THE INTEGRATIVE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN THE ETHICS OF GALATIANS

by

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“How is Paul’s ethic grounded in his theology?” queries Richard Hays. “This problem has long vexed interpreters.” Brian Rosner underscores, “The challenge for every student of Paul is to discover in Paul’s thought not only theological coherence but ethical integration.” This quest for “integration” (including Paul’s view of “law and grace”) has led to historic divides between theological systems, such as Lutherans, the Reformed, and dispensationalists. Some scholars have recently claimed that theological-ethical integration can only be achieved through adaptations of the “New Perspective(s)” on Paul.¹

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On a *prima facie* level, it might seem that the structure of Pauline theology would ultimately undermine ethics. "If God has already declared the believer to be righteous...then what motivation does the believer have for ethical behavior?" Commenting on Paul's statement that God "justifies the ungodly" (Rom 4:5), Leander Keck exclaims that the notion "offends the most elemental moral perception and seems to annihilate ethics altogether." C. K. Barrett declares, "Every moral philosophy, every ethical religion, has to answer the question, Why be good? Has not Paul made the question so difficult that it must remain virtually unanswered?"

By narrowing the investigation to the epistle to the Galatians, this article will demonstrate that Paul's ethics can indeed be integrated with Paul's theology of grace. Barrett pronounces that "the very existence of Christian ethics is a paradox; the paradox is nowhere sharper than it is with Paul, and nowhere sharper in Paul than in Galatians." Unfortunately, the ethics of Galatians has sometimes been slighted, causing Bernard Lategan to reference "the apparently underdeveloped nature of Paul's ethical statements" in Galatians and the "ethical deficit" in the epistle.

Hay's lament that "it has proven difficult to establish any direct inner connection between Paul's message of justification by faith on the one hand and his ethical admonitions on the other." These examine the ethics of Galatians, Meigs' work adopts the "New Perspective(s)" while Loubser's rejects the "New Perspective(s)."

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12 Hays, "Christology and Ethics in Galatians," p. 269 (italics added).
present study will argue that the distinctive “inner connection” is the powerful, integrative role of the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{13}\)

**THE SPIRIT AND UNION WITH CHRIST**

According to Richard Longenecker, “Much that has been written on Galatians has tended to ignore the central place of the Spirit in Paul’s argumentation throughout his Galatian letter.”\(^\text{14}\) All believers have received the promised Spirit through faith (Gal 3:2, 14).\(^\text{15}\) As Gordon Fee insists, “For Paul the reception of the Spirit is the *sine qua non* of Christian life.”\(^\text{16}\) Paul used this coming and presence of the Spirit in believers as a prodding reminder toward further sanctification:

> "Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish?"


Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?” (3:2–3).17

Paul’s argument assumes that the Galatians understood the Spirit’s reception as “the telltale sign of belonging,” as confirmation of their relationship with God.18 God supplied the Spirit (and the working of δύναμεις) among the Galatians by their hearing with faith, not by works of the Law (Gal 3:5).19 The δύναμεις of the Spirit also empowered the prayerful cry of “Abba” (4:6) as well as the fruit of the Spirit (5:22–23).20

Believers have been redeemed and have received adoption as sons.

“And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Gal 4:5–6).21 “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (4:7).22 The believer is no longer under the “guardian” (παιδαγωγός) of the Law (3:25).23 Rather, the Christian is a full son of God, through faith (3:26). This dynamic relationship has ethical import, as the power of God (as the “divine parent”) acts through the sons of God.24 Commentators of Pauline ethics have accordingly summarized his ethical appeal as “Become what you are.”25


19 Longenecker concedes that “just how the Spirit’s presence was manifest in their lives is uncertain from our vantage point…but we may infer that there were outward signs of some sort” (Longenecker, Galatians, p. 102). Cf. Hans Dieter Betz, “Spirit, Freedom, and Law: Paul’s Message to the Galatian Churches,” Svensk exegetisk årsbok 39 (1974): 153.


22 The Greek word for “slave” (δοῦλος) in Gal 4:1 and 7 refers to a “bondservant.”

23 The statement of Gal 3:25 is not simply an individual, existential description; it carries salvation-historical significance (see McClain, Law and Grace, pp. 28–29).


The one who walks (περιπατέω) by (or in) the Spirit will not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). One should note that Galatians 5:16 is not a negative imperative of prohibition, but a subjunctive of strong denial. The one walking in the Spirit will by no means fulfill (οὐ μὴ τελέσῃ) sinful desires. Believers are “empowered by a dynamic relationship with the Spirit,” in which “God acts in and through them.” The flesh and the Spirit conflict with one another in such a manner that the moral agent does not do the things he or she “wishes” or “desires” (θέλω) (5:17).

