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Jesus' Faith and Ours: A Re-reading of Galatians 3

by Richard B. Hays

I. Faith, Justification, and Christ: Elements of an Exegetical Problem.

The doctrine of justification by faith has long been construed as the clear and uncontestable bedrock of Pauline theology. Ever since Martin Luther's paradigmatic hermeneutical breakthrough, it has seemed evident (to Protestant interpreters, at least) that Paul meant something like this: we find acceptance with God not by performing acts of outward obedience but by believing in God's Son Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sake. Galatians in particular—one of Luther's favorite texts—appears to be a vehement manifesto of this gospel of justification, affirming the freedom of the Christian from all external requirements: all we need to do in order to be forgiven by God and reconciled to him is to hear and believe.

The extent and consequences of the consensus on this point may be demonstrated by comparing the recent Galatians commentaries of Hans Dieter Betz and F. F. Bruce.[1] These two very learned NT scholars, coming at Galatians from different theological traditions and with very different methodologies, produce readings of the text which agree on this salient point, that Paul's gospel concerns primarily the justifying of the individual before God. The point is made eloquently in a quotation from Luther which Betz places as the superscription to his entire commentary.

> "Indeed we are not dealing with political freedom, but with a different kind of freedom, which the devil especially hates and attacks. It is that freedom for which Christ has set us free, neither from any human servitude nor from the power of tyrants, but from the eternal wrath of God. Where? In the conscience."[2]

This superscription provides a revealing insight into Betz's hermeneutical perspective; clearly he intends to locate his interpretation of the letter squarely within the mainstream of Lutheran piety. The gospel is understood here as a liberating word addressed to the (terrified) *conscience* of individuals, and the "freedom for which Christ has set us free" is understood as an *internal* freedom from guilt which must be sharply distinguished from "political freedom." This kind of piety has sometimes played itself out on the stage of modern history with tragic consequences.

Usually, theologians seeking to counterbalance such a perspective have not challenged the Reformation's interpretation of Paul. Efforts to assert the Gospel's relevance for social ethics have tended to appeal instead to other resources within the canon: Exodus, the prophets, the teachings of Jesus in the synoptic gospels. Weighty warrants indeed. Recent scholarship on Paul, however, has opened up important new insights which suggest that Paul need not—indeed *should* not be interpreted as a witness for an inward-turned religion dealing primarily with individual guilt.[3] Building upon this work, I will argue in this essay that as long as Paul's gospel is interpreted as the answer to individual soteriological dilemma, that gospel is being severely truncated.

The individualistically-oriented reading represented by Betz's commentary severs the relation between theology and ethics in a way which Paul would find most distressing. Consider, for example, Betz's remarkable evaluation of the parenetic section of Galatians:

> "Paul does not provide the Galatians with a specifically Christian ethic. The Christian is addressed as an educated and responsible person. He is expected to do no more than what would be expected of any other educated person in the Hellenistic culture of the time."[4]

I find such a reading of Paul, drastically minimizing the distance between the world and the community of faith, entirely incredible. Did Paul think that God sent the Holy Spirit through Jesus' death on the cross merely in order to empower the church to live in accordance with the conventional standards of popular morality?

Betz has reasons, of course, for interpreting Paul in this fashion. He is able to point to numerous passages from the moral philosophers of Hellenistic antiquity which parallel Paul's exhortations in one way or another. It is neither possible nor necessary to examine these parallels in detail here; the question is not whether such parallels exist. The question is whether Betz has adequately described the *theological* framework within which Paul's moral exhortations are to be understood. In my judgment, Betz underestimates the extent to which these exhortations in Paul's hands become expressions of an ethic which is radically transformed by the kerygma of Christ crucified.

Thus, the real question is one of theological interpretation. Betz's reading of Galatians supports Bultmann's influential opinion that Christian obedience entails no particular type of conduct which is specifiably distinct from that of the non-Christian. The theological roots of Bultmann's view on this point are, of course, deeply imbedded in the Lutheran "two kingdoms" ethic, which in turn is the logical outworking of Luther's understanding of justification as liberation from guilt.

