What if Martin Luther Had Read the Dead Sea Scrolls? 
Historical Particularity and Theological Interpretation in Pauline Theology: 
Galatians as a Test Case

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Abstract — This study argues that a more attentive focus on the sociohistorical context of Paul's letters can lead to a fruitful theological exploration of Paul's theology that approximates fairly closely some of the key emphases of the Reformed/Lutheran tradition. Though the Reformation tradition of exegeting Paul's letters has properly grasped many of the central themes of Paul's theology, it has often lacked attention to historical particularity and social realism. Yet, a better grasp of the particulars can lead to a richer theological paradigm. As an example, this study examines Gal 2:11–21 with specific attention given to "works of law," "faith of Christ," and "righteousness" in order to demonstrate how one might shift from historical criticism to a theological interpretation within the Reformed/Lutheran tradition.

Key Words — Martin Luther, John Calvin, Reformation, Paul, Galatians, justification, works of the law, faith in Christ, historical criticism, theological interpretation

Introduction

Imagine that in San Diego in November 2007 Martin Luther was seen wandering around the Society of Biblical Literature bookstall and browsing all the various books on Paul, especially those that pitted him against the now commonly known "New Perspective on Paul."¹ We can only guess what his response might be to reading Paul: Fresh Perspectives by N. T.

¹ Here, I am obviously imitating the "Whimsical Introduction" of Stephen Westerholm, Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), xiii–xvi.
Wright and The Future of Justification by John Piper. Luther might be flattered by his portrait on the cover of Piper’s book and feel a bit of déjà vu after reading Wright’s work. Had they not settled this all before? When Paul spoke of “works of the law,” he meant not “Jewish ceremonies” or “boundary markers” but any human deeds that seek for merit before God. Justification was not to be confused with sanctification, as the opponents of Paul and the Papists believed. The “righteousness of God” was an alien and imputed righteousness, not God’s “covenant faithfulness.” Next, imagine Martin Luther stumbling into the Dead Sea Scrolls exhibit that was in San Diego that year and, after excitedly perusing the displays, buying a German translation of the scrolls in the museum book store. Soon after, Luther sits down at a bar with a frosty Budweiser and begins reading, “As for me, if I stumble, the mercies of God shall be my eternal salvation. If I stagger because of the sin of the flesh, my justification shall be by the righteousness of God which endures forever” (1QH 11.11–12), and flicking over further he comes across “Now, we have written to you some of the works of the Law, those which we determined would be beneficial for you and your people, because we have seen [that] you possess insight and knowledge of the Law” (4QMMT C 26–28). After devouring the entire volume, with a mixture of confusion and curiosity, Luther goes up to the nearest person in the bar, who just so happens to be Jacob Neusner, and asks what he makes of these Dead Sea discoveries and what they mean for the Reformation. Neusner is not short on a reply; in fact, they have a three-hour-long conversation that ends in a publishing agreement for 20 volumes on Jews and Christians to be jointly written by the end of the month (Luther and Neusner are both prolific authors after all).

Would reading the DSS have led Luther to change his mind about Jews and Judaism? Would it have made him rethink his understanding of Paul and Paul’s Jewish Christian interlocutors and reassess his own view of Galatians? This is fantasy and fiction, but I have often wondered what would have been the effect, had the magisterial Reformers had a more informed knowledge of the diversity of Judaism in antiquity, grappled with Jewish sectarianism as background to intra-Christian debates, and shown more attention to the occasional nature of the Pauline letters. Would the Reformed appropriation of Paul be torpedoed or renewed by a more accurate awareness of Paul’s historical context? This is disputed in biblical scholarship as evidenced by the words of William Campbell: “There are in fact two theologies of Paul in conflict. One derives from post-Augustine Christian theological terms and disputes which are considered normative

even for Paul. The other seeks to avoid the overt theological conceptualization, to concentrate on the concrete realities of Israel and the nations in relation to God, and to limit discussion to the meaning and terminology of the contextualized letters of Paul.”

Is a theology of Paul built on “concrete realities” necessarily inimical to a post-Augustinian and Reformed theological interpretation? Campbell’s point should be digested, but I am not so sure that such a violent polarization is warranted. Stephen Chester, in contrast, states: “In exploring the relationship between particular instance and wider principle it is possible to read Galatians in a way that holds the Reformers’ correction about ‘works of the law’ and yet also devotes proper attention to Jew/Gentile relationships in the church and their contemporary implications.” More in line with Chester, it is my contention that Reformed theological interpretation of Paul (i.e., that emerging from the Reformation) is improved, not undermined, by greater attention being given to the historical particularity of Paul’s letters. Indeed, while the Reformed theological framework obviously needs some serious repair work, the whole edifice stands a better chance of surviving contact with history than some of the more revisionist approaches. Therefore, in this study, I want to argue that a shift from historical particularity to the theological interpretation of Galatians yields much fruit for a broad and revised understanding of Paul.