There is also an eschatological facet to the Spirit’s work. “For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” (Gal 5:5). Romans 8:2–4 proclaims, “For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according of Christian Life and a Method of Moral Reasoning,” Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics 1 (1981): 36.


to the flesh but according to the Spirit. “Walking in the Spirit” precludes following fleshly desires, so that the Spirit-led individual does not do the things he wants to do in the “flesh” (Gal 5:17).31

Brawley explains, “Being led by the Spirit constitutes concrete living in the present that transcends law.”32 This is because the “fruit” of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal 5:22), and “against such things there is no law” (5:23).33 The Spirit goes beyond the Law in supplying the power and even the motivating will to accomplish what is right.34 The enumeration of “the fruit of the Spirit” functions as a form of “virtue ethics,” laying “a significant emphasis on the character of the moral actor—rather than, for instance, the enumeration of his duties.”35 Through the Spirit, the believer is transformed into the image of the object of faith (Jesus Christ), leading to further Christlikeness.36

The Spirit unites Christians with Christ. In characteristic Pauline terminology, believers are “in Christ” (Gal 5:6). As many as were “baptized into Christ” have put on Christ (3:27).37 All believers are spiritually one in Christ Jesus, and share the same spiritual blessings (3:28). Those who belong to Christ Jesus “have crucified the flesh with its


33 See Tolmie, “Liberty,” p. 253. Styler prefers the translation, “there is no law dealing with such things as these,” since “the harvest of the Spirit in the Christian life goes far beyond the most comprehensive list of works and duties that any law could prescribe” (Styler, “Basis of Obligation,” p. 179). Cf. 1 Tim 1:9: “The law is not laid down for the just.”


35 Barclay, Obliging the Truth, p. 231; italics original. “Thereby the focus shifts from what is to be done (the agentum) to the doer, the agent” (Keck, “Justification of the Ungodly,” p. 203). With qualification, Louber prefers the term “quality” rather than “virtue”: “A virtue gives the impression of something objective to be achieved. With quality I intend it as an expression of the gift of love” (Louber, “Ethic of the Free,” p. 636).

36 See Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, p. 67.

37 Cf. 1 Cor 12:13; Rom 6:1–11.
passions and desires [παθήμασιν and ἐπιθυμίαις]” (5:24). The Christian through the Law has died to the Law so that he might live to God (2:19). In a moving passage, Paul proclaimed, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (2:20). The believer is not to continue sinning as if Christ (with whom he or she is united) is the minister or promoter of sin (2:17). Paul countered such a notion with his characteristic interjection: “Certainly not!” (Gal 2:17; cf. Rom 6:1–20).

THE SPIRIT AND LOVE

According to the Epistle to the Galatians, the Spirit not only indwells and empowers the individual believer, but he also transforms the believing community. The Galatians had been previously “enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:3) and enslaved by “those that by nature are not gods” (4:8). Yet coercing Gentiles to live like Jews (under the Law) is “not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2:14).

The Christian stands in true freedom, and this freedom becomes a primary theme of the letter. “For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1). As G. M. H. Loubser paraphrases this text, “Christ set us free
with the intention that we exercise our freedom.” Based upon this truth, Paul exhorted his readers to “stand firm” and not to submit again to a yoke of slavery (5:1). Christ has graciously freed us from the law through his work of the Gospel. “Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (3:13).

Believers have been called to freedom (“freedom is a vocation,” it is both “Gabe und Aufgabe” [gift and mission]). Yet they are not to use this “freedom” as an opportunistic excuse for “the flesh” (Gal 5:13). Instead, believers (who have been placed into new community by the Holy Spirit) are to serve one another in love (5:13). “Freedom is oriented toward love,” writes Lionel Windsor. So that “what Christians are saved to is given priority in ethical decision-making over what they have been saved from.”

“Freedom” is the liberty to do as one metaphor of freedom (Freedom and Obligation, p. 55). By contrast, Styler maintains that the apostle may perhaps draw upon “various aspects of sacral manumission,” but a background in the Hebrew Scriptures is sufficient to explain the metaphors: “God redeems a people for himself” (“Basis of Obligation,” p. 180 [italics original]).


Lategan maintains that “two pivotal commands provide the framework for the series of loose ethical injunctions in the rest of the section. The first is the command to stand in the freedom that Christ has made possible (5:1); the second is the command to walk in the Spirit (5:25)” (“Is Paul Developing a Specifically Christian Ethics?” p. 321). The indicative/imperative sequence is clear in both verses.

