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Light from Galatians 3:1 on Pauline Theology

By PAUL G. BRETSCHER

I

Ἦ ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος;

The interpretation of this impassioned verse from an impassioned epistle has for some time ceased to be a problem for commentators. "New evidence," reported by George Milligan in 1923, came by way of a 17-century-old scrap of papyrus. It told of the parents of a wayward son who notified the governor that they would no longer be responsible for the son's debts and asked that a public announcement to this effect be "placarded up" (προγράφηται) where all might read it.¹ This instance of the use of προγράφω succeeded in unifying opinion on the meaning of this verb in Gal. 3:1. The prefix προ- was to be understood spatially here also. In vivid metaphor Paul reminds his "foolish Galatians" of the crucified Christ, whom he has "placarded up" before their very eyes.

Thus the RSV translates our verse, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?"² The New English Bible has, "... before whose eyes Jesus Christ was openly displayed

¹ George Milligan, *Here and There Among the Papyri* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1923), p. 78.

² Unless otherwise indicated, English quotations from the Scriptures in this paper follow the RSV.

upon His cross!"³ Heinrich Schlier renders it, . . . *denen doch Jesus Christus öffentlich vor Augen bingeschrieben wurde als Gekreuzigter?* In his notes he explains further, *öffentlich ausgeschrieben, — wir würden sagen "öffentlich angeschlagen," bezogen auf Reklame, Vorladungen, Bekanntmachungen, vor allem auch amtliche Verfügungen, Erlasse, Edikte.*⁴ Albrecht Oepke, like the NEB, feels no obligation to retain the concept of something "written," and offers *euch, denen Jesus Christus öffentlich vor Augen gestellt war als Gekreuzigter.*⁵ Burton has: "before whose eyes Jesus Christ was placarded crucified," and he comments that the Gospel of Christ crucified was "the great fact which Paul had set forth before the Galatians with the clearness of a public proclamation on a bulletin board, and which should, therefore, have been impossible for them ever to forget."⁶ G. Schrenk

³ *The New English Bible* (Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, 1961).

⁴ Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, in Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament*, 7. Abt., 10. Auflage (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1949), pp. 78, 80.

⁵ Albrecht Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater, Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 9. 2. Auflage (Berlin: Ev. Verlagsanstalt, 1960), p. 66.

⁶ Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, in the I. C. C. (Edinburgh: Clark, 1921), pp. 143 f.

paraphrases, *denen Jesus Christus gleich einer Proklamation, die angeschlagen wird, als Gekreuzigter vor Augen gestellt wurde.*⁷

Consensus such as this on what the verse means implies similar agreement in the rejection of alternatives. The ancient interpretation took for granted that προγράφειν could mean "draw" or "paint." Luther describes Paul's vehement preaching, "even as if a painter had portrayed Christ Jesus crucified before their eyes." And he continues, "Now being absent, he putteth them in mind of the same things, saying: 'to whom Jesus Christ was described in your sight.' As if he said: There is no painter that with his colours can so lively set out Christ unto you as I have painted him out by my preaching."⁸ Similarly Bernhard Weiss speaks of *das ihnen vor Augen stehende Bild Jesu* or *Christus als Gekreuzigter vor Augen gemalt*. To Weiss the prefix is temporal, referring to Paul's past preaching.⁹ If Paul did not

literally use visual aids like poster paints or flannelgraphs, the language would at least suggest the vividness of the preaching, which enabled the hearers to "see" the crucifixion, as it were, before their very eyes. Oepke suggests that this may be the explanation for the intrusion of an interpretative ἐν ὑμῖν into many manuscripts. The difficulty is that although there is sufficient evidence for the use of γράφειν in this sense, no case of προγράφειν in the meaning "paint" has been found, unless, as Oepke suggests, one would want to accept Chrysostom's interpretation of this very passage as evidence.¹⁰ Burton points out that even the instances of γράφειν in the sense of "paint" are considerably earlier than the era in which the New Testament was written.¹¹

Other interpretations take the prefix in the temporal sense, i. e., "to write beforehand." This is indeed the meaning of the word in two other Pauline passages. Rom. 15:4 reads, "For whatever was written in former days (προεγράφη) was written for our instruction. . . ." The form of the verb here is identical with that in our verse. Eph. 3:3 says, ". . . the mystery was made known to me by revelation, as I have written (προέγραψα) briefly." Here again the prefix has temporal meaning, though now the reference is not to the Old Testament Scriptures, but to something previously written by the same author. In the final occurrence of the term in the New Testament the prefix is also

⁷ G. Schrenk, article on γράφω, in Gerhard Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1932—1933), I, 771 f.

⁸ Martin Luther, *Commentary on St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians*, Wittenberg Lectures of 1531, "Middleton" English version of 1575, revised and completed by Philip S. Watson (Westwood, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1953—61), p. 196.

⁹ Bernhard Weiss, *Die Paulinischen Briefe* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1896), p. 334. Walter Bauer in his *Griechisch-Deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Berlin: Verlag Alfred Töpelmann), in his 3d ed. of 1937 still understands προγράφω in our passage as "paint." He suggests, *denen vor Augen gemalt wurde Jesus Christus am Kreuz*, similarly under ὀφθαλμός. Beginning in the 4th ed. of 1952 he adds, *Manche denken an die Bed. vor aller Augen hinschreiben, öffentlich hinschreiben, so dass es jeder lesen kann* and offers the newer evidences. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, in *A Greek-English*

Lexicon of the New Testament (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957) follow in offering the alternatives, "show forth or portray publicly," or "proclaim or placard in public."

¹⁰ Oepke, loc. cit.

¹¹ Burton, loc. cit.

temporal. Jude 4 speaks of "some who long ago were designated (προγεγραμμένοι) for this condemnation." In Gal. 3:1, however, the prefix in a temporal sense is found not to fit into this consistent pattern of usage. Burton states the case as follows: "To take it in the first sense (i.e., 'write beforehand') as referring to Old Testament prophecy, though consistent with current usage, is excluded by *κατ' ὄφθαλμούς*; to take it in this sense and refer it to Paul's own presentation to the Galatians is forbidden by the inappropriateness of *γράφω* to describe the apostle's *viva voce* preaching; for if *προ*- be taken temporally, *ἐγράφη* alone remains to describe the act itself."¹²

One interpreter who takes the prefix temporally, and whose reason for doing so is not quite met by Burton's objections, is Frederic Randall. He sees in our passage a parallel to Eph. 3:3. "Here probably it refers in like manner to some document which he had placed in the hands of the Galatians or some letter which he had written for their guidance during his absence and in which the vital truth of the crucifixion had been enforced. . . . The addition of *κατ' ὄφθαλμούς* is in harmony with this view."¹³ Nowhere in the epistle, however, is there a hint of such a document. The rendering "publicly placarded" therefore seemed sufficiently attested and meaningful to carry the day.

There are considerations, however, which still give one pause. The fact that

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Frederic Randall, *Galatians*, in *Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1897 to 1910), ad loc.

Paul himself in Rom. 15:4 uses the same word in the same form and in a period when the same problems are still very much on his heart is one cause for hesitation. Furthermore the prefix *προ*- occurs twice again in this very context, in Gal. 3:8. The verse reads: *προϊδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοὶ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεός, προευηγγελίσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ . . .* In Rom. 15:4 the thing written beforehand was the Scripture. In this verse the accent is again on the previously written Scripture. Should we not suspect a conceptual connection with *προεγράφη* in 3:1?

