

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This chapter summarizes the preceding discussion, then draws conclusions about the situation addressed and the place of grace and justification in Paul's thought. In the light of those conclusions it then evaluates some of the prominent alternate theories about the centre of Paul's thought.

Paul did not write or think abstract theology in a vacuum, he wrote and thought theology applied to pastoral situations. Any discussion of Paul's thought must be put in the context of the situation in which Paul was writing. The presenting problem, which Paul was addressing in his letter to the Galatians, was that certain Agitators had come teaching that the Galatians needed to Judaize (Gal. 2:14). These Judaizers were probably not denying justification by faith as the point of entry to the Christian faith, but were insisting on seeking righteousness through observance of the *Torah* in order to be true children of Abraham and receive the blessings promised to the children of Abraham. Although the Judaizers' teaching was not addressing entry to the Christian faith but Christian behaviour or lifestyle, Paul realized that their teaching undermined, contradicted and turned people away from the gospel (1:6) and the grace of God (2:21, and 5:4).¹

Galatians is not an anti-law document as some have said. It is a pro-grace document. Paul saw grace as God's answer to the situation in Galatia; grace was the answer to the teaching of the Judaizers. The concept of grace appears at all the key positions in the rhetorical structure of Paul's letter. In most of these occurrences it is integral to the logic of his argument. While grace was integral to Paul's logic, his focus was on the gospel and its implications for how the Christian should live. The gospel is about the grace of God, which gave Jesus Christ "for our sins" (Gal. 1:4). The Christian lifestyle is to be one of remaining

¹ This is where careful attention is needed not to read Romans into Galatians. They two letters were addressing two inter-related but different issues. Romans was addressing the gospel issue directly (Rom. 1:16-17), whereas Galatians was addressing a lifestyle issue that contradicted the gospel (Gal.1:6, 2:14).

in grace, waiting by faith for the hope of righteousness.² It is not saved by grace, stay in by works, but enter by grace, stay in by grace.³

It is interesting that no one has put forward a theory that grace was the centre of Paul's theology, or that it was the coherent core that holds all else together. While all scholars acknowledge that the core of his theology is what God has done for human kind in Jesus Christ, they realize that the concept of grace belongs to Paul's theological framework and did not form the focus of his thought. The debate about the centre of his thought seems to revolve around questions such as, "What was the main concept that Paul used to focus his message of what God has done for man in Jesus Christ?", and "How did that main concept relate to other key concepts?" While the concept of grace is everywhere, there is no mention of grace (as a noun) doing anything.⁴ Grace is usually a means or a motivation for the Lord doing something else such as saving, justifying or giving other gifts. 'Gracing' (as a verb) is rarely referred to as an action itself. Galatians 3:18 may be referred to as one of those rare exceptions, but even there it is part of a construction that needs "the promise" as the object "graced" to complete the thought. Grace is an attitude or disposition word, an obligation word. It does not on its own describe what a person does, nor does it in itself describe a relationship or standing.⁵ While Paul's thought reveals a full awareness and recognition of the grace of God motivating and driving everything he wrote about, his thought was driven to communicate specifically what God has done by his grace. Grace was one of the key components of Paul's theological framework that at times surfaced to become a component of the focus of his message. A salvation history orientation and an eschatological outlook

² The nature of the situation in Galatia necessitated that Paul speak against *Torah* observance as a means of attaining righteousness. However, he was far more concerned to defend the gospel of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ than he was to speak against the *Torah*.

³ Cf. Rom. 5:2 where Paul spoke of continuing to stand by grace. Sanders is quite right that Paul (like Palestinian Judaism) was concerned about staying in the covenant. However, Paul's answer to the issue was quite different to that of the Judaizers.

⁴ Except when it was obviously being used as short hand reference to something else (i.e. for a particular act of grace e.g. Titus 2:11 "the grace of God has appeared ...," which is a reference to the work of Jesus Christ as an act of God's grace).

