

## **PART II**

### **THE ENSLAVEMENT OF THE BYGONE EVIL AGE**

## CHAPTER 3

### THE OLD AGE OF SLAVERY TO FLESH

As early as in his prescript to the letter, stating that Christ “gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age,” Paul very manifestly gives prominence to the so-called present evil age (Gl. 1:4). It is my contention that we can only really understand and appreciate the magnitude of the freedom brought about by Christ, as well as the far-reaching implications involved for Christian individuals and communities, after an appreciation of Paul’s view of the present evil age.<sup>1</sup> I will argue that it is a fallacy to think of freedom in Galatians almost exclusively in terms of freedom from law. Paul has a much larger picture in mind. For him it is about freedom from the present evil age in all its facets. I will indicate that Paul views the life in the present evil age – that is life before the advent of Christ, as well as without Him<sup>2</sup> – as a life of slavery. Man is born into this life as a slave. It is his fate. There is nothing that mankind can do of itself to liberate or deliver itself from this life of slavery. Paul is quite clear that God had to will it and Christ had to deliver mankind (Gl. 1:4-5). The point was strongly argued in the previous chapter with its heavy emphasis on apocalyptic, that God’s initiative and actions broke through the old frame of thinking and living and that a totally different frame of mind became possible through Jesus Christ and according to God’s will. The *modus* of this life of slavery can be described as life according to flesh. By nature man lives life according to man’s vision, man’s insight, man’s goals, man’s rules, etc. He gives sense to his life and orders it by living in accordance with set principles or gods of his own making (Gl. 4:8). In the process of orientating his life and life around himself to serve him and his society, he becomes the slave of his own making(s) and of the elements of the world (Gl. 4:9-10).

Theologically, Israel’s position before the advent of Christ was different from other nations. It was in a covenantal relationship with Yahweh who had graciously provided them with a set of rules (הֲלָוָה-“law”) according to which they had to live and combat evil(s) in their midst. Because of man’s sinful inclination and proneness to live according to flesh, law was not successful in combating evil. Although Yahweh had mercifully introduced mechanisms for restitution, in the long run man could not master sin and flesh. This resulted in a life of slavery, hopelessness and death. Aggravating the situation was the problem that law created division amongst men, because not all followed Yahweh and many

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<sup>1</sup> It is not customary for Paul to use “sins” in the plural form. He prefers to speak of “sin”. It is therefore accepted by most scholars (e.g., Betz, 1979, 40; Conzelmann, 1969, 69-71) that Paul took over this formula from Christian tradition understanding Christ’s death as an expiatory self-sacrifice for individual transgressions of the Torah. Martyn, 1997, 89, observes that there was a liturgical formula probably known to the Galatian churches that confessed: “The Lord Jesus Christ gave his very life for our sins.” The emphasis would then be on sins as human misdeeds. Paul, however, adds to this: “so that he might snatch us out of the grasp of the present evil age” (Martyn’s translation). In this way he emphasises the reality of a deeper root cause for sin behind the individually identifiable sins, namely the enslaving present evil age. Also Martyn, 2000, 253.

<sup>2</sup> That is a life into which Christ was not revealed.

Gentiles who feared Him were not willing to receive the distinctive outward markings characteristic of Jewish people, namely circumcision and dietary and calendar requirements. It was also repressing in terms of gender rulings. Only divine intervention could bring about final deliverance from this life of slavery to flesh and its secondary jailors. God provided this deliverance in the apocalyptic event of Christ's advent. I will motivate that the *present evil age* is the overall description for life before and without Christ and his Spirit. It is characterised as a life of slavery to flesh and its secondary jailors. It is opposed to new creation, which is a life of freedom in the Spirit, and according to God's promise to those of faith in Christ.<sup>1</sup> Because the secondary jailors, flesh's secundi, the elements of the world and law, feature so prominently in Paul's arguments for freedom, they will be dealt with in a separate chapter.

As the major theme of the letter is *liberation – eleutheriōō* "to free" (e.g., 5:1); *exagorázō* "to liberate from slavery" (e.g., 3:13) – so the major sub-theme is *oppression – ὑπό τινα εἶναι*, "to be under the power of" (e.g., 4:5). In short *the human tragedy* is universal oppression, ubiquitous enslavement to the powers of the present evil age. And in Christ, God's deed is the cosmic act of liberation, deliverance from that slavery.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. THE PRESENT EVIL AGE AS SLAVERY TO FLESH

The word σάρξ occupies a very prominent position in the letter to the Galatians, occurring 18 times.<sup>3</sup> Paul uses the term in a variety of ways of which all are not related to our subject in the same way or with the same intensity. There are examples where he uses it to refer to (fore)skin,<sup>4</sup> or where it is used in combination with blood (σάρκι καὶ αἵματι) to refer ordinarily to human bodily existence<sup>5</sup> in all its mortality and frailty.<sup>6</sup> Then there are the definitely ethical references to σάρξ,<sup>7</sup> which are all used in a morally negative sense. The latter are the instances that feature most prominently in the discussion on σάρξ, although it will hopefully become clear that all the references do have a connection with one another at different levels. The common denominator being that σάρξ without faith in the Son of God is aligned with the present evil age and against God and the cross of Christ.

### 1.1. A word with a history

Like all terms, especially those from antiquity, σάρξ has for many centuries been used in different ways and across a vast array of semantic fields. It is not neces-

<sup>1</sup> The reader is reminded that Chapters 3 and 4 are preparatory for Chapters 5 to 7 that deal with liberation and the liberated life after the demise of the present evil age in the advent of Christ and his Spirit.

<sup>2</sup> Martyn, 2000, 254.

<sup>3</sup> Schmoller, 1989, 451, lists (Gl. 1:16), 2:16, 20; 3:3; 4:13, 14, 23, 29; 5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24; 6:8, 12, 13. Morgenthaler, 1958, 140.

<sup>4</sup> Gl. 3:3; 6:12, 13.

<sup>5</sup> Gl. 1:16. 2:16 has the same meaning, although it is not combined with "blood". The same is probably true of Gl. 2:20. Gl. 4:13, 14 most definitely refer to bodily existence.

<sup>6</sup> Betz, 1979, 272.

<sup>7</sup> Gl. 4:23, 29 in being contrasted with promise (23) and Spirit (29) are at the least indicative of the human mode of existence without Christ, but probably should be read in line with the morally negative references. The references in Gl. 5:13, 16, 17, 19, 24 & 6:8 definitely have a morally negative meaning.

sary for our purpose to reflect the development of the term in any detail.<sup>1</sup> What is important for the current study though, is that attention be paid to both helpful and dangerous tendencies that have had a significant impact on the scholarly debate. Probably the most presented tendency is that of anthropological dualism in its vast array of forms and nuances, mostly dictated to by philosophical schools of thought from the stable of *idealism*. This tendency dominated the debate for the most part of the first eighteen centuries of Christianity. The next very influential train of thought was instigated by *existentialist philosophy*. In this regard Rudolf Bultmann was probably the single most influential scholar, endeavouring to break down the dualisms of the idealistic era and making the entire man responsible for his life of faith. The dilemma with both these approaches in all their nuances, although helpful in many respects, is that they often lack scriptural evidence and superimpose on the hermeneutical and exegetical processes.

There are various *social-scientific approaches* that have made a significant contribution to the understanding of flesh, very specifically in its Galatian application where circumcision is a matter of prominence. No conclusion on flesh in Galatians can be attempted without taking cognisance of these developments.

## 1.2. Σάρξ and anthropological dualism

Anthropological dualism presents itself in different nuances.<sup>2</sup> Roughly speaking this approach distinguishes between two entities in man: *spirit*,<sup>3</sup> being of good quality and the real and lasting essence of man; and *flesh*, being in need of moral control, fleeting, and an earthly prison to the former. According to Plato the *soul* would be part of the world of *forms* (ἰδέαι). The latter were considered to be the higher order of originals or changeless archetypes of which every phenomenon was an imperfect copy striving to be typical of its archetype.<sup>4</sup> Knowledge of life's different forms was the basis of life and ethics in practice. The *soul* was part of the *forms*, incorruptible and immortal, whilst the body was part of the lower order, transitory, and in the end, dispensable. Man's mission in life was to shake off the latter in order to experience freedom, and in that,

<sup>1</sup> Many studies have been done on the development of the term in both its usage and scholarly understanding. Worthy of special mention is Jewett, 1971. Also helpful, are amongst others: Sand, 1967; Brandenburger, 1968, 98-124; as well as Thiselton, 1975, 671-82.

<sup>2</sup> Plato was probably the most influential exponent of this train of thought, providing the tools for later generations of Christian scholars to contaminate their hermeneutical and exegetical endeavours with anthropological dualism. Durand, 1982, 29-30, reminds us that Plato was undoubtedly the most influential, but that he was not alone. He came from a tradition of idealism extending till long after his death.

<sup>3</sup> Importantly, Plato does not refer to this human essence as *spirit* (πνεῦμα), but rather as *soul* (νοῦς or ψύχη). He equally does not refer to the *flesh*, but rather to the *body* (σῶμα). This being said, the terminology of *flesh/spirit* was superimposed upon by the use of Platonism's basic thought patterns. This contaminated the Christian scholarly activity with regard to the antithetical pair of *flesh/Spirit* in Galatians. See also Liddell & Scott, 1975, on these terms. Barclay, 1988, 185-6, quite rightly shows that Plato was in no way constitutive of Paul's thoughts on this antithetical pair. Not even Philo, a Jewish philosopher in the Platonic tradition and who is often incorrectly compared with Paul, a contemporary, but from the other side of the Mediterranean, could be brought in as a link. Also read Hagner, 1988, 509-10 and Dreyer, 1975, 102-4.

<sup>4</sup> D.F. Wright, 1988, 518.

salvation.<sup>1</sup> Within this frame of reference the biblical notion of *σάρξ* was wrongly interpreted as a reference to the evil essence in man (Plato's *body*). This was opposed to the *spirit*, which was the inherently good part of man and his true essence. Coupled with this problem is the tendency to translate *σάρξ* with "physical nature" or "physicality"- in other words that which can be physically observed. This in itself makes it very difficult to include man's psyche and inner being from which his emotions and desires (*ἐπιθυμίαι*) arise. It also touches on the problem that the body is seen as evil and the seedbed for everything detrimental to morality. It assumes that that which is morally pure resides naturally somewhere in every man and needs only to be released by means of *ἐγκράτεια* ("self-control"), to which Paul refers at the end of his list of virtues, which he names "the fruit of the Spirit" (Gl. 5:22-23).

This approach to Paul's use of *σάρξ* is not acceptable, mainly for two reasons. *Firstly*, it accepts as fact that Paul thought in terms of Hellenistic categories and was taken up by Plato's philosophical categories. Although Paul would have been sensitive to his Hellenistic audiences, there is not enough evidence that he built his theology on a Hellenistic view of the advent of Christ and the Spirit. There is more than enough evidence, as will be illustrated in due course, that Paul's theological reflection was thoroughly from the vantage point of the OT and Second Temple Judaism. *Secondly*, it is clear that Paul's antithetical categories (*flesh/spirit*) do not coincide with that of Plato (*body/soul*).<sup>2</sup> For Paul, man in his entirety (body and soul)<sup>3</sup> lives in opposition to or in accordance with *πνεῦμα*. With *πνεῦμα* Paul refers to the divine Spirit as an entity entirely outside man's being. This Spirit is to determine man's actions as opposed to the flesh doing it. Paul does not distinguish between an imperishable soul and a perishable body. Man in his entire being is perishable and will, as believer in Christ, become imperishable (1 Cor. 15:35-57).<sup>4</sup> He states that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who lives in the believer (1 Cor. 6:19).

Russell states that most scholars since Luther opted to describe the flesh/spirit dualism as internal to man.<sup>5</sup> This might be an overstatement. In any event, one must be careful when using the term "internal" in this regard. If it means "inherent to man's being" so that man has two natures in eternal battle, it has to be rejected as an anthropological dualism on the grounds mentioned earlier. It would then also be untrue that the mentioned scholars follow that route. If it means that man has an internal conflict because these forces from outside continually cause him to make difficult choices, the picture changes. Witherington remarks that despite all the problems with the abovementioned and rejected anthropological dualistic approach, there is something to be said for the suggestions by some scholars that the so-called *yetzer tov* and *yetzer hara* (good and

<sup>1</sup> Van Peursen, 1976, 36-49; Störig, 1972<sup>1</sup>, 152-3.

<sup>2</sup> Landmann, 1971, 70-3.

<sup>3</sup> This is with reference to Plato. This study rejects any notion of an ontological dichotomy inherent to man.

<sup>4</sup> Bauckham, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 276-8, provides evidence from the OT and Second Temple Judaism supporting this notion.

<sup>5</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 7, cites a host of modern scholars.

bad inclinations of man within Jewish reflection) are at the basis of Paul's reflection.<sup>1</sup> According to this view every human being has these two inclinations. In the case of the morally negative inclinations to which *σάρξ* refers in Gl. 5:13, it is linked to desires (*ἐπιθυμία*) that Christians are also capable of having, even though they are in contrast to the guidance of the Spirit.<sup>2</sup> The proviso that Witherington adds is that one should not distinguish between the two in terms of the abovementioned anthropological dualism. In this respect he also refers to Rm. 7:21-25, of which he quite rightly warns that it should not be imposed on Galatians.

Paul is presenting a Christian view of a pre-Christian condition, here [Gl. 5] the apostle is clearly referring to what is the case with a Christian person. The tension in the Christian life is not between old person and new person (for the old person has been crucified and is dead and buried), but rather between Spirit and flesh.<sup>3</sup>

Paul states that scripture consigned all things to sin (Gl. 3:22). He clearly has in mind that all humans in their total being are under sin. Viewing this apocalyptically, as one probably should, it refers to the order of the present evil age, in which Jew and Gentile alike are under the power of and affected by sin.<sup>4</sup> Paul definitely does not distinguish between two natures in man. However, he does regard man as having fallen in every aspect of his humanity. Witherington describes this corruption as affecting man's mind, heart, will, emotions, body, social relationships and institutions. He adds that the corruption is extensive, affecting the whole of humanity and every aspect of human existence, but not totally intensive. It does not deprive man of still bearing God's image.<sup>5</sup> A useful suggestion by him is that one should not think of *σάρξ* in terms of "sinful nature", but rather as "sinful inclination". He says this on the grounds of *σάρξ* being associated with passions and desires and its being contrasted with love in

<sup>1</sup> Betz, 1979, 272. See W.D. Davies, 1970, 17-35.

<sup>2</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 377; Betz, 1979, 272.

<sup>3</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 377. Rm. 7 is not under discussion in this thesis and will not be reflected upon.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 260-1; Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 194.

<sup>5</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 377. In Reformation theology this has become known as "total depravity" (*corruptio totalis*). Colwell, 1988, 642, states: "This doctrine of total depravity is not intended to imply that fallen humanity is incapable of good works, but rather that there is no aspect of human being that is unaffected by sin: there is no 'relic or core of goodness which persists in man in spite of his sin' (Barth, CD IV.1, p.493)." Berkouwer, 1971, 485, indicates that, although there is agreement amongst Reformed theologians on the universal character of sin, disagreement is apparent with regard to sin's gravity and depth. This is not our concern. Enough said! Witherington has many to back him on his stance on total depravity in a long tradition of Biblical theology, including NT scholars: to mention only Ridderbos, 1975, 114-26 and Guthrie, 1981, 207 (referring to Rm. 8:7). What is questionable is his remark that the intensity of the depravity is not such that man is not redeemable. This gives the impression that man has the capacity at least to seek redemption. He does not argue the case, probably because it is not that relevant to the discussion on flesh. But, because he raises the matter, it should be mentioned that Paul's absolute antithesis between flesh and Spirit in Galatians; his association of sin and curse with flesh (and salvation and moral behaviour with the Spirit); his close association between living by and walking in step with the Spirit (Gl. 5:25); and his emphasis on man's plight (Israel included) in the present evil age, does not seem to harbour the notion of man being able to assist in his redemption in any way. These matters will be dealt with in due course. Fee, 1997, 166-83, is enlightening with regard to the Spirit's fundamental role in changing the believer's orientation.

vs. 13.<sup>1</sup> Not so useful, is his view that Paul seemingly had the notion of the body as “the weak link in the Christian’s armor,”<sup>2</sup> unconvincingly stating

it is the one aspect of human existence that has not yet experienced redemption, and will not do so until the resurrection. The mind is being renewed, the heart refilled with God’s love, the bent will straightened, fallen emotions being replaced by holy affections, but the fallen body which generates sinful inclinations is not; or at least one can say it is the portion of human personality least affected by redemption thus far. It is a mistake to assume that the term ‘flesh’ ever entirely loses its connection with the human body in Paul’s usage.<sup>3</sup>

The bothering factor with Witherington is that he comes very close to re-instating the very anthropological dualism he set out to question.<sup>4</sup> Obviously, being crucified with Christ and being a new creation does not involve miraculous recreation of the body into an unblemished state. Equally, according to Paul (1 Cor. 15), the body (σῶμα) will be radically transformed at the general resurrection to be imperishable or immortal. However, it is doubtful that one can so easily separate the body from the rest of man’s nature and just as easily ascribe the sinful tendencies (σάρξ - *alá* Witherington) to the body as the main culprit. It comes close to accepting that σὰρξ resides in the human σῶμα - at least primarily.

In his discussion on בָּשָׂר (bāśār) in the OT, Wolff indicates numerous instances where it refers to human frailty (Ps. 56:4) and unreliability (Jb 10:4). It often indicates man’s insufficiency in comparison to God (Jr. 17:5, 7), and flesh’s need to be empowered by Him, or else to perish (Job 34:14f.).<sup>5</sup> In the OT בָּשָׂר (bāśār)

does not only mean the powerlessness of the mortal creature but also the feebleness of his faithfulness and obedience to the will of God.<sup>6</sup>

Judaism in its various forms closely connected man’s carnality with his sin, but without interpreting the flesh as the actual cause of sin. It referred to OT statements which describe dependence on the flesh not merely as folly, but also as sin (Isa. 31:3). “All flesh” is mankind, and to strive after evil is inherent in man (Gen. 8:21). There must then be a relation between the flesh and dependence on the flesh.<sup>7</sup>

What is certain and very relevant to Galatians, is that flesh produces desires and passions in conflict to the Spirit.<sup>8</sup> This is even true of the Christian who has crucified the

<sup>1</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 377-8.

<sup>2</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 378.

<sup>3</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 378.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 240, comes very close to this position when he states that it “is used here not simply of weak human nature nor yet of life under bondage to the σαρκεία as opposed to life in the Spirit; it denotes...that self-regarding element in human nature which has been corrupted at the source, with its appetites and propensities, and which if unchecked produces the ‘works of the flesh’ listed in vv 19f.”

<sup>5</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>2</sup>, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>2</sup>, 31.

<sup>7</sup> Thiselton, 1975, 673.

<sup>8</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>2</sup>, 31, stresses that flesh as ethical frailty in Pauline theology, is not the creation of Qumran, as many would believe [Davies in Stendahl], but of OT (Ezk. 16:26; 23:20). Already in Is. 31:3 the two are contrasted. In Jl. 2:28 the Spirit is presented as the hope of the flesh. Longenecker, 1990, 240, correctly states that, although occurring in the OT, it was not used on a scale comparable to Paul’s use of σάρξ. He does, however, acknowledge Davies’ thesis that the “ethical use” of the term “was coming into vogue in Paul’s day.”

flesh with its passions and desires (Gl. 5:24). Despite the crucifixion of the flesh it still continues to battle with the Spirit.<sup>1</sup> The important factor for the Christian is that, although he has not yet been ridden of the temptations posed by the flesh,<sup>2</sup> he can, by the power of the Spirit, already overcome flesh in its different presentations. This is akin to the rabbinical notion that the body is a vessel that may from time to time be possessed by different spirits.<sup>3</sup> Hellenistic Judaism did not have an essentially negative appraisal of flesh. According to the Apocalypse of Elias (35:7f.; 42:12f.) the spiritual flesh will replace the physical flesh.<sup>4</sup> Apparently the dimension in which it partook would determine the quality of the flesh. The fact is that Hellenistic Judaism did not regard flesh as by nature inherently corrupt. One does not even find an anthropological dualism between *flesh* and *spirit* in the Qumran documents with their emphasis on dualisms. Meyer refers to a magnitude of relevant Qumran documents.<sup>5</sup> With regard to righteousness before God he says of 1 QS 11:9: "Here the sinfulness of the flesh is simply the sinfulness of human life."<sup>6</sup> With regard to Qumran Hübner finds that even the use of flesh and Spirit in reference to man and God, as in Galatians, does not of essence imply an antithesis between human flesh and the Spirit of God.<sup>7</sup> Jörg Frey remarks that the meaning of *flesh* in Pauline thought is nearer to Palestinian than to Hellenistic Judaism, but that his antithetical use of *flesh* and *Spirit* is not to be found in either of the two.<sup>8</sup> Together with this, in Paul the Spirit has the upper hand as the One who powerfully resurrected Jesus from the dead. He continues:

In der hier vorgeführten palästinisch-jüdischen Tradition ist die Rede vom >Fleisch< gerade nicht durch einen >ontologischen< Gegensatz zum Geistigen bestimmt, sondern durch den Ungehorsam gegen Gott, die Sünde. Zugleich ist der mensch als Ganzer >Fleisch<, nicht nur sein materieller Teil, und dies impliziert keine Abwertung seiner leiblich-geschöpflichen Natur, sondern ein Urteil über die Ausrichtung seiner Existenz. Dementsprechend kommt auch bei Paulus der Mensch stets als Ganzer ins Blickfeld: Er ist ganz Fleisch (Röm 7, 18) und von der Macht der Sünde beherrscht (Röm 7, 14.20.23), sofern er nicht im Glauben an Christus der Sünde abgestorben (Röm 6, 10f.) und vom Geist bestimmt ist (Röm 8, 9f.).<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore in soteriological terms Paul differs dramatically from both Palestinian and Qumran Judaism in terms of law. Where the spiritual man in Judaism seeks to observe the law, Paul regards this as part of the flesh. The spiritual man is the man who is in Christ.<sup>10</sup> These differences taken into account, Barclay correctly observes that not too much must be made of comparisons between Paul and Qumran, or even Paul and Philo, although they were contemporaries.

<sup>1</sup> Betz, 1979, 272.

<sup>2</sup> In Gl. 2:20 Paul confirms that he still lives in the flesh, but with faith in the Son of God who now dominates his life. He is clear in Gl. 4:14 that his flesh experienced afflictions and bodily ailments. Longenecker, 1990, 241.

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, 1975, 673.

<sup>4</sup> Thiselton, 1975, 674.

<sup>5</sup> Schweizer, Baumgärtel & Meyer, 1971, 110-4.

<sup>6</sup> Schweizer, Baumgärtel & Meyer, 1971, 113.

<sup>7</sup> Hübner, 1970/1, 268-84.

<sup>8</sup> Frey, 1998, 68-9.

<sup>9</sup> Frey, 1998, 72-3.

<sup>10</sup> Frey, 1998, 73-4.



Neither of the two main bodies of literature which may appear to be closest to Paul really matches his thought. And comparison with the use of בָּשָׂר (bāsār) in the Old Testament would also merely point up the distinctive aspects of Paul's terminology. Thus, while benefiting from the comparison and contrast with other writers, we are left with Paul himself and the need to find some explanation for his distinctive use of these terms.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is important and helpful that there is enough evidence in variegated Judaism of man not being ontologically defined by a *flesh/spirit* dualism, neither within himself nor in relation to God.<sup>2</sup> It was more about man in his entirety being existentially oriented either towards or against God. As Thiselton states:

The flesh, i.e. man's existence apart from God, has therefore a drive that is opposed to God. It not only occasions sin but also becomes entangled in it... This is not the flesh of the anti-Epicurean polemic, but man himself, in so far as he gives himself up to his own aims in opposition to God's.<sup>3</sup>

Dunn stresses that flesh is not something sinful in man's nature, but a "propensity towards sin, or weakness before sin's power (Rm. 7:14-25)."<sup>4</sup> Flesh is

the human condition in its belongingness to this world – that is, the weakness of the human being in contrast to the power of the divine, the dependency of the creature on the satisfaction of the bodily appetites, and the tendency of the physical body to decay and corruption.<sup>5</sup>

R.N. Longenecker adds that flesh itself is "the captive of sin" and not its origin.<sup>6</sup>

"Flesh" denotes not merely the bodily passions and lusts, nor even strictly speaking a "lower nature" contrasted with a "higher nature" in a person, but rather the human individual in his or her sin and depravity apart from the redeeming grace of God and the sanctifying work of the Spirit.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly there is enough reason to accept that Paul's opposition of flesh and Spirit is not about an anthropological dualism. Neither flesh nor Spirit is inherent to man's being. It is rather about man being existentially influenced from outside his being, either by God's Spirit, or by flesh towards which man has a predisposition, because of his fallen state and corruption. Soteriologically the Christian has been aligned to the sphere of the Spirit and should not allow himself to be influenced by or re-aligned with the sphere of flesh from which Christ delivered him.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Barclay, 1988, 191-2. In this regard Frey, 2003, 103-6, is vastly important. Frey indicates (105-6) that Qumran provides a much closer correlation to Paul's negative use of *flesh* than the OT does. One need therefore not seek assistance from Greek usage, which inevitably leads to imposition. Variegated Judaism provides enough scope on which Paul could theologise. Although he would probably not have made use of Qumran writings, Qumran is evidence of different strands of theology in Judaism. This would have provided Paul with a seedbed.

<sup>2</sup> Frey, 2003, 109.

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, 1975, 676. In this sense flesh weakens law, using it as an instrument to assert itself before God.

<sup>4</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 287. Bauer, 1979, 744, explains σάρξ as "the willing instrument of sin... subject to sin to such a degree that wherever flesh is, all forms of sin are likew. present, and no good thing can live in the σάρξ."

<sup>5</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 287.

<sup>6</sup> R.N. Longenecker, 1990, 240.

<sup>7</sup> Fung, 1988, 244; Van Peursen, 1976, 91: "Het gaat dan immers niet om de lichamelijkheid maar om de aardse bestaanswijze van de mens. Deze is in zichzelf niet zondig maar wordt tot zonde, indien zij het volledige oriëntatiepunt voor het menselijke leven wordt. 'Naar het vlees wandelen' wordt dan geteld tegenover 'naar de geest wandelen' dwz. resp. de levensgang die eigen vergankelijkheid niet stelt tegen de achtergrond van God en de existentiële wijze die zichzelf wél vanuit God laat richten."

<sup>8</sup> One is reminded of the apt words of Barth, 1949, 140: "The Holy Spirit is not identical with the human spirit, but He meets it... But that freedom of Christian living does not come from the human spirit. No human capacities

### 1.3. Σὰρξ and cosmological dualism

#### 1.3.1. *The Tübingen School and Albrecht Ritschl*

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the so-called liberal consensus under F.C. Baur's initiative took it upon themselves to rid the debate of the platonically induced flesh – spirit anthropological dualism. Baur, influenced by Hegel's dialectical philosophy<sup>1</sup> refused to accept any form of anthropological dualism. He accepted that σὰρξ was man's material body and prone to sensuality. In man's νοῦς he would make up his mind to fulfil good intentions, but his σὰρξ would immobilise him. Although he acknowledged this much, he was clear that the dualism of πνεῦμα and σὰρξ was not in man himself, but in the cosmos. He cites Gl. 5:1f. as proof that according to Paul both πνεῦμα and σὰρξ are entities standing over and against man in the greater cosmos. In man himself, as part of the cosmos, σὰρξ presented itself in his σῶμα.<sup>2</sup>

Albrecht Ritschl reacted to the German Idealistic approach, rejecting both the earlier anthropological dualism, as well as his contemporaries' cosmological dualism. In line with their Hegelian view on history and development, the Tübingen School understood the development of theology in the NT as the result of a struggle between Petrine Jewish-Christians and Pauline Gentile Christians, leading to a theological synthesis in the second century.<sup>3</sup> With regard to Pauline anthropology they understood it as having been greatly influenced by Hellenistic categories with Paul doing his best to find a balance between Hellenistic and Jewish anthropological categories.<sup>4</sup> Ritschl's contention was that Paul took his cue from the OT idea that the whole man in his fleshiness stands over and against God who is Spirit.

The man of faith visualises flesh as evil when he looks back at his own situation before conversion and recognises that he was totally sinful in face of God's law. So flesh in itself is not the source of evil but rather describes man in a state of alienation.<sup>5</sup>

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or possibilities or strivings of any kind can achieve this freedom....When it happens that man obtains that freedom of becoming a hearer, a responsible, grateful, hopeful person, this is not because of an act of the human spirit, but solely because of the act of the Holy Spirit. So, this is, in other words, a gift of God. It has to do with a new birth, with the Holy Spirit."

<sup>1</sup> Hegel's system was named Absolute Idealism, because he believed all reality to be brought together in an all-embracing, aloof Absolute Mind or Spirit, referred to as God. He held that the totality of life was in a pattern of movement, always starting with a thesis evoking an antithesis. These two are reintegrated onto a higher levelled synthesis. Further, individual man operates on the level of the *subjective Geist*. He becomes aware of himself, focuses on himself and lives for himself. This evokes the *objective Geist* where man features on a structural level including family, society, the state, other structural entities, and history. This is the level at which ethics features. This results in the *Absolute Geist*, which is a new self-awareness. So it perpetuates. Störig, 1972<sup>2</sup>, 81-92; Heron, 1980, 38-42. Harris, 1988, 696-7, contends that Baur's influence on his students gave rise to a small group of NT scholars known as the Tübingen School in which "a non-supernatural theological and historical perspective determined all biblical interpretation."

<sup>2</sup> Jewett, 1971, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Harris, 1988, 696.

<sup>4</sup> Jewett, 1971, 51-6, reflects the variety in the school.

<sup>5</sup> Jewett, 1971, 57.

Ritschl's contribution is valuable; especially in the sense that he recognises Paul's Jewish roots and does not allow for Paul's anthropology to be dissolved in Hellenism, not even for the latter to be the main influence on Paul. With him one also sees the beginning of the demise of Idealism as a hermeneutical tool to understanding Paul. Jewett is of the opinion that Ritschl could, however, not explain "some of Paul's more radical statements on σάρξ."<sup>1</sup> Also of great value is his emphasis on flesh as something less material and not an entity inherent to the human being, although typical of being human!

