

Preface

All of the essays in this volume except two were published—one in a *Festschrift* and the others in various scholarly journals—between 1981 and 2013. Except for minor editing to bring them into conformity with the Polebridge Press format and style, the correction of some typographical errors, and the re-wording of a very few sentences in the interest of greater clarity, these articles appear in the present volume exactly as they were originally published. Both of the essays that have not previously been published—“‘There Is Not Male and Female’: A Pauline Addition in Galatians 3:28” and “The Story of Peter and Cornelius as a Corrective to Galatians 2:11–14”—were completed in 2014.

Working through materials that I wrote during a span of more than three decades has been an interesting and, in some respects, a humbling experience. On the one hand, I still find myself in basic agreement with most of what I wrote during the earlier years of my career. On the other hand, it is now clear to me that I could have expressed myself more clearly and cogently at some points, and, in some respects, my thinking has evolved over the years. For example, in some of my earlier work, I simply assumed that Gal 2:7b–8 was written by Paul; later, I became convinced that this was a non-Pauline interpolation. Similarly, I simply assumed at one time, along with most other contemporary New Testament scholars, that the Book of Acts was written in the first century and that its author was not familiar with any of the Pauline letters; now, I am persuaded that Acts was written in the second century—perhaps as late as the middle of the second century—and that its author did know and, indeed, use a collection of the Pauline letters. A more abrupt shift in my thinking has related to Paul’s attitude toward women. Until quite recently, I thought that his radical egalitarianism simply rested upon a foundation already laid by Jesus and within the pre-Pauline church. I am now persuaded, however, that the evidence regarding Jesus and the pre-Pauline church is scanty and, at best, questionable and

that Paul may well have been the first to articulate the radical egalitarianism expressed in Gal 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, *there is not male and female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

It has been particularly my interest in the question of interpolations in the Pauline letters that has informed much of my work over the past forty years. Most of this work was incorporated into my book, *Interpolations in the Pauline Letters*, which was published by Sheffield Academic Press in 2001, but the present volume includes chapters arguing that four additional passages are, in fact, later non-Pauline interpolations.

I am grateful to Larry Alexander, publisher of Polebridge Press, for accepting my proposal to publish this collection of essays on Paul and his legacy, and no words of mine can adequately express my appreciation to the team of Cassandra Farrin, Char Matejovsky, and Robaire Ream for the skillful and highly professional way in which they have moved my materials through the process of publication. It is to them that I attribute much of the quality of this volume; whatever problems there are, however, should be laid at my door.

My thanks to the following journals and publishers for permission to include previously-published materials in this volume:

- *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*: “Why Paul Went to Jerusalem: The Interpretation of Galatians 2:1–5”; “Galatians 2:7b–8 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation”; “First Corinthians 15:29–34 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation”; and “Apollos and Timothy as the Unnamed ‘Brothers’ in 2 Corinthians 8:18–24.”
- *Journal of Biblical Literature*: “Translation and Interpretation of Ἐὰν Μὴ in Galatians 2:16”; and “Galatians 2:8 and the Question of Paul’s Apostleship.”
- *New Testament Studies* (Cambridge University Press): “Does the ‘We’ in Galatians 2:15–17 Include Paul’s Opponents?”; “Second Corinthians 6:14–7:1 and the Chiasmic Structure of 6:11–13; 7:2–3”; and “The Portrayal of Aquila and Priscilla in Acts: The Question of Sources.”

- *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* (Sage Publications): “Second Corinthians 3:7–18 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation”; and “Romans 8:29–30 as a Non-Pauline Interpolation.”
- *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* (Sage Publications): “Acts and the Pauline Corpus Reconsidered.”
- *The Expository Times* (Sage Publications): “The Timothy-Titus Problem Reconsidered.”
- *Trinity University Studies in Religion* (Trinity University Department of Religion): “The ‘Theology of Woman’s Place’ and the ‘Paulinist’ Tradition.”
- Mercer University Press: “Acts and the Pauline Corpus Revisited: Peter’s Speech at the Jerusalem Conference.”