Pounding Luther and Liberating Paul

What has been at stake in modern debates on Paul in the last 25 years is the validity of the theological framework of the Lutheran/Reformed tradition and the biblical foundations that it claims to rest on. One of the major pillars of revisionist readings of Paul has been the “total travesty” of the “Lutheran perspective on Paul.” Lutheran and Reformed interpretations in general have not fared well in evaluation by New Perspective on Paul interpreters. This Reformation interpretation of Paul is frequently

5. My thought here is taken largely from Francis Watson, Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 351–69, but drawn along a trajectory in the Reformed and British Evangelical Tradition.
touted as being too individualistic, hampered by Western ideas of guilt, anthropological instead of Christocentric, too influenced by medieval debates on law and merit, and lacking an awareness of the historical contingency of Paul’s letters. In fact, one of the most invective labels one Pauline scholar can impose on the work of another Pauline scholar is “Lutheran,” which has come to mean things such as “passé,” “uncritical,” “unhistorical,” or “not Christocentric enough.”

Others have come to Luther’s defense, and this has resulted in an industry of refutations not seen since Marcion came to Rome. Carl Trueman delivered a fiery criticism of James Dunn’s handling of Luther in a Tyndale Fellowship paper, to which Dunn responded, expressing that he had no intent of repudiating Luther (Trueman since has graciously conceded a misrepresentation of Dunn in personal correspondence). The New Perspective on Paul has not made inroads in the Lutheran heartland of Germany. In an interview in Criswell Theological Review, Martin Hen-


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gel was asked if he was impressed by the New Perspective on Paul, and he replied, “Not at all, because it is not really new. Pelagius, who lived 1600 years ago, held to similar views.” When asked why British scholars have been slower than their American counterparts to embrace the New Perspective on Paul, Hengel replied that “they have more common sense.”

Some have taken a more mediating view in reaffirming (elements of) the traditional Lutheran reading, while taking on board insights from the New Perspective. John Ziesler, for instance, maintains that the New Perspective on Paul is exegetically justified, while the Lutheran interpretation is appropriate theologically if regarded as an exposition rather than exegesis. Michael Bird has attempted to identify a position beyond reformed and revisionist readings of Paul that appreciates the social origins and social function of Paul's teachings on “righteousness” but demonstrates how a nuanced reading of Paul retains the essential architecture of Reformed theology. Francis Watson, who arguably wrote one of the most polemical tirades against Luther in the 1980s, has cautiously distanced himself from the New Perspective on Paul in the second edition of his volume on Paul, where he intends to move beyond the “polarity” of the old and new perspectives divide. Watson maintains that Luther’s interpretation of Paul’s critique of works is “allegorical,” and the Lutheran image of Paul is “deeply flawed.” He points out that some New Perspective on Paul critics and pro-Lutheran apologists routinely miss the horizontal or social dimensions of Paul’s argument about justification and consequently lack “social realism.” Yet Watson rejects the once unassailable assumptions of the New Perspective on Paul, such as the naive essentialism of post-Sanders scholarship that Judaism was a religion of grace with a singular soteriological scheme. He also maintains that Paul advocated a sectarian separation between Christian communities and Judaism. Even so, Watson states that one can embrace the historical critical sensitivity of F. C. Baur and the theological acumen of Martin Luther because both readings see in Paul’s antitheses an opposition between two mutually exclusive principles, relating to divine and human agency in

16. These works are Francis Watson, Paul, Judaism and the Gentiles: A Sociological Approach (SNTSMS 56; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 2–22, 180–81; and idem, Beyond the New Perspective, xiii, respectively. 
17. Ibid., 25–27. 
18. Ibid., 6, 26. 
the one case, universality and exclusiveness in the other. And both readings need to be rather drastically relativized, since they reduce Pauline antithesis to a common denominator and fail to grasp the incommensurability of patterns of communal life oriented towards two distinct and irreducible particularities.20

We might do well to also appreciate that James Dunn and N. T. Wright have both expressed that they have no desire to abandon either Scripture or the Reformation. Dunn writes:

I have no particular problem in affirming that the doctrine of justification (in its fully orbed expression) is articulus stantis et cadentis ecclesiae; I am astonished by and repudiate entirely the charge that the ‘new perspective on Paul’ constitutes an attack on and denial of that Lutheran fundamental. . . . The point I am trying to make is simply that there is another dimension (or other dimensions) of the biblical doctrine of God’s justice and of Paul’s teaching on justification which have been overlooked and neglected, and that it is important to recover these aspects and to think them through afresh in the changing circumstances of today’s world. In a word, I seek not to diminish let alone repudiate the doctrine of justification (mē genoito), but to bring more fully to light its still greater riches.21