⁵ The closest Paul came to using grace to describe a relationship or standing was in Rom. 5:2 ("the grace in which we stand"), but even there grace describes the gift of the fruit of justification by faith that makes it possible for us to stand in a state or relationship of peace with God.

were also part of the framework of Paul's thought but grace was the dominating framework concept.⁶

In all the key positions that grace occupies in the structure of Paul's letter to the Galatians, justification by faith is right there beside and linked to it. At first the gospel was the focal expression of God's grace, but as the letter developed it became clear that justification by faith took that position, and therefore the central focus of Paul's thought in his letter. There were several reasons for this. He saw it as the primary expression of the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ.⁷ Abandoning justification by faith is synonymous with abandoning grace (1:6, 2:21, and 5:4-5).⁸ As Paul argued for living by the grace of God in a way that is consistent with the gospel, justification by faith was the key to his argument.⁹

Justification by faith was also at the centre of Paul's thought because as the Apostle to the Gentiles he was concerned to have a gospel content that universally applied to all races. Justification by faith was the gospel content which explicitly embraced the Gentiles as Gentiles apart from the law.¹⁰ Paul's use of justification by faith was not primarily polemically driven by the situation in Galatia, but it was mission driven by his calling as Apostle to the Gentiles.

⁶ Again it becomes apparent that although they polemically debated each other, both Käsemann (eschatology) and Stendahl (salvation history), each has their own accurate insights into parts of Paul's theology.

⁷ Dunn (*Galatians*, p.31) says that grace expresses the gospel. However, in Paul's letter to the Galatians it is the other way around. The gospel expresses the grace of God. Dunn is probably reading Romans 3:24 into Galatians.

⁸ In Paul's language grace could be used as a synonym for justification by faith because of the central part of grace in justification by faith. But he never used it the other way around; justification by faith is never used as a synonym for grace because grace is a much bigger concept.

⁹ The calling/apostleship aspect of the grace given to Paul was important, but its purpose was building to Paul's argument for justification by faith.

¹⁰ Shogren ('Grace', in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2, Ed David Noel Freeman, Doubleday, New York, 1992, p.1087) says, "for the apostle [Paul], justification by faith safeguards the pure reality of saving grace." Contrary to Dunn, Paul saw this as also a soteriological issue, not just sociological issue. It was not just a matter of whether Gentiles needed to adopt "distinctive Jewish laws and customs as a necessary part of the gospel" (Dunn, *Galatians*, p.130), but it was also a matter of whether or not insisting on these distinctives created a man 'doing' element to the gospel, and thus destroyed the gospel itself as an expression of grace.

Justification by faith was at the centre of Paul's thought because it was the answer to the lifestyle issue which was being faced in Galatia (2:14). Where Paul did directly speak of justification by faith as the means of entry into the Christian faith, it was in order to lay a foundation of the agreed gospel content before he went on to state the contended lifestyle issues. Paul's gospel was about entry into, and living as, the people of God through faith in Christ. The Agitators' gospel was about *Torah* observance as a lifestyle to attain righteousness and the blessing of God. Paul was showing that the entry into the Christian faith and the subsequent Christian lifestyle are inseparable. The Christian lifestyle needs to be lived the same way it was entered, by faith. To insist on a *Torah* lifestyle was to sever the believer from Christ and fall from grace.¹¹ In Galatians Paul used the concept of justification by faith as an entry concept ("have believed" [2:16]), as a present life concept ("now live by faith ..." [5:4]) and a future concept ("hope of righteousness" [5:5]).¹² Justification by faith covered both the entry of the believer and their lifestyle as an ongoing relationship living by faith in Christ.¹³ Paul's letter is not primarily about salvation at all, but about maturity or sanctification in the Christian life.¹⁴ Justification was central to his thought because it was the key doctrine not just for entry to the faith but also for the Christian life.¹⁵

Justification by faith was central to Paul's thought and doctrine because it was the concept that best gave expression to salvation history, which together with grace was a key component in his framework. It always underlay the focus of his gospel thinking. It spanned the transition between the Old and New Covenants; between 'the ages'. Although the controversy in Galatia presented itself as an issue between Jewish and Gentile

¹¹ When Sanders says the concept of participation ('in Christ') is the centre of Paul's thought, he is partly right. For the concept of 'in Christ' also applies to both the believers' forensic/relationship state before God and their lifestyle.

¹² *Contra* Donfried ('Justification and last judgment in Paul', *ZNW* 67, 1976, pp.96), justification is not just past event and sanctification the present experience, justification by faith is a past, present and a future salvation concept. Understanding this principle also sheds much light on the debate about the meaning of quote from Habakkuk 2:4 which appears in both Galatians 3:11 and Romans 1:17 and says "the just shall live by faith."

¹³ The concepts of reconciliation, adoption and redemption all describe an entry into the people of God, but are never applied as lifestyle doctrines.