### 1.3.2. *Finding a cosmological evil element in σάρξ*<sup>2</sup>

One is reminded of Longenecker's earlier remark that flesh is not the origin of sin, but itself "the captive of sin", as well as Fung's remark that flesh refers not to a "lower nature" in man, but rather to the human individual in his sin and depravity.<sup>3</sup> Importantly, one must distinguish between flesh, sin and flesh being captive to sin, implying that sin does not originate from flesh, but abuses flesh to dishonour God.

For Paul, therefore, sin is not in the first place an individual act or condition to be considered by itself, but rather the supra-individual mode of existence in which one shares through the single fact that one shares in the human life-context and from which one can only be redeemed by being taken up into the life-context revealed in Christ (Col. 2:13).<sup>4</sup>

Günther stresses sin as "almost a personal power acting in and through man" (Rm. 5:12, 21; 6:6, 17; 7:9f.).<sup>5</sup> He speaks of the power of sin as disclosed to those knowing Christ, obviously implying it as an entity distinct from man. Spirit and flesh are in conflict on the battlefield called man and continually involve man in this struggle.<sup>6</sup>

What he terms in Galatians 1:4 "this present evil aeon," elsewhere as "the power of darkness," is set over against the royal dominion of Christ (Col. 1:13); and in Ephesians 2:2 he further qualifies walking according to "this world-aeon" as following the course of "the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience." The world is therefore in its unity and totality the domain of demonic powers, which he denotes as "angels," "principalities," "powers" (Rom. 8:38; 1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 2:14, *et al.*), "the world rulers of this darkness," "the evil spirits in heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12), of which Satan, as the "god of this aeon" (2 Cor. 4:4), is the head (cf. Rom. 16:20; 1 Cor. 5:5, *et al.*).<sup>7</sup>

Most importantly, the evil powers should not be understood as part of an original dualism – neither cosmologically, ontologically or theologically. There was no original dualism between God and the powers, and also not within God Him-

<sup>1</sup> Jewett, 1971, 57. It is not clear exactly what Jewett has in mind. From the context I gather that he has in view Paul's statements where σάρξ seemingly has a cosmological character, and that these cannot all be discounted in his definition. If this is the case, the matter will be dealt with in due course.

<sup>2</sup> This paragraph would probably make more sense if read after §1.4. of this chapter dealing with σάρξ as understood in existentialism. On the other hand, cosmological dualism provides a very logical point at which to deal with the evil element in σάρξ. For that reason it is included at this juncture.

<sup>3</sup> R.N. Longenecker, 1990, 240; Fung, 1988, 244.

<sup>4</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 93. See also Grundmann, Quell, Bertram & Stählin, 1964, 308-13.

<sup>5</sup> Günther, 1978, 581.

<sup>6</sup> Günther, 1978, 581.

<sup>7</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 91.

self.<sup>1</sup> The evil powers belong to God's creation and were equally conquered by Him in Jesus Christ (Col. 1:16; 2:15). Believers have been delivered from the present evil age (Gl. 1:4); the cosmos has been crucified to them and they to the cosmos (Gl. 6:14). With regard to evil powers Berkouwer quite correctly warns against making judgements from scripture too easily. He warns against the possibility of seeking an evil power on whom to blame man's iniquities and willingness to corroborate with sin.

Once we see the obviousness of guilt we can only observe how impossible it is to draw the relations between sin and the demonic realms in exclusive terms of "power" and "brute force." A *force majeure* or an inexorable fate is not the product of those power-aspects to which we have already referred. Indeed, the "power of darkness" can never be measured in the categories of causality, and we can never say that sin is determined by the "*prima causa peccati*".<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, when Scripture speaks of the *power* of the evil one we also hear (at the same time) of the "passions of the flesh", and following the "desires of body and mind," and being "children of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). No power of darkness causally "explains" our sin, and no inexorable force compels us to do evil. There is no *ex opera operato* "*in malam partem*." There is no relentless force, except that which is actualized in the *modus* of man's own culpability. Only in our guilt and capitulation to the evil one is the power of evil irrepressible.<sup>3</sup>

A resistance to this "superlative force" cannot be expected from the side of sinful, bound and weakened man. The freedom can only come from another power that seizes a man and reverses the course of his living. It must come from a "power" that is strong enough to cast out evil spirits by command (Mark. 9:25). Freedom must come from the Spirit of God (Matt. 12:28; cf. Luke 11:20).<sup>4</sup>

It is nigh impossible to fully explain the essence of the power of evil. The Bible, only dealing with it in connection with man's guilt or God's revelation of salvation and forgiveness, never presents it as an individual subject. Being "*only relationally defined*",<sup>5</sup> one should not read too much into texts regarding *loci* on evil or demonology.

Hendrikus Berkhof works with the double notion of guilt and tragedy. Guilt is grounded in the notion that man in his fleshly being decides to sin or to be lured into sin. However, evil also operates at a supra-personal level. He argues that Paul de-personalised heavenly beings of Jewish apocalyptic who were thought to influence earthly life, referring to them as *powers* (ἐξουσίαι - Col. 1:16), *principalities* (ἀρχαί - Col. 1:16) and *elements of the world* (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου - Gl. 4:3), making them part of the impersonal, demonically distorted structures of the world. This way, evil, operating on a supra-human level, influences man to the extent of being overpowered.<sup>6</sup> The point is that there is a power, however one defines it, outside and above man that influences him to sin. Flesh cannot be defined purely in terms of man's trusting in his merely being human. Even Barth with his reference to evil and the demonic as *das Nichtige*, and his conviction that it had to be regarded with the

<sup>1</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 92; J.J.F. Durand, 1978, 93-4.

<sup>2</sup> Berkouwer, 1971, 112.

<sup>3</sup> Berkouwer, 1971, 112.

<sup>4</sup> Berkouwer, 1971, 113.

<sup>5</sup> Berkouwer, 1971, 114-5.

<sup>6</sup> H. Berkhof, 1979, 215-23. Sin as an overpowering force (216) and the gravitational force of man's heritage (219).

utmost disbelief by which it had to be theologically excoriated from our lives and thoughts, if only by implication, accepted the existence of these supra-human forces opposed to God. In this regard one is reminded of his enigmatic remark: “Das Nichtige ist nicht das Nichts.”<sup>1</sup>

Man clearly has to contend with an evil force from beyond his individual and collective being.<sup>2</sup> It seems, unless one absolutely demythologises demons and evil powers, and, together with that, logically also demythologises God – leaving man deserted in his divided being – that one has to accept evil as operative in some form. Its domain of influence can be referred to as *flesh*. In this way *flesh* is a sphere exterior to man with which he is free to associate and, consequently to sin.

## 1.4. Σάρξ and existentialism

### 1.4.1. *Rudolf Bultmann on σάρξ*

Bultmann, without a doubt the most influential NT scholar in the field of existentialist interpretation,<sup>3</sup> was greatly influenced by the existentialist philosopher, Martin Heidegger,<sup>4</sup> who emphasised self-realisation and man’s need to ascribe meaning to (his) life. Man being uniquely himself is not an expression of a pre-given nature, but the result of creative historical acts of decision and choice.<sup>5</sup>

This is an intriguing subject,<sup>6</sup> but under threat of being side-tracked, we return to Bultmann. Bultmann maintained that scripture contains *kerygma*, which is the message about human existence. This is reflected in mythological language, which is the linguistic effort to objectify the experience through which man has come to self-understanding.<sup>7</sup> In order to understand the NT, or rather, to uncover the *kerygma* in the NT, it is the task of theology to *demythologise* the Christian proclamation reflected in scripture.<sup>8</sup> This having been done, the function of this mythical language must be discovered. Behind the mythical description of God, lies the authentic reality of God who, from beyond our own existence, addresses us in our *facticity*.<sup>9</sup> In the redemptive myth concerning Jesus, we hear the *kerygma* of God who is there for us. In this encounter we come to the self-understanding of faith. Only in this self-understanding of faith can God be encountered. The result is that Bultmann’s theological concentration is on faith as man’s attempt to come to self-understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Barth, 1950, 403.

<sup>2</sup> J.J.F. Durand, 1978, 89-90 motivates this stance and adds sufficient Pauline evidence.

<sup>3</sup> Macquarrie, 1973, 271, correctly states: “It may be claimed that much of the most creative theological thinking in this century has sprung from the encounter with existentialism.”

<sup>4</sup> Küng, 1980, 493. A very thorough reflection of Heidegger’s philosophical approach is provided in Heidegger, 1999. Interestingly enough, according to Macquarrie, 1973, 93, this Marburg colleague of Bultmann’s “has hardly anything to say about the body by which we have the possibility of being in a world.”

<sup>5</sup> Webster, 1988, 115-6.

<sup>6</sup> Brief orientations can be found in Heron, 1980, 106-8; Störig, 1972<sup>2</sup>, 254-60; E.D. Cook, 1988, 243-4.

<sup>7</sup> Webster, 1988, 115. One could probably describe it very much the same as symbolic universe today.

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann, 1941, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Macquarrie, 1973, 189-90, describes it as: “not an observed state of affairs but the inward, existential awareness of one’s own being as a fact that is to be accepted.” Heidegger uses the term “throwness” (Macquarrie, 1973, 191-2). Also Heidegger, 1999, 5, 11f.

Aptly Bultmann himself characterised his understanding of theology as anthropology.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one could argue that his theology was dissolved in his anthropology.<sup>2</sup> It is no surprise that Barclay describes Bultmann's view on Pauline anthropology as "characterised by an emphasis on man in relationship to himself."<sup>3</sup>

Against this backdrop the *flesh/spirit* antithetical pair, individually and in relation to each other, markedly has a typical Bultmannian interpretation. Whilst Baur's Tübingen School, holding onto idealism in dialectical dress, successfully dealt with anthropological dualism, replacing it with cosmological dualism, Bultmann would set it on an existentialist course. Besides *σάρξ* stressing man's material corporeality, weakness and transitoriness,<sup>4</sup> Bultmann moreover stresses *σάρξ* as man's outward and visible sphere, that which by its nature has an external appearance.<sup>5</sup> He then distinguishes between man's living *ἐν σαρκί* ("in the flesh") and *κατὰ σάρκα* ("according to the flesh"). The first phrase refers to man's normal earthly life as biological and social being – man as he is on the surface of things without viewing him from an ethical or a theological perspective.<sup>6</sup> In other words, it is a given and according to God's creational intention. In the second mode of existence (*κατὰ σάρκα*) the ethical and theological neutrality is replaced by a negative assessment. This negative assessment is not because of a change having taken place in the flesh, but because flesh is redirected from God to itself as norm for living. In other words, living *in the flesh* is a divine given for man's existence this side of the grave. On the other hand, living *according to the flesh* is to live contrary to the Creator's intention, turning away from Him and trusting creation to provide life and fulfilment.

And to take flesh as one's norm is precisely what Bultmann has defined as sin, for it means to turn from the Creator to the creation, 'To trust in one's self as being able to procure life by the use of the earthly and through one's own strength and accomplishment'.<sup>7</sup>

This sphere becomes a power over us insofar as we make it the foundation of our lives by living "according to it," that is, by succumbing to the temptation to live out of what is visible and disposable instead of out of what is invisible and non-disposable – regardless of whether we give ourselves to the alluring possibilities of such a life imprudently and with desire or whether we live our lives reflectively and with calculation on the basis of our own accomplishments, "the works of the law."<sup>8</sup>

With regard to Galatians he maintains that the application of this definition implies that both a life lived in lawlessness, as well as a life lived in conscientious abiding by the law, can be lived *κατὰ σάρκα*. In the first instance one lives according to the flesh by seeking to gratify one's passions and desires characteristic of one's sensuality and being focussed on oneself, as well as relying on

<sup>1</sup> Heron, 1980, 104-5.

<sup>2</sup> J.J.F. Durand, 1982, 131; Ridderbos, 1975, 42.

<sup>3</sup> Barclay, 1988, 192.

<sup>4</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 230-2.

<sup>5</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 230.

<sup>6</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 231-4. P.E. Hughes, 1962, 348f., supports this position from 2 Cor. 10:3. Barrett, 1973, 250, is correct in pointing to Paul's being inconsistent with this distinction with regard to Rm. 8:9. I disagree with him however, that Paul's inconsistency includes Gl. 2:20. See also Grosheide, 1959, 276; and Pop, 1975, 287-8.

<sup>7</sup> Barclay, 1988, 193; Bultmann, 1953, 239.

<sup>8</sup> Bultmann, 1941, 16.

oneself. In the second instance the pursuit of a life under law is according to flesh if man relies on this observance for his righteousness before God.<sup>1</sup> This still leaves Bultmann with the problem that Paul sometimes (Gl. 5:16-17) gives the impression that flesh has a life of its own. He personifies flesh as if it is a cosmic entity outside man – even demonic – determining human behaviour. This Bultmann explains as figurative, rhetorical language illustrating man's powerlessness to secure life on his own. He has lost the capacity to be the subject of his own actions.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Spirit brings into man's life the possibility of breaking through that slavery and powerlessness,<sup>3</sup> to get a grip on life again, and to take decisions to live a life of obedience.<sup>4</sup>

Bultmann's interpretation of flesh had a marked influence on NT scholarship. Much can be learnt from him. On the other hand, Barclay is correct in much of his criticism.<sup>5</sup> He stresses that Bultmann's distinction between living ἐν σαρκί and κατὰ σάρκα does not apply to all occurrences, as is the case in Rm. 7-8 where they are synonymous. He quite rightly stresses that the context should be decisive and that σάρξ does not always refer to that which is outwardly observable. In this sense many fleshly works, like jealousy, are not visible, while other non-fleshly activities, like baptism, are visible by nature and necessity. He correctly criticises Bultmann's assumption that Paul's concern was directed against self-righteousness and legalism within Christianity, while Paul's concern was that Christianity was being Judaised.<sup>6</sup> Bultmann's heavy emphasis on the individual and his self-understanding (illustrated well in his understanding of Rm. 7)<sup>7</sup> have caused him to ignore concepts such as πᾶσα σάρξ (Gl. 2:16) referring to mankind, and uses of κατὰ σάρκα with regard to man in his relationships (Gl. 4:23; Rm. 1:3; 4:1; 9:3, 5-9).<sup>8</sup>

The criticism is valid. On the other hand, with enough discretion, one could reinterpret Bultmann in terms of the criticism and still remain true to his basic concept. Whether this would have been acceptable to Bultmann is uncertain and best left at that. What remains a problem is Bultmann's thorough demythologising of historical events and their influence on history. Barclay remarks:

On the basis that 'every assertion about Christ is also an assertion about man and vice versa', Bultmann interprets the cross not as an apocalyptic event which changes the cosmos but as an event of revelation disclosing the grace of God which 'frees man from himself. Similarly the eschatological gift of the Spirit becomes the power of futurity', the new possibility of genuine, human life which opens up to him who has surrendered his old understanding of himself'. However much this may be valid reinterpretation of Paul for today, it remains very doubtful that the historical and apocalyptic dimensions of Paul's thought can be eradicated quite so completely in any attempt to represent Paul's own perspective.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 235-6.

<sup>2</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 240-1.

<sup>3</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 327-30.

<sup>4</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 310f.

<sup>5</sup> Barclay, 1988, 196-8.

<sup>6</sup> In this regard E.P. Sanders has done phenomenal work. We reflect on Sanders in my Ch. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Bultmann, 1967, 198-209.

<sup>8</sup> Barclay, 1988, 198.

<sup>9</sup> Barclay, 1988, 198.



### 1.4.2. Ernst Käsemann on σάρξ

Ernst Käsemann, a former student of Bultmann's, was critical of his tutor's historical scepticism, as well as of his breaching of the relation between 'the preached Christ' and the 'historical Jesus'.<sup>1</sup> He was equally critical of Bultmann's anthropology, especially because of its dominance of Pauline theology, and the overemphasis on human individuality.<sup>2</sup> To his mind much more had to be made of man's being in relation to others and to the world in which he lives. In turn, this world in which man finds himself is the scene of apocalyptic and cosmological conflict that does not leave man untouched.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, Käsemann's insistence that apocalyptic is the mother of Christian theology would have a marked influence on his anthropology. It is at this point that the value of his contribution is recognised.

His understanding of *body* (σῶμα) differs from Bultmann's, who viewed it as man's person in relation to himself.<sup>4</sup> Käsemann stresses the body's physicality as "that piece of world which we ourselves are and for which we bear responsibility."<sup>5</sup> Regarding the *flesh/Spirit* dualism, he stresses it has nothing to do with individual self-realisation and basic orientations. It is not a dualism of orientation in man. Rather, flesh and Spirit are powers influencing man from outside his being (and body) to align with either what is worldly or heavenly, and, subsequently being part of one of the two dualistically opposed spheres of the cosmos. The same is true of the *Spirit*:

[I]t was conceived by Paul as a power, a sort of material reality and an aeon or cosmic sphere.<sup>6</sup>

Thus the Spirit, as the earthly presence of the resurrected Lord, is that gift which at the same time claims us (and our bodies) for service to the appointed Lord of the cosmos. Conversely, 'the flesh' ...designates human 'worldliness', that is, being determined by the world.<sup>7</sup>

It is this being determined by the world and its mode of existence, and consequently serving it, that Paul describes as life according to flesh. What sets his view miles apart from Bultmann's is his emphasis on the world's rebelliousness against God, and his introduction of a demonic element. When man decides to live a worldly or fleshly life, he aligns himself with the demonic sphere in opposition to the Spirit, the resurrected Lord's earthly presence.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the flesh/Spirit dualism is neither an anthropological nor a cosmological dualism. It is not by definition inherent to the being of either cosmos or man. Rather, it is about the Spirit of God being operative in the world, the latter having set itself up against God and his Spirit, and man as σῶμα (man in his physicality) aligning himself with one of them. Understood this way σάρξ is both a given human reality in

<sup>1</sup> Heron, 1980, 110.

<sup>2</sup> Käsemann, 1971, 65, 74; 1969, 14-5, 175-7.

<sup>3</sup> Käsemann, 1969, 131-7.

<sup>4</sup> Bultmann, 1953, 226-7.

<sup>5</sup> Käsemann, 1969, 135.

<sup>6</sup> Jewett, 1971, 71.

<sup>7</sup> Barclay, 1988, 200.

<sup>8</sup> Käsemann, 1971, 26.



Bultmann's understanding of living ἐν σαρκί, and a cosmological entity influencing man to set himself against the Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

The apocalyptic element in Käsemann's reasoning regarding σάρξ is of great importance. The advent of Christ and the accompanying arrival of the Spirit as the eschatological sign *par excellence*, marks the arrival of the new age in which Christ reigns supreme. It has brought about a separation in time between "the present evil age" which is typical of this world in its opposition to God, and the "new creation" in which God newly lays claim on man and his service.<sup>2</sup> This new dispensation, although inaugurated by the advent of Christ, has not yet fully arrived. Until such time as it does, the conflict between Spirit and flesh will continue and man will equally be called upon to obediently align with the Spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, Käsemann's position, moving the emphasis from a dualism within to one outside man, but appealing to man to align with the one or the other, is a marked improvement on Bultmann. This being said, Käsemann is still guilty of describing man's reaction to flesh and Spirit individualistically. He fails to discuss humanity as a whole's reaction to the dualistic appeal. In this way it boils down to the individual's securing of a positive position before God. The will of the flesh then becomes an attempt to secure status for oneself before God by virtue of good works.<sup>4</sup> Barclay correctly states:

Thus in describing the connection between law and flesh, Käsemann falls back on an individualistic interpretation which is not only questionable in itself but also difficult to correlate with the apocalyptic perspective which he elsewhere describes so effectively.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of this paragraph it should be emphasised to Bultmann's credit that he called attention to man's responsibility with regard to his identity and ethical choices in life. Man is not merely a pawn without any control over his life whatsoever and dictated to by exterior forces. Käsemann, again, should be credited for stressing the divine initiative in the advent of Christ dividing life into two opposing aeons. Man's choices are not merely towards self-realisation and they are not done in a moral void or on neutral ground. They are done in accordance with one's alignment with one of these aeons.

### 1.5. Σάρξ and the social-scientific approach

In recent decades historical criticism has been challenged by advances in anthropological, sociological and socio-psychological research, resulting not only in its "fine tuning", but also in a fundamental overhaul.<sup>6</sup> Knowledge of literary and material deposits uncovered by archaeologists and historians could not provide enough knowledge of ancient Mediterranean worldviews, mindsets, so-

<sup>1</sup> Käsemann, 1971, 26-27.

<sup>2</sup> Käsemann, 1969, 191.

<sup>3</sup> Käsemann, 1971, 26-27, 174-182.

<sup>4</sup> Käsemann, 1971, 179.

<sup>5</sup> Barclay, 1988, 202.

<sup>6</sup> Esler, 1998, 2.

cial interactions and behaviour.<sup>1</sup> There is a socio-cultural chasm between the first-century Mediterranean and the modern (also post-modern) Western world.

If we do not face up to this distance we remain at risk of ethnocentrically imposing our own taken-for-granted notions of reality onto a people who may simply not share them, of assuming that our understanding is their understanding.<sup>2</sup>

Walter Russell is a typical exponent of this approach as applied to the *σάρξ/πνεῦμα* dualism in Galatians.<sup>3</sup> He focuses on reading Galatians and the *flesh/Spirit* dualism mainly in terms of community. His central thesis links up with Käsemann's apocalyptic notion. He rejects any notion of an internal duality in the believer and perceives the two concepts as representative of "an external contrast between two eras or modes of existence with corresponding mind-sets (φρονήσετε in Gl. 5:10)."<sup>4</sup> He acknowledges H.N. Ridderbos for taking up this view earlier on, describing it as a *redemptive-historical* rather than an *existential contrast*.<sup>5</sup> Seen this way, Russell interprets the "flesh community" in Galatia as

a community identified and characterised by a person bodily in his or her frailty and transitoriness unaided by God's Spirit....This community is representative of a person *before or apart from* Jesus Christ's liberating death, burial, and resurrection. Thus, such persons can think and feel the right thing to do, but are unable to do it fully.<sup>6</sup>

These two identities represent eras in redemptive history. Flesh, in tandem with the era prior to the advent of Christ, is associated with νόμος (*law*) and τὰ στοιχεία τοῦ κόσμου (Gl. 4:3, 9 – *elements of the world*).<sup>7</sup> After Christ's advent the so-called Judaisers anachronistically argued that circumcision was necessary for believers in Christ as a sign of obedience to the law. According to Russell Paul's use of flesh refers to their particularistic and ethnocentric gospel, as opposed to Spirit referring to the universal and multi-ethnic gospel. Flesh and Spirit refer to two believing communities in Galatia, i.e. the Judaising and Pauline Christian communities with two respective identities and behavioural patterns ("deeds of the flesh" and "fruit of the Spirit").<sup>8</sup> He stresses the Galatians' vulnerability to the Judaisers' non-gospel in terms of group identity, much rather than in terms of ideology. Being presumably mostly of Gentile origin, they would be susceptible to taking up the group identity of the Judaisers, because it would bring them into closer continuity with the historical people of God from which the Messiah originated according to God's election. Although this probably is part of the solution to the puzzle, he stretches it too far when he adds: "How else can one explain why so many adult males would even consider submitting to the trauma of adult circumcision?"<sup>9</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Esler, 1994 (esp. 1-18).

<sup>2</sup> Esler, 1998, 3.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 2. It fits well with my point in Ch. 2 that Paul was reframing the Galatians' symbolic universe.

<sup>5</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 66.

<sup>6</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 2.

<sup>7</sup> These two subjects are dealt with in my Ch. 4.

<sup>8</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 3.

<sup>9</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 89.

A choice between ideological and sociological motivation for the acceptance of the non-gospel cannot be determined only on the basis of the “trauma of circumcision”. Was it indeed perceived as such?<sup>1</sup> Could ideological or theological fervour not have had as much an impact on their being, providing enough motivation to subject to such perceived trauma? He is nearer to the mark when he adds that the Judaisers could have stressed the need for law-observance, because they regarded it as a gift of God’s grace.<sup>2</sup> In the absence of an expanded Christian ethic and against former pagan behavioural patterns, they would be prone to accepting an ethical pattern given by the God of the OT to his elect.

The emphasis of the social-scientific approach is on group-identity. This approach stresses the very important fact that the first-century Mediterranean personality can be described as essentially dyadic. In short, it refers to a personality that is not viewed individualistically, but in terms of inter-relatedness. It is about a personality defining itself in terms of others and behaving in terms of the expectations of others. In this regard social position is of the utmost importance. One’s social position determined one’s horizontal behaviour towards social peers, but also vertically with regard to those of higher or lower ranking. The dominating values in such personalities and communities were honour and shame. One’s reputation was always at stake and behaviour focussed on community views and identity.<sup>3</sup> This also involved stereotyping of individuals in terms of their group and its behaviour. Moral responsibility was that of the whole group, not only of the individual.<sup>4</sup> Russell very effectively illustrates how these traits can be traced in Galatians.<sup>5</sup>

Without putting Russell’s view up for discussion, a few remarks are called for. A social-scientific approach to Galatians as part of a broader approach is essential. In this regard Russell is most valuable. Social context, group identity and group behaviour as strongly influenced by the Judaistic threat, should make one wary of too broad an understanding of flesh, and too easy an inclusion of the so-called libertinistic threat in the understanding of  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  from Gl. 5:13 onwards, as if there were no connection with the Judaistically coloured use of the term in the earlier references. The specifically Judaistic threat must be seen to be included in the use of  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  also in the latter part of the letter.

He is also correct that a redemptive-historical approach is necessary. Galatians was undoubtedly not written in a vacuum. It is about the believing community’s identity in Christ and their ethos since his advent and resurrection as promised in the OT. However, his criticism of Barclay’s position that  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  is an “umbrella term” with a broader meaning than just the Judaistic usage<sup>6</sup> is not necessarily

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<sup>1</sup> Does this view not possibly superimpose modern-day psychological terms and perceptions onto ancient religious experience; one of the dangers Russell sets out to avoid and in which he is otherwise very successful.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 89.

<sup>3</sup> Malina, 1993, 67.

<sup>4</sup> Malina, 1993, 70-1.

<sup>5</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 87-118. Esler, 1998, 29-57, does the same, but also adds the notion of “limited good” (47-8).

<sup>6</sup> Thus,  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  refers to what is merely human, belonging to a life before and without Christ, including Torah.

correct.<sup>1</sup> It was obviously Paul's point of entry into the subject, but he did not necessarily use it exclusively in a Judaistic way. His audience was not the Judaistic party. In fact, his audience consisted of believers redeemed predominantly from a Gentile background. If *redemptive-historical* is expanded to reflect the position of the Gentile being grafted into the olive tree (Rm. 11:17-24), and therefore also taken as applicable to the Galatians; if we accept Paul's reference to the  $\sigma\tau\omicron\iota\chi\epsilon\acute{\iota}\alpha$  – law being one of them – in Gl. 4:3, 9 to mean that anyone without Christ (with or without law) is a slave; and if Paul's insistence that they were now sons of Abraham (Gl. 3:7,29), of the free woman (Gl. 4:23,31), and of God (Gl. 4:4-7), without ever having needed to become part of the historical Israel, it seems most plausible that *redemptive-historical* has a broader meaning. It is, therefore, quite acceptable that  $\sigma\acute{\alpha}\rho\chi$  in Galatians refers to that which is merely human, and inclusive of the Judaistically tainted view. In this regard Russell might be too restrictive when he narrows it down to "what is merely human *and* distinctively Jewish".<sup>2</sup> He comes too near to equating the merely human and the distinctively Jewish element.

It is debatable whether the dyadic personality should be regarded as altogether exclusive of individuality.<sup>3</sup> Obviously individualism would be anachronistic to the first-century Mediterranean personality, but should the individual and his relationship to God be seen as exclusively corporate? The OT has ample evidence of individual relationships with God (e.g., the Psalms, Job). True, the OT reflects an earlier period, but very much the same type of thinking regarding personality and the community. There are also enough occasions where Jesus decidedly has the individual in mind, such as the Sermon on the Mount. Sure, it has a corporate element as well. The point is that dyadic is not exclusive of individuality.

Enough said! Despite this criticism, a final conclusion should take cognisance of the results of social-scientific research. Obviously, the latter should equally consider literary-critical results.<sup>4</sup> An author could well intend to say much more than what can be sociologically defined. In this regard Esler aptly observes:

Moreover, as we seek to determine how the communications of the New Testament were understood by their initial audiences it is inevitable that we will find some meanings which did not occur to the first readers or listeners. We can only aim for approximations of ancient meanings. Nor can we avoid the fact that all interpretation of an ancient document is a dialogue between the past and the present; the point is that using communication theory depends on accepting that there is a past with which we may enter into dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 212-3.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Esler, 1998, 13, stresses the point that different societies have different emphases on individuality, but that social-scientific research should never neglect the individual.

<sup>4</sup> Robbins, 1995, 274-89; 1996, 6-17. One is also reminded of the observation by Harrill, 1995, 2, that "scholars investigating early Christianity from a purely sociological hermeneutic often do not aim to provide better readings of specific texts, but rather produce broad theoretical models, complete with grids and graphs that require their own exegetical decipherment."

<sup>5</sup> Esler, 1998, 21.

## 2. WEIGHING THE EVIDENCE

We now have to come to a workable conclusion as to what Paul meant by *σάρξ* that will have to be tested against the textual evidence in Galatians. From the above selection of scholarly reflection a single sentence definition seems impossible. Barclay is correct that Paul uses the term in a broader sense and that the term's multi-dimensionality clearly comes into play. The specific context to the text itself is therefore decisive.<sup>1</sup> It is equally important to keep the historical occasion as overarching context in mind, so as not to exploit the multi-dimensionality in an irresponsible way.<sup>2</sup> Paul's use of the term has a central meaning throughout the letter. He does not use it disparately from section to section. On the other hand, I am not in agreement with Russell that the golden thread is consistently the Judaizing threat. I will illustrate how Paul expands the initial threat to include the totality of human life without Christ and his Spirit, and in opposition to the Spirit.

### 2.1. That which is merely human as the main thrust of *σάρξ* in Galatians

It is about being human with all its frailty, transitoriness, limitations, social and structural capacities and corruptibility, and indeed about having been corrupted (Gl. 3:22). It is in line with Bultmann's understanding of man's living *ἐν σαρκί*. Gl. 1:16; 2:16, 20 and 4:13, 14 use *σάρξ* primarily in this fashion. There is no ethical weight in the term. It is morally neutral. On the face of things it also seems neutral in terms of religious identity, but there could be more to it than meets the eye.