In the accepted interpretation *προεγράφη* is understood metaphorically. Nothing was actually "written forth," nor was any poster literally posted. But if it simply conveys an image of graphic portrayal, does not this interpretation place a rather heavy burden on the phrase *κατ' ὄφθαλμούς*? The moment *προεγράφη* enters the realm of metaphor it drags *κατ' ὄφθαλμούς* with it. There can be no question, of course, of the metaphorical use of eyes, e.g., Eph. 1:18, "having the eyes of your hearts enlightened," or Matt. 13:15, "their ears are heavy of hearing, and their eyes have they closed." But Gal. 3:1 is different. Here we have not simply the noun, but a prepositional phrase, a rare one at that, a *hapax* in the New Testament. The significance of this phenomenon is indicated by the fact that Arndt-Gingrich takes it up in three different places, under the preposition, under the noun, and again under the verb.

Burton takes care of the problem in two lines of type. He understands *κατ' ὄφθαλμούς* to mean simply "in your presence," the equivalent of Gal. 2:11, *κατὰ*

πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀνέστην, and cites Aristophanes (*Ranae* 625) ἵνα σοι κατ' ὀφθαλμούς λέγῃ as having just this sense.¹⁴ This suggestion, however, supports our suspicion that the phrase implies a literal rather than a metaphorical seeing; for if something happened "in the presence" of the Galatians, then they observed the thing visually. But Burton lapses at this point. He does not realize that he has subtly changed the meaning of the verse. If he translates, "In your presence Jesus Christ was placarded crucified," then the thing they observed was the act of placarding! Then the apostle is calling attention to himself, to the marked vigor and spirited intensity with which he had, as it were, placarded Christ. Neither Burton himself nor any of the translators we have cited really believes that this is what Paul intended. Rather what they saw was Jesus Christ crucified. Therefore Burton in his translation will not operate with his own disposition of the κατ' ὀφθαλμούς, but says, "before your eyes Jesus Christ was placarded crucified." There is the difficulty. They saw something. What was it? It was a visual image created by words! But then they really did not "see" with their eyes at all. Κατ' ὀφθαλμούς becomes metaphor.

Such a burden the phrase cannot bear, nor does it ever do so, even in the classical reference which Burton cites. It does not do so either in the Septuagint, where it is the usual translation for רָאָה, with a

¹⁴ Burton, p. 144. Liddell and Scott offers this same passage and another: τυράννου κατ' ὀφθαλμούς κατηγορεῖν, to accuse him to his face, Xenophon, *Hiero* 1:14. Friedrich Preisigke offers no instance of the phrase in the papyri, in his *Wörterbuch der griechischen Papyrusurkunden* (Berlin, 1925).

variety of pronominal suffixes.¹⁵ The Septuagint passages refer first of all to an individual who sees something happening. Thus IV [II] Kings 25:7, καὶ τοὺς υἱοὺς Σεδεκίου ἔσφαξεν κατ' ὀφθαλμούς αὐτοῦ. (Similarly 2 Kings 12:11; Jer. 35:5; Ezek. 21:11.) In a second group of passages a nation is personified and as such sees God's action of judgment in history. Ezek. 20:41 is representative: καὶ ἀγιασθήσομαι ἐν ὑμῖν κατ' ὀφθαλμούς τῶν λαῶν. (Similarly Jer. 28:24; Ezek. 20:14, 22; 22:16; 36:23.) In some of these cases the RSV quite properly translates, "in the presence of." But no instance suggests that the "seeing" was only a psychological reaction to a graphic oral description.

St. Paul appears to be arguing from something the Galatians have literally perceived with their eyes. The very position of the phrase, first in the clause, underscores the emphasis he places upon what they have so seen. In concept, we suggest, it is akin to the use of the dative in 1 John 1:1, ὁ ἑώρακαμεν τοῖς ὀφθαλμοῖς ἡμῶν. In intent it may be likened to the sheer earthy, antimetaphorical quality inherent in such expressions as κατὰ ἄνθρωπον (Gal. 3:15, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω) and κατὰ σάρκα (4:23, ὁ ἐκ τῆς παιδίσκης κατὰ σάρκα γεγέννηται, or Rom. 1:3, ἐκ σπέρματος Δαυὶδ κατὰ σάρκα).¹⁶

¹⁵ The examples listed from the Septuagint, with the exception of Jer. 28:24, are those suggested by Walter Bauer and Arndt-Gingrich under ὀφθαλμός.

¹⁶ Other instances of κατὰ ἄνθρωπον are Rom. 3:5; 1 Cor. 3:3; 9:8; 15:42; Gal. 1:1. Of κατὰ σάρκα, Rom. 4:1; 8:3; 9:5; 1 Cor. 1:26; 10:18; 2 Cor. 1:17; 5:16; 11:18; Eph. 6:5.

II

There is significant evidence, therefore, to support a literal understanding both of the *κατ' ὀφθαλμούς* and of the *προεγράφη*. The question, of course, is whether the verse can make any sense this way. Let us try. Seen by itself the idea behind each of the terms is clear. On the one hand, the Galatians had literally, with their very eyes, seen something, and Paul is reminding them of that occasion. On the other hand, something was once (the aorist) written down (*ἐγράφη*) beforehand (*προ-*). If we grant the likelihood of a conceptual link between vv. 1 and 8, we will be disposed to presume that the reference here is to the Scriptures of the Old Testament.

Between these seemingly disparate ideas there is a connecting link, namely, *Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς ἑσταυρωμένος*. He is what they had seen with their own eyes. At the same time He is what was written down beforehand. Now obviously they had not seen Jesus Christ crucified outside the walls of Jerusalem. Neither is Paul trying to say that they had seen holy writers of a past age in the process of putting Messianic prophecies on paper. What they had seen was the product of the holy writers, the documents, the black-on-white scrolls of the Scriptures. More specifically even than this, what they had seen as these scrolls were unrolled was some very particular Bible passage or passages to which Paul's finger had once directed their eyes and whose content was the very Christ of the Cross whom Paul preached. Such passages as Is. 53, Ps. 22, or Ps. 69 would qualify. To such a scene in their recent past the apostle is summoning their memory in the tremendously compressed

clause, *οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμούς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἑσταυρωμένος*. A translation hardly suffices to reproduce this conciseness. A paraphrase may be more adequate: "Foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you? Did you not see Him with your own eyes, black on white in the Scriptures, Jesus Christ crucified?" Perhaps in this compressed statement the aorist refers not so much to the origin of that Scripture as to that single moment in past time which they are so foolish to have forgotten, the occasion when they had seen the crucified Christ written there.

If this is what Paul means, it points to an understanding of his missionary method. Throughout this epistle, as indeed in all his writings, Paul presupposes that even his Gentile readers both have access to, know, and reverence as divinely authoritative, the Scriptures we call the Old Testament. The entire argument which begins at our verse rests on this assumption. But how did a largely Gentile congregation come into this kind of contact with these Jewish writings? We may certainly assume that the Jewish synagogues both had and used the sacred writings in one form or another. We may assume further that the congregations Paul addresses in Galatia had within their membership some who had been Jews or proselytes and who carried into the church their previous training. But now an additional factor begins to emerge. Paul himself had taught them the Scriptures. It was part of his method. If the converts in Berea "received the Word with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so" (Acts 17:11), it was Paul himself who had launched them into such an examination.