Paul cites Deut 21:23 as evidence that everyone who is hanged on a tree is cursed.


Furnish emphasizes that, for Paul, “redemption is not just deliverance from the hostile powers to which [the Christian] was formerly enslaved, but freedom for obedience to God” (Victor Paul Furnish, Theology and Ethics in Paul [Nashville: Abingdon, 1968], p. 226). Liberty may be lost to the chains of legalism, but it can also be lost by license, as one becomes the slave of his own lusts and passions (Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, p. 56). Wilson finds “an Exodus matrix of thought”, as the Galatians were “redeemed from Egyptian-like bondage” (Curse of the Law, p. 98; see also Todd A. Wilson, “Wilderness Apostasy and Paul’s Portrayal of the Crisis in Galatians,” New Testament Studies 50 [October 2004]: 550–71).


Lionel Windsor, “Indicative and Imperative in the Letters of Paul,” http://www.lionelwindsor.net/bibleresources/bible/new/Paul_indicative_imperative.htm (accessed June 12, 2011), p. 4. “This self-giving is paradoxical because it consists in the community’s exercise of freedom (5:13a) in the interests of others in such a way that ‘slavery’ is the result” (Hays, “Christology and Ethics in Galatians,” p. 283). Citing Peter Carman, Hays contrasts the Pauline and Stoic/Cynic understandings of freedom. The philosophers chose to relinquish privileges or possession “as a means to the end of gaining freedom through self-sufficiency (αὐτουργεία).” “Paul, on the other hand, presupposes freedom as a gift already given through Christ, not as an end to be sought, and urges that freedom be employed as a means to serve others” (Hays, “Christology
ought, flowing from the freeing joy of loving internal motivation.\textsuperscript{51} In Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but only “faith working through love” (5:6).

Thomas Schreiner quips, “love is the heart of Paul’s ethic.”\textsuperscript{52} Paul believed that the entire law was “fulfilled” in one word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Gal 5:14).\textsuperscript{53} The verb πληρέω may mean (1) is fulfilled, (2) is summarized, (3) is brought to completion, or (4) is made perfect.\textsuperscript{54} J. Louis Martyn concludes that due to “Christ’s powerful effect on the law,” it has “been brought to perfected completion by Christ,” and “love is the completion of the law.”\textsuperscript{55} This ethic of

\textsuperscript{51}See Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, pp. 62, 67. Galatians thus describes “a theology of freedom, expressed in recognized and enacted obligation” (p. 32).


\textsuperscript{55}Martyn, “Crucial Event,” pp. 59–61. See also 2 Cor 3:7–14; Eph 2:15; Col 2:14. Graham Stanton highlights the different verbs in “keeping the whole law” in 5:3 and “fulfilling the whole law” in 5:24 (Graham Stanton, “What Is the Law of Christ?” Ex Audito 17 [2001]: 55). Westerholm similarly contrasts “observing” the requirements of the law and “fulfilling” the “righteousness which the law is all about” (Stephen Westerholm, “Letter and Spirit: The Foundation of Pauline Ethics,” New Testament Studies 30 [April 1984]: 244). “Paul never speaks of the law’s fulfillment in prescribing Christian conduct, but only while describing its results” (Westerholm, “On Fulfilling the Whole Law,” p. 237). The same verb (πληρέω) is used in Rom 8:4, and a cognate is used in Gal 6:2. The concept of “fulfilling the law” is connected with walking according to the Spirit in Rom 8:4: “In order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according
love allowed Paul to make a consequentialist appeal within a communal context: "But if you bite and devour one another, watch out that you are not consumed by one another" (5:15).56

For Paul, progressive sanctification was personal, but it was never purely individualistic.57 Sanctification takes place within the context of the believing community, and congregations "are places where moral reflection, formulation, and action occur."58 In one sense, each individual believer is called upon to bear his own load (Gal 6:5). But in another sense, the Galatians were to bear one another’s burdens (6:2). Commentators note the difference in vocabulary: Each believer bears his own individual φορτίον or “load” (6:5); but each is also to bear the βαρη or “burdens” of others (6:2).59 Jan Lambrecht comments, “Mutual help evidently does not dispense one from personal responsibility; even with the help of others, every one still has to carry his own load.”60 As believers share in this mutual burden-bearing, they fulfill to the Spirit.” Therefore, living by the norm of self-giving love is tied to “walking by the Spirit” (see Gal 5:14, 16, 25). Wilson highlights an “eschatological nuance” in πληρόω (Wilson, Curse of the Law, pp. 107–12). Hans Hübner has differentiated between ὅλος ὅ νόμος in Gal 5:3 and ὁ πᾶς νόμος in 5:14 (Hans Hübner, Law in Paul’s Thought, trans. J. C. G. Greig, ed. J. Riches [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1984], pp. 38–40; Hans Hübner, Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments, vol. 2: Die Theologie des Paulus [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993], pp. 103–5). But see James D. G. Dunn, The Epistle to the Galatians, Black’s New Testament Commentaries (London: Black, 1993), p. 290.

