

The Receiving of the Spirit: Monergism in Gal. 3:1-5

INTRODUCTION

The book of Galatians is a fascinating polemical work from the pen of the Apostle Paul. According to New Testament Scholar James D.G. Dunn, in Galatians we have “theology in the raw, red-blooded theology, quintessential paulinism.”¹ F. F. Bruce states that Galatians widely holds “primary of importance among the writings of Paul,” having close affinity with Paul’s letter to the Romans.²

The still ongoing debate engendered by the New Perspective on Paul has focused on various texts in Romans and Galatians especially with regards to the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου.³ This phrase as well as the parallel phrase πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ has been much debated.⁴ In the midst of this debate, the significance of the passage of Gal 3:1-5 has been less noticed. In this light, I would like to look at the passage of Gal. 3:1-5 and see what it teaches us with regards to the issue of salvation and the law.

¹ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2

² F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1982), 2

³ Proponents of the New Perspective on Paul include New Testament scholars James D.G. Dunn and N.T. Wright. The movement is largely influenced by the earlier work of E.P. Sanders in his work entitled *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Pa.: Fortress Press, 1977). See D.A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament, 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1992, 2005), 470-3 for a brief overview of the controversy.

On the phrase ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, see for example Paul L. Owen, “The “Works of the Law” in Romans and Galatians: A New Defense of the Subjective Genitive,” *JBL* 126, no. 3 (2007): 553-77. See also Dunn, *Theology*; *idem*, “Works of the Law and the Curse of the Law in Galatians 3:10-14,” *New Test. Stud* 31 (1985): 523-42; Douglas J. Moo, ““Law,” “Works of the Law,” and Legalism in Paul,” *WTJ* 45 (1983): 73-100; Moisés Silva, *Faith Versus Works of Law in Galatians*, in D. A. Carson *et al.*, eds., *The Paradoxes of Paul* (vol. 2 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004), 217-48

⁴ One example can be seen in Richard B. Hays, “Jesus’ Faith and Ours: A Re-Reading of Galatians 3,” *TSF Bulletin* (Sept-Oct 1983): 2-6

VARIOUS HISTORICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE PASSAGE

The text Gal. 3:1-5 has been variously interpreted in the history of the church. The Church Father Chrysostom for example interprets the passage to be teaching that the charismatic gifts comes from having faith rather than following the Law, and the Apostle Paul was therefore perplexed with the Galatian Christians as to why they would abandon the faith which gave them gifts of power for the Law “which can offer you nothing of the same kind.”⁵ In the Medieval period, Haimo of Auxerre interprets the passage as teaching that the addition of ceremonial “carnal ceremonies” wearies the believer but this is not so for the message of faith that is believed, with the Spirit given to believers through having faith not by observing the Law.⁶ Bruno the Carthusian interprets the text as commending faith that is “easily grasped by hearing alone” as opposed to the “unbearable” works the Law dictates, stating that the Spirit is grasped by faith just as the “same faith righteousness” comes through faith. Only this is the hope of the Galatians, not by following the Law.⁷ Robert Grosseteste on the other hand interprets the passage in a more Platonic manner by contrasting the spiritual hearing of the inner ear which enables the acceptance of the faith in the spirit with the attention to the fleshly things of the Law, with Paul rebuking the Galatians for choosing the latter.⁸

In the Reformation era, John Calvin interpreted the text as teaching that the gift of regeneration by the Spirit is appropriated by believing in the Gospel message and not through

⁵ Chrysostom, *Commentary on Galatians 3* (NPNF¹ 13:23-5) The charismatic gifts listed are effecting of miracles to raise the dead, cleansing lepers, prophesying and speaking in tongues.

⁶ *The Bible in Medieval Tradition — The Letter to the Galatians* (ed. and trans. Ian Christopher Levy; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 96

⁷ *Ibid.*, 149-50

⁸ *Ibid.*, 215-26

meriting by works.⁹ Matthew Henry sees the text as Paul questioning the Galatians whether the working of the Spirit in their souls came about because of preaching of the necessity of doing good works for justification, or by preaching of the doctrine of faith in Christ.¹⁰

It is my contention that the passage clearly proclaims that salvation is wholly of God through the operation of the Spirit in creating belief through hearing. The whole of salvation is gracious, not in any way predicated by performing the works commanded by the Law as a means of “staying in” the covenant.¹¹ Sanctification as well as justification is monergistic in its initiative and empowerment as being wholly a work of God, and this is achieved by the Spirit working within us by faith created through hearing.

PRELIMINARY OVERVIEW

A preliminary overview of this passage reveals the importance of three motifs with regards to the issue of salvation: the receiving of the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε), the phrase ἔργα νόμου, often translated as “[the] works of the law,”¹² and the phrase ἀκοή πίστεως, which is ambiguously translated as “the hearing of faith” in the KJV. We would go through these phrases later in seeing how they help us understand the teaching of our passage.