It is, of course, impossible to prove that the Galatians and other congregations had access to the sacred scrolls. Paul apparently carried his own Scriptures with him (2 Tim. 4:13). That the Galatians could refer to the Scriptures, at least to the Pentateuch and the Prophets, will become the more likely as our discussion proceeds. For the moment the point is that Paul used the Scriptures in his missionary teaching. Finding a hint of his custom also in Gal. 3:1, we see him gathering his little group around him, reverently unrolling the scroll, indicating with his finger the specific passage, and allowing those who could to read it, and from these Scriptures declaring to them the crucified Christ, the hope of the Gentiles, and the promises of the Kingdom. This was no pedantic lecture, designed merely to prove that fulfillment corresponded to prediction. The Gentiles came to faith in Christ by hearing the proclamation of the Gospel rather than by rational "proofs." How Paul used the Scriptures he indicates in Rom. 15:4, "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." So the Scriptures were holy to the Gentiles because with their own eyes they had seen the crucified and risen Lord written there, with all His hope and comfort. The authority of the Scriptures which Paul accents also in our verse is "Jesus Christ . . . crucified."

But why does the apostle so passionately urge this point? To answer this question we begin to look for an antithesis, to discover what he is crying against. We explore the context, and there one word springs out, νόμος. "Law" is the issue in

the Antioch scene in chapter 2, occurring three times in v. 16, twice in v. 18, and once in v. 21. In chapter 3 we find νόμος again, vv. 2, 5, 10, and *passim*. But this Law is no vague generality. Like "Jesus Christ crucified" it also is something concrete, visible to the eye, for it is written in those very same Scriptures. To appreciate the force of Paul's argument, let us for the moment imagine a completely inverted situation. Suppose that Paul were writing as the champion of the Law, against opponents who were perverting that Law with the Gospel. Suppose it were back to the Law that he was trying to summon his people. Then we might find him saying, "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοῦς ὁ νόμος προεγράφη . . ." But what Law? The central focus of Galatians immediately suggests how the sentence then must end, ". . . ὁ νόμος προεγράφη περιτομῆς." "O foolish Galatians! Did you not see it there with your very eyes, written black on white in the Scriptures — the law of circumcision?"

We find confirmation for such an understanding of Paul's antithesis in Gal. 3:10. Here Paul quotes Deut. 27:26, which reads in the Septuagint as follows: Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ἄνθρωπος ὃς οὐκ ἔμμενει ἐν πᾶσιν τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ νόμου τούτου ποιῆσαι αὐτούς. Notice, however, the peculiar way in which Paul amplifies this verse. In place of the simple τοῖς λόγοις he has τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ. Why? Obviously, because his readers have been staring at the words of the Law written in the Book!¹⁷

¹⁷ Deut. 31:24 refers to Moses as γράφων πάντας τοὺς λόγους τοῦ νόμου τούτου εἰς βιβλίον. Whether this verse contributed at

Conscious of this antithesis we are ready now to reconstruct what had happened in the Galatian churches. The false teachers came in with their own profound reverence for the Scriptures, a reverence shared by all of Judaism. They believed in verbal inspiration. On the surface at least, this attitude to the Scriptures was indistinguishable from that which the Gentile Christians had come to hold. But then these men took down the very scrolls that St. Paul had handled and from which he had proclaimed the holy joy of the Gentiles in the Gospel. They rolled them open before the eyes of the Christians. They pointed their finger at a paragraph there, words written black on white. "See what it says," they would say, "it stands in your own Bible, written from ancient days with the authority of the one true and eternal God, the same God who sent Jesus Christ. It tells you ever so clearly how to get in on the promises, how to share in the inheritance of the people of Abraham. Yes, Jesus Christ came to open the way to the Gentiles, but here stands the prescription for your full participation. See it yourself!" The Christians looked and were shaken by what they read there with a clarity from which there was no escape. The sacred Scriptures fairly shouted support to these new teachers. The passage to which the finger pointed could only be Ex. 12:43-49:

And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "This is the ordinance of the passover: no foreigner shall eat of it; but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after

all to the wording of Paul's quotation in Gal. 3:10 is problematical. In any case it would not help answer the basic question: Why does Paul make such an addition to his citation of Deut. 27:26?

you have circumcized him. No sojourner or hired servant may eat of it. . . . All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with you and would keep the passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcized, then he may come near and keep it; he shall be as a native in the land. But no uncircumcized person shall eat of it. There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you.

Imagine the consternation! They bury their noses in the passage, read it again and again, search the context, but it traps them. The more they stare, the more perplexed and confused they become. A conversation somewhat like the following perhaps took place to judge by Paul's response and rebuttal in chapters 1, 2.

"But Paul, Paul never showed us this. *He* never said anything like this was necessary," someone protests. (1:6,9)

"Well, that's understandable," comes the smooth reply. "Of course, I don't want to judge the man, but it is likely he just doesn't know the Scriptures." (1:14)

"He seemed to know the Scriptures quite well. After all, he was trained in Pharisaism."

"Then he really ought to know better. One thing is sure, he's not in step with the church in Jerusalem. There they regularly require circumcision, even for Gentile converts (2:3). That's where the apostles are who were with the Lord, and they ought to know." (2:6)

"But Paul called himself an apostle too!"

"He is a latecomer, though; you have to admit that. Doesn't it make sense to trust pillars of the church like Peter and

James (2:9), before you put your faith in a man who has the message secondhand and who perhaps gets things mixed up or forgets part of his job? It seems awfully strange that he can teach you the Scriptures, and yet overlook as important and obvious a section as this one." (1:1, 11, 12)

"I wish Paul were here!"

"It's a little hard to predict what he would do if he were here! From what I hear he must be a little unstable, certainly inconsistent. Didn't he circumcize Timothy in Lystra (Acts 16:3)? Seems to me he bends with the wind. When it suits him he preaches circumcision himself (5:11). But when it would be rather a difficult thing to demand, he won't make a point of it, in order not to lose any converts (1:10; 2:5). He certainly does not have a very favorable reputation in Jerusalem, I can vouch for that!" (1:24; 2:9)

"I don't know," someone replies un- easily, "I still think we ought to ask Paul what he thinks."

"What Paul thinks is not the issue. It's what the Lord thinks! Look at the passage. I didn't make it up, you know! Read it! 'The Lord said to Moses and Aaron!' What better authority do you want than that? I wish you would ask Paul. Ask him why he never showed you this Scripture! He is caught, there is nothing he can answer! Maybe it will at least encourage him to come clean with the Scriptures and the Law, or else quit claiming to be an apostle!"

"Can't we wait, at least, till Paul comes back? He promised to return!"

"Wait? How much time do you think there is? Who knows how soon the Lord will return to give us the inheritance of

the Kingdom?¹⁸ Do you want to take a chance on being left out? (5:1-3) It belongs to those who are God's people, the circumcized seed of Abraham (3:29). Look at these verses, it's good news! Why do you act as though it is such a dreadful thing? God Himself is telling you here, black on white, how you strangers can become one with God's people, with the congregation of the sons of Israel, with their land and all the blessed promises it stands for!" (1:6-9)

We can feel how devastating the argument became with its recourse to the authority of the Scriptures. The congregation was ready to capitulate, and it was a miracle of divine grace that somebody broke loose from the hypnotic spell (τίς ἡμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν;) in order to run to the apostle with the question. When there seems to be no possible answer, Paul knows the answer. Its key is the cross of Christ (3:1), the truth of the Gospel (ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 2:5, 14). His own apostolic authority and the authority of the Jerusalem apostles rest on this basis. Even an angel from heaven has no authority without it, but must be cast out. Beginning in the third chapter he defines even the authority of the Scrip-

¹⁸ It is curious that the eschatological accent, so prominent a feature in 1 and 2 Thess. (presumably Paul's first epistles), is almost wholly lacking in Galatians. Although Paul makes much of the promises and warns of the Judgment (5:21; 6:5-8), there is no reference explicitly to Christ's coming or our waiting to meet Him, such as is found in almost every chapter of both letters to Thessalonica. Perhaps the conflict in Galatia brought about a shift in his emphases. Though a high eschatological consciousness remains, the persistent concentration on this theme, evident in the epistles to the Thessalonians, does not recur in his writings.

tures by that same "truth of the Gospel," and by the authority of that Gospel he puts the Law in its place.