This theological tradition running from Luther through Bultmann to Betz is wrong, not just because its political consequences may seem unpalatable, but because it stems from faulty exegesis. When

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[1]Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Hermeneia; Fortress, 1979) and F. F. Bruce, *Galatians* (NIGTC, Eerdmans, 1982).

[2]Martin Luther, *In epistolam S. Pauli ad Galatas Commentarius* (1535, WA 40/2), p. 3; cited in Betz, p. v.; the English translation is my own.

[3]E.g., Ernst Käseman, "The Righteousness of God in Paul," *New Testament Questions of Today* (Fortress, 1969), pp. 168–82; Krister Stendahl, *Paul Among Jews and Gentiles* (Fortress, 1976); E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Fortress, 1977); Marcus Barth, "The Kerygma of Galatians," *Interpretation 21* (1967), pp. 131–46; and J. Christiaan Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Fortress, 1980).

[4]Betz, p. 292.

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Galatians is read through the sort of hermeneutical lens provided by the Luther quotation the result is a gospel that is not merely truncated (as though its deficiencies could be remedied by adding something else, as we would add extra memory to a computer) but also distorted. In the final analysis, Betz's enormously erudite commentary overlooks or misrepresents many of Paul's fundamental and explicit concerns in Galatians. Let there be no misunderstanding: I level these serious charges at Betz not to single his work out as an aberration, but precisely because his commentary so lucidly exemplifies a widely-shared hermeneutical perspective. Betz's commentary is original, even idiosyncratic, in various ways which we cannot explore here. My criticism, however, strikes precisely at the point where Betz speaks for the mainline Protestant tradition.

Betz shares the Western proclivity for reading this letter to the Galatian community as though it were a timeless tract addressed to isolated believing subjects. He slips casually into treating the parenetic section as if it were addressed to "the Christian" (singular), although in fact it is addressed throughout to the *community*, and its most basic concern is the preservation of unity within the community. (For example, the vice and virtue lists of 5:16–24 are bracketed by clear admonitions against division within the church: 5:13–15 and 5:25–6:5.)[5]

This paper will concentrate on two other closely intertwined issues which have a crucial bearing on the way we construe the message of Paul's letter to the Galatians. I will argue that our received exegetical tradition trips and falls into deep errors, landing with a splash which sends ripples outwards through our whole interpretation of Pauline theology.

First, what does "faith" (*pistis*) mean, and how is it related to justification)? The popular interpretation of Paul treats *pistis* as referring to "believing," a kind of subjective, cognitive activity which is prerequisite to justification. That is to say, *pistis* becomes a new kind of work. William Law put the issue bluntly: "Suppose one man to rely on his own faith and another to rely on his own works, then the faith of the one and the works of the other are equally the same worthless filthy rags." Protestant interpreters have often tried to surmount this difficulty by explaining that faith is a gift from God. Certainly that is an edifying idea, but it encounters two serious objections: 1) precisely the same affirmation could be made with reference to "works," and indeed we find that it *is* made in the Qumran Thanksgiving Hymns; 2) in Galatians, as in Romans, Paul never describes faith as a gift. This line of inquiry must lead us to reexamine Paul's discussion of faith in Galatians 3. Does he mean to refer to our activity of believing in Christ, or does he have something else in mind?

When Paul's gospel is interpreted as the answer to individual soteriological dilemma, that gospel is being severely truncated.

Secondly, how is the figure of Jesus Christ related to "justification by faith"? The popular interpretation of Paul treats Christ as the *object* of our act of believing; i.e., it places him "in the passive role of being the object of our justifying faith."[6] From the point of view of systematic theology, this leads to a confusing situation aptly described by Gerhard Ebeling:

> "The Reformers' understanding of faith had no effect on the formation of Christology—not, at least, in normal church dogmatics. . . . Hence the difficulty . . . of maintaining the strict inner connection between Christology and the doctrine of justification. The Christology mostly does not lead by any compelling necessity to the doctrine of justification, and the latter in turn usually leaves it an open question how far Christology is really needed as its ground."[7]

The classic illustration of this difficulty is provided by Paul's own discussion in Galatians 3 (and Romans 4) of the figure of Abraham, who was justified not by believing in Jesus Christ but by trusting God. If Abraham is the paradigm of the justified believer, why must we put our faith in Christ in order to be justified? Couldn't we, like Abraham, simply trust God? If so, why was Christ's incarnation and death necessary? Such questions must lead us back to a careful examination of what Paul does and does *not* say in Galatians 3 about Christ's role in justification.