¹⁴ Objections to the centrality of justification by faith have often been marked by a failure to understand its link with the ethics of the letter.

¹⁵ Boers (*The Justification of the Gentiles*, p.71) highlights 4:5 and 3:3 and says, "in these movements lies the key to the understanding of the letter." By using Galatians 3:3 he at least partially agrees that lifestyle is the key ("having begun ... being perfected"), though he doesn't use it that way. *Contra* Duncan (*Galatians*, p.xliv) who says, "Justification is thus just only the initial, though all important step towards the complete self-identification of the believer with Christ."

lifestyles, in Paul's mind it was an issue of the purposes of the gospel and the *Torah* in the two ages, which were divided by the coming of Christ. The changing of the ages and God's ways in the new age needed to be understood by all. Justification by faith explained both the continuity and the discontinuity between 'the ages' of salvation history.¹⁶ It spanned the continuity in being the concept which best accommodated both the promise to Abraham and its ultimate fulfilment in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It expressed the new truth of the gospel in a way that understood and connected with its Old Covenant origins in the saving righteousness of God. It explained the gospel as fulfilment of the promise to and the righteousness of Abraham. But at the same time it fully developed the discontinuity of the ages. It was the concept that delivered the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles who were apart from the *Torah* and to the Jews who were now free to live apart from the law.

Justification by faith was also central to Paul's thinking because it enabled him to explain the gospel in a form that gave expression to the eschatological framework of his thinking. It combined the certainty of a present right standing before the Lord with the hope of the favourable result of the judgement on the final day. He used that eschatological dimension of justification by faith as the ground for his ethics: living by faith waiting for the hope of righteousness.

The concepts of grace and justification by faith held a special place in the thought of Paul in Galatians. While grace was the dominant aspect of the framework of Paul's thought, justification by faith was the focal concept of his message and therefore the centre of his thought. Although justification by faith holds the concept of 'in Christ' together, it does not hold the other concepts together (e.g. redemption). Although justification by faith is inseparably linked to the concept of the Spirit, and dominates the concept of the Spirit in

¹⁶ Sanders says that the difference between the Jewish concept of righteousness and the righteousness of God in Christ "is not the distinction between merit and grace, but between two dispensations." The righteousness by law is now worth nothing because a new dispensation has come. "It is the concrete factor of *Heilgeschichte* which makes the other righteousness wrong." In saying these things, Sanders shows that he understands the discontinuity of the passing of direct applicability of the *Torah*, but does not understand the continuity in both ages of God's ways of righteousness by faith (EP Sanders, *Paul, the Law and the Jewish people*, SCM, London, 1985, p. 140). Dunn (*Galatians*, p. 2) describes Galatians as shaping the character and self perception of early Christianity, both in terms of its fundamental principles, and in relation to the Jewish matrix from which Christianity emerged.

frequency of usage, and structural position, the concept of the Spirit is not dependant on it in any way. Therefore, it could not be said to be the ‘coherent centre’ of Paul’s theology in the sense that all other theological concepts are logically held together by it.¹⁷ Yet, it is definitely central to his thought in this letter by virtue of being the dominant concept and also being indispensable to the logic and development of the argument. It is the focus of the letter.¹⁸ If it was removed, the letter would loose all focus and meaning. Therefore, although it cannot be said to be the “coherent centre” of Paul’s theology, it is the coherent centre of Paul’s thought in his letter to the Galatians.

Although several other concepts have been claimed to hold the central place in Paul’s thought that the Reformation scholars gave to justification by faith, none of them can be shown to hold that place within the logic of Galatians, nor within the concepts used to answer the Judaizers’ teachings.

But before these other claims are evaluated, it would be appropriate to evaluate the objections first raised by Wrede and Schweitzer that justification by faith was only a polemical doctrine used to fight the Jews. That it is expressed in his letters in polemical arguments against justification by law is obvious. It is possible that the historical roots of the formulation of this doctrine lay, at least partly, in Paul’s conflicts with Judaizers. However, that the doctrine was formed for polemical purposes is far less clear. It is most likely that it was the result of Paul’s theological reflections on God’s grace, the history of salvation and eschatology that these thoughts were later fine tuned in polemical debate.¹⁹

Judaism understood the grace of God; but only as expressed through the *Torah*. They knew nothing of God’s grace or eschatological deliverance apart from the *Torah*. Paul’s basic thesis that the righteousness of God was revealed through the revelation of Jesus Christ, apart from the *Torah*, necessitated a polemical expression. That Christianity emerged as the fulfilment of the Old Testament Scriptures again necessitated a polemical expression. To say that because it was a polemical doctrine it was not at the centre of Paul’s thoughts tears it

¹⁷ O’Brien (‘Justification in Paul’, p.84) says it is questionable whether any motif fulfils this role in Paul’s teaching.

