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Is the Christian in the Flesh? An Apocalyptic Reading of Galatians 5:16–26

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IS THE CHRISTIAN IN *THE FLESH*? AN APOCALYPTIC READING OF GALATIANS 5:16–26

Paul's letter to the Galatians, according to the traditional reading, is read through a sixteenth century paradigm to answer the question, "How is a person saved?" In this traditional reading, Paul's purpose is to establish the doctrine of *justification by faith alone apart from "works of the Law"* as the only way a person can be saved. Recent scholarship has examined and "read" this beautiful epistle through a different paradigm, namely an apocalyptic one. In an apocalyptic reading of Galatians, Paul's focus is shifted, though the doctrine of justification remains. This paper will look at the contrast of these two readings specifically with reference to the 'flesh/Spirit' dichotomy in Gal 5:16-26.

The Traditional Reading of Galatians

Previously Paul preached the pure gospel to the Galatians when he was with them (1:8–9, 11–12). They received the gospel and trusted in Christ alone for righteousness, for they were declared justified by God in Christ. Each stood before God in a saved condition without any merits of their own (2:16).

However, once Paul left the Galatian Christians, "Judaizers" crept in bringing another gospel that went contrary to the message Paul had taught them (1:6–7). The Judaizers taught that faith alone was not enough to be saved (6:12–13). The passive righteousness of Christ was not good enough, according to the Judaizers. The individual needed to take an active part in the role of their salvation as well. If a person wanted to be sure they were saved and counted by God as one of His people, then they needed to add the "works of the Law" along with their faith in

Christ. In this way the Gentile Galatians could be certain of their salvation and position before God.

The traditional reading of Galatians emphasizes that Paul understood that if a person followed the “Judaizers”’ other gospel, then that individual had also abandoned Christ. He or she had put their salvation in jeopardy (5:2–4). Thus Paul penned the letter to the Galatians so that the Galatians could judge between the two kinds of righteousness; the righteousness from Christ that saves the sinner, and the righteousness of the Law, or the Ten Commandments, which shows people their sin but does not have the power to save anyone. The righteousness of the Law proclaims what a person must do to live under the Law to attain salvation. If any of the demands are missed, then the person is under the curse (3:10). Circumcision (5:3), dietary laws (2:12), and feast days (4:10) were among the “works of the Law” required for the Torah-observant Jew to be justified by works. This Law also applied to any Gentile who desired to be justified before God.

However, the Law does not have the power to give the righteousness required to carry out its demands. Earning merits for salvation by people who “rely on works of the Law” (3:10) nullified Christ’s redeeming work on the cross and put the doctrine of justification on the line. The epistle to the Galatians is Paul’s treatise for justification by faith alone. “For if the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost.”¹ There can be no other gospel except the proclamation of justification by faith apart from works.²

The traditional reading does understand that Paul approaches the doctrine of justification with two ages in view: the “present evil age” and the eschatological age, or the promised age of the Spirit. Christ’s suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension ushered in the eschatological new promised age as God broke into time and space in Christ. Jesus went on a rescue mission to save

¹ Martin Luther, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (London: James Clarke and Co. Ltd., 1953), 26.

² F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), (continued next page)

people from this “present evil age” (1:4) and bring them into the new age by means of his Spirit.

Each age is dominated by some power. The “present evil age” is dominated by sin and wickedness, and is opposed to God. Those who are apart from Christ live out their existence wholly and completely in the “present evil age.” The Christian, however, lives in a new order existence³ in the overlap of the ages with one foot in each age. The Christian life is lived in the tension of the “now-not yet.” That is to say that the believer experiences the human fallen condition living in a fallen world with sin, death, and temptations. And yet the Christian also lives in the new age waiting for its fulfillment upon Christ’s final return.

In the meantime, according to the traditional reading, the justified Christian now lives with “two captains within the breast”⁴ creating another concurrent tension within. These two captains are the flesh and the Spirit. This leads to an anthropological interpretation of Paul’s letter to the Galatians as the focus is on individual Christians and the two natures that coexist within as they stand before God.

The Referent of *Flesh* Under the Traditional Reading

The traditional reading understands that σάρξ “flesh” is a word that can carry different meanings depending upon its referent and context. Some of the categories for “flesh” carry theological significance through which a text, or even an entire epistle, is interpreted. “Flesh”

81.

³ Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 40–42; Betz suggests that Christ’s redemptive act has freed the Christian from the power of sin in this age. But it does not say that the new age has already begun; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 42; Lenski’s interpretation of the two eons is governed in linear time. Each Christian is delivered from the condemnation of this present age. Christ is present with Christians as they now live with Christ. The present eon, which is wicked, will be followed by “‘the eon about to come,’ i.e., that of the blessed eternity. . . . The ‘present’ eon is the one which began with Christ’s death and is thus now present; it is the final eon of the world which is to be followed by eternity. Satan rules it so that it is ‘wicked’ through and through.” The Christian’s sins still tie us to this present age. Our hope is that Christ will take us out of this age. Until then, we are tied to the world, but not of it. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians to the Ephesians and to the Philippians* (Columbus: The Wartburg Press, 1937), 28–30.

⁴ Luther, *Galatians*, xxx.

can refer to the stuff that covers the human body as it encases the bones, muscles, blood vessels, and organs. “Flesh” can refer to the human body in total. It can refer to a human being in contrast to God and other supernatural beings. “Flesh” can refer to earthly descent as in ancestors and descendants. It can refer to physical limitations of life here on earth. And it can refer to the external side of life.⁵

BDAG defines σάρξ in the flesh/Spirit conflict as the physical body as an instrument of various actions and expressions opposed to πνεῦμα “spirit/Spirit.” “Flesh is dominated by sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is all forms of sin are likewise present.”⁶ Σάρξ is thus translated as ‘sinful nature’ (NIV) and the ‘works of the sinful nature’ within each person are listed by Paul in 5:19–20. Thus the Christian has two natures within. There is “the flesh,” which is *the old sinful nature* or *the Old Adam*, and there is the regenerate nature led by the Holy Spirit. These two natures are at war with one another.

The flesh then has its roots in and is equated with the sinful nature.⁷ It has a life of its own⁸ and works as an agent for sin. Understood in this way the Christian in this life is and exists *in the flesh*.

What does the Christian *look like* according to the traditional reading? It is as if the Christian is split in two with two different agents or consciences operating simultaneously. One agent is σάρξ “flesh” and the other is πνεῦμα, or “the Holy Spirit.” These two natures affect how the Christian lives out life on a daily, ethical basis. These two natures are incompatible, however. They war against one another so that the Christian becomes the battleground in the ‘flesh/Spirit’

⁵ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), Oak Tree Software, Inc., v.1.3, 914 (hereafter cited as BDAG).

⁶ *Ibid.*, 915.2ca

⁷ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, 2010), 346.

conflict. The sinful nature has its desires, which are contrary to that of the Spirit-led new nature. The new nature has its desires that are contrary to the sinful, fallen nature. The Christian strives to live ethically according to the Spirit's desires. And yet the flesh has an almost equally strong pull upon the Christian as well. As the conflict continues on, the Christian life becomes somewhat of a stalemate as the Christian is pulled in two directions. Sometimes the flesh gets the upper hand, and at other times the Spirit dominates (Gal 5:17; Rom 7:14–20).

When the Christian sins and gives into the “desires of the flesh,” there is comfort in the promise that the sinful nature has been crucified (5:24). However, since the Christian is still living and breathing, the sinful nature cannot be killed in total. The flesh is severely wounded, but never fully dead as it retains its power within the Christian. In other words, for “those who belong to Christ Jesus” (5:24) the flesh has been crucified as a decisive act at conversion. Translated as an inceptive aorist with the action continuing into the present,⁹ the crucified sinful nature dies and rises daily as it continues to haunt the Christian until the body dies, or until Christ's final return. Until one of those events occurs, the Christian lives every day in repentance, asking for forgiveness and trusting in the promises of baptism.

Among those who express an anthropological understanding of “flesh” in the σάρξ /πνεῦμα “flesh/Spirit” dualism, Lenski offers a unique interpretation of the referent of πνεῦμα. His answer to the stalemate between the flesh and the Holy Spirit that occurs in the anthropological reading of Galatians is to translate πνεύματι as a simple dative of means. He understands that the Spirit produces within the Christian what can be called “spirit.” In other words “spirit” is a qualitative term. This “spirit” is the new nature, and is opposite the flesh, or *the old nature*. Lenski translates in this way because he uses the analogy of Scripture for his

⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 272.

⁹ A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 586.

interpretation of the “flesh/spirit” conflict. “The analogy of Scripture shows that *we* never use the Spirit as a means (see v. 5¹⁰), but we do so use our own ‘spirit.’”¹¹ The Christian now is able to “walk by what is spirit” in Christian freedom un-synergistically. In this way, Lenski can remain faithful to the analogy of Scripture. And yet when the Christian “spirit” is overcome by the ‘flesh’, it is the “spirit” that is weak and not the Holy Spirit that appears to be weak against the ‘flesh’. It is this liberated spirit that exists face-to-face with the flesh in constant clashing.¹²

The Apocalyptic Reading of Galatians

A newer reading of Galatians expands the perspective, the angle of vision, from the last 500 years and travels back another 1500 years to the days of Paul. In first-century Judaism one finds a pair of apocalyptic glasses to read the letter through a worldview present at that time.

In this paper I am focusing on a worldview, a system of beliefs, and not on a genre of literature *per se*.¹³ What was the apocalyptic worldview at the time of Paul? It can be found in Jewish apocalyptic literature during his lifetime. Most notably apocalyptic eschatology is found in its purest form in 1 Enoch 1–36, but best illustrated by *Assumption of Moses* 10:¹⁴

Then his [God’s] kingdom (rule) will appear throughout his whole creation,

¹⁰ Lenski, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians*, 258–259.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 281.

¹² *Ibid.*, 258, 282–283.

¹³ Important work has been done on the question of apocalyptic genre, however. The Society of Biblical Literature Genres Project took it upon itself to analyze all Jewish literature regarded as “apocalyptic.” Their results are published in *Semeia* 14 (1979). The Project defined “apocalypse” as:

A genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another, supernatural world. . . . intended for a group in crises with the purpose of exhortation and/or consolation by means of divine authority.

In addition Collins notes that “all the apocalypses have a hortatory aspect, whether or not it is spelled out in explicit exhortations and admonitions.” John J. Collins, *The Apocalyptic Imagination: An Introduction to Jewish Apocalyptic Literature*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) 6.

