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Connecting the Dots

One Problem, One Text, and the Way Ahead[1]

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The journey to a solution from the problems I outlined in chapter 3 can begin usefully by considering just one concern—Judaism—in relation to a limited text—Galatians 2:15–16.[2] This consideration can illustrate both why the presence of a fundamentally Arian type of Western contractualism in Paul is so problematic, however unnoticed, and what the basic strategy for resolving it is that *Deliverance* is proposing. In what follows, largely for the sake of convenience, I will call the problematic approach "forwardness."[3]

1. Permission from Sage Publications is here gratefully acknowledged to reproduce in what follows parts of my earlier study "An Attempt to be Understood: A Response to the Concerns of Matlock and Macaskill with *The Deliverance of God*," *JSNT* 34 (2011) 162–208.

2. I am following some sage advice here from Charles (Charlie) Cousar's review of (inter alia) *Deliverance*, 416.

3. I am drawing here on E. P. Sanders's important phrase and insight in much of *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* that Paul "thinks . . ." or is "thinking backward"; cf. esp. 434–35, 38–40, 42, 74–85. But I define this, unlike him, in rigorously epistemological terms, and in relation ultimately to the distinction between Athanasius and Arius argued for earlier. This is emphatically *not* a question of psychology and/causality for me but of truth claims and their justification(s).

Galatians 2:15–16

In Galatians 2:15–16 Paul states, Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί· [16] εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν, ἵνα δικαιωθῶμεν ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, ὅτι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σάρξ.[4]

Fortunately only one question in this abbreviated and controversial text concerns us at present: our basic construal of the antithesis between "works of the law" and "faith . . ." in relation to Jews. What is at stake for the Jewish question in Paul in whether we construe this antithesis "forward" or "backward" (forward being Arian and backward Athanasian)?

Almost everything.

The phrase "the Jewish question" really denotes a cluster of more specific questions springing from the apostle's relationship to Judaism that spans his past as a Jew, the roles of Scripture and the law in his apostolic thinking, the nature and status of Israel there, and so on—an important set of issues. But I suggest that if we construe Galatians 2:15–16 forward then this set of Jewish questions in Paul is *irresolvable*. Any solution to it that we derive from this moment on must lack integrity in a variety of ways. But most scholars probably do not realize this—that they are slipping into a form of Arianism in this way that renders their accounts of Judaism in Paul both odious and unsustainable. And this is one point where *Deliverance* is trying to supply a conceptuality to our debates that is helpful.

Forward constructions run—obviously—forward from some problem to a corresponding solution. They begin with a particular account of a problem, and the validity and integrity of the solution therefore depends on the validity and integrity of the construction of the problem; the solution builds directly on top of the problem, rather like a house made of bricks builds up from its foundations and first courses at ground level. But it follows from this that if the antithesis in Galatians 2:15–16 is read forward then Paul is speaking of some problem in terms of "works of law" to which "faith" is the corresponding solution. And faith is

4. "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; [16] yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law" (NRSV).

something to do with his gospel, so works of law must be something to do with the prior basis for that gospel, here presumably in some relation to Judaism. Moreover, given that both Paul and his later converts all seem remarkably free with respect to various Jewish practices prescribed by the law, it looks as though works of law in this antithesis is describing a problematic prior Jewish state to which faith is the Christian gospel's response, a response facilitating some freedom for both Paul and his converts *from* the law. Works of law are left behind here. But the later validity of that response will of course depend on the construction of the problem—of the Jewish works of law. The argument works forward. It follows then from these interlocking assumptions that works of law must *ground* a later position of faith, *and* must do so, moreover, in way that *collapses* on itself to *produce* faith and not works of law observance. Faith, after all, supersedes and displaces them; there are no more works of law on the right hand side of the antithesis. Paul's converts do not become Torah-loving Jews. In short, the assumption that this antithesis functions prospectively entails that works of law must be *an "objective," monolithic, and self-defeating description of Judaism precisely in terms of works*. And a number of important interpretative constraints are now operative that trap the Pauline interpreter. Indeed, this reading is nothing short of a historical and theological disaster.

It is a historical disaster on two (further) counts—because it places a preexisting grid onto all investigative scholarship concerning Judaism and because that grid is unworkably negative.