¹⁸ This is not agreeing with Käsemann that it is the focus of Paul’s theology.

¹⁹ Kümmel, *Theology*, p.195.

from its origins in the salvation history of the people of God and rips it from the social and historical issues and struggles that were recorded from the situation in Galatia, but were at the centre of the thought of all the churches in the first century.²⁰

Justification by faith was also not just polemical, it was personal for Paul. It was the means by which he had broken completely from Judaism and Judaizing Christianity to create the genuinely Gentile church.²¹ It was the means by which the new people of faith defined themselves in relation to Christ, in distinction from in relation to the Jewish roots of the church. So that even where not in a polemical context, it was still the essential definition of the new covenant people of God.²² Although in Galatians it is explained in contrast to and distinction from justification by the law, it needs to be seen as a positively Gentile inclusive concept, rather than as an anti-Jewish concept.²³ If justification by faith was polemical, so were grace and the gospel. The New Testament Church was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. The church was born out of the nation of Israel. Thus the relationship of the Gentile Christians to the Jewish faith was a key issue of identity for all Christians, whether in a polemical situation or not.²⁴

Paul's purpose was to explain the justification of both the Jews and Gentiles by faith as the fulfillment of God's purposes within history. Galatians records him making that explanation within the context of a polemical debate with some who did not understand or appreciate the implications of the fulfillment of God's purposes. Those who claim that justification by faith was only a polemical doctrine have themselves failed to understand or appreciate the framework of salvation history within which Paul thought. Salvation history is not a theological term that Paul ever used. Although no one makes the claim that it was the

²⁰ Kümmel, *Theology*, p.196.

²¹ G. Schrenk ('δικαιοσύνη', p.202) says, "Paul must first justify himself before his own earlier thinking, and his whole theology is rooted in this radical clarification of the question of the law ... That justification is a militant doctrine and a keypoint in the Christian mission is because there is exposed in it a new insight concerning the relation of the law and Christ."

²² JG Machen (*The Origin of Paul's Religion*, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1921, pp. 278f) said, "the reason why Paul was devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith was not that it made possible the Gentile mission, but rather that it was true. Paul was not devoted to the doctrine of justification by faith because of the Gentile mission; he was devoted to the Gentile mission because of the doctrine of justification by faith."

²³ Bornkamm, *Paul*, p.116.

²⁴ Dunn (*Galatians*, p.1) says that the significance of Galatians transcends the particular historical situation. He (*Galatians*, p.2) quotes Betz ('Spirit, freedom and law', p. 145) in support of this.

centre of Paul's thought, the significant place that the concept of salvation history had within Paul's thought is undeniable. Like the concept of grace, it was often integral to what he was explaining but rarely the focus of attention. For example, the way that Paul explained the promise, purpose and fulfilment of the concept justification by faith from the time of Abraham to the times of the Gentiles always kept justification by faith as the focus of attention, yet salvation history was the framework within which he thought and wrote.²⁵

Schweitzer's theory that redemption was the centre of Paul's thought has little support. The phrase "gave himself for us" in Galatians 2:20, when linked to "deliverance" in Galatians 1:4, gives some support for the existence of the concept in the *propositio*, but none for it being central to the thought of the *propositio*. Logically 'redemption' is a good concept to link the cross to freedom in Christ and the believer's release from bondage. However, the centre of Paul's thought is not determined by theological or philosophical reasoning. Only an examination of Paul's writings will reveal the centre of Paul's thought. Such an examination shows that while Paul did use the concept of 'redemption', he did not give it the place of priority.²⁶

The term 'redemption' is only used twice in Galatians. It appears in two passages in the *probatio*. In neither passage is it the focus of the discussion. In 3:13 it occurs within a discussion on how righteousness was imputed to Abraham and it is subordinated as a mechanism to impart the blessing of faith.²⁷ It was how Paul described what Christ did on

²⁵ O'Brien ('Justification in Paul', p.84), though actually using the term 'Redemptive History,' says that justification by faith must be understood within the framework of salvation history and the covenant promises and that the term 'the righteousness of God' must be understood as meaning God's faithfulness to his covenant promises to Abraham. He ('Paul's missionary calling', p.146) also says that Paul's use of these Old Testament scriptures show that his thinking had a *Heilsgeschichtlich* orientation. Stendahl says that the salvation historical dimension is the primary substructure in Paul's thought.