¹⁴ Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, The New Testament Library (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 32.

Then the devil will have an end,
Yes, sorrow will be led away with him.

For the Heavenly One will arise from his royal throne,
Yes, he will go forth from his holy habitation
With indignation and wrath on behalf of his sons.
And the earth will tremble ...

The apocalyptic eschatological worldview has two main aspects. One is temporal and the other is spatial. The temporal aspect is that time continues to move forward. There is no going back in time. Yet this worldview is also progressing toward an end goal, namely the judgment and the destruction of the wicked.¹⁵ The approaching final judgment creates a context for the clarification of a person's ethics as well as a community's ethics.

The spatial dimension, or sphere, of the apocalyptic eschatological worldview highlights the supernatural: spirits, angels, demons, their powers and the powers or influences of forces unseen to humankind. These two dimensions, the temporal and spatial, are happening concurrently. In other words, the spatial moves forward along the time continuum until the final judgment. At that time, the next successive age begins—the age of the Spirit. Jewish apocalyptic worldview anticipated a clear separation and demarcation between the two ages, and these two ages are fundamental to an apocalyptic worldview.¹⁶

Does Paul's epistle to the Galatians reflect the apocalyptic eschatological worldview of his day? Whatever Paul's worldview was previously, it was radically altered when he received the Gospel δι' ἀποκλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ "through a revelation of Jesus Christ." God did this ἐν ἐμοί "in [Paul]"¹⁷ (Gal 1:13–17; Acts 7:54–8.1a, 9:1–19). A decisive event had taken place as

¹⁵ Ibid., 32–33.

¹⁶ Ibid., 31.

¹⁷ Das is very helpful as he points out the various possibilities for this prepositional phrase ἐν ἐμοί. Paul's revelation should not be understood as something that is purely internal and subjective. God's power through this revelation was a transformative one as God worked *in and through* Paul; *in* him as he changed his worldview of the "before" time and "after" time of Christ coming onto the scene, and *through him* as God used Paul for his purpose of
(continued next page)

God apocalyptically “revealed” the gospel in Paul’s life. J. Louis Martyn points out that the verb ἀποκαλύπτω “to reveal” and noun ἀποκάλυψις “revelation” are used four times within this epistle at important junctures of the letter (1:12, 15–16; 2:2; 3:23). In 1:12,16 Paul writes that it was God and not a human who “revealed” the gospel in him. The risen Christ had been made known to him as he was persecuting the Christian church. Previously, Paul knew of this Jesus who was *believed* to be the Christ by his followers. However, God “revealed” this to Paul on the road to Damascus as Christ personally encountered Paul. It was at that point that Paul believed and had his eyes opened to God’s new reality and new order in this time. Paul’s Jewish worldview had changed. “Even his subsequent travels and the inner-church battles he has to wage for the truth of the gospel are events he understands under the banner of apocalypse (2:2, 5, 14).”¹⁸

The other crucial occurrence of ἀποκαλύπτω is in 3:23–24. Here Paul writes about two distinct ages; there was the time “before faith” was “revealed” and the time after it was “revealed.” “Faith” in these verses is Christ, as shown by the parallelism of “before faith came” (3:23) and “until Christ came” (3:24). Paul explicates ἀποκαλύπτω with the arrival of Christ on the scene. In other words, this is God invading the old cosmos bringing in the new order and age in the person of Jesus Christ. This is more than simply a “revealing” or “unveiling” of Christ. He came in order to “rescue” us from the “before time” of Christ to the “after time” of Christ, namely the time of deliverance.¹⁹

Recall now that a Jewish apocalyptic worldview entails a temporal dimension and notice how Galatians employs this schema. Paul now posits two temporal reference points with two

mission to the Gentiles (*Galatians*, 133); Hays states that the ἐν is instrumental. God has chosen Paul to be his eschatological instrument. In doing so Paul could be a pattern for Christian existence to others (*Christology*, 281).

¹⁸ J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible 33A (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 98–99.

competing worldviews; a “before” time and an “after” time of Christ.

The “before time” is the time when humanity was enslaved under the Law (3:3) and imprisoned to “elementary principles of the world” (4.3).²⁰ However, during this time God had made a promise to Abraham and his seed, who is Christ, that they would receive his blessing (Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7; Gal 3:16). God also promised that Abraham and his seed would receive his Spirit poured out within them (Isa 44:3).²¹ God’s people had been waiting for the future age of the Spirit to arrive (Ezek 36:22–27) and be poured out on them. The surprise for Paul, and the offense to his opponents, was that the future age that was to come after the final judgment had already come upon them prior to the final judgment. The future age was made a present reality when God invaded “the present evil age” in the person of the crucified, risen and ascended Christ (1:3–4; 4:4–5).²² His Spirit was present and active *now* among and within his people as the future age had arrived (3:2–3). Temporally, there is now an overlap of two ages rather than a succession. These two ages are competing against one another and humanity is caught in the conflict.

In this Christologically modified apocalyptic worldview, each age is also a zone or sphere involving supernatural beings that seek to rule over the world.²³ This is the spatial, or cosmological, aspect of an apocalyptic worldview. The power in “the present evil age”—the “before time” of Christ—that seeks sovereignty over the world is called *flesh*. Paul assigns Torah-observance or “works of the Law” (3:2), Sin, slaves under the Law (4.5) and the children of the slave woman (4:23), the cursed (3:13), Mt. Sinai (4:24), the present Jerusalem and her

¹⁹ Ibid., 98–99.

²⁰ Das, *Galatians*, 129–130; See also Martyn, *Galatians*, 99.

²¹ Das, *Galatians*, 332–334.

²² Martyn, *Galatians*, 99.

²³ De Boer, *Galatians*, 33.

children (4:25) and "the elementary principles of this age" (4:3, 10) as minions of the flesh. These all exist and find their home in "the present evil age." The power in the "age to come"—the "after time" of Christ—that seeks sovereignty over the world is the Spirit.²⁴ Paul assigns freedom (5:1, 13), children of the free woman (4:31), fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23), the righteous, the Jerusalem from above (4:26), heirs and adopted sons (4:5) as those who belong to the "age to come."

Under such an apocalyptic reading, each sphere or zone within its respective "age" can be considered a military base of operation.²⁵ The flesh is the commander in "the present evil age" and the Spirit commands and leads in the "age to come." Christ came on a rescue mission as he broke into and invaded this time and space to rescue humanity *from* "the present evil age" and *into* "the age to come" (1:4) The believing community belongs to and operates within the Spirit's military base of operations during the conflict over the cosmos between the flesh and the Spirit.

An apocalyptic reading of this epistle does not "read" Galatians as Paul's treatise on individual justification *per se*. Rather, the letter is read and interpreted with a larger redemptive purpose.²⁶ This changes how the problem of the human race is framed. The problem in the letter is not that a person's sins get in the way and now the person is tempted to overcome these sins through works righteousness. But rather *sin* is a malevolent power that enslaves all of humanity. It is a godlike power that holds all people captive.²⁷ It is *from* sin, which is part of "this present evil age," that Christ has come on a rescue mission for all humanity (1:4).

The Galatian crisis, then, concerns where the necessary righteousness is to be found in

²⁴ Martyn, *Galatians*, 100.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 531.

²⁶ Richard B. Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians: The Law of Christ," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49 (1987): 276–277.

²⁷ De Boer, *Galatians*, 35.

order to be included as God's people, and to receive the power to enable Christians to live with one another within community and overcome the power of the flesh.

In this apocalyptic worldview, Jesus Christ alone provides the solution. The topic sentence for this epistle, as alluded to above, is 1:4.²⁸ An apocalyptic reading does not use a forensic framework as the hermeneutic for the epistle. Rather, "Paul shifts the import of the phrase 'for our sin' from a forensic framework to a cosmological one."²⁹ Christ gave Himself over for our sins, but in Galatians Christ did this for the purpose of rescuing us from "this present evil age" and bringing us into another age as the new creation (6:15).

Thus, two communities are established; those who belong to "the present evil age" and those who belong in "the age to come" as part of the "new creation" (6:15). True enough, it takes individuals to make up a community. However, this epistle is not about the individual alone who is either apart from Christ or in him, a believer or unbeliever who stands before God alone. Pauline Christianity is a matter of the community of fellow believers.³⁰ The believers are the corporate seed (singular) of Abraham because they are baptized into Christ the seed and have put on Christ (3:27). This seed, or community, is the "new creation" empowered by the Spirit of Christ.³¹ The opposing community is enslaved to "the present evil age" and is under the thumb of a foreign power.³² These are those who live apart from Christ and in the sphere of the "before" time of Christ of "this present evil age" along with Torah observance.

²⁸ Martyn, *Galatians*, 90.

²⁹ De Boer, *Galatians*, 30.

³⁰ Das, *Galatians*, 418 n. 114.

³¹ Das, *Galatians*, 388–389.

³² Martyn, *Galatians*, 90.

Flesh in the Apocalyptic Reading of Galatians

Under the apocalyptic reading of Galatians, not every occurrence of “flesh” is read with full cosmic meaning. There are times (as we shall see below) where the term refers to present existence, as in 2:20b. The context, as always, determines the referent of “flesh.”

Paul needed to use sin’s power in his argument concerning the Galatians’ struggle, but he couldn’t use the word “sin” because it could have been misleading. Sin was associated with “disobedience to the Law,” which could be used against Paul to accuse him of being an antinomist. Rather than attempting to redefine the word, Paul chose a different term to describe the moral threat. He chose the flesh to describe the power of sin as evil and as the moral threat.³³ The flesh belongs to “this present evil age.”³⁴

Now, humanity exists during the overlap of the two ages with the flesh and Spirit exerting their influences. Paul’s argument is that, since Christ lives in him, it is no longer his old self that lives since that “flesh” had died with Christ (2:20). But rather it is now his new Spirit-empowered self that lives because Christ lives in him (2:20b). The life Paul now lives in the flesh does not mean his *sinfulness*, but rather he uses this as he does in 2 Cor 10:3 to state his present existence. This existence corresponds to the overlap of the ages with the flesh, which is crucified to him with Christ, and his “new creation” life via the Spirit of Christ in him. It is Paul’s way of saying “now-not yet.”³⁵

The modes of existence relate with God in opposite ways. Those who are in the flesh have a relationship with God based on their obedience to the Mosaic law.³⁶ Those whose mindset

³³ John M. G. Barclay, *Obedying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 110.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁵ Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson), 376.