- In *Gl. 1:16* *σαρκὶ καὶ αἵματι* ("flesh and blood") most definitely refers to man as human being in his frailty, limitations and transitoriness, but he is distinctly contrasted with God (15) who revealed his Son to Paul. What Paul knew did not come to him by conferring with others equally dependant on God. It came by gracious divine revelation. Paul already places *σάρξ* in an apocalyptic frame by introducing the element of revelation (*ἀποκαλύψαι*). In terms of his personal redemption history, although the advent of Christ was the actual apocalyptic turning point of history, this divine revelation of Christ was Paul's personal turning point – the advent of Christ in his life. In this respect the contrast of God and flesh on the fulcrum of Christ's revelation alludes to flesh's inability to know God of its own accord. God had to break into the sphere of flesh for man to come to knowledge of Him.
- In *Gl. 2:16* it is quite clear that *ἄνθρωπος* is used in tandem with *πᾶσα σάρξ*, the former referring to the generic man and the latter to the whole of mankind. This once again gives *σάρξ* the meaning of man in his dependence and frailty, but a new dimension is added, namely that *σάρξ* is in need of justification. Man in his transitoriness has also sinned and the only way to be justified, is not by works of law, but through faith in Christ (*οὐ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ*). Still *σάρξ* in itself is not reflected as an evil force, but man himself in his dependence and needs, and also his need to be justified. It does not im-

<sup>1</sup> Barclay, 1988, 203-4.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 137-8.

ply that σάρξ is by definition unjustifiable and inherently evil as in Hellenistic thought.<sup>1</sup> It indicates that it is in need of justification by faith in Christ as opposed to works of law. Jewett draws attention to the fact that Paul probably cited Ps. 143:2 from the LXX, but that he replaced ζῶν (“living thing”) with σάρξ. His intention was probably “to counter the Judaisers’ claim that circumcised flesh was acceptable as righteous by God.”<sup>2</sup> There does, therefore, seem to be an anti-Judaising tone to Paul’s use of σάρξ in Gl. 2:16.

- When he reaches *Gl. 2:20* he places this life lived ἐν σαρκί in an apocalyptic frame.<sup>3</sup> He still lives in the flesh, but since the advent of Christ in his own life, he lives life in all its transitoriness and frailty through faith in Christ and no longer merely in human or Jewish fashion. He now partakes in a new existence in relation with the Son of God.
- *Gl. 4:13-14* is Paul’s last reference to σάρξ as that which is seemingly merely human. The phrase δι’ ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκὸς should probably be translated with “ailment of the body.” He is referring to an illness that could have been a trial for them, but which they overlooked. Has Paul replaced the more appropriate σῶμα (“body”) with σάρξ for rhetorical reasons? Does ἐν τῇ σαρκί μου, which refers to this ailment, enhance this supposed rhetorical effect?<sup>4</sup> Obviously, in this context σάρξ underlines man’s transitoriness and physical corruptibility, as well as his incapacity to help himself. But, seen in the context of the Galatian situation of believers in Christ having become sons of God through the Spirit (*Gl. 4:6-7*) and now reverting to works of law, is Paul not stressing their spiritual retraction? In terms of law, Paul with his illness would have been unclean arriving in Galatia. Despite this they were willing to assist him.<sup>5</sup> In fact, they received him as if he were Christ Jesus himself. Even more, because of this ailment they received the gospel and became sons of God. If his flesh and the laws associated with a condition such as his, were not a problem then, why are they now? It seems a real possibility that Paul’s use of σάρξ in this context is not as “innocent” as meets the eye, but a way of aligning law and flesh against Spirit and loving service. Law and flesh have a way of subduing the Spirit and loving service.

One must bear in mind that, regarding the Galatians, the Spirit as apocalyptic gift to God’s people is implicitly used in the same way as the revelation of Christ was used with regard to Paul in *Gl. 1:16*. For them the redemptive change had come. Apocalyptically they no longer belonged to the time before their reception of the Spirit.

It is also fundamentally important to underline the Spirit’s entry into this life. God sent Him (*Gl. 4:6*). Flesh is not said to have come over man like some

<sup>1</sup> Jewett, 1971, 98.

<sup>2</sup> Jewett, 1971, 98.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 121.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 140, maintains that the only possible theological significance of *Gl. 4:13-14* is that Paul stresses the irrelevance of bodily conditions and the Galatians’ departure from that standpoint.

<sup>5</sup> The θεοσεβόμενοι amongst them would have assisted despite their knowledge of Jewish law in this regard. The Gentiles would probably have helped oblivious of these laws. Fact is, knowledgeable at the time or not, they were previously caring and even received him as though he were Christ Jesus.

cosmological force from outside. Man is flesh (Bultmann's ἐν σαρκί). The Spirit, on the other hand, comes from God and enters man's life in the flesh in order to help man cry out to God: "ἄββὰ ὁ πατήρ" (Gl. 4:6). The Spirit enters man's existence by divine initiative. Flesh, on the other hand, is part of his existence in the present evil age.

## 2.2. Evil as underlying σάρξ

Flesh needed justification. Not only was man transitory and corruptible, he had been corrupted. In Gl. 3:22 Paul is quite clear about the matter. The present age is described as evil (Gl. 1:4) with evil powers reigning in it. Man's natural inclination since Adam's fall is to allow himself to be influenced by, even to follow, this evil mode of existence. Flesh, as mere bodily existence (Bultmann's living "in the flesh"), was not the problem, but man's choice to live according to the dictates of the sphere of the corrupted world in opposition to God.<sup>1</sup>

Sin as a cosmological entity, so impacted and impacts on man, that it brings those outside Christ into submission. So, in terms of its origin, flesh is not an anthropological entity. Neither is it cosmological. The cosmological entity is the evil power of sin and opposition to God operative in the present age. Flesh is more an existential term, not in the sense of Bultmann's anthropological existentialism, but in the sense of aligning one's existence with the present evil age's mode of existence. It is about a supra-human power impacting on man in the flesh and influencing him to act according to its ways in opposition to God.

## 2.3. Flesh, law and circumcision are purposefully aligned in the letter

In Galatians Paul does not speak of flesh in a vacuum. It is part of his arguments against circumcision and law, and his promotion of freedom. One should therefore, as the social-scientific perspective prompts, tend to Paul's alignment of flesh with law and circumcision.

- *Gl* 3:3 is the first instance in Galatians where Spirit and flesh are contrasted. Prior to this contrast Paul refers to the Galatians' reception of the Spirit by means of hearing with faith and not by works of law (*Gl*. 3:2). He asks them whether they, having begun with the Spirit, intend to end with the flesh. He regards their reversion to law as reversion to flesh. Law and flesh are thus aligned. To trust in law is at least a form of trusting in flesh. To seek to complete (ἐπιτελεῖσθε) Christian life by way of law rather than through the Spirit, is tantamount to living according to the flesh, which is how they lived before their acceptance of the Spirit. This is an apocalyptic element. Their receiving of the Spirit introduced them to a new identity and mode of living.
- Both *Gl*. 4:23 and 29 are located in the so-called "Allegory of Sarah and Hagar" (*Gl*. 4:21-31). Being born according to flesh is equated with being born in slavery and is juxtaposed with being born free and according to the prom-

<sup>1</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 66; Küng, 1968, 151-3; Sasse, 1965, 891.



ise (Gl. 4:23). In Gl. 4:29 being born according to flesh is juxtaposed to being born according to the Spirit. In these cases σάρξ without a doubt has a deeper theological bearing. It is set over and against God's promise and his Spirit and deeply rooted in the covenantal history of which Abraham and Isaac are the most prominent characters. These references to σάρξ definitely imply that freedom cannot be obtained by σάρξ without God's intervention by promise and Spirit. A life rooted in and seeking fulfilment in flesh leads to slavery. Redemptive-historically speaking it is quite clear from the context that Paul strongly associates the Judaisers and other Jewish people with living κατὰ σάρκα. People who seek to be circumcised and to adhere to other Jewish laws are opposed to the promise and the Spirit. This does not necessarily imply a promiscuous life. In fact, whilst aimed at the Judaisers, it does not have that bearing at all. It is about finding one's identity and living it within the almost psychotically enclosed parameters of law. It is about living a life cut off from the promise God gave in Christ. In this sense he values the Judaisers' religion as being a merely human religion.<sup>1</sup>

Once again, the Spirit used in conjunction with the promise gives the redemptive-historical perspective an apocalyptic ring. The Spirit was part of the promise. The advent of Christ and his Spirit introduced the new promised era. Believers had been rescued from the present evil age so that a life lived κατὰ σάρκα was now anachronistic, belonging to the previous era of which those living according to the Spirit could not partake with integrity. Paul also sets a life κατὰ σάρκα equal to a life of slavery and in contrast to a life according to promise and freedom. Once more, σάρξ is not an entity either outside or inherent to man. It is man himself in his frailty, corruptibility and need of divine injunction. The Spirit is from God and acts on man. However, in this case σάρξ actively opposes the Spirit and those living according to the Spirit. This could be the first instance in Galatians where Paul introduces σάρξ as man trusting in himself and rejecting God's promise and Spirit. In other words, flesh refers here not only to man's corruptibility, but also to his having been corrupted.<sup>2</sup>

Dunn makes reference to Gl. 2:15, where Paul refers to the life he still lived in the flesh (ἐν σαρκί), stating that it could "include an allusion to ethnic origin...and particularly to Jewish trust 'in the flesh'."<sup>3</sup> In Gl. 3:20 Paul contrasts the beginnings of their eschatological life in Christ having started in the Spirit with a life of reversion to flesh, when he clearly refers to a life inclusive of at least circumcision, but probably also of other laws such as dietary and Sabbath laws.<sup>4</sup> It is also clear that flesh in Gl. 6:13 refers to the rite of circumcision as ethnic marking of the Jews.<sup>5</sup> In this respect there might be an OT basis in the

<sup>1</sup> Barclay, 1988, 207.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, 1998, 65.

<sup>3</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 146.

<sup>4</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 156.

<sup>5</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 339. Thiselton, 1975, 675, refers to Gl. 6:12, 13 and the circumcision as their wanting to make themselves agreeable to the church by human means, so that they could glory by human means in the act of the Galatians' circumcision. Seeking confidence before God in anything other than God Himself, would be seeking it in the flesh.



use of בשר (bāsār) in Gn. 17:11, referring to the foreskin of the penis, and in Lv. 15:2-7, probably referring to the male organ itself. In Ezk. 16:26 it definitely refers to male genitals.<sup>1</sup> Thus, there is an obvious alignment of circumcision and law with the flesh. The tripartite alliance was seen by Paul as part of the present evil age. It was impossible to introduce one of these elements into the new aeon without implicating the others.

## 2.4. Flesh has ethical implications

Russell rightly warns against losing sight of the Judaizers in Galatia when moving to the hortatory section.<sup>2</sup> However, one must acknowledge that Paul introduces a new dimension to σάρξ, supplementary to the Judaizing threat.<sup>3</sup>

To say that the Judaizers are in view is to beg the question somewhat...Therefore we must conclude that Paul's straightforward statement in 5:21b means what it appears to say: the description of those who do the deeds of the flesh in 5:19-21 is a description of pagans or non-Christians.... The simultaneous description of the *Christian* Judaizers and the *non-Christian* sarkic practitioners in Gl. 5:19-21 is easily understood from Paul's previous identity of the community of the σάρξ in Gl. 4:21-31. Especially in 4:23-25 Paul identifies the σάρξ community as the Jewish community still under the Mosaic or Sinaitic covenant (4:25).<sup>4</sup>

There are scholars who argue that in Gl. 5 Paul turns away from the so-called threat of freedom from the right, in order to focus on the threat from the left, namely libertinism. In the absence of law there would always be the threat of licentiousness.<sup>5</sup> If this were the case it would almost seem as if Paul was advocating Christian behaviour as finding a balance between law and freedom. This would be very shaky ethics and once again dependent on the believer's fleshly judgement. It would also not be in keeping with Paul's intentions in Galatians. As we shall see, Paul was not trying to find a balance between freedom and law. He was more concerned about preserving freedom against the threat of law. We will be looking into these matters in more detail in the following chapters. In the meantime we accept that Paul is not addressing a new situation.

- When Paul warns against the Galatians' abuse of their freedom as an opportunity for the flesh (μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀφορμὴν τῆ σαρκί) in *Gl. 5:13* it is difficult not to accept a new dimension to his reasoning. It is reasonable to accept that his rejection of law is anachronistic and belongs to an era before the advent of Christ would have raised the question as to how man's sinfulness and proneness to a life according to the flesh would be dealt with without law. Would his stand on the matter not cause man to fall prey to flesh-

<sup>1</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>2</sup>, 29.

<sup>2</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 156.

<sup>3</sup> W.B. Russell, 1993, 180, argues that the physical sense of σάρξ in Gl. 1-4 is not replaced by an ethical sense in Gl. 5-6. He rejects E.D. Burton's idea that the physical sense in Gl. 5 should be understood figuratively as a "metonymy of container" in which case: "The evil impulse is focused upon by referring to the bodily tissues that contain it." He much rather opts for a broadening of the bodily sense to include the ethical.

<sup>4</sup> W.B. Russell, 1997, 160.

<sup>5</sup> R.N Longenecker, 1990, 238.

liness? They were to do the opposite to what flesh wanted. They were to serve one another through love (διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις). The latter is not man in his sinful being's basic inclination (Gl. 5:16-17). When left to himself man lives for himself. His desires are opposed to the Spirit's. This is obviously another way of stating that man has been morally corrupted. It does not mean that sin resides primarily in the body, but that man in his being merely human has oriented his life against the Spirit, toward sin.

This should not be understood exclusively in individualistic terms. It most probably has a bearing on the necessity for the Galatian churches to be more inclusive than exclusive in terms of law abiding. In this regard Fee notes:

Quite in contrast to how this material is read by most...the concern from beginning to end is with *Christian life in community, not with the interior life of the individual*. Apart from 5:17c, which is usually completely decontextualized and thus misread (see below), there is not a hint that Paul is here dealing with a "tension" between flesh and Spirit that rages within the human breast...To the contrary, the issue from the beginning (vv. 13-15) and throughout (vv. 19-21, 26; 6:1-4, 7, 10) has to do with Spirit life within the believing community. The individual is not thereby brushed aside; after all, one both enters and lives within the Christian community at the individual level, which is where the individual believer fits into the argument.<sup>1</sup>

- This is especially obvious in the list of the works of the flesh (τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός) in *Gl. 5:19-20*. To explain these works exclusively, or even predominantly, in terms of the typical actions of the Judaisers as a group, in opposition to the Pauline understanding and associated actions referred to as the fruit of the Spirit, would be dishonest of Paul and straining matters, however one regards his rhetorical use. Taking the Hellenistic world in which Paul was speaking into consideration, these actions described as works of the flesh would undoubtedly have a broader meaning, even if only by association.<sup>2</sup> After all, these lists were of Hellenistic origin.<sup>3</sup> This notion is enhanced by the use of παθήματα ("passions"- *Gl. 5:24*) and ἐπιθυμίαι ("desires"- *Gl. 5:16, 17, 24*).
- Paul emphatically stresses the flesh/Spirit dualism in this hortatory section. One either chooses to live according to the flesh or according to the Spirit. In *Gl. 5:24* he reintroduces the notion of the crucifixion that he previously applied to his own life (*Gl. 2:20*). Once again it is the apocalyptic event of Christ's crucifixion that makes the difference, as well as the Spirit through whom this life is lived. Having crucified the flesh does not mean the believer is no longer fleshly or does not sin. That he still is, but fundamentally the Spirit determines his behaviour. His behaviour is no longer the merely human life in the sphere of influence of evil as is all human life belonging to the present evil age (*Gl. 1:4*), but behaviour that belongs to the new era or the new creation (*Gl. 6:15*).

<sup>1</sup> Fee, 1994<sup>1</sup>, 205.

<sup>2</sup> Barclay, 1988, 203.

<sup>3</sup> Betz, 1979, 281-2.

- This notion is very effectively highlighted in *Gl. 6:8* where Paul stresses the eschatological result of one's basic orientation in life as either according to flesh or according to the Spirit. With references like ἐν παραπτώματι ("any trespass"- *Gl. 6:1*) and ὁ νόμος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ("law of Christ"- *Gl. 6:2*) in the same pericope one does not get the idea that works of law are the only fleshly actions in Paul's mind. However, in *Gl. 6:12-13*, when he rounds up the initial argumentative situation, he returns to the Jewish identity markers – specifically circumcision and the resulting boasting in the flesh.

### 3. CONCLUSION

It should be clear that Galatians does not provide for the possibility of an anthropological dualism. There are no anthropological higher or lower orders in perpetual conflict with each other. We contend that πνεῦμα and σάρξ are not two entities in man's nature. Πνεῦμα refers to the Spirit and his sphere of influence and σάρξ primarily to the mode of living akin to the present evil age – that being a life of human submission and slavery to the influences of demonic powers acting against God's will.

It must be acknowledged that Paul also uses σάρξ in a more neutral sense, referring to man's being as transitory, frail, dependent and corruptible. In this respect Bultmann's notion of "living in the flesh" is most helpful. On the other hand, in Galatians it seems clear that Paul, even with his seemingly more neutral references, employs the latter to build up to the more negative use – that to which Bultmann refers as life "according to the flesh". The latter is the life defined by man's living for his own benefit and within his enclosed sphere of life, characterised by sin and corruption.

Having said this, and denouncing anthropological dualism, one should be wary of viewing the flesh/Spirit dichotomy as an original cosmological, ontological or theological dualism. If flesh is not only indicative of man in his transitoriness, frailty and self-reliance, but also of his having been corrupted, the latter must have come from somewhere. There seems to be evidence enough that one cannot merely "demythologise". One has to ascribe evil to a supra-human entity or power opposed to God who is the Origin of creation and, in the Christ event, Subjector of this evil entity.<sup>1</sup>

Although we should seek the origin of sin and its fleshly influence on man outside man, it does not render man blameless with regard to his having sinned. When man lives according to the prerequisites of the flesh, he acts under the dominion of powers and ideas that are not from God's Spirit. In other words, Paul employs this dichotomy to emphasise the status of the believer as one who is aligned with the Spirit and makes his ethical choices within that sphere as opposed to the sphere of the flesh, which is the sphere in which those without Christ operate –

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<sup>1</sup> I do not elaborate on this, nor do I use weighty terminology, simply because it is too vast to deal with here.

including Paul's opponents! That is the sphere of enslaving evil powers against which man has no defence in his frail and corrupted human make-up.

He strongly aligns circumcision and other "works of the law" with life according to flesh. It does not mean Paul has only the so-called Jewish identity markers in view, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, the whole of Jewish law which he sees as a divinely given form of the τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου for Jewish believers in the previous dispensation. Because they belong to the previous aeon, by practicing them one runs the risk of aligning with the present evil age and its fleshly existence.<sup>1</sup>

It seems flesh should be viewed from different angles, i.e. anthropologically, cosmologically and redemptive-historically. Our conclusion on flesh from an *anthropological angle* is that it refers to man himself in his being merely human, i.e. frail, transitory, corruptible, and indeed corrupted by sin. When man finds his identity in this disposition of his and his ethical behaviour is determined by and in terms of it, and thus, in opposition to God's dealings with him in Jesus Christ and his Spirit, he acts according to flesh. From a *cosmological angle* flesh refers to man's aligning of himself – individually or as humanity – on the side of the evil forces of the present evil age in their opposition to God as he operates through his Spirit. From a *redemptive-historical angle* it represents one of two aeons separated by the advent of Christ and his Spirit. The one aeon is without Christ and is referred to as the *present evil age*, characterised by a life of divisive slavery to flesh, law and elements of this world. The other is referred to as *new creation* and represents life in Christ and according to his Spirit, bearing the fruit of love and sacrificial service.

Σάρξ in Galatians predominantly underlines man's plight before God since time forgotten. It was due to man's need, whilst living in the flesh in a sinful world, not to succumb to living according to flesh, that Yahweh provided law. It was to guide man in service to Yahweh and his fellowmen. Ironically and tragically, law failed to do this precisely because of sin and man's propensity to turn anything good, even divine, against God. Law could not break this power, in fact, it would enhance it (Rm. 5:20; Gl. 3:22),<sup>2</sup> itself becoming slave to flesh.

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<sup>1</sup> Adams, 2000, 231-2.

<sup>2</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 144-9; Schlier, 1971, 91-2.

## CHAPTER 4

### ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD AND LAW: ENSLAVING SECUNDI IN THE HANDS OF FLESH

We have determined that the present evil age is characterised by opposition to God under influence of an evil supra-human power presenting itself in man's transitoriness, corruptibility and corruption. This domain is referred to as flesh. It was not originally part of creation – neither cosmologically nor anthropologically – but became thus. Galatians profoundly emphasises enslavement to law (νόμος) and, in passing, the elements of the world (τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου - Gl. 4:3). To such an extent do νόμος and στοιχεῖα collectively dominate the theme of slavery, one could wrongly get the impression that there are three major operative enslavers, i.e. σάρξ, νόμος and στοιχεῖα. So seemingly dominant is νόμος compared to σάρξ, one could be forgiven for initially thinking Paul regarded νόμος as primary enslaver and tormentor from the rigorist right. In opposition to this, σάρξ would then be regarded as secondary threat from the libertinistic left – an amoral seducer at loggerheads with νόμος.

We have determined that σάρξ is the primary enslaver of man, endeavouring to position man independent from and in opposition to God, from shortly after creation. Law arrived on the scene at a much later stage. Paul states it was 430 years after Abraham (Gl. 3:17). It was given to Israel, God's elect, to help curb its vulnerability to flesh and sin, but law itself became slave to flesh (Gl. 3:22). Law was so incapable of performing this task that it largely underlined Israel's enslavement to flesh. In fact, it inadvertently encouraged sin (Gl. 3:10-11, 21-22). It became an objective in itself, leading to believers comparing themselves with others and boasting about legalistic achievements. It underlined Israel's spiritual plight and hopelessness as much as that of the nations. It will be argued that Paul assigned only a limited function to law and only for the limited period till Christ's advent. Since the triple crucifixion in which Christ was crucified and Paul with Him, in order that Paul would be crucified to the world and the world to him (Gl. 2:20; 6:14), the law had reached its zenith and was totally denigrated to nothing more than one of the *elements of the world*.

I will argue that the nations lived in slavery to τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, negatively speaking, referring to various elements in which they trusted, other than in Yahweh, and, since the advent of Christ, anything other than having faith in Him. There is a possibility of these elements, by God's common grace, having a limited positive role, in the same way as law initially had. However, the main bearing of the chapter is on νόμος and στοιχεῖα as slaves of σάρξ. Flesh being the primary enslaver of the present evil age, law and the elements are its secundi emphasising man's plight and hopelessness seen from the Christ event in which it met its demise.

## 1. SLAVERY UNDER THE ELEMENTS OF THE WORLD

Paul's references to τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (Gl. 4:3) and στοιχεῖα (Gl. 4:9), together with the reference to τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὐσιν θεοῖς (Gl. 4:8) that could very well be an implied reference to στοιχεῖα, are problematic. Apart from Galatians στοιχεῖα occurs only in Col. 2:8, 20; Hb. 5:12 and 2 Pt. 3:10, 12.<sup>1</sup> Στοιχεῖν occurs in Gl. 5:25 and 6:16, but is not currently of interest to us. Although the reference to Col. 2:8, 20 could be helpful, we must be wary of allowing the study of "elements" in Colossians to determine its meaning in Galatians.<sup>2</sup> Although we cannot exhaust the theme currently, we will endeavour to fathom it to a point where we have something feasible with which to expound Galatians.

### 1.1. Interpretations

A lexicographical analysis is an apt starting point. Bauer presents the following information with regard to meanings attached to the word in different contexts:<sup>3</sup>

- a) *Elements of learning or fundamental principles.*<sup>4</sup> This would be the meaning in Hb. 5:12,<sup>5</sup> but not necessarily in Galatians.<sup>6</sup> Defenders of this option argue for development in religion from more elementary forms, like Judaism or the different Gentile forms, to Christianity as ultimate form and revelation.
- b) *Elemental or basic substances from which everything in nature is made, referring to the traditional: earth, water, air and fire.*<sup>7</sup> Martyn remarks that, unless for decided reasons, one should accept this meaning on lexicographical grounds.<sup>8</sup>
- c) *Elementary spirits associated by syncretistic religious tendencies of later antiquity with the physical elements.* Bauer is inclined to this interpretation.<sup>9</sup> Martyn mentions that supporting sources are mostly post-Pauline.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this does not exclude the possibility that Paul could have meant exactly this.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Schmoller, 1989, 463; Morgenthaler, 1958, 143.

<sup>2</sup> Martyn, 1995, 18.

<sup>3</sup> Bauer, 1979, 768-9.

<sup>4</sup> Also Matera, 1992, 149-50; Moore-Crispin, 1989, 203-23; Belleville, 1986, 64-9; Delling, 1971, 685.

<sup>5</sup> Nida & Louw 1, 1988, 588.

<sup>6</sup> Martyn, 1995, 19. Although Nida & Louw 1w 1988, 475, do not explicitly denote this meaning to στοιχεῖα in Gl. 4:3 & 9, they do hint in this direction with the translation "rudimentary knowledge." Interestingly, they denote a meaning to στοιχεῖα in all 5 occurrences, but they are slightly vague regarding its meaning in Gl. 4.

<sup>7</sup> Nida and Louw 1, 1988, 19, denote this meaning to 2 Peter 3:10.

<sup>8</sup> Bauer, 1958, 768; Martyn, 1995, 19.

<sup>9</sup> Nida & Louw 1, 1988, 147, denote this meaning in Col. 2:20. According to Betz, 1979, 205, Greco-Roman, and even Jewish syncretistic movements, held a negative view of the world (κόσμος). The elements constituting the world were not neutral substances, but "demonic entities of cosmic proportions and astral powers which were hostile towards man. In Judaism these forces were integrated in the world of 'angelic beings'." The resulting impact of these forces is that man is enslaved. Others inclined to this position are: Hong, 1993, 81, 165; Barrett, 1985, 39; Cousar, 1982, 92-3; Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 204; Schlier, 1971, 190-1.

<sup>10</sup> Martyn, 1995, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Schweizer, 1988, 468, regards it as possible, but not probable. Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 204, feels strongly that the scant evidence for this usage before the second century CE is no argument against its having been used in

d) *Heavenly bodies*. This meaning is closely linked to the previous one.

Although very helpful, lexicography alone cannot satisfactorily expound the meaning of such a complex word.<sup>1</sup> One is overwhelmed by the different interpretations of *στοιχεῖα*. Even with regard to so-called facts on which theories are constructed there is much conflicting evidence,<sup>2</sup> making it almost impossible to come to any conclusion. There is also the danger that some could try to revive demonological interpretations in reaction to others who have tried to demythologise personalised cosmological terminology, and vice versa.<sup>3</sup>

Bundrick has been very helpful in evaluating all the possibilities.<sup>4</sup> He determines the immediate context of Gl. 4:3 as reflecting on the inferior status of certain people in a time prior to the advent of Christ when they were confined under law; kept under restraint/imprisoned (Gl. 3:23); under a custodian/tutor (Gl. 3:25); children and no better than a slave (Gl. 4:1); under guardians and trustees (Gl. 4:2); slaves to the elements of the world (Gl. 4:3); and under law (Gl. 4:5). He then poses the dilemma of to whom Paul refers in Gl. 3:23-4:7 when he speaks in the first person plural (*ἡμεῖς*), and to whom in the second person plural (*ὕμεῖς*).<sup>5</sup> He is in agreement with Reicke and most scholars<sup>6</sup> that the use of the first person plural in Gl. 3:23-25 refers to the position of the faithful under the law in association with the Jewish Christians. The switch to the second person plural in Gl. 3:26-29 “indicates an extension in the point of view from Israel to the Gentile world.”<sup>7</sup> The use of the first person plural in Gl. 4:3 thus includes all Christians of both Jewish and Gentile origin. Of great importance is that, whatever the *στοιχεῖα* are, the term has to apply in some way or another to both Jew and Gentile. He then delineates the interpretations in terms of terminology introduced by both Bandstra and Kurapati,<sup>8</sup> as follows:

### 1.1.1. *Principle interpretation: στοιχεῖα as rudimentary principles*

This includes those interpretations mentioned under Bauer’s first category. Luther and Calvin interpreted it as OT law, more precisely, ceremonial law. Hugo Grotius regarded *στοιχεῖα* as elements of piety common to Jewish and pagan religion, namely: temples, altars, libations, calendars, festivals, etc.<sup>9</sup>

this way by Paul. The context, and not the history of the word’s usage, must be conclusive. He is of the opinion that the context in Galatians calls for such an understanding.

<sup>1</sup> Martyn, 1995, 20.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., Arnold, 1996, 55-76 goes against the trend, presenting “evidence” that *στοιχεῖα* was used in the sense of demonic or spiritual powers. He refers to the *Greek Magical Papyri, The Testament of Solomon and 2 Enoch 16:7*, identifying traditions that could be traced back to much earlier times – even up to three centuries BCE (57-9). Wink, 1978, 244, who wrote on the subject prior to Arnold, contends that no such evidence occurs prior to the third century CE. Although Arnold refers to him in his article, he does not specifically refute Wink’s position. He merely mentions that his own position is at least a probability (59). Bundrick, 1991, 359.

<sup>3</sup> Arnold, 1996, 68; Bundrick, 1991, 363.

<sup>4</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 353-64.

<sup>5</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 355.

<sup>6</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 361.

<sup>7</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 355-6.

<sup>8</sup> Bandstra, 1964, 171. Kurapati, 1976, 42-55.

<sup>9</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 357.

In Col. 2, then, Paul can use the same expression as in Gl. 4, for the reference is again to religion before and outside Christ, and the same judgement falls on this. At best it is only a shadow of the fulfilment (Gl. 2:17), and in fact it proves to be a deception when the one who believes in Christ thinks his existence can be supported by its ordinances (Gl. 2:8) even though the fullness of God's power is at work in Christ alone, Gl. 2:9.<sup>1</sup>

Cramer translates: "The elements of the religious-moral habit of the old man."<sup>2</sup> Bandstra argues that it refers to law and flesh as the fundamental forces impacting on each other within human existence before and outside Christ.<sup>3</sup> Esser thinks similarly, referring to the elements of this world as:

All the things in which man places his trust apart from the living God revealed in Christ; they become his gods and he becomes their slave.<sup>4</sup>

Longenecker also thinks in these terms, taking Gl. 4:3 to refer to the Mosaic Law as the basic principle by which Israel had to live in preparation for the coming Christ. In the same way Gl. 4:9 refers to the Gentiles' basic principles of religion, namely nature and cultic rituals.<sup>5</sup> Dunn finds this interpretation "lexically very possible and contextually the most likely in Gl. 4:3."<sup>6</sup> In Gl. 4:9 it becomes clear: "elemental principles of religion, whether pagan or Jewish, involved the observance of certain sacred days times and rites."<sup>7</sup>

### 1.1.2. *Cosmological interpretation: στοιχεῖα as material components*

This interpretation is in line with Bauer's second category and is supported by Schweizer<sup>8</sup> and Rusam.<sup>9</sup> Schweizer works with the hypothesis that στοιχεῖα in both Colossians and Galatians refers to that which it refers to in all the literature of the first century CE, namely the four (or five) elements of the universe (earth, water, air, fire, and sometimes, ether).<sup>10</sup> He examines quotations of Greek authors from the sixth century BCE until the end of the second century CE and finds that there was the conviction that the four elements were originally in harmony, but later began to strive against one another, resulting in disharmony.<sup>11</sup> Wolter emphasises that

<sup>1</sup> Delling, 1971, 686.

