

Galatians 2.20 in Context

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When interpreted in its context in the argument of Galatians, Gal 2.20 is an important part of Paul's discussion of justification by faith. It functions as a depiction of justification apart from any consideration of Jew or Gentile status. This conclusion is based on an examination of the flow of Gal 2.15–21, a consideration of 2.15–21 in its larger context, and a study of 2.20 itself. This role of Gal 2.20 has frequently been overlooked due to inherent difficulties in interpreting the passage and to specific features about the way scholars have interpreted the verse and the larger passage.

Albert Schweitzer listed Gal 2.19–20 first in his 'Utterances of Pauline Mysticism' with which he opened his 1930 classic treatment of Paul, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*.¹ He listed 2.20 first again in his examples of 'the fundamental conception of the Pauline mysticism', that is, that 'the Elect and Christ partake in the same corporeity'.² Paul's words do seem well suited to Schweitzer's treatment of mysticism:

Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.³

Schweitzer was not alone in seeing in Gal 2.20 a statement of Paul's mysticism. Adolf Deissmann did the same two decades before Schweitzer,⁴ and W. D. Davies did again slightly less than two decades after (though with much less enthusiasm for the term 'mysticism').⁵ E. P. Sanders, while eschewing the term 'mysticism', saw the verse as one of the key passages that demonstrated his notion of partici-

1 Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (London: A. & C. Black, 2nd edn, 1953) 3.

2 Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 121.

3 In the NA27 and UBS4 editions of the Greek text, Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι is part of v. 19. For ease of reference I will follow most English translations by including it in v. 20.

4 Adolf Deissmann, *Paul, A Study in Social and Religious History* (New York: Doran, 2nd edn, 1926), quoted in Wayne A. Meeks, *The Writings of St. Paul* (New York: Norton, 1972) 375. Deissmann's book was based on lectures delivered in 1910.

5 W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: SPCK, 1948) 87–91. Davies was concerned to distinguish Paul's 'mysticism' from the pagan mystery religions and used the term somewhat begrudgingly, often putting it in quotes.

pationist soteriology and the centrality of this notion over that of righteousness by faith.⁶

The issue of mysticism is not the only historical current of Pauline scholarship in which Gal 2.20 has been caught up in a feature role. The history of religions school saw evidence in the verse for Paul's dependence on the mystery religions, in particular Paul's experience of 'the divided state of the consciousness' or the sense of 'the duality of his own personality'.⁷ Rudolf Bultmann likewise saw Paul's language in the verse as stemming from the mystery religions and Gnosticism,⁸ though more important for Bultmann was the central theme seen in the verse of the Christian's eschatological existence.⁹

The common characteristic of all these interpretations is that the verse is treated as an individual expression of a larger Pauline idea. Either the verse stands on its own, or it is considered alongside other passages from the Pauline corpus that contain similar content. No doubt due in large part to the vivid language and evocative claim of the verse, the context in which the statement appears in Galatians is largely if not entirely disregarded. This tendency has endured into more recent interpretations of the verse, with even commentaries tending to focus on the inner details of the verse rather than the purpose of the verse in its context. The verse, for instance, still provokes discussions of mysticism.¹⁰

My purpose here is not to refute such interpretations of Gal 2.20. Indeed, the artfulness of Paul's language in the verse invites efforts to find wide-ranging significance and profundity. I do want to suggest, however, that interpreters have generally neglected the particular function of 2.20 in Paul's argument in Galatians. The verse occurs as a part of a larger unit, 2.15–21, that is focused on the issues of faith, the law, and righteousness that constitute the heart of what is at stake for Paul in Galatians. When interpreted in this context, it will be seen that 2.20 plays a particular role in Paul's argument as to how Christians are justified by faith and not by works of the law. This role has been missed or misconstrued even when the

6 E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 463–72, 502–8. Sanders's objection to the term 'mysticism' was mainly due to the frequent misunderstandings caused by the abuse of the term; see 434 n. 19, 440.

7 The former is the expression of Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970) 174–5; see also 153–63. The latter is the terminology of Richard Reitzenstein, from *Die hellenistischen Mysterienreligionen* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1910), quoted here from Werner Georg Kümmel, *The New Testament: The History of the Investigation of Its Problems* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972) 268–70.

8 Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1951, 1955) 1.345–8.

9 Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, 1.324–9, esp. 1.328; *idem*, 'New Testament and Mythology', in *Kerygma and Myth* (ed. Hans-Werner Bartsch; New York: Harper & Row, 1961) 1–44 (esp. 32–3).

10 For example, Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 124; Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word, 1990) 92–3.

context has been attended to.¹¹ Specifically, we will see that in its context the verse provides a depiction of the justification of the Christian apart from any consideration of the Christian's Jew or Gentile status.

The Argument in Gal 2.15–21

Recent commentators generally agree that Gal 2.15–21 is a unit for which the overall theme is justification by faith. The passage occurs at the end of Paul's narration of the confrontation he had with Peter at Antioch over the issue of table fellowship, which begins at 2.11. Paul ends the scene by reporting a short speech he delivered to Peter, which begins at 2.14b ('If you, a Jew, live like a Gentile and not a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'). Galatians 2.15–21 is the continuation and conclusion of this speech,¹² but it is widely agreed that the passage serves the more important purpose of introducing the topics that will occupy Paul for the remainder of the letter. Hence vv. 15–21 are usually set off from v. 14b. Most commentators use 'justification by faith' or a similar expression as the title of this section of the letter, and the prominence of the themes of law, faith, and righteousness is patent. Paul's essential point in the passage is clear: justification comes through Christ and not through the law.