III

Before we proceed, however, we need to establish what has so far merely been stated and assumed, namely, that the Scripture passage upon which the Galatian congregation was foundering was Ex. 12:43-49. That the key item of Law involved in this epistle is circumcision, mentioned altogether 13 times, is apparent to anyone who reads it. This is not to say that other laws do not come into play. "You observe days, and months, and seasons, and years," Paul cries in 4:10. But circumcision remains the crux. According to 5:3 the concentration on this single Law had become so engrossing that no one even stopped to consider the logical consequence, namely, that to yield at this point is to become obligated to the whole Law, to submit to any and every other passage of the sacred scroll to which anyone would point his demanding finger.

We would look for an Old Testament passage, then, that deals with circumcision. There are only two sections in which this matter receives more than passing attention. One is the account of Abraham's circumcision in Gen. 17. An examination of this chapter reveals that the word *vóμoς* does not occur. The accent is rather on "covenant" (12 times). The mark circumcision leaves in the flesh is called "an everlasting covenant," a "sign" of the covenant between God and the people of Abraham. Reference is made to the circumcision of slaves born in Abraham's house, but there is nothing regarding strangers or foreigners who might wish to

attach themselves to Abraham's household and covenant.

The other passage is Ex. 12:43-49. In this Passover chapter the word "covenant" is absent. The verses we are considering are explicitly called Law, *vóμoς*, both at the beginning and at the close of the ordinance. A report of the obedience of the people follows: "Thus did all the people of Israel; as the Lord commanded Moses and Aaron, so they did." A report of the consequences of that obedience closes the paragraph: "And on that very day the Lord brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt by their hosts." Nothing is said here about circumcision as a "sign." It does, however, make provision for the inclusion of foreigners and slaves, who perhaps were a part of the "mixed multitude" that went up with Israel (v. 38). It also defines the Passover as a "sacrament" of participation in the promises, reserved exclusively for God's own people, "the congregation of the sons of Israel." Now all these features fit into the context in Galatians. We are dealing with Gentiles, uncircumcized, who wish to be included in the promises God has made to His people, who want to belong. The prominence of the word *vóμoς* in Exodus 12 corresponds to its importance in our epistle.

Nor is this all. We turn now to Gal. 3:17. Here Paul speaks of the Law given "four hundred and thirty years afterward" — that is, after the promises were made to the patriarchs. The figure derives from Ex. 12:40, 41, where it occurs twice. But this is only 2 verses (in Rahlf's edition of the Septuagint only 4 lines) above the paragraph of Law we are considering. Anyone who looked at that Law, written

black on white before his eyes, could not but notice this figure. Therefore Paul can so authoritatively exploit it: "Four hundred and thirty years after the promises — that's when that Law of yours was first given!" It is a devastating argument.

There is more to be gleaned from Gal. 3:17. Now we need the verse in full. "This is what I mean: the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void." The verse speaks of the νόμος, but it also mentions the διαθήκη, and it sets these two in contrast. Διαθήκη, however, as we have seen, is the key term in the other circumcision chapter, Gen. 17. Does this, perhaps, suggest that Paul's opponents operated with more than Exodus 12, that they had a full circumcision theology, which was based also on Genesis 17, and made much of the concept of Abraham's seed, Abraham's blessing, Abraham's promises? If Ex. 12 were their exclusive Scripture, we would expect to find some reference to the Galatians as belonging to "the congregation of the sons of Israel" (Ex. 12:47). Paul never mentions this. The antithesis he must meet is that of identification with Abraham and Abraham's inheritance and promises (Gal. 3:8, 14, 16, 29); but this is rooted in Genesis 17 and its context.

If this conclusion is valid, we may reconstruct the theology of the Judaizers in its convincing simplicity. They pointed to Gen. 17 and talked of participation in the covenant. They referred to the promises God had made already to Abraham and the inclusion of the Gentiles in those promises. The passage which Paul quotes in 3:8 they also used: "In thee

shall all the nations be blessed" (Gen. 12:3). The promises were made to Abraham "and to his seed," they said. The seal of these promises is circumcision. Yet the intention from the beginning was that the Gentiles should be included when the finality of the blessing was ushered in. In Jesus Christ that day has arrived. By His death and resurrection He has opened the way to the Gentiles to be heirs and to participate in the Spirit. The commission has gone to the apostles and to the Jews to bring to the Gentiles the hope of Israel — and quickly, for Christ will soon return and the time is short. But this means that the Gentiles must be incorporated into Abraham's seed, and the way this is done is graciously provided us in Ex. 12, namely, circumcision. The day of fulfillment is here, when Abraham becomes a multitude of nations (Gen. 17:5)! Christ's return will gloriously fulfill the promises previously signaled to Abraham under the figure of the possession of the land of Canaan. (17:8)

What Paul now does with this is profoundly significant, a most remarkable gift of the Spirit! His study of Gen. 17 and its Abraham context, his constant conviction in the Spirit that every other authority must be subject to the authority of "the truth of the Gospel," leads to a startling and wonderful insight. Circumcision is not the διαθήκη and cannot be identified with it. The covenant antecedes the "sacrament," and circumcision is only its seal. The term "covenant" is used in connection with God's promises to Abraham already in Gen. 15:18. Earlier in that chapter stands the remarkable statement that Abraham is reckoned as righteous, not for his obedience under Law, not even for

his circumcision, but simply because he believed the promises and the God who made them! (Gen. 15:6). Therefore Paul will not tolerate an equating of διαθήκη and νόμος! If what transpired at Sinai is called a covenant (Ex. 19:5), Paul cuts the knot by declaring, "There are two covenants" (Gal. 4:24). By what hermeneutical principle does he interpret the Old Testament? What is his authority? It is what it always is, and was, and must be — the fulfillment of the Old Testament in Jesus Christ: ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου.

In Romans 4 Paul recasts the same basic argument. Things have changed, however. He is not writing now in the heat of a theological battle on which turns the whole future of the church and the Gospel. He is rather equipping the church consciously with a theological summation of that battle as a resource for the future. He is laying "nomism" to rest. There is another difference. When Paul wrote Galatians the battle turned on Ex. 12. In Rom. 4 there is no reference to this passage. The point that the promise has temporal priority over the Law of circumcision can be made from the history of Abraham alone, without reference to the "four hundred and thirty years." In Galatia it was the enemy that had set up the battle line, and the apostle had to join the battle at their controverted Bible passage.

We turn now to the closing verses of Gal. 3. The question has been, What are the terms on which Gentiles may belong to the people of Israel, to the seed of Abraham, so that they are full heirs of the promises? Under the terms of the new, "other Gospel," brought in by the Judaizing teachers, the answer is circumcision, and all the authority of the Sacred Scrip-

tures is marshaled in its support. No doubt they called it Gospel (1:6,7), for it was good news. Ex. 12 was designed, after all, not to exclude Gentiles but to bring them in, to make it possible for them to belong.

