

THE SPIRIT,
ETHICS, AND
ETERNAL LIFE



PAUL'S VISION FOR
THE CHRISTIAN
LIFE IN GALATIANS

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INTRODUCTION

THESIS, ARGUMENTS,
AND CONTRIBUTION

IN W. D. DAVIES'S FAMOUS MONOGRAPH on Paul's theology, Paul and Rabbinic Judaism, he boldly states, "No interpretation of Paul's doctrine of the Spirit can be accepted which does not regard it as integral to the whole of his thought."¹ Not every Pauline scholar agrees with Davies's statement, as many scholars focus their work on justification, union with Christ, or on another important part of Paul's soteriology.² However, the enormous history of scholarship on the Spirit in Paul shows many concur the Spirit is important to his theology.³ The Spirit's

¹W. D. Davies, *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism: Some Rabbinic Elements in Pauline Theology*, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 202.

²For example, see the numerous Pauline theologies that argue for a different center of Paul's theological thought besides the Spirit.

³Gordon Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2011) argues the Spirit is central to Paul's theology. I say more about this in the history of research below. For a few additional examples of the scholarship on the Spirit in Paul's theology, see bibliographies cited in Fee and in Hermann Gunkel, *The Influence of the Holy Spirit: The Popular View of the Apostolic Age and the Teaching of the Apostle Paul* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2008); originally published in German as *Die Wirkungen des heiligen Geistes nach der populären Anschauungen der apostolischen Zeit und der Lehre des Apostels Paulus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1888); David John Lull, *The Spirit in Galatians: Paul's Interpretation of Pneuma as Divine Power*, SBLDS 49 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1980); John Yates, *The Spirit and Creation in Paul*, WUNT 2:251 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Volker Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul: Transformation and Empowering for Religious-Ethical Life*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014); Rodrigo J. Morales, *The Spirit and the Restoration of Israel: New Creation and New Exodus Motifs in Galatians*, WUNT 282 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010); C. C. Lee, *The Blessing of Abraham, the Spirit, and Justification in Galatians: Their Relationship and Significance for Understanding Paul's Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013). See also the citations, appendix, and bibliography in Rabens, *The Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*. I use the shorthand *Spirit* throughout the book to refer to the Holy Spirit.

significance in Paul's theology in Galatians is evident by the numerous times he refers to the Spirit and to the important theological concepts he connects to the Spirit in the central section of the letter in Galatians 3:1–6:10.⁴ As the title of my book suggests, my monograph focuses on only one aspect of the Spirit in Paul's letter to the Galatians: namely, the relationship between the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life.⁵

Paul explicitly mentions the Spirit numerous times in Galatians (Gal 3:2-3, 5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:5, 16-18, 22, 25; 6:1, 8, 18).⁶ In Galatians 3:2-3 and 3:5, Paul reminds the Galatians with a series of questions that they received the Spirit by faith and not by works of law. In Galatians 3:13-14, he states Jesus died so that they would receive the Spirit, which he also identifies as the blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:14). In Galatians 4:4-6, he says Jesus was born into the world as a Jewish man under the law to redeem those under the law and to give them adoption into God's family as sons. The result is that God sent forth Jesus' Spirit into the hearts of those adopted as sons attesting to the fact that God is now their Father.

In Galatians 5:16, Paul commands the Galatians to "walk in the Spirit." In Galatians 5:16-26, he argues the Galatians must walk in the Spirit to

⁴E.g., Jesus' representative and substitutionary death (Gal 3:13-14); Jesus' death, the Spirit, and sonship (Gal 4:6); the Spirit and justification (Gal 5:5); walking in the Spirit and eternal life (Gal 5:16, 18, 21; 6:8-9). Paul often refers to the Holy Spirit in his letters: Rom 1:4, 9; 2:29; 5:5; 7:6; 8:2, 4-6, 9-11, 13-16, 23, 26-27; 9:1; 11:8; 12:11; 14:17; 15:13, 16, 19, 30; 1 Cor 2:4, 10-14; 3:16; 4:21; 5:3-5; 6:11, 17, 19; 7:34, 40; 12:3-4, 7-11, 13; 14:2, 12, 14-16, 32; 15:45; 16:18; 2 Cor 1:22; 2:13; 3:3, 6, 8, 17-18; 4:13; 5:5; 6:6; 7:1, 13; 11:4; 12:18; 13:13; Gal 3:2-3, 5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:5, 16-18, 22, 25; 6:1, 8, 18; Eph 1:13, 17; 2:2, 18, 22; 3:5, 16; 4:3-4, 23, 30; 5:18; 6:17-18; Phil 1:19, 27; 2:1; 3:3; 4:23; Col 1:8; 2:5; 1 Thess 1:5-6; 4:8; 5:19, 23; 2 Thess 2:2, 8, 13; 1 Tim 3:16-4:1; 2 Tim 1:7, 14; 4:22; Titus 3:5.