<sup>2</sup> Cramer, 1961, 175.

<sup>3</sup> Bandstra, 1964, 173.

<sup>4</sup> Esser, 1976, 453. This is basically also the position of Ridderbos, 1976<sup>1</sup>, 153-4. Ridderbos, 1960, 176, adds that both in Colossians and Galatians the same meaning is intended, namely that στοιχεῖα must be equated with κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων ("according to human tradition") in Col. 2:8. Ridderbos, 1975, 149, refers to it as "legalistic prescriptions to which heathen religion subjects its adherents and which he sees returning in the form of all kinds of ceremonial, ascetic, and other regulations of Judaistic and syncretistic heresy."

<sup>5</sup> Longenecker, 1990, 165-6.

<sup>6</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 286.

<sup>7</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 299.

<sup>8</sup> Schweizer, 1988, 455-68.

<sup>9</sup> Rusam, 1992, 119-25. This is, broadly-speaking, also the line of thought in Van Kooten, 2001, 49-68.

<sup>10</sup> Schweizer, 1988, 456.

<sup>11</sup> Martyn, 1995, 29-32, continues to think in terms of the Jewish Apocalyptic antinomies of which mention was made in my Ch. 2. He regards the elements as the pairs of opposites of this world. He relates the baptismal tradition (Gl. 3:28) to it, describing it as elements of religious distinction. However, it would probably be better to think of the elements as causing the distinctions, than of the distinctions as the elements themselves.



man not only lived in such a sphere, but was equally, as part of the *cosmos*, made up of these elements and subjected to their imbalance and strife.<sup>1</sup> This made the earthly sphere unhealthy, mortal and even painful. The soul, wanting to escape this fate, is continually pulled down by the elements. In order to break these chains man has to live an ascetic and regulated life. The concept of *στοιχεῖα* carries the notion of dependence on the make-up of this world.<sup>2</sup> Man is not free, but subjected to the material and inner workings of this world. This dependence and need to be free, causes man to seek refuge in cultic activities, religions of different sorts, and philosophies.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the principle elements and cosmic material elements are closely related. Schweizer contends that as early as the second century BCE Judaism, leaning towards Greek ideas, assimilated it via Pythagorism. In the first century CE even Philo took up Pythagorean ideas.<sup>4</sup> He observes a difference between Colossians and Galatians in the sense that Colossians is more concerned with asceticism: the soul having to be freed from impurity to pierce through the elements to heaven. Galatians is concerned with legalism. He relates the two positions in Galatians mentioning the possibility that Jewish law could have been seen – at least by Paul's opposition – as an aid to freedom from slavery of earthly elements. This way, law is a return to their pre-Christian paganism.<sup>5</sup>

In 4:3 Paul can even identify his own life under the law with that of the pre-Christian Galatians. The “ones that are by nature no gods” (4:8) could mean heathen gods like Hephaestus, or angels that rule over nature's course, but they could also designate the “saviour-heroes” helping the soul to its ascent. Paul might even suggest that the “demons” they revered were “by nature” not even pagan gods, but merely ascending souls.<sup>6</sup>

### **1.1.3. Personalised-cosmological interpretation: *στοιχεῖα* as personalised powers or spiritual beings**

This interpretation includes Bauer's third and fourth positions. The idea arose from ancients associating the element of fire with the stars. Astrology in turn named the stars after gods, making them inclined to regard heavenly bodies as influencers of earthly events.<sup>7</sup> This interpretation was popular throughout the patristic period and significantly endorsed by scholars of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Bo Reicke regards ὑπὸ νόμον and τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου as synonyms. He argues that νόμος and στοιχεῖα are related in the same way as Judaism and paganism in the sense that the elemental spirits of paganism can be associated with the angelic powers of Gl. 3:19 who are believed to have given law.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Wolter, 1993, 122.

<sup>2</sup> Wolter, 1993, 124.

<sup>3</sup> Wolter, 1993, 124-5.

<sup>4</sup> Van Kooten, 2001, 50-68, also goes to a lot of trouble to illustrate that Philo took up these ideas via Plutarch, and that there were thus philosophers and Jewish intellectuals contemporary to Paul who held these ideas.

The question is, how widely were these ideas held in Jewish thought?

<sup>5</sup> Schweizer, 1988, 464-6.

<sup>6</sup> Schweizer, 1988, 466.

<sup>7</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 358.

<sup>8</sup> Reicke, 1951, 259-3.

Bruce finds this too inadequate to link law and the angels in Galatians.<sup>1</sup> The reference to the observation of days, months, seasons and years (Gl. 4:10) opens a possibility for Jewish observance of, e.g., new moon festivals,<sup>2</sup> as well as heathen practices, but does not necessitate a connection with the elements.

While the other two traditions of interpretation are mostly careful not to equate τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in Galatians too easily with that in Col. 2:8 and 20,<sup>3</sup> this tradition seems to find it less problematic. It even, in cases, almost too easily equates τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου with the ἀρχαὶ and ἐξουσίαι (*principalities and powers*) in Col. 1:16; 2:15; probably because many of these studies were conducted from a Colossian point of view. One must be careful of simply equating the meaning of στοιχεῖα in Colossians with that in Galatians. The specific contexts must be taken into account in order to pick up nuances.<sup>4</sup> One has to take into consideration that the letter to the Colossians was written at least ten to fifteen years after the one to the Galatians<sup>5</sup> and that the context was probably different. Schweizer is probably correct in his view that the Galatians, like the Colossians, had a pre-Christian syncretistic background. Whether this background was identical in both cases, or only partly similar, is not clear. Jewish influence was probably greater in Galatia.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, Paul could have had another meaning or nuance in mind in Galatians.

According to Bundrick<sup>7</sup> Caird justifiably states that the concept of world powers in some way or another reaches into every aspect of Pauline theology. He reacts against discarding the idea as a residue from primitive superstition. He understands στοιχεῖα as elemental spirits holding both Jew and Gentile in bondage, with links to both law and astrology. He argues, when law is isolated from its God-given context and made into an individual religious system “it becomes demonic.” In this sense, both Jewish and Gentile legalisms are demonic and can be called principalities and powers or elemental spirits of the world.<sup>8</sup> Schlier thinks similarly, regarding στοιχεῖα in Galatians and Colossians as interchangeable with principalities and powers, dominions, thrones, gods, angels, demons and evil spirits. He contends that these elements “are probably the stars under whose influence the Galatians had felt bound to observe certain sidereal festivals.”<sup>9</sup> Bruce argues, στοιχεῖα in both Gl. 4:3 and 9 refers to

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 203.

<sup>2</sup> Thornton, 1989, 97-100.

<sup>3</sup> Martyn, 1995, 16, warns that στοιχεῖα in Galatians should be read in its own right before comparisons are made with other references. Bundrick, 1991, 362. Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 203.

<sup>4</sup> Schweizer, 1982, 127. Despite these differences, Ridderbos, 1975, 149, maintains that it is very easy to conclude that all the references refer to principle elements. Ladd, 1975, 399, 402-3.

<sup>5</sup> Most scholars, among them Schweizer, 1982, 24-6; Bruce, 1957, 163-5; 1977, 408-12; Guthrie, 1970, 557; Ridderbos, 1960, 107-9, are comfortable with a date shortly after the Letter to Philemon, in the latter half of Paul's Roman imprisonment (± 62 CE). In Ch. 1 we dated Galatians prior to the Council (49/50 CE).

<sup>6</sup> Schweizer, 1982, 128. Also the point of Schweizer above that Galatians is characterised by a legalistic background and Colossians by an ascetic one.

<sup>7</sup> Bundrick, 1991, 360.

<sup>8</sup> Caird, 1956, viii, 41, 51.

<sup>9</sup> Schlier, 1961, 11, 14, 23.

“beings that are by nature not gods” (ἐδουλεύσατε τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς) in Gl. 4:8. They had become “demythologised” and “non-entities” in Paul’s mind and at that of the believers having been liberated by the Spirit. For people who had not put these entities out of their minds they still had a sinister and demonic influence, albeit only an indirect or distant influence. Their lives as pagans were regulated by these entities just as law previously regulated Jewish Christians.<sup>1</sup>

To be enslaved to such counterfeit deities was to be enslaved to the στοιχεῖα, and the Galatians would be enslaved to the στοιχεῖα all over again if they ‘reverted’ not to their former paganism but to Jewish religious practices...For all the basic differences between Judaism and paganism, both involved subjection to the same elemental forces. This is an astonishing statement for a former Pharisee to make; yet Paul makes it – not as an exaggeration in the heat of argument but as the deliberate expression of a carefully thought out position.<sup>2</sup>

## 1.2. Conclusion

It seems most likely that Paul had something in line with *rudimentary principles of some kind* in mind. Whatever the specific meaning, in some way it must be connected to both paganism and Judaism. The reason being that ἡμεῖς in Gl. 4:3 cannot otherwise but be identified with both Jewish and Gentile Christians. It is difficult to know to what extent Jewish Christians could previously have regarded themselves to have been subjected to the four elements of earth, air, fire and water. There is not enough conclusive evidence to prove that Jewish Christians of the time, in their pre-Christian days, were on a significant scale and at grassroots level inclined to the teachings of Philo, let alone Pythagoras. What is possible, even probable, is that the Galatians were well aware of and even influenced by such pagan philosophies.<sup>3</sup> So different was it regarded to be from Judaism that it seems Paul actually tried to shock them into understanding that they could be reverting to the στοιχεῖα by observing Jewish law (Gl. 1:6; 3:1; 4:19-21; 5:2), and that Jewish and other religions were not all that unrelated. Never in their wildest dreams had they seen such a connection. But, from a Jewish point of view, Paul would have had to do more explaining. It would be even more essential if the Galatians were to explain Paul’s position in their defence against the opponents.

It is equally difficult to see how Jewish Christians would equate the στοιχεῖα with astral spirits and even demons. The argument that the pagan astral spirits and Jewish mediating angels (Gl. 3:19) can be connected, is unconvincing.<sup>4</sup> Evidence from pre-Pauline and Pauline times to substantiate a personalised-

<sup>1</sup> Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 202, 204.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 202-3.

<sup>3</sup> J. North, 1992, 177-8 indicates that during the early phases of Christianity paganism was not as organised or institutionalised into different religions as it would be at a later stage. Every community, city-state or tribal group had an own form of religious life. “[I]n some sense all groups in the pagan world were religious, since they all involved some degree of cultic and ritual activity, some orientation towards the gods” (177). They might also belong to, or join, a philosophical sect that held particular views about gods and their activities” (178).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce, 1984, 66-7.

cosmological interpretation on philological grounds is inconclusive. Not even Kurapati's arguments in favour of such evidence<sup>1</sup> are convincing.<sup>2</sup>

One must be very wary of too easily drawing parallels between "elements" and "principalities and powers" in Colossians. One must bear in mind that Galatians cannot be explained in terms of Colossians and that "in no such listing (of principalities and powers) in the NT is στοιχέια included (cf. Rm. 8:38-39; 1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 1:21; 6:12; Col. 1:16; 1 Pt. 3:22)."<sup>3</sup>

Although the weight of information points to a meaning in terms of principle elements, it is very possible that στοιχέια does not have an inherent meaning in NT usage, and that its meaning has to be deduced solely from its context. It is equally the same in the English language.<sup>4</sup> In this sense, considering that it has to be applicable to both Jewish and pagan contexts, it seems safe to assume that Paul had rudimentary principles, observances, customs and rites pertaining to all religions, in mind. These elements were intended to give meaning to life, order their lives, regulate their behaviour, and even in cases, assist them in obtaining salvation of some kind. Thus in Gl. 4:3 Paul uses the word ἡμεῖς ("us/we") relating to the common position of Jews and Gentiles without Christ. In Gl. 4:9 he uses the second person plural, because in the context of Gl. 4:8-11 he brings their specific pagan background with its own στοιχέια in relation to that of Jewish legalism in Gl. 4:3.

If we accept this explanation, the Jewish Christian reader would probably have thought in terms of former Jewish religious principles, observances and rites, largely exclusive of entities such as demons and spirits. A Gentile Christian reader would have thought primarily in terms of his pre-Christian religious principles, observances and rites, probably inclusive of his previously revered gods, spirits, etc., and most probably also different pagan superstitions.<sup>5</sup> That Paul largely demythologises the beings that are by nature not gods does not mean that he demythologises the totality of principalities and powers. It does not mean Paul did not believe in the existence of angels and demons – a subject in its own right. Suffice it to say, as a child of his time, versed in the previously discussed symbolic universe of Jewish apocalyptic, it would be very strange indeed, if Paul had it in mind to totally demythologise the world of spirits, demons and angels in Gl. 4:8.<sup>6</sup>

Everything apart from Christ – Torah-religion included – is to be considered part of the "plight" from which Christ offered deliverance.<sup>7</sup>

Since the Christ event Christians have been presented with and partake in a new world-order. Having been crucified to the world in Christ, and the world to

<sup>1</sup> Kurapati, 1976, 69-75.

<sup>2</sup> Bundryck, 1991, 362.

<sup>3</sup> Bundryck, 1991, 362. Also Bruce, 1984, 66.

<sup>4</sup> Wink, 1978, 227.

<sup>5</sup> Bruce, 1984, 64.

<sup>6</sup> Forbes, 2001, 86.

<sup>7</sup> Donaldson, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 73.

him (Gl. 6:14), they had been set free from a world of adverse spiritual influences.<sup>1</sup> One should think in terms of

first principles, the ABC's primitive teaching (cf. Hb. 5:12). Paul gathers up under them in a somewhat denigrating manner...the legalistic prescriptions to which heathen religion subjects its adherents and which he sees returning in the form of all kinds of ceremonial, ascetic, and other regulations of Judaistic and syncretistic heresy in the churches of Galatia and Colossae. These principles of the world, too, brought men under their jurisdiction, could give them no deliverance, but rather carried them ever more deeply into spiritual bondage. For this reason Paul equates them in their effect with the rule and slavery in which the man finds himself who wishes to be justified by the works of the law.<sup>2</sup>

Life without Christ was equal to life under the slavery of any element. It was *according to the flesh*. It belonged to the present evil age and was opposed to the Spirit. It was one of man's own makings with which to serve his own ends individually and corporately. In Christ God provided a completely new reality (*Wirklichkeit*) in terms of which man could live. In the Christ event, God's salvational reality (*Gottes Heilswirklichkeit*) had replaced the reality of the world of the elements (*Weltwirklichkeit der Elemente*).<sup>3</sup> Thus, one could assume that, in our context, Paul's reference to the *elements of the world* is the reality of life without Christ and the salvation he provided. To depend on any entity other than the Person of Christ for salvation or meaning to life, is equal to being enslaved to the *elements of the world*.<sup>4</sup>

A qualification might be needed when viewing this matter dogmatically. Some strands of Reformed theology provide for God's so-called common providence, common revelation and common grace. These are interrelated matters concerning God's dealings with man in general, outside the so-called redemptive-historical pattern in the Jewish-Christian tradition.<sup>5</sup> It is about God not allowing man in his fleshliness, outside the redemptive-historical pattern, to sin unrestrained and to render life impossible to live. In this regard, it is interesting that Paul's lists of vices and virtues in Gl. 5:19-23 are taken from such lists in Hellenistic culture and philosophy.<sup>6</sup> With the exception of love, these virtues were all sought after in Hellenism. Granted, Christianity gave new meaning to the different elements. In God's common grace, even the pagans had an insight into proper behaviour. The fact is that they would seek to live up to these virtues in their own fallibility, neither in dependence on God nor in his honour, but to improve their standing.

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<sup>1</sup> Guthrie, 1981, 144-5.

<sup>2</sup> Ridderbos, 1975, 149.

<sup>3</sup> Wolter, 1993, 126.

<sup>4</sup> Buckel, 1993, 180.

<sup>5</sup> Much can be said about these subjects. For our purpose clear enough orientations on the subject can be found in L. Berkhof, 1958, 432-46; Kearsley, 1988, 280-1. H. Berkhof, 1979, 50, makes mention of this in terms of there being more to truth than only that which is redemptive-historically available in the Bible and in line with Christ and his teaching. He states that revelation in Christ is not exclusive, but definitely normative. I am convinced that Paul's views on conscience in Rom. 2 are in line with this position.

<sup>6</sup> Betz, 1979, 281-2.

This also accounted for religious aspiration, decent behaviour, social brotherliness and the achievements of art and science.<sup>1</sup>

The question arose, How can we explain the comparatively orderly life in the world, seeing that the whole world lies under the curse of sin?... How can we account for it that sinful man still “retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and of the difference between good and evil, and shows some regard for virtue and for good outward behaviour?”<sup>2</sup>

In his grace God provided these rudimentary principles for life in general. He specifically provided Israel with the law. The fact remains that man, in placing his trust in these principles, and excluding God from influencing his life on his terms and according to his promise, trusted himself and that which he regarded as his own making. Negatively, one must stress that the *elements of the world* would have included such elements that were not provided by God in his common grace, but thoroughly humanly devised elements such as idols and other gods (Gl. 4:8) and the vices of Gl. 5:19-20. Whichever way, these elements are either opposed to God or lead away from Him, because of the corrupting influence of *flesh*. The only way around this dilemma, is faith in Jesus Christ in whom God has provided salvation.

## 2. BE NOT TOO QUICK TO JUDGE WHAT ΝΟΜΟΣ MEANS

Our intention in this section is not to discuss the Christian’s position with regard to law. Although it surfaces at times, it will concern us only in the following chapters. What is important now is to determine Paul’s estimation of law before the advent of Christ. What did he include in the term νόμος (“law”)? What was a life *under law* like in the *present evil age* of which he speaks in Gl. 1:4 and from which Christ has delivered Christians? Is his estimation of law and its function before Christ negative, neutral or positive? Does law itself work against the evil of the *present evil age*, or does it enhance evil? If the latter were true, would it be because of an inherent problem with law, or because of the situation in which law operates, rendering it inoperative and even counterproductive? This in itself is a massive subject with which we cannot deal extensively, but on which we must have a motivated stance, especially in view of Paul’s seemingly negative judgement on law in Galatians and opposite stance in the letters to Rome and Corinth.<sup>3</sup>

According to the Nestle-Aland text Paul uses νόμος 118 times in four of his undisputed letters – Romans (74), Galatians (32), I Corinthians (9) and Phillipians (3).<sup>4</sup> Our concern is with its use in Galatians, but we shall have to take cognisance, where necessary, of Paul’s use of the term in his other letters, especially

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<sup>1</sup> Kearsley, 1988, 280.

<sup>2</sup> L. Berkhof, 1958, 432.

<sup>3</sup> See my Ch. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Schmoller, 1989, 349-50. Also refer to Winger, 1992, 33, in connection with occurrences of νόμος in the *Textus Receptus* (Rm. 9:32 and 1 Cor. 7:39) that are not accepted today. Morgenthaler, 1958, 123, cites only 72 references in Romans.

in Romans, for the abovementioned reason. The high occurrence of the word in Galatians is indicative of its importance regarding Paul's message to the Galatians. How he uses it in terms of word combinations and contexts is equally important in determining its specific meaning and impact on the message. Undoubtedly, Paul's conception of law is fundamentally important in the study of Galatians, especially regarding *freedom*. However, there are obscuring factors making it difficult to clarify the subject matter.

- There is the difficulty of revisiting the original context in which Paul reacted.
- Added to this is the fact that Paul does not use the Semitism *torah* (תורה), but the Greek word νόμος, raising the question whether νόμος is equivalent to *torah*.
- Scholars are not unanimous with regard to how inclusive Paul regards νόμος in terms of the distinction between ceremonial, cultic and moral law.<sup>1</sup>
- Paul himself compounds the problem by speaking both negatively and positively of law. In Galatians he is predominantly negative, whilst in Romans and 1 Corinthians the opposite is seemingly true.
- Lastly, there is the difficulty that Paul's letter to the Galatians is very polemical, making it necessary to keep an open mind with regard to stereotyping, labelling, exaggeration and other rhetorical mechanisms.

Once again, the concern in this section is to determine how law functioned in the *present evil age*. How was it a curse (Gl. 3:13)? Was it a yoke of slavery (Gl. 5:1)? If it was, in what respect was it thus? What are the dangers of which one should be wary when determining Paul's position on νόμος?

*Firstly*, there is the danger of regarding Second Temple Judaism's view on law as homogeneous. On the contrary, there were different views. For a start, there was a difference of opinion on the source from which to deduce moral and ceremonial law.<sup>2</sup> There were the problems involving the intensity or vigour of its application, the width of the field of application, and whether it also applied to Gentiles.<sup>3</sup> Some were more narrow-minded than others, thinking about ethics

<sup>1</sup> Many scholars argue that νόμος refers only to ceremonial law as distinctive laws setting boundaries between ethnic Israel (Jewishness) and other religions and cultures. However, I will argue that Paul most probably had the totality of law in mind.

<sup>2</sup> J.A. Du Rand, 1997, 269-70, attests to the fact that the Sadducees regarded only the Pentateuch as norm in legal, cultic and moral matters. In opposition, the Pharisees had a widely worked out standard making use of the oral tradition reflected in the *halakah* and *haggadah* and the different *Targumim*. The Essenes had an even more stringent and expanded standard incorporating their wisdom literature. Lührmann, 1989, 75-9, draws attention to the fact that the Pharisees accepted a much wider and stringent set of laws including both written and oral traditions, while the Sadducees rejected these. The Essenes also rejected the Pharisaic interpretation, regarding it as people-pleasing (39). They had their own interpretation, which they strictly followed. Meeks, 1986, 96, stresses that law ranged between two poles. On the one end was God's Torah as the meaningful structure of all reality. On the other end were the lists of stipulations Jews performed to indicate their belonging to the covenant. Although different groups had different sets of stipulations, they were unanimous that law had to be done.

<sup>3</sup> The Sadducees obviously were more concerned with those laws akin to the Priestly Code and found in the Pentateuch. The Pharisees were much more concerned with detailed law observance than the former and,



and salvation legalistically.<sup>1</sup> This is in tandem with a *second difficulty*, namely development in *Torah* and its meaning. It is especially important with regard to Paul's remarks in Gl. 3:15-29 on law's later arrival. We must be careful of judging Paul's view on law in the *present evil age* from a position after the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE. We must be equally aware of the possibility posed by scholars that the Gospels reflect a picture of the Jews – especially the Pharisees – that is more legalistic and casuistic than it probably was.<sup>2</sup> They create the impression that legalism and casuistry was the overall norm in all Phariseism, and for that matter, all Judaism.<sup>3</sup> A *third difficulty* is that, because of Galatians' strong emphasis on faith as opposed to works of law, it has often been misread as dealing *exclusively* with justification by faith: that is, exclusive of human achievement.<sup>4</sup> In other words, it deals with how to enter into a right relationship with God *per se*, i.e. through faith in Christ as the only requirement and not through meritorious works. Although this is true of the gospel, and also in Paul's view, one would be mistaken to interpret Galatians against this limited backdrop. Galatians was not written to people of the Jewish faith, but to Christians considering the inclusion of Jewish law requirements as part of their ethos.

In order to determine Paul's position on νόμος both before and after the advent of Christ, but in this chapter with regard to the former, one must orientate oneself to the development and subsequent crystallisation of different positions on law up to Paul's time. Although this is a most intriguing subject, because of the danger of sidetracking from the aim of this study, it will be dealt with only briefly. Our main aim at this point is to determine at what point in the development of Torah Paul found himself. Although we will seek light from other Pauline letters where "gaps" have to be filled, we will stick as closely as possible to Galatians. Context plays a crucial role in this matter and therefore Galatians should speak for itself.<sup>5</sup>

Therefore, rather than letting Romans dictate to us what Galatians can and cannot mean (a luxury the Galatians surely did not have), we must allow Galatians to speak to us with its own integrity.<sup>6</sup>

especially with drawing boundaries between them and the Gentiles by way of detailed legislation and stringent application. It was also within these quarters that the idea of the universality of law took root and grew.

<sup>1</sup> We shall be returning to these problems shortly.

<sup>2</sup> Lührmann, 1989, 76-7, also cautions in this regard. Many others, such as Meyer & Weiss, 1974, 11-35, caution that one should not impose the Pharisaism of post 70 CE onto that prior to the fall of Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup> Lührmann, 1989, 40, refers to O'Dell, 1961, 241-57, emphasising that the entire Jewish community was not accommodated in one political or religious party. "There were without a doubt a number of deeply spiritual and eschatologically orientated men who belonged neither to the Pharisees, Sadducees nor to the priestly minded Qumran Essenes, but were nonetheless religious Jews."

<sup>4</sup> Luther is often associated with this position. Reformation Theology has been guilty of this misunderstanding.

<sup>5</sup> Donaldson, 1986, 95. Braswell, 1991, 84, refers to *occasionalism* in Paul's letters, which would be in line with Beker's reference to Paul's *contingency* as opposed to his *coherency*, to which we referred in Ch. 2. If the occasion is not taken into account seriously, it could, on the one hand, lead to perceived contradictions, and, on the other hand, to unnecessary harmonising.

<sup>6</sup> Braswell, 1991, 85.



## 2.1. Law as divinely embedded in covenantal grace

From its inception, law in Israel was embedded in the covenant and regarded as Israel's obligation in response to God's gracious dealings. It was not the foundation of the covenant. In fact, it was the other way around.<sup>1</sup>

The laws are not regarded, then, as a fair adjustment of human interests which is then divinely sanctioned. Nor is their observance the achievement which Israel presents to its God in gratitude for the covenant and election. In particular, it is not the achievement which establishes the divine relationship. The laws are in the strictest sense the requirements of the God to whom Israel belongs because He has revealed Himself in the exodus from Egypt and because in all future wars He will show Himself to be the God of this people. Thus the motive for keeping this law is simply that of obedience in so far as there is any conscious reflection on the question of motivation.<sup>2</sup>

Paul is clear that law came 430 years after the promise (Gl. 4:17). Grace preceded law. Importantly, it does not mean obedience to the God of grace was not implied from the start. Grace and promise awakened obedience. They were as inseparable as the two sides of a coin, but with grace taking initiative and, in that sense, precedence. The fact is that law as external moral code was a later development.<sup>3</sup> Von Rad makes vital remarks regarding the Decalogue:

The proclamation of the divine will for justice is like a net thrown over Israel: it is the completion of her conveyance to *Jahweh*.<sup>4</sup>

Israel certainly did not understand the Decalogue as an absolute moral law prescribing ethics: she rather recognised it as a revelation vouchsafed to her at a particular moment in her history, through which she was offered the saving gift of life.... With the hearing of the commandments *Jahweh* has offered to his people life; with the hearing of the commandments Israel was placed in the position of decision for life or for death. Certainly *Jahweh* looked for this decision from Israel; but in no case were these commandments prefixed to the covenant in a conditional sense, as if the covenant would only come into effect once obedience had been rendered. The situation is rather the reverse. The covenant is made, and with it Israel receives the revelation of the commandments.<sup>5</sup>

Since Wellhausen's revolutionary hypothesis that the law did not come before the prophets, but was introduced at a later stage,<sup>6</sup> there has been much debate of which the details do not concern us now.<sup>7</sup> Suffice it to say that today there is broad agreement that the law was not only earlier than the prophets, but that God's will as

<sup>1</sup> Eichrodt, 1978, 44; Bright, 1972, 150. Loader, 2001, 70-85 stresses that *law* and *gospel* (or *promise*) in the Pentateuch were never intended to oppose each other. The former is incorporated in the latter via the narrative in which it is clothed. In this sense: "A law-incorporating gospel is a torah," and the Pentateuch has the function to reflect (God's) "statement of grace and the requirements of responding love grafted upon it" (83).

<sup>2</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1036. This is also the opinion of Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 391, stating: "Israel was elected by *Jahweh* before she was given the commandments. As a result of this election she became *Jahweh*'s chosen people, and this, in fact, happened before she had had any opportunity of proving her obedience, as Deut. XXVII. 9f, which seems to have derived from some ancient ritual, clearly shows."

<sup>3</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 191.

<sup>4</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 192.

<sup>5</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 194.

<sup>6</sup> Wellhausen, 1927.

<sup>7</sup> Deist, 1976, 50-8. See Smend, 1983, for a critique of Wellhausen.

expressed in the law was revealed to Israel within the earliest stages of Jahwism.<sup>1</sup> This is the primary point of departure to which Israel had to be re-orientated throughout its history. It is also the primary measure against which the development of Torah should be evaluated. Von Rad points to interpretation of tradition as a very important factor in the OT. OT tradition was always open to the future.<sup>2</sup> As history unfolded it was interpreted by tradition and tradition was enriched and reinterpreted by historical events, especially God's saving events and promises. The different OT traditions (Jahwist, Elohist, Priestly tradition, Deuteronomist and Chronicler) are testimony to this. This obviously implied more than one view on law. Despite the best intentions and soundest interpretations "not every presentation of history could stand up to such repeated reinterpretation without suffering harm in the process."<sup>3</sup> This should also be remembered of the interpretation of the law. There was development and difference of interpretation, which calls for wariness and discernment when trying to probe Paul's view on the law.

It should be clear at this point that obedience to God and obedience to law were not synonymous. Obedience was something God demanded from the human species from the very beginning. Although it was probably not altogether news to Israel when it was given to them, law as an external code formulating God's will at certain instances in Israel's history was a later and contextualised addition. The fact of the matter is that God required obedience before handing down law. However, it must be stressed that these two semantic fields, obedience and law, increasingly overlapped in Israel's perception during the time of the development of law. This is especially true of the Second Temple Period. It would probably be safe to suggest that at the time of Paul's writing to the Galatians the two semantic fields had almost completely overlapped in the minds of most Jews; especially in the minds of the Pharisees, the party from which Paul was called as an apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>4</sup>

### **2.1.1. Torah: historical development and the variegated view on law**

Although Torah (תורה) as ethical standard had become a rather developed and formalised system in NT times, originally, it referred to a divine instruction/ruling/verdict for concrete situations.<sup>5</sup> Besides the more personal revelations of God to individuals in which He gave direction with regard to decisions, encouragement in trying times

<sup>1</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>2</sup>, 390. Zimmerli, 1965, 46-60, criticizes Von Rad for making a too sharp distinction between law and prophets and rightly stresses that there was a dialectical structure within law from the start. It promised life and salvation as divine grace, but always implied obedience as response. The prophets stressed the latter and the judgement accompanying disobedience.