In the interest of brevity and clarity, I will state my conclusions in the form of theses for disputation, a tactic for which our forefather Luther provided honorable precedent. You will no doubt be relieved to know that my theses number not nineth-five but four, two negative in form and two constructive.

> 1) Nowhere in Galatians 3 does Paul place any emphasis on the salvific efficacy of the individual activity of "believing."
>
> 2) Nowhere in Galatians 3 does Paul speak of Jesus Christ as the object towards which human faith is to be directed. (Gal. 2:16 is another matter; see below.)
>
> 3) *Pistis Iesou Christou* in Gal. 3:22 (and 2:20, etc.) refers to "Jesus Christ's faithfulness," his obedience in fulfilling God's redemptive purpose. Paul characteristically insists that we are redeemed/justified not by *our* believing but by Jesus Christ's faithfulness on our behalf.
>
> 4) This more christologically-oriented reading of Galatians illuminates in a new way the integral relation between theology and ethics in Paul's gospel.

Obviously, such claims can only be tested through detailed exegesis. The consequences for our overall understanding of Paul are considerable.[8] Of course, it is not possible here to undertake a complete exegetical study of Galatians 3. I will focus on three verses (3:22, 3:11, and 3:2) and then sketch briefly the implications for our overall understanding of the letter.

II. Galatians 3: Exegetical Probes

A. Gal. 3:22

The easiest place to begin our discussion is Gal. 3:22, because the *RSV* translation, which reflects the popular reading of Pauline theology, is so clearly strained and implausible. *RSV* renders the text as follows: "But the Scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to all those who believe." This translation is unacceptable for several reasons.

First, the formulation is redundant: why does Paul need to say both "to faith in Jesus Christ" and "to those who believe"? He could more easily have written ". . . in order that what was promised might be given to those who believe in Jesus Christ." This suggests that the phrase *ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou* might have some other meaning and function in the sentence.

Secondly, a very strong case can be made that it is not idiomatic Greek usage to express the object of faith with an objective genitive construction. Hellenistic Greek prefers to designate the object of faith with the dative case (cf. Gen. 15:6, quoted in Gal. 3:6: *Abraam episteusen tō theō*) or by using the prepositions *epi* or *eis*. Apparent exceptions such as Mark 11:22 can be found, but Paul's usage seems to conform to the more conventional pattern. See, for example, Rom. 4:25: *tois pisteuousin epi ton egeiranta Iēsoun ton kyrion hēmōn ek nekrōn* (". . . to those who believe in the one who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead"). When Paul wants to speak of believing *in* Jesus Christ, as he does in Gal. 2:16, he uses the preposition *eis* (cf. also Col. 2:5). All of this suggests that the construction *ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou* in Gal. 3:22 should not be interpreted as a reference to "faith in Jesus Christ." Perhaps the most arresting parallel to this phrase is to be found in Rom. 4:16: *ek pisteōs Abraam*. Here Paul certainly does *not* intend to refer to "faith in Abraham"; he means simply "Abraham's faith." In light of this parallel, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that the similar phrase in Gal. 3:22 should be understood to mean "Jesus Christ's faith."

Thirdly, the *RSV* is almost surely wrong in taking *ek pisteōs Iēsou*

[5]This is one of the ways in which Paul's parenesis differs most significantly from Betz's parallels.
[6]G. M. Taylor, "The Function of *Pistis Christou* in Galatians," *JBL 85* (1966), p. 74.
[7]G. Ebeling, *Word and Faith* (Fortress, 1963), p. 203.
[8]Much of the exegetical work that follows here represents a distillation of material developed at greater length in my dissertation, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* (SBLDS 56, Scholars, 1983), pp. 139–91. For fuller documentation of the arguments advanced here, I refer the reader to that more technical study.