⁵My book primarily focuses on Galatians, but Richard Hays was correct years ago when he said, "Of all the New Testament writers, Paul offers the most extensive and explicit wrestling with ethical issues." Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 14.

⁶He also discusses multiple theological concepts related to the Spirit in the letter without using the term Spirit (e.g., the revelation of Christ "in" Paul [Gal 1:15-16], justification by faith [Gal 2:16-17; 3:11; 5:5], walking in the truth of the gospel [Gal 2:14], co-crucifixion with Christ [Gal 2:19], living by faith in the Son of God [Gal 2:20; 3:6-9], not nullifying Jesus' death [Gal 2:21], eternal life [Gal 2:20; 3:12, 21], seed of Abraham, heirs of the promise, children of the free woman [Gal 3:29; 4:7; 4:21-31; 5:1], enslavement to love one another [Gal 5:13], doing good toward all [Gal 6:10], boasting in the cross [Gal 6:14], the recognition that neither social boundaries nor ethnic marks of distinction determine status among the people of God [Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15], and new creation [Gal 6:15]).

inherit the kingdom of God. In Galatians 5:18, he mentions being led by the Spirit. In Galatians 5:25, he refers to receiving life by the Spirit and conducting one's daily life by the Spirit. In Galatians 6:8-9, he states the Galatians must sow in the Spirit to inherit eternal life. Each of these statements suggests the Galatians *can* and *must* walk in step with the Spirit to inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life because of God's saving action *in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world* (Gal 3:2-14; cf. 1:4). The Galatians' walk in the Spirit, that is, their ethical transformation, proves they have already begun to participate in eternal life now in this present evil age in anticipation of their inheritance of the kingdom of God in the age to come *because of God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world* (Gal 1:1, 4; 3:1-6:15). Furthermore, Paul suggests the Galatians' obedient walk in the Spirit is also *necessary to, while not the foundation upon which* they would inherit the kingdom of God and reap eternal life because of God's work in them to give them eternal life so that they would walk in the Spirit. That is, they received eternal life only by faith in Christ by the Spirit apart from works of the law, and they must walk in the Spirit so that they would inherit the kingdom of God because they received life in Christ by faith by means of the Spirit (Gal 5:5, 25). Their transformed, God-given ability to conduct themselves in obedience by the Spirit was part of God's saving action in Christ and provided the proof that God in Christ has given them life by the Spirit by faith in Christ alone (Gal 3:14; 4:5-6; 5:16-26; 6:8-9).

The "other" gospel of the opponents in Galatia, which focused not on God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles but on the human action of obedience to the law, would cause the Galatians to remain enslaved under the law's curse and to the present evil age; would only lead the Galatians to an eschatological anathema; and would cause them to return again to a life of idolatry (Gal 1:8-9; 4:8-31). Subscribing to works of the law would have never granted them freedom from the law's slavery under the power of sin to walk in obedience and freedom in the power of the Spirit as the liberated ones commanded now to love one another as themselves. To the contrary, the opponents nullified God's saving

action in Christ, part of which is the distribution of the liberating Spirit into the hearts of those who have been justified by faith (Gal 1:8-9; 2:21; 3:1-14; 4:5-6; 6:8). However, Paul's gospel focuses on God's saving action in the crucified and resurrected Christ alone. One very important aspect of his gospel message to the Galatians was the work of the Spirit in their midst to free them from bondage to sin and the cosmic forces of evil, and to lead them to life now and in the age to come (Gal 1:4; 3:1-5:26).