In the first instance it demands a unified account of Judaism from Paul (and in fact generally) and this looks unlikely given the way historical investigation usually proliferates and complicates description over time and space.[5] But, second, the argument needs not merely a universal description but an intrinsically negative one—the position that all right-thinking Jews should realize that their divinely-authorized way of life is self-evidently inadequate and flawed and so needs to be traded up for another system like faith at the earliest opportunity. Historical investigation

5. Imagine trying to build the Christian gospel on a prior "objective" historical analysis of the church! Do scholars even give an incontestably unified account of the Old Testament, which is a simpler matter?! Perhaps even more pointedly, imagine supplying an account of the Christian gospel that ended up concluding that its deepest truth was its own utter inadequacy and need to be abandoned as soon as something better comes along—perhaps like Islam, so the central truth of Christianity, considered on its own terms, would be that Christians acknowledge the collapse of Christianity and embrace Islam.

must therefore reveal an unwavering, uniform tradition that is continually collapsed in on itself as its fundamental identity—as its deepest truth. Things could be sharpened still further here if I introduced the extra negative twist contributed by the need to supply a conditional account of Judaism in relation the law, but we have enough at present to work with. Suffice it to say then that this just does not look anything like an accurate historical account of Judaism in Paul's day.[6] It is in fact very much an *outsider's* description of Judaism, from a later, superior viewpoint being offered as the definitive *insider's* reading.[7]

But the awkwardness of the forward approach becomes even more apparent when we turn from historical problems to consider some of the implicit theological difficulties (although not by any means all of them). God's covenant has now been bifurcated into Plan A and Plan B. Two fundamentally different modes of salvation are in play. Moreover, *the first one does not work properly*. Hence it will now be impossible to give a consistent covenantal account of God in Paul's thought (i.e., a unified one).[8] It will also be impossible to give a consistently benevolent and/or sover-

6. But it looks like it does describe a significant part of the Jewish question as many scholars currently struggle with it in relation to Paul's broader interpretation—the presence of an apparently monolithic and negative description of Judaism in his writings in terms of "works of law" that NT scholars often refer to as "legalism." (*Deliverance* orients this contention around Sanders's classic account in *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, but adjusts it more precisely in relation to concerns with prospectivism and contractualism). Even more disturbingly, it overlaps neatly with a fair amount of the anti-Jewish polemic that Christians have traditionally directed toward Jews through history (and this connection becomes even clearer when Paul's putative argument is reconstructed in detail. That is, this description of Jews becomes even worse when we add in the ways in which non-Christian Jews [ostensibly] *resist* and *reject* it! See *Deliverance*, 85–87, 96–124, 205–6, and notes).

7. In this whole relation see the penetrating critiques of Carter, *Race: A Theological Account*, and Jennings, *The Christian Imagination*, already noted in my previous essay. Carter and Jennings address the unethical and self-serving construction of "non-white races" by Christian theology, Jennings in dialogue especially with post-colonial dynamics. But *exactly the same criticisms apply to the Christian construction in this relation of Jews*. An earlier classic treatment of these dynamics, not reliable in all its details now but still highly informative, is Ruether, *Faith and Fratricide*. Other scholars alert to these problems in relation to Paul include John Gager, Lloyd Gaston, Stanley Stowers, and Charles Cosgrove, although in *Deliverance* I pursue a different solution from theirs to try to resolve this conundrum.

8. I realize that certain advocates of the importance of the covenant in Paul's thought will reject this suggestion. But they still need to navigate past the historical and theological difficulties generated by Paul's "works of law" texts. And I am at present not convinced that Dunn does this (see ch. 12 in *Deliverance*, 440–59), and I raise similar concerns in relation to Wright in "Is Tom Right?" 323–45.

eign account of God.[9] God in his wisdom would have placed humanity in a system that does not work and yet go on to hold them accountable for its failure. Any benevolence is limited, moreover, to the recipients of Plan B, and even then it is only available if the right conditions are continually exercised. Alternatively, God did not anticipate that Plan A would fail so badly, or indeed expect Plan B to be so limited in its effects.

However, this is not just rather unappetizing theology. Note how the basis for theology has subtly been shifted into a historicizing exercise undertaken in relation to some universal problem. Everything depends on the definition of this problem, which is taking place from within the problem ("self-evidently"), so presumably by the people located there, prior to receiving anything recognizably christological through revelation. And this is clearly anachronistic (such a commitment to the historical basis of truth is distinctively modern); and it is also a further theological catastrophe.[10] The truths about God revealed in Christ will now depend on the truths about a group of people discovered by some of those people who know the sources well. And theology is now grounded in an essentially academic battle in terms of historicism and over history. Everything will turn on the definition of Judaism that is derived from history and its reconstruction.

Now scholars have their uses in my view but deriving and justifying the fundamental truths of the gospel is not one of them. None of these interpretative battles can ultimately be won in a constructive way and some of them will never actually end! We could put this a little more technically and speak of the triumph of Troeltsch and Bousset at this point—not good things! (Note, I am not advocating abandoning historical inquiry

9. Barth unleashes a devastating critique along these lines in *CD* IV/1, 54–66. I agree strongly with Barth both in relation to his concerns about improperly derived "covenants" and his claim that a proper account of the Christian gospel *must* be covenantal. But a true account of the covenant must be rightly derived—retrospectively of course, hence "one covenant valid from the foundation of the world to its end, providing for human sin with the determination of Jesus as Mediator and Redeemer" (57; cf. Rom 8:29–30). This is a theological construct and not a historical one in the sense of being a historically *derived* one. NT interpreters can be insensitive to the difference between a covenant that informs and runs within history but that is disclosed or revealed, and one that is grasped by historicizing. These are completely different things.