Wright is similar:

When I began research on Paul in autumn of 1974, my aim was to understand Paul in general and Romans in particular better than I had done before, as part of my heartfelt and lifelong commitment to Scripture and to the sola scriptura principle, believing that the better the church understands and lives by Scripture, the better its worship, preaching, and common life will be. I was conscious of thereby standing methodologically in the tradition of the Reformers, for whom exegesis was the lifeblood of the church and who believed that Scripture should stand over against all human tradition. I have not changed this aim and method, nor do I intend to. Indeed, the present controversy often appears to me in terms of a battle for the Reformers’ aims and methods—going back to Scripture over against all human tradition—against some of their theological positions (and, equally, those of their opponents, since I believe that often both sides were operating with mistaken understandings of Paul).22

In my judgment, what seems to be happening in biblical scholarship in the last five to ten years is the arrival of a more defensible middle ground between the old and new perspectives.23

What we can confidently say is that New Perspective on Paul interpreters have exposed a lack (not utter absence) of historical particularity in the Lutheran/Reformed tradition of exegeting Paul.24 This lack of particularity is found in the tendency to dehistorize Paul in the Lutheran/Reformed tradition.25 For instance, Luther’s preface to Romans (though hard to critique due its sheer poetic brilliance and bold theological profession) says of Paul’s purpose in writing Romans: “Therefore it seems that St. Paul, in writing this letter, wanted to compose a summary of the whole of Christian and evangelical teaching which would also be an introduction to the whole Old Testament.”26 This is a view continued by Melanchton, who regarded Romans as a Christianae Religionis compendium, and this view remained extant even until the time of Anders Nygren in the 1940s.27 We might also take to task the view of Ernst Käsemann and Karl Barth, who treat the character of the Jew in Paul’s diatribe in Romans as a timeless example of the religious man striving before God. Barth wrote, “The Jew, the religious and ecclesiastical man, is, it is true, first summoned to make the choice; this is because he stands quite normally on the frontier of this


24 Cf. the discussion of Chester (“When the Old Was New,” 323–25, 329), who points out that, in his Galatians commentary of 1519, Luther had given some thought to the ethnic dimension of Peter’s action in Gal 2:11–14, but when he writes his Galatians commentary in 1535 all discussion of ethnic dimensions disappears and is replaced by a law/gospel antithesis. Chester maintains that Calvin was especially conscious of the shift in Paul’s argument between the particular instance of Jew/Gentile relationships in the church and the wider principle that justification depends entirely on grace. See particularly Calvin’s comments that highlight the ethnic dimensions of the context in Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 63–71, esp. pp. 65, 71. Yet I would baulk at Calvin’s claim that between Paul’s opponents in Galatia “and the Papists there is no difference; and therefore, in refuting them, we are at liberty to employ Paul’s argument” (p. 78). The Galatian proselytizers did not have a scheme of sacraments and merit anything like that against which Calvin himself was fighting (p. 77).

25 A point acknowledged by George, “Modernizing Luther,” 447.


27 Philip Melanchthon, Loci Communes (1521); Anders Nygren, Commentary on Romans (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1949).
world and at the point where the line of intersection by the new dimension plane . . . must be veritably seen."28 And Käsemann said that Paul "strikes at the hidden Jew in all of us."29 Rudolf Bultmann's book *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting* has a chapter on "Jewish Legalism" that is indicative of his uncritical acceptance of F. W. Weber's thesis on Judaism.30 Moreover, in certain parts of his *Theology of the New Testament*, his portrait of Paul resembles a Lutheran existentialist whose entire theological scheme is rooted in a particular anthropology.31 Mark A. Seifrid, a modern Lutheranesque interpreter, is arguably reductionistic to treat the justification of the Gentiles as essentially an illustration of how God justifies the ungodly.32 Yet in the Protestant mix there has always been a minority who have read Paul with more historical sensitivity. Martin Bucer was one of the reformers who held that for Paul "law" denoted the whole Law of Moses but the "works of the law" referred specifically to the Jewish ceremonies. Trusting in the "works of the law" does not justify because the "law" does not justify.33 Chapter 27 of the Second Helvetic Confession recognizes the Jewish context of the law and its ceremonies as well as the virtue of *adiaphora* or "things indifferent" in Christian ethics. The British philosopher John Locke produced a translation, paraphrase, and notes of Paul's epistles, and regarded Romans as fundamentally concerned with the matter of the inclusion of the Gentiles. He wrote on Rom 3:25 that God "took the Gentiles into his church, and made them his people jointly and equally with the few believing Jews. This is plainly the sense of the apostle here, where he is discoursing the nation of the Jews and their state in comparison with the Gentiles; not of the state of private persons. Let anyone without prepossession attentively read the context, and he will find it to be so."34 In the critical sphere, we should mention F. C. Baur, who, for all of his Hegelian failings, correctly grasped the situational nature of Paul's letters (esp. Romans) and how significant the Jew and Gentile divisions were