56For an interesting discussion of Paul’s illustrative use of “the atrocious aggressiveness of predaceous animals,” see Schnabel, “How Paul Developed His Ethics,” p. 271.


59Lambrecht, for example, maintains that βαρης in the context refers to “the heavy cost” of restoring a transgressor, but it may refer to other difficult struggles and pressures as well. On the other hand, φορτίον refers to “everyday worries” (Jan Lambrecht, “Paul’s Coherent Admonition in Galatians 6:1–6: Mutual Help and Individual Attentiveness,” Biblica 78 [1997]: 52, 56). Lambrecht’s distinction is not always clear on pages 52–56.

60Lambrecht, “Paul’s Coherent Admonition,” p. 54.
“the law of Christ” (6:2). Light is shed upon Galatians 6:2 by comparing it with 5:14. “To fulfill the law of Christ is to bear one another’s burdens, which is a particular example of loving the neighbor, which fulfills the law.”

In this text, Paul appears to allude to the norm of Spirit-produced, self-giving love found in the love command (cf. Gal 5:6, 14, 22). This norm of self-giving love is ultimately exemplified in the Son of God, “who loved me and gave himself for me” (2:20). “Therefore,” according to G. Walter Hansen, “it must be insisted that for Paul, Christ

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crucified is the law of Christ. It is his cross that sets the standard for self-giving, self-sacrificing love. It is his cross that is the supreme measure of love. Any definition of the law of Christ that loses sight of the cross loses the center of Paul’s ethics.”

Thus, Pauline ethics may truly be described as “Gospel-centered” ethics. “The loving community, which is the focus of Paul’s concern, finds its moral imperative in the story of the cross,” writes Hays. “The community as a whole is given a task of burden-bearing which corresponds to and at the same time fulfills the life-pattern of Jesus Christ as portrayed in Paul’s kerygmatic formulations.”

“Christology and ethics are inseparable,” insists Graham Stanton. And Victor Furnish explains, “Christ’s love is both a gift and a claim, a benefit to receive and a power to display.” This norm of love does not negate the necessity for more specific moral imperatives, as Galatians 5:13–6:10 demonstrates (cf. also the “love command” [Rom 13:10] within the wider context of Rom 12:1–13:14). There is “no fundamental dichotomy in Paul’s mind between the ‘internal’ impulse of the Spirit and ‘external’ moral instruction,” comments John Barclay. And “when Paul talks of freedom from the slavery of the law, he obviously does not mean freedom from ‘external’ commands altogether.”

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65Hays, “Christology and Ethics in Galatians,” p. 290. Hays concludes that “the law of Christ” is “a formulation coined (or employed) by Paul to refer to this paradigmatic self-giving of Jesus Christ,” “the structure of existence embodied paradigmatically in Jesus Christ” (“Christology and Ethics in Galatians,” p. 275). Thus, the cross as the “sacrificial self-surrender of the Son of God defines the ethical norm for those who live ‘in’ him” (Hays, “Christology and Ethics in Galatians,” p. 288). Horrell concurs with this conclusion (David G. Horrell, Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul’s Ethics [London: T & T Clark, 2005], pp. 222–31). A concern for others is also tied to “the law of Christ” in the larger context surrounding 1 Cor 9:21 (and clearly differentiated from the Mosaic Law in 1 Cor 9:20–21). In this Corinthian text, Paul refers to being ἐννομος Χριστοῦ rather than ὑπὸνομον Χριστοῦ (see McCaill, Law and Grace, pp. 79–80). Hays further points to “the law of faith” in Rom 3:27 and “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus” in Rom 8:2. It seems, however, that Hays has divorced Christ’s precept of self-giving love for neighbor from the example of the self-giving Christ (contrast Lambrecht, “Paul’s Coherent Admonition,” p. 55). Furthermore, Hays’s article seems to gloss over the possible relationship between Gal 5:14 and 6:2 on pp. 274–75.