Chapter 1

Why Paul Went to Jerusalem

The Interpretation of Galatians 2:1–5

The interpretation of Gal 2:1–5 (and indeed of vv. 1–10 as a whole)¹ involves a number of important and perplexing exegetical, historical, and theological problems. Among these is the question of the syntactical relations among the various sections of vv. 1–5: (a) the account of Paul’s Jerusalem trip in vv. 1–2; (b) the mention of circumcision in relation to Titus in v. 3; and (c) the reference to the “false brothers” in vv. 4–5. Particularly problematic is the fact that vv. 4–5 (usually translated as “but² because of the false brothers secretly brought in . . .”) constitute an elaborate prepositional phrase that appears, at least initially, to have no syntactical relation to what precedes or follows. Thus, most commentators treat the verses as some type of anacoluthon, ellipsis, or parenthesis.³

“Why Paul Went to Jerusalem: The Interpretation of Galatians 2:1–5.” *CBQ* 54,3 (July 1992) 503–10. Copyright © 1992 Catholic Biblical Association of America. Reprinted with permission.

1. Ramsay, among others, maintains that “though one may thrust in a period here or there, it is really one sentence that runs through verses 1–10” (*Historical Commentary*, 289).

2. I shall suggest below that the more appropriate translation of *de* in this case is “and”; see BAGD, 171: “Most common translations: *but*, when a contrast is clearly implied; *and*, when a simple connective is desired, without contrast.”

3. A notable exception is O’Neill (*Recovery of Paul’s Letter*, 32–33), who regards the *de* of v. 4 as a later addition to the text and translates vv. 3–4 as follows: “for not even my companion who was a Greek was compelled to be circumcised on account of the false intruding brothers who came in to spy out the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. . . .” For a thorough discussion of the issues, see Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 77–86. Burton (pp. 79–82) mentions three possible types of construction for the prepositional phrase: (1) “those which make it limit some following word”; (2) “those which make [it] limit what precedes, introducing an expegetic addition to the preceding statement”; and (3) “those which make [it] limit something supplied from the preceding.” His own conclusion is that a form of the third type “alone brings this portion of

Hans Dieter Betz, for example, regards vv. 4–5 as “a grammatical anacoluthon” and interprets the verses as a “digression” from the primary discussion in vv. 1–3: “After Paul had reported the outcome of the confrontation in 2:3, the digression in 2:4–5 returns to that confrontation and gives a more detailed account of it.” Linking vv. 4–5 logically to the immediately preceding v. 3,⁴ Betz apparently assumes that the activity of the “false brothers” occurred in Jerusalem at the time of Paul’s visit and was directly related to the question of the circumcision of Titus. Thus, he proposes to translate vv. 4–5 as follows: “Now this happened because of the false brothers secretly brought in . . .”⁵

Bernard Orchard, on the other hand, argues that vv. 3–5 represent an “ellipsis” or parenthesis within vv. 1–10 and that vv. 4–5 comprise a secondary parenthesis within vv. 3–5. According to Orchard, Paul interrupts his account of the trip to Jerusalem (vv. 1–2, 6–10) to point out that the issue of Titus’ circumcision was not even raised in Jerusalem, as would have been expected had the leaders there been in disagreement with Paul’s version of the law-free gospel (v. 3). This parenthetical statement is then further interrupted by the elliptical “But because of the false brothers . . .” of vv. 4–5, which Orchard proposes to complete with some such words as “the liberty of the Gentiles is now in danger” or “this question has now arisen.”⁶ Orchard’s argument is, for the most

the paragraph into line with the apostle’s general argument by which he aims to show his entire independence, even of the other apostles” (pp. 81–82); thus, Burton suggests (p. 77) the following translation: “And not even Titus . . . was compelled to be circumcised, and (what shows more fully the significance of the fact) it was urged because of the false brethren.”

4. In principle, the particle *de* could “throw the reference” either forward (beginning a new sentence, which, for some reason, Paul never completes) or backward (introducing a subordinate clause that is somehow related to what immediately precedes); most scholars opt for the latter.

5. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary*, 89–92.