Yet while there is general agreement on these basic points, sorting out the details of Paul's argument in the passage is notoriously difficult. Paul is especially abstruse in vv. 17–19, and hence the interpretation of these verses is vigorously debated. Since understanding v. 20 in its context depends on understanding these verses that establish the context, it is necessary to examine these verses briefly, attending especially to the issues that affect the interpretation of v. 20.

In the opening of the pericope, vv. 15–16, Paul sets out some basic points of belief over which he expects there to be no argument:¹³

- 11 The most extreme example is Charles H. Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1988) 131–46. Cosgrove holds that, while 2.14b–18 focuses on the issue of justification, 2.19–20 turns to a different topic. 'Not until verse 21 does Paul return to the theme of "righteousness" that dominates verses 14b–18' (132). The theme of vv. 19–20 is rather 'eschatological life' (139–42).
- 12 Most interpreters today agree on this point. A few argue that Paul's reply to Peter consists only of v. 14 and that in v. 15 he addresses the Galatians directly: Udo Borse, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1984) 112; J. A. Ziesler, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Epworth, 1992) 21. William F. Arndt, 'On Gal. 2:17–19', *CTM* 27 (1956) 128–32, argues that the speech to Peter runs to 2.16.
- 13 This is the widely held understanding of the function of vv. 15–16. A few interpreters disagree that Paul expects agreement with the claims of the statements, for example, Sabbas Agourides, 'Peter and Paul in Antioch (Galatians 2,11–21)', in *The Truth of the Gospel (Galatians 1:1–4:11)* (ed. Jan Lambrecht; Rome: Benedictina, 1993) 59–90; Stephen Anthony Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ in Antioch: Maccabean Martyrdom and Galatians 1 and 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2001) 192.

(15) We are by nature Jews and not sinners from the Gentiles, (16) but knowing that a person is not justified from works of the law but¹⁴ through [the] faith in [or 'of'] Jesus Christ, we also have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified from [the] faith in [or 'of'] Christ and not from works of the law, because from works of the law no flesh will be justified.

There are a number of disputed points in these verses, including the thorny *pistis christou* debate,¹⁵ but the only real concern for the present purposes is Paul's distinction between Jews and Gentiles on the basis of the latter being 'sinners' (ἁμαρτωλοί). Is this distinction to be taken at face value, or does Paul state it ironically? If the former, the verse would seem to clash with what Paul says in Romans 1–3, viz. that Jews and Gentiles alike are all sinners.¹⁶ Yet there is no real indication of irony – v. 16 builds on v. 15 as if Paul means what he says – and so most interpreters understand Paul here to be building on the typical Jewish self-understanding of themselves over against Gentiles, the latter being by nature sinners outside the people of God.¹⁷

Verse 17, however, undercuts this distinction. After stating his basic doctrine of justification in vv. 15–16, Paul presents a potential objection to his doctrine and responds to it: 'But if while seeking to be justified in Christ, we were also found ourselves to be sinners, then is Christ a minister of sin? By no means!' The basis of the objection is the second clause, 'we were also found ourselves to be sinners' (εὐρέθημεν καὶ αὐτὸ ἁμαρτωλοί). It is generally agreed that the 'we' here, as in vv. 15–16, includes not only Paul and Peter, but Jewish Christians generally.¹⁸ The

14 'But' translates ἐὰν μὴ and is the common translation here, though in most contexts ἐὰν μὴ is translated 'except'. The choice is important for interpreting v. 16, but it does not have a significant impact on interpreting v. 20, so I will keep with the usual translation. For discussions see especially Chinedu Adolphus Amadi-Azuogu, *Paul and the Law in the Arguments of Galatians* (Weinheim: Beltz Athenäum, 1996) 77–8; William O. Walker, 'Translation and Interpretation of ἐὰν μὴ in Galatians 2:16', *JBL* 116 (1997) 515–20.

15 The debate centers on whether πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ in v. 16 (and similar expressions elsewhere in Paul's letters) is to be translated as a subjective genitive, 'the faith of Jesus Christ' (in brackets in my translation), or as an objective genitive, 'faith in Jesus Christ'. The literature on the subject has become voluminous in the last decades. A good place to start is the dialogue between Richard B. Hays (arguing for the subjective genitive) and James D. G. Dunn (arguing for the objective genitive) in *Pauline Theology. IV. Looking Back, Pressing On* (ed. E. Elizabeth Johnson and David M. Hay; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997) 35–81. For additional bibliography, see Longenecker, *Galatians*, 87. See also n. 51 below.

16 The most significant argument in this regard is that of Heinz Neitzel, 'Zur Interpretation von Galater 2, 11–21', *TQ* 163 (1983) 15–39, 131–49. Neitzel's interpretation includes a radical reconstruction of vv. 15–16.

17 See, e.g., Betz, *Galatians*, 115; Borse, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 112; James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (London: A. & C. Black, 1993) 132–4; Joachim Rohde, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1989) 109–10.

18 For example, Hans-Joachim Eckstein, *Verheissung und Gesetz: Eine exegetische Untersuchung zu Galater 2,15–4,7* (Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1996) 3; René Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche: Interprétation d'un conflit* (Ga 2, 14–21) (Paris: Cerf, 1982) 14–15; Simon

key question, then, is what Paul means by Jewish Christians being found to be ‘sinners’.¹⁹ The most common solution is that Paul is referring to the fact that when Jews seek justification in Christ, they find themselves on equal footing with Gentiles (despite the law) and hence ‘sinners’ in the same sense as the reference to Gentiles as ‘sinners’ in v. 15.²⁰ Thus the distinction made between Jews and Gentiles in v. 15 is nullified. Other suggestions for the meaning of the clause have been offered,²¹ but in the context of the scene at Antioch, this one fits quite well, since the distinction between Jews and Gentiles is the primary point of contention. The objection Paul presents in v. 17 would then provide the potential justification for Peter’s action in v. 12: putting Jews into the position of sinners, formerly occupied only by Gentiles, makes Christ a minister of sin. Paul, of course, will not permit this reasoning, and he gives his favorite negative response to the objection, μή γένοιτο.