³⁶ Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: *(continued next page)*)

and worldview is under the influence of the flesh seek the necessary righteousness through the “works of the Law.” Those who are governed by the Spirit have received the necessary righteousness by the Spirit who dwells in them. They are led by the Spirit and fulfill the Law as it is in the hands of Christ (6:2b) for the life of the community in Christ.³⁷

Each community, or sphere, is characterized by a pattern of behavior, which determines ethical and moral choices.³⁸ Patterns of behavior will either reflect God within and through a community, or it will not. Paul describes the pattern of behavior for those who are under the Law and governed by the flesh as “works of the flesh” (5:19–21). He also describes the pattern of behavior as “fruit of the Spirit” for those who have a new identity in the Spirit and thus belong to the Spirit’s new social order (5:22–23a).³⁹

An apocalyptic reading of Galatians makes it clear that the individual person belongs to one or the other community. A person cannot belong to both simultaneously. The person’s worldview is either that of “the present evil age” or that of “age to come.” The person belongs to either the flesh’s military base of operation or to the Spirit’s military base of operation. The person is either under the influence of the flesh or under the influence of the Spirit. This means, then, that the Galatians were committed to some form of action and pattern of behavior and against the others. Paul reminded them of their commitment. They were committed *to* the Spirit, which meant they were committed *against* the Flesh.⁴⁰

Structure of Galatians

In light of this reading of Galatians, and especially of “flesh and Spirit,” what is the

Eerdmans, 2004), 172.

³⁷ Hays, “Christology,” 273.

³⁸ Barclay, *Obeying*, 112.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21, 102.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 115.

believers' relationship to the flesh? One way of getting a better understanding of this relationship is by examining the structure of the letter, and specifically for this paper, how section 5:13–6:10 functions as a part of this epistle. Again, the traditional reading and the apocalyptic reading approach this differently.

The traditional reading of Galatians breaks the epistle into three neat and basic parts: Part I, chapters 1–2; part II, chapters 3–4; part III, chapters 5–6.⁴¹ Part I is the autobiographical section of the letter. Paul needed to defend his apostleship since the “Judaizers” sought to discredit him, and thus his gospel message as well. The introduction of the epistle (1:1–10) is included in part I. Part II is the “doctrinal section” of the epistle. Paul lays out his argument of justification by faith alone apart from works and that heirs of Abraham are such by faith. Part III is the hortatory or exhortation section of the epistle.

As scholarship advanced in this epistle, scholars retained the basic three-part structure of the letter. However, for some scholars the division for the beginning of part II can begin with 2:15 and go through 5:12 to include Paul's address (2:15–21) as integral to the main argument of Galatians.⁴²

As neat and tidy, and appealing, as the basic three-part structure can be for the traditional reading of Galatians, it also brings to the foreground a glaring problem, namely, how does part III function with respect to the rest of the epistle? Throughout the first two parts of Galatians, Paul has had a “negative” view of the Law and “works of the Law.” However, in part III, and especially 5:13–6:10, Paul gives the Christian many exhortations, and he refers positively to commandments from the Torah (5:14) and also makes reference of the “law of Christ” (6:2). So,

⁴¹ Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1948), lxxii–lxxiv; also J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 65–67.

⁴² Fung, *Galatians*, 112.

it is hard to argue that there is no real connection between Part III and the earlier sections of Galatians.

The traditional reading has tended to offer two explanations.⁴³ One theory is that this section is not relevant at all to the rest of the epistle. It has nothing to do with chapters 1–4 and there is no real connection with the Galatian crisis or Paul’s theological arguments. J. C. O’Niell and M. Dibelius are examples of scholars who hold to this theory.

The other theory is that Paul “tacked on” this last section so that he would not be misunderstood by the “Judaizers” as an antinomist. His main argument has been a Law-free gospel. However, so that Christians do not get the idea that they can live any way they please in their Christian freedom, Paul lays out his exhortations in part III as a restraint against immorality. R. Jewett and H. D. Betz are examples of scholars who hold to this theory.⁴⁴

In the apocalyptic reading, there is a different explanation. Martyn, for example, argues that Galatians assumes a cosmos that has been disturbed by God in Christ and his Spirit. The gospel in Galatians begins with Jesus’s rescue mission out of “this present evil age” (1:4) and ends with the “new creation” (6:10). This forms an apocalyptic inclusion for Paul’s message. Since the “new creation” has not fully arrived, the exhortations of Part III simply reflect life in the overlap of the ages.

This paper, then, will assume Part III of Galatians coheres with the earlier sections of Paul’s arguments. With regard to both the epistle’s larger structure and the specific structure of

⁴³ Barclay, *Obeying*, 9–12.

⁴⁴ H. D. Betz advanced the study of Galatians and NT studies with his monumental work on Galatians when Fortress published it in the Hermenia series. Betz recognized Paul’s epistle to the Galatians as an “apologetic letter” genre (*Galatians*, 14). As such, Betz analyzed the letter according to ancient Greco-Roman rhetoric. Betz was easily able to separate the letter into seven basic parts: I, Epistolary Prescript; II, Exordium; III, Narratio; IV, Propositio; V, Probatio; VI, Exhortatio; VII, Epistolary Postscript (Conclusio) (16–23). Betz’s new approach began a new era in NT scholarship (Das, *Galatians*, 50). Though many subsequent scholars support and use Betz’s ancient rhetorical structure, he is not without critics; see J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians*, 20–24. A. Andrew Das discusses Greco-Roman rhetoric and epistolary analysis, and the structure of Galatians at length in his commentary (*Galatians*, 48–68); (continued next page)

5:16–26, I will be following the proposals of A. Andrew Das. His outline is as follows:⁴⁵

- 5:16–18 The Opposition of the Spirit and the Flesh
- 5:19–21 The Works of the Flesh
- 5:22–23 The Fruit of the Spirit
- 5:24–26 Conclusion and Admonition

The Galatian Crisis

Before offering exegetical treatment of 5:16–26, we should recall the nature of the Galatian crisis, and try to relate Paul’s interests in this later section of the letter to that crisis. The main issues are “what is the identity marker of God’s people?” and “where does the power come from to handle the flesh and give guidance for ethical living?” As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Galatian crisis was not only “how does a person get *into* the community of God’s covenant people?” Paul was also concerned with the ongoing nature of the Christian life.⁴⁶ John M. G. Barclay argues that there are theological arguments as well as social factors involved in the crisis. Theologically, Paul introduces the figure Abraham in 3:6 using καθώς “just as” to introduce Abraham’s faith with a quotation from Gen 15:6 in regard to God’s covenant made with Abraham.⁴⁷ Abraham believed God, and through this faith God “reckoned” him as “righteous.” In other words, Paul interprets this to mean that God regards Abraham as possessing the necessary righteousness, and having the value and status of one who is righteous. Baptism

Barclay, *Obeying*, 19–21; For a thorough history of interpretation of 5.13–6.10 read Barclay, *Obeying*, 9–23.

⁴⁵ Das, *Galatians*, 68.

⁴⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 18; Gordon D. Fee comments that the heart of the epistle is found in Paul’s questions in 3:1–3, which drives the argument of the entire letter. “So foolish are you (cf. verse 1)? Having begun by the Spirit (verse 2) now by the flesh do you finish?” This is the question to which the entire argument of the letter is devoted as a response. Which in turn means that the question is not, ‘How does one gain right standing with God? How are people saved?’ but, ‘Once given right standing with God, how is such a relationship sustained or maintained? The real questions, finally, is the role of Torah observance at all in Christian life. On this Paul is adamant. There is none’ (*God’s Empowering Presence*, 384).

⁴⁷ Barclay, *Obeying*, 52, 87.

and faith are instruments in uniting the believer in Christ/to Christ. Righteousness and the Spirit are closely associated with one another (3:2–6).⁴⁸

Using careful mirror-reading of the text, Barclay deduces, from the number of times Paul makes reference to Abraham (3:6–9, 14, 16, 18, 29; 4:22), that the “Judaizers” used Abraham as the model of Gentile conversion for their foundational argument to persuade the Gentiles to obey the “works of the Law,” especially that of circumcision.⁴⁹ The “Judaizers” would have made use of Gen 17 in their argument where God makes it very clear for Abraham and his descendants that every male who is not circumcised will be cut off from God’s people, his blessing, and his inheritance. Circumcision became the identity marker of those who belonged to God’s covenant people (Gen 17:14).

This argument from Scripture may have been persuasive to move the Galatians to the ultimate commitment to the Jewish tradition, namely circumcision, and the remainder of the Mosaic law⁵⁰ to complete their faith. After all, Abraham was the father of proselytes and the foundational figure for Judaism. If Abraham was circumcised, then the “Judaizers” argument may have been persuasive enough to move the Galatians to submit to circumcision and other “works of the Law” as well.⁵¹ Therefore Paul intentionally bypasses Gen 17 and focuses on Gen 15 as he combines God’s promises pertaining to the blessing of all nations through faith found in Gen 12:3 and Gen 18:18.⁵²

Gordon D. Fee notes that the reception of the promised eschatological Spirit (Jer 31:31–

⁴⁸ Das, *Galatians*, 305.

⁴⁹ Barclay, *Obeying*, 37–41; see also Das, *Galatians*, 8.

⁵⁰ Das, *Galatians*, 7.

⁵¹ Barclay, *Obeying*, 60.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 87.

34; Ezek 11:19–20), in common Jewish expectation, would lead people to obey the Law.⁵³ The Galatians had already received the Spirit (3:2–3). However, according to the “Judaizers,” they had not submitted to the “works of the Law,” thus they had not completed the faith (3:2–3). The only way the Galatians could “secure their identity as members of God’s people and recipients of his promises was by accepting circumcision: their present half-way status was valueless.”⁵⁴

In addition to the theological issues, sociological factors should be considered when trying to describe the Galatian crisis. Barclay admits that these factors are not as apparent as the theological issues that Paul puts forth. However, there are “sufficient hints in the letter and sufficient knowledge of the social implication of proselytism”⁵⁵ to support his argument.

With regard to social status, when the Galatians became Christian, they needed to abandon their former pagan gods and ways that held them captive to “the present evil age” and “worthless elementary principles of the world” (1:4; 4:8–11). The Galatians had dislocated themselves from family, friends, fellowship and business associates when they renounced the family and community gods. In other words, they renounced their identity. As long as Paul was with them the Galatians had support, encouragement, security, identity and Christian ethical guidance. But a vacuum was created when Paul left them and the Galatians were on their own. What were they to do? They could no longer share in their national and ancestral practices. But they were not members of the Jewish synagogue either. The Galatians sought security and identity in their Christian faith. The “Judaizers,” Christian Jews, came in from the outside and provided the answer to their insecurity, identity, and gave them ethical guidance.⁵⁶ The Galatians should submit to circumcision and practice Law-observance in order to complete their identity.