6. Orchard, “Note on the Meaning of Galatians ii.3–5”; “New Solution,” esp. pp. 165–67; “Ellipsis between Galatians 2,3 and 2,4,” with reaction by Blommerde, “Is there an Ellipsis?,” and reply by Orchard, “Once Again the Ellipsis”; idem., “Ellipsis and Parenthesis,” 249–58. Note that Bruce (*Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, 116) prefers to fill in the ellipsis with “the question of circumcising Gentile converts was first raised.”

part, accepted by F. F. Bruce, who suggests the following reconstruction of the course of events:

When Paul and Barnabas visited Jerusalem on the occasion referred to in v 1, nothing was said about requiring Gentile converts to be circumcised, although Titus was with them and would have constituted a test case had any one been minded to raise the question. The question was not raised until later, when certain ‘false brethren’ infiltrated the church of Antioch, the headquarters of Gentile Christianity, and tried to insist on circumcision. Paul and his colleagues made no concession to those men—whatever rumours to the contrary may have been spread abroad—for a concession on this issue would have jeopardized the integrity of the gospel. And the position which Paul and his colleagues took then is the position which Paul takes now towards the crisis in the churches of Galatia.⁷

Thus, Orchard and Bruce locate the activity of the “false brothers” not in Jerusalem at the time of Paul’s visit but later in Antioch or perhaps Galatia.

Contrary to Betz, Orchard, Bruce, and most other commentators, I now propose to revive a quite different interpretation of Gal 2:1–5.⁸ I believe that the two prepositional phrases, *de kata apokalypsin* (v. 2) and *dia de tous pareisaktous pseudadelphous . . .* (v. 4), are syntactically parallel, that both are linked to the verb, *anebēn* (v. 2), and that, together, they indicate the twofold reason for Paul’s trip to Jerusalem (note that both are introduced by *de*). Thus, in vv. 2–5, Paul asserts that he “went up in accordance with a revelation . . . and because of the false brothers” and comments briefly and almost parenthetically regarding each aspect of the reason after mentioning it.⁹ The trip was undertaken in obedience

7. Bruce, *Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, 116–17.

8. Burton notes (*Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, 80) that the interpretation now to be proposed was “advocated by some of the older modern expositors,” citing Sieffert, *Der Brief an die Galater*.

9. Note that Paul continues the parenthetical style in vv. 6–10: “what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality” (v. 6b); and “for he who worked through Peter for the mission to the circumcised worked through me also for the Gentiles” (v. 8).

to a revelation that Paul should go and lay his gospel before the leaders in Jerusalem, apparently with the hope of obtaining their stamp of approval (v. 2). That he was successful in this regard is indicated by the fact that “even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek” (v. 3; cf. “those . . . who were of repute added nothing to me” in v. 6).¹⁰ The historical occasion for the revelation, however, and thus in a very real sense also a part of Paul’s reason for going to Jerusalem, was the prior activity (in Antioch?)¹¹ of the “false brothers” who had objected to his version of the gospel (v. 4). Regarding these false brothers, Paul insists that “we did not yield submission [to them] even for a moment” (v. 5).¹²

Thus understood, the meaning of Gal 2:1–5 can be set forth in “sense lines” as follows:

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with
Barnabas, taking Titus along with me,

And I went up by revelation and laid before them—but privately
before those who were of repute—the gospel that
I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be

10. The introduction of the reference to Titus (v. 3) with the conjunction *alla* (“but”) might appear to disrupt the preceding reference to Paul’s Jerusalem trip and thus to relate v. 3 to what follows in v. 4. I believe, however, that the disruption points only to the last part of v. 2 (“lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain”), not to vv. 2–3 as a whole. Paul had apparently entertained at least the hypothetical fear that he might have been “running in vain” in his proclamation to the Gentiles, but his apprehension was set at ease by the fact that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised.

11. Acts 15:1–2 appears to indicate Antioch (14:26–28); Gal 1:21–24, however, might suggest the broader regions of Syria and Cilicia.

12. There is a very real sense in which v. 3 and v. 5 are parallel: the former is a parenthetical statement illustrating the success of Paul’s trip to Jerusalem; the latter, in similar parenthetical fashion, emphasizes Paul’s refusal to yield to the “false brothers.” This parallelism is in no way destroyed by the fact that v. 3 refers to what happened in Jerusalem, while v. 5 points to what had happened earlier, probably in Antioch. As to why Paul mentions first what happened later (vv. 1–3) and only later what had occurred earlier (vv. 4–5), see below.

running or had run in vain (but even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek);

and [it is also true that I went up] because of the false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus in order that they might enslave us (to whom we did not yield submission even for a moment) in order that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