In v. 18 Paul continues: ‘For if I build up again that which I tore down, I demonstrate myself a transgressor’ (εἰ γὰρ ἃ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ, παραβάτην ἑμαυτὸν συνιστάνω). Most commentators take the γὰρ to imply that Paul here provides the grounds for his denial of the objection in v. 17.²² Verse 18

Légasse, *L'épître de Paul aux Galates* (Paris: Cerf, 2000) 170; Franz Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974) 167; Heinrich Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 10th edn, 1949) 52–3.

19 With the great majority of scholars, I take this clause to be a *realis* (a statement of a real condition): Paul means that Jewish Christians are indeed found to be sinners. There are a few noteworthy interpreters who consider the clause an *irrealis*: Betz, *Galatians*, 119–20; Rudolf Bultmann, ‘Zur Auslegung von Galater 2,15–18’, in *Exegetica: Aufsätze zur Erforschung des Neuen Testaments* (ed. Erich Dinkler; Tübingen: Mohr [Siebeck], 1967) 394–7; Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit*, 137–8; Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, 55–60; Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 176–7. See Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ*, 206–12, for an especially helpful presentation of the exegetical options on this question and the other difficulties in v. 17.

20 So, e.g., Borse, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 115; F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982) 140–1; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 89; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1992) 95; Robert C. Tannehill, *Dying and Rising with Christ* (Berlin: Töpelmann, 1967) 56.

21 See Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, 62–6, for a discussion of the options. The most notable alternative is the view argued for in several articles by Jan Lambrecht that ‘sinners’ refers to pre-conversion sins. See Jan Lambrecht, ‘The Line of Thought in Gal. 2.14b–21’, *NTS* 24 (1978) 484–95; idem, ‘Once Again Gal 2,17–18 and 3,21’, *ETL* 63 (1987) 148–53; idem, ‘Paul’s Reasoning in Galatians 2:11–21’, in *Paul and the Mosaic Law* (ed. James D. G. Dunn; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001) 53–74; idem, ‘Transgressor by Nullifying God’s Grace: A Study of Gal 2,18–21’, *Bib* 72 (1991) 217–36. The biggest problem with this view is finding any motivation for the charge that Christ promotes sin; so also John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988) 79 n. 10.

22 So Barclay, *Obeying the Truth*, 79–80; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody, Ma.: Hendrickson, 1999) 117; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 90; J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) 255; Matera, *Galatians*, 95; Rohde, *Der Brief des*

thus functions as a counter-charge: Paul states that the real problem is not in being found a ‘sinner’ but in rebuilding ‘that which I tore down’. The latter phrase (ἃ κατέλυσα) undoubtedly refers to the law and perhaps specifically (given the context of the Antioch incident) to table fellowship restrictions.²³ How does rebuilding this implicate oneself as a ‘transgressor’?²⁴ This is a vigorously debated question, but the succinct explanation of F. F. Bruce is apposite: ‘One way or another, someone who builds up what he formerly demolished acknowledges his fault, explicitly in his former demolition or implicitly in his present rebuilding. If the one activity was right, the other must be wrong’.²⁵

It is significant here that Paul shifts to the first person singular (‘I’) from the plural ‘we’ of the preceding verses, especially as the use of ‘I’ will continue through v. 21. The reason for the change probably comes down to both generalization and tact. The ‘we’ of the preceding verses referred to a definite group, viz. Paul and Peter along with the other Jewish Christians at Antioch, but in v. 18 Paul speaks hypothetically of anyone (though the direct application would be to a Jewish Christian), and so a more general ‘I’ is used.²⁶ At the same time, Paul probably has in mind Peter and those at Antioch who followed him – by withdrawing from the Gentiles (vv. 12–13), Peter rebuilds the barrier between Gentiles and Jews that had been removed. Paul’s use of ‘I’ allows him to implicate Peter tactfully without a direct attack.²⁷

Paulus an die Galater, 114–15. Lambrecht, ‘The Line of Thought in Gal. 2.14b–21’ (and also Lambrecht’s other works mentioned in n. 21 above), argues that taking the γάρ this way results in a logical gap in Paul’s argument. He suggests that instead the γάρ be taken in the sense of a δέ, so that v. 18 begins ‘a relatively new train of thought’ (495). But this alleged logical gap is far easier to leap than the break in the argument created by taking γάρ in the sense for which he argues. Against Lambrecht see Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, 60–1.

23 A view strongly agreed upon today. E.g. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988) 120; David E. Garland, ‘Paul’s Defense of the Truth of the Gospel Regarding Gentiles (Galatians 2:15–3:22)’, *RevExp* 91 (1994) 165–81 (esp. 169); Légasse, *L’épître de Paul aux Galates*, 188; Neitzel, ‘Zur Interpretation von Galater 2, 11–21’, 136; Tannehill, *Dying and Rising*, 56; François Vouga, *An die Galater* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998) 60. Older interpreters often took ἃ κατέλυσα to refer to sin or a life focused on sin; see Arndt, ‘On Gal. 2:17–19’, 129–30.