⁹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (trans. by William Pringle; Calvin’s Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1948), 46-9

¹⁰ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible—Volume VI: Acts to Revelation* (6 vols; Old Tappan, N.J.: Flaming H. Revell Company, n.d), 658

¹¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *Was Paul a Covenantal Nomist?* In Carson *et al*, *Justification 2*, 249. O’Brien was refuting Sanders’ theory of covenantal nomism, that “salvation is by grace but according to works; works are the condition of remaining ‘in’, but they do not earn salvation” (Sanders, *Palestinian*, 543)

¹² It is translated in such a manner in the ESV, NASB, KJV, NIV1984 and NIV2011.

Gal. 3:1 starts off with Paul strongly rebuking the Galatians. “O foolish Galatians,” Paul exclaimed. “Who has bewitched (ἐβάσκανεν) you?”¹³ Paul was evidently perplexed with the Galatian Christians. In his eyes, their behavior is analogous to the behavior of being placed under the spell and power of an evil power for their harm.¹⁴ Paul then reminded the Galatian believers that Christ was publicly portrayed as being crucified before their very eyes, with the perfect participle ἐστρωμένος functioning adverbially showing us the manner in which Christ was publicly portrayed, of which the crucifixion is a past event with significance for the present.¹⁵

It is in this setting that Paul in verse 2 rhetorically questions the Galatians regarding their “receiving of the spirit.” Is the receiving of the spirit by the Galatians achieved “by the works of the law” (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου) or is it “by the hearing of faith” (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως). Here, the “works of the law” (ἔργων νόμου) is contrasted antithetically with the “hearing of faith” (ἀκοῆς πίστεως), with the presence of one necessarily excluding the other. This rhetorical question by Paul was

¹³ Two textual variants are present here in Gal. 3:1. The first inserts the phrase τῇ ἀλήθειᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι (“to not be persuaded of the truth”) after the phrase τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν. It has inferior textual attestation and is thus probably errant, with F.F. Bruce suggesting that it was inserted under the influence of Gal. 5:7 (Bruce, *Epistle*, 147). The second variant comes from inserting the phrase ἐν ὑμῖν after Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη. The meaning would be essentially unchanged with the added phrase merely clarifying the sentence further, and it also has inferior textual attestation and is probably an addition to clarify the meaning of the sentence.

For understanding the verb προεγράφη with the προ- as having a locative sense, see *Word Biblical Commentary* 41, 100

¹⁴ βασκαίνω in BDAG. In the entry by Gerhard Delling in the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, βασκαίνω is used in the sense that the Galatians “have willingly yielded to these magicians and their influence without realising to what powers of falsehood they were surrendering.” (G. Delling, “βασκαίνω,” *TDNT* 1: 594-5)

¹⁵ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1996), 627. Philip Graham Ryken, *Galatians* (Reformed Expository Commentary; Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2005), 83-5

repeated again in verse 5, with the postpositive οὖν closing the pericope, and serves as the background for Paul's further questions as found in verses 3-4.¹⁶

RECEIVING OF THE SPIRIT

The motif of the Galatians having received the Spirit (τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε) in verse 2 is the main subject of the passage.¹⁷ Having rebuked the Galatians for their apparent enchantment with the error they have embraced (Gal. 1:6), Paul develops the logical consequence of having and believing in the crucifixion of Christ publicly portrayed before them in the Gospel as stated in Gal. 3:1. Believing in the Gospel of Christ's crucifixion is co-extensive with having received the Spirit.¹⁸ In the parallel sentence in verse 5, this reality of having received the Spirit is elaborated as ὁ ... ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν ... καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν.¹⁹ The Spirit is supplied and operates mightily in believers when he is received, with the present tense indicating a continuing action of the Spirit operating mightily in believers.²⁰ The term δυνάμεις can mean "the power that works wonder" or "a deed that exhibits ability to function powerfully".²¹ Since the works of the Spirit in the lives of believers are both internal and external, it is best to render it "mightily" instead of "mighty works" as the latter is a subset of the former.²²

¹⁶ WBC 41, 105

¹⁷ ἐλάβετε is in the aorist tense, signifying a past historical event.

¹⁸ The identity of the spirit in verse 2 (and verse 5) is taken by exegetes to refer to the Holy Spirit. The co-extension of receiving the Holy Spirit with what we know as "conversion" or believing in the Gospel message can be seen in passages such Rom. 8:15, 1 Cor. 2:12, 2 Cor. 11:4. "Anyone who does not 'have the Spirit' is not a Christian (Rom. 8:9)". See Derek Thomas, *Let's Study Galatians* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2004), 66

¹⁹ The first participle (ὁ ... ἐπιχορηγῶν) is attributive to τὸ πνεῦμα, while the second participle is in a predicate position to τὸ πνεῦμα, being linked with καὶ to the previous clause. Therefore the phrase can be translated: "The Spirit which is supplied to you and operates mightily in you."