The vocabulary used in Ex. 12 does not provide a link with these last verses of Gal. 3. Most of the key terms are either rare in the New Testament or occur not at all. The words προσήλυτος and συναγωγή have acquired a special, technical meaning and are no longer available in their original sense. The adjectival term for "male," ἀρσενικός, is simply ἄρσην in the New Testament. Ἄλλογενής, foreigner, occurs only at Luke 17:18. Πάροικος, sojourner, is only slightly more common, at Eph. 2:19 and 1 Peter 2:11. Οἰκέτης is used four times; μισθωτός, twice in one verse, the "hireling" of John 10:12. The word for a "slave bought with money," ἀργυρώνητος, does not occur, nor do either of the terms for "native," αὐτόχθων and ἐγχώριος τῆς γῆς. None of these words are to be found anywhere in Galatians.

Yet there is a correspondence of ideas, especially at v. 28, so striking that it can hardly be accidental. In vv. 26 and 27 Paul argues that it is Baptism (inseparable from faith), rather than circumcision, that breaks down all barriers to the outsiders and that makes all of us sons, not merely of Israel or of Abraham but of God. But now notice what the specific walls are which have fallen. In Ex. 12 circumcision was the instrument by which to include the ἄλλογενής, the προσήλυτος, and the πάροικος in the congregation of Israel. In Paul's day this is precisely the difference represented by "Jew and Greek." Circum-

cision also was called upon to overcome the inequality of servitude or slavery, three degrees of which are expressed by οἰκέτης, μισθώτης, and ἀργυρώνητος. In the society of Paul's world this corresponds to the separation between "slave and free." But there is a third barrier, one which circumcision itself raised and for which it inevitably had no answer. The accent is on the male. All the males are to be circumcized. What, then, is the status of the female? Surely the Gentiles, confronted with the demand of this Law, would ask this even as all of us at one time or another have asked it. To this barrier also the Gospel speaks, says the apostle. And so he reaches his ringing climax: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female!" And in the last verse, reverting to the contribution Gen. 17 had made to the entire discussion, he exclaims: "For you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise!"

IV

Among the Galatians, then, reverence for the authority of the Scriptures without the proper key to their understanding made them helpless victims of false teachers and endangered their faith. Perhaps this whole tragic situation will become clear if we return now to survey Paul's entire theological argument.

A

Let us begin at the Antioch incident (2:11-21). It is quite clear what Peter's dilemma was. Ever since the vision at Joppa (Acts 10, 11) he had understood that the Gospel belonged freely and with-

out prejudice to the Gentiles. At the Council of Jerusalem he took a firm stand for that principle, against every pressure, and his position received the clear endorsement of the whole church (Acts 15). This issue, however, had not been settled once and for all because a vital theological question had not yet been answered or even fully faced. This was the question of the Scriptures, their purpose and authority for the church in view of their fulfillment in Christ. The Scriptures are the Word of God; the Law is contained in the Scriptures, and therefore the authority of God stands behind it. Can one now ignore, bypass, or repeal that Law, without destroying the authority of the Scriptures and so blaspheming God?

At Antioch Peter, of all people, is "bewitched" by the same kind of argument which later had so devastating an effect in Galatia. We may presume that the delegation from Jerusalem called him aside, unrolled the scroll of the Scriptures, and in all sincerity and soberness pointed their finger at something written there. A rather good case can be made for Lev. 20:22-26 as the passage in question.¹⁹ Some very

¹⁹ The evidence that this passage was Peter's stumbling block at Antioch is not quite as decisive as that for Ex. 12:43-49 in Galatia, but it is sufficient to support the hypothesis.

a. The situation at Antioch concerned *eating*. This is precisely the concern of Lev. 20:25, where the proper distinction between clean and unclean foods is made a factor in the holiness of God's people. A Jew eating in the home of a Gentile could no longer observe this distinction.

b. Two key terms, ἀφορῶ and ἕσθη, occur both in Lev. 20:26 and in Gal. 2:12, the verse in which Peter's problem is stated. In both instances ἀφορῶ has the technical sense of disassociation according to the Law, for the maintenance of holiness.

specific injunctions are here laid upon God's holy people. "You shall not walk in the customs of the nations. . . ." "You shall make a distinction between the clean and the unclean. . . ." The last verse is climactic! "You shall be holy to Me, for I the Lord am holy and have separated you from the peoples that you should be Mine." Now this is the Law! It describes what distinguishes God's people from the world. In these words the authority of God confronts men. "Surely, the Gospel belongs to the Gentiles, but does this mean we now forget about the Scriptures?" The representative of James would say, "Did not Jesus warn, 'Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven?' (Matt. 5:19). Did not the Lord summon us to discipleship, to follow Him even

c. It is strange, however, that the word ἅγιος, for all its importance here in Leviticus, never occurs in Galatians or even any of its cognates. At first hand this might weigh against our hypothesis. There is, however, another factor even more curious. In every Pauline letter written after Galatians (therefore excluding 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Galatians), ἅγιοι appears prominently in the address as a noble title of the Christian readers! (Cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1.) This sudden and then persistent emphasis can hardly have been accidental. May we speculate that it was the result of his reflection on Peter's problem verse that led Paul to define the holy people of the holy God by way of the cross? The cry of Leviticus, ἔσσεσθέ μοι ἅγιοι ὅτι ἐγὼ ἅγιος κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὑμῶν, has been fulfilled to us ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ κυρίῳ ἡμῶν!

If this reasoning stands, then the especially careful formulation of this concept as applying to the believers, in 1 Cor. 1:2, may constitute corroborating evidence that this epistle was the next to be written after Galatians.

when it means being misunderstood, accused, and bearing disgrace for His sake? Certainly the easy thing is to eat with the Gentiles, but the easy way is the way of concession, retreat, compromise, 'pleasing men' (an argument that weighed heavily in Galatia, cf. 1:10). What the Lord wants of you is a clear testimony of your submission to His Law, to the authority of the Scriptures — the testimony of being separate! You are the leader, Peter! Everybody looks to you!"

Thus Peter was confronted squarely with the issue to which the church needed an answer. He felt himself caught between conflicting authorities. It was, we may well imagine, an agonizing situation for him, and in his uncertainty he yielded to the pressure which at the moment was most insistent. It does not necessarily follow that he fully consented to the position of the Jerusalem delegation. Perhaps he withdrew, doing nothing, until he could make up his mind. The effect was the same. In this instance, as so often, indecisiveness is already negative action.