for the emergence of Christian theology. Markus Barth, way ahead of his time, perceived in Paul's language of justification in Galatians the attempt to create a new humanity from both Jew and Gentile. Krister Stendahl correctly observed the salvation-historical purpose of Romans that made sense as to why Rom 1–8 was followed by 9–11.

All may not be lost then for the Lutheran/Reformed camp, as some well-founded criticism may in fact be necessary and invaluable for the continuing future of this theological tradition. If we had to nominate the Lutheran/Reformed perspective's most redeemable qualities in Pauline interpretation, they would have to be that (1) it shows the triumph of biblical theology over scholastic methods, (2) it correctly grasped the anthropological pessimism of the human condition and the passive nature of “righteousness” in Paul’s thought, (3) it has correctly understood grace as an event in the life and writings of Paul, and (4) it has poignantly introduced audiences to the grammar of grace and the true meaning of sola gratia. Paul may not have been a Lutheran, but Luther and Calvin were certainly Paulinists in their Galatians commentaries. Thus, Luther and Calvin remain worthy guides ad fonts Pauli because of their attention to Paul's theological texture, even if they glossed over his historical context to the detriment of their followers. But the traditional portrait of Paul’s theology is still in desperate need of a spruce-up if it is to remain historically credible, not just esthetically pleasing to the theological proclivities of some adherents. I submit that the post-Reformation tradition of Pauline exposition could be beneficially corrected and at other times reinforced by paying greater attention to the historical particularity of Paul’s letters. Therefore, it is the aim of the rest of this study to establish a renewed perspective on Paul that provides a deliberate theological interpretation of his letters based on the historical contingency and particularity of their context and content. To that end, I want to examine briefly Gal 2:11–21 and

38. Contra Watson, Beyond the New Perspective, 346. On grace as an event, see Bultmann, Theology, 1:288–92.
39. See Martin Luther, Commentary on Galatians: Modern-English Edition (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1988), 75–76, 103–4, where Luther's resolute defense of the gospel, his emphasis on grace, and his own biographical cameo in the commentary is clearly analogous to Paul's narration of his own conversion experience in the epistle as narrated in Gal 1:6–16.
“works of law,” “faith of Christ,” and “righteousness” in order to demonstrate how one might shift from historical criticism to a theological interpretation within the Reformed tradition.

WORKS OF LAW

Let us strike at the jugular and ask what is meant by the phrase “works of law” (εργα νόμου) as it appears in the Pauline corpus (Rom 3:20, 27–28; Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5, 10)?

41 For Martin Luther, “The works of the law are everything that a person does or can do of his own free will and by his own powers to obey the law. But because in doing such works the heart abhors the law and yet is forced to obey it, the works are a total loss and are completely useless,” and “it extends to all that is contrary to grace.”

42 In contrast, the phrase is frequently taken by New Perspective on Paul proponents to denote the law in general but more specifically those laws that functioned as “boundary markers” between Jews and Gentiles, viz., circumcision, Sabbath keeping, and dietary regulations. On this perspective, to say that justification is not by works of law is to suggest that covenant membership and continued covenant standing is not attained through exhibiting the distinctive emblems that marked out faithful Jews (though Dunn and Wright do not deny that it also means forgiveness of sins and having a right standing with God). Is this “boundary marker” view just a rehash of the “ceremonial law” that goes back to Pelagius and Jerome?

43 Not really. Al-


42 Luther, “Vorrede auff die Epistel S. Paul”; idem, Galatians, 90.


44 Chester (“When the Old Was New,” 328) writes:

The view that by ‘works of the law’ Paul means ceremonies is not one that persists today and yet the contours of contemporary debate about the phrase are strikingly similar. Erasmus’ identification of ceremonies with Jewish cultural hegemony anticipates the position of those today who argue that Paul’s target is primarily circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance in their role as Jewish identity-markers, demonstrating separation from the nations and loyalty to the covenant. The arguments put by those who disagree resemble those used by the Reformers to argue that Paul intends to refer to the whole law in its inability to justify. True, recent advocates for understanding the phrase as focused on the boundary-marking function of the law accept that the phrase does refer to all that the law requires, but contend that some parts are more prominent
though there is some overlap in limiting the law to Jewish distinctives, the "ceremonies" in question are those that the Jewish people regard as still oper-
urable for their continuing relationship before God particularly through the
cultus of the temple. New Perspective on Paul advocates, however, see "works of law" as focused primarily on matters relating to Jewish separation from Gentiles. In other words, one cannot regard Dunn and Wright's view of "works of law" as a pelagianism rebooted with a sociological half twist. 45

