

Seeking a Dialectic Synthesis of Faith and Work: A Biblical Investigation of the True Meaning of “Justification by Faith” for Christians in Korea

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I. Introduction

Christian churches in Korea experienced huge growth within a short period. Some statistics show that one-fourth of their population confesses they are Christians. It is often said, however, that the Christian church has not substantially changed Korean society in spite of its growth in number and occupying a significant portion of the population. Having one Christian out of four should make a great moral impact on society. Our God in the Bible is an ethical God who requires his people to be holy. Then why can Korean Christians not demonstrate their difference in morality from their world? They have been noticed in confessing and proclaiming a sin-forgiving gospel but rather subtle in living out a life-transforming gospel. There are several factors that result in such a weak ethical Christianity.

Old Shamanism, which is deeply rooted in Korean culture, plays a significant role. The fundamental mechanism in Shamanism is to bring in “blessing” and to eliminate “misfortune” for its religious clients regardless of their morality. Shamanistic piety depends on one’s technical procedure in rites, having nothing to do with ethics in life. For the Koreans who suffered from recurring misfortunes in a long history, it was natural that a strong desire for blessing has developed. Religious Koreans who were hungry for happiness sought for such a kind of religion that provides them with blessing, easing their inner pain while loading not too much burden of morality upon their shoulders. In such a situation, the doctrine of “justification by faith alone” has been quite congenial to many religious Koreans. Faith-alone-Christianity successfully replaced old religions. An ethics-free Shamanistic mind-set at the bottom, however, did not seem to be eradicated, rather it was well geared to a misguided application of the doctrine.

Such a trend was accelerated even by the rapid industrialization in the 1970’s. President Park’s government pushed the entire nation into an extreme pragmatism in which any means to economic success was easily justified for a set goal regardless of principles and morality. It happened to be the very 70’s when the Korean church went through an enormous growth in its number. In order to plant the holiness of God in the peninsula of Korea, we need to overcome these three barriers—Shamanistic mind-set, ethics-free pragmatism, and the misguided doctrine of “justification by faith alone”—blended together in creating the current dilemma. As a New Testament student, I am obliged to make an attempt to correctly define the doctrine of “justification by faith” as the Scripture means to testify it.

II. Three’s Company: James, Paul and Luther

“Oh you jughead, you may want to prove that faith without deeds is useless” (James 2:20).¹ James deplored some people who believed that “faith alone” could save them. The Greek words,

¹All translations are the author’s unless otherwise stated.

ἄνθρωπε κενέ, translated into “senseless person” (NRSV) or “foolish man” (NIV), literally mean “empty person.” As such James, the Lord’s physical brother, almost cursed those who did not take “works proper” into serious consideration for salvation, calling them “empty headed.”

For Martin Luther, on the other hand, the doctrine of justification was “the summary of Christian doctrine,” and “the sun which illuminates God’s holy church.” Luther’s assertion is quite extreme. “Nothing in this article can be given up or compromised, even if heaven and earth and things temporal should be destroyed. . . .”² Works of grace are necessary as a witness of faith to the world. However, any works should not be taken to be necessary for salvation.

Such a teleological significance would set aside the “by grace alone” and “by faith alone” of justification and of salvation. Luther thought that the expression that works or the new obedience are necessary to salvation raises thoughts about merit and guilt and that such questions are unbearable in the discussion of salvation.³

As far as salvation is concerned, even good works apart from faith are rather sinful.⁴ For Luther *sola gratia* must be *sola fide*. It is no wonder that Luther was not fond of James who argued for the necessity of works in salvation. James is plainly against the slogan of “faith alone.” “You see that a person is justified *by works* and *not by faith alone*” (James 2:24). Luther thought James was full of straw, for he did not find anything evangelical in his letter.

Then, who is right? James or Luther? Does the Bible in its entirety teach us that righteousness-salvation is “by faith alone” as with Luther? Otherwise, is James in line with the overall message of the Holy Scriptures as he insists that righteousness-salvation is “not by faith alone”? Against James, Luther discovered the essence of the gospel, that is “justification by faith alone,” in Paul’s letters, especially Galatians and Romans. We need to ask whether this doctrinal phrase in fact constitutes the core of Paul’s gospel as well as the center of New Testament soteriology.