68Deidun states, “But if love goes beyond calculable obligation, it does not go around” (New Covenant, p. 171). See Wolfgang Schrage, Ethik des Neuen Testaments, Grundrisse zum Neuen Testament 4 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1982), pp. 180–85; Schreiner, Law and Its Fulfillment, pp. 147–49. Wilson summarizes the recent, widespread consensus concerning Gal 5:13–6:10: “Most scholars now agree that 5.13–6.10 is both integral to the letter and, at least to some extent, relevant to the situation” (Curse of the Law, p. 2; cf. 9). The passage is by no means a Fremdkörper within the letter.

69Barclay, Obeying the Truth, p. 229; Deidun differentiates between external
Paul freely used such obligatory vocabulary as ἀνάγκη, ὀφείλει, δεῖ, and κοινόν (Gal 6:16; 1 Thessalonians 4:1–2; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; 1 Corinthians 11:10; Romans 13:5–8). Second Thessalonians 3:6 warns against everyone who walks “not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.” Frank Thielman believes such texts refer to “a defined body of moral teaching which Paul took from church to church” and which he expected the believers to “know well.” Thus, “the traditional moral teaching of the church” which Paul handed down “remained necessary.”

THE SPIRIT AND THE BELIEVING COMMUNITY

Paul’s communitarian ethic engendered a concern for lapsed brothers and sisters. Spiritual members were to restore those caught in transgression, in a spirit of gentleness. Mature believers were to guard themselves throughout the restoration process, lest they too were tempted (Gal 6:1). “For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself” (6:3). Lambrecht writes, “If one thinks himself somebody without recognizing that all he is and possesses comes from God, i.e., if one thinks of himself as if he were not created and not a forgiven sinner, if one considers something as if it were not a gift (cf. 1 Cor 3:18–21 and 4:7), then he really deceives himself.”

Moreover, Paul’s communitarian ethic was also expressed in economic terms. The one who is taught in the word must “share all good things with the one who teaches” (Gal 6:6). Paul continued by stating a general precept in Galatians 6:10: “So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” The context strongly implies that “doing good”

obligation (still present) and external constraint (no longer necessary) in life in the Spirit. “External compulsion has been replaced by a motus ab intrinseco” (Deidun, New Covenant Morality, p. 189; cf. 188–217, 251–58), “Freedom is real freedom, and any attempt to restrict it must be firmly refuted. But obligation is real obligation too, and there must be no attempt to evade it” (Barrett, Freedom and Obligation, p. 70).


73 Ibid., p. 46.

74 Most commentators agree that the verb κοινωνέω carries monetary overtones in this verse. See the long discussion in J. Hainz, Koinonia. “Kirche” als Gemeinschaft bei Paulus, Biblische Untersuchungen 16 (Regensburg: Pustet, 1982), pp. 62–89.

75 Although many religious ethicists today speak of a general “preferential option for the poor,” Paul would seemingly emphasize a “preferential option for poor believers.”
includes financial assistance.\footnote{See Mark 14:7; 1 Tim 6:18–19; Heb 13:16; Pol. Phil. 10.2; Clement of Alexandria, Rich Man 33; Paed. 3.7. See also Herm. Vis. 17.2–6; Herm. Mand. 27.4.}

Sandwiched in between these two verses (Gal 6:6 and 6:10) is a passage concerning reaping and sowing (6:7–9). Paul began with a principle: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap” (6:7).\footnote{The concept of not allowing oneself to be deceived is a fairly common Pauline injunction (see Gal 6:3, 7; 1 Cor 3:18; 6:9; 15:33). For examples of the agricultural motif of sowing and reaping in Greek and Latin literature, see Barclay, Obeying the Truth, p. 164, n. 63.} One may either sow to “the flesh” or sow to “the Spirit.”\footnote{Since the original Greek did not differentiate proper pronouns by means of capitalization, some have maintained that Gal 6:8 refers to sowing to “the spirit” rather than “the [Holy] Spirit” (J. C. O’Neill, “The Holy Spirit and the Human Spirit in Galatians [Gal 5, 17],” Ephemerides theologicae loxanienses 71 [1995]: 107–20). The discussion of “the Spirit” in Gal 5:17, however, leads into the “fruit of the Spirit” (clearly a reference to the Holy Spirit) in 5:19–23.} The former leads to “corruption,” but the latter leads to “eternal life” from the Spirit (6:8).\footnote{One should not assume that the believer stands neutrally between flesh and Spirit and merely chooses between two equally valid options. “Paul’s central theology of participation requires that human agency is reconceived without being abandoned, the self not merely relocated but reconstituted by its absorption within the non-coercive power of grace” (John M. G. Barclay, “By the Grace of God I Am what I Am: Grace and Agency in Philo and Paul,” p. 18 (italics original), http://www.abdn.ac.uk/divinity/Gathercole/paper-barclay.htm [accessed June 12, 2011]). For a lengthier discussion, see John M. G. Barclay and Simon J. Gathercole, Divine and Human Agency in Paul and His Cultural Environment, Library of New Testament Studies 335 (London: T & T Clark, 2008).}