We should pay particular attention to the ethnocentric elements of "works of law" because of three factors: (1) A cursory read of Menahem Stern's Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism shows how acutely aware pagan authors were of Jewish separation and the loathing and vituperative rhetoric that they voiced against the Jews because of their distinctive practices (e.g., Tacitus Histories 5.5). 46 (2) I am struck by how Justin Martyr in his discussion of the law with Trypho immediately makes the center of attention fall on Jewish separation from Gentiles. 47 (3) We have to acknowledge that the primary issue in Galatians and Romans was the conditions and basis of Gentile acceptance into mixed churches. Thus, "works of law" are attacked by Paul in order to demonstrate that one does not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. If this is so, then Luther's reading of a semipelagian synergism into works of the law, identifying the law with an internal struggle and treating circumcision as an example of legalism, can hardly be sustained. 48

Yet I remain convinced that "works of law" simply means the works that the law requires and denotes the commandments of the entire Mosaic code. 49 Moreover, Paul deliberately universalizes the phrase in places such as Gal 2:16 (and Rom 3:20), where he says that by works of law "no flesh" will be justified before him, relating "works" to an anthropological problem related to human evil and disobedience. Abraham is cited in Gal 3 precisely as someone who straddles Gentile and Jewish identity, and his example of

46. Menahem Stern, Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism (2 vols.; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974–84).
47. Justin, Dial. Tryph. 10.
48. Luther, "Vorrede auff die Epistel S. Paul"; idem, Galatians, 320.
faith while uncircumcised counters both ethnocentrism and a general no
mism construed as meritorious. In other words, reliance on “works of law’
ism is related to a more universal problem than merely Jewish ethnocentrism.
It should come as no surprise to find that Jewish literature from the HB
to the Dead Sea Scrolls varyingly associated performance of the law with
perspectives of obedience and reward even under the aegis of a covenantal
relationship, since covenantal grace is only efficacious in the context of
covenantal obedience. What Paul labors to demonstrate through a complex
web of intertextual argumentation in Gal 3:10–14 is that law brings a
curse and only faith brings life. In addition, “works” can take on a merito-
rious character under certain sociological conditions or in conjunction
with particular theological emphases: (1) Under certain eschatological
schemes, the role of works becomes more acute when one considers the ba-
sis for entrance into the future age. (2) During intra-Jewish sectarian de-
bates about which and whose interpretation of the law is valid the necessity
for particularized law observance is heightened as it is related directly to
salvation. And (3) in debates within a community about the rite of entry for
new members, works play a determinative role for the status of persons enter-
ing the group because the community is viewed as elect and, therefore,
as the locus of God’s saving purpose. I submit that all three conditions are
arguably present in Galatians. Accordingly, the laws that emblazon the
covenant and distinguish the people can still take on a nomistic substance
and even a meritorious character.

As such, I take “works of law” to mean the Jewish way of life as codi-
fied in the Torah. Note that it refers to the whole law, but taking on the
whole law will inevitably result in identifying with the Jewish etnos. Rapa
appropriately regards the “works of law” in Galatians as nomistic obser-
vances related to the Jewish law that were said to be inseparable from what
it meant to be “Christian.” In the minds of the Galatian intruders, belief in
Jesus as the Jewish Messiah must naturally be accompanied by a commit-
tment to pursue life as a practicing Jew as a necessary prerequisite to salva-
tion. As such, we can reject the notion of “works of law” as ceremonies,
boundary markers, or an atemporal example of human striving for merit
that avails before God. Theologically put, Paul’s critique of works of law in
Gal 2:15–16 means he is undermining a particular view of election (Abrah-

50. Craig A. Evans, “Paul and ‘Works of Law’ Language in Late Antiquity,” in Paul and
51. See particularly the handling of this passage by Das, Paul, the Law, and the Covenant,
146; Preston Sprinkle, Law and Life: The Interpretation of Leviticus 18:5 in Early Judaism and in
Paul (WUNT 2/241; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 131–64; and Joel Willitts, “Context Mat-
52. Watson, Beyond the New Perspective, 19.
mic sonship is about faith and Spirit, not physical descent or circumcision) and a particular view of human agency (righteousness by faith and not by works of law).