⁵³ Fee, *Galatians*, 5.

⁵⁴ Barclay, *Obeying*, 54–55.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 60.

In this way the Galatians would have a recognized standing by the government as Jews. Even though Jews were not held in highest status in the eyes of the government, at least it was better than what they were experiencing in this suspect new religion. The Galatians would once again have some security and social connections through the Jews in the synagogue. In addition, they would have a structure for God-pleasing virtues, and the power for moral and ethical living provided by the Law. In other words they would not be isolated in their Christian faith and practice, and the “works of the Law” would preserve their Christian community.⁵⁷ This was the view (and the error) of the teachers who had come to Galatia after Paul.

By starkest contrast, Paul’s eschatological worldview, created by his encounter with the risen Christ, had convinced him that the promised age of the Spirit had come in Christ. The “fullness of time” had come (4:4–5). The eschatological Spirit had been poured on the nations (Acts 2:1–13) and God’s promise had been fulfilled among the Gentiles apart from the “works of the Law” (Ezek 37:14; Gal 4:6). The reception of the eschatological Spirit was the Galatians’ identity marker as God’s people, not circumcision or any other “works of the Law.” This same Spirit also was their guide for ethical living as the Spirit empowered the Galatians to handle the temptations of the flesh. Paul’s concern was that if the Galatians submitted to circumcision in order to be assured that they had received the Spirit and necessary righteousness, and to secure their status among God’s people, then they would be putting themselves back under the obligation to keep the *whole* Law (5:3). They would be putting themselves back under slavery and the curse of the Law, the very status from which Christ rescued them out of “the present evil age” (3:10–14; 1:4). In other words, they would be no better off than when they lived in their former pagan religion and practices. The Galatians’ motives may have seemed right in their own

⁵⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 10–14.

⁵⁷ Barclay, *Obeying*, 56–60, 68, 70–72.

eyes, but they in fact would receive the very consequences they sought to avoid, and Christ would be of no benefit to them (5:2). The Galatians needed to know *what time it was*.⁵⁸ Paul was very aware of time. It is the time of the Spirit.

Overview of Galatians 5:16–18

This section is Paul's response to the previous unit 5:13–15. Paul brings together his solution for the two major concerns with the Galatian crisis, namely the "Judaizers'" insistence of Law-observance to fulfill the Law⁵⁹ as a covenantal requirement as well as the way to deal with the flesh since they were still morally obligated to show in their lives the righteousness revealed in the Law, which pleases God.⁶⁰ His answer to both is God's eschatological empowering Spirit. He begins by contrasting the two world orders of influence over humanity; the sphere of "flesh" and the sphere of the eschatological Spirit during this period of time when two overlapping competing ages move forward concurrently. The "flesh" and the Law belong to the "present evil age" that is passing away due to the coming of Christ. The Spirit belongs to the promised future age, the "new creation" that will go on into eternity.

Section 5:16–18 is Paul's articulation and expansion of *the love command* in unit 5:13–15. Paul recognizes that the love command can itself be turned into a new external law and bring condemnation upon the Galatians because, like the Mosaic law, it would not have the power to give what it demands. Paul explains to the Galatians the inner dimension and power of the love command⁶¹ as he promises the Galatians that the Spirit is more than sufficient to handle the 'desiring flesh'. He also states the reality that they are led by the Spirit and thus are no longer

⁵⁸ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 422–425.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 429.

⁶⁰ Ronald Lutjens, "'You Do Not Do What You Want': What Does Galatians 5:17 Really Mean?" *Presbyterion* 16 (1990): 110.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 110–111.

under the authority and constraints of the Law since the Spirit supersedes the Law's requirement. The Spirit is God's answer to both problems.

In verse 16 Paul uses the imperative "walk by the Spirit" along with the promise⁶² and assertion that in so doing they will not "satisfy," in other words "make provision for,"⁶³ the desire of the flesh. Paul's imperative is not so much directed at the individual in terms of personal life as it is toward the Christian community (5:15).⁶⁴ Verse 5:17 is the ground for 5:16 while maintaining the promise made in verse 16. In other words, "Walk (plural) by the Spirit and I promise you, as a Christian community, you will most assuredly not complete the desire of the flesh." Why? Because "the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, so that you do not what you want to do." By this Paul means to say that yes, the Galatians are "Law-less," but that does not mean that they are "lawless" and can behave any way they please. And yet, as a realist, Paul does not espouse some sort of triumphalism as if Christians will be able to live perfectly. Christians will still commit sins. However, they will not live their lives from the vantage point of "this present evil age" that is passing away. Christians live with a forward view looking toward the completion of "the new creation" (6:15).⁶⁵

Verse 5:18 is a continuation of verse 17 as he lays forth the reality of their existence in the Spirit in the indicative.⁶⁶ They are no longer ὑπὸ νόμον "under the Law."

Galatians 5:16

Λέγω δὲ "But I say": This is Paul's response to what the Judaizers may have said: "Lead your daily life guided by the Law, the gift by which God grants life, and we promise you that

⁶² Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 432.

⁶³ Fee, *Galatians*, 208.

⁶⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul, the Spirit and the People of God* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994), 115, 136.

⁶⁵ Das, *Galatians*, 562–563.

⁶⁶ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary 41 (Dallas: Word), 246.

you will not fall under the power of the Impulsive Desire of the Flesh (the Evil Impulse).”⁶⁷ He offers an alternative to the behavior that was taking place in verse 15,⁶⁸ namely to continue walking in the Spirit with whom they had begun (3:3).

Πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε “walk by the Spirit”: The aim of the Law was to create a community of God’s people where God’s character and purposes would be fulfilled. However, the Mosaic law did not have the power to fulfill its demands.⁶⁹ Paul’s answer to this is to “walk by means of and in the sphere of the Spirit.”

Verse 5:16 is the only place in the Pauline corpus that “walk by the Spirit” appears. The context of this phrase suggests that this is Paul’s basic ethical imperative.⁷⁰ He addresses the Galatian community⁷¹ using a term from his Jewish heritage to conduct their lives, not by the “works of the Law,” but rather by means of the Spirit. “Walk” is Paul’s most common word to describe or urge ethical behavior: God’s people were to walk in the ways, or commandments, of YHWH. It implies conducting one’s life in a particular manner.⁷² Paul places “Spirit” before the verb for emphasis as he joins together God’s eschatological Spirit along with the ethical imperative to “walk.”⁷³ Thus to “walk in the Spirit” means to conduct one’s life in a particular way and exclude any opposing conduct.⁷⁴ Paul’s present stem imperative denotes an action that already is in progress. The Galatians have already received the Spirit (3:2–3). The imperative stresses to the Galatians that they should continue as they had begun in the otherworldly

⁶⁷ Martyn, *Galatians*, 492.

⁶⁸ Das, *Galatians*, 560.

⁶⁹ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 426.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 429; De Boer notes that the verb reflects the frequent ethical use of *הלך* in the OT and other Jewish texts (*Galatians*, 351).

⁷¹ Das, *Galatians*, 558.

⁷² Matera, *Galatians*, 206.

⁷³ Fung, *Galatians*, 249.

powerful Agent.⁷⁵

ἐπιθυμίαν σαρκός “desiring flesh” or “desire of the flesh”: In classical writing ἐπιθυμία means “desire,” “yearning,” “longing” with an objective genitive. The noun and verb are neutral in themselves and without moral color. The objective genitive is what colors ἐπιθυμία, in this case it is σαρκός.⁷⁶ “The desire of the flesh” is singular. Paul’s use of the singular “desire” assumes that the flesh is a singular, powerful, cosmic force.⁷⁷ The “desire of the flesh” is to seek control over humanity. It is a supra-human power that seeks to set up a military base of operations within the Galatian community.⁷⁸ Its “desire” or intention is “on maintaining in communal form its own orb of power, the present evil age (1:4; 5:13).”⁷⁹ The end result, or τέλος, of the flesh is life apart from Christ, or eternal death, curse and damnation. The flesh by this time in the epistle, has been taking on a different nuance via contrasting the Sinaitic covenant with the other covenant. Paul has allied the flesh with Hagar and “the son of the slave woman” (4.23a), and the Spirit with Sarah and “the son of the free woman born through promise” (4.23b, 29a). The allegories have two different outcomes. Hagar and Ishmael, who correspond to the flesh, are being thrown out of the inheritance (4:30). However, Isaac is to receive the inheritance. To “complete the desire of the flesh” means to lose the inheritance.⁸⁰ However, Christ and his Spirit have invaded the present time. And what is the result of this invasion? First, peace is a result of the invasion, for the fruit of the Spirit manifests in the

⁷⁴ Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina 9 (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical, 1992), 206.

⁷⁵ Burton, *Galatians*, 297; also Barclay, *Obeying*, 111 and de Boer, *Galatians*, 352.

⁷⁶ Burton notes that the idea of sensuality or lust associated with the modern understanding of “desire” should not be associated with ἐπιθυμία (*Galatians*, 299–300); see also Das, *Galatians*, 562.

⁷⁷ Martyn, *Galatians*, 493; Das, *Galatians*, 562.

⁷⁸ Martyn, *Galatians*, 483.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 528.

⁸⁰ De Boer, *Galatians*, 336.

community of God's church. Secondly, the Spirit now resides in the believers, a residing that had not been there prior to the invasion (Ezek 37:14). Ironically, and theologically, this invasion of peace has not happened peacefully.⁸¹ This power, the flesh, seeks to set up a military base of operation within the community of God's Spirit-people to manifest among them⁸² patterns of behavior from their former lives in "the present evil age" (1:4) before Christ appeared on the scene, which will destroy the community.⁸³ This singular desire manifests itself in the "works of the flesh" that Paul lists in verses 19–21a.⁸⁴ The Galatians' existence has been oriented toward the flesh and has become a significant issue (5:13, 15).⁸⁵

Ὁὐ μὴ τελέσητε "you certainly will not satisfy it": Τελέω "satisfy, complete, fully to carry out, to bring to an end." The focus is not on the "works of the flesh" themselves. These are means to "the flesh's" end, or intent, which is to bring humanity back under its influence of "the present evil age" that is passing away. Empowered with the Spirit and under his influence, the Galatians will not "complete" the intent of the flesh (5:3). Note the verbal connection of τελέω in 5:16 with ἐπιτελέω "perfected, complete, to bring to an end something begun" in 5:3.⁸⁶

οὐ μὴ followed by an aorist subjunctive indicates something that will not happen in the future.⁸⁷ This second clause takes the form of a promise and not an imperative,⁸⁸ which expresses "a strong assurance that if they walk by the Spirit they will not, in fact, fulfill the flesh-lust, but

⁸¹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 530.