Christou as a modifier of the noun *epaggelia* ("promise" or, as the *RSV* has it, "that which was promised"). Nowhere in Paul's discussion has he alluded to anything that was promised to faith in Jesus Christ. The promise which has been under discussion is the promise to Abraham (cf. Gen. 17:8), which of course makes no reference to faith in Christ. In fact, Paul has already explicitly insisted that the promise was given only to Abraham and to Christ (3:16). Furthermore, in 2:16 and 3:8,11,24 Paul uses the prepositional phrase *ek pisteōs* adverbially as a modifier of the main verb in a clause, rather than adjectivally. These observations taken together suggest that in 3:22 *ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou* should be taken to modify the verb *dothē*, yielding a translation as follows: ". . . in order that what was promised might be given (to) faith in Jesus Christ, to those who believe."

The parentheses in this translation, however, already point to a fourth and final difficulty with the *RSV* rendering. The preposition *ek* means "out of, from," not "to." By no conceivable stretch of the imagination can it bear the force that the *RSV* here requires it to bear. In Gal. 3:22 *pistis Iēsou Christou* must designate not the *receiver* of the promise but the *source* out of which or through which the promise is given to those who believe (*tois pisteuousin*).

In light of these observations, we may now propose an alternative translation: "But Scripture locked everything up under sin in order that what was promised might be given through Jesus Christ's faithfulness to those who believe." Note that I have translated *pistis* here as "faithfulness"; the word has a wider semantic range than the English word "faith," and it regularly connotes faithfulness, trust, or reliability. These are its dominant connotations; the notion of cognitive belief is definitely secondary. My interpretation of Gal. 3:22 requires us to suppose that Paul, rather than writing an awkward, redundant sentence, is playing upon a double sense of *pistis/pisteuō*: Christ's faithfulness (*pistis*) to God, manifested in his death on the cross "for us" (cf. 2:20, 3:13), becomes the basis upon which those who believe (*hoi pisteuontes*) now receive the blessing promised to Abraham.

Does this interpretation make sense? Is it consonant with the kerygma expressed elsewhere in Paul's letters? Consider, for example, Rom. 5:19: "For just as through the disobedience of one man the many were constituted as sinners, so also through the obedience of one man the many were constituted righteous (*dikaioi*)." One could hardly ask for a clearer statement of a christology which portrays Christ's faithful obedience as soteriologically efficacious on behalf of others. Notice also the extremely interesting passage in Eph. 3:12 which refers to "Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and confidence of access through his faith (*dia tēs pisteōs autou*)" (my translation—note again how the *RSV*'s "through our faith in him" contorts the straightforward sense of the Greek). Though I cannot assemble all the evidence here, I think that a very good case can be made that Paul conceived of Jesus Christ as cosmic protagonist (*archegos*, in the language of Hebrews) who enacts the destiny of his people; his self-sacrificial faithfulness is vicariously effective on behalf of all who participate in him.

Once we begin to catch the vision represented by this sort of christology, new exegetical possibilities open up at every turn in Galatians. Consider, for example, Gal. 2:16, which has often been claimed as a definitive proof text for the view that *pistis Iēsou Christou* must mean "faith in Jesus Christ." In the first place, as Betz has rightly observed, this speech of Paul to Cephas (2:14–21) is full of highly condensed formulations, many of them perhaps echoing early Christian confessional language. Paul is here sounding themes which he will explicate in the rest of the letter. This means that our interpretation of *pistis* in 2:16 must be shaped by Paul's explicit discussion and usage in chapters 3–6. If 2:16 is interpreted on the analogy of 3:22, in which *pistis* is evidently ascribed both to Christ and to "believers," a very clear sense results: "Knowing that a person is not justified on the basis of works of the law (*ex ergōn nomou*) but through Jesus Christ's faithfulness, we also placed our faith in Christ Jesus in order that we might be justified on the basis of Christ's faithfulness and not on the basis of works of Law." Certainly Paul's formulation affirms that "we believed in Christ Jesus" (*hēmeis eis Christon Iēsoun episteusamen*); here Christ is clearly presented as the object of human faith/trust. But the different grammatical construction in 2:16a,c (*dia/ek pisteōs Iēsou Christou*) signals a different and equally important affirmation: Jesus Christ's faithfulness (not our faith) is the ground of justification.