Only in Galatians and Romans out of the entire New Testament, do we have significant arguments for the doctrine of “righteousness by faith,”⁵ and Galatians chronologically precedes Romans. In order to trace the historical development of the doctrine, we must investigate the text of Galatians first.

III. The Place of the Doctrine in Galatians

What was Paul’s original missionary preaching for the Gentiles? Was it the doctrine of

²*Martin Luthers Werke* 50:199, cited by Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, trans. Robert C. Schultz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966), 224.

³*Ibid.*, 249

⁴*Martin Luthers Werke* 26:126.

⁵The meaning of the Greek word δικαιοσύνη is conveyed better by the English word “righteousness” than “justification.” The word δικαιοσύνη cannot be limited by the meaning of “legal defense” the latter carries. I will choose to follow Sanders’ decision for the translation of the word as long as I discuss the theme in the context of the Scriptures. See E. P. Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44-49. For terminology, I may alternate “justification” when I refer to it as a modern doctrinal phrase. It is also necessary to notice that Paul nowhere adds an adverb μόνου (= only) when he uses the phrase “righteousness by faith.” We will come back to this issue at an appropriate place.

“righteousness by faith”? Was the message of the gospel proper identical to this doctrinal proposition? Paul, the proponent of this doctrine, strongly insists that the origin of his gospel is definitely divine. “For I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel that was proclaimed by me is not of human origin; for I did not receive it from a human source, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11-12, NRSV).

A. Righteousness by Faith as the Main Theme of Galatians

What is the actual information he received when he says he received the gospel? What is the reality to which Paul’s gospel in Gal 1:11-12 points? The question should be about the first message which Paul preached as the gospel to the Galatians and aroused their full-hearted acceptance in its beginning (Gal 4:11-15). One quick possible answer would be “righteousness by faith apart from the law,” which appears to be a main issue of this letter and in turn becomes a catch phrase of Protestantism when Luther appears in history. If so, Paul received doctrinal knowledge, that is, “righteousness by faith apart from law,” through or at the time of God’s revelation of Jesus Christ.

The central message of Galatians is undeniably “righteousness by faith apart from law.” If we borrow Betz’s rhetorical analysis of Galatians, after a long biographical section (*narratio*, 1:12-2:14) the main thesis set up for the arguments by the *propositio* (2:15-21) is the summary of the doctrine of “righteousness by faith.”⁶ The main thesis is supported with proofs in the following *probatio* section (3:1-4:31). The experience of the Spirit by the Galatians is the first proof for the proposed doctrine, that is, “righteousness by faith.” All the subsequent argument by Scripture (3:6-4:31) is to uphold that faith argument. Is this “righteousness by faith” the very core of the gospel knowledge Paul came to understand in the revelation?

If the essence of the gospel Paul received through the revelation and in turn preached to the Galatians is “righteousness by faith apart from law,” the main thesis of the epistle to the Galatians would be a reiteration of that same revealed propositional statement. In other words, Galatians is an expository commentary on the already revealed message. According to such a proposal, Paul had received a propositional truth at the moment of the mentioned revelation of Jesus Christ: “one is made righteous by faith in Christ without keeping the law.” Then, Paul as an apostolic missionary preached the encapsulated doctrine to the Galatians. As some people misread the Galatians with the doctrine of the law and circumcision, Paul now returns to the very doctrine he preached and tried to bring the Galatians back to his first teaching, by writing Galatians as a lengthened doctrinal elaboration of the essence of the gospel.

Ronald Y. K. Fung suggests such a thesis in his commentary, following the tradition of J. G. Machen:

According to Paul, the gospel which came to him as a result of God’s revelation of Christ, which he had preached to the Galatians in the beginning, is the same as that which he still preaches at the time of writing and to which he is now in his letter calling the readers to return (cf. 1:6; 3:1). This, as the content of the entire letter will attest (cf. especially 2:15-4:11; 5:2-12; 6:12-16), is none other than the gospel of justification by faith. Thus, according to these verses (1:11f.), it was the gospel of justification by faith which came to Paul as the result of a direct revelation of Jesus Christ.⁷

⁶Hans D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 114.

⁷Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988), 54.