²⁶ The way Duncan (*Galatians*, pp.xxxiv-liv) handles the relationship between redemption and justification is most enlightening. The main heading of his chapters on the theology of Galatians are arranged around the doctrine of redemption. Under a major heading "The Consequences of Redemption," Duncan has several minor headings including "Justification and the gift of the Spirit" and "Righteousness." Under one of those minor headings he says the dominant religious issue in Galatians concerns justification (Duncan, *Galatians*, p.xlvii). His chapter on dominant religious idea is eight pages. He gives 'redemption' one page, While 'righteousness', 'righteousness of God' and 'justification and reconciliation' are given seven 7 pages. Duncan is confused. He is following Schweitzer in saying redemption is the major issue, but the text keeps drawing him back to justification.

²⁷ Clowney ('The biblical doctrine', p.19) places redemption and reconciliation as taking place "that we might be justified by God's grace." He see them both as mechanisms for bringing about the justification which is at the centre of Paul's thought.

the cross to enable justification to take place. The logic of the salvation event gives it a temporal priority to justification. But that does not mean it held a place of priority in Paul's thought. The focus of Paul's thought was not on what Christ did but on how believers are righteous before God by faith. Paul did not downplay the redemption Christ accomplished in any way, but it did not dominate his thought either.²⁸ In 4:5 it is subordinated to adoption, which is subordinated to sonship and the gift of the Spirit, which are the main concerns of the passage. Again it is a mechanism to link the gospel and the sonship/Spirit theme being discussed. It is placed in contrast to the *Torah*, which does not link the gospel to sonship, but rather brings those who submit to it into slavery.

Redemption is a past event in Galatians, where past events are not the focus of concern. Redemption is mentioned in the context of a future hope in Romans 8:23. It is significant that in Galatians 5:5, where a future hope is under discussion, Paul spoke of the hope of righteousness, not redemption. In fact, redemption is not the focal concern of any letter bearing Paul's name.²⁹ While redemption is an important concept in understanding Paul's gospel, there is no evidence to support the claim that it was the central or even a dominant concept in Paul's thought, nor that it was at the centre of the framework of his thinking.

The term 'in Christ' is used as a statement of the believers union with Christ in several verses in Galatians (1:22, 2:4, 2:17, 3:14, 3:28, 5:6, 6:15). In addition to these references, the term 'in me/us/you' is also used to signify the believers union with Christ (2:20, 4:19). This concept can provide some challenge to grace and justification by faith for a significant position in Paul's thought. Yet despite its widespread occurrence, Paul did not use it in connection with grace in the way he used justification by faith, nor does it appear in the strategic literary positions that grace and justification by faith occur. Again, as in the case

²⁸ Paul uses sets of dichotomies throughout the letter (esp 2:15-3:18). It is grace, the gospel and justification by faith that make up the positive side. Redemption appears in the letter but not as part of the dichotomy structure.

²⁹ The noun (ἀπολύτρωσις) occurs only seven times in all the Pauline literature (four of those in disputed letters), a maximum of three times in any one letter (Eph.), and not at all in Galatians. The verb (ἐξαγοράζω) occurs only four times in the Pauline literature (two of those in disputed letters), only a maximum of 2 times in any one letter (Gal.). The fact that the doctrine of the English terms 'redeem' and 'redemption' are constructed from a very different noun and verb stem casts a further shadow of doubt over allowing such infrequently used terms to be considered central to Paul's thought. Requiring two English words (justification and righteousness) to translate one Greek concept is a very different matter to constructing a singular English doctrine from two different Greek terms.

of the term ‘redemption’, although the logical and philosophical connection between ‘in Christ’ and grace and justification is clear, that does not prove its priority in his thought. What does the evidence of his use of the term within his letter to the Galatians reveal about its place in his thought? The evidence is that justification by faith, far more than the concept of union with Christ, was the driving concept at the centre of all the key literary positions and was the content of grace and the gospel.