²⁰ Bruce, *Epistle*, 151

²¹ δυνάμεις, in BDAG

²² The Holy Spirit gives gifts for service (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-11, Heb. 2:4) and also bears fruit in the believers' life (e.g. Gal. 5:23-24). It can be argued that the charismatic fruits may be what Paul

Receiving of the Spirit, the main subject matter of the pericope, therefore refers to the supply of the Holy Spirit to the Galatians and His continually operating in them mightily through both the gifts and fruits of the Spirit. Chrysostom's interpretation of this reference to miraculous gifts, which is not ruled out by Calvin, is probably correct although deficient.²³ Similarly, Calvin's interpretation as the regenerating grace of the Spirit is correct but does not give a full picture of what the text teaches.

ΕΡΓΑ ΝΟΜΟΥ — WORKS OF THE LAW

As earlier mentioned, much debate has centered on the phrase ἔργων νόμου or ἐξ ἔργων νόμου.²⁴ In this paper, I will however focus on the use of the term in this particular pericope and then interact with the ways it is used and interpreted in other biblical texts.

Gal. 3:2 as stated rhetorically asked the Galatians the question whether they have received the Spirit ἐξ ἔργων νόμου or ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως. While the theoretical answer to the question is believed by Paul and is known by the Galatians, the truth of the answer is negated in the practical living of the Galatians, and it is this case Paul is arguing for.

Verses 3 and 4 continue Paul's rhetorical argument. The Galatian Christians have begun by the Spirit, and Paul therefore wants to know why they are trying to complete the Christian life in

intends since they are located within the same epistle, but that is to isolate Paul's thought from the larger corpus of Pauline writings and the historical circumstances of the early church as described by the historian Luke in the book of Acts.

²³ Chrysostom, *NPNF*¹ 13:2. Calvin, *Commentary*, 81.

²⁴ See second part of footnote 3 above. I will use the Greek phrases instead of translating it for most of this paper since a proper interpretation and translation can only be achieved after proper exegesis of what the phrases mean, instead of using the ambiguous constructs 'works of law' and 'hearing of faith'.

the flesh, which is to make their suffering in vain.²⁵ The term “flesh” here denotes “the physical body as functioning entity.”²⁶ F.F. Bruce argues for taking the ‘flesh’ to be human nature in its unregenerate weakness.²⁷ Such an interpretation is however unwarranted as the dichotomy is not “flesh” as contrasted with ‘faithfulness’ (the human person in his regenerate strength from the Spirit), but ‘flesh’ contrasted with ‘Spirit’. Beginning by the Spirit is what the Galatians were doing when they have received the Spirit as mentioned in verses 2 and 5—it is being supplied and operated by the Spirit in and through their lives and to be ‘led by the Spirit’ (Gal. 5:18). Therefore, the opposite of being led by the Spirit is not to be unregenerate, but to live without the guidance and assistance of the Holy Spirit, which is to say to live by normal human functional capacity. It may be objected that unregenerate Man living apart from the Holy Spirit will indeed reflect fallen human nature, and certainly this is true, but such is a deduction dependent on the premise that Man is totally depraved, for a denial of the doctrine of Total Depravity implies that Man can will not to reflect fallen human nature if he chooses not to. Therefore, Bruce’s interpretation of σάρξ is one interpretive layer down from the meaning of the neutral term σάρξ, a term which is not necessarily negative.²⁸

The rhetorical question in verse 3 implies that the Christian life is not to merely begin with the Spirit and then transition to completing it by the flesh whether in part or the whole, but to be lived by being fully led by the Spirit from the beginning to the end. This has implications for our

²⁵ In verse 3, ἐναρξάμενοι as an aorist participle functions as a temporal adverbial participle. The terms ἐναρξάμενοι and ἐπιτελείσθε denote the starting and completion of Christian living (c.f. Phil. 1:6) (Bruce, *Epistle*, 150)

²⁶ σάρξ, in BDAG.

²⁷ Bruce, *Epistle*, 149

²⁸ For example, the use of σάρξ in Jn. 1:14 is most certainly not negative, for Christ did not become sinful in the Incarnation. One other advantage to not rendering it as “sinful nature” is to avoid giving the Neo-platonic notion that the only contrast is sinful humanity and sinless divinity, as if to be human is to be sinful.

interpretive task as we realize that verses 3 and 4 explicate out the dichotomy between ἔργα νόμου and ἀκοή πίστεως. In fact, the dichotomy between ‘beginning with the Spirit’ and ‘completing with the flesh’ seems to parallel the dichotomy between ἔργα νόμου and ἀκοή πίστεως, with implications for the meaning of both phrases.