10. See Kerr, "Ernst Troeltsch," chapter 2 in his *Christ, History and Apocalyptic*, 23–62.

but it is essential to position this mode of inquiry in the correct location, which emphatically means not in first position.[11])

In short, the forward construal of the famous antithesis between works of law and faith in Galatians 2:15–16—which is done so easily—locks the Pauline scholar into an explanatory dead end in historical and theological terms. The Jewish question becomes irresolvable. And orthodox theology becomes impossible.

Now admittedly the Jewish question will not necessarily be resolved if we can avoid the difficulties caused by a prospective reading of this data in Paul, but it will never be resolved if we do not manage to avoid reading this text forward. Moreover, if we can relocate the reference of works of law away from Judaism *per se*, then we will simplify the relevant data in Paul concerning Judaism significantly, and might make a solution to the whole question more likely.

But before we consider whether we can do this we should recall quickly that the same explanatory dynamic as this is observable in relation to all the other problems in Pauline scholarship that were noted in chapter 3, and at more length in chapters 3 through 6 of *Deliverance*. This approach in terms of forwardness causes the basic set of clashes between Paul's forensic and participatory discourses, the former generally being held to run forward and the latter backward. It generates the Procrustean account of conversion, whether in relation to Paul, his converts, or modern converts. It causes alarm to apocalyptic readers of Paul, who work backward, and it constructs the generic outsider rather like the generic Jew and so in the intrinsically harsh terms that we have just noted. It is then a larger and more pervasive problem in Pauline scholarship than we might have hitherto thought—a quagmire we need rather desperately to escape. And it has serious consequences for the church as well.[12]

11. See the careful assertions of Yeago, "The New Testament and the Nicene Dogma," 152–64; and Rowe, "Pressure," 295–312.

12. It can legitimize a rather harsh politics revolving around matters of identity, and a consequent policing of perceived boundaries in punitive terms as the church tends to "contract out of" the dire problematic situation of broader humanity to form a special privileged group. There is a concomitant inability to subject matters of Christian identity to christological scrutiny, and a corresponding need to defend increasingly fragile truth claims in relation to "creation." In other words, forwardness underwrites a "church" constructed in terms of the powerful sociological dynamic of homophily, endorsing all the sinister aspects of that dynamic. Scholars are currently exploring some these dynamics, but often unaware of their sinister dimensions, in terms of Social Identity Theory; Philip Esler's work is a useful starting point for the

So the time is clearly right to consider the solution suggested by *Deliverance*—a way that can possibly chart the scholar out of this quagmire.

Charting a Solution through Galatians 2:15–16

This route will be clarified if we turn once again to the text we have just considered. How do we solve the problem generated in relation to Judaism by expectations of forwardness in the construal of Galatians 2:15–16? Clearly by avoiding reading the text forward. But can we do this? Actually, it is surprisingly easy to advocate an alternative, non-prospective construal.

When the text says "not by works of law but by faith" it might just be articulating the straightforward antithesis that "A is not the case but B" in the sense of "I am not a Communist but a Catholic" (i.e., "I am not a zebra but an elephant"). One is not necessarily a Catholic *because* one was formerly a Communist and then went through a process of deep theoretical disillusionment, the conceptual apparatus of Communism collapsing, although in doing so preparing the way for an embrace beyond it of Catholicism—thereby suggesting, moreover, that this is the *only* way in

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former; cf. (inter alia) his *Conflict and Identity in Romans*. A more suspicious theoretical account of these dynamics is provided by Social Dominance Theory; cf. Sidanius and Pratto, *Social Dominance*.

This dynamic goes on to generate quite concrete problems. It has made significant contributions to two cataclysmic wars centered in Europe, to various smaller genocidal wars subsequently, as in former Yugoslavia, and to the endorsement of vicious political arrangements elsewhere in history ranging from chattel slavery to apartheid. The general insensitivity of the church to such problems, coupled with its frequent complicity in them, are not negligible matters. Moreover, exegesis is clearly involved and biblical scholars ought to try to map this, and not to avoid or deny it.

A lot of people think that Paul does not have very much to say to politics that is constructive *and this is why,* in large measure. A forward-oriented reading of Paul generates a Christian politics positioned somewhere between complicity and outright aggression. But this might simply be an incorrect reading of Paul.