The advantages of such an interpretation of Gal 2:1–5 are obvious: it eliminates the need to regard vv. 4–5 as an anacoluthon, ellipsis, or parenthesis by providing a clear syntactical link with the immediately preceding material (vv. 1–3). It also makes possible a clear and consistent chronological reconstruction of the course of events narrated in vv. 1–5: (a) the activity of the “false brothers”; (b) Paul’s refusal to submit to them; (c) the revelation that he should go to Jerusalem; and (d) the actual trip and its results. Finally, this interpretation of Gal 2:1–5 is consistent with the account in Acts 15:1–3, which cites the activity of Judaizers from Judea and the resulting controversy (in Antioch) as the occasion for Paul’s trip to Jerusalem.¹³ In this regard, I am by no means suggesting that the exegesis of Galatians (or any of Paul’s letters) should be controlled or even guided by the narrative in Acts. Nevertheless, all other things being equal, an interpretation of Galatians that is in harmony with Acts would appear, *prima facie*, to be preferable to one that conflicts.¹⁴

13. There is some question, of course, about whether Gal 2:1–10 and Acts 15:1–29 refer to the same occurrence; I am following what Bruce (*Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, 108) refers to as “the majority view” in assuming that they do.

14. The question of the historical reliability of Acts is, of course, a difficult one; see, e.g., Haenchen, “Book of Acts as Source Material”; idem., *Acts of the Apostles*, 98–103; and, for a somewhat different perspective, Hengel, *Acts and the History of Earliest Christianity*. If, as some scholars still hold, Acts is based upon relatively reliable narrative sources, the interpretation of Galatians that is in harmony with Acts would certainly be

There are, however, at least three possible problems with the interpretation of Gal 2:1–5 here being proposed. The first is that Acts 15:1–3 makes no reference to divine revelation as the reason for Paul’s trip to Jerusalem. This is particularly surprising in light of the fact that Acts elsewhere associates revelation with Paul’s travel plans.¹⁵ It has often been suggested, however, that the author of Acts has at times taken features of the same Jerusalem visit and divided them between two different alleged visits. John Knox, for example, argues that the two visits reported in Acts 15:1–9 and 18:22 correspond to the one visit of Gal 2:1–10 and that the two reported in Acts 11:27–30 and 21:15 correspond to the one anticipated in 1 Cor 16:3–4 and Rom 15:25–32.¹⁶ Kirsopp Lake and others, on the other hand, have assumed that both Acts 11:27–30 and 15:1–29 deal with the visit reported in Gal 2:1–10.¹⁷ Moreover, Ernst Haenchen has suggested that Acts 11:27–30 was artificially constructed by the author of Acts on the basis of two originally unrelated traditions: (1) Agabus’ prediction of a great famine; and (2) Barnabas’ and Paul’s relief mission from Antioch to Jerusalem.¹⁸ In my judgment, however, an at least equally likely possibility is that the author constructed Acts 11:27–30 on the basis of three originally unrelated traditions: (1) Agabus’ prediction of a famine (revelation); (2) Paul’s and Barnabas’ trip to Jerusalem in response to a divine revelation (Gal 2:1–2); and (3) Paul’s carrying of a gift of money to the Christians in Jerusalem (1 Cor 16:3–4; Rom 15:25–32). If my suggestion is correct, it then becomes clear why Acts 15:1–3 makes no reference to revelation as the reason for

preferable. This might also be true, however, if, as Morton Scott Enslin suggests (*Reapproaching Paul*, 26–27), “the letters of Paul . . . appear to have been the principal source used by Luke in reconstructing the activities of the man who brought to reality the Gentile mission”; in this case, what we would have at many points in Acts is an early interpretation of materials in the Pauline letters. See also Chapter 13 in this volume, “Acts and the Pauline Corpus Reconsidered.”

15. Acts 11:27–30; 13:1–4; 16:9–10; 23:11.

16. Knox, *Chapters in a Life of Paul*, 43–52.

17. Lake, “Note XVI. The Apostolic Council of Jerusalem,” 199–204.

18. Haenchen, *Acts of the Apostles*, 378–79.

Paul's trip to Jerusalem: the author of Acts has already used the tradition of divine revelation as the reason for a trip to Jerusalem in the account of the alleged earlier trip reported in Acts 11:27–30.