Lambrecht proclaims, “God is the master of the eschatological harvest.”\footnote{Lambrecht, “Paul’s Coherent Admonition,” p. 56.} But “eternal life” is more than eschatological. “The gift of ‘eternal life,’” asserts Windsor, “is not just a promise of immortality but the creation of a new person with re-oriented purposes.”\footnote{Windsor, “Indicative and Imperative,” p. 4.} Paul concluded with an encouragement: “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up” (6:9).

verses, Paul simply meant that those who “sow” (spending material wealth) to the flesh (for selfish desires) will only reap corruption, because one is sowing toward temporary and transitory causes. But as one “sows” (spending material wealth) in the Spirit, she or he will reap “life everlasting” (a lasting spiritual harvest). In another context of Christian giving (concerning the collection for Jerusalem saints), Paul similarly employed the metaphor of sowing and reaping: “The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Cor 9:6; cf. 9:10).

A fuller approach, however, would emphasize the wider context of the Galatian epistle as a whole, as well as other Pauline texts. Those who have already received the empowering Spirit (Gal 3:2–5) have already received the guarantee of the inheritance as sons (4:6–7). An indicative-imperative hinge occurs at Galatians 5:25: “If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit.” Such individuals sow to the Spirit (6:8) and, in turn, reap “eternal life” (6:8–9). Romans 6:20–23 provides an important parallel: “When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. But what fruit were you getting at that time from the things of which you are now ashamed? The end of those things is death. But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Both Galatians 6 and Romans 6 contrast a life of the flesh with a life of the Spirit. “The choice of sowing to Spirit or to flesh is the choice of a person’s basic direction in life.” The former leads to death, and the latter leads to eternal life. Nevertheless, Paul deliberately

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83Cf. the teachings of Jesus in Matt 6:19–24. The development of the argument from verse 7 through verse 9 implies that the reaping of “life everlasting” pertains to the sower himself (not to spiritual benefits in others, as some have argued).

84In all cases, the logical sequence (whatever its grammatical expression) places divine grace anterior to human action, and affirms the continuation of that grace in human activity. But in no case does the human actor becomes [sic] passive or inactive in the face of divine grace, but is rather energized by that grace to action” (Barclay, “‘By the Grace of God,’” p. 15).

85Furnish declared that “no interpretation of the Pauline ethic can be judged successful which does not grapple with the problem of indicative and imperative in Paul’s thought” (Furnish, Theology and Ethics in Paul, p. 4). Cf. the earlier indicative-imperative hinge in Gal 5:1. Another important example occurs in Rom 6:2, 12; cf. Col 3:3–5. A communal use of the indicative-imperative relationship can be found in 1 Cor 5:7–8. On πνεύματι στοιχέων and πνεύματι περιπατεῖτε, see Loubser, “Paul’s Ethic of Freedom,” p. 326; Loubser, “Ethic of the Free,” pp. 625, 627; Barclay, Obeying the Truth, p. 155.

86Cf. also Rom 8:13: “For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.”

87Barclay, Obeying the Truth, p. 165.
and carefully reserved the terminology of “wages” for death and uses “gift” for eternal life (cf. Rom 4:4–5). Furthermore, the Galatians 6 passage comes upon the heels of a contrast between the “works of the flesh” (5:19–21) and the “fruit of the Spirit” (5:22–23). The “works of the flesh” do not flow from the empowerment of the Spirit. The “fruit of the Spirit,” however, is the “the natural organic product of the Spirit.” Paul returns to a notion of “fruit” in Romans 6:22: “But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the fruit you get leads to sanctification and its end, eternal life.” Romans describes not only the “fruit” of sanctification upon being “set free from sin” but also the “fruit” of a life still in bondage under sin (Rom 6:21). The “fruit” (natural out-flowing) of such a sin-enslaved life is “death” (7:5).

SUMMARY: THE PNEUMATOLOGICAL TRAITS OF GALATIANS’ ETHICS

Paul adamantly insisted that his teachings did not at all nullify the grace of God, but rather magnified God’s grace (Gal 2:21). Both the chronological and the logical foundation of Christian ethics is grace. God has taken the initiative of grace in his unmerited favor centered in Jesus Christ, whose person and work is proclaimed in the Gospel. “Ethical behaviour, then, is a consequence, not the cause, of the newness of the believer’s being,” declares Michael Parsons, since “it is an appropriation of what has already been assigned in the work of the Lord and of the Spirit.”