An excellent primer on all these connections is Harink, *Paul among the Postliberals*, esp. 67–150 and 209–54. See also Rowe's superb *World Upside Down*. There has been a vigorous attempt in recent times to read Paul in more direct revolutionary terms using the Roman empire as a foil. This trajectory is refreshing but often struggles to find explicit evidence; see (inter alia) Elliott, *The Arrogance of Nations*. I suspect a christological account of Paul's politics ultimately offers more accuracy and radicality, although this is emphatically not to dismiss either the concerns or many of the insights of those engaged with the imperial discourse—see my "Paul's Apocalyptic Politics," 129–52.

which to become a Catholic. It is more likely that one was never a Communist and always a Catholic and that one dislikes Communism *because* one is a Catholic.[13] One is not A but B.

If we read Galatians 2:15–16 as a straightforward antithesis in these terms then the underlying epistemology of the gospel of faith, which is being spoken of on the right hand side of the antithesis so to speak, must be revelational. But this is not a difficult thing to argue in Galatians (see esp. 1:11–12, 15–16; and 3:23).[14] And if the text is presupposing a revealed gospel and articulating a straightforward antithesis between works of law and faith we are in much better shape in general interpretative terms.

If any shift to the gospel takes place because of revelation then the truth of the gospel is grounded in that revelation and no longer depends on the truth of some prior phase. Prior phases can still be present in psychological, rhetorical, or sociological terms, and probably will be, but they have no fundamental epistemological value. And although we would expect Paul to address prior salvation historical realities at some point, *these no longer need to be addressed here either, in a foundationalist manner,* and this is a very significant step forward for the whole cluster of Jewish interpretative questions that arise in relation to Paul.[15] It follows from this, moreover, that any motif in a Pauline text set in contrast to the gospel no longer needs to denote a prior causal phase or state. Hence the grounding of faith in revelation liberates the other half of the antithesis in Galatians 2:16 that speaks of works of law from the need to be anything. It can just be what it is. But can a responsible reading of the actual exegetical data be offered in these terms?

13. Obviously this example does not view Alasdair MacIntyre as paradigmatic.

14. J. L. (Lou) Martyn (1997) has of course offered us a sustained and powerful reading of the letter in such terms.

15. That is, any prior phase to the gospel can now be understood more clearly if not definitively in the light of the dazzling clarity and truth that has arrived with the gospel's disclosure, *retrospectively* (cf. 2 Cor 4:4–6; Phil 3:7–8). So, if we are considering Judaism, Paul will presumably supply a retrospective account of Judaism (i.e., of salvation history) *grounded in the revealed truths of the gospel* (cf. Rom 9:4–5). It will no longer be a historicizing account then, and we will be freed from the tyrannies and vagaries of scholars at this point (as we need to be). Neither will this Jewish construct be a vestibule through which everyone must pass en route to salvation. In fact, properly understood, it may not necessarily have to be left behind at all—a false understanding of Judaism, perhaps, but a *genuine* understanding?—possibly not at all (Cf. Rom 10:4; 15:8; 1 Cor 9:20; Gal 2:7–9). For a slightly longer articulation of this argument see my "Paul's Gospel, "Apocalyptic," and Salvation-History," chapter 3 in *Quest*, 56–68.

The good news—at least for this text—is that there are no obvious impediments to reading Galatians 2:15–16 in terms of a mere antithesis. This reading works perfectly well at the level of mere construal. We could go on to paraphrase Paul's text in verse 16 in such terms as "knowing that a [Jewish Christian] person is not delivered through works of Torah except (also) through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, we also have become convinced with respect to Christ Jesus that we all are delivered through the gospel centered on Christ's fidelity and *not* through any gospel also involving works of Torah."[16]

But what is Paul talking about here when he references "works of Torah," and rather negatively? We need to supply a plausible answer to this question for our alternative, revelational reading to work. But fortunately, an obvious answer does not lie very far away.

In all his letters, with minor exceptions, Paul opposes false teachers who are troubling his communities with bad accounts of the gospel, alternatively seducing and tyrannizing his precious converts (and here we reach back to some foundational insights in the work of F. C. Baur),[17] and such figures are clearly present in Galatia. A useful name for their countervailing program that Paul is rightly reluctant to call a "gospel" is "religion." I mean by this any account of Christian salvation that undermines the gospel's unconditionality and grace—a "Jesus-and . . ." approach one might say—in other words, contractualism.[18] And

16. Personal faith understood in certain carefully qualified terms could be substituted in here for the references to Christ's fidelity, while the last reference, if present, evokes Christ's passion and resurrection. This text is treated in more detail, and the reading justified more closely, in *Deliverance*, 839–47.