<sup>2</sup> Childs, 1992, 174-5, very soundly reasons that although law was earlier than the prophets it does not imply that the prophets simply commented on law from a canonically subordinate position. "There is a radical newness to the prophets' message, a deeper plunge into the reality of God, a freedom of prophetic function...which cannot be contained within the category of mere commentary" (175).

<sup>3</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>2</sup>, 361.

<sup>4</sup> The importance of this deduction will become clearer in Ch.5.

<sup>5</sup> Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1953, 435-6; Du Toit, 1997<sup>1</sup>, 437; Vriezen, 1977, 124; Brueggemann, 2002, 217. De Vaux, 1975, 142, explains *torah* as "in the first place a teaching, a doctrine, a decision given for a particular case. Collectively, the word means the whole body of rules governing men's relations with God and with each other...the prescriptions which his people had to observe in their moral, social and religious life."

and consolation in times of distress, there was the more official revelation of God's instructions regarding human conduct. When an individual was uncertain about day-to-day ethical, cultic or juridical issues, he could receive an "instruction" (torah) from God<sup>1</sup> via the priest<sup>2</sup> or prophet.<sup>3</sup> This also applied to the nation as a whole.<sup>4</sup> Typical of torah was the belief in its divine origin and the fact that it did not operate mechanically, but in a covenantal relationship with the living God, who elected his people, loved and cherished them, and cared about their well-being.<sup>5</sup> The operative words are *covenantal relationship* and *revelation*. In later times, it would also be read in the light of prophecy.<sup>6</sup> The priests were in touch with the community and their needs. Further, they were the mediators between God and his people. Unfortunately, the OT priestly institution had the inherent tendency to institutionalise life, especially religious life. This was also true of Torah. This was when prophets were called to duty. They had to challenge the institutionalisation and formalisation of faith by the temple officials.<sup>7</sup> They even had to challenge the complacency of the priestly order from time to time. On the other hand, the prophets could be called to book by the priestly office. Prophets had to be tested, as it were, by the tradition instituted in Israel.<sup>8</sup> These instructions gradually became encoded in oral traditions. In time, it obtained a degree of standardisation, later becoming written bodies of instruction.<sup>9</sup> Because of the development of form-critical and tradition-historical investigations in the past two centuries,<sup>10</sup> greater insight into the development of OT law has been acquired.

Von Rad makes it very clear that Israel did not initially understand the Decalogue, which is probably the mother of all Judeo-Christian ethics, "as an absolute moral law prescribing ethics." Not even Ezekiel, whom he describes as "the father of a rigorous 'legalism'," went that far.<sup>11</sup> Although the Decalogue could have been understood as burdensome, Israel only experienced its judging and cursing edge in the time of the prophets.<sup>12</sup> Even though the demands had to be accepted unconditionally and a curse followed for those who refused to follow them, there was a very real flexibility and adaptability with regard to religious, political and economic change.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, it really served life for Yahweh's

<sup>1</sup> It was probably much like modern day counselling, or confessional practice in Roman Catholicism.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Sm. 23:9, even though the word torah is not used. Hg. 2:12-14 is another example.

<sup>3</sup> Is. 1:10; 8:16, 20; 30:9. Vriezen, 1977, 243, mentions that Pr. 13:14 points to the fact that torah could also refer to the teaching or counselling of a wisdom teacher.

<sup>4</sup> Vriezen, 1977, 242-3.

<sup>5</sup> Vriezen, 1977, 243-4; Craigie, 1976, 37.

<sup>6</sup> Vriezen, 1977, 244, 246.

<sup>7</sup> Vriezen, 1977, 258. Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1040.

<sup>8</sup> Vriezen, 1977, 259.

<sup>9</sup> Brueggemann, 2002, 218.

<sup>10</sup> Deist, 1976, 38-135, provides a very good orientation, summary and evaluation of these developments. He also adds a section (136-45) on some insights from South African theologians. The flip side of these investigations is that there is no overall consensus on how this development took place. Matthews, 1998/9, 7-15, provides insight into the impact of social developments on the development of law in Israel.

<sup>11</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 193.

<sup>12</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 194, 196.

<sup>13</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 196-9. Craigie, 1976, 39-40, stresses the immediacy and contingency of law and covenant in history.

people and was essentially experienced as life giving. With regard to Deuteronomy, which is profoundly drenched in covenantal theology,

[t]here is certainly no wish for Deuteronomy to be a timeless, unalterable 'law'. On the contrary, it is an appeal to Israel at a quite definite moment in its history, an appeal of such a nature that all the actual happenings, problems and dangers of this one moment are visualised and taken seriously.<sup>1</sup>

One must add to this the very gracious sacrificial system with which Yahweh provided them and by way of which expiation could be done and atonement made. We will not enter into this subject other than stressing the greatness of Yahweh's mercy enfolding the demand to obedience and providing mechanisms to make amends and to heal relationships.

Leaving the ossification of the post-exilic period out of the picture, Jahweh's will for justice positively never stood absolutely above time for Israel, for every generation was summoned anew to hearken to it as valid for itself and to make it out for itself.<sup>2</sup>

The profoundly crucial point at which NT scholarship picks up with the development in Torah is in this period of fossilisation, the so-called post-exilic period, also known as Second Temple Judaism, to which we will attend shortly.

### **2.1.2. Law to be regarded holistically**

It has been motivated that law was never regarded in isolation. It was given within the covenantal relationship as an exterior regulator of the obedience Yahweh as covenantal benefactor expected from his covenantal beneficiary. It should never be regarded or studied apart from the covenantal frame of reference. In this sense, a holistic approach to law as integral part of Israel's covenantal relationship is necessary and obvious.

There is another sense in which law should be regarded holistically, namely with regard to its integrity. Traditionally scholarship divided OT law roughly into ceremonial, cultic, civil and moral law.<sup>3</sup> Too easily, these types of law were separated into unrelated categories. Add to this the distinction between oral law and written tradition and these two categories' influence on the interpretation of law and one is left with the problem of not knowing what Israel really understood under law.<sup>4</sup> What does seem sure, is that Israel

was in a position to understand the large body of totally unconnected commandments promulgated here and there by Yahweh as a single entity, "the Torah of Yahweh," it could regard them as a theological unity.<sup>5</sup>

Eichrodt supports this position. If one follows the history of Israel and the law it becomes clear that at different developmental stages different features came

<sup>1</sup> Von Rad, 1966, 29. Brueggemann, 2002, 218-9, mentions the development of law as a dynamic process.

<sup>2</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 199.

<sup>3</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>2</sup>, 390.

<sup>4</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 201.

<sup>5</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>1</sup>, 199.

into play and found their positions within law, but every aspect was part of one inseparable entity.<sup>1</sup> He adds that in the time of the Deuteronomist the whole legal system was unified on the basis of the requirement to love God.<sup>2</sup> This position should be supported. It will be revisited when we discuss Paul's view on law as a single integrated entity (§3.3).

### **2.1.3. *Torah in Second Temple Judaism***

When we view law in NT times we are dealing with post-exilic or Second Temple Judaism. This was the time after Israel's disillusionment with their own unwillingness to listen to the prophets. They had sinned and did not want to come under God's judgement again. Although they knew law did not establish the relationship with God, they regarded it as a mechanism for keeping the relationship intact (2 Chr. 33:8). This in itself was dangerous, because it is actually God in his grace who keeps the relationship intact. The intention, however, was that obedience was not optional, but integral to the relationship. Unfortunately, as time went by, the emphasis fell more strongly on obedience through law, and law began to obtain an independent significance apart from God and his grace.<sup>3</sup> In many cases law began to regulate the relationship. The community became increasingly law oriented. Law became the badge of membership of the Jewish people. It even became a universal law applicable to all people.<sup>4</sup> The cult, together with all the accompanying worship, was according to law. This resulted in the scribes, as the authorities devoted to law, in the end taking over the leadership.<sup>5</sup>

Gutbrodt stresses that law need not always have lead to casuistry, evasion of inner obedience or seeking of security before God, and indeed, it was not always like that. But, there was an inner logic to this approach, easily taking hold of people.<sup>6</sup> Martin Noth also stresses that Israel's acceptance of the total legal heritage, without it having had to lead to legalism, was bound to lead to the legislating of human obedience.<sup>7</sup> It is thus correct that law need not necessarily have led to casuistry and externalism, and equally one should not take all NT references reflective of Pharisaism at face value. On the other hand, it would also be dangerous, and in instances incorrect, to assume simply on a rhetorical basis that these NT references to Pharisaic extremes were necessarily untrue. If it were altogether mere rhetoric, it would jeopardise the integrity of the gospel itself and probably have been inexplicable to its

<sup>1</sup> Eichrodt, 1978, 74. Moore, 1946, 6-9. Bruce, 1982<sup>2</sup>, 28, also stresses that for Paul law referred to "the entire corpus of pentateuchal law." See also Moo, 1983, 241.

<sup>2</sup> Eichrodt, 1979, 335.

<sup>3</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1043.

<sup>4</sup> Esser, 1976, 442; Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1049.

<sup>5</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1044; Du Rand, 1997, 280-1.

<sup>6</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1044. Vriezen, 1977, 435-6, stresses the NT's portrayal of Pharisaic ethics as an observance of external rules, especially in their negative form, as an externalising of ethics and casuistry. Räisänen, 1986, 29-32, sites a host of scholars, himself included, who support E.P. Sanders, 1977, 425-6, on his position that Judaism did not necessarily tend to petty legalism. There were those such as the caricature of the Pharisee in Luke 18, but they are not reflected in extant Jewish literature of the time.

<sup>7</sup> Noth, 1957, 112-41.

first hearers. It is probably safer to accept degrees of legalism and casuistry, fitting well with Gutbrodt's so-called "inner logic".

In Rabbinic Judaism Torah was mostly equivalent to NT νόμος, consisting primarily of Mosaic Law, and not only of the Decalogue. Sometimes it referred to the entire Pentateuch.<sup>1</sup> It could also refer merely to the teaching of law. Most importantly, in Rabbinic Judaism it was accepted that God had revealed Himself finally in Torah and man could have a relationship with Him only through Torah.<sup>2</sup> It was given absolute authority in the sense that everything was created for the sake of Torah. Even God studied Torah. Not even the Messiah would bring another Torah. It is obvious that the Jewish frame of reference from the rabbinical point of view and influence was drenched in Law. Although it was not initially meant to be the cornerstone of Judaism in the OT, it gradually received a mediating position for many in Israel.

In the Judaism of the time of Christ, the study and fulfilment of the Torah were considered to be the way to righteousness and the way to life (cf. Lk. 10:28).<sup>3</sup>

Gutbrodt concludes that this mediating position, developmentally ascribed to law in Judaism, was the cause for "the hopelessness and despair to which the law gave rise in, e.g., 4 Esr. and 5 Bar."<sup>4</sup> In this situation, Jesus had a twofold approach. On the one hand, he repudiated law, removing it from the mediating and almost omnipotent position where man had placed it.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, He re-affirmed its original purpose to help man to obedience (Mt. 5:17, 20).

Jesus affirms the law because it demands obedient action and is not content merely with a disposition subject to no controls. He rejects confession of Himself as Lord when it is combined with the doing of ἀνομία (Mt. 7:23). The goal of the law is action; mere knowledge of the good will of God is not enough (Lk. 10:28).<sup>6</sup>

Although this matter will receive more attention in the following chapters, a remark or two is called for at present. On the one hand, one should not be under the impression that Jesus' repudiation of legalism and casuistry implied a libertine morality. Equally, on the other hand, Jesus' ethos did not call for a new law – at least not in the sense in which Judaism understood Torah, i.e. as an external tutor, policeman and judge all in one, keeping the faithful in line. We will see that Paul's view on law's demise as part of that of the present evil age, did not involve the rejection of a God-honouring morality. God's will was and remains paramount in the life of the believing community, but determining his will in every new situation would not be via an external set of laws or requirements – neither old nor new. It would be born from an inner knowledge and orientation founded on a new relationship with God in Jesus Christ. It would be realised by the illumination and guidance of the Spirit in the inner being, and in and through the believing community.

<sup>1</sup> De Vaux, 1973, 143, states: "In later times Pentateuch was referred to as *Torah*." This is also the opinion of Kaiser, 1993, 300, 329-53.

<sup>2</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1055.

<sup>3</sup> Esser, 1976, 442. Scroggs, 1989, 128.

<sup>4</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1050.

<sup>5</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1061.

<sup>6</sup> Gutbrodt & Kleinknecht, 1967, 1063.

Jesus already set this new ethos in motion by orientating men to Himself as opposed to law. One is reminded of passages such as Jn. 7:37; 8:36; 10:7, 11, 17-18, 27-28; 14:6. However, to state the obvious, one must bear in mind that Jesus' ministry was prior to his crucifixion and resurrection, which would inaugurate the new aeon with its new ethic. Only after the advent of the Spirit would the new ethic take full effect. Keeping that in mind, it would take time to dawn on believers that their ethical stance had completely changed. Paul's position more than a decade later would obviously be one of greater fruition.

It is fundamentally important that twenty-first century readers of both the OT and the NT understand that Yahweh never intended that legalism in any form should be the foundation of Judaism. This would reduce Yahweh to being like any other god, self-serving, able to be manipulated and manmade. This was not the divine intention with Torah. It was about obedience to the God of Israel who had founded a relationship with them and sealed it with the covenant of grace.<sup>1</sup> E.P. Sanders has been active in this regard and should rightfully be credited for reminding NT scholarship of the pivotal position of grace in OT theology and Judaism.<sup>2</sup> He coined the obligatory element of life in response to God's gracious dealings with man in Judaism as *covenantal nomism*. We shall return to his description of covenantal nomism in a more critical fashion in § 3.1.1. What cannot be denied is that, although many were faithful to God's intentions with law, it inevitably led to widespread legalism. It could be viewed as essential for salvation, even though subordinate to grace, at least in the sense of a synergistic form of salvation.

Whatever may be said of the Jewish tendency towards legalism it must be said that the true Jew never forgot that his relationship with God was rooted in the covenant relationship...The pious Jew knew that the steps of the man who has the law of God in his heart do not falter (Ps. xxxvii. 31) and he readily made his own the expressions of Torah piety which are found in Pss. I, xi and cxix and which show the extraordinary love, which Jews had for the law, and the delight and comfort they took in observing it.<sup>3</sup>

However, this being said, the legalistic approach to salvation was wide-spread and extended into the accompanying ethics, leading to a casuistic approach to Torah-obedience. This occurred as human reflection, logical deduction, and inevitable authoritative expansions became a bigger objective than the covenantal love at its ethical basis. Israel, individuals, and parties were more than often guilty of this. Salvation and ethics are inseparable. This is why Paul is so hefty regarding the subject in Galatians.

Enough said! The point is, we cannot judge the OT's or Judaism's stance on law and salvation in terms of misconceptions within their own ranks; neither can we view Second Temple Judaism's stance on law as monolithic.<sup>4</sup> We can least of all ap-

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<sup>1</sup> W.D. Davies, 1982, 5.

<sup>2</sup> E.P. Sanders has written extensively on the subject, amongst others in: *Paul and Palistinian Judaism*, 1977; *Paul, the Law and the Jewish People* 1983; *Jesus and Judaism* 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Maher, 1976, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Rajak, 1992, 9-21, is but one of many emphasising the variegated character of Judaism. Although she illustrates the point from a time well beyond Paul's, she does include adequate evidence relating to the time of his ministry.



proach Galatians as if Paul were debating against the Roman Catholic stance on justification in defence of Luther. It is fundamentally important to understand that Paul was not in any way opposing Judaism in any form<sup>1</sup> in his letter to the Galatians; be it Pharisaic Judaism or any of the other theological strands within Judaism. He was not concerned with defending the Christian position on salvation or ethics against Judaism.<sup>2</sup> He was writing to mainly Gentile Christians concerning what requirements (if any) Gentiles were to fulfil for full entry into and participation in the Christian community. What were they to do besides having faith in Jesus Christ in order to become children of Abraham (Gl. 3:38-29)? Was more expected of them than of Jewish Christians who were naturally born of Abraham?

### 3. PAUL'S VIEW ON LAW LOOKING BACK FROM THE CHRIST EVENT

Against this backdrop, we can try to determine Paul's view on νόμος before the advent of Christ, mindful of the fact that our main objective is Galatians. Not only this, but Galatians also deals with law more comprehensively and dedicatedly than any other Pauline letter. If our dating of Galatians is correct, this was probably Paul's first letter or treatise on the subject of law in Christian society, after having had at least 14 years of reflection on and experience of the matter in Gentile mission fields. It would have been on the eve of the Jerusalem council, at a time when Paul would have wanted to be as clear as possible in a situation of contingency, making use of the medium next best to a personal visit.

In view of the above, it is accepted that Paul, although his rhetoric involves emotion and subjectivity, would have done his utmost to argue according to principle. In fact, in Gl. 3:1-4:31, the section dealing with his arguments concerning the position of the law before and since the advent of Christ, Paul's theological arguments are systematic and well reasoned. With the exception of Gl. 3:1 and Gl. 4:1-20 where he expresses perplexity, he refrains from referring to how law, correctly or incorrectly, is regarded in practice. The *probatio* is the section in which Paul boils down the problem to get to the principle of the matter. We now turn to Paul's main arguments concerning law.

#### 3.1. Paul's view on law underlines the human plight

##### 3.1.1. *A subject with an elaborate history*

The debate on Paul's view of law and his seemingly imprecise, or even inconsistent, reference to its ongoing validity or retraction from salvation history has been a contentious matter since time immemorial. The pivotal matters in this regard relate to how Judaism itself viewed law and how Paul viewed it in hind-

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<sup>1</sup> At this point it must be noted that for our purpose it is not necessary to go into the debate of whether one should speak of "different Judaisms" or of a "common Judaism". Neusner, 1993, 300-1, strongly champions for the view of different Judaisms. So also P.R. Davies, 1995, 145-82; Grabbe, 1992, 527. Craffert, 2000, in a thought-provoking article, makes the profound observation that the notion of a "common Judaism" is being threatened at archaeological ground level. For our purpose, it would suffice to speak of at least a pluralistic Judaism.

<sup>2</sup> Stendahl, 1976, 1-7.



sight since the advent of Christ. Thielman provides a very concise and accurate overview of Pauline scholarship's recent debate in this regard, starting with Montefiore at the end of the nineteenth century and ending with the industrious Dunn almost a century later.<sup>1</sup>

What does Paul mean when he says that a person is justified apart from works of law? Has he pinpointed the Achilles heel of the entire Jewish religion? Has he reacted against a cold and unforgiving sector of Judaism? Has he sought to universalize his own religious experience? Or has he, in the heat of the argument, inaccurately accused the Jews of holding a teaching which they did not in fact hold?<sup>2</sup>

Thielman groups the different proponents on Paul and his view on works of law into four strands of thought.<sup>3</sup> The *first* line of thought works on the premise that the central doctrine of Jewish soteriology was righteousness through works. Paul vehemently attacked this notion, emphasising man's inability to fulfil the law. Grundmann is prominent in these circles, arguing that the average person in the Rabbinical Judaism of Paul's day was not too concerned about transgression in a lesser form bringing his righteousness into jeopardy. His concern was with the bigger picture. In this way law became more a revealer of sin and bearer of a curse than being sin's antidote.<sup>4</sup> This emphasised the human plight, even of the Jewish people, in the aeon before the advent of Christ. The *second* line of thought, which was initiated by Montefiore, claimed that Paul's attack on works of law, if aimed at the Rabbinical Judaism of his time, was unintelligible. Therefore, it was probably aimed at another of the many strands of Judaism operative in his time. His guess was Diaspora Judaism drenched in Hellenistic thought.<sup>5</sup> Importantly, he acknowledges the multi-dimensionality of the Judaism of Paul's day. The *third* line of thought is quite close to the previous one. Albert Schweitzer features prominently in this quarter of the field, laying heavy emphasis on Paul's religion as heavily coloured by apocalyptic Judaism. He maintains, however, that Paul does this, not because of pessimism, but because he shares the view of apocalyptic literature that law would have no role to play in the Messianic era.<sup>6</sup> These first three lines of reasoning are each aligned with a Jewish view on law of some kind, and in varying degrees, emphasise the human plight in the old aeon. A *fourth* train of thought was introduced by Ulrich Wilckens who contended that, although the Jewish background, especially Jewish apocalyptic, was extremely important for an understanding of Paul and law, it was not enough. Christology had to be introduced into the equation.<sup>7</sup> Law had not simply come to an end because it was expected by Jewish apocalyptic to come to an

<sup>1</sup> Thielman, 1989, 2-27.

<sup>2</sup> Thielman, 1989, 1.

<sup>3</sup> Thielman, 1989, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Grundmann, 1933, 57-60.

<sup>5</sup> Montefiore made three important contributions to the debate. In his first article: "First Impressions of Paul," *JQR* 6, 1894, 429, he found Paul unintelligible against the rabbinical Judaism of his time and noted that Paul's self-contradiction was because of the different scenarios in which he had to deal with law and salvation (432-5). In his second article: "Rabbinical Judaism and the Epistles of St. Paul," *JQR* 13, 1901, 167-8, he acknowledged that there were various strands of Judaism and that Paul would be more intelligible against this variegated Judaism. In the third contribution: 1914, 92, he even acknowledged the influence of Jewish apocalyptic.

<sup>6</sup> Schweitzer, 1931, 205-26.

<sup>7</sup> Wilckens, 1959, 284-5.

end in the Messianic era. It had come to an end because salvation was now available only in Christ. Since Paul's conversion Christ became for him what law had been for him in his pre-Christian days, namely soteriological in nature. E.P. Sanders took this more christological interpretation<sup>1</sup> to its logical climax.<sup>2</sup>

Sanders' point of departure was the refutation of the notion that Second Temple Judaism was characterised by an absence of grace and founded on a meritorious soteriology of works, which led to legalism being rife in Israel.<sup>3</sup> As we have seen, he is correct in refuting this notion. He develops the notion of *covenantal nomism*. In terms of this concept salvation in Judaism was founded on God's gracious election of Israel and his resulting covenant with them. Salvation was assumed until the human beneficiary intently abandoned this position in order to live outside this divinely initiated relationship. The obligation on the beneficiary to live in accordance with the moral requirements of Yahweh was in no way meritorious. It was merely the covenantal way of confirming his/her "being in" and willingly "staying in" the covenantal relationship. Thus grace, election and covenant, and not law, constituted the relationship. Within this relationship, Yahweh mercifully provided for forgiveness and restoration via atoning sacrifices, and not by way of good deeds. Sanders describes this view on law and salvation as *covenantal nomism*.<sup>4</sup> From this point of view Sanders rejects any attempt to understand Paul's theology as an analysis of Jewish legalism. Paul was, according to Sanders, less concerned about the roots of Judaism than about the fact that Christ was now revealed as the Saviour of the world. Sanders, therefore rejects the possibility that Paul had a critique of justification by law as baseline to his theology in any form. He was much rather concerned about participation in Christ, which was a new soteriological position free from the notion of legal justification.<sup>5</sup> He argues from Phlp. 3:4-12 that there were actually two ways to obtaining righteousness, namely the one based on election and the works of law, and the other – which was the correct one – based on participation in Christ through faith in his atoning death and resurrection.<sup>6</sup> It was not as though the Jew could not attain righteousness based on works<sup>7</sup> and therefore needed Christ's atonement. In other words, that they had a plight and that Christ had become the long awaited solution. Paul himself claimed to have achieved the legal terms. It was rather about a new sote-

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<sup>1</sup> Thielman, 1989, 25.

<sup>2</sup> A detailed critique of Sanders' position cannot be done here for the mere fact that the scope of this study does not allow for it. The brevity with which Sanders is treated here should, however, not be understood as a reflection either of the importance or the diligence of his labour, neither of the respect for his labours.

<sup>3</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 419-22. Other scholars, like Von der Osten-Sacken, 1987, have been writing on the incorrect understanding of Torah-spirituality for many years.

<sup>4</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 75, 236, 422-3; 1985, 335-40.

<sup>5</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 502f.

<sup>6</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 442-7, 497-502; Allison, 1987, 57-78, is a most read worthy article. See his strong emphasis on only Christ being the entrance into God's kingdom (73-4).

<sup>7</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1983, 29-43, accepts that this position goes against the grain of the common understanding of Gl. 3:10; 5:3; and 6:13. His conviction is that the common understanding is based on the incorrect assumption that Judaism was based on meritorious works. He motivates his position by referring to Phlp. 3:6; 1 Th. 3:13; 5:23; and 1 Cor. 1:8, according to which he sees Paul as being convinced that the law could be sufficiently kept.

riological paradigm having been introduced, namely of participation in Christ, because it was inclusive also of the Gentiles.<sup>1</sup> Arguing this way, Paul's view on law was not from plight to solution, but from solution to plight.

In short, this is what is wrong in Judaism: it is not Christianity.<sup>2</sup>

It is the Gentile question and the exclusivism of Paul's soteriology which dethrone the law, not a misunderstanding of it or a view predetermined by his background.<sup>3</sup>

Paul's seemingly conflicting remarks about law should be seen against the backdrop of his motivation for acceptance of the new paradigm and not as a refutation of, to Sanders' mind, a non-existent legalistic approach to salvation. In Galatians, for instance, Paul was not opposed to doing of the law (therefore Gl. 6:15). He was not arguing against a Jewish notion that the whole law had to be kept to obtain salvation, but against Jewish Christians wanting to reinstate the requirements by which one became Jewish, as entrance requirements into Christianity.<sup>4</sup> It is an understatement that Sanders' work had a profound influence on Pauline scholarship. It was both highly acclaimed<sup>5</sup> and respectfully criticised.<sup>6</sup> We now reflect on the main points of criticism of Sanders' position.

*Firstly*, despite being willing to accept that Judaism was not devoid of mercy and not founded on the principle of merit, scholars criticised his view of Second Temple Judaism as *too one-dimensional*. Jacob Neusner, despite his admiration for Sanders' attempt to rectify the position of grace in Judaism and his intention to help NT scholarship rid itself of earlier anti-Judaistic prejudices,<sup>7</sup> finds Sanders' methodology flawed. He accuses Sanders of imposing his view of Paul's religion onto Judaism; of searching for supporting evidence in documents not necessarily dealing with the issues from Pauline themes, such as covenantal nomism, election, atonement, etc;<sup>8</sup> and of not distinguishing between documents and using them merely to provide him with decontextualised extractions supporting his position on Paul and law.<sup>9</sup> He also touches on the criticism of many that Sanders did not distinguish between different Rabbinic views.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>1</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 497.

<sup>2</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 552.

<sup>3</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1977, 497.

<sup>4</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1983, 18-20.

<sup>5</sup> Dahl, 1978, 153; Caird, 1978, 543; Horbury, 1978/9, 118. It should be acknowledged that these scholars were also critical of aspects of Sanders' position, as will become clear.

<sup>6</sup> Naming but Neusner, 1978; Schreiner, 1984, 151-60; and 1985, 245-78; Hooker, 1982, 47-56; Allison, 1987, 57-78; Du Toit, 1988, 71-80; Thielman, 1989, 16-20 (actually his whole book); Seifrid, 1994, 73-95; Das, 2001, especially 1-11.

<sup>7</sup> Neusner, 1978, 177, 180, 190.

<sup>8</sup> Neusner, 1978, 180-1, stresses that the Judaism onto which Sanders imposes Paul is also limited to the Tannaic literature of Rabbinic Judaism. This literature itself should be understood against a wider backdrop of Mishnaic literature, because it is limited in its ability to reflect theological argumentation. See also Vorster, 1997, 426-34, for a very concise overview of this literature.

<sup>9</sup> Neusner, 1978, 182.

<sup>10</sup> Allison, 1987, 62, is but one of many to emphasise the point that the Qumran community for one, although covenantalists, believed in a new covenant of which they were the only true members. They also looked forward to the time of Israel's ultimate salvation. Du Toit, 1988, 78-9, also illustrates Qumran's different view from Sanders. Du

In this setting it is gratuitous to ask for an explanation of Sanders' constant reference to "the Rabbis," as though the century and a half which he claims to discuss produced no evidence of individuals and ideas having distinct histories.<sup>1</sup>

In line with a growing sense, that Sanders' position is an overstatement a most needed project has been launched to reach a clearer understanding of Second Temple Judaism's notion of justification.<sup>2</sup> This project is a reaction to Sanders' and the so-called *New Perspective's* use of Second Temple literature. A magnitude of writings from different trends in Judaism are thoroughly examined by specialists in the field. Carson summarises and concludes as follows:

Several of the scholars found that at least parts of their respective corpora could be usefully described as reflecting covenantal nomism. One conclusion to be drawn, then, is not that Sanders<sup>3</sup> is wrong everywhere, but he is wrong when he tries to establish that his category is right everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, in view of more available information,<sup>4</sup> covenantal nomism is reductionist and misleading. It is misleading for the fact that its application is too un-discerning over too broad a range of literature. The term is also applied as if covenantal nomism and merit theology are theological opposites. It might have been nearer the truth to regard merit and grace theology as opposites.<sup>5</sup>

*Secondly*, did Judaism really think humankind could fulfil all the requirements of law? The effect of Sanders' thesis is that it minimises, even almost erases, the plight of the Jew and all humankind in the old aeon. It begs the question why Paul would refer to the old aeon as evil (Gl. 1:4)? Why would salvation in Christ be at all necessary if entrance into Judaistic covenantal nomism could provide salvation? Without much ado, I refer to Das' very appropriate conclusion.

Those under the Mosaic law are subject to its curse for any infraction of its strict requirements... The situation for the law-observant Jew is no different than for "Gentile sinners." "For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law" (Gl. 3:21). The curse of the law demonstrates that those under the law are entrapped with the Gentiles in "the present evil age" (Gl. 1:4). The answer to humanity's plight in this dire cosmic situation is Jesus Christ, "who gave himself for our sins" (1:4). What Christ did would have been meaningless if it were possible for people to find a right relationship with God through the law (2:21).<sup>6</sup>

*Lastly*, does Sanders not, in his effort to emphasise the discontinuity between the Judaistic religious pattern of covenantal nomism and the Pauline religious pattern of "participation theology", in actual fact dislocate Christianity from its Jewish roots? Should one not acknowledge some form of overlap between the

Toit, 1996, 76, stresses that with regard to Qumran both the emphases on grace and obedience as necessary for salvation are upheld, and concludes: "a strong case here for a synergistic soteriology cannot be denied."