In the Pauline corpus and indeed in all of Scripture, ἔργα νόμου or related phrases are found 9 times, all in either Romans or Galatians.²⁹ The phrase when used in the context of justification is always negative; no one can be justified through ‘the works of the law’ (Rom. 3:20; Gal. 2:16) and those ‘of the works of the law are under a curse’ (Gal. 3:10). Regardless of how one decides to interpret and translate the phrase ἔργων νόμου, it is clear that Paul does not think of ἔργων νόμου as a positive thing in the area of justification.

The parallel of the dichotomy in verse 2 with that of verse 3 links the idea of ‘beginning with the Spirit’ with ἀκοῆς πίστεως, and ‘completing with the flesh’ with ἔργων νόμου. This implies that ἔργων νόμου somehow is related to the idea of striving using some amount of human effort with or without the help of the Holy Spirit. Such striving is for the purpose of completing the Christian life in a sort of higher spirituality, which Paul argues is actually an undermining of the Gospel message (Gal. 5:1-2, 1:6-10). The interpretation of ἔργα νόμου as an objective genitive therefore fits best the idea of completing the Christian with reliance on the flesh. ἔργων νόμου is therefore interpreted as ‘works commanded by the Law and performed in obedience to the Law’.³⁰

²⁹ Rom. 2:15 (τὸ ἔργον τοῦ νόμου); 3:20, 28; Gal. 2:16 (3×); 3:2, 5, 10

³⁰ Moo, “Law”, 92. In his *WTJ* article, Moo looks at the way Paul uses the word νόμος and the genitive construct of ἔργον (work) with νόμου (law).

Opposing this traditional Protestant interpretation are those who want to take ἔργα νόμου as either a subjective genitive or an attributive genitive. Paul Owen in an article in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* attempts to mount a new defense of the reading of the phrase as a subjective genitive.³¹ The essence of his article is to show how taking it as a subjective genitive can make sense in the various verses where ἔργων νόμου is found. As it deals with the use of ἔργα νόμου in Gal. 3:2,5, Owen makes the claim that the passage is contrasting the effects of law and the effects of faith. Owen then extrapolates the contrast to be a contrast between the old age of the law whereby the Spirit is not given, to the new age of faith where the Spirit is given, even stating that the traditional interpretation of verse 5 (as taking ἔργων νόμου as an objective genitive) does not make sense and that Paul could have written differently if the traditional interpretation was the meaning he desired to convey.³²

Owen's proposal however is not plausible. First of all, to dismiss the traditional interpretation of verse 5 as not making sense is subjective and commits the *ipse dixit* logical fallacy. Secondly, whether a phrase or sentence by the Apostle Paul looks peculiar to Owen is inconsequential; the goal of exegesis is to interpret the text, not to comment on how the exegete could have written the text if the exegete was Paul.³³ Thirdly, it is a leap of reasoning to jump from saying that receiving the Spirit is not by the 'effects of Law' but by the 'effects of faith'

³¹ Owen, "Works"

³² *Ibid.*, 563-4

³³ This is not to say that unusual phrases, words and grammatical usages are not to be noted and struggled over the reasons behind the biblical authors' decisions to express themselves in this way. What is not right is attempting to make the biblical writers write Greek in a way that does not seem odd to the exegete if a certain meaning was intended to be conveyed. For example, Owen reasoned that if the traditional interpretation of verse 2 is correct, the sentences should have been written along the lines of 'Did you receive the Spirit by obeying the Law or by believing'. The traditional interpretation therefore, he argues, is probably not what Paul had in mind because Paul did not write the literal Greek equivalent of the line 'Did you receive the Spirit by obeying the Law or by believing'. (*Ibid.*, 564)

and then to turn the ‘effects’ into different epochs in history. The whole rhetorical rebuke by Paul in verse 3, which is ignored by Owen, is that the Galatian Christians are indeed attempting to complete the Christian life in the flesh; by their own human efforts. The two contrasting ways of living in verse 3 are both done at the same time, not separated into two different epochs with the effects only limited to each epoch.³⁴ Lastly, to read ‘law’ and ‘faith’ as two different epochs according to Owen seems to suggest that ‘law’ belongs only to the Old Testament era while ‘faith’ belongs only to the New Testament era. Such looks very much like a form of hyper-Dispensationalism and ignores passages such as Gal. 3:8 which speak of the Gospel being pre-proclaimed to Abraham, not to mention also that Abraham is said to be saved by faith (Gal. 3:6).³⁵