17. Such third parties are clearly involved with the situations evoking 1 Cor, 2 Cor, Gal, Phil, and 1 Thess. I argue at length in *Deliverance* that this is the only explanation that makes sense of Romans (469–518), so this approach explains six of the seven letters in the "seven letter canon," excepting only the very short Philemon. If the Pauline "canon" is expanded to ten letters then third parties again lie clearly behind Colossians, and a specific type of external interference also probably explains 2 Thess (cf. 2:1–2). Ephesians then seems to be the only significant exception to this basic explanatory approach to Paul's texts, which draws on the founder of modern Pauline studies, F. C. Baur; see in particular his classic *Paul, the Apostle of Jesus Christ*. There are important methodological difficulties that have to be navigated when reconstructing any putative opponents precisely, but these do not detract from the basic insight that opponents are critical in explanatory terms; see esp. Barclay, "Mirror Reading"; and Sumney, *Identifying Paul's Opponents*.

18. James B. Torrance's analyses of contractualism over against authentic covenantalism are, of course, especially helpful at this point; see his "Covenant and Contract," and "The Contribution of McLeod Campbell to Scottish Theology" (both essays are reprinted in this volume in the appendices).

this observation points to a further important element in the solution articulated by *Deliverance*: a non-prospective reading of many of the key texts roots them more strongly in their practical circumstances, which is a significant advantage in any scholarly contest between construals.[19]

Good readings of Pauline letters are usually informed by robust accounts of their circumstances—of the factors that caused them to be written in the first place, and so written in a certain way—something *Deliverance*, borrowing a useful term from Derrida, discusses more precisely in terms of framing.[20] Prospective readings tend to lift their texts out of situational explanations by universalizing them into generic accounts of the gospel, and this can be a hard thing to justify in contextual terms. Non-prospective readers have plenty of gritty contingent information just to hand, however. They can consequently suggest that a strictly comparative argument is being signaled in Galatians 2:15–16 by Paul in which he will contrast his gospel with the religious system of certain troublesome opponents present in some sense at Galatia blow by blow and scriptural text by scriptural text. And such an account of the text in contextual terms needs no further explanation. It is entirely practical and understandable—the sort of situation that still arises frequently in Christian communities today (and not just in Christian communities of course). These texts arose out of conflict. This, indeed, is why they were written.

If non-prospective readers can support their readings with contingent framing explanations like these and prospective readers cannot, then the former turn out to enjoy a further advantage in any exegetical contest. But before moving on it is vital to note what has happened in broader interpretative terms.

Our difficulties with Jewish description in Paul in this relation—in terms of "works" and "legalism"—have disappeared because Paul is no longer describing Judaism in this text. Moreover, *all* the difficulties generated by *any* type of prospectivism in this text have evaporated—any clashes with retrospective thinking elsewhere in Paul, any crude rationalistic understanding of conversion, any grim construction of the non-Christian, and so on. And this very ease of interpretation—this problem-free quality at the levels of argumentation and broader theory

19. The importance of this sort of "contingent" explanation was articulated especially by Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, esp. 11–19; cf. 23–36; and xiii–xx in the 1984 edition.

20. See *Deliverance*, 225–28, 30, and endnotes.

and theology—functions as good evidence for the likelihood of this reading. Other readings generate these difficulties, but this merely antithetical approach does not. So which should be preferred? Obviously the reading that raises the fewest difficulties, hence the non-prospective, antithetical one.[21] And it is, in addition, the most responsible *contingent* reading.

But we have now not only navigated around any difficulties caused by prospectivism in this text, and done so in a responsible historical critical fashion; *we have mapped out what a solution to these particular difficulties through all of the rest of Paul will look like*.

Charting a Solution in General Terms

We have learned from our analysis of Galatians 2:15–16 that any successful account of a Pauline text in this relation will possess integrity in four different ways:

1. *contingent integrity*—a plausible account of the circumstances surrounding the composition and reception of the section of text in question, along with, presumably, of the letter as a whole;
2. *exegetical integrity*—an accurate account of the lexical and syntactical data in terms of sheer construal, that is, in basic lexical, grammatical, and phenomenological terms, insofar as modern scholars can reconstruct those;
3. *argumentative integrity*—a plausible account of the rhetoric and argument of the text in question, and this obviously ought to accord with criterion one above, but will be greatly eased by the presence of opponents, although to be successful in this relation any argumentation ought *not* to presuppose any form of prospectivism; rather, it ought to presuppose . . .
4. *theoretical integrity*—a fundamentally revelational account of the gospel, and hence a derivative, retrospective account of salvation history and of Judaism, as well as of any other analogous matters.

21. Note that some have not understood how these moves allow the traditional *content* of "works of law" in terms of legalism and the like to be retained, the exegetical dimension in my suggested construals thereby staying quite close to the traditional approach. But only the *reference* of the text has been shifted from Judaism to a false gospel, so no overarching theory or account of the gospel is now being launched in prospective terms with all its vicious consequences.

Two implications within this articulation now need to be accented.

First, it needs to be understood that *multiple interpretative dimensions are now operative in relation to any construal* and, furthermore, that the failure to satisfy *one* of these at any given moment *will cause the entire solution to founder*. My respondents have generally been insensitive to this so it needs to be emphasized here quite strongly.