In the eternal counsel of God the answer to the question was to come from one especially raised up and qualified by the Spirit to give it. Peter's break with Judaism seems to have been a gradual process involving a series of steps. Paul's, however, had been instantaneous and altogether crushing. Frequent reference to it is found in his writings, but the statement incorporated in Paul's response to Peter here is one of the most trenchant: "For I through the Law died to the Law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me . . . I do not nullify the grace of God." (Vv. 19-21)

Paul had been an all-out supporter of the Law, a defender of that Law against what he was convinced was the blasphemy of Jesus and of His disciples. And yet that very Law for which he fought had left him in the lurch. When on the Damascus road he looked into the face of Christ, the Law he had served so faithfully offered him no comfort or reward. It did not even stay neutral! Rather it rose up to expose his ungodly heart, to condemn and destroy him as a liar and as a persecutor of the Son of God! But in that very moment of shame and utter despair the Lord Jesus, who had taken Paul's "death" under the Law into His own cross, raised up this Pharisee, cast out and excluded by God's holy Law, into a new and blessed life of grace, freedom, and sonship. This is God's grace. Paul at that moment had no claim on God whatsoever, except the claim on wrath and judgment. Yet God in pure grace (1:15; 2:21), of His own free will (1:1) and pleasure (1:16), had revealed to him His Son. The word ἀποκάλυψις (1:12, 16) pictures "revelation" as the removal of a veil (κάλυμμα). What this meant to the apostle is reflected in his remarkable description in 2 Cor. 3:12-18. He had seen the Law in its full, consuming judgment and the Gospel in its uncompromised glory. This is what Paul means by ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (v. 14).

Because it has been granted Paul to see the light of the Gospel so clearly, he is in a position to dispel the confusion which a false view of the purpose of the Law had created in the church. The contrast is between justification ἐξ ἔργων νόμου and διὰ or ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ. Except for one occurrence in Rom. 3:20, the phrase

ἐξ ἔργων νόμου is peculiar to Galatians. Elsewhere in Romans, Ephesians, James, and other books, a simple ἐξ ἔργων suffices. But in Galatians the longer expression lies at the very heart of the discussion. It is used with hammering repetition three times in 2:16, and then again in 3:2, 10. The apostle is not discussing Law in this epistle as an abstract theological concept, but he has in mind very specific ordinances which demand obedience by the authority of the Scriptures, which contain them. Νόμος is the Law into which Peter had looked, written black on white in the Scriptures. The ἔργα are the actions which represent his conformity to that particular Law. The Law demands perfect holiness of the people separated to God. (Lev. 20:26)

"But," says Paul, "we have been delivered from the slavery and the fear of the Law and the utter frustration of attempting to be holy and acceptable in God's sight by keeping its precepts. By being justified through faith in Christ Jesus we become full partakers of God's promise and thereby are members of His holy people. It is no longer necessary to do the things written in the Law, which comprise merely the shadow of things to come and which now in Christ have come to an end as demands upon us. By submitting to these laws we in effect deny that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the whole Law upon our infractions of the Law. If I make the Law necessary as a means of establishing fellowship with God, then I am in effect rejecting His keeping the Law for me and His atonement for my breaking of the Law. The only life I have is the life Christ gives me when I believe in Him who loved me and gave Himself

for me. But if I now begin to reassert the old dead 'life' under the Law by injecting a legal principle or requirement into my justification, then what on earth did Christ die for?"

B

Now Paul turns to address the Galatians in chapter 3. They are so hypnotized (τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβιάσκαθεν;) by staring at that dreadful, inescapable letter of the Law in Exodus 12 that everything they ever learned is forgotten. Paul must break the spell. "You foolish Galatians, how was it that you learned to rejoice in the Scriptures? Wasn't it because in those black-on-white paragraphs, with your own eyes, you saw Jesus Christ crucified? Or how was it you received the Spirit? Was it by staring at a legal prescription in the Bible, as you are doing now, and then rising to perform it (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου)? Or was it simply by hearing me proclaim Christ to you as "the end of the Law" and responding in faith and joy (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως)? Aren't you silly? If the Spirit came to you freely, do you think you are going to hold Him and His promises by circumcision, which was merely a sign and seal of those promises? And what about the gifts of the Spirit, and the miracles — did they come to you freely and for no reason except God's love, or did you get them by staring into these black-on-white legal ordinances?"

But Paul does not undermine or deny the authority of the sacred scrolls. The Law is good and holy (Rom. 7:12). It must be seen not in isolation but as a part of the whole counsel and economy of God, i.e., in the context of the truth of the Gospel. Scripture has no authority either

different from the authority of the Cross of Christ or independent of it. Therefore Paul summons them to look into the same Scriptures in which they had found the letter of the Law regarding circumcision and to read their sacred pages in the full perspective of the truth of the Gospel.

"See what those Scriptures say about Abraham," Paul would say. "He was righteous simply by believing! Or notice what the Scripture says about Abraham's blessing and the Gentiles. Do you really imagine that you, the beneficiaries of that promise, are to be righteous now on some other terms than Abraham was? 'Ah, but the Law,' you say. Very well, look hard at that Law. See what is written there? It curses our disobedience and failure in even one little detail. Don't you understand that that is exactly why Christ came, to break the power of the Law over us by being cursed under the Law in our stead? It is Jesus Christ who has made it possible for you Gentiles to be participants in the blessings promised to Abraham by freeing all men from the curse of the Law. The promise of that salvation you can see and read in your own Bible. It was made a full 430 years before that Law of circumcision you so cherish! The issue is salvation by Law or Promise. It cannot be both!

"This does not mean the Law served no purpose. Of course it is in your Bible, I don't pretend it is not. But you need to understand its function. It was designed to hold God's people in check, to bind us Jews under its discipline until Christ came. But now Christ has come! He has set us Jews free, but He has set you free too! Christ is the Son, and by Baptism you have all received His name, you are all sons — not of Israel after the flesh (Ex. 12:47) but

of God. That's what unites us now, Jew and Gentile, slave and free, male and female — not circumcision. Christ is Abraham's offspring (v. 16), and when your life derives from Him as mine does (2:20) through Baptism (3:27), then you are Abraham's offspring and the inheritance is yours. (3:29)

"So don't look at us Jews and conclude that you lack some qualifications which we already possess. For in the past we were like children under discipline, like slaves bound by στοιχεῖα. This was the effect of our Law. But now rejoice with us! Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the Law. We are free! And rejoice in your own right, for He has also freed you from your own στοιχεῖα.²⁰ What on earth

are you trying to do? Crawl back into prison again or replace the slavery you endured as Gentiles with a Jewish slavery? Has all my labor been for nothing?"

The theological argument continues at 4:21. "If you still are not persuaded," Paul suggests, "if you still want to be under the Law, then look yet again at Abraham, whose offspring you want to be. Notice it is not simply a question of being the son of Abraham. The issue is: Which son? Nor is it simply a matter of sharing in the covenant, for there are two of them, you know. Which covenant? Are you the child of the flesh or of promise? Is yours the covenant of slavery or of freedom? You may boast of being Abraham's son as you conform to a legalistic and authoritative "Jerusalem," as you cling tenaciously to Sinai and the letter of the Law, as you even persecute and slander the Gospel and those who bear it. But know that in spite of all appearances you do not belong to the family of Abraham's God, for you are the slave and will be cast out. As for me, and those who believe my Gospel, we are the children of freedom and of the promise!