Likewise, in Gal. 2:20, when Paul declares that "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me," his radical declaration is further explicated by his confession that "I live in/by the faith(fulness) of the Son of God (*en pistei zō tē tou huiou tou theou*) who loved me and gave himself for me." Paul is certainly not saying here that he lives by virtue of his own act of believing in the Son of God; he has just relinquished any claim to be the acting subject of his own life. Instead, he is affirming that the acting subject is Christ, whose faithfulness is here closely linked with his loving self-sacrifice. The whole context portrays Christ as the active agent and Paul as the instrument through whom and for whom Christ acted and acts. This assertion of the priority of Christ's faithfulness over our willing and acting is the theological heartbeat of the whole letter.

B. Gal. 3:11

In Gal. 3:11 we have a classic example of a text whose meaning has long been obscured in spite of—or perhaps *because* of—extensive exegetical investigation. The wrong questions have been put to the text. Since the Reformation, interpreters have engaged in long and fruitless debates over the question of whether the phrase *ek pisteōs* ("by faith") should be taken as a modifier of the verb *zēsetai* ("shall live") or of the subject of the clause, *ho dikaios* ("the righteous one"). In other words, should the passage be understood to say "the righteous one shall live by faith" or "the one-who-is-righteous-by-faith shall live"? Despite all the exegetical energy expended in the past on this issue, I would argue that what we have here is a distinction without a difference. If the apostle Paul came and sat down among us today, I suspect that we would have a hard time explaining to him what was at stake in these different translations.

The really interesting question concerning Gal. 3:11 is "Who is *ho dikaios*?" Who is "the righteous one" about whom Habakkuk prophesied? Generally, our exegetical tradition has assumed unreflectively that the singular adjective *dikaios* has a generic significance: "the righteous person, whoever he or she may be." The *KJV* rendered this passage as "the just shall live by faith," as though the Greek text read *hoi dikaioi* (plural). Indeed, this is how the Habakkuk passage was understood at Qumran, and it is probably a faithful reflection of the meaning of the Hebrew text of Habakkuk. But we must ask how *Paul* understood this passage. There is compelling evidence to suggest that Paul, who characteristically cites the Septuagint version of OT texts, would have understood this passage from Habakkuk as a messianic prophecy, with *ho dikaios*

Christ's faithful self-giving is not to be understood simply as a magical metaphysical transaction or as a superhero's act of rescue which leaves us in an attitude of grateful passivity.

understood as a messianic title: "The Righteous One." The Septuagint rendering of Hab. 2:3–4 is unmistakably messianic:

> ". . . the vision still awaits its time, and will rise to its fulfillment and not be in vain. If *he* delays, wait for *him*, because *a Coming One* will arrive and will not linger; if he draws back, my soul will have no pleasure in him; but *the Righteous One* shall live by my faith."[9]

C. H. Dodd suggested more than thirty years ago that the logic of Paul's argument in Galatians 3 indicates that Paul is drawing here on a pre-Christian tradition which already recognized this Habbakuk passage as a *testimonium* to the coming of the Messiah. Dodd did not carry his intuition through to the conclusion that *ho dikaios* must be a designation for the Messiah, but that conclusion lies read-

[9]The translation is that of A. T. Hanson, *Studies in Paul's Technique and Theology* (SPCK, 1974), p. 42. I have added the emphasis. Hanson is one scholar who has argued for the messianic interpretation of *ho dikaios* in Gal. 3:11.

ily at hand, especially when we know that *ho dikaios* was used in this way during the intertestamental period (e.g., 1 Enoch 38:2) and that it functions as a designation for Christ in several other places in the NT (e.g., Acts 3:14, 7:52, 22:14, 1 Pet. 3:18, 1 John 2:1).

Furthermore, there is undeniable evidence in the immediate context that Paul tended to read the OT through messianic eyeglasses. In Gal. 3:16, Paul insists (in a way that appears to us highly arbitrary and tendentious) that the "seed" of Gen. 17:8 is a reference to Christ and *only* to Christ. His point is that God's promise was given to Abraham and to his singular "seed" (the Messiah), and that the Gentiles therefore receive the blessing of Abraham only because they participate "in Christ Jesus" (cf. Gal. 3:14). There is every reason to think, then, that Paul would take the singular form of *dikaios* in Hab. 2:4 just as seriously as he takes the singular form of *sperma* in Gen. 17:8. We can imagine him (on the analogy of Gal. 3:16) explicating Hab. 2:4 by declaring, "It does not say 'righteous ones,' referring to many; but, referring to one, 'the Righteous One.'" In Paul's eyes, the messianic meaning of Hab. 2:4 would have been unavoidable.