As Tolstoy once famously put this, addressing a different issue, although the truth remains the same: "Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way."[22] That is, readings, like marriages, are *complex* situations. Hence many things must work together at once if they are to work at all, but failure in any single subordinate system will cause the entire complex to malfunction.[23] So a happy construal is one in which everything is working well together, and that is clearly what we want. But in order to find it interpreters of Paul must learn to hold numerous, rather different interpretative dimensions together while reading him, and any failure to do so will lead ultimately to the payment of a hefty interpretative price.

The second critical implication that needs to be accented concerns the theoretical dimension. Needless to say, failure in this single dimension will lead to the failure of the whole—an unhappy construal will result—and this can happen in various ways.

The theoretical solution to the general problematic I chart in *Deliverance* was apparent in the sketch of the solution already evident in Galatians 2:15–16. We solved our localized problem there with respect to Judaism by reading that text at the argumentative level, (merely) antithetically and not forward, thereby presupposing a gospel rooted in revelation, that is, a retrospective theological epistemology. And we solve our problems generally in this relation in just the same way. If we read Paul consistently backward and *never* read him forward in underlying theological and epistemological terms, then this approach takes us out of our quagmire. But, conversely, if we read him forward anywhere in any

22. Tolstoy, *Anna Karenina*, 1.

23. So—to switch metaphors—it is rather like flying a plane. Everything needs to work at once if the plane is to take off and fly successfully. But failure in any one of several critical systems will lead to catastrophe. Hence, the engines, the landing gear, and the guidance system can all be working perfectly, but the loss of a wing will still doom the plane. The same holds for readings of Paul's texts, and especially for doctrinal or theological readings.

significant way then we are back in the swamp generated by foundationalism. And several aspects of this basic insight now need to be appreciated.

Without the elimination of forwardness from Paul's interpretation, the widespread problems generated by it are permanent and intractable. They are precisely the problems of forwardness, and of forwardness operating juxtaposed with backwardness. Only if forwardness goes *in toto* then do these problems and tensions go. If it stays then they stay.[24] So there can be no compromise here. It is not a "both-and" situation but a strict "either-or."[25]

It is important to appreciate, moreover, that any forwardness will be particularly dangerous if it operates in relation to reconstructions of

24. It follows as well that if it has been eliminated at certain points, interpreters should also try to avoid *reactivating* it, whether overtly, or more subtly and subliminally, e.g., as a traditioned association of key words and slogans like "justification." Space constraints preclude articulating this important dimension of things here as they deserve. I am particularly concerned about etymological reactivations, where signifiers like "justification" can be especially problematic. And I am also concerned with reactivations caused by more general expectations of conditionality or soteriological contractualism—a major concern in *Deliverance*. These reactivate foundationalism or prospectivism automatically. Unfortunately, any construal of human agency or freedom in terms of "choice" leads almost inevitably to conditionality, to soteriological contractualism, and hence to "forwardism," as well, so the broader discussion of agency is involved at this point. But I do not have the space here to discuss these further critical issues as they deserve. And my respondents have not raised any of these important matters.

Conditionality and contractualism are identified and exposed helpfully by James B. Torrance in the studies already noted—"Covenant and Contract" and "The Contribution of McLeod Campbell." "Freedom" is analyzed helpfully by Bauckham in *God and the Crisis of Freedom*. Also informative in this relation are Gunton, *Enlightenment and Alienation*; and Lakoff, *Whose Freedom?* A more thoroughly theological account of freedom is developed by Barth, especially in *CD* III/1 and IV/2.

25. Some of my respondents seem to think that this is overstating things and that some compromise is possible here. So Macaskill opines, "[w]hat is required . . . is a reading of Paul that can sustain such a theology [i.e., union with Christ] without discarding the forensic or contractual elements found in Romans 1:18—3:20" ("Review," 160); and Matlock asserts, "Campbell plays off against one another concepts that Paul holds together: the 'justice' and 'mercy' of God; 'justification' and 'participation.'" What is needed rather is "a satisfactory account of the interdependence of 'justification' and 'participation'" ("Zeal for Paul," 147).

But I am not so sure that the differences between Athanasius and Arius—or between Barth and Bultmann—can be erased on this advice from two New Testament scholars. Neither Macaskill nor Matlock demonstrates how these differences can be negotiated in concrete terms—or supplies as much as a reference to someone who can show us how to do this—so I remain worried that they simply are not grasping the problems here properly, and are offering advice that amounts to mere appeasement.