**THESIS: THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF
GOD'S SAVING ACTION IN CHRIST**

My thesis is twofold: first, Paul describes God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world in Galatians as vertical (justification by faith [Gal 2:16]), horizontal (love one another [Gal 2:11-14; 5:14-6:10]), and cosmic ("deliverance from the present evil age"; [Gal 1:4]); deliverance from the elementary principles of the world (Gal 4:3-11); and new creation (Gal 6:15). Second, God's vertical, horizontal, and cosmic saving action in Christ is *the* reason Paul commands the Galatians to walk in the Spirit, the reason they *can* walk in the Spirit, the reason they have life in the Spirit, and the reason they *must* walk in the Spirit to participate in eternal life now in the present evil age and to inherit the kingdom of God in the age to come.

To support my thesis, I offer the following six arguments. First, God revealed in Paul that Jesus is the good news to be preached "among the Gentiles" (Gal 1:15-16). God's revelation of his Son in Paul was both a visual and audible revelation (cf. Acts 9:1-22; 22:6-21). The Spirit was active in Paul through this revelation about the exalted Christ, compelling and convincing him by his indwelling presence and power in Paul that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:1-22; 22:6-21). Paul's remarks about God sending his Son in the fullness of time to redeem us and to make us adopted members into his family supports this point about Paul's experience of the Spirit on the Damascus Road and after Ananias laid hands on him (Gal 4:4-6; cf. 1:15-16; Acts 9:1-22; 22:6-21). Prior to Damascus, Paul vigorously persecuted the church of

God (cf. Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:1-22; Gal 1:13-14). After God revealed the Son to Paul on the Damascus Road, he immediately preached that Jesus is the Son of God (Gal 1:15–2:10; cf. Acts 9:1-22).

God's sending of his Son to redeem those under the curse of the law resulted in God sending forth the "Spirit of his Son" to dwell "in our hearts" (Gal 4:6).⁷ God's revelation of his Son in Paul was a revelation that indwelt him (filled) (Gal 1:15-16; cf. 3:2-3, 14; 4:6), enabled (helped) him (Gal 2:19), energized (created life in) him (Gal 2:20),⁸ transformed him (Gal 1:15-23), and empowered (strengthened) him (Gal 2:8-9) to live in obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ and to be faithful to his mission as an apostle to the Gentiles (Gal 3:14; 4:6; cf. 1:15-16). Paul realized that by this revelation of Christ in him by the Spirit, God's saving action in Christ was the moment when God invaded the present evil age to inaugurate new creation in Christ, and the moment he became crucified to the world (= to the present evil age), and the world to him (Gal 1:15-16; 2:19-20; 6:15).

Second, through Christ's death and resurrection (Gal 1:1, 4), God delivers Jewish and Gentile sinners "from the present evil age" and "from the curse of the law" by faith (Gal 1:1, 4; 3:13). Paul explicitly refers to Jesus' resurrection only once in the letter in Galatians 1:1. Each time, however, he refers to the cross in the letter, he assumes the resurrection. Because Jesus is alive, God gives life through Christ, not by the law (cf. Gal 3:21). Paul states Jesus' death delivers us "from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4), redeems "us from the curse of the law" (Gal 3:13), distributes the Spirit to Jews and Gentiles who have faith in Christ (Gal 3:1-5, 14), and gives life (Gal 3:21; 5:25) to Jews and Gentiles by faith (Gal 3:2-5, 14). Paul fronts the letter with a reference to Jesus' resurrection (Gal 1:1), and he accentuates "God revealed his Son in me" so that he would preach Jesus as good news among the

⁷Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of New Testament texts are mine.

⁸I borrow the language of "energism" from John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 441-42. I apply it to the work of the Spirit in believers. This energizing work of the Spirit in believers is grounded in God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the cosmos.

Gentiles (Gal 1:1, 15-16). This revelation of Christ in Paul refers to both Jesus' resurrection and exaltation (cf. Acts 9:1-22).

In Galatians, Paul highlights the cross and resurrection as the moment God acted in Christ to deliver Jewish and Gentile sinners and the cosmos from slavery to the present evil age (Gal 1:1, 4, 15, 19-20; 3:15-4:11). Paul frames the letter with references to the cross (Gal 1:4; 6:17). He either directly or indirectly refers to the cross multiple times throughout the letter.⁹ He refers to the cross by mentioning Jesus' death (Gal 1:4; 2:20-21), his act of redemption (Gal 3:13; 4:5), his cross or the crucifixion (Gal 3:1, 13; 5:11; 6:12, 14), his co-crucifixion with Christ (Gal 2:19), humans crucifying the sinful passions of the flesh (Gal 5:24), or the marks of Jesus in his own body (Gal 6:17).