What then would be Paul's point in Gal. 3:11? The example of Jesus Christ himself indicates clearly that no one is justified by the Law. A paraphrase will make my interpretation clear:

> "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the Law; for, as the Scripture says, even the Messiah, the Righteous One, will find life not by the Law but by faith."

Anyone who has worked on this passage knows that Gal. 3:10–12 is full of perplexing exegetical snares; nonetheless, the proposal advanced here goes a long way towards clarifying the logic of Paul's argument. The unifying idea throughout this central section of Galatians 3 is that we receive justification (or "the promise") vicariously because we participate in the fate of the Messiah, Jesus Christ, who was vindicated by God and received life/justification not because of "works of Law" but because he was faithful even in undergoing a death which made him an accursed outcast in the eyes of the Law. As a consequence of his faithfulness, he receives the blessing promised to Abraham, and we share in that blessing because we are "in" him. This way of thinking does not come naturally to most of us, but it is the way that *Paul* thought. If we want to follow his argument, we have to do it on his terms.

C. Gal. 3:2

But what about the very opening of Galatians 3? Is it not true that Paul's rhetorical questions in vv. 2–5 make it clear that the Galatians received the Spirit "by hearing with faith"? Once again, I believe that the *RSV* translation rests upon questionable preconceptions about the shape of Paul's theology and that the Greek text, considered in light of Paul's usage elsewhere, might lead us to a rather different interpretation.

The key phrase, occurring both in v. 2 and v. 5, is *ex akoēs pisteōs*, which the *RSV* translates as "by hearing with faith." This is certainly a possible translation of the words; here, unlike Gal. 3:22, no violence is done to Paul's language or syntax. The problem, however, is that both nouns in this extremely condensed phrase are ambiguous. *Akoē* can mean either the act of hearing or that which is heard (= report, message). *Pistis* can mean either the act of believing or that which is believed (= "the faith"). Although commentators often insist that the objectification of *pistis* as a designation for the content of the Christian proclamation is a phenomenon which occurs only later in the pastoral epistles, the evidence of Gal. 1:23 flatly contradicts this claim: "He who once persecuted us is now preaching the faith (*tēn pistin*) which he once tried to destroy." (Cf. also 3:23–25.) Thus we must at least consider the possibility that our phrase in Gal. 3:2 means "by hearing the faith," although the absence of the definite article makes this unlikely.

More crucial is the question about the meaning of *akoē*. Paul uses the word elsewhere in his letters in both of the senses described above. The closest parallels to the present context, however, are found in Rom. 10:17 and 1 Thess. 2:13. In the former, a quotation from Is. 53:1, *akoē* unambiguously means "message": "Lord who has believed our message?" In the latter, the sense is somewhat murkier, but the meaning seems to be ". . . you received God's 'word of proclamation' (*logon akoēs*) from us." If these parallels shed light on Gal. 3:2, the upshot would be that Paul is contending that the Galatians received the spirit not through their act of *hearing* the gospel but through the *proclamation* of the gospel to them. Clearly neither of these interpretations excludes the other in principle, but the difference in emphasis is significant. The reading proposed here is consistent with Paul's well-attested belief that the proclaimed word of the gospel is itself powerful and effectual (cf. Rom. 1:16, 1 Thess. 1:5, 2:13).

The matter can be put another way. The conventional interpretation, reflected in the *RSV*, attributes to Paul the idea that the Galatians received the Spirit not because they did "X" (performed works) but because they did "Y" (heard and believed). That way of reading the text raises all the problems discussed above, by presenting faith as a human accomplishment which elicits God's approval. The interpretation that I am proposing locates the point of contrast within 3:2 somewhat differently: the contrast is not between two modes of human activity (works/believing) but between human activity (works) and God's activity (the proclaimed message). Readers will have to judge for themselves which way of describing the contrast more faithfully captures Paul's fundamental concerns.