The Faith of Christ

The literature surrounding the πίστις Χρίστου debate is immense, and the decision as to whether it should be taken as a subjective genitive (the “faithfulness of Christ”) or as an objective genitive (“faith in Christ”) has proven divisive in biblical scholarship. My lexical intuition is to gravitate toward the objective genitive because a genitive modifier most usually delineates and restricts the head term but does not determine it. Furthermore, the context of the discussion seems to focus on the human response in appropriating the grace of God through either “works” or “believing/trusting.” Nonetheless, there is something suspiciously right about the subjective genitive that makes it so alluring. Paul’s contrast not only is about human responses but also implies a contrast of epochs, one defined by law and the other defined by faith. Elsewhere, the faithfulness and obedience of Jesus Christ has important functions in salvation especially in Rom 5:12–21 and Phil 2:5–11. In addition, if we read Gal 2:16 in light of Gal 3:25 (where “faith” is a synecdoche for the coming of Christ), then we are on firmer ground for supporting a subjective genitive interpretation.

By way of answer to this conundrum, I am persuaded that πίστις operates in Gal 2:16 and Rom 3:22–23 for the human response to the manifestation of the saving righteousness of God. However, this righteousness is revealed in the Χριστός event, which stands for the manifestation of the divine act of salvation wrought in the faithfulness, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ. Accordingly, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ is supplied not by πίστις but by Χριστοῦ. On this reading, πίστις Χριστοῦ is the event of the gospel itself and implies an underlying narrative about Jesus Christ. That means that we do not have to choose absolutely between subjective

and objective meanings of the genitive. 58 We can properly say that “we have believed in Christ Jesus in order that we might be vindicated by trusting in the God-in-Christ-event.” Indeed, we can add to this the participatory elements supplied by Gal 2:17, 19b–20, and 3:28. One’s belief, trust, and fidelity is evidence of a participation in the one who was himself “obedient unto death” (Phil 2:8) and is the “faithful witness” (Rev 1:5). Believers are only justified by being “in Christ” and identity and salvation are determined exclusively by union with the Son of God. The Christological and anthropological dimensions merge as faith is an expression of the self-giving faithfulness of Jesus Christ living through the believer. Consequently, justification is no mere abstract transaction of merit (whether it is imputed or imparted), but believers are justified only insofar as they participate in the justification of the Messiah in his resurrection (Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 15:17; 1 Tim 3:16) so that the gift of a righteous status cannot be isolated from the one in whom believers are righteous. As a corollary, the righteous status possessed by believers cannot be logically separated from the transformative promise of the gospel because declaration and transformation are rooted in the same ontological reality of union with Christ. 59 The theological mileage that one gets out of this analysis is that it retains the Christological focus of the subjective genitive interpretation but without damage to the grammatical relations of the text.

The nature and depth of the antithesis between “faith of Christ” and “works of law” are arguably far more complex than often recognized in the Lutheran/Reformed view. Although the contrast of the “faith of Christ” and “works of law” implies two distinctive and differing modes of human appropriation to God’s saving action, we cannot reduce the contrast to merely “believing” versus “doing.” For a start, there is the communal dimension, as Paul has no conception of faith other than that which is indelibly connected to love, walking in the Spirit, and fulfilling of the law of Christ (Gal 5:6, 16–26; 6:2).60 That is because “faith” and “works” represent two competing ways of life for two distinct communities that have arrived at radically different perspectives on how alienation from God is fixed: through Torah or by Christ. Second, ιπτις Χριστοῦ represents hu-


man faith in God’s revelation of salvation in Christ, meaning that the πίστις Χρίστου versus εργα νόμου is also a contrast of human activity and divine action. Third, there is a contrast of epochs between that designated by the “works of law” (Mosaic covenant) and that designated by the “faith of Christ” (new covenant). The former era is characterized by obedience to the law, cocooned around Israel as a temporary measure to preserve the messianic line, provides instruction in the nature of evil, pronounces condemnation over all evildoers, and points to the coming deliverance of God. Whereas the new era is characterized by faith in God’s promises, covenantal renewal, and spiritual vivification, it also has a universal scope that includes the Gentiles and provides the medium for covenantal and eschatological vindication. For Paul, other Jewish symbols such as call, faith, Spirit, and sonship are present and show that the change of aeons has transpired in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In sum, Paul’s critique of “works of law” implies a rejection of a particular view of human agency in salvation, it means widening the scope of salvation, and it denotes the eschatological supersession of the old age by the new.

**Righteousness**

The Reformed conception of justification has been that it refers to the forgiveness of sins supplemented by the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. In many New Perspective on Paul tellings, justification in Gal 2:16 refers to “covenant membership.” Can we split the horns of these options? I believe we can once we recognize that the questions “Who are God’s people?” and “How are they saved?” are intrinsically bound together.