Some argue that union with Christ is the assumption underlying justification. But these two concepts can and must be understood in relation to each other.³⁰ The believer is declared righteous on the basis of their union with Christ in his righteousness. But the union only happens by faith.³¹ Justification by faith does not stand alone, nor does any other concept in scripture. It stands in relationship to many other concepts in the scripture. In one sense it is incorrect to try to rank them against each other; they all work together. However, some concepts are tied more closely together than others and more dependant on another particular concept than others. On its own the term ‘in Christ’ is too vague for what Paul wished to communicate. Nor does claiming to find the concept where the term is missing help matters. The concept of ‘in Christ’ only takes on real meaning when it is combined with another concept (e.g. “Crucified with” “died with” “lives in me”).³² Where the term is found in the *propositio* it is linked to justification (2:17). That is what gives it meaning and significance. On its own it does not explain the message Paul was trying to communicate. Sanders preferred term ‘participation’ is an attempt to make a theologically vague concept less vague. Perhaps ‘participation’ is a clearer word, but theologically it is no better. The question is still left begging, participation in what? It still only has meaning when combined with another concept to give it meaning.

The concept of participation in Christ is definitely part of Paul’s thought, but it is not at the centre of the message of the Galatians letter. Paul’s letter was about the appropriate response

³⁰ Clowney, ‘The biblical doctrine’, p.19. Although Duncan (*Galatians*, p.xliv) understands them in relation to each other when he says, “Justification is thus just only the initial, though all important step towards the complete self-identification of the believer with Christ”, he totally misunderstood the relationship.

³¹ Motyer (‘Righteousness by faith’, p.49) says, ‘Union “with Christ” is basic to Paul’s doctrine of justification.’ Clowney (‘The biblical doctrine’, pp.46-47) says, Paul has two twin pillars that make up justification, union with Christ and the history of redemption. While this is an oversimplification that needs a lot of qualifying, what he is trying say has some merit.

³² Wedderburn, ‘Some observations’, pp.83-4.

to the grace of God in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Participation in Christ came under the general umbrella of the grace of God as part of the framework of Paul's thinking, but it fails to include a response component, which the centre of the letter required to answer the situation it was addressing.³³ There is no language of the appropriate response to grace in general or to the gospel in particular. Justification by faith is both an expression of the grace of God and also requires an appropriate response of faith to the grace of the gospel. Scholars are right to see 'in Christ' as important in Paul's thought, but wrong to set it up in place of justification by faith as the centre of his thought. It would also be wrong to set them up as equal alternatives. Within Galatians the term 'in Christ' is subordinate to justification by faith.

Betz deals well with the way Paul sees the Spirit as an answer to the *Torah* and the flesh. However, while making a good case for the importance of the Spirit, the primacy of the Spirit in the letter to the Galatians is assumed and stated rather than proven.³⁴ Although he never draws the conclusions himself, Betz' own work on the structure of Galatians puts all the building blocks in place to prove that justification by faith, and not the Spirit, is the central and dominating concept in Paul's thought.³⁵ The introductory remarks are centred on the Father and the Son and their work of deliverance, the Spirit is not mentioned. The *exordium* revolves around Paul's concern for the gospel, the grace of Christ. His concern is not over the Spirit. The *narratio* does not mention, or even hint at, the Spirit in the relevant background information. The *propositio* does not include the Spirit in any of Paul's propositions of agreement or disagreement, in his statement of the charge against him or its rebuttal. The *probatio* does include the Spirit, but where it occurs it is presented as the fruit of faith (3:1-5 & 14), a faith which dominates the *probatio* far more than the Spirit does. The *exhortatio* is the only part of Paul's message where the Spirit can be rightly said to dominate, but again in the first part of the *exhortatio* (5:1-6) it is presented together with faith, which

³³ This is typical of the new perspective understanding of Paul. It understands his terms to be terms of definition and declaring. The missing centre in the theology of the new perspective is the absence of the concept of the Lord's requirement of a response of faith to the grace of the gospel. That is why they do not see justification by faith as central to their understanding of Paul's thought. However, not perceiving that Paul is writing demanding a response of faith totally misunderstands Paul's thought.

³⁴ Betz, 'Spirit, freedom and law', pp.158-160.

plays a bigger role in that section. The Spirit is important, especially in the *exhortatio*. However, to suggest it is Paul's chief concern is simply not supported by the text.