24 The precise nuance of παραβάτης is often debated. See Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ*, 212–3, for an extensive treatment of the issue.

25 Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 142. Many interpreters prefer greater precision in specifying the transgression. See Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 120–2, for a helpful presentation of the options.

26 Similarly, Paul C. Böttger, ‘Paulus und Petrus in Antiochien: Zum Verständnis von Galater 2.11–21’, *NTS* 37 (1991) 77–100 (esp. 92–3); Christiane Dieterlé, ‘Être juste ou vivre (Galates 1, 11–2, 21)’, *FoiVie* 84 (1985) 5–18 (esp. 15); Vouga, *An die Galater*, 56, 60–1.

27 So Barclay, *Obedying the Truth*, 80 n. 13; Ernest de Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1948) 130; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 90; Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 178.

Verse 19 is connected to v. 18 by another γάρ: 'For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God' (ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον, ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω). The relationship between this verse and the preceding ones is another disputed point. Does the γάρ imply that it explains why 'that which I tore down' in v. 18 should not be rebuilt?²⁸ Or does it instead provide another reason why Christ should not be seen as a minister of sin, thus providing an additional response to v. 17?²⁹ With the sense of vv. 15–18 described thus far, the former option makes perfect sense and is hence to be preferred as the most natural syntactical option. The reason that ἡ κατέλυσα (referring to the law) is not to be rebuilt is that 'I died to the law'.³⁰ With this option there is still a connection to v. 17, because vv. 18–19 together form a response to v. 17.

From this look at 2.15–19, we can see that the verses leading up to v. 20 are all focused on the central issues of justification, the law, and faith. Verses 15–16 present Paul's basic doctrine of justification by faith. Verse 17 provides a potential objection to the doctrine, which Paul emphatically rejects, and vv. 18–19 then explain the rejection. Despite the numerous exegetical difficulties that interpreting the passage entails, nothing through v. 19 changes the focus of Paul's discussion.³¹

Why, then, is 2.20 not often interpreted in the context of Paul's discussion about justification? We have noted as we have gone through the passage that these verses are fraught with exegetical difficulties, especially vv. 17–19. Since the meaning of these verses in Paul's argument concerning justification is difficult to discern, the context and basic sense of the passage seem rather muddled by the time v. 20 is reached. When this muddled state is contrasted with the clear syntax and straightforward assertion of v. 20, it becomes easy to leave the context behind and concentrate on the content of v. 20 itself. The natural questions that tend to be asked about the verse pertain to content and not context, such as, 'How does Paul understand himself to be crucified with Christ?' and 'What does it mean that Christ lives in Paul?' Thus the relationship of the passage to other Pauline material such as Romans 6 is often brought into the discussion. This tends to lead exegetes

28 So Lambrecht, 'Transgressor by Nullifying God's Grace', 220; Légasse, *L'épître de Paul aux Galates*, 188–9; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 91; Martyn, *Galatians*, 256; Vouga, *An die Galater*, 61.

29 So Bultmann, 'Zur Auslegung von Galater 2,15–18', 397; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 122; Garland, 'Paul's Defense', 169; Victor Hasler, 'Glaube und Existenz: Hermeneutische Erwägungen zu Gal. 2,15–21', *TZ* 25 (1969) 241–51 (esp. 245–7); Matera, *Galatians*, 95.

30 What exactly Paul means by claiming to have died to the law *through the law* (διὰ νόμου) is a highly disputed point that must be left aside here. For helpful overviews of the options, see Cummins, *Paul and the Crucified Christ*, 217–18; Kieffer, *Foi et justification à Antioche*, 67–9; Légasse, *L'épître de Paul aux Galates*, 190–2; Ziesler, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 28–9.

31 Against especially Cosgrove, *The Cross and the Spirit*, 131–46; see n. 11 above.

down quite a different road than the context of 2.15–21, well away from the topic of justification by faith.

In addition to these inherent difficulties in understanding the passage, there are two additional problems in interpreting 2.20 that stem from specific features about the way scholars have interpreted the passage. The first is the widespread acceptance of Hans Dieter Betz's identification of the passage as the *propositio* of the letter, which causes several problems that lead to the separation of 2.20 from the topic of justification. The second is the tendency of interpreters to put a sharp break between 2.20 and 2.21. Verse 21, in which Paul emphatically denies that righteousness comes through the law, is often interpreted either as referring solely back to vv. 15–17 or else as a refutation of a specific charge made against Paul. In either case, the connection between v. 20 and v. 21 is lost, and the clear importance of justification in v. 21 is seen as irrelevant to the interpretation of v. 20.

Hence before we examine 2.20 itself, these two additional problems must be addressed.

Gal 2.20 and Betz's *Propositio*

Hans Dieter Betz's rhetorical analysis of Galatians has been one of the most influential contributions to the study of Galatians in the last three decades. Betz identified Galatians as belonging to the ancient genre of the 'apologetic letter' and conforming to the genre's structural conventions.³² As a part of his analysis, Betz identified 2.15–21 as the *propositio* of the letter, which 'sums up the legal content of the *narratio*' (1.11–2.14) and 'sets up the arguments to be discussed later in the *probatio* (chapters 3 and 4)'.³³ The *propositio* begins with points of agreement (vv. 15–16), then proceeds to the points of disagreement (vv. 17–18), followed by the *enumeratio* and *expositio*, which respectively provide the number of points to be discussed and a brief statement of the points (the former is missing in the passage since there is only one point; vv. 19–20 comprise the latter); finally, the *propositio* concludes with a *refutatio*, a sharp denial of a charge (v. 21).³⁴

Betz's analysis has been widely discussed and criticized, and it is not my purpose here to examine the merits of his analysis as a whole.³⁵ Most of the criticism

32 Betz initially laid out his analysis in his article 'The Literary Composition and Function of Paul's Letter to the Galatians', *NTS* 21 (1975) 353–79. His analysis is an integral part of his later commentary (*Galatians*; see n. 10), and for 2.15–21 the analysis is more complete in the commentary.