The other alternative of the attributive genitive is embraced by scholars such as James D. G. Dunn among others.³⁶ Dennis R. Lindsay expresses the attributive genitive of ἔργων νόμου as focusing on the “intrinsic nature of the works.”³⁷ In line with the idea of covenantal nomism, ἔργων νόμου is interpreted as the works defined by the Law as a reference point, or “what God expects of the people he has chosen as his own, the obligations which membership of God’s

³⁴ The idea of an eschatological inbreaking of the new age of ‘faith’ into the old age of ‘law’ is also held by Moisés Silva as narrated in Moisés Silva, *Interpreting Galatians, 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 1996, 2001), 176. That is legitimate biblical theologizing as long as one holds to the fact that the eschatological inbreaking reveals in fuller and more expansive detail what is already true in the old economy of law, which is that salvation has always been by grace through faith. It is not so much a retreat into the old economy of law of which the Galatians were in danger of, but of turning to the shadows when the new covenant reality has already arrived.

³⁵ On Dispensationalism, see John H. Gertsner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, 2nd Edition. (Lake Mary, Fla.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000)

³⁶ Dunn, “Works”, 529

³⁷ Dennis R. Lindsay, “Works of Law, Hearing of Faith and Πίστις Χριστοῦ in Galatians 2:16-3:5,” *Stone Campbell Journal* 3 (Spring 2000): 83

covenant people placed upon them.”³⁸ In this line of interpretation, the problem with the Galatian Christians was primarily sociological in nature, for example: were the Galatians receiving the Spirit by works characteristic of the Jewish covenant community, or by faith characteristic of the Gentile covenant community?

First of all, the New Perspective baggage associated with the attributive genitive does not come from the text but is read into it, and it is also not intrinsic to the argument for an attributive genitive. Dunn’s argument for his particular brand of the New Perspective for example depends on a certain sociological reading of the passage around Gal. 2:7 and the social context of that time, which hypothesized an unresolved conflict between Peter and Paul as being background information for why Paul came down so hard on the Judaizers. Such however is a questionable reading of the text.³⁹ The error in seeing Second Temple Judaism as being fundamentally gracious has also been ably refuted.⁴⁰

Secondly, the attributive genitive is ambiguous since it is neither objective nor subjective in nature, thus resulting in possible strange interpretations of Scripture. This can be seen in Lindsay’s application of the attributive genitive to the parallel phrase πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as

³⁸ Dunn, *Theology*, 77

³⁹ Dunn, *Theology*, 8-9, 13-15, 27-28. There is simply no need to explain Paul’s silence as to Peter’s response after being rebuked by Paul for his compromise in Gal. 2:14, as Peter not accepting Paul’s brotherly rebuke and creating a conflict of Jerusalem with Paul. Such is to commit the fallacy of arguing from silence. Similarly, trying to read too much into supposed demeaning language used by Paul in Galatians is arguing from silence and committing the logical fallacy of affirming the consequent.

⁴⁰ Dunn, *Theology*, 76. For refutation of the error, see D.A. Carson *et al.*, eds., *The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (vol. 1 of *Justification and Variegated Nomism*; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2004)

found in Gal. 2:16 which renders it a vague faith characterized by Christ.⁴¹ While this does not make it wrong, the fact that the attributive genitive makes what should be clear vague does not make it a viable option.

If ἔργων νόμου is interpreted as ‘works commanded by the Law and performed in obedience to the Law’, the next question to be asked is as to what ‘the Law’ refers to. The Law here refers to every law that Jews are meant to keep, as Gal. 3:10 with its citation of Deut. 27:26 shows.⁴² The medieval interpreter Haimo of Auxerre therefore is in error at this point, especially since the Jews do not know of any three-fold division of the Law. Rather, all and every law-keeping that is done has nothing to do with the reality of receiving of the Spirit as described in Gal. 3:2,5.

ΑΚΟΗ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ — THE HEARING OF FAITH

The ambiguous phrase ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως is placed in contrast to ἐξ ἔργων νόμου in Gal. 3:2,5. The parallel of this dichotomy with the one in verse 3 links ἀκοή πίστεως with ‘beginning with the Spirit’. ἀκοή πίστεως therefore is an action that is consistent with a life led by the Spirit who is supplied and operates mightily in believers.

The importance of knowing the use of the genitive in ἔργα νόμου is due to the parallel it is to the ambiguous phrase ἀκοή πίστεως. The phrase literally translated “hearing of faith” is more ambiguous in meaning than ἔργων νόμου. As Richard Hays mentions,⁴³

⁴¹ Lindsay, “Works of Law,” 86-7. One wonders if the interpretation that this refers to Christ having faith, as opposed to being faithful, can be ruled out if one adopts the attributive genitive here.