Paul's soteriology because of its strategic importance for his thinking more broadly.[26] And any compromise in soteriology will be exacerbated by the fact that a foundationalist, forward-looking soteriology *will start first*; it will be the one that analysts begin with, in its account of the pre-Christian problem, so it will tend to override any later commitments to revelational and retrospective soteriology, should they be present in Paul as well. The forward-operating soteriology will frame and control the healthier version and Paul will, in soteriological terms, thereby be reduced in practice to a forward model. In other words, a prospective account of "justification" *will frame and dominate* any retrospective account in terms of "sanctification." (The alternative here is a picture of utter confusion, which most interpreters understandably avoid.)

It should be noted further that Paul's Christology will occupy a secondary explanatory position as well. The Christology in any forward account of soteriology is compromised by explanatory constraints introduced in its account of the problem, which dictate the shape of the solution; and the healthier, more central Christology in any alternative retrospective soteriology will be constrained by the prior presence of the forward system as just noted. To construe Paul forward then is to construe him inevitably in christologically constrained and fundamentally Arian terms. This is not to suggest that readings should be rejected simply because of their potentially unpalatable theological implications, but it is to note on which side of the debate any pressure from orthodoxy ought to be felt.

But it is apparent by this point in our discussion as well that any solution to our rather awful problems can be an *economic* one. Indeed a general solution to our difficulties will not add anything to Paul that is not already there; everyone agrees that for much of the time he thinks backward. So a solution needs only to eliminate any additional discourse

26. Part of the agenda of my *Quest*; see esp. "soteriologies have conceptions of 'the problem,' of 'the solution,' and of 'the transfer' between them. Within these broad categories they contain opinions of the nature of sin, of the atonement, of humanity, of Christ's nature and function, of God, of the role of the Spirit, and of the nature of the Christian condition, which may in particular have its ecclesial and ethical aspects usefully distinguished. There are important attendant claims about epistemology. So all the usual critical *loci* of theology intersect in these basic questions about salvation . . . [s]o the assumption that this soteriological focus overlaps directly with central matters in Paul's theological conceptuality seems prima facie justified. This focus almost certainly contains Paul's properly basic convictions that tend to give rise to his other commitments that are then, by definition, secondary" (33).

in terms of forwardness making Paul's overarching description simpler and more consistent. It will treat forwardness as a disturbing foreign interpretative accretion—which is quite possibly what it is. (We will return to this important possibility in chapter 9.)

Finally in this relation it is important to appreciate that the elimination of forwardness does not entail the elimination of all forensic terminology and rhetoric from Paul's theology. As we saw in Galatians 2:15–16, one half of this material—correctly interpreted, in revelational terms—continues to speak fairly directly of Paul's gospel: the faith side of the antithesis.[27] Only the opposing side concerning works of law was redeployed dogmatically as its concrete reference was shifted away from Judaism in general. All of this data might need to be subtly reinterpreted but 50 percent of it will continue to be applicable directly to Paul himself.

In closing then let us firm up our map of this path to a solution—and further clarify some treacherous byways to avoid that run away from it—by returning to consider Galatians 2:15–16 for one last time.

The Geographical Key

Earlier we found what we might call a merely antithetical and revelational construal of Galatians 2:15–16 resolved any difficulties with Jewish description and so by implication resolved any other problems associated with forwardness. In view of all its successes then we might ask why anyone would read Galatians 2:15–16 differently. And yet we frequently encounter an expectation of forwardness in the antithesis between works of law and faith in commentators on Galatians 2:15–16, while sometimes it seems as if there are no alternatives. But some might suggest I am making this up so here is a brief slate of instances, plucked almost randomly from a library shelf, demonstrating the presence of my concern.

This movement is clear in Luther's lectures on Galatians published in 1535: "Now the true way to Christianity is this, that a man do *first* acknowledge himself by the law, to be a sinner, and that it is impossible for him to do any good work. . . . When a man is thus taught and instructed by the law, then he is terrified and humbled, *then* he seeth indeed the

27. There is an important intertextual quality to Paul's argumentation here that I explore repeatedly in *Deliverance* in dependence on seminal work by Richard B. Hays and others (see especially Hays's *Echoes of Scripture*); see 610–16, 26–27, 688–702, 729–50, 86–87, 91–92, 797–809.

greatness of his sin. . . . The *first* part then of Christianity is the preaching of repentance, and the knowledge of ourselves."[28] Luther said a lot of other things, many in my view basically incompatible with this material (and this is the real import of chapter 8 in *Deliverance*), but he did say these things too. And he was a reasonably influential commentator. We would expect his views to recur in subsequent readings, and they do.