33 Betz, *Galatians*, 114.

34 Betz, *Galatians*, 114.

35 Important critiques of Betz's analysis include David E. Aune, 'Review of Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*', *RSR* 7 (1981) 323–8; George A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1984) 144–52; Longenecker, *Galatians*, c–cxix; Wayne A. Meeks, 'Review of H. D. Betz, *Galatians*', *JBL* 100 (1981) 304–7.

of his proposal, however, has centered around applying his analysis to Galatians 3–6.³⁶ The acceptance of 2.15–21 as the *propositio* remains common.³⁷ It is thus worth noting that when we compare his analysis of the structure of the passage with the results of our earlier discussion, several problems present themselves. First, Betz’s analysis requires making a structural seam between v. 18 and v. 19, but this division is contrary to the flow of Paul’s argument. As we have seen, vv. 18–19 together form a response to the objection of v. 17. Second, vv. 19–20 are ill-suited as an *expositio*, which is supposed to contain the points to be discussed in the rest of the letter. Verse 16 would be much better suited to this task. Third, v. 21 does not read as a *refutatio* (a point to be elaborated on below).

Why is the identification of 2.15–21 as the *propositio* of particular concern here? When the passage is read this way, it ultimately contributes to the difficulty of reading Gal 2.20 in its context. A number of problems result from reading the passage as the *propositio*, especially from fitting it into the structure of the *propositio*. First, the context of 2.11–14 is lost. When 2.15–21 is emphasized as a separate section of the letter, it is easy to forget that it is formally a part of Paul’s address to Peter (Betz, indeed, held that it was not³⁸). The loss of this setting makes vv. 17–18 especially hard to decipher, since the Antioch debate is an important part of their context. The loss also contributes to the misunderstanding of v. 21 (see below). Second, the connection between vv. 17–18 and v. 19 is removed. This result of Betz’s structural analysis removes the topic of justification, which is central in v. 17, from the context of v. 19, and thus also from v. 20. Third, the relationship of v. 20 to the rest of the letter is skewed. The *propositio* is supposed to set up all the arguments in the letter, but since 2.15–21 contains little having to do with either the Spirit or the paraenetical portions of the letter, v. 20 tends to bear the weight of these. Thus the spiritual and existential aspects of v. 20 are emphasized, rather than its place in Paul’s discussion of justification.³⁹ Fourth, the connection between v. 20 and v. 21 is lost. This results from the identification of v. 21 as the

36 Longenecker, for instance, roundly criticizes Betz’s work in the Introduction of his commentary (*Galatians*, cix–cxiii) but uses it fully in his commentary on 2.15–21 (*Galatians*, 82–96).

37 So, e.g., Amadi-Azuogu, *Paul and the Law*, 62–3; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 112; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 80–3; Helmut Merklein, “‘Nicht aus Werken des Gesetzes . . .’: Eine Auslegung von Gal 2,15–21”, in *Bibel in jüdischer und christlicher Tradition* (ed. Helmut Merklein, Karlheinz Müller, and Günter Stemberger; Frankfurt: Anton Hain, 1993) 121–36 (esp. 122); Vincent M. Smiles, *The Gospel and the Law in Galatia* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1998) 103–5; Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1998) 169–70.

38 Betz, *Galatians*, 114 n. 14.

39 Betz thought the statements of 2.20 were expounded on as follows (Betz, *Galatians*, 122–5):

Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι:	3.26–28
ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός:	3.2–5; 4.6; 5.5–6.8
ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί . . .:	3.1–5.10.

refutatio. The importance of this will be seen below. Finally, the context with 3.1–5 is de-emphasized. When different parts of 2.15–21 are forced to cover the rest of the letter in piecemeal fashion, the immediate connection between 2.20 (and the rest of 2.15–21) and 3.1–5 is easy to miss.⁴⁰ The importance of this connection will also be discussed below.

We should be wary, therefore, of the interpretive problems caused by reading 2.15–21 as the *propositio*, especially how it distorts the interpretation of 2.20.

Gal 2.21 and 3.1–5

Perhaps the clearest connection between 2.20 and Paul's discussion of justification comes in 2.21. 'For if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died needlessly' (εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς δωρεὰν ἀπέθανεν). The reference here to Christ's death provides an obvious connection to v. 20, with the logical inference being that the non-needless death of Christ mentioned in v. 20 is the source of justification. Once again, however, certain tendencies in the interpretation of the verse lead to the obscuration of this connection and inference.

The key problem is that v. 21 is often seen as a response of Paul to a specific objection made against him by his Galatian opponents. When he states that 'I do not deny the grace of God' (οὐκ ἄθετῶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ), he is seen as denying the charge that 'he is making of no account the special grace of God to Israel in giving them the law'.⁴¹ There are three main arguments used in support of this interpretation. The first is that the use of the phrase οὐκ ἄθετῶ implies a denial of a charge.⁴² This is simply not true in the least; stating that one does not do something does not require that one has been charged to do that thing. The second argument is that v. 21 is the *refutatio* and hence must be the denial of an actual charge.⁴³ This was addressed earlier; we have seen that the passage does not conform well to the structure of the *propositio* in vv. 17–20, and therefore it should not be assumed to do so in v. 21, either. We will see shortly that v. 21 should be understood quite differently than as a *refutatio*.