To begin with, in Gal 2 it is intriguing to us moderns that Paul moves from a debate about food and fellowship in 2:11–14 to discharging some highly polemical remarks about righteousness not coming by works of law in 2:15–21. The shift from Gal 2:14 to 2:15 is hardly abrupt; indeed, it is difficult to determine precisely where Paul’s rebuke to Cephas ends and where Paul’s theologizing of the episode to the Galatians begins. My understanding of the Antioch episode is that the offense to the “certain men from James” and those of the “circumcision group” was that these shared meals identified Christian Gentiles as equals with Christian Jews but without their having to come via the route of proselytism. Cephas’s separation was a mandate that Jesus-believing Jews and Jesus-believing Gentiles could

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62. Cf., quite perceptively on this, Calvin, *Galatians*, 68.
63. Bird, *Saving Righteousness*, 119–34; cf. Nanos, *Irony of Galatians*, 152–54; Watson, *Beyond the New Perspective*, 106–8. This is a long way from Luther’s contention that Peter was confusing law and gospel (Luther, *Galatians*, 86).
not have fellowship unless the Gentiles were circumcised. Paul's disgust was that this makes Jesus merely an add-on to Torah observance, relegates Gentile believers to the status of mere adherents, and shifts the determining force in the economy of salvation to the Torah/Sinai event over and against the cross and the new creation. Undoubtedly, the presenting issue in Gal 2:11–14 is the matter of the symbolic boundaries of the election of the people of God. For Paul, though, this is the people of God who are destined for salvation, and this salvation takes place exclusively in the cross and resurrection. Thus, the boundaries of identity and the soteriological singularity of the gospel are interrelated.

As such, in Gal 2:15–16 Paul moves beyond a discussion of boundary markers and group membership and he addresses the plight of the Jews under the law and even the bondage of the human condition apart from Jesus Christ. At the heart of the letter is the question of what is the problem with humanity that Judaism (and the Mosaic covenant) cannot remedy. Although the epistle to the Galatians is a manifesto for the inclusion of Gentiles into the people of God as Gentiles, there remains Paul's uncompromising conviction that the cross has exposed the absolute weakness of the human will, the terrible sickness of the human heart, and the inability of the law to positively change either. If merely ethnocentrism was the problem, Paul could resolve this by arguing, like Josephus or Philo, that God accepts everyone who comes under the wings of Torah. Instead, he advocated Christ over Torah as the means of salvation and the defining charter of God's people in the messianic age. Graham Stanton writes:

I concede that Paul's first use of the phrase 'works of the law' in [Gal] 2:16a is triggered by the issues which dominate the preceding discussion in Gal 2, circumcision and food laws. But as the initial listeners heard the arguments of the following verses unfold, they were left in no doubt that Paul was concerned about far more than these 'test cases of Jewish distinctiveness over against Gentiles.' Paul rejects the agitators' claim that one's standing before God (past, present, and future) is determined by carrying out the requirements of the law. If Paul's argument engages the subjects of Christian identity and Christian salvation in Gal 2:11–21, then this necessitates seeing "righteousness" as far more comprehensive than "imputation" or "covenant membership." I prefer to say that this justifying verdict is the creative act where God creates a new people,

with a new status, in a new covenant, as a foretaste of the new age. Righteousness by faith without works of law implies that the divine verdict of acquittal and the gift of righteousness are enacted out of a theodramatic story of salvation that has come to pass. Justification then includes undoing the consequences of the fall of Adam, it affirms the call of Abraham, it validates God’s special concern for Israel, it addresses the curse of Torah, it announces the climactic revelation of God’s saving righteousness at the cross, resulting in new creation, and it presumes on the obedience and faithfulness of God’s people until the consummation as the ultimate proof that God’s new world has begun.

Theological Interpretation of Galatians 2:11–21

In light of the forgoing analysis of Gal 2, assuming it that has a degree of historical-critical verisimilitude and exegetical rigor, I want to conclude by showing the theological results that follow when the historical particularity of the context is more fully appreciated. I want to suggest three outcomes.