This forward argumentative movement is subtly apparent in Ernst de Witt Burton's classic ICC treatment: "[The phrase 'by Works of Law'] . . . is *causal*, giving the *reason* for the ἐπιστεύσαμεν of the principal clause" (*Commentary on Galatians*, 119, emphasis added). Burton is not reducible to this dynamic but it is present. And it is apparent as well in H. D. Betz's famous rhetorical commentary, where the frequent theoretical or doctrinal associations of the key terms are also apparent:

> The second part of the "self-definition" [in v. 16] contains what is traditionally called Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. . . . The first word of verse 16 states the *basis* for being a Christian in distinction from being a Jew . . . [which is a] theological conviction. . . . Next we are given the content of that conviction, again in the form of doctrinal principles. It is the denial of the orthodox Jewish (Pharisaic) doctrine of salvation . . . by doing and thus fulfilling the ordinances of Torah.[29]

The basis of the gospel is the failure then of Jewish works, and the argument works forward. And the same prospectivism is apparent in F. F. Bruce: "How can a man be just . . . before God? . . . [Paul] considers one answer ('By works of law')—the answer which he himself would previously have given—and dismisses it; he offers a new answer ('By faith in Christ')."[30] Not surprisingly, it is also apparent in Thomas R. Schreiner's recent analysis: "Paul *grounds* the claim that Jews, such as Peter and Paul, are only justified by faith in Christ with the proposition that no one anywhere can be righteous before God by doing the law."[31]

This movement is not equally apparent in all commentators interpreting Galatians 2:15–16. Neither are any of these commentators reducible to this dynamic. But it is certainly present in many, while alternative construals are not always as clear or cogent. So it remains a significant

28. Luther, *Commentary*, 131, emphases added.
29. Betz, *Galatians*, 115–16, emphasis added.
30. Bruce, *Epistle to the Galatians*, 138.
31. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 166, emphasis added.

problem. When it is present, *contradiction is unleashed and confusion ultimately reigns*. Paul oscillates between anticipating Athanasius and anticipating Arius.

There is no need to address here all the reasons for the widespread and complex advocacy of forwardness in Paul. *Deliverance* supplies a fuller account.[32] Given the fact that this destructive advocacy of Arianism in Paul exists we need to consider in closing this essay how exactly it makes its case. And our analysis can begin here with the important observation that Galatians 2:15–16 is too brief to launch a prospective argument definitively by itself. It simply does not say explicitly that it is summarizing an argumentative progression. It *might* be, but it might *not* be—and we have already met with some good reasons to think that it might not. So what we tend to find—admittedly oversimplifying a complex picture, but hopefully without too much distortion—is a set of appeals to a prospective soteriology embedded in the distinctive terminology of Galatians 2:16, which, as we have already seen, opposes works of law to faith in terms of justification, a process assumed to run forward, coupled with a broader general expectation that in relation to certain questions Paul just obviously thinks forward. ("What else would he be saying?!") In other words, we tend to encounter an expectation that a particular doctrinal construction must be operative at this point in relation to certain words and phrases. So something of an interlaced linguistic and conceptual trail now lies before us.

It leads to a family of distinctive texts in Paul. And consideration of these allows us to expand the specific terms involved appropriately from works, faith, and justification, to include things like "circumcision" and "uncircumcision," Abraham, and particular scriptural quotations, which further reinforces the identification of the distinctive texts because almost all these key terms and phrases occur in a well defined group. And these texts are, in the main, Romans 1:16—5:1 and 9:30—10:21 (the terminology fading through this last passage), Galatians 2:15—3:29 (although the terms also fade toward the end of this material) and 5:5–6, and Philippians 3:2–11 (especially vv. 6 and 9).[33]

32. Largely in ch. 9, 284–309.

33. *Deliverance* analyzes this material in 767–70. It also treats shorter passages that often use some of the key terms but possess more ambiguous relationships to the obvious texts—Rom 5:1–2; 6:7–8; 11:20–23; 12:1–8; 14:1, 2, 21, 23; 1 Cor 1:30; 2 Cor 4:13; 5:21; Gal 1:23, 6:10; 1 Thess 1:9b–10. Note that these texts, along with the slightly longer texts that *Deliverance* calls the "heartland," are too abbreviated and therefore

But we can cut a long story short here by recalling the set of explanatory criteria that we have just identified. At some point an advocate of forward thinking in Paul will need to find a text that speaks explicitly of a forward-oriented *theory* of salvation—that spells this theory out explicitly and fully—and that decisive text is obviously Romans 1:16—4:25. It is longer than all the other relevant texts put together and it apparently lays things out systematically and clearly for chapter after chapter. But another shortcut is possible at this point.

Because the theory being released is oriented forward the decisive argumentative and theoretical phase must be the account of the problem, to which a corresponding solution is supplied in 3:21—5:1, being anticipated in 1:16–17. And the problem is articulated in Romans 1:18—3:20. So *this* text will actually be the launching pad for the prospective understanding of much of Paul's thought and will therefore be the critical locus for the entire swamp that we have earlier described. Everything will stand or fall in relation to it. It is, indeed, either the heart of the problem or the heart of its solution. So it will repay us to consider this text very carefully indeed—the subject of chapter 9.

ambiguous to launch theoretical prospectivism if that reading is being contested.