The third argument is that the law being God's gracious gift to Israel was a fundamental tenet of first-century Judaism; hence the phrase 'the grace of God' (τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ) must refer to the law.⁴⁴ This meaning of 'the grace of God', how-

40 As noted in the previous footnote, Betz did relate part of 2.20 to 3.2–5, but only in the sense that the 'doctrine of the indwelling Christ' is related to the Spirit (Betz, *Galatians*, 124).

41 Burton, *Galatians*, 140–2. So also Agourides, 'Peter and Paul in Antioch', 75; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 125; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 94–5; Martyn, *Galatians*, 259–60; Rohde, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, 117–18.

42 Burton, *Galatians*, 140–2; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 94–5.

43 Longenecker, *Galatians*, 94–5. Betz, *Galatians*, 126, expresses uncertainty over whether the charge is real or a rhetorical invention of Paul's.

44 Martyn, *Galatians*, 247, 259–60.

ever, is supported nowhere else in the letter.⁴⁵ Paul's use of χάρις elsewhere in Galatians argues against such a meaning (see esp. 1.6, 15; 5.4; 6.18). More importantly, this interpretation makes little sense in the context of the passage. As we have seen, it is widely agreed that Gal 2.15–21 is, at least formally, part of the address to Peter at Antioch (the clear break is at 3.1, not before then). It would thus be odd for Paul to insert here an interjection against his Galatian opponents themselves, and there is no indication that such a charge was made against Paul at Antioch. Thus the most logical conclusion is that 2.21 is part of the address to Peter, not a denial of a charge made against Paul elsewhere. This is not to say that 2.15–21 is not actually directed at the Galatians (it is in a letter to them, after all!). But the formal context must not be disregarded.

Part of the reason why an interpretation for v. 21 has been sought outside of its immediate context may be that v. 20 has not been seen to be connected to Paul's argument about justification. If this connection is seen properly, then v. 21 follows quite naturally from v. 20. The grace of God is Christ's justifying action in handing himself over to be crucified and the Christian's participation in that event. If justification comes instead through the law, then such divine action and human participation in the event are irrelevant. Verse 21 thus wraps up all of the arguments contained in 2.15–20; it picks up on the basic theme of justification stated in vv. 15–16, but it particularly builds on v. 20. The mention of Christ's death in v. 21 makes sense only because of the reference to his crucifixion and giving of himself (παραδόντος ἑαυτόν) in v. 20.

What is the significance of Paul's opening words in v. 21 that he does not 'deny the grace of God'? As in v. 18, Paul employs the tactful technique of saying something about himself that he means to apply to someone else (i.e. Peter and those who followed him, and indirectly anyone in the Galatian churches who follows the example of Peter). Paul is thus charging his *opponents* with nullifying God's grace through their re-establishment of the law.⁴⁶ He is not refuting a charge made against himself.

In 3.1, with the phrase ὦ ἄνοητοι Γαλάται, Paul turns to address the Galatians, beginning a new section in the letter. It is worth noting, however, that the themes of 2.15–21 are still in Paul's thoughts in 3.1–5. In fact, the statements of 3.1–5 largely follow from 2.15–21.⁴⁷ In 3.1 Paul reminds the Galatians that before their very eyes 'Jesus Christ was displayed as crucified'. It is striking that Paul feels no need to explain what he sees as the significance of this reference to the crucifixion. Yet the thought that immediately follows in 3.2 concerns the dichotomy

45 Also noted by Eckstein, *Verheissung und Gesetz*, 76; Smiles, *The Gospel and the Law in Galatia*, 187.

46 So also, e.g., Borse, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 119; Garland, 'Paul's Defense', 169; Matera, *Galatians*, 96–7; Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 184; Vouga, *An die Galater*, 56–7, 62–3.

47 Noted by Dieterlé, 'Être juste ou vivre', 5–18.

between faith and works of the law that is featured in 2.15–21. This same dichotomy is also the point with which Paul concludes the paragraph in v. 5. Paul expects the Galatians to understand that the crucifixion bears heavily on the choice of πίστις over ἔργα νόμου. How can Paul have such an expectation? Because this is precisely the role of 2.20.

Gal 2.20 as a Depiction of Justification

We have seen that the surrounding context of Gal 2.20 strongly implies that the verse plays an important part in Paul's discussion of justification, faith, and the law in 2.15–21. I suggested earlier that the particular role played by the verse is to provide a depiction of the justification of the Christian apart from any consideration of the Christian's Jew or Gentile status. Having studied the surrounding context of the verse, we can now flesh this claim out with an examination of the verse itself.

Recall that vv. 18–19 serve to respond to the objection of v. 17 that Paul's understanding of justification makes Christ a minister of sin. Verse 18 states that the law cannot be rebuilt (this, Paul says, is what would be the sin), and v. 19 explains why not: 'For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God'. Verse 20 then begins with 'I have been crucified with Christ' (Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι). As many have noted, this phrase expounds on the claim to have 'died to the law' in v. 19a.⁴⁸ Likewise, the following four clauses – all of which have a form of ζῶω as their verb – expound on the claim to 'live to God' in v. 19b: ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός· ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ. Hence structurally v. 20 is an expansion of v. 19 and thus along with vv. 18–19 a part of the answer to the objection of v. 17. But what role does v. 20 itself play? Why did Paul not simply stop at v. 19?