Third, Paul states that Jesus died on the cross to "deliver us from the present evil age" and to "redeem us from the law's curse," with the result that we receive the Abrahamic blessing of the Spirit by faith (Gal 3:13-14). God's saving action for Jews and Gentiles through Christ's death and the Galatians' experience of this salvation by faith in Christ alone was also the moment when the Galatians were adopted into God's family as sons in salvation history (Gal 4:5). God "sent the Spirit of his Son" into the hearts of Christ-following Jews and Gentiles (Gal 4:6). His Son's Spirit cries out to God as Father on behalf of those whom the Son has redeemed (Gal 4:6). The Spirit's work in them through Christ's redemption for them proves Jews and Gentiles, once enslaved to the law and to the present evil age (Gal 3:15-4:11), are now free sons and heirs of Abraham's inheritance through God (Gal 4:7-5:1, 13). The Spirit's work in Jews and Gentiles through Christ, then, proves God's deliverance of the entire creation has now broken into this present evil age in Christ (Gal 3:13-14). The distribution of the Spirit to Jews and Gentiles, who are justified by faith alone in Christ alone and who attest to their justification by faith by walking in the Spirit, proves they have received the blessing of

⁹For my brief discussion of the cross and the Spirit in Galatians, see Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 4-7; *Christ Redeemed "Us" from the Curse of the Law: A Jewish Martyrological Reading of Galatians 3.13*, LNTS 524 (New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 2-3.

Abraham, which is the Spirit (Gal 2:16; 3:6-14; 5:2-5).¹⁰ Those who walk in the Spirit are signposts that God's saving action in Christ has begun now to renew the cosmos in this present evil age (Gal 6:15).

Fourth, the Spirit indwells (fills) (cf. Gal 3:2, 5, 14; 4:6), transforms (Gal 3:3), energizes (creates/gives life) (Gal 3:21; 5:25; 6:8; cf. 6:15), and enables, empowers, strengthens, and helps (Gal 5:5, 18, 22, 25; 6:1) Christ-following Jews and Gentiles in the assemblies of Galatia to walk in the Spirit and to live contrary to the flesh and the present evil age. Through Christ's redemption of the Galatians from the curse of the law by his death and resurrection (Gal 1:1, 4; 3:13-14), the Spirit frees the Galatians to choose actively to live by the Spirit in the present evil age (Gal 5:1, 16-26) as he gives them the fruit of the Spirit upon their participation in Christ by faith (Gal 5:22). As a result, those in Christ by the power of the Spirit triumphantly (not perfectly!) oppose the flesh and the present evil age as they walk in step with the Spirit, even while living in the present evil age (Gal 5:16-26). Because of God's saving action in Christ, the Galatians had already both conquered the flesh's power and the present evil age (Gal 1:1, 4, 15-16; 2:11-6:10), and they had already begun to participate in the renewal of creation and the hope of righteousness (Gal 5:5; 6:15).

Fifth, those in Christ have the Spirit living in them by faith (Gal 3:2-14; 4:5-7). They can and must walk in step with the Spirit to inherit eternal life (Gal 5:21) because God has definitively acted in Christ "to deliver us" and the cosmos from the present evil age (Gal 1:4; 6:15) so that we would participate in eternal life now by faith in Christ in this present evil age and in the age to come (Gal 2:16-3:29). The age to come has already broken into the present evil age by the indwelling presence and power of the Spirit (Gal 1:4; 3:14; 4:5-6; 5:16-26). The evidence of the breaking-in of the age to come now is those who participate in Christ in faith by walking in the Spirit, and they prove by their obedience that God in Christ has already begun the process of cosmic renewal (Gal 3:1-6:15).

¹⁰I argue for this reading of the genitive in the exegetical sections.

Those in Christ must walk in the Spirit to inherit eternal life, because walking in the Spirit is a manifestation of the life God has already given to all who are justified by faith in Christ and who await the “hope of righteousness by faith by the Spirit” (Gal 2:16–3:14; 5:5–6:10). The future certainty of eternal life is realized and manifested now in part through Jewish and Gentile Christ followers as they walk a path of obedience in the power of the Spirit in community with one another in the assemblies of Christ and in their daily rhythms in society because of the freedom they have in Christ by faith in the power of the Spirit (Gal 5:13–6:10).