<sup>1</sup> Neusner, 1978, 183,

<sup>2</sup> I refer to the monumental research by an eminent group of concerned scholars reflected in Carson, O'Brien & Seifrid (eds.), 2001. Unfortunately, the second volume dealing with the specifically Pauline bearing has not yet appeared.

<sup>3</sup> Carson, 2001, 543.

<sup>4</sup> In a review of the above volume J.A. Sanders, 2002<sup>1</sup>, 154, reminds scholarship of the fact that more scrolls are available today than when Sanders formulated his point of view.

<sup>5</sup> Carson, 2001, 543-4.

<sup>6</sup> Das, 2001, 169-70.

two positions?<sup>1</sup> If Sanders is correct in his assertion, Horbury is justified in saying that, from Sanders' position, Paul and Judaism "pass like ships in the night."<sup>2</sup> There is no connection. Obviously, this would also imply the dislocation of the Old and New Testaments: truly impossible!

Sanders should, however, be credited for correcting a widely held misconception in NT scholarship that Judaism was primarily a religion of legalism and devoid of grace. However, he has gone too far down this alley by dissolving Israel's plight before its God and making salvation as participation in Christ spring up almost from out of the blue.

In the next paragraph we will attempt to illustrate from the OT and from literature of the Second Temple Period, the divine move from the one aeon to the next as a move from the Jewish (and, indeed humankind's) plight to the christological solution. Hopefully it will become clear that Judaism, throughout the OT and the period of the second temple, logically and theologically called for a solution to their plight.

### **3.1.2. From plight to solution in the Old Testament and Judaism<sup>3</sup>**

#### **3.1.2.1. *The Old Testament emphasises humanity's plight***

Undoubtedly, the OT depicts humanity's plight right from the primeval period reflected in Gn. 1-11. Harrison says of this prologue to the Pentateuch that:

The reader is furnished with an account of the creation of the world and of man, the incidence of sin as a universal concept, and the corollary that by definition it must always stand under divine judgement.<sup>4</sup>

Von Rad emphasises that the stories of the fall, Cain and Noah illustrate the ever-widening gap sin brings between God and man. He observes that each story ends with God being merciful, except for the last story of man's iniquity, i.e. of Babel. God disperses man into different nations and away from his sight. However, this story involving the entire humanity dovetails with the *Heilsgeschichte*<sup>5</sup> of God's gracious calling of Abraham in whom He would bless all nations.

[The Yahwist] gives the aetiology of all aetiologies in the Old Testament and becomes at this point a true prophet, for he proclaims the distant goal of the sacred history effected by God in Israel to be the bridging of the cleft between God and all mankind; and he announces it neither as being rationally grounded nor as being already comprehensible in its details.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hooker, 1982, 48. It is widely accepted that the first Christians identified very strongly with the Jewish people, despite obvious differences. P.G.R. De Villiers, 1987, 26; Minear, 1960, 70-104; Breytenbach, 1997, 381-3.

<sup>2</sup> Horbury, 1978/9, 118.

<sup>3</sup> For the discussion of this subject I am indebted to Thielman, 1989, 28-45, for the very simple, but handy layout with which he deals with the subject. While making use of his scheme it will hopefully become clear that I have not simply imitated him.

<sup>4</sup> Harrison, 1977, 565.

<sup>5</sup> The term that was strongly advocated by Oscar Cullmann after World War II, although initially introduced by J.C.K. von Hofmann and Adolf Schlatter. See Marshall, 1988, 612-3.

<sup>6</sup> Von Rad, 1972<sup>1</sup>, 24, 152-4. Brueggemann, 1982, 104, comments that Gn. 1-11 "ends with a scattering." The earth is populated, but none of the population is listening. God remains gracious by calling Abraham and the

But, man's plight is not only about separation from God. It is also about deception (Gn. 3:6,12), fear (Gn. 3:10), suffering, sorrow and pain (Gn. 3:15-16), domination (Gn. 3:16), burdensome toil (Gn. 3:17), and disarray in nature (Gn. 3:18). Kidner refers to the human plight as "paradise lost".<sup>1</sup> Despite God's gracious dealings with the patriarchs (Gn. 12-50), we find them being bold before God (16), cunning (25, 27, 30) and resentful of one another (34, 37, 38). This even continues after the divine intervention when Israel was liberated from Egyptian slavery as Exodus and Numbers abundantly attest.<sup>2</sup> In fact, it is axiomatic that the wilderness period in Israel's exodus was marred by the motif of murmuring.<sup>3</sup> Throughout Leviticus and Numbers, emphasising ritual, purity, sanctification, sacrificial offerings and a fatal curse on sinners leading to death, the plight is indirectly underlined.<sup>4</sup> With regard to the Day of Atonement, central to Israel's religion, Wenham writes:

The need for the nation as a whole to be purged of sin is portrayed vividly here. The rites in the holy of holies were unseen by the general public. The scapegoat ceremony was seen by all and could **be understood by all**. *It was a powerful visual aid that demonstrated the reality of sin and the need to eliminate it.*<sup>5</sup>

Moving on to the time from the entrance into Canaan to the deportations and exiles to Assyria and Babylon, disobedience becomes very prominent. Despite God's grace and patience, this section of Israel's history ends in God's curse being executed. The prophets rose to the occasion, but not the people of God. Amos preaches judgement over God's people (Am. 4:6-12).<sup>6</sup> Hosea frequently describes the iniquitous Israel with the imagery of "whoredom".<sup>7</sup> Referring to sayings with which Hosea describes Israel's iniquities, Wolff follows with:

The context in which these sayings in each case appear indicates how Hosea's God, in profound sorrow, laments the apostasy of his people; how he himself suffers under the distress their estrangement prepares for them....Yahweh, having declared his judgement, laments over the impending disaster.<sup>8</sup>

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barren Sarah in the time of identifiable history (105). The whole creation is in expectancy to see if Abraham will listen. He emphasises humanity's plight that will only be answered to at Pentecost (Ac. 2) (104).

<sup>1</sup> Kidner, 1967, 68-72. Although the plight and lament concerning sin is very prominent in the OT, the plight involves much more. It includes the difficulties man in general and especially man as Yahweh's covenantal partner faces.

<sup>2</sup> Zimmerli, 1972, 147-56.

<sup>3</sup> Childs, 1974, 254-64, provides interesting reading on this motif. He warns that it was not all negative. There were times of legitimate need in which petitioning and God's gracious provision were highlighted. However, Fensham, 1977, 91, emphasises the dominance of murmuring representing Israel's forgetfulness of God's kindness.

<sup>4</sup> G.J. Wenham, 1979, 25-32. One should be reminded of the fact that the animals brought as sacrifices substituted the sinner who was being atoned. See G.J. Wenham, 1981, 29-34.

<sup>5</sup> G.J. Wenham, 1979, 237. Maarsingh, 1974, 131, 140, stresses that the Day of Atonement emphasised both death as judgement on the sinner who was not atoned for, and Yahweh's provision of a new beginning for his people. In retrospect from a NT position, this illustrates the movement from plight in the OT to God's permanent solution in Christ.

<sup>6</sup> Mays, 1969, 7-8,12, describes the prophet's message as God's final "no" to his people. The prophet's message entailed the end of salvation-history. Zimmerli, 1990, 75-6, draws attention to the fact that, while the rest of the prophets emphasise "the Day of Yahweh" as part of the salvation tradition, Am. 5:18-20 portrays it as a day of judgement.

<sup>7</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>1</sup>, xxvii.

<sup>8</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>1</sup>, xxviii.

This divine lament becomes heart rendering in Is. 5:1-7. God is devastated by his people's unfaithfulness. It is not his impotence that caused their ultimate exile, but their guilt.<sup>1</sup> Von Rad emphasises the conscientious and caring labour that the owner of the vineyard put into his vineyard, but that it had proved fruitless and disappointing.<sup>2</sup> Jeremiah describes Judah's plight as having gone completely beyond human capability to restoration. He says it is as impossible as for an Ethiopian to change his skin or a leopard his spots (Jr. 13:23). Sin is engraved into Judah's heart [of stone]<sup>3</sup> with a pen of iron and a diamond point (Jr. 17:1).

[D]eep-seated wickedness caused by centuries of schooling and repeated excursions into idolatry had made evil virtually a fixed feature of her life and behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Equally, Ezk. 16, 20 and 23 portrays the inability of God's people to do his will. No matter what He did for them, they reacted with rebellion and idolatry.<sup>5</sup>

Wisdom literature underlines the plight of man, especially of the believer, in a variety of ways. In Ecclesiastes we find a profound disillusionment with life. Loader emphasises that Koheleth describes life viewed from the human stance as essentially meaningless.<sup>6</sup> He describes life as abundant in toil and meagre in reward (Ec. 1:3; 2:22f.). Justice is overshadowed by injustice (Ec. 3:16) and men are placed in positions of power over one another (Ec. 5:7; 8:9). The downtrodden have no one to comfort them (Ec. 4:1), and the future holds no promise, because nobody knows what lies ahead (Ec. 8:7; 9:1; 10:14).

Behind the problem of the future, there lies for Koheleth the still more difficult question of death which casts its shadow over every meaningful interpretation of life.<sup>7</sup>

Of course, the Psalms particularly illustrate the plight of both the individual and the community.<sup>8</sup> Man's wickedness from birth is attested to at instances such as Ps. 51:7 and 58:4, although the latter does not refer to all individuals, but to the wicked whom the poet has in mind. However, the reference in Ps. 58:2-3, 6

<sup>1</sup> Kaiser, 1983, 93-4.

<sup>2</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>2</sup>, 151.

<sup>3</sup> Van Selms, 1972, 228, like most commentaries, notes that the "tables of the heart" is used here in two senses. It alludes to the Decalogue that was written on tables of stone, but more precisely to the fact that their hearts had grown to be cold and hard as stone.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, 1980, 374.

<sup>5</sup> Von Rad, 1975<sup>2</sup>, 226.

<sup>6</sup> Loader, 1984, 20-1.

<sup>7</sup> Von Rad, 1972<sup>2</sup>, 228.

<sup>8</sup> Sabourin, 1974, 215-8 and 295-7, provides ample examples of both the individual and communal laments in the Psalms. Brueggemann wrote two very interesting articles: *CBQ* 47, 1985<sup>1</sup>, 28-46; and *CBQ* 47, 1985<sup>2</sup>, 395-415. Especially the second article stresses the integral part pain plays in the unfolding of Israel's walk with God. It is not about avoiding pain at all cost, but about accepting its being endemic to the relationship with Yahweh and embracing that pain (1985<sup>2</sup>, 398/9). This embrace, however, is not a submissive acceptance of one's (unalterable) fate, but rather a making known to God of one's plight, being sure that He has heard, and hopefully waiting on Him to resolve the situation. Gerstenberger, 1963, 393-408, stresses that the laments are acts of relentless hope that the current plight is not outside the reach of Yahweh's gracious dealings with his people. This is obviously important for our current subject, the plight – solution model in the OT. Brueggemann, 1985<sup>1</sup>, 43, stresses very profoundly: "I suggest that this question of pain experienced as personal hurt and expressed in the lament psalms and in the public outcry that leads to liberation (cf. Exod. 2:23-25), is the main question of Old Testament faith."



to beings who charm the wicked into their wrongdoing alludes to the idea of a supra-human origin of sin with which man struggles to deal successfully.<sup>1</sup> In Ps. 143:2 the individual pronounces his being unjust in the presence of God. Ps. 51:9 confirms the poet's notion that only divine intervention could cleanse him from sin. Even the so-called Psalms of innocence, e.g., Ps. 26, do not attest to absolute innocence and self-righteousness.<sup>2</sup> In fact, Ps. 26:11 implies sin on the part of the poet because he pleads for mercy in God's judgements, and earlier on (vs. 6) refers to a context of ritual cleansing. One must assume that a very specific context, to which the reader does not have access, is applicable. He is quite sure of his innocence regarding a specific situation.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, Eichrodt is very convincing with regard to the role of law in intensifying the plight of sinful man. He argues that semantically guilt was often not distinguished from sin. In many cases, the same root (אָוֶן) is used for both terms, despite the existence of a word for guilt, אָשָׁם, which is used predominantly with regard to restitution.<sup>4</sup> Equally important, the root רָשָׁע, which has a forensic purport, is often used to refer to religious guilt. Israel's conviction, according to Eichrodt, moved from an objective view on sin and guilt as demonic involvement, to a more subjective view where man, as individual and as clan, was personally responsible for his deeds. This called for law as a protection of the individual from damages,<sup>5</sup> as well as a system of placing blame, retribution and reparations. Because it was Yahweh who implemented law to protect his people, any infringement of the law made one guilty before God. In this way, law played a primary role in enforcing guilt upon God's people.<sup>6</sup> The introduction of punishments for certain misdeeds enhanced the notion of law emphasising man's plight, and indeed exacerbating it. It also had the effect of discolouring the religious condition of a personal relationship with Yahweh with juristic and indeed legalistic thinking of balancing shortfalls with good deeds.<sup>7</sup>

But the attempt to ease the burden of guilt-feelings in these ways could bring no real relief. Instead it revenged itself by the uncertainty which attaches to all human arithmetic. Side by side with the proud sense of being able to ward off guilt by strict obedience to the Law there inevitably arises the doubt whether what has been done is really enough in face of God's incorruptible holiness. Thus those who seek protection from God's wrath under wholly inadequate coverings find themselves all the more the slaves of the sense of guilt; and the Law becomes a taskmas-

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<sup>1</sup> Weiser, 1962, 431.

<sup>2</sup> Sabourin, 1974, 232.

<sup>3</sup> Weiser, 1962, 242-4; N.H. Ridderbos, 1962, 270-1. One is slightly uncomfortable with the assessment of Eichrodt, 1979, 392, that Ps. 26 reflects a weakening of the sense of sin, which the prophets tried to restore, although one must acknowledge that there was such a tendency.

<sup>4</sup> Eichrodt, 1979, 413, cites Gn. 43:9; 44:32; 20:9. Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1953, 307 provides more examples.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, 1992<sup>1</sup>, 78, stresses: "We completely misunderstand if we imagine that the laws of the Pentateuch are rules for order. They are, rather, acts of passionate protest and vision whereby Israel explores in detail how the gifts and vision of the exodus rescue can be practiced in Israel on an ongoing basis as the foundation for society. As God acted in response to a cry of hurt, the law is an attempt to devise institutional power arrangements in which those in authority, those who have legitimate power, those who 'know good and evil,' are responsive to hurt and attentive to the dangers of exploitation."

<sup>6</sup> Eichrodt, 1979, 414-6.

<sup>7</sup> Eichrodt, 1979, 422.



ter from whose tyranny men can be freed *only by the One who discloses the full depth of their guilt, but also took the curse of the Law upon himself.*<sup>1</sup>

God's gracious intervention in providing man with the law so that the iniquities could be averted was not successful. The history of Israel's plight illustrates the point sufficiently. Man's plight of sinfulness is not always described in terms of specifics. There is ample evidence of sin being equal to violation of law.

In the Septuagint text of the prophets, the text which Paul apparently used, Israel and Judah are reprimanded twenty-one times for forgetting, dealing impiously with, rejecting, not desiring to obey, and not keeping God's law.<sup>2</sup>

The fall of the city and the exile of many of its citizens marked a watershed in Judean history and have left *fissure marks radiating* throughout the Hebrew Scriptures. The 'day of judgment' heralded in prophetic pronouncements had not just dawned, it had burst on Judah with immense ferocity.<sup>3</sup>

Thus, the predicament of the people of God, and indeed of all nations, of the inability to live in obedience to Yahweh, and therefore living under his righteous judgement, should be clear from this bird's eye-view of the OT. Man's inability to live a righteous life is in tandem with God's gracious interventions. The OT confirms that only divine intervention can save man from his plight in the present evil age (Gl. 1:4). Man is not possibly capable of this, neither with, nor without the help of law.

This ruthless diagnosis of the sinful constitution of Man, however, makes his situation hopeless. Of all the evils which oppress him, sin is now recognized as the most serious, and the breaking of its spell *becomes the most important question in life*. Such an assessment of the situation, moreover, disposes of the attempt of the Law to create a world of righteousness and holiness. Indeed the whole history of the nation showed how little the Law could prevent rebellion against God's will, but instead inevitably exposed the real depth of hostility to God. *The only course now left open was to turn one's eyes to the eschatological new creation of God's people, which would be able to heal the irremediable rift between Man and God.*<sup>4</sup>

### 3.1.2.2. OT eschatology looking forward to Yahweh's solution to the plight

Now that we have emphasised the plight of God's people in OT times, it is necessary to reflect the hope for a solution made possible by Yahweh in his grace. Despite the plight and times of rampant pessimism, the OT as a whole never succumbed to a perpetuating spiral of pessimism. As Von Rad illustrated in our previous section, the primeval history reflected in Gn. 1-11 presents us with a gracious God who overcomes his disappointments in man's recurring iniquity with repeated shows of mercy; to such an extent, that Gn. 1-11 should be seen as introductory to the rest of God's salvation-history as reflected throughout the remainder of scripture.<sup>5</sup>

Although the theme of hope is recurrent throughout the OT,<sup>6</sup> the pattern of plight to solution is nowhere more profoundly illustrated than among the proph-

<sup>1</sup> Eichrodt, 1979, 422-3.

<sup>2</sup> Thielman, 1989, 33. He cites these instances that are not all repeated here.

<sup>3</sup> Miller & Hayes, 1986, 416.

<sup>4</sup> Eichrodt, 1979, 390. Also Pretorius, 1981, 136, 139, who remarks that even with regard to kingship there was a growing feeling that human initiative and ability was not enough to restore Israel. Westerholm, 1997, 154-7.

<sup>5</sup> Brueggemann, 1992, 78-81, correctly suggests that the themes of hurt and hope are found throughout Torah.

<sup>6</sup> Walke, 1988, 123-39, in a riveting article on Yahweh's covenants with Israel, investigates the notions of unconditionality and conditionality; that of promise and obligation; of theological certainty and moral quality; etc. He stresses that Yah-

ets. We limit ourselves to only some of the main prophetic and apocalyptic themes, bearing in mind Moltmann's distinction mentioned earlier.<sup>1</sup>

Amos exhorts the people of Israel as God's people to mend their ways (Am. 5:14-15). He expresses the hope, because Yahweh is no national god who dutifully bows to the whims of his people, that He will show mercy to a *remnant* with whom, by implication, He will make a new beginning. Amos seems to express the notion that Yahweh, despite Israel's sin, still has the will to be their God, and this offers a foundation for hope.<sup>2</sup> It must be added, though, that although the concept of a remnant was widely used, both pessimistically and optimistically, it only obtained a fixed theological content of hope, divine preservation and salvation in the exile period (Is. 46:3f.). In Is. 45:20 it is broadened to include even individuals from the nations who turn away from idolatry to serve Yahweh.<sup>3</sup> Ezra and Nehemia (Ezr. 9:8,15; Neh.1:2f.), at the turn of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE,<sup>4</sup> apply the remnant to the returning exiles.<sup>5</sup> Whilst the date of Zechariah is debatable, it is widely accepted that at least Zch. 9-14 reflects the Greek period at the end of the fourth and more to the beginning of the third century BCE.<sup>6</sup> If we accept this, this apocalyptic section also reflects the hope of a remnant associated with the Day of the Lord (Zch. 13:8-14:2).

The *Day of the Lord* is a very prominent eschatological theme of hope for the expected future salvation<sup>7</sup>. Walters and Milne summarise it well:

Israel's experience of God as saviour in the past projected her faith forward in anticipation of his full and final salvation in the future. Precisely because Yahweh has shown himself to be the Lord of all, creator and ruler of the whole earth, and because he is a righteous and faithful God, he will one day effect his total victory over his foes and save his people from all their ills (Is. 43:11-21; Dt. 9:4-6; Ezk. 36:22-23). In the earlier period this hope of salvation centres more upon immediate historic intervention for the vindication of Israel (cf. Gn. 49; Dt. 33; Nu. 23f.). In the prophetic period it finds expression in terms of a 'Day of Yahweh' in which judgement would combine with deliverance (Is. 24:19f.; 25:6-8; Joel 2:1f., 28-32; Am. 5:18f.; 9:11f.). The experience of the Exile

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weh's gracious interventions and providential acts, despite Israel's iniquity, "allowed man to live confidently and to follow God in hope (127). Equally, he adds, Israel recurrently disqualified itself from full participation in the blessings of the covenant. This placed the nation under a curse instead of a blessing. He continues: "The prophets of the exile foresaw an escape from this dilemma. In the name of Yahweh, they announced that Yahweh would grant Israel a new covenant in place of the old treaty. This covenant would contain the substance of the treaty – the eternal law of Yahweh – but not its form. Instead of having the form of a unilateral treaty depending on Israel's obedience, it would take the form of a grant, like the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. Yahweh would put his law in Israel's heart" (136). See also McCready, 1988, 225. Certainly this underlines the plight-solution pattern. Brueggemann, 1992<sup>2</sup>, 81, emphasises the prominence of the theme of hurt and hope in the prophets. Although we will not discuss the Psalms in this regard, Childs, 1979, 517-23, refers to the Psalms as a corpus of eschatological literature.

<sup>1</sup> See my Ch. 2 at §4.2.6.2

<sup>2</sup> Mays, 1969, 102. Günther & Krienke, 1978, 249, make mention of the vagueness of this hope in Amos. Bright, 1953, 71-97, writes extensively on this subject with regard to Isaiah, and remarks: "The reader of Isaiah senses at once that denunciation and doom are balanced there by a glorious hope (83)." See also Brueggemann, 1992<sup>2</sup>, 192-7.

<sup>3</sup> Günther & Krienke, 1978, 249-50. See also Zph. 2:7-9 and Van Der Woude, 1978, 117-20. Ackroyd, 1968, 115-7, also stresses this point with regard to Ezekiel.

<sup>4</sup> Fensham, 1982, 9-16.

<sup>5</sup> Fensham, 1982, 151.

<sup>6</sup> Baldwin, 1972, 62-6. Harrison, 1977, 950-7, also provides an overview of the debate.

<sup>7</sup> Bright, 1953, 164-70. With regard to the Sion tradition as eschatological theme of hope, refer to my Ch. 2.

gave concrete imagery and a concrete setting for the expression of this hope as a new exodus (Is.43:14-16; 48:20f.; 51:9f.; cf. Je. 31:31-34; Ezk. 37:21-28; Zch 8:7-13); but the disappointing and limited results of the restoration projected the hope forward again and transmuted it into what has been termed the transcendental-eschatological (Is. 64:1f.; 65:17f.; 66:22), the hope of the 'olam habba', the new world at the end of the present age in which God's sovereign rule and righteous character would be manifested among all the nations.<sup>1</sup>

The hoped for future restoration of Israel is very impressively presented in the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel as the *renewal of man's inner being*. It is even presented in terms creating the allusion of a new Exodus (Ezk. 20:32-44).<sup>2</sup> Jr. 31:31-34, after reflecting on man's rebelliousness, his inability to change his sinful inner being, and the resultant inevitable, looming doom (Jr. 2:22; 3:10; 13:23; 17:1), envisions the intention of Yahweh to re-equip Israel to do his will.<sup>3</sup>

I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, "Know the Lord," for they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest... For I will forgive their wickedness and I will remember their sins no more. (31:33-34).

In Ezekiel it is elaborated with Yahweh's promise of a new heart and spirit (Ezk. 36:24-32), the heart referring to man's will and personality. Spirit (רוח) in Ezk. 36:26 takes the meaning of a new sense of ethical purpose in man's inner being.<sup>4</sup> The heart being the most important organ and the seat of man's reason, will and feelings – the centre of his decisions<sup>5</sup> – had to be divinely recreated in order to be positively disposed to Yahweh's wishes and encouragement.<sup>6</sup> The spirit in this case seems very closely connected with the Spirit of Yahweh Himself, so that it is not merely about man receiving a renewed urgency of purpose, but really being endowed with Yahweh's Spirit.<sup>7</sup> In short, Ezekiel envisions a day when Yahweh will intervene in man's world of rebellion in which he has separated himself from God, so as to renew man's inner being to such an extent that he will be both able, willing and enthusiastic about seeking and serving Yahweh's purposes for his life. This idea is advanced even further in Jl. 2:28-29. Of this Gowan writes:

Joel promises that the democratization of prophecy which Moses once hoped for will in fact one day occur: "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets, that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:29). This is what Joel now promises. No longer will one have to depend on someone else to learn the will of God, for all will have the same access to revelation. Joel's choices of subjects make sure that no one will be left out. Young and old, male and female, free and slave – all are to be included, and once the slave is mentioned one cannot say that Gentiles are excluded, even though they are not specifically mentioned.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Walters & Milne, 1980, 1371-2. Also J.S. Wright, 1980, 369. Mason, 1977, 413-21, and 1982, 142-9, emphasises that the editorial framework of Haggai and Zechariah indicates that the first instalment of the restoration would be the temple rebuilding.

<sup>2</sup> Ackroyd, 1968, 110.

<sup>3</sup> Bright, 1953, 123-5, notes that this obviously heightened their hope for restoration in the future.

<sup>4</sup> Eichrodt, 1970, 499.

<sup>5</sup> Wolff, 1974<sup>2</sup>, 40-55.

<sup>6</sup> Eichrodt, 1970, 500.

<sup>7</sup> Wolff, 1974, 38; Eichrodt, 1970, 500-2.

<sup>8</sup> Gowan, 1986, 75. Allen, 1976, 97-9, is in complete agreement and adds that Paul, acknowledging this expansion, very expressly includes the Gentiles in Gl. 3:28.

In conclusion, it should be clear that together with the very strong emphasis on the plight of Israel in the OT, and its record of continually living contrary to God's will as expressed in the law, Israel had a very real eschatological hope of restoration. This hope, in juxtaposition to its plight, emphasised Israel's plight and its need for divine intervention of which the prophets continually reminded them that it would be realised in the Day of Yahweh.

### 3.1.2.3. *Second Temple Judaism still reflecting the model of plight and hope*

Although Second Temple Judaism was firmly grounded in OT theology, there was development from one period to another.<sup>1</sup> Different contexts have a way of placing new nuances on the same text. Though we will not elaborate on these nuances, the following is obvious and illustrates the plight-solution pattern.

- *From monarchy to messianism.* The exile dealt the monarchic ideal a heavy blow. In fact, it was rendered dysfunctional and inoperative. They were initially under governorship answerable to Persia till 332 BCE, then of Alexander the Great, followed by the Egyptians and the Syrians. The Maccabean Revolt ended this in 141 BCE.<sup>2</sup> In the time of Alexander the priestly office took charge of Jewish interests. It was especially in the period of Antiochus IV (175-164 BCE) that the priestly office rose to deal with the Jewish political governance of which the high priest was the political leader.<sup>3</sup> The Maccabean Revolt was followed by a period of sovereignty: the period of the so-called Hasmonean Dynasty (140-63 BCE). In this period Israel experienced something of the old monarchic ideal with kings succeeding one another in familial fashion.<sup>4</sup> Then came the Romans (63 BCE – 135 CE): a period of the greatest importance for NT scholarship. The dynasty ended and, although the ideal of nationalism persisted, the notion of a monarchy became a distant memory. In this void, the *messianic ideal* replaced the kingship ideal.<sup>5</sup> The important point with regard to the current subject (plight-solution) is that Israel experienced the plight of religious, cultural and political oppression.<sup>6</sup> However, they had the multi-dimensional hope that Yahweh would, by mediation of the Messiah, intervene in the near future to provide a solution to their plight.<sup>7</sup> The Qumran community even expected two messiahs and longed for the eschatological feast when they would sit down with the priestly Messiah as well as with the Messiah of Israel, a military figure of Davidic lineage.<sup>8</sup>
- *Apocalyptic.* This subject having been dealt with extensively earlier on, it will not be repeated here. Suffice it to repeat that this phenomenon ex-

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<sup>1</sup> Du Toit, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 234.

<sup>2</sup> Du Toit, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 231-9.

<sup>3</sup> Du Toit, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 236-7.

<sup>4</sup> Du Toit, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 239-42.

<sup>5</sup> Du Toit, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 233.

<sup>6</sup> P.G.R. De Villiers, 1997, 462-5. Also P.G.R. De Villiers, 1978, 75-110.

<sup>7</sup> P.G.R De Villiers, 1997, 464-5. D.S. Russel, 1967, 144-8, elaborates on the point.

<sup>8</sup> Du Rand, 1997, 296; Dumbrell, 1997, 398; J.Cook, 1997, 1120.

ploded onto the Jewish scene in this period.<sup>1</sup> The phenomenon emphasises the expected judgement of the unrighteous by Yahweh and the hope of eschatological salvation. It obviously stresses the plight – solution model as operative during this period. In this regard Hubbard observes:

I spoke earlier of the “apocalyptic paradigm” and argued that the primary role of eschatology and the motif of new creation within this paradigm was to enable the suffering elect of Israel to make sense of their present circumstances through the promise of ultimate redemption and vindication.<sup>2</sup>

- *Law.* As expressed earlier, law reigned supreme in this period. After the return from exile there was a fear of history repeating itself with Israel being disobedient once again, and consequently being punished. The reforms introduced by Ezra emphasised the need for total obedience. This sparked an overreaction, which led to law observance according to the letter. Ritual cleanliness, or purity,<sup>3</sup> the observance of the Sabbath and circumcision was heavily emphasised.<sup>4</sup> The Qumran community especially took this notion to its ultimate conclusion.<sup>4</sup> They had lost the hope for the restoration of Israel as a nation and distrusted the high priestly office, putting their trust in the “Teacher of Righteousness” to lead them to the *eschaton*.<sup>5</sup> Qumran literature emphasises man’s inability to please God and the hope that in the *eschaton* He would purify his people.<sup>6</sup>

It should be clear that the literature of the Second Temple period reflects the plight and solution pattern. Thielman puts it well:

In summary, both canonical and non-canonical Jewish literature from the era in which Paul lived demonstrate familiarity with a pattern of thinking about God’s dealings with Israel which runs from plight to solution. In some cases, the plight was conceived as the inability of Israel to obey God’s law and the solution was conceived in terms of a future in which Israel would be free from sin. This was certainly not the only way of thinking of God’s historical design for Israel in ancient Judaism; but it was one way, and it was current in the first century.<sup>7</sup>

W.O. McCready suggests:

the post-exilic writers were, in fact, successful in what they set out to do by way of implementing God’s design for the times. I hold that subsequent phases of Judaism, down to and including such groups as the Pharisees, Essenes, and Christians, at the turn of the Common Era, inherited a religious self-concept that anticipated a more glorious day for the people of YHWH. Whether their claims to be the community to introduce that glorious day were correct is not relevant here. What is important is that these later communities expected a better day,<sup>8</sup> and that the source of their positive outlook has its roots in the writings of the post-exilic period.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> D.S. Russel, 1967, 139-44.