The gracious initiative of grace is elegantly described in a turn of phrase in Galatians 4:8. The Galatians had “come to know God,” but behind this human response was God’s own gracious initiative: they had actually come “to be known by God.” Paul uses this truth, which he accepts as an ontological given, as the basis of paraenetic instruction expressed through inquiry: “How can you turn back again to the weak

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88“Of merit there is no talk at all: the statement is set in the context of the whole argument of the letter. The life of well-doing is a receiving from grace of that which God wills to give” (Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956], p. 220).


and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?" (Gal 4:9). “The starting point for Paul’s ethics then is not a human work,” insists William Longsworth. “It begins with God’s initiative, the gift of the terms for a new relationship with God.”

What is the “inner connection” between the indicatives of grace and the imperatives of responsibility in Galatians, between theology and ethics, between kerygma and didache, between justification by faith and the admonitions of morality? Albert Schweitzer, for example, claimed that “there is no logical route from the righteousness by faith to a theory of ethics.” Nevertheless, there is a direct and dynamic connection available within the Galatian letter. Being justified is “the presupposition, source, basis of conviction, and power for action.”

And the Spirit is the living link between justification and Christian ethics, as is evidenced through theological corollaries, enabling power, internal motivation, and communal context. The Spirit is the continuation of God’s work in the believer (indicative) as well as the empowerment to fulfill divine injunctions (imperative). The Spirit is both God’s guaranteed presence and God’s enabling power in the believer. Hans Dieter Betz disparaged Paul’s “almost naïve confidence in the ‘Spirit.’” Perhaps, however, much of one’s perspective relates to one’s assessment of the reality, personality, and efficacy of the Holy Spirit.

First, God not only justifies and forgives, but he also, through his Spirit, regenerates and unites the believer to the crucified and risen Savior (Gal 2:19–21). Justification, although absolutely essential and

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95Deidun maintains that the ultimate ground of the imperative in the Pauline epistles is the indwelling Spirit (Deidun, New Covenant Morality, p. 55).


foundational, is not the entirety of soteriology. That is, salvation is not only forensic or juridical, but also relational and participatory. Salvation is a word of acquittal (justification) but also a word of adoption and new creation (Gal 3:26; 4:6–7; 6:15).

Because Christ himself renovated, enriched, and transformed the content of ethical obligation, and because the believer is “in Christ,” then “in our incorporation into Christ we are brought close to the very basis on which obligation rests.” G. M. Styler explains, “[Jesus Christ] confronts us with human obligation in its ultimate form; and does so not just by the legacy or teaching or insights that he has bequeathed, not just because of the life that he lived and its consequences; but because of the life that he lives, which is ours to live also.” Thus, affirms Windsor, “believers are governed by their new order of being in Christ and belonging to him, which leads to a life of service to others.”

Second, the Spirit internally empowers the believer to do what is right, something the Law could not do (Gal 5:22–23). Christians are not only forgiven sinners, but also enabled sons. They have received the Spirit of adoption, and they should walk in the Spirit, be led by the Spirit, and be guided by the Spirit. Moreover, they should manifest the fruit of the Spirit. Loubser proclaims, “Everything changed radically in the advent of Christ and his Spirit,” so that “ethics could never again be viewed other than as a life in the paradigm of Christ made possible in individual believers through his Spirit.”

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100 Furnish, Theology and Ethics in Paul, pp. 151–53; Peter Stuhlmacher, Gerechtigkeit Gottes bei Paulus, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 87 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 236. For a description of re-creation as a telic re-ordering of fallen creation guaranteed by the resurrection of Christ leading to a re-orientation of ethics in the present, see Oliver O’Donovan, Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics, 2nd ed. (Leicester: Apollos, 1994).

101 Styler, “Basis of Obligation,” p. 184. “The life we are to live is not just the life to which Christ points; it is the life of Christ himself” (ibid., p. 186).

102 Ibid., p. 187.

103 Windsor, “Indicative and Imperative,” p. 5; italics original.


105 This is the theme of Denton, “‘No Longer a Slave.’”

106 Loubser, “Ethics in the New Creation,” p. 349; see also Loubser, “Paul’s Ethic of Freedom,” p. 315; Loubser, “Ethic of the Free,” p. 16. For Paul, “Christ living in me” and “the Spirit indwelling the believer” are “two ways of talking about the same
Spirit, “The believer has been set free from the entire present evil age dominated by flesh and all the elements it employs to enslave man.”