⁸² De Boer, *Galatians*, 357.

⁸³ Martyn, *Galatians*, 493; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 432–33.

⁸⁴ Matera, *Galatians*, 199.

⁸⁵ De Boer, *Galatians*, 337.

⁸⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 562.

⁸⁷ Burton, *Galatians*, 299; Martyn, *Galatians*, 492; Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 209.

⁸⁸ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 433.

will be able to resist and conquer it.”⁸⁹ The flesh and the Spirit are simply incompatible.⁹⁰

Galatians 5:17

To clarify, in this verse are the powers of the flesh and the Spirit during the overlap of the ages. Is the power of the flesh equal to the power of the Spirit creating a “stalemate” in the Christian life? Or is the power of the flesh at least strong enough to thwart the Spirit’s power at times? Or is the Spirit’s power sufficient and strong enough to overcome and conquer the desire of the flesh?

The other issue is found in the phrase “what you want” at the end of 5:17. Does this express positive intentions, negative intentions or indeterminate ones? Related to this is the ἵνα clause, which is the most difficult ἵνα clause in the entire epistle.⁹¹ Does it express purpose —“*in order that* you do not do what you want,” or result—“*with the result that* you do not do what you want”?⁹²

ἡ γὰρ σὰρξ ἐπιθυμεῖ κατὰ τοῦ πνεύματος, τὸ δὲ πνεῦμα κατὰ τῆς σαρκὸς, ταῦτα γὰρ ἀλλήλοις ἀντίκειται ἵνα μὴ ἃ ἐὰν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε “For the flesh desires [what is] contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit [desires what is] contrary to the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another in order that you do not do the things you want”: In the first two clauses Paul lines up the two opposing teams in two opposing realms⁹³ using *conflict* imagery. Why are the flesh and the Spirit incompatible? Paul provides the explanation for his certainty and assurance that the Galatians will not satisfy the desire of the flesh in 5:16 with 5:17 beginning with γὰρ “for.” The power of the flesh and the power of the Spirit are literally at war with one another because each

⁸⁹ Burton, *Galatians*, 299; see also Betz, 278.

⁹⁰ De Boer, *Galatians*, 353.

⁹¹ Barclay, *Obeying*, 112.

⁹² Das, *Galatians*, 563.

⁹³ Matera, *Galatians*, 206.

has competing and diametrically opposed outcomes. The third clause in 5:17 begins with γὰρ as well to explain why the flesh and Spirit desires are against one another; “for” they are opposed to each other. They are mortal enemies and have nothing in common.

Are these two powers, then, equally matched creating a stalemate? Or does one dominate and conquer the other? Paul begins 5:17 with γὰρ to explain the reason why he can assert with confidence and assurance that “you will definitely and assuredly not ‘satisfy’ the desire of the flesh” in 5:16. I can note at this point some of the ways that scholars have read 5:17, and especially the clause that begins with ἵνα.

“Ἴνα clause: The first way⁹⁴ to interpret this is that “what you want” refers to the Spirit-prompted desires frustrated by “the flesh.” This parallels “what I want” in Rom 7:15 in the context of Rom 7:14–25, desires that are hindered by “the flesh.” The Spirit helps the believer and believing community from following through with the desires of “the flesh.” The Spirit is the subject of the ἵνα clause, and not the flesh.⁹⁵

However, the Galatian context does not support the approach that the flesh at any time successfully defeats the Spirit’s desires, let alone continually does so during the Christian’s existence here on earth. This would create a “stalemate” in the Christian’s life. If this were the case, then Paul would not be providing a good reason for the Galatians to “walk by the Spirit”!⁹⁶

In addition, according to some scholars, the context of Gal 5 cannot be answered with Rom 7:14–25.⁹⁷ In a footnote Fee gives the various reasons why Rom 7 is an inappropriate

⁹⁴ Barclay’s example “a”, *Obeying*, 113; Das’s second example, *Galatians*, 565; Lutjen’s example B, “You Do Not Do What You Want”, 105–106.

⁹⁵ Lutjens, “You Do Not Do What You Want,” 106–107.

⁹⁶ Barclay, *Galatians*, 113.

⁹⁷ Das, *Galatians*, 564; Betz, *Galatians*, 280; Bruce, *Galatians*, 244; Fee, *Galatians*, 211 n. 14.

answer for Gal 5:17.⁹⁸

A second possibility⁹⁹ would take “what you want” as referring to the flesh’s desires: the Spirit prevents the Christian from following through on “what you want” according to the flesh.¹⁰⁰ This supports the confident statement in 5:16. However, it ignores Paul’s statement “these are opposed *to each other*” and explains why “what you want” should be limited to fleshly desires.¹⁰¹ Proponents of this view include Martin Luther, John Calvin, and J. B. Lightfoot.¹⁰²

A third possibility¹⁰³ is that “what you want” refers to both the flesh’s desires and the Spirit’s desires. In this case the flesh desires are against the Spirit’s and the Spirit’s desires are against the flesh’s with the result (ecbatic ἴνα)¹⁰⁴ “you do not do what you want” whether that is according to the flesh or the Spirit. This sets up a stalemate in the battle between the flesh and the Spirit. However, to admit a stalemate would undermine the confident statement in 5:16 as well. Proponents of this view include Augustine, Donald Guthrie, James Dunn, Robert Jewett, and Ronald Fung.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ According to Fee, Paul’s argument in Rom 7 cannot be used for Gal. 5:17 because Paul is addressing different situations. (1) in Rom 7 Paul wants to exonerate the Law as holy, righteous and good (Rom 7:12); that is not what he is arguing in Galatians, but precisely the opposite since in Galatians the time of the Law is over. (2) Rom 7 is the struggle between the indwelling of sin and the acknowledgment that the Law is good; Galatians does not hint at the indwelling of sin, but rather Paul argues for the indwelling of the Spirit. (3) Rom 7 emphasizes the *inability* and *helplessness* to do the good that the Law requires. In Galatians, Paul asserts that the Spirit provides the power to the Christian for the *ability* to overcome the flesh; the Christian is *not* helpless. (4) Rom 7 does not mention the Spirit at all; it is imported from Rom 8 where he talks about two different kinds of existence in this world. “What you want” referring to Spirit-prompted desires being thwarted by the flesh would destroy Paul’s own argument for a Spirit-empowered existence, which is basically unsuccessful (*God’s Empowering Presence*, 435–436 n. 234).

⁹⁹ Barclay’s example “c”, *Obeying*, 114; Das’s third example, *Galatians*, 564–565; Lutjen’s example C, “You Do Not Do What You Want,” 106–107.

¹⁰⁰ Das, *Galatians*, 564.

¹⁰¹ Barclay, *Obeying*, 114; Das, *Galatians*, 564.

¹⁰² Lutjens, “You Do Not Do What You Want,” 105–06.

¹⁰³ Barclay’s example “b”, *Obeying*, 113–114; Das’s first example, *Galatians*, 563–564; Lutjen’s example A, “You Do Not Do What You Want,” 104–105.

¹⁰⁴ Barclay, *Obeying*, 113.

¹⁰⁵ Lutjens, “You Do Not Do What You Want,” 104–05.

Ronald Lutjens puts forth a viable possibility of a parenthetical thought from Lightfoot, but adapts his proposal. Lightfoot suggested that the last half of 5:17 was the parenthetical thought: for the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh (for they are in conflict with each other with the result that you do not do the things you want). Lutjens locates the parentheses only around the second and third clause to emphasize a different parenthetical thought: for the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit (and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh for they are in conflict with each other) in order that you might not do what you want.¹⁰⁶ This, then, is Paul's basic sentence: what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit to prevent you from doing what you want, that is, what you want to do in accordance with the Spirit.¹⁰⁷ Lutjens' parenthetical approach acknowledges that the power of the flesh against the Christian and Christian community is a real force to be reckoned with. However, Paul could in no way acknowledge that power without also reminding the Galatians that the eschatological Spirit among them is also a player in this war. It is not a one-way conflict where the Christian is completely helpless. Paul could hardly acknowledge the antagonism of the flesh without giving at least a quick glance to the Spirit.¹⁰⁸

Barclay offers a viable solution to this exegetical problem as well. His thought is that, since Paul makes an appeal to the Galatians in 5:16 to "walk by the Spirit" followed by the promise "you will certainly not satisfy the desire of the flesh," then the focus of 5:17 is *not* on two equally matched foes. Rather the thought is that the Spirit simply interrupts the flesh's self-expression.¹⁰⁹ Mutual opposition implies mutual exclusion, which explains why the Galatians' "walk by the Spirit" will not satisfy the desire of the flesh. This also means, then, that just

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 114, 115.

¹⁰⁷ Das, *Galatians*, 565.

¹⁰⁸ Lutjens, "You Do Not Do What You Want," 115.

because the Galatians have “freedom” in the Spirit that does not mean that they can live any which way they please. This warfare necessitates some options and excludes others—ἵνα μὴ ἅ ἐὰν θέλητε ταῦτα ποιῆτε. The Galatians’ “walk by the Spirit” automatically sets them against the flesh and defines the moral choices they must make.¹¹⁰

Both Lutjens and Barclay approach 5:17 with the victory of the Spirit over the flesh. Their approaches take into consideration the Galatians’ identity in Christ and the power of his indwelling Spirit among them. The Galatians have Paul’s certain promise and assurance that they will not satisfy the desire of the flesh. However, Paul also lets the Galatians know that since they are in the sphere of the Spirit that means they are not in the sphere of the flesh, for these two are opposed to one another. That also means that since they “walk by the Spirit” they, as a community, must prioritize their moral decision-making according the Spirit. Paul is not espousing a sense of triumphalism or perfectionism here. He makes that clear in 5:24–26 and in 6:1. However, Paul does not give the suggestion of their inability as a community to do them either.¹¹¹ This flows neatly into 5:18.

Galatians 5:18

Up until now Paul was preoccupied with the flesh. So the sudden appearance of the Law seems a little surprising. However, Paul’s main issue in this part of the letter deals with the ineffectiveness of the Law in dealing with the flesh.¹¹² He now ties up the loose ends.

