v. 17.” Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 92.

<sup>35</sup> διὰ νόμου reflects means (deSilva, *Galatians*, 47).

<sup>36</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 171.

<sup>37</sup> Fung, *Galatians*, 123. It is not, as William Barclay, *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*, Revised (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 21–22 has it, Paul trying “the way of the law” and discovering “All the law had done was to show him his own helplessness,” though this is a legitimate function of the law.

<sup>38</sup> Cowan, “The Legal Significance,” 466.

<sup>39</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 143.

<sup>40</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 171.

<sup>41</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 171.

<sup>42</sup> Fung, *Galatians*, 123.

<sup>43</sup> “Paul has shown that if he were to rebuild the very things… which he had torn down, he would prove himself a transgressor, because he would be doing something that would clash with his deepest convictions based on past experience.” William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Galatians*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 103.

<sup>44</sup> Bruce, *Galatians*, 143.

<sup>45</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 167.

<sup>46</sup> deSilva, *Galatians*, 48, calls τῇ an “adjectivizer of τοῦ νίοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἔμοῦ. This whole phrase describes the quality of Paul’s πίστει, and the “basis for this trust.”

<sup>47</sup> It bears recognizing that Paul is still arguing for his system of *justification* by faith. The “non-needless death of Christ mentioned in v. 20 is the source of justification.” Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 95.

<sup>48</sup> Fung, *Galatians*, 125; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 91, 96.

---

<sup>50</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 172.

<sup>51</sup> Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 96.

<sup>52</sup> Morris, *Galatians*, 91.

<sup>53</sup> This is a more literal rendering of the verbless phrase διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη. Fung, *Galatians*, 125. notes Paul’s use of asyndeton here.

<sup>54</sup> This is the reason for Shauf’s excellent treatment of these verses in their context. See Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 86–87.

<sup>55</sup> Shauf, “Galatians 2.20 in Context,” 100–101.

<sup>56</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *Justification by Faith Alone*, ed. Don Kistler (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), 15.

## Bibliography

Barclay, William. *The Letters to the Galatians and Ephesians*. Revised. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976.

Barcley, William B., and Ligon Duncan. *Gospel Clarity: Challenging the New Perspective on Paul*. Carlisle, PA: EP Books, 2010.

Betz, Hans Dieter. *Galatians*. Hermeneia. Edited by Helmut Koester, Eldon J. Epp, Robert W. Funk, George W. MacRae, and James M. Robinson. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979.

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle To The Galatians*. Edited by I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque. NIGTC. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982.

Cowan, J Andrew. “The Legal Significance of Christ’s Risen Life: Union with Christ and Justification in Galatians 2.17-20.” *JSNT* 40.4 (2018): 453–72.

Das, A. Andrew. *Galatians*. ConcC. Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2014.

deSilva, David A. *Galatians: A Handbook on the Greek Text*. BHGNT. Edited by Martin M. Culy. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014.

Dunn, James D. G. *Jesus, Paul and the Law: Studies in Mark and Galatians*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990.

———. *The Epistle to the Galatians*. BNTC. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1993.

Eadie, John. *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*. Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground Christian Books, 2005.

Edwards, Jonathan. *Justification by Faith Alone*. Edited by Don Kistler. Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000.

Fung, Ronald Y. K. *The Epistle to the Galatians*. NICNT. Edited by Gordon D. Fee. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988.

Garland, David E. “Paul’s Defense of the Truth of the Gospel Regarding Gentiles (Galatians 2:15-3:22).” *RevExp* 91.2 (1994): 165–81.

Harrisville, Roy A. “Before Πίστις Χριστοῦ: The Objective Genitive as Good Greek.” *NovT* 48.4 (2006): 353–58.

———. “Πίστις Χριστοῦ: Witness of the Fathers.” *NovT* 36.3 (1994): 233–41.

Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of Galatians*. NTC. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979.

Hunn, Debbie. "Christ versus the Law: Issues in Galatians 2:17-18." *CBQ* 72.3 (2010): 537–55.

———. "Ἐὰν Μή in Galatians 2:16: A Look at Greek Literature." *NovT* 49.3 (2007): 281–90.

Longenecker, Richard N. *Galatians*. WBC 41. Edited by David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin. Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1990.

Martyn, J. Louis. *Galatians*. AB 33A. Edited by William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

Matera, Frank J. *Galatians*. Edited by Daniel J. Harrington. SP 9. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.

Matlock, R Barry. "Dethologizing the Πιστις Χριστου Debate: Cautionary Remarks from a Lexical Semantic Perspective." *NovT* 42.1 (2000): 1–23.

Moo, Douglas J. *Galatians*. BECNT. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

Morris, Leon. *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996.

Ridderbos, Herman N. *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*. Edited by N. B. Stonehouse. Translated by Henry Zylstra. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953.

Sanders, E. P. *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977.

Schreiner, Thomas R. *Galatians*. ZECNT. Edited by Clinton E. Arnold. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

Shauf, Scott. "Galatians 2.20 in Context." *NTS* 52.1 (2006): 86–101.

Silva, Moisés. *Interpreting Galatians: Explorations in Exegetical Method*. Second. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001.

Taylor, John W. "Demonstrating Transgression by Building up the Faith: Argumentation in Galatians 2:17-18." *BBR* 22.4 (2012): 547–62.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.

Wright, N. T. *Paul In Fresh Perspective*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009.