A second possible problem with my interpretation of Gal 2:1–5 is the order in which the revelation and the false brothers are mentioned in the narrative. If the activity of the “false brothers” was the *occasion* for the revelation, why does Paul mention the revelation first and refer to the false brothers only in the midst of his account of the events in Jerusalem? Does this not suggest, as many have argued, that the activity of the false brothers occurred only after Paul's arrival in (or perhaps even after his departure from) Jerusalem and thus had nothing to do with his reasons for going? The answer, I believe, lies in Paul's rhetorical strategy in the first sections of Galatians. From the very beginning of the letter, Paul insists that his gospel came directly from God, not from humans.¹⁹ As a part of his argument, he explicitly notes his limited contact with the apostles in Jerusalem. Following his call, he “did not confer with flesh and blood nor go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before [him],” but rather “went away into Arabia and returned again to Damascus” (1:16–17). When, after three years, he did go to Jerusalem (apparently for the first time!), he remained with Cephas for fifteen days but “saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother” (1:18–19). The importance of this limited contact with the Jerusalem apostles is emphasized by the affirmation in 1:20, “In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!”²⁰ Thus, it is not at all surprising that when Paul refers to this second visit to Jerusalem, he goes to great pains to insist, at the very beginning of the account, that he went *only* because of a divine revelation (2:2). Once this is made clear and something is said about the purpose and outcome of the visit, he can reflect

19. See, e.g., “an apostle—not from humans or through a human but through Jesus Christ and God the Father” (1:1); and “the gospel that was preached by me is not a human gospel, for neither did I receive it from a human nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:11).

20. For similar affirmations, see 1 Thess 2:5; 2 Cor 1:23; 11:31.

back on the historical context of the revelation, which, as the occasion of the revelation, was also, in effect, a part of the reason for his trip to Jerusalem.²¹

A third possible problem with this interpretation of Gal 2:1–5 was pointed out a number of years ago by Burton. Burton acknowledged that the proposed interpretation “yield[s] a not unreasonable sense, and avoid[s] many of the difficulties encountered by the other constructions”; nevertheless, he dismissed it as “scarcely call[ing] for discussion” because “it is hardly conceivable that the reader would be expected to supply mentally a word left so far behind.”²² The word “left so far behind,” of course, is the *anebēn* (or possibly the *anathēmēn*)²³ of v. 2. This appears to be a rather serious problem, at least initially. I believe, however, that it can be resolved along essentially the same lines as was the previous one. As was suggested above, Paul’s rhetorical strategy early in Galatians is to insist that his gospel originated not with humans but with God. Central to this strategy is the emphasis upon his limited contact with the church’s Jerusalem leadership. The central issue at hand, then, is Paul’s visits to Jerusalem. Thus,

21. Perhaps an imperfect analogy might be seen in 1 Cor 1:14–16, where Paul first asserts what is most important to him at the moment—“I am thankful that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest any one should say that you were baptized in my name”—and then in effect says, almost as an afterthought, “Well, the truth is in fact a bit more complicated than this.” This analogy fails, however, in the sense that Paul does not here pursue the second point further, as is the case in Gal 2:4–5.

22. Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 80–81.

23. In his expanded paraphrase of Gal 2:1–10, Ramsay (*St. Paul the Traveller*, 55–56) suggests that the prepositional phrase of vv. 4–5 is to be linked not with *anebēn* but rather with *anethēmēn*: “Now I may explain that I went up on account of a revelation (*which shows how completely my action was directly guided by the Divine will, and how independent it was of any orders or instructions from the Apostles*). And I communicated to them with a view to consultation the gospel which I continue preaching among the Gentiles. . . . Further, the occasion of *my consulting the leading Apostles* was because of certain insinuating false brethren . . .” It is possible, of course, that the prepositional phrase is dependent upon both *anebēn* and *anethēmēn*.

in chap. 2, Paul first notes the simple fact (and timing) of the second visit (v. 1); immediately thereafter comes his insistence that the visit was undertaken only in response to divine revelation (v. 2a); then follow the purpose and something of the outcome of the visit (vv. 2b–3). Only after making it clear both that the visit was ordained by God and that it was successful does Paul apparently feel comfortable disclosing that human activity (that of the “false brothers”) played any part, even indirectly, in his decision to go to Jerusalem. Thus, in vv. 4–5, he describes briefly the occasion for the revelation and therefore also for the trip: the activity of the “false brothers” and his refusal to yield to them.²⁴ Having thus completed his explanation of his reason for going to Jerusalem, Paul then (vv. 6–10) returns to the point first raised in v. 3, that is, the outcome of the meeting.