⁴² Gal. 3:10 quotes Deut. 27:26 while substituting the phrase τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ νόμου in the LXX, or in the Hebrew תְּבַרְכֶּנּוּ בְּכָל־הַדְּבָרִים אֲשֶׁר־כָּתוּבִים בְּסֵפֶר־הַבְּרִית (BHS), with τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου. The difference is probably due to the fact that the Israelites were verbally proclaiming this curse, while the curse was written down in the Book of the Law at Paul’s time.

⁴³ Hays, “Jesus’ faith,” 5

... both nouns in this extremely condensed phrase are ambiguous. *Akoē* can mean either the act of hearing or that which is heard (= report, message). *Pistis* can mean either the act of believing or that which is believed (= “the faith”)

The meaning of the phrase ἀκοή πίστεως can therefore have at least the following meanings: ‘hearing with faith’, ‘the hearing that is characteristic of faith’, ‘hearing the faith’, ‘believing what comes from hearing’ or ‘the message of faith’.⁴⁴ Compounded with the ambiguity of the phrase is the fact that it only occurs two times in the entire Scripture—Gal. 3:2 and 3:5. There is therefore no way to check its usage in other parts of the Pauline corpus or the entire Scriptures as a whole.

The closest parallel passage that mentions both of the two concepts ἀκοή and πίστις as related to each other is Rom. 10:16-17, which we shall look at soon. In the immediate context of our pericope, as we have inferred that ἔργα νόμου is an objective genitive, we should understand the parallel construct ἀκοή πίστεως as an objective genitive as well. This would therefore mean that the phrase would be translated either as ‘hearing that results in believing’ or ‘hearing the content of the faith’, depending on whether πίστεως is to be interpreted as being active or passive.⁴⁵ In-Gyu Hong in an article argued for the former, as the linkage in the very next verse καθὼς links our pericope to the next one. The fact that the verb ἐπίστευσεν in verse 6 denotes the active activity of believing is strong evidence to take πίστεως as being active, and therefore the

⁴⁴ The first interpretation is the one taken by ESV, NASB. See also Thomas, *Study*, 67. The first interpretation is probably an inference from the second interpretation, which is an alternative put forward by Silva, in Carson *et al*, *Justification 2*, 236. The third interpretation is put forward by Richard Hays, in Hays, “Jesus’ faith,” 5. The fourth interpretation is embraced by the NRSV, NIV1984, the NIV2011, NLT, and it is also the main interpretation put forward by Moisés Silva in Silva, in Carson *et al*, *Justification 2*, 236. For the last interpretation, see for example Bruce, *Epistle*, 149; Dunn, *Theology*, 54.

⁴⁵ If we hold to the parallelism, ἀκοή must be active as ἔργα is active.

phrase is best taken to mean ‘hearing that leads to believing’.⁴⁶ That is consistent with the more vague alternate interpretation given by Silva, which as the broad category of an attributive genitive can cover this interpretation.

What then should we make of the argument for interpreting ἀκοή in the passive sense? Is the argument (or arguments) valid?

The argument for taking ἀκοή to be the passive form of ‘report’ or ‘message’ comes from its use in Rom. 10:16 with Paul citing Is. 53:1 in the Septuagint, which in the Hebrew (הַשְׁמִיעַ) has the main meaning of ‘report’.⁴⁷ Verse 17 then seems to continue by using the same word ἀκοή as stating that faith comes ἐξ ἀκοῆς. The argument is then made that Rom. 10:17 has in mind ἀκοή as report, and therefore ἀκοή in ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως must be similarly passive. To confirm this interpretation, F.F. Bruce writes that ἀκοή was used to denote the content of what is heard in classical and later Greek, “as well as the faculty, organ or act of hearing.”⁴⁸

To this, it must be maintained that just because ἀκοή can denote the content of what is heard does not mean that it must be so. It is also by no means clear that there is no change in form between Rom. 10:16 and 17. As Hong states,⁴⁹

... the inferential participle appearing in the beginning of v. 17 does not connect v. 17 with v. 16 but with vv. 14-15 which mainly say that believing depends on *hearing* which in turn depends upon preaching.

⁴⁶ On the interpretation of the genitive πίστεως, see In-Gyu Hong, “Does Paul misrepresent the Jewish Law? Law and Covenant in Gal. 3:1-14,” *Novum Testamentum XXXVI*, 2 (1994): 171

⁴⁷ הַשְׁמִיעַ, in BDB

⁴⁸ Bruce, *Epistle*, 149. Cf. *WBC* 41, 103 which states as follows:

“But ἀκοή was also used in classical and Koine Greek to denote “the content of what is heard” (cf. Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.20.1, passim).”