Some case can be built for seeing the concept of freedom as central to Galatians. The noun 'freedom' (ἐλευθερία) occurs four times, the adjective 'free' (ἐλεύθερος) six times and the verb 'free' (ἐλευθερώω) once. However, apart from one reference in the *narratio* (2:4), all the occurrences are concentrated in the fourth and sixth arguments (one in the fourth argument, five in the sixth) of the *probatio* and in the first third of the *exhortatio* (5:1-13). Although the term is used a substantial number of times, the concept is totally missing from key parts of the letter, such as the *exordium*, *propositio*, and four of the six arguments of the *probatio*; it is only found in one of the significant summary points of the letter (5:1).

Betz suggests that freedom was used as a theme to pick up on some political and social experience of the Galatians.³⁶ While this may or may not be true, Paul's use of the concept was primarily being driven by the theological reasoning of the letter. Paul needed some expression which was the opposite to bondage to the *Torah*.³⁷ While the evidence supports the view that freedom is a major theme, because it is not the issue addressed, nor even a main part of the answer to the main issue,³⁸ the claims of its centrality are hard to accept.³⁹ Freedom is in fact not the key theme but a key byproduct of the main theme of being children of Abraham by faith.⁴⁰

³⁶ Betz, *Galatians*, p.3.

³⁷ In Romans, Paul felt free to continue to use the slavery imagery to speak of slavery to Christ. Yet where the problem of the *Torah* was being discussed in Galatians, in the context of the wider issue of how one becomes and lives as a true son of Abraham, the slavery imagery did not fit.

³⁸ Bring (*Galatians*, pp.3-4) mentions how in liberal theology Galatians has been presented as a document which proclaims freedom. He also says that many have accepted that freedom is the central theme of the letter "and yet they have not shown clearly the unique character of Paul's conception of freedom."

³⁹ One wonders how much the popularity of the theme of freedom was incited by the social situation of the 1960's.

⁴⁰ Freedom comes from the righteousness of Christ; as a result of it. The fulfillment of righteousness by Christ frees the believer from the need to work to attain that righteousness. The one without faith in Christ may reject the bondage to the *Torah*, but would still remain in bondage to the flesh. The one who seeks release from the bondage to the flesh through obedience to the *Torah* ends up doubly in bondage. Paul could see the issue from both a strict Pharisee's view and a Christian's view (Bring, *Galatians*, p.11). These Judaizers did not make it on either count, they could not keep it perfectly, nor did they trust Christ fully.

While there are insights to be gained by using reconciliation as a theme through which to examine Paul's thought, Galatians does not support Stuhlmacher's thesis that reconciliation is the overarching theme under which Paul's thought is to be understood.⁴¹ He states that justification by faith was part of the original early church material and probably came from the circle of Stephen and gave substance to the Antioch gospel. Yet despite one reference to "primitive Christian doctrine" in 1:4, which comes well before justification is mentioned, once the doctrine of justification is raised in Galatians it stands on its own feet as a robust mature doctrine. Paul used justification because it answered the situation at Antioch, not because it was a traditional doctrine handed down.⁴²

Stuhlmacher's methodology of trying to satisfy the criteria of understanding the New Testament as not detached from the Old Testament is to be commended. He is correct that a biblical theological approach is needed to understand Paul's thought, but he is wrong in his understanding of the question that was in Paul's mind. He pays little attention to Paul's use of the Old Testament to understand the questions Paul was trying to answer. He sees expiation, which leads to reconciliation, as the answer to the Old Testament problem of sin. In turn he sees reconciliation through Jesus Christ as the answer to the Old Testament question about the messianic realisation of the Kingdom of God as the community of God. However, Paul's view of the problem is more accurately described as that of the standing of the people of God in relation to the covenants (Gal. 3:15-18). The problem Paul was addressing was not primarily how to remove sin and its penalty, but how to be right with God when the law only brings a curse (3:10), and imprisons those under it (3:22).⁴³ Nor does Paul's letter reveal any concern for the separation from God that the doctrine of reconciliation addresses.⁴⁴ Rather he was focused on discussing the appropriate positive

⁴¹ O'Brien ('Justification in Paul', pp.83-83) questions whether any motif could be said to be the 'centre' of Paul's theology in the sense of a dominant, all embracing or underlying principle of coherence to Paul's thought.

⁴² All of Stuhlmacher's arguments ('The gospel of reconciliation', pp. 169-70) which link the atonement, vicarious suffering of Christ and justification are suddenly summarized in the concept of "the messianic work of reconciliation" in a way that leaves the reader wondering from where the concepts of reconciliation arose, and what rationale Stuhlmacher has for his reference back to 2 Corinthians 5:18, which is again quoted in support.