III. Conclusions and Implications

The brief exegetical probes offered here do not yet provide a full account of the logic of Paul's argument in Galatians 3, but they do provide some indication of the way in which I think the thrust of that argument ought to be understood. Paul is not interested in "believing" as a mode of human activity which is somehow inherently salvific, nor does he give more than passing mention (2:16) to the idea that our faith is directed towards Jesus Christ as object. The emphasis of Paul's theological response to the Galatian crisis lies upon Christ's activity for us. This activity of Christ is understood by Paul as a loving, self-sacrificial obedience to God, which is best described by the single word *pistis*, faithfulness. This faithfulness of Jesus Christ is the efficient cause of the redemption/liberation of God's people.

Paul's objection to the Galatians' flirtation with Law is twofold:

> 1) He fears that they will fall into the error of supposing that their own actions are necessary in order to accomplish something which Christ has already accomplished. He jealously insists upon both the sufficiency and the priority of Christ's sacrificial self-giving on the cross for us.
>
> 2) He fears that the Law will become a cause for division and conflict within the church, reestablishing a barrier between Jews and Gentiles which Christ's death had abolished. Our attention to matters of exegetical detail in this paper has precluded sufficient development of this theme, but it must never be forgotten that Paul's letter to the Galatians is a pastoral letter addressing the problems of whether the Jewish Law is binding on Gentile believers (it is *not* a treatise on how troubled souls can find salvation). Paul's understanding of God's act of deliverance in Christ leads him to a vision of the church as a community in which the divisions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female, are reconciled, as all become one in Christ (3:28). The meaning of justification is inseparable from the concrete reality of the community in which Christ's love is at work. Self-asserting practices which jeopardize the unity of the community are a de facto denial of Christ and of the reality of grace (5:4).

It is at this point that we can begin to see more clearly the integral relation between theology and ethics in the letter. Christ's faithful self-giving is not to be understood simply as a magical metaphysical transaction or as a super-hero's act of rescue which leaves us in an attitude of grateful passivity. "For freedom Christ has set us free" (5:1), and this freedom is to be exercised in serving one another through love (5:14). In other words, our free obedience to God is to take on the shape of Jesus Christ's obedience. That (I would suggest) is what it means to "fulfill the Law of Christ" (6:2), through bearing one another's burdens. This is likewise what Paul has in mind when he exclaims (4:19), "My little children, with whom I am in travail until Christ be formed among you!" (not inwardly, in your individual hearts, but concretely in loving community).[10] For these reasons I would insist, against Betz, that Paul does offer the Gala-

tians a "specifically Christian ethic," an ethic which derives its material norms not from conventional wisdom but from the scandal of a Messiah "publicly proclaimed as crucified" (3:1). Those who believe this message and become incorporate in him will share his destiny; thus, our faith will recapitulate the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

What are the practical political implications of such a gospel? That question must be answered with prayerful discernment in the various situations in which we find ourselves. One thing is clear, however: there *are* political implications. According to the Reformers, "faith in Jesus Christ" sets us free from guilt; according to *Paul*, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ sets us free to serve one another in love. Thus the proclamation of the gospel necessarily leads to the formation of human communities which take the shape of Christ (4:19) and thus embody "faith working through love" (5:6).

[10]All of these issues concerning the shape and content of Paul's ethics are considered in greater detail in my essay, "The Law of Christ: Christology and Ethics in Galatians," in a forthcoming book on theology and ethics in Galatians, co-authored by Beverly R. Gaventa, David J. Lull and myself.