⁴⁹ Hong, “Misrepresent,” 171

Furthermore, as Sam Williams has argued, the word ἀκοή “never, in its various uses, loses the nuance of a ‘passive’ noun,” such that it always has as its primary sense “things heard.”⁵⁰

Paul in Rom. 10:17 is therefore

... playing upon “the double sense of ἀκοή (what is hear/hearing) as he moves from the meaning of the term in the Isaiah quotation (‘what was heard’) to the meaning he wishes to highlight (‘hearing’)⁵¹

Lindsay on the other hand goes at it from a different angle. He states that there is a significant parallel of ἀκοή πίστεως to υπακοή πίστεως, and the latter phrase cannot be either an objective or a subjective genitive.⁵² This argument however is not valid, for just because the root of ἀκοή and υπακοή is the same does not mean that they have the same meaning and the same use in construct. Similarly, it cannot be merely asserted that “obeying the Gospel” (ὕπηκουσαν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ) in Rom. 10:16 has the same meaning as “obedience of faith” (ὕπακοή πίστεως) in passages like Rom. 1:5. That Rom. 10: 18 does say that the Jews did indeed hear but did not believe does not mean that the difference lies in that one was an obedient hearing while the other was not, as that commits the logical fallacy of begging the question or circular argumentation. It could be counter-argued, that the ‘hearing of faith’ is a spiritual hearing, which is contrasted with the normal physical act of hearing in Rom. 10:18.

Along a theological trajectory, Hays argues for the passive understanding of ἀκοή as ‘message’ because he takes the contrast of ἔργα νόμου and ἀκοή πίστεως as being “not between two modes of human activity (works/believing) but between human activity (works) and God’s

⁵⁰ Sam K. Williams, “The Hearing of Faith — ΑΚΟΗ ΠΙΣΤΕΩΣ in Galatians 3,” *New Test. Stud.* Vol. 35 (1989): 84.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 85. On page 93, Williams clarifies what he means by the usage of hearing in that it is “both passive and active — ‘passive’ in that it is the accepting of a word that comes from beyond the self, but ‘active’ in that this accepting is at the same time an alert engagement, an energetic commitment to the God who is proclaimed.”

⁵² Lindsay, “Works of Law,” 85.

activity (the proclaimed message).”⁵³ But this is to assume that taking ἀκοή as being active must imply that such hearing is a human activity. As I will argue, ἀκοή is both active (describing a human work) and yet it describes God’s activity at the same time.

The phrase ἀκοῆ πίστεως therefore should be interpreted as an objective genitive of two active nouns — ‘hearing leading to believing’, as Rom. 10:17 makes clear.⁵⁴ Such a logical ordering does not necessitate chronological distance between the two actions or events, but merely states what is logically prior to the other.⁵⁵

An objection to the argument from parallelism to which Williams replied was that “the parallelism between the two phrases [ἔργα νόμου and ἀκοή πίστεως] is not exact, for ‘works’ do not stand in the same relation to ‘Law’ as does ‘hearing’ to ‘faith’.”⁵⁶ Williams countered that they are parallel in at least one respect, which is “they both name human responses to a divine initiative.”⁵⁷ Williams is correct in his response in that both are human acts that are done in light of divine initiative, but their relation to the divine initiative as being that of ‘response’ will be disputed below.

Having looked at the overview of the pericope and at the three main phrases within it, let us consider the text in its implication for theology.

JUSTIFICATION AND SANCTIFICATION

In light of the meaning of the following three phrases, we can construe the flow of the pericope as follows:

⁵³ Hays, “Jesus’ faith,” 5

⁵⁴ Thus ἀκοῆς πίστεως is equivalent to ἀκοῆς εἰς πιστεύειν. Cf. Rom. 10:17: “ἡ πίστις ἐξ ἀκοῆς”

⁵⁵ Williams argued for the rendering of ἀκοή πίστεως as “that ‘hearing’ which Christians call faith.” (Williams, “Hearing,” 90). While the two are in some sense equative, Rom. 10:17 does posit the two in a logical relation whereby ἀκοή precedes πίστις.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 86

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

Paul rebuked the Galatians for their foolishness. In order to shock them from their seeming enchantment by the Judaizers, he beseeched them to reflect on their own conversion experience. Were the Galatians converted or having received the Holy Spirit by doing works that are commanded by the Law, or by the divine gifts in the human act of hearing that creates their act of believing in the Gospel message? The answer to this rhetorical question would be glaringly obvious to the Galatian Christians, who when they were yet Gentile believers did not know or follow the Mosaic Law. Continuing in this line of thought, Paul hammered in the point by making the contrast explicit in verse 3, by asking them why if they had begun with the Spirit, they would now desire to complete their faith in the flesh, which is to say by adding human effort to the complete work of salvation in Christ. Verse 4 calls upon the Galatians to reflect upon their suffering and ask them if they had suffered such in vain, for if they had become circumcised and became Jewish proselytes, they would have suffered less. Verse 5 repeats verse 2 and once again call upon the Galatian believers to reflect whether the works of the Spirit within them came about because of their striving to do the works of the Law, or because of their conversion to Christ by faith.