⁴³ In Galatians, Paul is not so concerned with the death and judgement that the *Torah* brings; that issue is dealt with more in Romans.

⁴⁴ In fact Stuhlmacher ('The gospel of reconciliation', p.165-7) does little exegesis of any of Paul's letters to prove his thesis. Speaking of Christ he uses the titles 'reconciler' and 'messianic reconciler.' He boldly makes the claim that "The reconciliation of God with men proclaimed by the Easter gospel is ... the historical substance of this gospel. It is the quintessential work of Jesus" (p.167), but does not

response to the grace of God: how does covenant obedience find its righteous expression, in keeping the *Torah* or in faith in the Christ of the gospel?⁴⁵

As a final summary, grace was the dominant concept of the framework of Paul's thought and therefore, the lens through which Paul's thought needs to be examined. Although it only occasionally surfaces within the focus of his message, it is the underlying concept at each key structural point within the letter. As Paul addressed the issue of the place of the *Torah* within the life of the Gentile believers, he built his answer upon the framework of a grace versus *Torah* axiom.

The main reason why justification by faith was central to the focus of Paul's thought in his letter to the Galatians was because it was the concept that best addressed the situation in Galatia. It explained why the Galatians should not Judaize and submit to the *Torah*. It enabled Paul to explain that they needed to live in a way that was consistent with the gospel; that they needed to live as Christians, the same way they became Christians, by faith. It is, therefore, the primary expression of grace and the gospel in Galatians. That is why it dominates most of the key structural positions in the letter, and is the focus of the flow of the logic of his message in Galatians.⁴⁶

There is another reason why justification by faith was central to Paul's thought; a reason that transcends the events in Galatia. It was central to Paul's thought because, as a

exegetically support his contention that it is "the historical substance of the gospel," nor does he build an exegetical case to justify its use over other interpretations of the work of Christ.

⁴⁵ Whether or not any of the other letters of Paul give Stuhlmacher's theory any greater support is also questionable. Stuhlmacher may find some exegetical support for his theory when he is quoting 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (p. 169), but even there he links reconciliation to other concepts, including righteousness, in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 1 Corinthians 1:30. He claims that the "pinnacle phrase of the Pauline gospel of justification" had been surrendered by the time of the letters of Colossians and Ephesians, but that the gospel of reconciliation had not (p.170-171). This is somewhat overstated. Reconciliation occurs once in Ephesians (2:16) and twice in one verse in Colossians (Col 1:20). It is hardly the central concept in either of these letters.

⁴⁶ Generally speaking, the main reformers (Luther and Calvin) understood the place of justification by faith in Paul's thought. On the other hand, those who are challengers of the Reformation thinking (Wrede and Schweitzer, the main proponents of the new perspective on Paul, and other scholars, who dispute the centrality of justification by faith), although making significant contributions to Pauline studies, and pointing out some real distortions in traditional Reformed theology, have misunderstood the part justification by faith plays in the thinking of Paul.

theological concept, its content expressed several matters that Paul saw as essential for all Christians. Firstly, grace was the framework within which Paul thought, because he saw it as the framework within which God worked. Therefore, justification by faith was central because as a 'by faith' concept it ensures that a focus is retained upon the grace of God as the origin of the blessing that flow from the gospel. Secondly, Paul was the Apostle commissioned with the task of taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles. Justification by faith was the concept that gave the best expression of the gospel for that ministry, for it applies the work of Christ to Gentiles apart from the *Torah*. Thirdly, he saw the gospel of Jesus Christ as the climax of salvation history. Therefore, justification by faith was central to Paul's thought because it conceptually linked the Old Testament concept of the saving righteousness of God, with its fulfillment in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Fourthly, Paul also had an eschatological aspect to the framework of his thought. Therefore, justification by faith was central to the thought of Paul because, as a legal concept, it brought the eschatological judgment of God into focus. Fifthly, he considered living a life of sin to be an anathema. Therefore, justification by faith was central to Paul's thinking because it kept the ethical concept of righteousness and the lifestyle concept of living by faith closely connected with the gospel entry point to the Christian faith.

The concept of justification by faith was the central concept in Paul's thought. This letter reveals that the situation in Galatia was simply the catalyst to bring Paul's gospel thoughts into focus. Justification by faith dominated his thought because it was the one concept that could express and bring together so many issues of the Christian faith in a way that no other concept could.

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