The Law was used to deal with the flesh in the time before Christ when God’s people were “under the Law” (3:23–25).¹¹³ The Law had no power to fulfill its own demands. It only

¹⁰⁹ Das, *Galatians*, 566.

¹¹⁰ Barclay, *Obeying*, 112.

¹¹¹ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 435 n. 234.

¹¹² Das, *Galatians*, 567.

¹¹³ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 438; Matera, *Galatians*, 207.

brought curse and death (3:10). Christ came at the fulfillment of time to redeem those who were under the Law and enslaved to the elementary principles of this world (3:13; 4:3–4). Therefore, the Galatians were no longer under the Law.

In this verse Paul joins together the Law and the flesh as allies along with “elementary principles of this world” as those who are over against the Spirit. But as Paul reminded the Galatians, the Spirit is more than sufficient and powerful to conquer the “desire of the flesh” and lead them in moral living since they are now in the realm of the Spirit and no longer under the Law.¹¹⁴ Therefore, those who are “led by the Spirit” (dative of means) have been incorporated into the realm of Christ. They are no longer under the authority of the Law and its demands for moral direction in their lives (3:25). Those who are apart from Christ remain under the Law and in the flesh.¹¹⁵ But Paul did not dismiss the validity of the Law as the norm! The issue is the *ineffectiveness* of the Law against the flesh. The Spirit is the One who breaks the Law from the flesh¹¹⁶ and now puts the Law in the hands of Christ (6:2). The Spirit’s leading will enable the walking (5:16).

What does this mean for the Galatians’ ethical choices? Just as a person cannot be in the realm of the flesh and the realm of the Spirit at the same time, so too one cannot be led by the Spirit and under the Law at the same time. Indeed, the Galatians are “Law-less” but that does not mean they are “lawless” and can live in whatever way they please since they are led by the Spirit (5:17). “Led” suggests an element of submission to the one leading, in this case it is the Spirit. The Christian actively chooses to follow the priorities of the Spirit.¹¹⁷ Their old lives and patterns of behavior are a part of “the present evil age” that is passing away.

¹¹⁴ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 438.

¹¹⁵ Matera, *Galatians*, 207.

¹¹⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 567.

The point Paul wants to make in 5:16–18 is not in regard to which power is more powerful. The purpose of the letter is to demonstrate the sufficiency and power of the eschatological Spirit to provide moral direction and protection against the flesh. The point Paul makes in 5:17 is that there are two unique realities that belong to two very different worlds. Like water and oil, life in the Spirit is simply incompatible with life in the flesh.¹¹⁸ To live in one means to *not* live in the other. The flesh will exploit the freedom they have in Christ (5:13) but the Spirit counteracts the flesh with a power that motivates and directs the Galatians to exclude the flesh. In other words, the Galatians are not free to do *whatever* they wish.¹¹⁹ This leads right into the next section.

Overview of Galatians 5:19–23

Paul returns to the theme of 5:17, namely that the flesh and the Spirit stand in unrelieved tension.¹²⁰ The lists are not meant to be prescriptive of how an individual or community acts *per se*, as if fits of rage automatically consigns one to the realm of the flesh until it is overcome, at which point one is back in the realm of the Spirit. Rather these are descriptive lists. And they are by no means exhaustive. The two lists describe what the communities of believers and unbelievers look like “in the midst of the war.”¹²¹ But they also describe the “before” and “after” of the Galatians. The “works of the flesh” and “things like these” are the very things that “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified” (5:24) and left behind.¹²² Thus, the “works of the flesh” are no longer an option for the Galatians’ Christian communal living since they are those

¹¹⁷ Matera, *Galatians*, 207.

¹¹⁸ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 434.

¹¹⁹ Barclay, *Obedying*, 115.

¹²⁰ Fee, *Galatians*, 211.

¹²¹ Martyn, *Galatians*, 525.

¹²² Fee, *Galatians*, 212; de Boer, 360.

who “walk by the Spirit” (5:13, 16).¹²³ Up to this point Paul’s description of Christian community has been quite general: live by the faith (2:20; 3:5, 11), continue in the Spirit (3:3; 5:16, 18), faith working through love (5:6). In fact, the “vices and virtues” lists do not go into great detail either. Paul will go into greater detail of what the fruit of the Spirit looks like in practice in 6:1–10 as the Galatians “walk by the Spirit” in community.¹²⁴

In these verses Paul lays out two lists commonly referred to as the lists of vices and virtues. At first glance the list of “vices” seem to be a random list with a catchall phrase “and things like these” to include anything else a Christian might do that is against God’s will. However, what appears at first to be a random collection¹²⁵ of vices and behaviors indeed has order to them when the epistle is read with the community of Christians and a communal aspect in mind. Paul arranges them in four ways. The first three (sexual immorality, impurity, and sensuality) are sexual behaviors that are contrary to the accepted morality according to God’s will for his people; the next two (idolatry and sorcery) are sins against God—worship practices that are contrary to God’s will for his people; the next eight (enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissension, divisions, and envy) focus on relationships between people and breakdowns in relationships; the last two (drunkenness and orgies) focus on the sins of excess.¹²⁶ Das points out that if the eight social sins were removed from the list, then the remaining sins would consist of action sins rather than sins of disposition. In addition, Das points out that the eight social sins are not included in the list of vices from the popular philosophers of the day. Paul begins and ends the list of “the works of the flesh” with sins that the formerly pagan Galatians would rightly condemn. The social sins are included in the middle of the list so that

¹²³ Fee, *Galatians*, 212.

¹²⁴ Barclay, *Obeying*, 146–147.

¹²⁵ Betz, *Galatians*, 283; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 254; Fung, *Galatians*, 253.

these would hit home with the Galatians as well.¹²⁷

Galatians 5:19–21

Φανερά δέ ἐστὶν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ἃ τινά ἐστὶν “Now the works of the flesh are evident; they are”: This is the only occurrence of “the works of the flesh” in the Pauline corpus. A similar phrase, “the works of darkness,” is found in Rom 13:12.¹²⁸ Though “the works of the flesh” should be obvious to the Galatians, nevertheless he lists them here so that he makes sure they understand.¹²⁹ Martyn points out that “are evident” is in the indicative mood to describe the effects that the flesh actually produces.¹³⁰

Sexual sins; πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια “sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality”: The English word “pornography” is derived from πορνεία. Paul consistently uses “sexual immorality” for sexual sins (1 Cor 5:1), lustfulness and Gentile passions (1 Thess 4:3–5), or for sexual relations apart from a marital relationship (1 Cor 7:2). Marriage is the solution for sexual sin.¹³¹ This does not include “gay marriage.”¹³² “Impurity” refers to moral impurity or depravity, which makes a person unfit for being in God’s presence. This is the opposite of “holiness” to which God calls his people.¹³³ “Sensuality” or “debauchery” is sexual conduct that exceeds all

¹²⁶ Fee, *Galatians*, 212; Das, *Galatians*, 569; de Boer, *Galatians*, 358–360.

¹²⁷ Das, *Galatians*, 569.

¹²⁸ Matera, *Galatians*, 200.

¹²⁹ Das, *Galatians*, 569.

¹³⁰ Martyn, *Galatians*, 496.

¹³¹ Das, *Galatians*, 570.

¹³² On June 26, 2015 the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in a 5–4 vote that “gay marriage” was now the law of the land. It is important for Christians to remember that, even though the Supreme Court has ruled “gay marriage” as a legal right and recognized in the eyes of the civil realm, nevertheless it is not recognized as such in the sight of God. This is an example of the flesh-realm warring against the Spirit. The book *Washed and Waiting* is written by Wesley Hill who is a celibate Christian homosexual. Hill recognizes the biblical truths found in God’s word and walks the reader through his own struggles as he is “led by the Spirit” in holy living. Celibacy is the same ethical standard for the single heterosexual Christian whether he or she chooses to be in that situation or not (Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 72).

¹³³ De Boer, *Galatians*, 358; Das, *Galatians*, 571.

bounds of decency, or what a group considers socially unacceptable.¹³⁴

Illicit Worship; εἰδωλολατρία, φαρμακεία “idolatry” “sorcery”: “Idolatry” is devotion to any god other than the Triune God. Paul considered this a sin from his Judeo-Christian worldview. However, pagans would not have viewed this as a sin. “Sorcery” (or “witchcraft”) appears only here in the Pauline corpus.¹³⁵ The English word “pharmacy” is derived from φαρμακεία. Drug usage was common in witchcraft. Inscriptions from Paul’s day indicate that “sorcery” was a popular practice. Paul also warns against those who cast the demonic evil eye (3:1).¹³⁶

Breakdowns in relationships; ἔχθραι, ἔρις, ζῆλος, θυμοί, ἐριθειαι, διχοστασίαι, αἰρέσεις, φθόνοι “idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions”: This list refers to sources of conflict between persons, which also has a destructive consequence among community. There is a sudden shift to plurals except for the second and third noun in this list.¹³⁷ The list begins with “hatreds” as it spells out the various ways it can manifest itself. It should be noted that of the four categories, the category dealing with social relationships and breakdowns is by far the largest. Paul could have used two or three words for this list. However, in light of 5:15 and 5:26 it seems that Paul might have tailored this list for the Galatians’ situation.¹³⁸

Sins of excesses; μέθαι, κῶμοι “drunkenness, orgies”: These, like the first five “works of the flesh,” would be easily recognized as sins by the Galatian believers. The shock is the heart of the list of social sins that are sandwiched in-between. In doing so, Paul wants the Galatians to

¹³⁴ Fee, *Galatians*, 213

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 214.

¹³⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 572.

¹³⁷ Fee, *Galatians*, 214; de Boer, 359.

¹³⁸ Fee, *Galatians*, 214–215.

recognize their own problems and issues as sins within the larger list.¹³⁹ Martyn notes that “the way in which the use of wine and liquor can lead one to withdraw into oneself, thus being absent to the neighbor who may be in genuine need” also effects community life.¹⁴⁰ Every individual is important to community life. One’s absence contributes negatively to the community of believers.