Sixth, Paul warns the Galatians their failure to walk in the Spirit in obedience to the gospel would result in their falling short of inheriting the kingdom of God and eternal life (Gal 5:16, 21; 6:8-10). He asserts we await future righteousness (= justification) by faith “by the Spirit” (Gal 5:6). On the contrary, those who walk in accordance with circumcised flesh and the Mosaic covenant will not benefit from Christ’s death in the judgment, will sever themselves from Christ, will obligate themselves to keep the entire law to gain life, will subject themselves to an apostolic curse and to the curse of the law, and will not inherit eternal life (Gal 1:8-9; 3:10; 5:2-5; 6:8-9). In Paul’s view in Galatians, Christ-following Jews and Gentiles can, must, and will walk in freedom as slaves of love toward one another in obedience to the gospel in the power of the Spirit because of God’s saving action *for* and *in* them through Christ and because of his liberation of creation from the present evil age. Thus, their walk of obedience in the power of the Spirit is the proof of God’s saving action for them and for the cosmos through Christ and is necessary for those justified by faith alone in Christ alone to inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21).

To be clear, according to Paul, the Galatians’ obedience to the gospel in step with the Spirit is neither the fundamental *ground* of their inheritance of the kingdom of God and eternal life nor the *result* of their inheritance of the kingdom of God or eternal life. Both of these preceding ideas are contrary to Paul’s argument and to his soteriology in

Galatians.¹¹ Rather, because of God's vertical, horizontal, and cosmic saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world through Christ, an obedient walk in the power of the Spirit is both the *necessary proof* that Jews and Gentiles have already begun to participate now in eternal life and necessary for anyone who participates in Christ in faith to inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life (Gal 5:21; 6:8-10). Walking in the Spirit is evidence of eternal life to be received by faith by the Spirit, and life in the Spirit is one aspect of God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles in Galatians (Gal 3:13-14; 4:5-6; 5:16-6:10), for God's saving action in Christ in Galatians is vertical, horizontal, and cosmic.

The Galatians' walk of obedience in the Spirit is one expression of the eternal life Jews and Gentiles receive by faith alone in Christ alone because of God's saving action in Christ. Jesus died for their sins to deliver them from the present evil age (Gal 1:4) and to give them the Spirit by faith, which is the blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:13-14; 4:6). Because of God's saving action in Christ, those with faith in Christ experience eternal life by the Spirit: in Galatians 5:25, Paul says "since we have life by the Spirit, let us conduct our daily lives by the Spirit." Consequently, the Galatians can, must, and will walk in the Spirit so that they will inherit the kingdom of God in the age to come. They can, must, and will sow in the Spirit so that they will reap eternal life (Gal 6:8-9). They already received eternal life in this present evil age by faith alone in Christ alone, and God in Christ had already given them life by faith by the Spirit. Jesus died to deliver them from the present evil age and to give them the Spirit by faith (Gal 1:4; 3:13-14; 4:5-6).

CONTRIBUTION

As the history of research will show, scholars have written much on the Spirit in Paul's theology. However, critical scholars have wrongly

¹¹For a similar point, see Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 226. I cite the 2009 6th edition in this monograph. However, I nuance some things differently from Furnish in my discussion of the Spirit, ethical transformation, and eternal life. Furnish's comment occurs in a discussion of the indicative and the imperative in Paul's theology, not in a discussion about the Spirit.

drawn a hard and fast distinction between Paul's ethics and theology. For example, Martin Dibelius claimed in the 1960s the New Testament authors (and more specifically Paul in Gal 5–6 and Rom 12–15) created their ethical parenesis piecemeal by reproducing the moral instruction present within the general Hellenistic society in which they lived. Paul's ethical exhortations, so the argument goes, were not connected to his gospel.¹² In his famous Galatians commentary, H. D. Betz asserted Galatians 5:1–6:10 is not a uniquely Pauline Christian ethic, but Paul's ethics are simply his reflections on and conformity to the ethics of his Hellenistic contemporaries.¹³

My analysis of the relevant texts in Galatians, the concepts related to the Spirit; personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Galatians; and my analysis of selected Jewish texts will argue that Paul's ethical exhortations in Galatians are grounded in and are part of his message of God's saving action in Christ for Jews, Gentiles, and the world. A specific point I make throughout the book is that Paul's ethics are part of his soteriology in Galatians.¹⁴ That is, God's salvation in Christ includes ethical transformation by faith and by the power of the Spirit.