The whole focus of Paul's rhetoric with regards to salvation and Christian living is very clear. Christianity is based upon the Spirit being given to believers. Such is a monergistic act by God not in any part by Man. The contrast here is between monergism and synergism; between 'hearing of faith' and 'works of the Law'. To attempt the 'works of the Law' is therefore to add to the finished work of Christ; it is to say that Christ is not enough, the Cross is not sufficient to save.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ Hong, "Misrepresent." As Hong shows, in Paul's view the law is not the Jewish path to salvation but is rather the obligation of the Sinai Covenant. The problem with Hong's argument

Such may merit some concern: If salvation and the Christian life is all of God, then are Man responsible and are they to do anything in salvation and Christian living? After all, we have argued that ἀκοή is indeed active, which would necessitate it being a human act.⁵⁹ The key to this lies in differentiating between human action, and divine initiative and empowerment. Just as Phil. 2:12-13 states, we are to work out our salvation because God is the one who is at work in us, so likewise in the ‘hearing of faith’, God initiates His work of salvation through granting the gift of the ‘hearing of faith’ to us who believe, such that we exercise this gift of God as a human act in the process towards our believing and our salvation. God initiates, God gives, God empowers, and we act in accordance with it.⁶⁰

It is with this in mind that Williams is in error in describing the ‘hearing of faith’ as a human response.⁶¹ Believers do not ‘respond’ to God, unless we desire to describe the divine work in Man as a ‘response’. Believers whom God works in do not have ‘free will’ to not ‘respond’. Rather, it is a ‘natural’ act of which we willingly do in accordance with our new reality as regenerate children of God.

Theologically, what Paul is arguing for in Gal. 3:1-5 is that justification and sanctification are both monergistic with respects to God’s initiative and empowerment. Just as the Galatian believers cannot make themselves the recipients of the Spirit, they should not think to improve

from this fact is that legalism does not come only when one explicitly thinks one is saved by obeying the Law. The whole argument of Gal. 3:3 is that beginning with the Spirit and then viewing the Law as a means to stay inside the covenant (‘completing with the flesh’) is the errant view of the Judaizers Paul argued against and is also legalism, just of a different variety.

⁵⁹ C.f. Silva, in Carson *et al.*, *Justification 2*, 235

⁶⁰ Sanctification is thus monergistic in terms of its initiative and empowerment, yet synergistic in terms of agency. We are to be actively engaged in sanctification, but doing so only because God is at work in us. Cf. Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith*, 2nd Ed. (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 778-9

⁶¹ Williams, “Hearing,” 86

their spirituality through any work and especially by the works of the Law.⁶² The Galatian believers were being led to believe that justification by faith through the Spirit is fine, while they must complete their Christian life with the flesh.⁶³ Paul sees that view of justification by faith and justification/sanctification by works as an undermining of the doctrine of justification by faith itself.⁶⁴ In order for justification to be only by grace through faith, human works have to be rejected *in toto*. In justification, this means that human acts (of repentance and believing) are the means by which God works out his salvation but they are never contributing to salvation merely evidential of God's working. In sanctification, this means that human works are to be done by the Spirit's empowerment according to His will and not according to our own strength, as we in growing in godliness and doing good works do so because of our being led by the Spirit. Such good works and godliness are likewise evidential never indicative of salvation or spirituality.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this pericope teaches that salvation is wholly of God. Paul argues against any works especially in doing the works of the Law which seeks to supplement the Spirit's work in conversion, and thus argues against the placing of works for sanctification in a higher-life manner which undermines the reality of justification by grace through faith alone. This salvation is wrought about in believers through the operation of the Spirit in the instrument of hearing

⁶² The Mosaic Law as given by God is holy (Rom. 7:12) and is meant to describe how God's people should live. If works done according to God's holy, righteous and good law cannot merit salvation, then we should not think that any of our works done according to either God's moral law or any other laws can merit salvation.

⁶³ This is precisely Sanders's definition of "salvation is by grace but according to works; works are the condition of remaining 'in', but they do not earn salvation." (Sanders, *Palestinian*, 543). The New Perspective's definition of the Jewish faith and "Paul's gospel" is in fact the Judaizers' false gospel.

⁶⁴ Cf. "To require circumcision and the law as supplements to faith renders faith on its own insufficient" (Hong, "Misrepresent," 182)

creating faith in the believer, and our growth and sanctification in Christ is to be done by being led by the Spirit.

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