Καὶ τὰ ὅμοια τούτοις “and things like these”: Paul takes care that his list is not read as another law.¹⁴¹ The list is not exhaustive. In addition, it is descriptive and not prescriptive.¹⁴²

ἄ προλέγω ὑμῖν, καθὼς προεῖπον “I warn you, as I warned you before”: Paul reminds the Galatians that he had left them with at least some practical ethical instruction prior to his departure.¹⁴³

ὅτι οἱ τὰ τοιαῦτα πράσσοντες βασιλείαν θεοῦ οὐ κληρονομήσοθιν “that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God”: Paul concludes this list with an eschatological note looking to the future, or the “not yet” of the Christian life. The “works of the flesh” do not describe believers, but rather the behavior of unbelievers.¹⁴⁴ The Galatians, and modern readers as well, were to take his warning seriously. Paul was not saying that if a believer has an incident of getting drunk, or a fit of rage that he or she would lose his or her inheritance and place with God. Paul’s emphasis is on the *practice* of such things. The kingdom of God is “now-not yet” in the life of the Christian. The Galatians already possessed the Spirit (3:2–3), and yet life in the “promised age” is not fully realized until Christ’s final return. Those who regularly practice life

¹³⁹ Ibid., 215.

¹⁴⁰ Martyn, *Galatians*, 497.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 497.

¹⁴² Das, *Galatians*, 575; Matera, *Galatians*, 202.

¹⁴³ Das, *Galatians*, 576; Matera, *Galatians*, 202; Martyn, *Galatians*, 497.

¹⁴⁴ Fee, *Galatians*, 216.

in the flesh described by Paul in this unit cut themselves off from Christ (5:4). The kingdom of God is a gift. However, “it demands appropriate ethical conduct.”¹⁴⁵ Paul warns the Galatians “if some persons wish to have the gift while spitting into the face of the Giver, they incur his judgment.”¹⁴⁶ This is a matter of the heart as their attitudes toward God put them back into their former way of life. They will not inherit the kingdom of God. The Galatians have already received the Spirit and God’s inheritance. However, they were in danger of losing it if they handed themselves over to life in the flesh once again.¹⁴⁷

Galatians 5:22–23

ὁ δὲ καρπὸς τοῦ πνεύματός ἐστιν “but the fruit of the Spirit is”: The sign or mark of the new eschatological age is God’s Spirit. He has now arrived on the scene transforming the hearts and lives of God’s people. And the Galatians—Gentiles no less!—have received the promised Spirit as well.¹⁴⁸

Paul now sets a sharp contrast to “the works of the flesh” with “the fruit of the Spirit.” The source of ‘the fruit’ is the Spirit. Thus, those who are led by the Spirit are Spirit-people and products of the Spirit as well. The Spirit produces fruit in and through them. Paul does not view this as a passive activity among the Galatians since they are also to “walk by the Spirit” and conform their lives accordingly.¹⁴⁹ “Whereas, however, the Flesh is *somewhat* like the operator of a marionette, pulling certain strings to produce certain effects (*erga*), the Spirit is like a healthy tree or vine that continuously bears fruit.”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Matera, *Galatians*, 292.

¹⁴⁶ Martyn, *Galatians*, 498.

¹⁴⁷ Das, *Galatians*, 576.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.* 577.

¹⁴⁹ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 443–444; Matera, *Galatians*, 202.

¹⁵⁰ Martyn, *Galatians*, 498; emphasis is Martyn’s.

Where “the works of the flesh” formed chaotic subdivisions (3–2–8–2 or 3–2–4–4–2 pattern) and reflect chaos, “the fruit of the Spirit” can be divided in an orderly way into three groups of three.¹⁵¹ Love heads the list of the “fruit of the Spirit.” Love is God’s character among his people.¹⁵² It is “a sense in a class by itself, and is probably thought of as the source from which all the rest flow.”¹⁵³

Galatians 5:23b

Κατὰ τῶν τοιούτων οὐκ ἔστιν νόμος “against such things there is no law”: Verses 5:18 and 5:23 must be read along side one another. Lest anyone, especially the “Judaizers,” think that Paul is against the Law, 5:23 corrects that thought. Paul is not at all against the Law. What he argues against is the Law as the source of God’s righteousness and that the “works of the Law” are righteousness “fruit” produced to satisfy its demands (3:21). Noble character is important. But it does not come from Law-observance. Rather, noble character is the fruit of the Spirit produced in Spirit-people led by the Spirit. The Spirit is not acting in opposition to the Law. Thus, 5:18 and 5:23 must be read together.¹⁵⁴ Freedom from the bondage of the Law does not mean a complete elimination of the Law itself. Paul affirms in 5:23 that the Mosaic law is still a norm. The fruit of the Spirit, however, satisfies the true intention of the Law.¹⁵⁵

Paul could have also concluded this list with an eschatological promise as he did at the conclusion of “the works of the flesh.” He could have said, “those who do such things *will* inherit the kingdom of God.” However, this would imply that the inheritance depended upon the believer’s ability to manifest the Spirit’s fruit in his or her life, which it does not. This would turn

¹⁵¹ Das, *Galatians*, 578; Martyn, *Galatians*, 498.

¹⁵² Fee, *Galatians*, 218.

¹⁵³ Burton, *Galatians*, 314.

¹⁵⁴ Barclay, *Obeying*, 125.

¹⁵⁵ A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Jews*, Library of Pauline Studies (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2003), 171.

God's gift into another law. And yet, Paul is clear that the believer actively sows to the Spirit and will reap the fruit in eternity (6:7–10).¹⁵⁶ Paul does not confuse God's gift and vertical relationship with his people with the righteousness that ought to be lived out on the horizontal relationship with humanity. In other words, a person is saved through faith alone, but not with a faith that is alone.

Overview of Galatians 5:24–26

With this final unit Paul brings his present argument full circle as he brings Christ and his work (5:24) back into the picture. Verse 5:25 echoes the basic imperative in 5:16 and 5:24–25 helps further to explain the promise of why the Galatians will not satisfy the flesh's desire (5:16b).¹⁵⁷ He does this by “picking up the language . . . in 2:19–20, as that must now be understood in light of the argument in 3:6–4:7. Those who have put their trust in Christ, [Paul] maintained earlier, have also been ‘crucified with Christ,’ so that the current life in the (literal) flesh is not predicated on the perspective of the (fallen) flesh.”¹⁵⁸

Verse 5:26 concludes this unit and section with the reason for Paul's admonitions since 5:15. Verse 5:26 serves as a fulcrum between the conclusion to Paul's argument in the previous section and 6:1–10.¹⁵⁹ Verse 5:26 serves as the conclusion to Paul's argument that the Spirit over and against the flesh is more than sufficient to rebuff the desire of the flesh, and 5:26 leads directly into specific applications in 6:1–6.¹⁶⁰ The Spirit who rebuffs the flesh now determines life. Paul's argument here entails a decisive shift in the Galatians' existence and pattern of

¹⁵⁶ Das, *Galatians*, 586; Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 453.

¹⁵⁷ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 454.

¹⁵⁸ Fee, *Galatians*, 225.

¹⁵⁹ Michael Parsons, “Being Precedes Act: Indicative and Imperative in Paul's Writing,” *Evangelical Quarterly* (April, 1988), 120.

¹⁶⁰ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 454.

behavior, and a sharp break from the flesh (5:24). It is as decisive as moving from death to life.¹⁶¹

Additionally, Paul's eschatological worldview brings in the two realities of eschatological Spirit-people, the "now-not yet" of the Christian, with his indicative-imperative pairing. In 5:24 Paul declares who the Galatians are; they are those who belong to Christ (5:24). They are ones who live (indicative) by the Spirit and thus walk (imperative) by the Spirit (5:25). Paul shows that triumphalism is not what 5:16, 22–23, 24 are all about. Christians live in the tension of the "not yet" as they struggle against the desire of the flesh (5:26).¹⁶²

Galatians 5:24

Οἱ δὲ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] "And those who belong to Christ Jesus": "Those" are they who are incorporated with Christ through faith and baptism (3:27). They are heirs of God's promise (3:29).¹⁶³ τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ἰησοῦ] is a genitive of possession,¹⁶⁴ but it also indicates more than possession. Paul brings the Galatians back to 2:20 where Paul's *person* as a paradigm has been exchanged with Christ who now dwells in him. Paul has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection.¹⁶⁵ Christ crucified the flesh, thus the Christian united with Christ has made a decisive break with the flesh as well. Belonging to Christ indicates a participation in the life of Christ¹⁶⁶ and his righteousness.¹⁶⁷

Τὴν σάρκα ἐσταύρωσαν σὺν τοῖς παθήμασιν καὶ ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις "crucified the flesh with its passions and desires":¹⁶⁸ Paul's *I* was crucified with Christ (2:20). In the crucifixion "I" also

¹⁶¹ Barclay, *Obeying*, 119.

¹⁶² Fee, *Galatians*, 226–227.

¹⁶³ Das, *Galatians*, 586.

¹⁶⁴ Schreiner, *Galatians*, 350.

¹⁶⁵ Das, *Galatians*, 267, 270–271.

¹⁶⁶ Matera, *Galatians*, 204.

¹⁶⁷ Das, *Galatians*, 271.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 586.

had the relationship severed with the Law as the way to determine the approach to the world.¹⁶⁹ Christ and the cross is Paul's source of confidence. Paul now brings this same source of confidence into this unit for those who "walk by the Spirit" (5:16). Christians are not the objects of the crucifixion. Rather, Paul describes them as the *agents* of this crucifixion. The emphasis of the action and responsibility rests on the Christian due to the active voice. The Christian now deals with the flesh with its passions and desires in a much more radical way. Christians also deal with the flesh from a position of victorious achievement since the death of the flesh is a past event.¹⁷⁰ The Christian has been dramatically affected with respect to the former way of life. Because of the crucifixion and "belonging to Christ," the Christian was made to have a decisive break with the flesh as well as being part of the "new creation" (6:15)¹⁷¹ and are participants in the "now-not yet" realm of the Spirit. Those who "walk by the Spirit" (5:16) are then "led by the Spirit" (5:25) and follow the Spirit's direction as the safeguard against evil and immoral living. This supports Paul's assurance in 5:16–17 that the Galatians, following the Spirit, will not satisfy the desire of the flesh¹⁷² and thus do "what they want," namely that which is God pleasing (5:17c). Christ is not a "servant of sin" (2:17).

The passive crucifixion of the believer in 2:19–20 serves as the reason, or ground, for 5:24. Thus Paul views the Christian as an active agent in the crucifixion of the flesh including the inner passions and sinful cravings.¹⁷³ The verb in verse 24 is aorist/indicative/active. "The believer, who *crucified* the flesh, *is* holy. The death of the flesh is a past event. The flesh belongs

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 267.

¹⁷⁰ Barclay, *Obeying*, 117–118.

¹⁷¹ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 455.

¹⁷² Barclay, *Obeying*, 118.