With other scholars, I agree that the term *soteriology* has its limitations in New Testament studies when considering ancient texts, because the term is a modern Christian theological creation. Paul's soteriology is also complex in both Christian and Jewish New Testament scholarship. In this monograph, however, I use the term to refer to God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world. Indeed, my efforts to highlight the soteriological nature of Paul's ethics in Galatians is one of my contributions in this monograph.

¹²For example, see Martin Dibelius and Heinrich Greeven, *James*, trans. Michael A. Williams, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 5. Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 17, pointed me to this observation.

¹³H. D. Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 292. Original citation in Hays, *Moral Vision of the New Testament*, 17.

¹⁴For a collection of essays on soteriology in selected texts in Second Temple Judaism, see Daniel M. Gurtner, ed., *This World and the World to Come: Soteriology in Early Judaism*, LSTS (New York: Bloomsbury, 2011).

According to Volker Rabens, Kurt Stalder is the primary scholar who focused an entire monograph on the Spirit and ethics in Paul's theology.¹⁵ However, to my knowledge, there is not a single monograph in English-speaking scholarship on Galatians that focuses exclusively on the relationship between the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Galatians with an emphasis on the Spirit for the purpose of shining a fresh ray of light onto Paul's soteriology in Galatians. I also set Paul's remarks about the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Galatians in conversation with his comments about love of neighbor (Gal 5:13-14; 6:2) and ethnic conciliation (Gal 2:11-14; 3:28; 6:16). A third contribution comes in the conclusion, where I offer some practical suggestions regarding ways in which understanding the relationship between Paul's presentation of God's saving action in Christ, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Galatians could shape and inform a Christian contribution to ethnic and racial discourse in the public square and a Christian ethic of social engagement, as I attempt to provide an exegetical and theological starting place from Galatians for Christians to develop a sustainable, contemporary Pauline theological ethic grounded in Paul's message of God's saving action in Christ for a rapidly changing society.

My contribution fills a void by arguing that in Galatians, Paul prioritized God's saving action in and through Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the cosmos as the cause of and the reason for the Galatians' personal agency and ethical transformation. Ethical transformation is part of God's saving action in Christ; an obedient walk in the Spirit in the Christian community of faith and in society with real people in this present evil age is one aspect of God's saving action in Christ, and an obedient walk in the Spirit is necessary for the Galatians' future inheritance of the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21) and eternal life in the age to come (Gal 6:8-9). An obedient walk in the Spirit proves the Galatians have been justified by faith and have already begun to participate in life in the

¹⁵Kurt Stalder, *Das Werk des Geistes in der Heiligung bei Paulus* (Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1962). My comments about Stalder are dependent upon Rabens, *Holy Spirit and Ethics in Paul*, 253.

age to come by faith alone in Christ alone as they live now in this present evil age by walking in step with the Spirit (Gal 5:16-26). To be clear, an obedient walk in the Spirit does not justify anyone. Paul emphatically says Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. Rather, an obedient walk in the Spirit proves that one is justified; yet obedience is necessary so that justified Jews and Gentiles will inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21). Obedience is the proof, given by God's saving action in Christ to be received by faith, that God's verdict of justification is indeed true for all who have trusted by faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

To elaborate on the above point, God's saving action in Christ is the foundational reason the Galatians initially received the Spirit by faith in Christ, participated in eternal life by faith in Christ in the present evil age, and will participate in the age to come, and the foundational reason they must obey, can obey, and will obey in step with the Spirit so that they will inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life (Gal 5:16-6:10). In Galatians, salvation is entirely about what God has done for Jews and Gentiles in Christ. As several New Testament scholars have observed, Paul, in this sense, talks about God's saving action in Christ and the soteriological benefits it accomplishes for those who receive the gift of salvation by faith in an already-not-yet tension (not contradiction!). God's saving action in Christ is the foundational reason Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith in Christ alone and are liberated from their transgressions (Gal 1:4; 3:10-13, 19) and their enslavement to sin's power (Gal 3:22-24; 4:1-9); the reason the creation is liberated from enslavement to sin and to the present evil age (Gal 1:4; 6:15); and the reason the Galatians are liberated from the power of sin in order to walk in obedience to the gospel in step with the Spirit and in love for one another (Gal 1:4; 5:1-6:10). Yet the Galatians must walk in step with the Spirit to inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:16-25), and they must sow in the Spirit to reap eternal life and to avoid sowing in the flesh and reaping eschatological corruption (Gal 6:8-9).