A final point is of interest but cannot here be explored in any detail: Paul’s understanding of “revelation” and the relation between divine revelation and the events of human activity and experience. Paul speaks of his own call in terms of God’s “revelation” of Christ (Gal 1:12; cf. 1:16), and he also speaks of ongoing “revelation” in the life of the Christian (1 Cor 14:6, 26, 30; 2

24. Paul could, of course, have repeated the verb *anebēn* at the beginning of v. 4. I can only speculate why he did not. He had already used the verb twice (vv. 1 and 2), and he may simply have thought it unnecessary or even stylistically displeasing to use it yet a third time within the same sentence. If my reading of Gal 2:1–5 is correct, one might also wonder why *anebēn* was not added to the text by one or more later scribes in an attempt to make the passage more easily understandable. Again, I can only speculate. Scribes may have regarded repetition of the verb as unnecessary or undesirable for the same reasons as did Paul. On the other hand, they may (as has been the case with most modern interpreters) not have understood that *anebēn* was related to the second prepositional phrase. This latter alternative is perhaps strengthened by the fact that the textual tradition reflects various attempts to clarify the beginning of v. 5 (Marcion, for example, omitted *oude*, and the original text of D omitted *hois oude*). The fact that later scribes (and modern interpreters) failed to understand Paul’s meaning is no compelling argument, however, against any particular interpretation of Paul’s meaning.

Cor 12:1, 7).²⁵ Except in the passage under consideration, the specific *content* of a revelation is never indicated (e.g., that someone should take a trip to a specified place), although 1 Cor 14:6, 26, 30, where “revelation” is closely associated with “spiritual gifts,” rather clearly imply that there *is* such content. Surely it is not unreasonable to assume, however, that Paul saw divine revelation as situational, that is, as related to specific occasions, events, problems, questions, and the like, in much the same way as Paul’s own letters were addressed to the specific contemporary needs of his congregations. Thus, in Paul’s mind, his own controversy with the “false brothers” in Antioch and a divine revelation instructing him to confer with the apostles in Jerusalem might well have been linked as two aspects of his reason for going to Jerusalem; indeed, the revelation would likely have been viewed as God’s response to the situation.²⁶

25. In addition, Paul speaks of the “revelation” of certain divine attributes or activities, such as righteousness (Rom 1:17), righteous judgment (Rom 2:5), wrath (Rom 1:18), and wisdom (1 Cor 2:10), as well as of various aspects of eschatological “revelation” (Rom 8:18, 19; 1 Cor 1:7; 3:13). Finally, he speaks once of the “revelation” of faith (Gal 3:23).

26. This is not necessarily to suggest that Paul viewed the situation *per se* as a revelation from God or that he “saw” the revelation *in* the situation; rather, in Paul’s mind, the situation would likely have prompted the revelation in the sense that the revelation was God’s response to the situation.

Chapter 2

Translation and Interpretation of Ἐὰν Μὴ in Galatians 2:16

Without question, Paul's letter to the Galatians has played a major role in the history of Christian thought. Indeed, Donald G. Miller once claimed—no doubt with some degree of hyperbole—that “perhaps no writing of equal length has influenced the world so mightily.”¹ Along the same lines but in more restrained tones, John Knox observed that Galatians “is one of the most significant of early Christian documents, not only because of the light it throws upon Paul and the primitive churches, but also because of the influence it has exerted in subsequent history.”²

Within the letter, it is generally agreed that one particular verse—2:16—is of crucial importance. Carolyn Osiek, for example, declares that this verse “states in one sentence the core of Paul's conviction about the salvation brought by Christ vis-à-vis salvation as promised by the Law,” and Thomas C. Geer, Jr., asserts that “Galatians 2:16 is generally regarded to be the theological center of Paul's letter to the Galatians.”³

If this is true, then the accurate translation and correct interpretation of the verse are clearly matters of the utmost concern. As Geer points out, however, both the translation and the interpretation of Gal 2:16 are fraught with difficulties. At issue are such questions as: (1) the meaning of δικαιοῦν, ἔργα νόμου, and πίστις (Ἰησοῦ) Χριστοῦ; (2) the translation of ἔὰν μὴ; and (3) the relation of vv. 15–16 to the preceding verses in the chapter.⁴ Obviously, different answers to these difficult questions will

“Translation and Interpretation of Ἐὰν Μὴ.” *JBL* 116,3 (Fall 1997) 515–20. Copyright © 1997 Society of Biblical Literature. Reprinted with permission.