The answer follows from considering the movement of Paul's argument from v. 17 to v. 21. Verse 17 presents a *specific* charge against Paul's doctrine of justification, and vv. 18–20 are all presented as a response to the charge. Yet in v. 21 Paul concludes with a very *general* denial that righteousness comes through the law, with the implication that it is rather Christ's death that brings about justification. What is it that enables Paul to move from a specific charge (v. 17) to a general claim (v. 21)? It is the form of the response to the charge itself – the logic of Paul's response in vv. 18–20 shifts to increasingly general statements as Paul progresses. Verse 18 states a potential action by an individual or group of Jewish Christians (re-establishing the law). Verse 19 is a statement of fact that applies to all Jewish Christians (dying to the law). Verse 20 is a similar statement of fact, but it applies not only to Jewish Christians, but to Gentile Christians, as well. Paul's response to the charge of v. 17 thus moves outward from the narrow issue that defines the

48 E.g. Betz, *Galatians*, 122; Böttger, 'Paulus und Petrus in Antiochien', 94; Hasler, 'Glaube und Existenz', 248; Neitzel, 'Zur Interpretation von Galater 2, 11–21', 141.

charge to a consideration of what it means for anyone to be justified in Christ. Verse 20 is the capstone of the argument, in which Paul provides a general depiction of the process of justification. Hence Paul can then conclude with the general claim of v. 21.

I refer to v. 20 as a 'general' depiction of justification because its claims are removed from the debate over the law and hence not tied to the distinction between Jews and Gentiles that is the context of the debate at Antioch. This is the key difference in the references to death in v. 19 and v. 20. Verse 19 describes death as happening 'through the law to the law', and this reference to the law is crucial for v. 19 to make sense as an explanation of v. 18. The applicability of v. 19, however, is limited by these references to the law. The 'I' of v. 19 can only be a Jewish Christian. The 'I' of v. 20, however, can refer to any Christian, to Jew and Gentile alike. This sets up the broad claim about justification in v. 21, and even more so the direct address to the Galatians in 3.1–5, where Paul will suddenly switch from addressing a Jewish Christian (Peter) to addressing a predominantly Gentile Christian audience. In order for the assumed implications of the crucifixion in 3.1–5 to make sense, this move of an explanation of justification away from a strictly Jewish Christian context is necessary. 'Dying to the law' would not be a meaningful phrase to Gentile Christians, but 'crucifixion with Christ' is.

There are four key features of v. 20 itself that together form the general depiction of justification. They are: (i) Christ's loving action in dying on the cross; (ii) the crucifixion of the Christian with Christ; (iii) Christ living in the Christian; (iv) the current life lived in faith. Each of these requires some explanation in relation to the issue of justification.

Concerning (i), Christ's loving action in dying on the cross: the reference to 'the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me' is an echo of Paul's opening words of the letter, where Paul wishes grace and peace upon the Galatians 'from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins, in order to free us from the present evil age' (1.3b–4).⁴⁹ That Paul emphasizes the salvific effects of Christ's death in the greeting of the letter is surely no accident, for it is central in his later arguments about justification coming through faith and not the law. Galatians 3.13 specifically links Christ's death on the cross with the claim that 'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law'. Hence it is no surprise that a reference to Christ's death should occur in an argument about justification coming through Christ and not the law, as occurs in 2.15–21.

That the reference to Christ's death in 2.20 *does* pertain to Paul's argument about justification is made clear in 2.21 and confirmed in 3.1–5, as we have already seen in part. When Paul states in 2.21 that if righteousness comes through the law

49 So also Bernard Lategan, 'Is Paul Defending his Apostleship in Galatians?', *NTS* 34 (1988) 411–30 (esp. 428–9); Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 192.

then Christ died needlessly, the logical inference is that Christ's death and not the law is the source of righteousness. That the law is not the source of righteousness is stated in 2.16, but it is only in 2.20 that Christ's death is mentioned. Christ's death is the note on which v. 20 both begins ('I have been crucified with Christ') and ends ('who loved me and gave himself for me'). Verse 21, then, serves to bring together the statements concerning justification in vv. 15–17 with the statements concerning Christ's death in v. 20. Paul's argument in 3.1–5 is then built on the connection of v. 20 to v. 21. The assumption of the relevance of Christ's crucifixion (3.1) to the experienced superiority of faith over works of law (3.2–5) would make no sense were it not for the connection between 2.20 and 2.21, between the connection of death with justification.

Concerning (ii), the crucifixion of the Christian with Christ: the immediate role of the statement that 'I have been crucified with Christ' is to explain how Paul can claim to have died himself in v. 19. It is important to note this, because the notion of union with Christ, whether expressed in terms of dying, living, or sharing in suffering, is an extremely wide-ranging motif in Paul's letters in terms of its significance. It may pertain to the justification process, as here; it may pertain to the Christian's relationship to God (as in 4.6; see further below); it may pertain to moral life; it may pertain to the experience of suffering (often paired with the hope of future resurrection); or it may pertain to Christians' life together.⁵⁰ Hence it is not surprising that the interpretation of these words may give rise to discussions of all sorts of topics in Paul's letters. Here, however, it serves to explain how Paul can claim to have died to the law. It is in this that we can see the movement of Paul's logic from particular to general. Dying to the law is one particular result of the more general status of being crucified with Christ, a status with potentially many more implications than being freed from the law, as the variety of items just mentioned shows. The most important aspect of the more general status here is the removal of the particularly Jewish context. While it is only Jewish Christians who must experience death 'to the law', both Jewish and Gentile Christians experience crucifixion with Christ. As discussed above, this is an important generalization for Paul to make in order to shift the relevance of his argument to the situation of the Galatians. At both Antioch and Galatia, crucifixion with Christ is a common experience of Jewish and Gentile Christians, indeed, *the* common experience which justifies them before God.