Paul's opponents preach the "other" and "distorted" gospel of works of the law in Galatia. Their gospel focuses on circumcision and the

precondition of Gentiles performing human works of law to participate in eternal life now and to inherit eternal life in the age to come instead of focusing on God's saving action through the gospel of Jesus Christ alone, through whom the Galatians received the Spirit by faith alone in Christ alone (Gal 3:14; 4:5-6; cf. Gal 1:1, 4; 3:1-4:21). Human works of the law are not within the realm of God's saving action in Christ because they have no relationship with either Christ or the life-giving power of the Spirit, whom God gives to Jews and Gentiles by faith alone in Christ alone because he died for their sins to deliver them from the present evil age (Gal 1:4) and to redeem them from the curse of the law so that they would receive the Spirit as sons of God (Gal 3:13-14; 4:5-6).

Not human works of the law, but only a complete embrace of Paul's gospel by faith, leads to eternal life because Paul's gospel, and his gospel alone, focuses on God's saving action in and through Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world. It emphasizes a complete rejection of the opponents' gospel, which focuses on a human agency that is enslaved to the present evil age and on human works of law that enslave to the present evil age (Gal 3:15-5:1). Stated another way, only accepting Paul's gospel of God's saving action in Christ by faith alone leads to the reception of the Spirit and grants the Galatians life in the Spirit by faith, and only an obedient walk in the Spirit results in those spiritual ones (those who walk in the Spirit) inheriting the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21) and sowing in the Spirit so that they will reap eternal life and escape eschatological destruction (Gal 6:8-9). Faith in Jesus Christ alone gives the Galatians the Spirit who transforms, fills, energizes, and empowers them to participate in eternal life now in the present evil age as they experience a liberated personal agency and ethical transformation because of God's saving action in Christ (Gal 5:21). In Christ by the Spirit, the Galatians were able to make a conscious (and free!) choice to walk in step with the Spirit because they had already participated in God's saving action in Christ and received life from the Spirit (Gal 1:15-6:10).

Walking in the Spirit and ethical transformation are on the side of God's saving action in Christ, not fundamentally on the side of human

action, although the Galatians must daily make a free and conscious choice to walk in step with the Spirit because of their participation in God's saving action in Christ by faith. That is, walking in the Spirit and ethical transformation are not human-generated works of obedience that serve as means by which the Galatians will inherit the kingdom of God and eternal life. Instead, an obedient walk in the Spirit is an important aspect of God's saving action in Christ (Gal 1:4; 3:1–6:15). Only those who receive God's saving action in Christ as a gift by faith are the ones in whom the Spirit dwells and are the ones who live in step with the Spirit (Gal 3:13–14; 4:5–6; 5:16–26). Furthermore, Paul's exhortations in Galatians 5:13–6:10 to walk in the Spirit are neither detached from Paul's soteriology in the letter nor from his purpose of writing Galatians.¹⁶ Instead, Paul's exhortations to the Galatians to pursue an obedient walk in the Spirit are exhortations about the necessity and reality of personal agency and ethical transformation because of God's saving action for them in Christ. God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles creates personal agency and ethical transformation in them, and both these are part of God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles; both are part of the good news that Paul preached (Gal 1:6–6:10; esp. 3:1; 5:20–21). Both are important to his soteriology in Galatians (cf. Gal 5:13–6:10), for ethical transformation is both a direct result of the transforming power of the Spirit and necessary for inheriting the kingdom of God (Gal 5:20–21; cf. 5:16–26).