1. Miller, *Live As Free Men*, 11.

2. Knox, “Galatians, Letter to the,” 338.

3. Osiek, *Galatians*, 26; Geer, “Galatians 2:16,” 1.

4. Geer, “Galatians 2:16,” 1.

lead to quite diverse understandings of the meaning of the verse. For example, as Geer notes, “the recent discussion between James D. G. Dunn and Heikki Räisänen about Paul’s relationship to his former religious life has focused primarily on Galatians 2:16.” Dunn believes that the verse demonstrates Paul’s basic continuity with Judaism, while Räisänen views it as indicating the apostle’s essential break with Judaism.⁵

To be sure, the debate between Dunn and Räisänen involves all of the questions mentioned above; moreover, the questions are themselves interrelated to such an extent that a definitive answer to one would be impossible without attention also to the others. Nevertheless, it is clear that the question of the correct translation of ἐὰν μή lies at the heart of the debate between Dunn and Räisänen and, in fact, is central to an understanding of the verse as a whole. Thus, I shall focus on the question of the translation of ἐὰν μή and how this might affect the translation and interpretation of the verse as a whole.

The usual translation of the Greek phrase ἐὰν μή is “if not,” “unless,” or “except.”⁶ In Gal 2:16, however, it is almost always translated as “but only” or simply “but.”⁷ The rationale for this was articulated many years ago by Ernest de Witt Burton:

ἐὰν μή is properly exceptive . . . , but it may introduce an exception to the preceding statement taken as a whole or to the principal part of it—in this case to οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου or to οὐ δικαιούται ἄνθρωπος alone. The latter alternative is clearly to be chosen here, since the former would yield the thought that a man [*sic*] can be justified by works of law if this be accompanied by faith, a thought never expressed by the apostle and wholly at variance with his doctrine as unambiguously expressed in several pas-

5. Geer, “Galatians 2:16”; see Dunn, “New Perspective on Paul,” esp. 103–18; and Räisänen, “Galatians 2.16 and Paul’s Break with Judaism.”

6. BAGD (211) gives only “if not” and “unless” as meanings.

7. See, e.g., BDF §376: “Ἐὰν μή is seldom used for ‘but, save’ (Att. likewise) and always without verb.” Cited as examples are Gal 2:16 and Mark 4:22. In the latter case, I regard “except” as the preferable translation; the former, of course, is the verse under present consideration.

sages. . . . But since the word “except” in English is always understood to introduce an exception to the whole of what precedes, it is necessary to resort to the paraphrastic translation “but only.”⁸

Apparently following this rationale, the NRSV, for example, reads: “a person is justified not by works of the law *but* through faith in Jesus Christ”; and F. F. Bruce has: “it is not by legal works that any human being is justified *but only* by faith in Jesus Christ.”⁹ Räsänen accepts this translation of Ἐὰν μὴ and maintains that “justification by works of the law . . . is denied throughout verse 16, as it is in the rest of the letter.”¹⁰ Dunn, on the other hand, argues that Ἐὰν μὴ in Gal 2:16 should be translated in its usual sense of “except” or “unless.”¹¹ Thus, in his view, Paul appears to be saying that justification is impossible on the basis of the law *unless* faith in Christ is also present.¹²

It is my own judgment that Dunn is technically correct as regards the *translation* of Ἐὰν μὴ in Gal 2:16: it carries its usual meaning of “except” or “unless.” It is also my judgment, however, that Burton is correct as regards the *reference of the exception* introduced by Ἐὰν μὴ: the exception refers only to the words “a person is not justified,” not to “a person is not justified by works of law.” Paul is *not* saying that “a person is not justified by works of law except through faith in Jesus Christ”;¹³ rather, he *is* saying (in this part of the verse) that “a person is not justified except through faith in Jesus Christ.”

Is it possible, however, to explain the syntax of Gal 2:16 in such a way as to make this clear? I believe it is. I suggest that in Gal 2:16

8. Burton, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 121.

9. Bruce, *Epistle of Paul to the Galatians*, 136.

10. Räsänen, “Galatians 2.16 and Paul’s Break with Judaism,” 547.

11. Dunn, “New Perspective on Paul,” 112.

12. This is, to be sure, an oversimplification of Dunn’s view.

13. It is not my purpose in this study to enter the debate regarding the correct translation of πίστις (Ἰησοῦ) Χριστοῦ (i.e., whether the genitive is a subjective or an objective genitive); thus, I follow the more generally accepted view and translate the phrase as “faith in (Jesus) Christ.”

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