The Good, the Bad and the Troubled: Studies in Theodicy

by Marguerite Shuster

When Bad Things Happen to Good People **by Harold S. Kushner (Schocken, 1981, 149 pp., $10.95).**

Evil and the Christian God **by Michael Peterson (Baker, 1982, 160 pp., $7.95).**

Learning to Live with Evil **by Theodore Plantinga (Eerdmans, 1982, 163 pp., $5.95).**

How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong? **by Lewis Smedes (Harper and Row, 1982, 132 pp., $5.95).**

Of all the thorny problems in theology, none commands more existential and philosophical concern than theodicy—the problem of justifying a perfectly good, omnipotent God in the face of the myriad evils besetting this world. No problem provides a more potent weapon for the skeptic; none, a greater challenge to the faith of the simple believer; none, a stickier logical dilemma for the scholar. Attempts to deal with the issue seem to rise like waves and then subside, each carrying some in its sweep but leaving most dissatisfied. For instance, Alvin Plantinga's brilliant demonstration of some years ago *(God and Other Minds)* that no amount of evil can be proved inconsistent with the existence of a perfectly good, all-powerful God, may satisfy the canons of symbolic logic, but it fails to still the protests of the wounded human spirit. And so the attempts continue.

Naturally, the Gordian knot unravels quite simply when either of its two primary strands—God's absolute goodness and his omnipotence—is dissolved. Many modern efforts, like those of process theology, take this tack, doing away with the problem and with Christian orthodoxy at a single stroke. A number of other options do exist, however, five of which I shall enumerate.

1. "The best of all possible worlds." Many argue that, *all things considered*, no *better* world than this one could be designed; and, therefore, this world is consistent with our beliefs about God. For instance, could we know what "good" and "beautiful" are if there were no "evil" and "ugly" (contrast necessary to our perceptions)? Would we not lose an arena for "soul-making" (posited as a primary value) if there were no opportunities for struggle, heroism, sacrifice? Is it logically possible to design a rich, varied world, populated by numerous individuals who are not mere machines but have choices (see #3, below), without conflicts which produce evil arising?

2. Eschatology, or "pie in the sky bye and bye." Many believe that looking just at our temporal lifetime is taking much too narrow a view. When we get to heaven, we not only will be rewarded in a way that turns our earthly sufferings to nothing, but also we will see clearly why our lives and the lives of others were ordered as they were; and we will rejoice at the perfection of God's plan.

3. Free will. Traditionally, theologians have placed heavy emphasis on the genuine freedom God bestows upon moral agents (including angels; so demonic sources of evil fit here). In order to love God freely—the ultimate good—we must also be free to turn from him, to put something or someone else in his place. When we do, evil results. God voluntarily limits his power to curb evil by preserving our freedom.

4. Theophany (here used to mean not necessarily an actual, physical appearance of God, but rather a psychologically or spiritually compelling manifestation of God to an individual). Christians often report than in times of trial, God makes his presence and love known to them so powerfully that they are certain "everything will be all right"—*no matter what happens*. Their subjective experience of God's goodness and care overwhelms all logical evidence to the contrary. In its extreme form, such an experience resembles mystical experiences of "unity," in which distinctions between good and evil are dissolved.

5. "I don't know." At its worst, the "I don't know" response is an intellectually and/or emotionally dishonest, head-in-the-sand evasion of a faith-disrupting problem. At its best it is a frank admission that we must walk by faith and not by sight; that our logic will surely betray us if we deify it; that we will not by our searching find out God.

Having set the stage, then, let us turn to four recent, highly diverse approaches to the problem of evil. Although all are clear and nontechnical enough for the general reader, there the similarity among them in style and content ends.

In **Evil and the Christian God**, Michael Peterson sets out not only to demonstrate that the Christian God and evil are not incompatible, but more, that the nature of evil in the world actually supports a theistic understanding of reality. To address the problem at its most difficult, he accepts at face value the common human feeling that much evil we experience is pointless; and then he argues that precisely this gratuitous evil is what we should expect if a good God, concerned for our freedom and for soul-making, were in control (see #'s 1 and 3, above; Peterson explicitly denies that this is the best of all possible worlds, but many of his arguments follow almost exactly the same lines as those of persons who make that affirmation). All he needs to do to reach this conclusion is to reject what he calls "the doctrine of meticulous providence"—namely, belief that a truly good, omnipotent, omniscient God would not allow truly pointless evil; that, indeed, such a God would be "fastidious" in preventing it. Once one has scrapped that belief, one can quickly proceed to argue that true human freedom plus the lawful natural order needed to provide a "neutral moral environment" for human development together easily produce the devastating array of evils we actually observe. God's integrity remains unimpugned.

I find this book logically unpersuasive, humanly callous, and

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