OUTLINE OF THE PROJECT

I support my thesis by an exegetical analysis of the relevant texts in Galatians. Where appropriate for my argument, I also set Paul's discussion of the relationship between the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Galatians in conversation both with selected Old Testament texts and Second Temple Jewish texts. I discuss

¹⁶For an early important monograph on the relationship between Gal 5:13–6:10 and the rest of the letter, see John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: A Study of Paul's Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988).

these Jewish texts to compare their remarks throughout the exegetical chapters about the relationship between the law, personal agency, ethical transformation, and life with Paul's statements about the relationship between the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Galatians.¹⁷

The following chapter presents a history of research on selected scholarship on the Spirit and ethics in Paul, with an emphasis on Galatians, to show my distinct contribution to the relationship between the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in Paul's soteriology in Galatians. Chapter three discusses the relationship between God's revelation of the resurrected and crucified Christ in Galatians. I argue Paul frames his revelation of God in Christ in the language of apocalyptic and with forensic and salvation-historical language. The chapter further argues Paul connects the arrival of the Spirit amid the Galatians with God's apocalyptic invasion of the world in Christ's cross and resurrection. This chapter engages the key texts in Galatians and a few of the scholars who have highlighted apocalyptic soteriology in Galatians. The chapter further argues the flesh and the Spirit represent two different and opposing ages in Galatians. The flesh represents the old age, and the Spirit represents the new age inaugurated by Christ's cross and resurrection. As a result of these two opposing ages, Paul argues the Galatians are not free to do whatever they want (Gal 5:17). They are free to be slaves of one another in love (Gal 5:13-14).

Chapter four argues those justified by faith in Christ alone can, will, and must walk in step with the Spirit to inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:21 is Paul's only explicit reference to the kingdom of God in the letter. This chapter sets my argument in the context of Paul's remarks about the Spirit, the cross, the resurrection, and the authority of his gospel in the letter. God's saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the world was an invasive and disruptive act of sending his Son

¹⁷For a recent book on law and life in Judaism and Paul, see Preston M. Sprinkle, *Law and Life: The Interpretation of Leviticus 18:5 in Early Judaism and in Paul*, WUNT 2/1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008).

to deliver Jews and Gentiles from the present evil age. His saving action in Christ granted to those justified by faith with Spirit-energized, Spirit-empowered, Spirit-transformed, and Spirit-enabling personal agency and ethical transformation in Christ. This personal agency and ethical transformation prove Jews and Gentiles have been justified by faith right now in this present evil age and guarantees they will be justified by faith on the day of judgment and participate in the future inheritance of the kingdom of God in the age to come. They have already begun to participate in it right now by faith and by the power of the Spirit.

Chapter five brings together the arguments in chapters three and four. Here I discuss Paul's comments about the Spirit, personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life in the context of his argument in the letter that he is anxious and deeply concerned about the Galatians' situation because they are contemplating a turn away from his gospel, which gives to them the Spirit and life by faith. Their embrace of the law, which leads to a curse, keeps them enslaved and does not give them life in the Spirit (Gal 3:1–6:10). This chapter offers a reading of the letter that gives the Spirit a more prominent role in Paul's argument than some of the other readings in the history of scholarship. If my arguments in chapters three and four are correct, then Paul's anxiety over the Galatians and his forceful arguments to persuade them from turning away from his gospel arise in part because he fears they do not have the Spirit, which he says is the blessing of Abraham. Therefore, he fears they will not inherit the kingdom of God. If they lack the Spirit, then they certainly do not have any of the soteriological blessings for which Jesus died and was resurrected since both the Spirit dwelling in the Galatians and a walk in step with the Spirit are the emblems and the signposts that they have already begun to participate in God's vertical, horizontal, and cosmic saving action in Christ for Jews and Gentiles and for the cosmos right now in this present evil age.

Chapter six reflects on the relationship between the Spirit and ethical transformation in Paul's soteriology in Galatians. This chapter makes the point that it is wrong to separate soteriology and ethics in Galatians

into two separate realms. In fact, Paul would say ethics are soteriological in nature since Christians experience personal agency, ethical transformation, and eternal life because of God's saving action for them and for the cosmos in Christ. The soteriological gift of the Spirit received by faith and given because of Jesus' death for our sins and because of his resurrection from the dead liberates Jewish and Gentile Christians from the present evil age, enables them to choose life in the Spirit, and creates in them the fruit of the Spirit. This chapter also offers practical reflections related to spiritual formation and ethical transformation in daily Christian living. These reflections include setting Paul's remarks about the Spirit and ethical transformation in Galatians in conversation with his comments about love of neighbor to provide a biblical and theological foundation, grounded in Paul's theology of God's saving action in Christ for Jews, Gentiles, and the world, to develop a contemporary Christian ethic of social engagement in the public square.

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