"So do not rivet your eyes only on those Bible passages! Do not read them

²⁰ For a survey of the endless study that has gone into the term στοιχεῖα see Ernst Percy, *Die Probleme der Kolosser- und Epheserbriefe* (Lund: Carl Bloms Boktryckeri A.-B., C. W. K. Gleerup, 1946). Trevor Ling in his recent monograph, *The Significance of Satan* (London: SPCK, 1961), pp. 69—72, gets at the problem in a fruitful way by focusing primarily on the context of the phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Gal. 4:3, 9 and Col. 2:8, 20. In these two epistles the term seems to be somewhat technical, distinct therefore from its other occurrences in the New Testament or Septuagint. Here alone do we find the phrase στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, apparently representing forces which in Paul's mind have enslaved the Gentiles in a way that corresponds to the enslavement of the Jews under the Law. In my own reconstruction I take it as a summary term in Hellenic superstition, incorporating an arrangement of supernatural beings and forces (the θεόνομοι, κυριότητες, ἀρχαί, ἐξουσίαι of Col. 1:16; 2:10, 15) which control the matter of the world, including the body, to the frustration and injury of man. These forces are glaringly prominent in those moments when man, for all his intelligence and willpower, loses control over his world. Thus if one knocks over the milk or steps on a rake which promptly knocks him in the head, it is one of this hierarchy of *stoicheia* which has done it. A delightful

modern word for such a category would be "gremlin," coined in World War II — though it lacks the participation in a cosmological system which *stoicheia* seems to imply. One may speculate that these words were used with irreverent good humor in the regions of mid-Asia Minor; yet behind them lay a considerable seriousness. This the apostle was able to exploit. For it is evident that man does not control his world. The world rather controls and drives him, making his life a continual battle, his existence forever precarious. The religio-philosophic speculations of Gnosticism had their roots in just such an interpretation of existence.

apart from the rest of Scriptures! Stand straight and free in their promises of liberty, and don't let anybody hang a yoke of slavery around your neck. And the more you claim this freedom by the power of the Spirit, the more will you express it not by license and lawlessness but by conforming your whole life to the immutable will of God, set down in tables of stone and revealed in the life and word of Jesus Christ. Since it is only through Him that what you do is acceptable to God, all requirements which merely pointed forward to His coming are no longer binding upon you. If you demand men to keep such laws, you are denying that all promises of the Scriptures have been fulfilled in Him.

"And now a postscript in my own hand. Those who insist that you be circumcized are not suffering for Christ, nor is circumcision the suffering Christ has called us for. In reality they are escaping the suffering, they want nothing of the scandal of the Cross. They boast of the Law but don't keep it themselves — I know, I was one of them. My only glory now is the Cross. By its power I have been born again and fashioned to live in God's new creation, His world of mercy and peace, the Israel of God. I have sufficient signs of it to refute anybody, not the mark of circumcision, but the marks of the lashes I have endured with my Lord."²¹

²¹ With the writing of Galatians the Spirit gave the church a theological formulation of the relationship between the Law and the Gospel. It was a much-needed statement, for the issue had been arising continuously. This leads to some tentative suggestions:

a. Galatians became a key document in the church. It was widely circulated and sent in all probability by Paul himself to other evan-

V

"A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Perhaps the proverb applies also to a study like this one. Out of what began as a concern for the meaning of one word (προεγράφη) we have been driven to penetrate the basic thrust of the entire Epistle to the Galatians. Nor has the leavening ended. There are two further Pauline passages to be brought briefly into the context of the present discussion.

Col. 2:14

Χριστός . . . ἐξάλειψας τὸ καθ' ἡμῶν χειρόγραφον τοῖς δόγμασιν ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῖν, καὶ αὐτὸ ἤρξαεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, προσηλώσας αὐτὸ τῷ σταυρῷ.

gels and apostles who faced similar difficulties. It is interesting that, though Pauline theology did not dominate the church as we know it from extrabiblical sources in the early centuries, this particular issue was settled everywhere. It did not arise again.

b. Since this was an impassioned response to a very particular situation, however, a more rounded theological statement, covering the implications of this understanding of Law and Gospel for all Christian preaching, life, and hope, was needed. The awareness of this need worked in the apostle through the Spirit and flowered sometime later in Romans.

c. The basic core of Romans was meant for Christendom generally, and the epistle was sent with a covering greeting and conclusion to various centers of the church, including Ephesus, Antioch, and Jerusalem. This would account for the various locations mentioned in the ending. Perhaps it was the Jerusalem document that did not include chapter 15. Evidence that Romans exerted considerable influence in Jerusalem lies in the need eventually to respond to distortions of it. (James 2:14 ff.)

d. The circularizing of Romans and Galatians in the church was a major theological event, a grand gift of the Spirit. Inferences concerning the relations between Paul and Jerusalem, derived from evidences before the appearance of this correspondence, cease to have validity after that event.

The entire paragraph, vv. 8-15, should be reviewed as context. In spite of the fact that the apostle freely uses some of the language of a Hellenic, perhaps Gnostic, cosmology, it is quite clear that the theological point he is pressing is essentially that familiar to us in Galatians. The στοιχεῖα, that previously bound us, are mentioned again, as is the "life" we have in Christ. Circumcision, faith, Baptism, Cross, freedom from bondage of the Law and from the death which was ours in sin, as well as the warning against becoming enslaved again — all are here. Of course there are new ideas also. Baptism as our burial reminds of Rom. 6; the circumcision of Christ as fulfilling ours is peculiar to Colossians.

We must limit ourselves, however, to one thought in the verse quoted. Grammatically there is no particular difficulty, except perhaps with the dative, τοῖς δόγμασιν, which need not concern us. Though χειρόγραφον occurs only here in the New Testament, it is a fairly common word meaning a (presumably handwritten) bond or certificate of indebtedness. The construction καὶ αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου is a little curious, however. The phrase ἐκ μέσου followed by a genitive is quite common, the equivalent of the Hebrew מֵתוֹכָם . Thus ἐκ μέσου τῶν δικαίων (Matt. 13:49); αὐτῶν (Acts 17:33; 23:10; 2 Cor. 6:17); ὑμῶν (1 Cor. 5:2); ἔθνῶν (1 Clement 29:3). In all these cases, supplied by Arndt-Gingrich, the prepositional phrase is followed by the genitive but does not itself have the article. They do not necessarily parallel the construction in the text before us, which has the article but lacks a genitive object. In 2 Thess. 2:7 μόνον ὁ κατέχων

ἄρτι ἕως ἐκ μέσου γένηται, we have a construction in which ἐκ μέσου takes no genitive, though the article still is lacking. Arndt-Gingrich suggests that this may be a Latinism, the equivalent of the idiom *e medio tolli*, meaning simply "remove."²² It is not really a parallel to what we have before us.

The one instance I have found in which the phrase, as in our text, has the article but lacks the genitive object, is Is. 57:2, ἀπὸ γὰρ προσώπου ἀδικίας ἦρται ὁ δίκαιος. Ἔσται ἐν εἰρήνῃ ἡ ταφὴ αὐτοῦ, ἦρται ἐκ τοῦ μέσου. Literally translated, "From the presence of injustice the righteous man will be taken. His grave will be in peace, he will be taken from the midst." Notice, however, that the lack of a genitive here to answer the question, "From the midst of what?" is justified by poetic parallelism. The previous sentence has already indicated the answer by its ἀδικίας. The New Testament and Septuagint references which Arndt-Gingrich supplies, therefore, do not support the conclusion that αὐτὸ ἦρκεν ἐκ τοῦ μέσου in our verse means "destroy."²³ We are entitled to press the question, "Out of the midst of what was the χειρόγραφον taken?" If the apostle does not answer this by adding a genitive of explanation, then his insertion of the article, ἐκ τοῦ μέσου, may well be taken to indicate that the answer is altogether obvious to his readers.

The conclusion drawn from our study of Galatians drives us to press the ques-

²² William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1957), sub γίνομαι, I 4 c β.