While the Law “could only present objective moral standards,” the Spirit produces “subjective moral transformation.”

Third, the Spirit produces love in the believer’s heart as an internal motivation (Gal 5:13–14, 22–23). The ethics of Galatians emphasizes not only what one should do but also how one is empowered and motivated to act. The Spirit dynamically enables those who are justified by faith in Christ and engenders the motivation of gratitude and love within them. James Dunn notes that “the source of motivation” (the Spirit of Christ in Galatians 4:6; 5:25) and “the norm of behavior” (“the law of Christ” in 6:2) are both “distinctively Christian.” In Romans 5, God demonstrated his love in the gift of Christ (5:8) who died for the ungodly (5:6). Now, in turn, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us” (5:5).

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of God’s Son (Gal 4:6) and was given not merely to empower but “for participation in the life of Christ.”

“Christian ethics is not characteristically Christian because of its ethical rulings,” argues Loubser, “but because of its pneumatological-soteriological foundation and way of operating.” Therefore, the ethics of Galatians is a “christological-pneumatological ethic of freedom.”

One might presume that a strong doctrine of the justification of the ungodly by faith would destroy ethical living. Evidently, some of

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109 According to Denton, Pauline obedience from the heart is inward, genuine, willing, and comprehending (Denton, “No Longer a Slave,” p. 273). For Paul, this internal compulsion does not negate other motivations, such as an eschatological motivation (Gal 6:8–10).
112 Dunn, Epistle to the Galatians, p. 316.
116 See Keck, “Justification of the Ungodly and Ethics,” p. 199.
Paul’s opponents argued this very point (see Rom 3:8; 4:5; 6:1, 15). Yet the one rightly related to God (justified by faith) is united to Christ and dynamically empowered by the Spirit, resulting in an increasing practical holiness as the believer walks in the Spirit and is led by the Spirit. In Paul’s own life, his transformed relationship with God through Christ led to radical changes in his own personal behavior. In sum, “He stopped destroying the church and began to proclaim the good news of God’s Son.”

Fourth, the Spirit places the believer into the body of Christ (Gal 3:27–28), which becomes the context of communal ethics. Therefore, as Loubser declares, “Paul places profound emphasis on the community of faith corporately and harmoniously acting in accordance with the Spirit (Gal 5:26–6:10).” Paul was concerned with the possible destruction of community life (5:15). He condemned harmful habits that subvert community life, such as enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and envy (5:19–21). “Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other” (5:26). Instead, the Galatians were to serve one another in love, based upon the injunction, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (5:13–14). Such love was not only commanded, it was also Spirit-produced, along with kindness, goodness, and gentleness (5:22–23). Community-building responsibilities include restoration, burden-bearing, and mutual assistance (6:1–10). “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (6:2). “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (6:10).

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117 Some have argued that Romans may be, in part, a response to misrepresentations that arose from Paul’s strong language in Galatians concerning law and grace (see Ulrich Wilckens, “Über Abfassungszweck, und Aufbau des Römerbriefs” in Rechtfertigung als Freiheit: Paulustudien [Neukirchen: Neukirchen Verlag, 1974], pp. 142–43).

118 Brawley, “Identity and Metaethics,” p. 118; see Gal 2:13–24. “But his encounter with the grace of God was emphatically not…a further refinement to the righteousness he found in the law, but a total re-evaluation of all his norms, an act of God which undercut what he had previously held to be the definition of piety” (Barclay, “By the Grace of God,” p. 11).

119 Just how easily this communal context can be omitted is evidenced by Styler, “Basis of Obligation,” p. 183, n. 22.


121 This communal concern was also connected to the Gospel itself. “The vital question is thus whether an action builds up the community or destroys it, shows love toward the brother for whom Christ died or does him harm (Rom 14.13–23; 1 Cor 8.7–13; 9.19–23)” (Hooker, “Interchange in Christ and Ethics,” p. 13); cf. Hartog, “Work Out Your Salvation,” pp. 19–33.

122 Hays notes that the vice and virtue lists of Gal 5:16–24 “are bracketed by clear admonitions against division within the church in 5:13–15 and 5:25–6:5.” This is one of the ways in which Paul’s paraenesis “differs most significantly” from the Hellenistic parallels gathered by Betz (see Hays, “Jesus’ Faith and Ours,” pp. 259–60).
How, then, is the ethics of Galatians grounded in Paul’s theology? The work of the Holy Spirit unites justification and sanctification. Faith in Christ brings not only “freedom” but also the dynamic ministry of the Spirit, who internally motivates and radically empowers a grace-initiated and community-oriented ethic of loving service.\(^{123}\)

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