<sup>2</sup> Hubbard, 2002, 48.

<sup>3</sup> Du Toit, 1997<sup>2</sup>, 234. Neyrey, 1986, 91-128, although dealing with the Gospel according to Mark, provides a very concise orientation of how Judaism’s purity functioned. In a later article, 1996, 80-104, Neyrey provides a very concise orientation with regard to the subject as well as influential scholars in the field.

<sup>4</sup> Du Rand, 1997, 293-6.

<sup>5</sup> Pretorius, 1981, 139-40.

<sup>6</sup> Thielman, 1989, 36-41. In fact, Thielman illustrates from other Jewish literature of the time how the pattern of plight – solution was prominent (41-5).

<sup>7</sup> Thielman, 1989, 45.

<sup>8</sup> McCready, 1988, 224.

### 3.1.2.4. *Paul's move from plight to solution as reflected in Galatians*

One can assume that Paul, a product of the latter half of the Second Temple period, would think on these subjects in terms of plight and solution. He experienced the Christophany and formed his theology, christology and soteriology in this period. He wanted to make himself clear to believers who had been influenced by the theological views of the time. I believe this assumption correlates with the arguments Paul uses in Galatians.

- The contrast Paul introduces between *present evil age* (1:4) and *new creation* (6:15) is an explicit reflection of the movement from the human plight in the present evil age, to the solution provided in the dispensation of the eschatological new creation. He explicitly states that Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver the believers from the present evil age (Gl. 1:3-5). Man's plight is depicted as being in the grip of sin (Gl. 3:22). Despite the gift and presence of law, man could not loosen the grip of sin. Divine intervention and deliverance of a different order was needed. This eschatological new order was above circumcision, and, for that matter, above law. No longer did law matter, but new creation (Gl. 6:15) became the order of the day. In the advent of Christ and faith in Him a movement had taken place from plight to solution.
- Paul depicts the movement from plight to solution as from bondage to freedom. In the context of circumcision<sup>1</sup> Paul writes of false brethren who came to spy out their freedom in order to bring them into bondage again (Gl. 2:4), the latter being in contrast to the truth of the gospel. At the very least, circumcision and dietary laws, if not law as a whole, are portrayed as enslavers in opposition to freedom in Christ. Once again, a movement from plight to solution had been effected in Christ.
- Nowhere is the plight of sinful man depicted so tragically, and the eschatological solution so profoundly in terms of the covenantal promises, as in Gl. 3:10-14. Man's life before the advent of Christ was cursed. Israel was expected to live according to every precept of the law. Paul expressly states:

Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them (Gl. 3:10)

Paul's profound emphasis on grace in Galatians in contrast to the earlier experience of curse is expressive of the notion that in Christ a movement from plight to solution had been effected. Du Toit correctly refers to Paul's references to his Damascus experience as reflections of divine grace.<sup>2</sup> In Gl. 1:15 Paul writes: "But when *he who had set me apart* before I was born, and *had called me through his grace was pleased* to reveal his Son to me" (ὅτε δὲ εὐδόκησεν [ὁ θεός] ὁ ἀφορίσας με ἐκ κοιλίας μητρός μου καὶ καλέσας διὰ τῆς χάριτος αὐτοῦ ἀποκαλύψαι τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί).

<sup>1</sup> Titus not being compelled to be circumcised (Gl. 2:3); the division of missionary labour between circumcised and uncircumcised (Gl. 2:7-9); and Peter's withdrawal from the uncircumcised's table, for fear of the circumcision party (Gl. 2:11-12).

<sup>2</sup> Du Toit, 1996, 73-4.

Commentators stress that his use of the verb εὐδόκησεν (“he was well pleased”) and the substantival participles ἀφορίσας (“who ordained”) and καλέσας (“who called”), together with God as subject, indicate the basis of his ministry.<sup>1</sup> His whole ministry is thoroughly drenched in grace. The verb εὐδόκησεν is indicative of the Damascus incident as an exclusively divine event without any human foundation.<sup>2</sup> In his undisputed letters

Paul refers in no less than nine different contexts to his Damascus encounter as an experience of grace. In fact, grace became almost a name-tag by which means one could recognise a Pauline reference to his Damascus experience.<sup>3</sup>

He was fundamentally, even painfully aware of his own indebtedness to God for the grace endowed to him. In Gl. 1:13-14 he reiterates his indebtedness at the time of his calling, his being a persecutor of the church, and his choice to be faithful to the traditions of his fathers (Gl. 1:14) rather than accepting the Son, subsequently revealed to him on the road to Damascus (Gl. 1:12,16). Having committed such horrendous sin against Jesus, and then being elected to turn diametrically and become an apostle of the once rejected Jesus, was a profound deed of divine grace.

Grace provided the solution to the mystery of Damascus. Paul's theology grew out of a real-life encounter. It was the experience of the radicality of grace that led to a theology which took grace radically seriously.<sup>4</sup>

The pre-Christian Paul's spirituality was drenched in and defined by law. For him it was the expression of God's will. He regarded law-righteousness as necessary in order to be acceptable to God (Phlp. 3:9; Rm. 10:3). This was not at odds with those in Judaism who were zealous for the law, as for instance, Qumran “where the righteousness of God and his grace are stressed so strongly, obeying the law is proclaimed as (also) necessary for salvation.”<sup>5</sup> Paul seemingly regarded it possible to fulfil law's demands, regarding himself blameless in terms of law (Phlp. 3:6).<sup>6</sup> However, contra to Dunn one must agree with Du Toit:

In transposing himself back into his pre-Damascus era he calculates the various aspects of his pre-Christian prowess in terms of credits and debits, as the bookkeeping terms κέρδη and ζημία (3:7-8; cf also ἐζημιώθη) indicate. Following the way in which Paul adds up the six items to his credit in v.5-6a, until he reaches the result and climax of his

<sup>1</sup> R.N. Longenecker, 1990, 30.

<sup>2</sup> Rohde, 1989, 59. Equally, Hengel, 1991<sup>2</sup>, 283, describes it as God's unfathomable deed of electing grace.

<sup>3</sup> Du Toit, 1996, 75. He adds that it would be “incorrect to minimise what Paul himself has maximised.”

<sup>4</sup> Du Toit, 1996, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Du Toit, 1996, 76.

<sup>6</sup> Hengel, 1991<sup>2</sup>, 253, 283. Of course one is reminded of Dunn's so-called “New Perspective on Paul” to which more attention will be paid in Chapter 6, but of whom we have to take note at this point. In Dunn, 1990<sup>2</sup>, 215-41, he argues that Paul distinguishes between fulfilling the law as a deed of faith (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως) in experience of the Spirit and living according to “the works of law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) which is in accordance with the flesh, namely the fulfilling of the law requirements pertaining to circumcision, diet and Sabbath as the outward markings or identity markers separating the Jews from the Gentiles. The latter was not enough and the typical Jew could easily think of himself as blameless in terms of these outward obligations, as Paul stresses in Phlp. 3:6 (227). Refer also to Dunn, 1990<sup>2</sup>, 183-214 to which we turn in Chapter 6.



calculations in v.6b, one cannot but conclude that, in appraising himself to be ἄμεμπτος, the Pharisee Paul found himself to be measuring up to all that the law required of him.<sup>1</sup>

To conclude, what we have in Phil. 3:6 is Paul's pre-Christian evaluation of himself. As a Pharisee Paul may have thought that he kept the law flawlessly (although even then this probably included offering sacrifices in the temple for his sins), but this was a pre-conversion view of himself which his encounter with Christ transformed. After Paul came to know Christ he realized that his so-called righteousness under the law was a false righteousness, an illusory righteousness.<sup>2</sup>

It should be clear that Paul, looking back to his pre-Christian days, realised the superficiality of his concept of being blameless before God. Although, as a zealot he had more in mind than his outward ethnic observances, looking back at his life from the advent of Christ he realised his plight was greater than his interpretation of law-observance had led him to believe. His observations in Gl. 3:10 ("Cursed be every one who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, and do them.") can hardly be open to another interpretation. The clause πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά is clear about the fact that *everything* written in the *book of the law* had to be *done*. That not being the case, one would be under a curse. Sanders argues against this understanding of Gl. 3:10. To be sure, his arguments on this matter are rather flimsy, being dependent on a few assumptions that seem just too much against the natural thread and obvious meaning of the text.<sup>3</sup> His arguments have been effectively refuted.<sup>4</sup> If Paul uses OT citations to boost his arguments, then his argument in Gl. 3:10 is clearly that those who rely on works of law are under a curse, and his citation explains exactly why: no one can do all things stipulated in the law. Obviously, he is stating law as a whole should be kept flawlessly. The word πᾶς is in no way coincidental. In fact, it is essentially and intentionally the crux of the matter: man's plight is that he is under a curse from which he cannot escape in order to obtain the blessing of Abraham. The plight-solution motif is enhanced when Paul continues in Gl. 3:13-14 by explaining that Christ became that curse by dying on the cross, removing the curse in order that Abraham's blessing could be available to Gentiles through faith. However subordinate one regards Gl. 3:10-13 to be, it is fundamental to the logic of Paul's argument.

<sup>1</sup> Du Toit, 1996, 77.

<sup>2</sup> Schreiner, 1985, 262.

<sup>3</sup> E.P. Sanders, 1983, 21-22, poses three arguments. *Firstly*, Paul was at a loss for a proof-text in which νόμος and ἐπικατάρατος ("cursed"), in whatever form, occur. He then selected Dt. 27:26 in which "all" does not appear in either the Masoretic or the known LXX texts. Betz, 1979, 145-6, suggests that Paul used an unknown LXX text, because others had also quoted in the same fashion. Another possibility is that Paul inserted it himself, but this is unlikely in view of the previous assumption. Ellis, 1957, 10-20, has laboured very well on the very tricky and complex subject of Pauline use of the OT. Unfortunately the word πᾶς, according to Sanders, only "happens to appear" in the text, but really has no bearing (21). *Secondly*, he postulates that Paul actually meant that those who accept the law are cursed (22). *Thirdly*, Gl. 3:10-13 is subordinate to 3:8 and 14, so that it is really not about all of law having to be kept in order to be justified (he uses "righteoused"), but about faith as only way by which Gentiles could share in the blessings of Abraham (22).

<sup>4</sup> Amongst others by Schreiner, 1984, 151-60 and 1985, 256-60.



In the same vein, if one were to engage on the route of circumcision one cannot dismiss Gl. 5:3 from the assumption that Paul regarded the whole of law to be kept perfectly.<sup>1</sup> Whether there were means of atonement is irrelevant to the argument that full participation in and obedience to law was expected. Although there were means of atonement, it was still a fact that man suffered under the curse of not matching the expectation. Even if Paul used this remark as a threat, as Sanders asserts, it could only make sense if law was seen as undivided and every element of it as essential for Israel.

Dunn's arguments at this point are also unconvincing. He argues from the assumption that Paul is not against law as such. His rejection of works of law in Galatians is expressly with regard to those "works of law" regarded as "identity markers" of Jewish nationalism, such as circumcision and dietary and Sabbath observances.<sup>2</sup> This assumption, with which we shall deal more extensively in Ch. 6, does not seem to have enough supporting exegetical evidence and seems more like a construct to try to come to grips with the intriguing problem of Paul's predominantly negative stance on law in Galatians and seemingly more positive notes elsewhere. For argument sake, if we were to accept Dunn's position that they were pushing for the Galatians to accept circumcision and the other ethnic "badges", but were not concerned about the Galatians having to abide to the other laws, a host of questions arise. Why would they not push for observance of the other social and moral laws? Does the literature of the time nowhere reflect Judaism as concerned about more than just the badges? If Judaism regarded law as an undivided entity, as shown earlier, why would the opponents suddenly distinguish between law and works of law? Is there evidence of a strand in Judaism expressly making this distinction? Even more difficult: is there any evidence of a group in early Christianity expressly regarding the entire law to be observed with the exception of, amongst others, the "identity markers"? Questions abound and emphasise that Dunn's position is probably more of an assumption than a fact.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, we have Paul's letter to the Galatians in front of us emanating an obvious meaning, namely that Paul understood law as a whole as a yoke of slavery. He speaks of being "under law". Why, when he of all people knew of the breadth and depth of law as divine institution in Second Temple Judaism, would he speak in such an unrefined way if he had only the ethnic markers in mind? Surely, with a subject of such magnitude, and in such a contingent and urgent situation, Paul would have been clearer if he had only a part of the law in mind. Drane correctly states:

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<sup>1</sup> Moo, 1983, 84-5. Sanders, 1983, 27, argues Paul meant it only as a threat that if one started on the route of circumcision one would logically have to go all the way. He adds that the Judaism of Paul's day provides no literature in support of the notion that perfect obedience was necessary, but impossible (28). This means restoration was instated on the assumption of imperfect obedience.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, 1990<sup>2</sup>, 194f. See also Silva, 1991, 339-53.

<sup>3</sup> Moo, 1983, 90-9, stresses man's inability to do the whole law, because of an inherent deficiency making it impossible to gain sufficient merit before God. Man's plight is underlined. However, he adds that not only this inherent deficiency disqualifies law and works of law, but also the fact that a salvation-historical shift had occurred in Christ.

But 4:21, both grammatically and logically, seems to prove beyond the slightest possibility of doubt that the Galatian heretics were promoting the observance of the Law as well as circumcision.<sup>1</sup>

Working with what we have before us, we must accept that in Gl. 5:3 Paul's explanation for rejecting the adoption of circumcision was not primarily that it would divide the Christian community. He expressly states that the problem would be, by implication, the reintroduction of the entire law.

[L]aw was a single fabric for Paul, and the acceptance of part of the law necessarily and logically implied that one had to obey the rest of the law as well. That this is Paul's view is clear from Gl. 5:4 also. Circumcision is a badge as Dunn says, but it is the badge of those who want to be justified by the law as a whole (cf. Gl. 5:4).<sup>2</sup>

- One cannot reflect on the plight-solution scheme without referring to Gl. 4:1-7. Paul emphasises the radical change in status brought about by Christ's advent (Gl. 4:4), i.e. from slavery to the elements (Gl. 4:3), to son- and heirship of God (Gl. 4:5-7). He adds that together with this radical change in status, they also received the Spirit (Gl. 4:6), an eschatological promise of the OT and the Second Temple period.

With regard to the plight-solution model we conclude that Paul's view of the past as a curse and his experience of grace is enhanced by his vision and understanding of Christ in whom he now partakes through faith. Sanders' Paul's participation in Christ is separated from the earlier plight, so that justification in Christ seemingly jumps up from nowhere. Looking back Paul describes that life as cursed. He might not previously have experienced this plight as seriously as he views it now, but for him it was, in retrospect, a movement from plight under law to solution in Christ; from life in slavery and bondage to sonship and the indwelling of the Spirit. The depth of his plight certainly became more defined and pronounced in the advent of Christ and Paul's subsequent Damascus experience and participation in Christ. The hope of the eschatological grandeur was profoundly enhanced by the Spirit's indwelling. It had not sprung up from nowhere. It was the christological redefinition of a plight-solution model existing in Judaism since time forgotten.

### 3.2. The law as παιδαγωγός during the time of plight

Paul introduces παιδαγωγός as metaphor for law in Gl. 3:24 and 25. It portrays his most essential understanding of the position and function of law in Galatians. It is probably Paul's single most enlightening metaphor in illustration of law's position in the covenantal relationship and salvation history. It is also one of the most bespoken metaphors. We will approach Paul's understanding of law from his understanding of παιδαγωγός and then move to related matters in especially the argumentative section.

The lexicographical history of παιδαγωγός, going back to the Hellenistic institution by which a child was placed in the care of a trusted slave, carries a magnitude of

<sup>1</sup> Drane, 1975, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Schreiner, 1985, 265.

meanings or nuances.<sup>1</sup> At the time that Paul wrote to the Galatians it was a common practice throughout Greco-Roman society. Interestingly, it was also found in Jewish households. Josephus' son is known to have had a pedagogue and Jewish writers made use of the word.<sup>2</sup> This designated slave was responsible for the child from early morning till bedtime, from his sixth or seventh year till his twentieth. With the exception of teaching, which was done by the διδάσκαλος, he supervised the child's complete life and accompanied him everywhere in order to protect him. He was also responsible for teaching the child good manners and overall socially acceptable behaviour.<sup>3</sup> Obviously, this included the need for disciplining and punishment.<sup>4</sup> There were παιδαγωγοί renowned for being overly strict and abrasive. Some were even portrayed bearing a whip or cane.<sup>5</sup> In all fairness, from the child's point of view the παιδαγωγός could easily be wrongly judged as too much of a disciplinarian. Often, especially in the field of drama, caricatures of παιδαγωγοί were created for specific effect. One must be careful of interpreting the metaphor in terms of these caricatures.<sup>6</sup> Many children experienced kindness from their παιδαγωγοί. Although friendships often lasted till after the child had come of age, his coming of age was the official point at which the παιδαγωγός' duty ended. The early guidance of the παιδαγωγός would still have an influence in the mature man's life, but his direct input would be missing.<sup>7</sup>

This background has crystallised into a vast array of meanings that have to be narrowed down contextually to prevent *illegitimate totality transfer*. It has been suggested that παιδαγωγός underlines the following aspects of law:

- The *refutatory function* by which the believer is made aware of his wrongs.<sup>8</sup>
- The *temporary task and status*,<sup>9</sup> to which Belleville adds the strict and supervisory character,<sup>10</sup> and Cosgrove the moral supervision.<sup>11</sup>
- The *unbending character* in bringing people to live virtuously.<sup>12</sup>
- The *protective task* in order to preserve the people of God from Gentile idolatry until the Abrahamic promise would realise, a type of protective custody.<sup>13</sup>
- *Law, creating a situation of captivity*, confining people to slavery and minority<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tolmie, 1992, 409-10.

<sup>2</sup> D.J. Williams, 1999, 61.

<sup>3</sup> Betz, 1979, 177. D.J. Williams, 1999, 62, states: "The pedagogue had to teach the child all that the Greek meant by *eukosmia*: good manners, good deportment, 'decency' in every department of life."

<sup>4</sup> D.J. Williams, 1999, 62. R.N. Longenecker, 1982, 53-6.

<sup>5</sup> Betz, 1979, 177.

<sup>6</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 262.

<sup>7</sup> Young, 1987, 169; Barrett, 1999, 67.

<sup>8</sup> Reicke, 1985, 256.

<sup>9</sup> Oepke, 1989, 161-3; Kertelge, 1984, 388; A.T. Hanson, 1988, 75. In fact most scholars, although not necessarily ascribing the temporary character as primary characteristic of the law to the metaphor, regard this as part of the metaphor.

<sup>10</sup> Belleville, 1986, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Cosgrove, 1978, 163.

<sup>12</sup> Betz, 1979, 177-8.

<sup>13</sup> Gordon, 1989, 153-4.

All this being said, we proceed to determine the most probable meaning of this significant metaphor in its specific context. The points of similarity between the metaphor and the law have to be determined.<sup>2</sup> This approach ought to eliminate a few possibilities and bring others into clearer focus. It is clear that Paul uses παιδαγωγός to stress the *limitations* inherent to Israel's law: limitations in terms of *time*, *function* and *scope*.

### 3.2.1. *Limited time*

Law's efficacy is restricted to the time between its inception (430 years after the promise to Abraham – Gl. 3:17) and the fulfilment of the promise to the seed, which is Christ (Gl. 3:16). Young points to the abundance of temporal terms with regard to law's function in Gl. 3:19-4:7, such as: ἄχρις (3:19), πρό (3:23), εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν (3:23), εἰς Χριστόν (3:24), ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως (3:25), οὐκέτι (3:25), ἐφ' ὅσον χρόνον (4:1), ἄχρι (4:2), ὅτε (4:4), οὐκέτι (4:7).<sup>3</sup> Law had a particular function to fulfil, but only till the advent of Christ, when it ceased.<sup>4</sup> It can be accepted that most scholars regard the temporary status of the law in some way or another. It is in terms of function that many differences occur. The importance of the remark will become clearer as we proceed. At this point, suffice it to say that, because of a continued effort to ascribe an ongoing function of some kind to law since the Christ event, many scholars are forced either to revise their position on the temporariness of law, or to profoundly qualify law or its function. As soon as one ascribes an ongoing function to law, it implies that law's time was not limited to the period between Moses and Jesus. If this were the case, Paul's word on law's temporariness, central to Galatians, could not be taken at face value.

### 3.2.2. *Limited function*

We would do well to see law as a *guardian* of some kind. It was given because of transgression (Gl. 3:19). It was never meant to substitute the promise or to cast the latter in its shadow. It had to protect Israel against doing sin to which all humankind was prone (Gl. 3:22).<sup>5</sup> At that stage Israel had only the promise and not the fulfilment. Just as Moses, according to Jesus, gave permission to divorce because of their hardness of heart (πρὸς τὴν σκληροκαρδίαν ὑμῶν -- Mt. 19:8; Mk. 10:5), God gave the law to indicate how He wished to be served in the covenant. It also served as their *identity marker* amongst peoples of other convictions and religions. Especially the first two commandments of the Decalogue reminded them of to whom they belonged and served. Added to this there were external identity markers drawing boundaries between them and the nations, i.e. circumcision, dietary and calendar observations.

<sup>1</sup> Lull, 1986, 497.

<sup>2</sup> Witherington, 1998, 265.

<sup>3</sup> Young, 1987, 174. Also Lull, 1986, 483.

<sup>4</sup> Lategan, 1987, 16; Hong, 1993, 149-56; Belleville, 1986, 71; Kruger, 1992, 325. Tolmie, 2004, 118-33, very effectively illustrates the point that Gl. 3:15-18 is an argument in favour of dissociating covenant and law, and that Gl. 3:19-25 adds to this the inferiority of law in comparison to God's promise and faith.

<sup>5</sup> Refer back to my Ch. 3 at §2.2 and §2.4. Kruger, 1992, 318-21, 325.

Very significantly, one senses that while using this metaphor Paul reflects in a very objective and non-derogatory manner on law for the limited period for which it was intended. Whatever one's interpretation of the reference to angelic ordination and human mediation at the inception of law (Gl. 3:19), Paul does not seem to deny its divine origin. If that were the case, we would have to accept that the angels he speaks of were demonic.<sup>1</sup> He gives no such indication. It would also imply the almost unthinkable, that Moses, as intermediary, was playing to the hand of Satan. It is unthinkable that Paul would regard the pedagogue guarding over Israel, as demonic. It follows that Paul accepted the divine origin of the law. The question is then: why did he make this remark? Why did he not simply state that Yahweh gave the law? Why implicate the angels and Moses? True, it was probably how Yahweh did it, using angels and Moses as emissaries. I suggest Paul used this remark as a rhetorical mechanism to stress the limitedness of the law.<sup>2</sup> Bear in mind that Paul says a great deal about law in Gl. 3:19. *It was added because of transgression* (τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη), implying it was not initially given. Yahweh did not regard it as necessary from the start of his walk with his people, adding it afterwards as a gracious tool for them to deal with ethical choices. Its functional time was limited *till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made* (ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ᾧ ἐπήγγελται).

He remarks that the angels and intermediary were involved and follows in Gl. 3:20 with the remark that an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one. Now Hübner, who believes that Paul changed his opinion on law fundamentally between Galatians and Romans, and that he developed in his theological reflection, understands these angels to be evil angels.<sup>3</sup> In Galatians Paul would then argue that law was not from God. We cannot agree with this position and agree with Witherington that the verb προσετέθη ("it was added") "is an aorist passive verb with a suffix, and the appropriate question to be asked is: 'added' by whom? The context does not say specifically, but it surely is most natural to take this as another example of the divine passive, especially when in the very next clause we find ἐπήγγελται, a passive, clearly implying God is the agent. Paul had previously said that God gave the promises"<sup>4</sup> In this regard also, one would have expected Paul to be more specific. Wallace adds that in that case one would also expect the angels to have been mentioned with the main verb.<sup>5</sup> Grammatically, the use of the preposition διὰ followed by a genitive is significant. If it were followed by an accusative, it would have the meaning "because of".<sup>6</sup> This would place the angels nearer to a position of initial or initiating actors. Followed by a genitive, as is the case here, it has the mean-

<sup>1</sup> Lightfoot, 1890, 145, regards the angels as attesting to the law's excellence. Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 177, refers to Calvin's view that the angels, as witnesses, provide law with authority.

<sup>2</sup> Tolmie, 2004, 128-9, chooses the notion of inferiority. He argues that God alone gave the promise, but that more parties were involved with law's inception. Law is thus inferior compared to the promise.

<sup>3</sup> Hübner, 1984, 27.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 255.

<sup>5</sup> Wallace, 1990, 235.

<sup>6</sup> Moule, 1953, 54-5; J.W. Wenham, 1965, 66.

ing “by means of.”<sup>1</sup> This strengthens the notion that the angels acted on someone’s behalf. We accept it was on God’s behalf.

Heikki Räisänen, well known for his view that Paul contradicts himself, regards this as a case in point.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, it seems rather unlikely that Paul would have changed his mind on the origin of the law and its position in Christianity. He had been involved in the Gentile mission for about 15 years. If Galatians was written prior to the Jerusalem council and reflected the position Paul put forward and which was largely accepted, there would be no reason for Paul to retract his Galatian stand. This is not to deny that Paul’s thought developed during his missionary activity. It was inevitable. After his conversion and calling Paul moved into largely fallow territory. He was not handed down a complete theology on the law at his Christophany. However, I do not detect a straightforward development on law from one extant letter to another. Whatever development there was in Paul’s thought on law, it must have taken place before he wrote Galatians.<sup>3</sup> He was, after all, on no account a theological novice at the time. Is it not possible that he was playing the intermediary card to emphasise the fact that Moses represented Yahweh’s transgressing people?<sup>4</sup> Could the angels not have been added as a parallel for Moses, but representing God? Had it not been for the transgressions of the people as represented by Moses, God would not have had the need to ordain the law via his angels. Had there been no transgression in the world, there would not have been any need for a human intermediary. Paul thus stresses the contingency of law as a divine and merciful interception, but also that Yahweh did not originally (in a temporal or salvation-historical sense and not ontologically) intend it thus.

The question as to Paul’s so-called ambivalence towards the law comes into scope. His so-called more positive position on law in Romans than the more negative position in Galatians has been vigorously debated. Of special interest, *sticking exclusively to Galatians*, is his seeming ambivalence on the subject in this letter too. In Gl. 3:10-14 Paul five times refers to the law as a curse (*κατάρρα*), making accursed (*ἐπικατάρατος*) those under it. In the broader context of Gl. 3:10-22 he strongly contrasts this curse with faith (11, 12, 14), Christ (14), promise (14, 16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22) and blessing (14). But in Gl. 3:21 he puts the rhetorical question: “Is the law then against the promises of God?” and answers it with: “Certainly not.” Just before this (19) he states that law was given by angels, through an intermediary, which, as motivated earlier, probably expresses a positive view on law, but then, only with regard to its limited function and life span. All things being equal, he is negative about law in Galatians only with regard to a possible ongoing function in Christianity. With regard to its limited function of guardianship over Israel before Christ’s advent, Paul has no quibble. At that stage, Israel did not have Christ or his Spirit to guide them. Since Christ’s salvific work, they had his example, deliverance and Spirit to guide them. They no longer had any need for the law to guide or guard them.

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<sup>1</sup> Moule, 1953, 56-7; Van Rensburg, 1953, 57.

<sup>2</sup> Räisänen, 1983, 59 & 205.

<sup>3</sup> Räisänen, 1986, 5. See also Räisänen, 1992, 24.

<sup>4</sup> An intermediary implies that relations had gone sour. This emphasises law as a divine contingency ruling.

In Gl. 3:23, just before introducing the παιδαγωγός, Paul describes life under law as ὑπὸ νόμον ἐφρουρούμεθα συγκλειόμενοι (“confined under law, kept under restraint”). The use of the passive participle συγκλείω is explanatory of the verb φρουρέω. In other words, being confined under law meant being restricted. He takes it a step further, continuing the idea in Gl. 3:24 by introducing a resultative clause with ὥστε in combination with γέγονεν, coming to the conclusion that it all boils down to the same as being under a pedagogue. Activities were restricted, life was controlled and free association impossible.<sup>1</sup> This was exactly one of the downsides of law’s function as a restricting identity marker. It made it almost impossible for Jew and Gentile to mix freely. We will return to this when our focus turns to the discriminatory effect of law.

In Gl. 4:2 he returns to the subject, referring to the position of the heir as ὑπὸ ἐπιτρόπους ἐστὶν καὶ οἰκονόμους (“under guardians and trustees”). All of this leads Young to conclude that the metaphor is not about “discipline, education, instruction or punishment, but about restriction.”<sup>2</sup> He acknowledges that such restrictions would have been protective, but that it was not Paul’s intention in Galatians to stress protection. Restriction was the key functional factor. It obviously fits in well with his dispute with Peter over table fellowship (Gl. 2:11-14). Paul seems to totally ignore the *educational role* of the παιδαγωγός. He is not even mentioned as leading the child to the διδάσκαλος. In this regard it has been argued that Christ is the διδάσκαλος to whom the law as pedagogue leads the believer. This could not possibly be the case in Galatians as Paul depicts law as doing exactly the opposite.<sup>3</sup> Εἰς in Gl. 3:24 has the meaning of *until* and not *to*, like in Gl. 3:23. Equally, Witherington remarks

Paul’s view of ‘salvation history’ is not developmental or evolutionary but apocalyptic or interventionist.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, Paul is not arguing in favour of a continued function for law after the Christ event in the sense of driving sinners to Christ for salvation. He is actually confirming the notion stressed in Ch. 2 that the radical switch from the *present evil age* to *new creation* had taken place in the advent of Christ. The change was radical. There was no compelling reason for a continued function for law.

### 3.2.3. *Limited scope*

The law can be described as Israel’s in-house rules given to them by Yahweh, who created a special relationship with Israel going back to the covenant with Abraham. Because of Israel’s sinfulness (Gl. 3:19) and hardness of heart whilst being in the covenantal relationship, He gave them the law 430 years later in the time of Moses (*because of Israel’s transgression*). The divine intention was to assist Israel to live according to Yahweh’s wishes and to protect them from other influences. It was not meant for those outside the covenantal relationship. To them He gave their consciences (Rm. 2:12-16)<sup>5</sup> and στοιχεῖα τοῦ

<sup>1</sup> Young, 1987, 170.