First, righteousness by faith without works of law implies a contrast of two perspectives about human agency and divine action in the economy of salvation. If the manifestation of God’s grace is identified with the giving of the Torah, then the human response in obedience will become the determining factor in salvation. However, if the focus is switched to the cross and resurrection as the moments when God executes his verdict against evil and enacts his justification in the Son, then the emphasis falls on the human response more as reception and reliance than as performance or imitation. In this later model, the efficacy of the divine act is heightened and the effectiveness of a human response is lessened in contrast. This is not a return to a dichotomy of grace and legalism much less a differentiation of synergism and monergism, but it is a recognition of two different accounts of grace (i.e., dynamic versus static) operating in different modes (i.e., faith and works) and with different emphases along a continuum of divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Second, Paul’s articulation of justification demonstrates that soteriology and ecclesiology are not insulated spheres in his thought. The questions of who God saves and how God saves are not identical but clearly overlap. If justification is by works of law then it presumes a view of human agency that negates the necessity of the cross and effectively nullifies its achievement. At the same time, given the clear social function of the law in Jewish communities, justification by works of law would also mean that “God is the God
of the Jews only” (Rom 3:28). Paul's universalism starts not with salvation in Christ but with the universality of God's impartial judgment on Jew and Gentile and the lack of difference between them in justification. That leads to the singularity of the cross and resurrection as the reversal of the Adamic condition and the curse of the Torah. At the same time, those to whom by faith “righteousness would be counted” (4:11) are also those who are “counted as circumcised” (2:26). A genuine Pauline theology of imputation requires a double reckoning of righteous status and covenant identity. God's saving righteousness that acquits and vindicates is equally an action of bringing Gentiles into the “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) and making them children of Abraham (Gal 3:14, 29). Reformed theologians have wrestled with the relationship between justification and sanctification in order to find a place for transformation. I want to suggest that a new task for theologians is to pursue how a relationship between justification and adoption brings ecclesiology back into the soteriological picture.68

Third, Paul's theological reasoning has an essentially storied nature that is best expressed in a redemptive-historical framework. Galatians itself activates and narrates a number of substories as part of Paul's wider rhetorical strategy.69 There is the controlling story of the definitive apocalyptic act of the God of Israel in Jesus to rescue the world from the bondage of the evil age through his death and resurrection (Gal 1:4). There is the story of the Galatians themselves, who received the gospel from Paul, and the options they now face in light of certain intruders who are pressuring them to move closer to Judaism (Gal 1:6–10; 4:8–20; 5:2–15). There are the stories of Abraham (Gal 3:6–29) and Israel (4:21–5:1). There is also the story of Paul's conversion that turned the persecutor into a proclaimer (Gal 1:11–24) and the story of Paul's struggle to fight for the integrity of Gentile Christians before the Jerusalem church (Gal 2:1–14). Together this tapestry of substories constitutes an overarching narrative that communicates the incommensurable antithesis of Christ and Torah as nodes of Christian identity and vehicles for God's saving power. This narrative context has a serious bearing on how to construct Paul's theology. Many in the Lutheran/Reformed tradition have had a propensity to read Paul through the lens of an ordo salutis when they should have read Paul in light of a historia salutis.70 Although an ordo salutis may be a valid construction from Paul's writings

68. For a good place to start, see Michael Theobald, “Rechtfertigung und Ekklesiologie nach Paulus: Anmerkungen zur 'Gemeinsamen Erklärung zur Rechtfertigungslehre,’” in Studien zum Römerbrief (WUNT 136; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 226–40.
(e.g., Rom 8:28–29), a better framework is provided by a distinctive Pauline historia salutis (e.g., Rom 1:16; 15:7–8), since it replicates the flow of Paul’s own argumentative strategy. As another example, in Gal 3:13–14 Paul affirms what can only be called “penal substitution” (or perhaps better is “substitutionary judgment”),71 with Jesus Christ’s taking the curse of the law on himself resulting in “redemption.” Nonetheless, his rationale for stating this is to show that the blessing of Abraham has come to the Gentiles, which places the achievement of Christ’s death in clear redemptive-historical coordinates and not exclusively in personal individual vertical soteriology. The challenge ahead of us is to use a redemptive-historical framework in order to tie together both the vertical and horizontal aspects of Paul’s soteriology.72

**Conclusion**

I do not know if Martin Luther would have changed his mind on the semantics of righteousness or the purpose of Galatians by reading the Dead Sea Scrolls. However, as far as the Reformers such as Luther go, there is a genuine Paulinism that pervades their thought, but it has been expressed in terms that have tended to obscure the original context of Paul’s writings. Or else Luther and his progeny have tended to absolutize the polemics in somewhat reductionistic ways. If one’s theological proclivity means embracing the Reformation catch cries semper reformanda and ad fontes, then we will always be in a critical dialogue between Scripture and Tradition in the quest for theological truth. That means a willingness to correct, modify, reword, and jettison those aspects of one’s theological tradition that are not keeping in step with the Christian Scriptures. I have argued that closer attention to the particularity of the “works of law” with its sociological function, the fusion of anthropology and Christology in the “faith of Christ,” and the horizontal and vertical dimensions of justification are examples of just the sort of modification that is needed. Thus, a theological interpretation of Paul’s letters with a more attentive grasp of the historical particulars will hopefully become a fruitful avenue for exploring the theological richness of Paul’s message. As such, greater attention to historical particularity energizes rather than stifles theological interpretation of the Christian Scriptures.