Concerning (iii), Christ living in the Christian: when Paul describes his call or conversion as a Christian in 1.15–16, he specifically describes it as God's revelation

⁵⁰ The moral sense is strongest in Rom 6.1–11 and 1 Cor 6.12–20; the experience of suffering and hope for resurrection in 2 Cor 4.7–12 and Phil 3.7–11; Christians' life together in 1 Cor 10.14–22 and 12.12–27. Each idea is not exclusive from the others, however, as several of these texts demonstrate. Rom 8.9–17 probably contains the richest combination of these ideas in Paul's letters.

of 'his son in me' (τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ ἐν ἐμοί). Galatians 2.20 makes it clear that this notion of Christ being inside the Christian is at the heart of Paul's conception of what it means to be a Christian, rather than being merely a matter of his own status. This idea is further expounded upon in 4.6, where Paul asserts that Christians' status as adopted sons of God results in τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ υἱοῦ αὐτοῦ being sent εἰς τὰς καρδίας ἡμῶν. This statement has to be viewed as equivalent to the ζῆ δὲ ἐν ἐμοί Χριστός of 2.20, but in 4.6 Paul uses the Spirit language that he avoids prior to ch. 3. The claim of 4.6 is a part of Paul's larger discussion of Christians' adopted sonship in 3.23–4.7, and both the context of this section in Galatians and the flow of the argument in the section make it clear that this status is part and parcel of the theme of justification. Being adopted as sons of God appears, in fact, to be another way of stating justification; Paul uses the motif of adoption because it allows him to extend the metaphor in terms of household customs. Worthy of special note regarding the connection to justification is 3.26: πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. Faith is said to result in sonship here just as it is said to result in justification in 2.16.

Similarly, in 4.19 Paul tells the Galatians that he is 'again in labor' (πάλιν ὀδίνω) until 'Christ is formed in you' (μορφωθῆ Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν). The use of the childbirth imagery combined with the word 'again' suggests that this metaphor refers to the Galatians' basic experience of conversion and is an indication of the considerable danger they are in, needing such a second conversion. It is not hard to see that this is a part of the issue of justification by faith vs. works of the law, since seeking justification by works of the law is the source of the Galatians' predicament.

The claim of 2.20 is stronger than these others places where Paul speaks of Christ living in the Christian, because Paul precedes the claim by stating that 'I no longer live'. The living presence of Christ in the Christian is thus all the more dominant. This clause serves to link the claim about being crucified with Christ to the claim that Christ lives in the Christian. It therefore connects these two aspects of justification – one's own death permits Christ's presence in oneself.

Concerning (iv), the current life lived in faith: Paul qualifies his claim that 'I no longer live, but Christ lives in me' by referring to life that 'I now live in the flesh'. This admission to living is then itself circumscribed by the following clause, which states that this life is lived 'in the faith of the son of God' (ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῆ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ).⁵¹ This is Paul's picture of the justified life. The reference to 'the son of

51 Or if τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ is taken as an objective genitive, 'by faith in the son of God'. I am inclined to agree with Vouga, *An die Galater*, 59, that the choice is not nearly as important as is often asserted, because the key *opposing* terms in the opposition of 'works of the law' and 'faith in/of Christ' are not works and faith, but law and Christ. Whichever choice is made in the *pistis christou* debate, 2.16 makes it clear that faith 'in' Christ is important, and 2.20 makes it clear that Christ's own disposition and action are paramount ('who loved me and gave himself for me').

God'⁵² here is immediately filled out by further description (discussed above): 'who loved me and gave himself for me'. Paul is still thinking of the justifying action of Christ when he speaks of present life ἐν σαρκί. The connection between living by faith and righteousness is made again in 3.11–12, where Paul sets up the dichotomy of living by faith vs. living by the law and asserts that righteousness is possible only through living by faith: ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται (quoting Hab 2.4 LXX).⁵³

Conclusion

Thus we see that Gal 2.20 is very much a part of Paul's argument about justification.⁵⁴ Both the immediate context of 2.15–21 and the larger context in which the passage is set point towards interpreting 2.20 as a depiction of justification. The verse caps off Paul's reply to the objection in 2.17 that his understanding of justification makes Christ a minister of sin. It does so by providing a general depiction of justification that fills out the specific claims of the Christian's relationship to the law in vv. 18–19. In doing so it provides the rationale for the emphatic statement about the true source of righteousness in v. 21. Moreover, the statement of justification in terms that pertain to Gentiles and not only Jews helps to prepare for the transition to the address of a Gentile Christian audience in 3.1–5.

Just as importantly, the concepts mentioned in the verse itself are connected to justification elsewhere in Paul's letter. The themes of Christ's death, the co-crucifixion of the Christian with Christ, Christ's presence in the Christian, and the Christian's own life of faith are all aspects of Paul's discussion of justification in the rest of Galatians. Therefore understanding 2.20 as a depiction of justification not only makes sense in interpreting the verse in its immediate context, but it also resonates with Paul's discussion of justification in the rest of the letter.

52 There is a well supported alternate textual tradition here reading θεοῦ καὶ Χριστοῦ in place of υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (p⁴⁶ B D* F G). See Longenecker, *Galatians*, 94, for a discussion.

53 It is unlikely that ζήσεται here has *only* a future reference, since the contrast between faith and works is said to have present implications with regard to righteousness in 3.9–10.

54 I do not claim to be the first to notice the basic connection. See especially Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 60; also Robert A. Bryant, *The Risen Crucified Christ in Galatians* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2001) 170; Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 60–2.