¹⁷³ Longenecker, *Galatians*, 264.

to the old order that is passing away.”¹⁷⁴ This is not to say that the believer participates in his or her salvation. The believer does not do this. Christ did this for us (1:4; 2:20; 3:27). The indicative “they crucified” leads into the imperative of the next verse.

Galatians 5:25

Εἰ ζῶμεν πνεύματε, πνεύματι καὶ στοιχῶμεν “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit”: Paul rounds out his argument as he hearkens back to the opening imperative in 5:16 “walk by the Spirit” and “live by the Spirit.” In 5:16 Paul urged that walking by the Spirit is the antidote to life in the flesh. Here in 5:25 Paul urges that crucifixion is death for the flesh. He moves the reader from death in Christ (5:24) to life in the Spirit (5:25). The Galatians are to receive their directions and instructions from the Spirit and behave accordingly.¹⁷⁵ Though they, and we, live as the “new creation” (6:15) in the “now time” after Christ (1:4; 6:14), Paul is also a realist. He understands that the fullness of the eschaton is not yet fully realized. The powers of the “old age” continue their attempts to exert their influence over humanity, including the Christian and Christian community. The “old age” continues as the sphere in which the Christian life is lived out.¹⁷⁶ Thus, Paul does not propose some sort of notion of triumphalism as if once a person belongs to Christ, that person will not give into the impulses of the flesh. The “present evil age” (1:4) continues until Christ’s final return. Until then Paul exhorts Christians to conform their behavior and lives to the direction of the Spirit.¹⁷⁷

Paul writes this verse in a chiasmic shape that shows the relationship between the indicative and the imperative:¹⁷⁸ “If we live by the Spirit, by the Spirit let us also conform our

¹⁷⁴ Das, *Galatians*, 586–587; emphasis is Das’s.

¹⁷⁵ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 456.

¹⁷⁶ Barclay, *Obeying*, 213.

¹⁷⁷ Das, *Galatians*, 587.

¹⁷⁸ Parsons, “Being Precedes Act,” 121.

lives.” Paul now provides the answer to the ethical question he raised in 3:3, “having begun in the Spirit are you now finishing up in the flesh?”¹⁷⁹ The answer is no!

Does Paul convey certainty and confidence in this verse? Or does he convey merely the possibility or an idea; a “goal to shoot for” for the Galatians? Barclay comments that Rudolf Bultmann understood the word “if” to mean that “the faith bestowed possibility of ‘living by the Spirit’ must be explicitly laid hold of by ‘walking by the Spirit.’”¹⁸⁰ The emphasis is on “possibility.” However, “live by the Spirit” is a present/indicative/active verb. Paul stresses the real condition of the believers namely that the Spirit truly dwells in and among them (3:2–3). Bultmann’s “possibility” weakens the indicative and does not match up with the confidence Paul describes to the Galatians in 5:16–17.¹⁸¹

Ei “if”: Paul uses a cohortative/subjunctive verb in the second half of the verse, which acts as an imperative. The indicative “we live” in the protasis gives way to the imperative “let us walk” in the apodosis. In this context, the protasis expresses a present reality and not a matter of doubt. Paul reminds the Galatians of their true reality and identity in the Spirit. In other words, “This is who we are. We are Spirit people. Therefore this is what we do; we live by the Spirit.” The apodosis flows from the protasis. In other words, the act of “keeping in step with the Spirit” flows from the reality and certainty of living by the Spirit. The activity “keep in step with the Spirit” is required on the basis of the indicative.¹⁸² It is the moral corollary to the indicative that precedes it.¹⁸³ Paul is exhorting them to do what they had already been doing but have forgotten

¹⁷⁹ Betz, *Galatians*, 293; de Boer, *Galatians*, 370.

¹⁸⁰ Barclay, *Obeying*, 213.

¹⁸¹ Barclay, *Obeying*, 213; Parsons, “Being Precedes Act,” 121; Burton argues that the protasis is a conditional clause (a present particular supposition) that refers to a present possibility, presumably a reality (*Galatians*, 321–322).

¹⁸² Parsons, “Being Precedes Act,” 121; Bruce, *Galatians*, 257; Fee, *Galatians*, 227; Das, *Galatians*, 587.

¹⁸³ Parsons, “Being Precedes Act,” 122.

to do.¹⁸⁴ The “if,” then, could be understood as “since.”¹⁸⁵

Στοιχέω “walk”: This is not the same verb “to walk” found in 5:16. Στοιχέω has a military origin that means “to stand or move in a row or line.”¹⁸⁶ It is defined as “to be in line with a person or thing considered as standard for one’s conduct, *hold to, agree with, follow, conform.*”¹⁸⁷ The focus is on the Spirit and concrete ethical behavior.¹⁸⁸ The Galatians were looking for guidance in ethical living that would be God-pleasing. However, the “Judaizers” persuaded them in the wrong direction. Das rightly states, “If the Galatians are looking for the rule of law, they will find all the guidance and discipline they need in the Spirit. The marching orders are clear (5:26b): they will be led by the Spirit (5:18) and will walk by the Spirit (5:16).”¹⁸⁹

Galatians 5:26

Μὴ γινώμεθα κενόδοξοι, ἀλλήλους προκαλούμενοι, ἀλλήλοις φθονοῦντες “Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another”: Paul brings to full circle the argument he began in 5:13. Rather than continuing with the positives of life in the Spirit, Paul shows how Spirit eschatological people are *not* to behave. He wants to counteract certain forms of life in the flesh. These sorts of behaviors lead to biting, devouring and consuming one another (5:15). Life in the Spirit keeps “life in the flesh” from happening in terms of conflict within community relationships. God’s gift of the Spirit is his response to the problem of the flesh. The flesh no

¹⁸⁴ De Boer, *Galatians*, 371.

¹⁸⁵ Parsons, “Being Precedes Act,” 121–122; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 265.

¹⁸⁶ De Boer, *Galatians*, 372; Betz, *Galatians*, 294; Martyn, *Galatians*, 545; Das, *Galatians*, 588.

¹⁸⁷ BDAG, 946.

¹⁸⁸ Betz, *Galatians*, 294.

¹⁸⁹ Das, *Galatians*, 588.

longer rules and reigns over the life of Christians and Christian community.¹⁹⁰ Christians are no longer *in the flesh*. They (and we) are in the Spirit 100 percent as we continue forward in time in the overlap of the ages. Nevertheless, Christians battle sin from the vantage point of the victory of the cross. The apocalyptic and eschatological Spirit of Christ brings the future reality into the present for the believer.¹⁹¹

Concluding Thoughts

Other subjects for further study and consideration grew out of this study that are out of the scope of this paper. For instance, how does an apocalyptic reading, rather than an anthropological reading, shape the interpretation and understanding of Paul's other epistles? And, closer to home in Galatians, how does a Jewish apocalyptic worldview and reading shape Paul's use of other important theological terms and concepts? One such word group includes δικαιοσύνη "righteousness," δίκαιος "righteous, a righteous person," and δικαίω "to 'justify'." Paul uses the verb δικαίω "to justify" eight times in Galatians. Half of those occur in 2:16–17. The remaining uses occur in 3:8, 11, 24; 5:8. Δικαιοσύνη "righteousness" occurs four times: 2:21; 3:6, 21; 5:5. Δίκαιος "a righteous person" occurs only in 3:11. A helpful starting point to gain a better understanding of this word family would be to read chapter 15 in Stephen Westerholm's book *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics*. Westerholm addresses "*dikaio*-terminology" working through the difficulty that there is no easy English equivalent for this word family.¹⁹²

"Righteousness" and the Law go hand in hand. A study could look at the relationship of the Law with "righteousness," and the "unrighteous" and "righteous" person through a Jewish

¹⁹⁰ Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 458.

¹⁹¹ Das, *Galatians*, 590.

¹⁹² Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand (continued next page)

apocalyptic worldview and reading of Galatians. A good place to start for a thorough understanding of “the Law” would be A. Andrew Das’s book *Paul, the Law, and the Covenant*.

A study of “righteousness” and the Law, almost out of necessity, would include Paul’s use of ἁμαρτία “sin, a state of being sinful, a destructive evil power.” Paul uses ἁμαρτία “sin” three times (1:4; 2:17; 3:22) and ἁμαρτωλός “sinner” twice (2:15, 17) for a total of five occurrences. Sixty percent of Paul’s usage occurs in 2:15, 17, which is in the same context where 50 percent of Paul’s use of “*dikaio*-terminology” occurs as well. There seems to be an intricate link between “the Law,” “righteousness,” and “sinner” in this section of Galatians. If a “sinner” is a person who is apart from Christ, in an apocalyptic worldview rather than an anthropological worldview, then what does it “mean” to be a *sinner*?

So, “Is the Christian *in the flesh*?” The answer, according to the Jewish apocalyptic worldview, is no.¹⁹³ The Christian is not in the flesh since the flesh describes the former way of life apart from Christ. The flesh and its power belong to “this present evil age” out of which Christ rescued his people. (1:4; 4:4). He continues his rescue mission through baptism (3:27) bringing God’s daughters and sons into his family through adoption (4:5). Thus they, and we, are heirs of God’s promise.

The apocalyptic reading of Galatians has a great affect on pastoral ministry, pastoral counseling, aspects of preaching and teaching, and relationships between Christians in Christian community since the emphasis is not anthropological, but rather upon *in which realm* a person exists. A person belongs either in the realm of “this present evil age” or as a part of the “new creation” in the realm of the Spirit. A person is either *in the flesh* or *in the Spirit*. Paul grounds a person and community in the Spirit or in Christ using the indicative. In other words, there is

Rapids: Eerdmans), 261–296.

¹⁹³ Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 431.

absolutely no doubt about one's identity in Christ and the possession of his indwelt Spirit. It is a gift from God (4:4–5). The cross and resurrection marked the turning point of the ages, and all that goes with this, for the Christian.

The Christian identity then leads into ethical choices and living as Paul's imperative flows from the indicative. This does not mean that the Christian will never be tempted or fall due to frail humanity. However, the apocalyptic reading of Galatians provides assurance that the Christian indeed *can* overcome the flesh. Christians are not helpless! We can turn our backs on temptation and the power of sin by the power of the Holy Spirit since the "flesh/Spirit" conflict does not occur within us. The conflict occurs outside of the Christian as the Christian, and Christian community, are caught up in the conflict of the two competing ages. However, this does not smack of triumphalism. Paul does not burden the Christian with perfectionism and the demand for perfect living. When Christians fail (6:1), Paul always brings us back to the indicative, and who we are because of Christ and his Spirit. There are no strings attached. Christ gave Himself for our sins for the purpose of rescuing us from "the present evil age."

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