<sup>2</sup> Young, 1987, 171.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon, 1989, 153.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 266.

<sup>5</sup> Käsemann, 1980, 61-8; Moo, 1996, 145-51.



κόσμου to guide them.<sup>1</sup> He would deal with them as He in his righteousness saw fit. To Israel alone He gave a specific measure, which would only function till the advent of Christ. It was to assist Israel till the promise would be fulfilled. It was never intended as a general ethical code, only as a covenantal ethical aid. Law was God's specific στοιχεῖον for Israel.

### 3.3. Paul does not distinguish between cultic and moral laws

It should be clear by now that Paul does not distinguish between cultic, ceremonial and moral laws in Galatians. If he had such a distinction in mind, one would have expected him to have been very clear.<sup>2</sup> Law observance was a fundamental issue. It was still early days in the Gentile mission. If our assumption is correct that the letter was written urgently and only months prior to the Jerusalem council, it would have been even more necessary for Paul to have made such distinctions clear. If, against the backdrop of law as a unity, he had only certain laws in mind, more precise details would be called for. Paul is silent. True, he makes no mention of specific moral laws. His specific references are to circumcision, dietary and calendar laws.<sup>3</sup> But, equally true, these were the specific subjects he was presented with. They were more obvious and heavily laden with identity connotations. Why is he so quiet about other cultic requirements? Probably because their discontinuance was obvious. Still, one would expect him to be very specific on such an emotional and contentious matter as moral laws if they still had to be observed.<sup>4</sup> He acts to the contrary when he deals with highly moral issues in Gl. 5:16-25. He does not revert to any specific OT law. In fact, he makes abundant use of Hellenistic lists of common vices and virtues, acceptable to almost any religion. He fittingly adds that law has no problem with these virtues (Gl. 5:23). It is as if he tries to strip Christian morality of any specific religious address. Add to this the matter of the στοιχεῖα in Gentile circles and law being akin to them, and Paul's rejection of a return to such στοιχεῖα, then Paul is rejecting any form of exterior law, principal or ruling as moral guide for the believing community. This does not imply that Paul was not serious about believers having to live morally acceptable lives: on the contrary. We will tend to this in the following chapters.

<sup>1</sup> Obviously, in this case one has those elements in mind regarding God's common grace and provision as discussed earlier. This would exclude the negative elements of their so-called deities.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, 1975, 266, correctly states the indivisibility of law, also for Paul. However, there are others who argue that a distinction be made between ceremonial and moral law, with the latter still being applicable after Christ's advent. Amongst the latter is, e.g., Cranfield, 1964, 67. B.L. Martin, 1989, 34, argues that Paul at least makes an "implicit distinction".

<sup>3</sup> Calvin, 1975, 310, attests to accepting law as an entire entity, but does distinguish between moral and ceremonial law, and regards the former as still valid and the latter as "having been abrogated not in effect but in use only" (311).

<sup>4</sup> Räisänen, 1986, 8, 48. Snodgrass, 1995, 155-6, raises the matter and dismisses any fundamental distinction between cultic and moral laws. Importantly, he adds that Paul, e.g., when referring to law as working death in him in Rm. 7:7-10, clearly has moral law in mind. Thus, there is no aspect of law as an entity of which Paul does not argue that it is a curse.



Paul mentions circumcision only 12 times, and only in passing makes remarks on calendar laws (Gl. 4:10). However, he refers to law as such 32 times. He very subtly introduces circumcision in Gl. 2:3-9 where he refers to his meeting with the apostles, and nobody having expected Titus to be circumcised. At this instance, it could be seen as an insignificant remark – almost uncalled for – except for the crucial fact that in their strained and explosive context the Galatians would immediately have picked up this remark. Except for the fleeting remark to the circumcision party in Gl 2:12, he reintroduces it overtly and as an issue only in Gl. 5:2. Now, other than in the case of the more neutral remark with regard to Titus' not being circumcised, it is a forbidden deed. Paul follows with harsh words. It leads to Christ being of no advantage to the circumcised person (Gl. 5:2). In fact, it implies being severed from Christ (Gl. 5:4). Between Gl. 5:2 and 4 he adds that circumcision begs the keeping of the entire law. In this regard the occurrence of νόμος is most significant. Paul never uses νόμος prior to Gl. 2:3. Between the above two references to circumcision (Gl. 2:3-9; 5:2) he uses νόμος 25 times. This structure strengthens the notion that Paul is actually concerned with law as such. Circumcision cannot be viewed as an entity on its own. It is part and parcel of law. This aggravated the situation. His arguments against law were not aimed at certain laws (e.g., circumcision, dietary and calendar). The latter, being under consideration in Galatia, probably sparked the letter. However, Paul does not focus on them. He deals with law as a larger entity and in the process also deals with its constitutive parts.

### 3.4. Conclusion on law: no different from τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου

So, Yahweh graciously gave the law. The intention was good, namely to act as a guardian. It had to help Israel identify sin and avoid it. It was an interim measure. As an interim measure, it was to be positively evaluated. It was never intended to be permanent. In this regard, Witherington reacts very negatively on Dunn's remark on Gl. 3:21 that:

The response indicates clearly that Paul would deny the very antithesis between law and promise which so many infer from verse 20. On the contrary, the role of the law is consistent with, integrated into that of the promise.<sup>1</sup>

To my mind Dunn's intention was not to state that the promise had been adapted by the introduction of the law. If that were the case Dunn would not have laboured the point earlier that law was an interim measure till the advent of Christ.<sup>2</sup> In this regard Witherington is absolutely correct – Dunn too – that:

This is precisely what Paul argues against in Gl. 3.15 when he says no one adds a codicil to or annuls an already existing testament (or covenant)! As Gl. 4.24 makes abundantly clear, Paul sees the *Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant as two separate covenants, not two parts of one*

<sup>1</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 192.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 189, describes Gl. 3:19a "as a positive description of the role of the law in the period prior to the coming of Christ."

covenant. Paul is trying to maintain their separation, while the agitators presumably were seeing them as blended together.<sup>1</sup>

It cannot be disregarded that the pre-Christian Paul experienced law positively and, after his conversion, continued to view law as such *for that limited and by-gone period until the Christ event*. Dunn is correct that scholars too often lose sight of the fact that law was not viewed in separation from the cultic remedies and sacrificial system. The latter was part of the law, helping God's people to remedy that which law showed as transgression and to which Paul alludes in references to the cross of Christ (Gl. 2:20; 3:13; 6:14).<sup>2</sup> This was not contra the promise. For that interim period it was made to serve the Abrahamic covenant.

*How was it a curse?* It was a curse for continually pointing out sin. It made man responsible for his wrongs and continually reminded him of defeat. The main point of the curse was that although law identified sin and sinners as responsible for their deeds, *it could never impute life into the sinner*.<sup>3</sup> It could never provide him with victory over sin. Law could never guarantee or even hope to provide man with teeth to deal with flesh. It could not change corrupted man. Only Christ and his Spirit would decisively deal with flesh and provide man with the ability to follow the Spirit and not the flesh.<sup>4</sup> Law was intended to be dissolved into the promise. When it is viewed as an entity – even as a God-given one – in isolation from the promise, it becomes merely another enslaver of the present evil age under the curse of sin and flesh. In other words, law is nothing more than another *στοιχέιον* divinely given and tailor-made for God's people, but now, since Christ's advent, a stumbling block. On the other hand, if it is regarded as dissolved into the promise and fulfilled in the Christ event, it should be honoured for that limited function.

#### 4. PRESENT EVIL AGE AS DISCRIMINATORY AND DIVISIVE

One could argue that a section on Gl. 3:26-29 should not be positioned under a heading concerning the present evil age, but more specifically as part of the discussion on law. The immediately preceding context (Gl. 3:1-22) definitely deals with the position of law as opposed to Spirit (Gl. 3:2-5), faith (Gl. 3:1-9, 14), promise (Gl. 3:15-21) and Christ (Gl. 3:16, 22-25). This Paul continues throughout Gl. 4, which follows directly on the pericope under discussion. It is also true that the central thrust of Paul's argument links up much more strongly with the first of the three distinctions than the second, and especially the third.<sup>5</sup> This links the formula more with an argument against law than as part of a broader discussion on the present evil age. It would even be more appropriate if seen as a baptismal formula<sup>6</sup> concluding the arguments against Judaistic notions.

<sup>1</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 255.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 190.

<sup>3</sup> Wilckens, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 22. See also his more expanded version of this article, 1982<sup>2</sup>, 154-90.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, 1998<sup>1</sup>, 259. Dunn, 1998, 161.

<sup>5</sup> Betz, 1979, 184-5; R.N. Longenecker, 1990, 157.

<sup>6</sup> Most scholars accept it as a baptismal formula, or at least possibly based on one. It will not be argued.

However, there is another way of looking at it. True, Paul discusses the Jewish position regarding law from Gl. 2:15-3:25. In fact, he even uses the first person plural (Gl. 3:13, 23-25) with regard to his and fellow Jewish Christian's position prior to Christ's advent. Then, almost abruptly he points to the Gentile believers (Gl. 3:26) and addresses them in the second person plural: "For you are all sons of God" (πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε).<sup>1</sup> He repeats the second person plural in Gl. 3:27-29. Then, after the baptismal formula, he reverts to the first person plural (Gl. 4:3-5) to equate the position of Jewish Christians under law as though under the slavery of the "elements of the world". In Gl. 4:6-11 he again returns to the second person plural, describing their former lives as under ungodly beings (Gl. 4:8) and elemental spirits (Gl. 4:9). The point he makes is that the baptismal formula could, rather than rap up the argument against the Judaizers, be the very important hinge on which Paul switches from the social dynamics of the broader pre-Christian society of the present evil age – both Jewish and Gentile – to that of the Christian society.

This notion is enhanced by apocalyptic overtones referred to earlier, i.e. the antinomies<sup>2</sup> of which Paul makes abundant use, and more specifically, the antinomies in the baptismal formula. Betz draws attention to the strong allusion to the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:3-11; Lk. 6:20-22) and other so-called "macarisms" in comparative religious studies. However, the strongest allusion is to what he refers to as "the element of 'eschatological reversal'" in both the beatitudes and Gl. 3:26-28, which "turn the natural order upside down" and declare "the abolishment of social, cultural and religious prerogatives."<sup>3</sup> In the parallel formulae εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε ("baptised into Christ") and Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε ("having put on Christ"), Paul uses an effective and forceful metaphor, well known in Jewish tradition as well as in Hellenistic mystery religions.<sup>4</sup> The neophyte entering the new religion underwent a total renewal of identity. In Christian terms it meant that, whatever the believer's culture, social standing or gender, after entry into the new community, through faith in Jesus Christ, previously important identity markers became irrelevant. A divine transformation had taken place.<sup>5</sup> By faith in Christ, having put Him on like a cloak,<sup>6</sup> the believer becomes part of the new aeon with the accompanying change in symbolic universe,<sup>7</sup> virtues and behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Obviously, this situation is enhanced by Paul's description of it as "new creation" (Gl. 6:15), and dying and rising with Christ (Gl. 2:19; 5:24; 6:14), which Eduard Schweizer describes as going "back to the apocalyptic hope of an eschatological life with Christ."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Betz, 1979, 185.

<sup>2</sup> Martyn, 1985<sup>2</sup>, 410-24.

<sup>3</sup> Betz, 1979, 183.

<sup>4</sup> Betz, 1979, 184 & 188 provides more information on the subject.

<sup>5</sup> Meeks, 1974, 182.

<sup>6</sup> According to Moule, 1989, 47-48, 51-3, the metaphor most probably had a background against the neophyte's divestiture and being re-clothed after the baptism.

<sup>7</sup> Latagan, 1992<sup>2</sup>, 273-6.

<sup>8</sup> Oepke, 1964<sup>1</sup>, 320.

<sup>9</sup> Schweizer, 1970, 183.

[I]t guards us from dissolving Paul's statements into mere anthropological descriptions. For, more than anything else, the apocalyptic hope of the New Testament for the new creation of the whole world, resists a mere existential interpretation.<sup>1</sup>

With regard to the triple antithesis in Gl. 3:28 it seems that, even though it probably was part of a pre-Pauline, primitive baptismal formula, or in some way at least used in the baptismal liturgy, it reflects prejudices found in any society, as research of both Jewish and non-Jewish traditions reveals.<sup>2</sup> A fine example occurs in the benediction at the beginning of the Jewish morning prayer cycle:

Blessed be He [God] that he did not make me a Gentile; blessed be He that He did not make me a boor [i.e., an ignorant peasant or slave]; blessed be He that He did not make me a woman.<sup>3</sup>

Ethnic, social and sexual differentiation was so profoundly imprinted in their being, that it would always be a lurking danger to their relationships in the Christian community: small wonder that it became part of the baptismal formula. Enough said! There is reason enough to discuss the baptismal formula as part and parcel of the discriminatory and divisive nature of the present evil age as such. The emphasis will not be on what they state with regard to new creation, which will be attended to in Ch. 5, but on what they imply with regard to life in all societies before and without Christ.<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.1. Ethnic differentiation

Humanity has never been harmonious, least of all ancient Mediterranean society.

[I]n the first century the Jews despised the Gentiles (even proselytes were often not fully accepted), the Greeks looked down on uncultured people outside their race, the Romans felt themselves superior to those they had conquered, and so on. Probably people of every nation look down on outsiders.<sup>5</sup>

One's status at birth determined everything in life. It was rather fixed for all time, and even determined one's appropriate behaviour towards other people and groups. The dyadic personality was embedded in a specific group with an own identity and ethos. Added to this was the stereotyping of other groups and the very specific defining of group boundaries.<sup>6</sup> This was applicable to all Mediterranean groups of whatever ethnicity.<sup>7</sup> Now, if one adds to this the very strongly defined rules with regard to purity in Jewish terms and the fact that Gentile Galatians were being urged to cross these boundaries, it makes the situation in Galatia very intricate. The rules with regard to the purity system, ho-

<sup>1</sup> Schweizer, 1970, 183.

<sup>2</sup> Oepke, 1964<sup>2</sup>, 777, finds it reflective of "a saying current in different forms among the Persians, Greeks and Jews in which man gives thanks that he is not an unbeliever or uncivilised, that he is not a woman and that he is not a slave." More instances can be found in Witherington, 1980, 593-4; R.N. Longenecker, 1990 157.

<sup>3</sup> R.N. Longenecker, 1990, 157, quotes this from *The Authorized Daily Prayer Book of the United Hebrew Congregation of the British Commonwealth of Nations*.

<sup>4</sup> Malina & Neyrey, 1996, 153-201, provide ample information on the cultural and social paradigm in which the ancient Mediterranean personality operated and which is relevant to our subject.

<sup>5</sup> Morris, 1996, 121. Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 188: when "a proselyte crossed over to the Jewish side of the gulf; the gulf remained."

<sup>6</sup> Malina & Neyrey, 1991, 73-74; Van Eck, 1995, 176-7. Also Malina, 1996, 41-61.

<sup>7</sup> Malina & Neyrey, 1996, 171-3.

liness mapping and boundaries were developed in painstaking detail.<sup>1</sup> One must add, in all fairness, that there were rabbis who, although they stuck to strict regulations, called upon followers to deal with Gentiles in such a way that they would be attracted to proselytising.<sup>2</sup>

This was where both the Galatians and the Judaisers came from. The ways of the present evil age came naturally to them. By faith in Christ and being clothed in Him, they had crossed the apocalyptic divide to the new creation in Christ. They were now all sons of God: united and on the same footing. It was a given that did not always come easily.

## 4.2. Social differentiation

The invalidation of the division between slave and freeman was most probably the most prominent social antithesis with which to describe society now renewed in Christ. If this very solid and prominent division were to be dissolved, all social boundaries would, by implication, have been disbanded. It was a social divide common to the whole Roman world. In fact, there were fixed guidelines and requirements for belonging to a certain class.<sup>3</sup>

Throughout the Roman world the division between slave and free was of the greatest importance. Slaves had no rights, and the lowliest free person was infinitely more important than any slave, however gifted. To recognise that a believing slave was just as important in God's sight as the highest among the nobility was to point to a radical abolition of a distinction that was taken for granted throughout Paul's world. These words mark a revolution.<sup>4</sup>

It is especially the Greek concept of freedom that comes to mind, i.e. to be a slave to no man.<sup>5</sup> In addition to the social aspect and Paul's view that nothing in society can remain the same when it is redefined in Christ, we must acknowledge the theme of slavery under law, the elements of the world and flesh as the overriding theme. It is true though, that the old dispensation is characterised by slavery in the religious, ethical and social senses.

## 4.3. Sexual differentiation

In modern scholarship this is probably the most contentious element of Paul's threefold antithetical remark. Some would argue that the issue of gender is not central to Paul's argument in Galatians and that not too much should be made of it. Of course, they would take heart that Paul could not have meant it too seriously, seemingly contradicting himself in his Corinthian correspondence (1 Cor. 11:2-15; 14:34-35). I would think that, given the Mediterranean social situation, it is fundamental to Paul's position.

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed orientation on this subject refer once again to Neyrey, 1986, 91-128 and Neyrey, 1996, 80-104.

Van Eck, 1995, 196-203, also provides good reading and references.

<sup>2</sup> Bruce, 1982<sup>1</sup>, 188.

<sup>3</sup> Van Aarde, 1994, 63-4, 99-101. Malina & Neyrey, 1996, 173-6.

<sup>4</sup> Morris, 1996, 122. Note that "these words" obviously refers to Gl. 3:28.

<sup>5</sup> Rengstorf, 1964<sup>1</sup>, 261-4.

Women had a subordinate<sup>1</sup> position in most societies in the Mediterranean Crescent.<sup>2</sup> In terms of the abovementioned Jewish and non-Jewish benedictions alone one is brought under the impression of how fundamentally institutionalised subordination of women was. I do not believe Paul was arguing a case for feminism or equal rights for women.<sup>3</sup> He was making a statement against any form of distinction in the community of faith, by which one believer is “more equal” than another. In this regard the matter of men having fuller participation in the community of faith than women was relevant. It was particularly relevant against the Jewish background. Circumcision, for one, by nature excluded women. By considering the reintroduction of this rite the Galatians would necessarily make a distinction between men and women. In fact, women could even be made spiritually dependent on men if it implied the Jewish practice by which a woman only participated in fellowship indirectly via her husband or eldest son. Add to this Paul’s mention of their observance of certain times (Gl. 4:10) and it takes on an ominous colour. If this, for instance, included the monthly times of ritual uncleanness because of menstruation, it would obviously impact negatively on women’s full participation in spiritual fellowship.<sup>4</sup> It might be stretching matters too far, but it is possible that the position of the unmarried woman in the believing community would also be affected, because of the absence of a believing father or brother.

There is another element. Societies in Jewish and Hellenistic circles considered marriage and procreation a moral duty. In Judaism it was rabbinical law.<sup>5</sup> Augustus rewarded marriage and procreation, and penalised bachelorship.<sup>6</sup> This was also the case in the Greek world.<sup>7</sup> Paul was possibly ambiguous in his use of this antithesis, not referring only to the female disposition, but also to that of the unmarried believer. He could be arguing that marriage was not con-

<sup>1</sup> “Subordinate” should not be equated with adjectives such as “inferior” or “subservient”. Malina & Neyrey, 1996, 176-82, stress the strictly defined roles for the two genders. Men fulfilled their role in the public arena, whilst the woman’s role was bound to the privacy of the home and family. Thus the man was more in the forefront and the woman in the background and each had to keep honour and shame ratings in tact on his or her own turf. See also Neyrey, 1994, 79-82.

<sup>2</sup> De Vaux, 1973, 39-40. Boucher, 1969, 50-8, mentions the fact that Paul’s statement that there is no male and female is not unique to him and is also found in Rabbinic Judaism. Gundry-Volf, 1997, 187, warns against skewed views on the position of women in Jewish society. “Hellenism and Judaism were a mixed bag when it came to women’s status and roles. Though both cultural systems were patriarchies, women in both milieus enjoyed various rights and freedoms – an extension of their social roles was underway in Paul’s day.” She efficiently compares Paul with Joshua ben Sirach (188-94), Philo, his non-Christian contemporary (195-201), and the Greco-Roman novel of Jewish origin, Joseph and Aseneth (201-9), concluding that it is unjustified to portray Paul as having radically switched from patriarchalism to egalitarianism at his conversion. Paul and Christianity were not the only egalitarian forces at the time. However, Paul’s thoughts on gender were fundamentally influenced by his understanding of the gospel. Being “in Christ” had been his motivation to move away from patriarchalism (210). This move is especially dramatic against the background of Sirach and Philo’s strong patriarchal influence. Despite an egalitarian movement away from patriarchalism in Paul’s day, patriarchalism was by far the dominant position in society and Paul’s movement away from it more dramatic than meets the eye.

<sup>3</sup> Although I would support the use of this text as part of a motivation for the equality of the sexes.

<sup>4</sup> Witherington, 1980, 595.

<sup>5</sup> Witherington, 1980, 595

<sup>6</sup> Balsdon, 1975, 76-8.

<sup>7</sup> Daube, 1977, 9f.

stitutive of the position one had in the community of faith. Grammatically it makes sense. In the previous two antitheses he made use of grammatical parallelism, merely replacing Ἰουδαῖος and Ἕλληνα with δοῦλος and ἐλεύθερος.

Οὐκ ἔνι Ἰουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἕλληνα,  
οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος,

He disturbs the pattern in the third antithesis, replacing οὐδε with καί, in effect breaking the neither/nor construction, and replacing it with “and neither is there *man and woman*” (οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ). Most scholars are of the opinion that this construction reflects the use in Gn. 1:27. The terms ἄρσεν and θῆλυ are also usually used to contrast male and female distinctly.<sup>1</sup> Dunn is of the opinion that the use of καί is of no consequence and that the basic use is the same as in the other antitheses.<sup>2</sup> This implies that only gender distinction is of no religious consequence in the faith community, but that humankind remains male and female after coming to faith. However, one must not rule out the allusion to marriage in the Genesis text. Grammatically there is another important deviation from the previous antitheses, i.e. the sexes are mentioned in the neuter. This could indicate that the biological differences are just as irrelevant in the believing community as social role differences. Paul could have alluded to marriage and kinship<sup>3</sup> as unnecessary for either men or women in Christ. Most importantly, Paul wrote against the backdrop of the present evil age in which sexual orientation, marriage and kinship were almost absolutes. New creation, viewing everything in terms of being in Christ, stripped them of their former grand status.

#### 4.4. Conclusion: Present evil age divisive and discriminatory

Undoubtedly, human society before the advent of Christ was immensely divided along ethnic, religious, cultural, social, and gender lines. The group to which one belonged determined one's identity and ethos. One's life, vocation and dreams were determined by one's being born into a certain ethnic group and family, and being of a specific gender. One's merely being the human that one was in a certain group and of a certain gender, determined everything. Thus, society was determined and structured according to flesh. It was a matter of honour to protect these boundaries. What the dyadic individual did reflected positively or negatively on the group's honour. Honour and shame ratings essentially determined one's social standing in the group. Add to this the accompanying stereotyping of other groups, and one thing is sure, society was strictly divided and discrimination was rife. It is not that the latter was necessarily experienced as negative, but it was inherent to a society that was always well aware of group identity and ethos.

<sup>1</sup> Oepke, 1964<sup>3</sup>, 362.

<sup>2</sup> Dunn, 1993<sup>2</sup>, 157.

<sup>3</sup> Witherington, 1980, 598-9.



The view of some<sup>1</sup> that only the first antithesis in Gl. 3:28 should be taken as central to Paul's argument against the Judaisers calls for attention. The argument is that Paul was actually debating the first matter, reminding the Galatians of what was said to them concerning ethnic identity at their baptism. They were now part of a new group, i.e. sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The other two antitheses were introduced merely because he cited the whole formula without further intention. It is true that Paul's initial irritation was along religious and cultural lines. The reintroduction of circumcision and Jewish dietary and calendar laws was certainly the door through which Paul accessed the situation. However, he did not stop there. He extended his argument to include the whole law as enslaving, despite the divine intentions. He even included τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου well known to the Gentiles in Galatia, and significantly dealt with these in the section following on this hinging verse (Gl. 4:1-11).

When Paul introduces this formula before moving on to the *elements of the world* from which the Gentile Galatians had been delivered, he seems to expand his initial argument into that field. He does this, because his argument is ultimately about more than the narrowly defined case put forward by the Judaisers. It is the argument of Gl. 1:4, i.e. that Christ came to deliver us from the *present evil age*, inclusive of the matters concerning social standing and gender. These were of the most basic elements of the Mediterranean world of their time, making up the bulk of societal relations. In the new community and creation these differences no longer determined identity, ethos and social relations. He probably added these elements in Gl. 3:28 for the same reason they were incorporated in the baptismal formula. They were central to what made society tick, known to and applied by all. They could not be functional in the new creation. They belonged to the time before Christ and in societies without Him<sup>2</sup> and were redemptive-historically anachronistic. Once again, the *present evil age* – life before and without Christ – was and is a life of division and discrimination in terms of what is merely human – life *according to flesh*.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

It should be clear that law and elements of the world cannot be discussed in isolation from *flesh*. They are part and parcel of a common entity to which Paul refers as *present evil age*. Therefore, it is fitting at this point to conclude on the whole of Part II.

(I) *Flesh: the domain of sin's influence on man*

The present evil age as Paul portrays it, was a life determined by flesh. In a morally neutral sense it would refer to man in his transitoriness, vulnerability, dependence and corruptibility merely living in terms of how he was created (*in the flesh*),

<sup>1</sup> Dunn, 1993:206, regards the other distinctions as elaborations of the first and primary distinction. Also Longenecker, 1990, 156-7.

<sup>2</sup> Waetjen, 1989, 1-12, illustrates how the social categories were associated with power or the lack thereof and how Christ as the "New Human Being" came to reorder that power. In the community of believers no such strata could be allowed to regulate interaction and decisions.

and not necessarily leading to sin. However, the picture changes when he lives life *according to flesh*. This happens when man lives life on his own terms and shuts himself off from being open to God's influence. It is not an ethically neutral stance. It is the result of man's having been corrupted by sin as a supra-human entity opposed to God and living in terms of that corruption. Man now has a propensity towards sin. The domain of sin's influence on him is referred to as flesh. It is not a discernible entity in man's being. It is a sphere of influence that has become part of man's facticity in his existence in the present evil age. It was not possible for man to escape this sphere. It encapsulated him. For relief or change to the situation the "capsule" encapsulating the present evil age, would have to be broken. Intervention from outside this closed system was needed. God Himself would have to intervene, and He did in the fullness of time, sending his Son to deliver man from the present evil age (Gl. 1:1-4) according to his promise to Abraham many centuries before Moses and his law.

*ii) The inability of law and other elements to deal with flesh*

God had not been inactive in the time since Adam. In his common grace he provided man in his pitiful situation with elements that would assist him and society to live life meaningfully to some extent. Paul, however, does not refer to these elements positively. He describes the elements in the negative sense of being human fleshly creations leading man away from God or into opposition to Him. It was no answer to flesh.

In terms of Israel, God's elect, the picture was different. 430 years after Yahweh elected Abraham and promised him His blessing, sealing it with circumcision, He provided Israel with the law of Moses to deal with the hardness of their hearts (sinfulness). One could say law was the specific element God gave to Israel to assist them in doing his will. This was to protect them from evil and to keep boundaries between themselves and people who served other gods.<sup>1</sup>

Like Israel, and unlike his opponents, Paul did not distinguish between laws. He regarded law as a complete entity. Although it was divinely given (Gl. 3:19), he regarded law in its entirety as an interim measure until Christ and his Spirit would come (Gl. 3:19). In this sense, he was positive about law. Unfortunately, law would not prove altogether successful. It could not inject life into man. It could not provide him with the will to shun the influence of flesh. This resulted in man's sinning in terms of the law, emphasising his plight. There were covenantal remedies provided with law, providing temporary relief of the plight, but law could not help man not to sin. In fact, he became enslaved to law itself, living in terms of law and not in terms of his faith. Law in the hands of flesh actually promoted boasting in the flesh. Society became increasingly divided and caught up in group orientations. In this way, law became an instrument in the hands of sin.

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot agree with B.L. Martin, 1989, 38, that one should distinguish between God's intention as negative and corresponding to the actual result, the increase of sin, and man's expectation that sin would be prevented.

iii) *Present evil age as no life at all*

*Flesh, law and elements of the world* enslaved man. He was indebted to God, because he could not live up to his standards, and therefore lived under a curse. Amongst themselves, they boasted of fleshly achievements. It was no life at all, and in terms of slavery,<sup>1</sup> not much different from the Gentile life and plight. Therefore, Paul could refer to life under law since the apocalyptic Christ event as a life of reversion to the elements of the world (Gl. 4:9). Since the Christ event, the divinely given law is on a par with the elements of the world.

With its wide-ranging enslaving and dividing characteristics, the present evil age is descriptive of a life in opposition to God and under a curse, ultimately leading to death (Gl. 2:19-20; 3:10-13). It was no life at all. Paul feared the Galatians were unwittingly reverting to this time before the advent of Christ and the Spirit in their lives. It would be apocalyptically anachronistic and disastrous in apocalyptic proportion. It would be tantamount to being severed from Christ (Gl. 5:4) and setting one's vision on oneself and one's abilities, as opposed to being dependent on God and his provision in Christ and his Spirit.

iv) *Preliminary implications for freedom*

Freedom in Galatians is often regarded in terms of freedom only from law. Quite often, it is even narrowed down to merely freedom from ceremonial law or merely the curse of law or the wrong attitude towards law. I have tried in Part II to illustrate that much more is at stake. Paul actually moves in behind the initial matters of circumcision, dietary and calendar laws placed on his table by the Galatian situation. He discusses law in the context of the present evil age under the influence, even dominion, of sin and flesh. Christ did not come merely to deliver man from law and its curse. He came to deliver man from the present evil age in its totality. Flesh, the primary enslaver, was dealt with. In the process, law actually became antiquated and irrelevant. Deliverance from flesh's influence annulled the need for law.

Freedom in Christ exceeds freedom from law superlatively. It is about freedom from a complete paradigm of life in bondage to the present evil age. It is about freedom from the inability to know God's will, let alone live accordingly. It is along these lines that we turn to Part III to focus on Christian freedom itself.

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<sup>1</sup> We will return to the *metaphor of slavery* in Ch. 5. It is fundamental in describing life in the present evil age.