²³ *Ibid.*, sub αἶρω, 4.

tion and then offers us the answer. The content of the χειρόγραφον was legal demands, validly authoritative with reference to us (καθ' ἡμῶν), but also directly opposed and hostile to us (ὃ ἦν ὑπεναντίον ἡμῶν).²⁴ Paul's switch from the second person plural in the previous verse to the first person here indicates that he wishes to include the Jews as well as the Gentiles as the victims of this hostility. What happened to this χειρόγραφον is described in two metaphors. First, Christ has erased it, wiped it away, so that it can no longer be read. Secondly, He has taken it out of the midst, lifted the condemning Bible passage right out of the Sacred Scriptures and nailed it to His cross! Paul is referring again to the very same Scripture that by the manipulation of the Judaizers had come so close to destroying the faith of the Galatians, Ex. 12:43-49, with its demand for the circumcision of the Gentiles as the way to their participation in the promises. The passage was in the church, in all Paul's teaching, the classic summation, the pivot, the image of the whole Law. But now it is gone. You cannot see it there in the Scriptures by itself any more. The only way to see it is by looking at the cross on which it is nailed. You cannot look at this Law without at the same time seeing the Crucified!

Therefore that Law, which once condemned us all, has lost its power. The principalities and powers that stood against us have been disarmed — Hellenic στοιχεῖα language applied to the Law, as in Gal. 4:3, 9. The cross looks at first hand as if it were the public demonstration and

shame of Jesus, condemned and defeated by the Law. In reality it is the public realization and display of the Law's defeat and death, the overthrow of every kind of force that enslaves men in fear, despair, and death. For it is the Law that has been "crucified," nailed to the Cross, in the crucifixion of Christ.

Eph. 2:11-22

In this passage we are not concerned with grammatical peculiarities, but only with an association of ideas. There is no studied conformity to the language and thought patterns of either Galatians or Colossians. The writer develops his argument in terms of that which fills him and in terms of the background and the needs of his readers. Yet it is quite apparent that the writer has lived through the struggles with which we have been dealing, that the definitions which became explicit first in Galatians are the working theology both of himself and of the readers.

The context again is circumcision, and the division between Jew and Gentile which it had come to dramatize. Therefore Paul can say to his Gentile readers, "You were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise." Terms like Ἰσραήλ, διαθήκη, and ἐπαγγελία bring to mind the Old Testament circumcision passages around which the Galatian controversy had moved. As we have previously indicated, however, two terms in Ex. 12 which Paul might well have used here were actually no longer available to him, since their meaning had become technical. Πρωσῆλυτος must become ξένος. Συναγωγή

²⁴ So Thomas K. Abbott, *Colossians* in the *I. C. C.* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897 to 1956), p. 255.

sometimes becomes *ἐκκλησία*, but this is not suitable to the present context. Hence Paul uses *πολιτεία*. 'Απηλλοτριωμένοι points to *ἄλλοτριος* in Gen. 17:12, a synonym of *ἄλλογενής* (Gen. 17:27; Ex. 12:43).

There follows a description of the reconciliation, in which the apostle draws freely on a new passage (Is. 57:19) for the terminology *μακράν* and *ἐγγύς* and for the *εἰρήνη* that unites them. Christ is the instrument of this uniting of the two separated elements, Jew and Gentile. What had to happen to achieve this is described in vv. 14-16: "He . . . has broken down the dividing wall of hostility (*τὴν ἔχθραν*) by abolishing in His flesh the law of commandments and ordinances . . . and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby bringing the hostility (*τὴν ἔχθραν*) to an end." A real wall stood between Jew and Gentile. It consisted of the Law, with all its commandments and ordinances. It is epitomized, however, in one word, used twice, *ἔχθρα*. We suggest that in the mind of the writer this is circumcision, the embodiment in one command of all the hostility between Jew and Gentile. Consistent, then, with Galatians and Colossians, this is the marvel of the cross, that here the Law speaks its last word to its own undoing, so that peace is created between Jew and Gentile and both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Finally the result, v. 19, "So then you are no longer strangers and sojourners, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God . . . Christ Jesus Himself being the Chief Cornerstone. . . ." Here there is a close association with past theological history.

Ξένος and (συμ)πολίτης relate to Ex. 12 by way of *προσίλυτος* and *συναγωγή*, as we have just seen. Πάροικος is one of the terms for "stranger" in Ex. 12:45. In a footnote to our discussion of Lev. 20:26, in connection with the crisis at Antioch (IV, note 19c), we suggested this as the beginning of Paul's grand use of the term *ἄγιοι* for the "saints" in Christ. The emphasis in Gen. 17 on the circumcision of those born in Abraham's house may be the background of Paul's concept of *οἰκείοι τοῦ θεοῦ*. (See Gen. 17:13 [also 23:27] in the Septuagint: *ὁ οἰκογενής τῆς οἰκίας σου*; also the use of the term *οἰκέτης* in Ex. 12:44.) In all this transference of Old Testament terminology to the New Testament church, the turning point is Christ Jesus.²⁵ For Paul this is the whole world.²⁶

CONCLUSION

It may be helpful to summarize the major steps along the way we have come.

1. Gal. 3:1 is to be understood literally and not metaphorically. It refers to the crucified Christ as the Galatians had seen

²⁵ The fact that the author of Ephesians feels so complete an identification with previous theological history reflected in Paul's writings beginning with Galatians, together with his complete freedom to build on that past with the same quality of inspired "genius," may well be taken as evidence of Pauline authorship of this epistle. In my own mind so perfect a combination of these two elements in a disciple of his seems almost inconceivable.

²⁶ For an excellent treatment on Christian liberty see two articles in the CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY by William F. Arndt: "Galatians: A Declaration of Christian Liberty," XXVII (Sept. 1956), 673-692; "On Gal. 2:17-19," XXVII (Feb. 1956), 128 to 132.

Him, black on white, with their own eyes, in the Scriptures.

2. The missionary method of St. Paul included his teaching from the scrolls of the Septuagint and his training of the congregations in the use of those Scriptures for their joy and edification.

3. The difficulty arose in Galatia when the purveyors of "another gospel" used the authority of those same black-on-white Scriptures to insist that circumcision was the way in which Gentiles could belong to the seed of Abraham and participate in the promises associated with Christ's return.

4. The Law of which Paul speaks in Galatians is no generalized theological concept, but very specific demands which the Christians may read for themselves and which have the authority of God. In Galatia the key passage at issue was Ex. 12:43-49 (supplemented by Gen. 17). In Antioch the key passage was Lev. 20:22-26.

5. Paul's task is not merely to distinguish between Law and Gospel or to reaffirm justification by faith, but to resolve the perplexing problem of the relationship of the authority of the Scriptures and of the Law to "the truth of the Gos-

pel," i.e., the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.

6. "The truth of the Gospel" is the cross, on which Christ fulfilled the Law by enduring its curse against us and so set us free from its threats. At the same time the Abrahamic blessing both to the Gentiles and to the Jews becomes a reality in Him. He is Abraham's seed, and when we by Baptism and faith put Him on, we become one in Him, children of Abraham and heirs of the promises. The Law and the Scriptures of the Law are to be seen only in the perspective of the Cross.

7. Let both Jew and Gentile rejoice in the new liberty. In that liberty and through the new life in Christ there is the power to live by that love which is the fulfillment of the Law.

8. Paul's solution of the problem of the Law, as focused on the circumcision passage Ex. 12:43-49, supplies a basic form for his future preaching and teaching. It is the presupposition of passages like Eph. 2:11-22 and Col. 2:8-15.

"Peace and mercy be upon all who walk by this rule, upon the Israel of God." (Gal. 6:16)

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