If Fung's argument is accepted, the essence of Paul's missionary preaching should be necessarily "righteousness by faith without law," and the *Mitte* of Pauline theology is also found in no other place than in Galatians.⁸

B. As a Polemical Doctrine

However, the entire corpus of Paul's letters in the New Testament does not easily confirm this. 1 Thessalonians, the Corinthian Correspondence, and Philippians very rarely mention the concept. A couple of places where the word δικαιόω is found do not clearly testify to the complete form in Galatians. The verb is used in 1 Cor 6:11, "And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified (ἐδικαιώθητε) in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God." However, Paul does not reject the necessity of the works but rather promotes them in 1 Cor 6:9-10: "Do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God" (NRSV).

Justification mentioned in verse 11 appears to mean the actual shift from "wrongdoers" to "workers of the good," not a nominal change of status. The Corinthians are now "sanctified" and "righteoused" in the sense that they are no longer such wrongdoers (ἄδικοι) in the Lord Jesus Christ and the Spirit of God. The word "faith" is not found and "righteousness" is rather made "in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

We cannot determine whether the section to which 2 Cor 3:9 belongs was written prior to Galatians or before. That the ministry of righteousness (ἡ διακονία τῆς δικαιοσύνης) stands against the ministry of condemnation (τῆ διακονία τῆς κατακρίσεως) may be congenial to the message of Galatians, but the mention is made incidentally in comparing two ministries and has nothing to do with the way of being "righteoused."

It is agreed by scholars that Philippians was written after Galatians. Phil 3:9 clearly mentions the concept of righteousness by faith apart from law. "And [I may] be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith." This is a part of Paul's life testimony, and even here the concept of righteousness is absorbed by "the knowing of Christ and his resurrection."

In both Corinthian letters and Philippians, "faith" or "believing" is used in a general sense, not as the means for righteousness as in Galatians. Only in Romans, the motif of righteousness by faith

⁸Since Martin Luther, "justification (righteousness) by faith" has been regarded as the center of Paul's thought. Early in the last century, however, Wrede attempted to show that the doctrine of justification by faith is only a polemical doctrine. See William Wrede, *Paul*, trans. Edward Lummis (London: P. Green, 1907), 123ff. Then Albert Schweitzer saw Christ-mysticism, which is represented by Paul's frequent use of the phrase "in Christ," as the key concept of Paul's theology. See Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1931), 1-25. For the relation of righteousness by faith and mysticism, see *ibid.*, 205-26. Schweitzer thought the doctrine of righteousness by faith is something incomplete and unfit to stand alone. Stendahl saw that Paul's main interest was in the rights of Gentile converts and righteousness by faith is only a byproduct of Paul's such efforts. See Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles*, 1-77. Ed P. Sanders thinks that Paul's thought is best characterized by "participationist eschatology." See E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 552-56. Utilizing Sanders' conclusion, Heikki Räisänen reads that Paul distorted Judaism by representing it as the religion of legalism. See Heikki Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1983), 162-98.

plays a significant role, but its nuance is quite different from that in Galatians.⁹ It is significant that 1 Thessalonians, which is written prior to Galatians as the earliest writing in the New Testament, does not say anything about the doctrine.¹⁰

The contents of Paul's missionary preaching (1 Thess 1:5) are well summarized in 1 Thess 1:9-10:

For the people of those regions report about us what kind of welcome we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming (NRSV).

Here, the essence is “turning to God who raised Jesus from death and will save them from the wrath.” Paul's earliest message does not include the motif of “righteousness by faith apart from law.” Paul's missionary message for the Corinthians, which is also prior to the incident that caused the writing of Galatians, does not contain the motif, either.

Paul writes that he determined to preach to the Corinthians nothing but “Jesus Christ and him crucified” (Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν καὶ τοῦτον ἐσταυρώμενον, 1 Cor 2:2). It is hardly believable that Paul in the context of the Gentile missions, such as the one in Galatia, originally preached “righteousness by faith,” which by the nature of the concept presupposes an argument against the law.

If the gospel Paul received through revelation and preached had been a doctrinal proposition of “righteousness by faith apart from law,” Paul could have overtly made it clear that the doctrine was God's propositional revelation, as he is eager to let the Galatians believe so in the letter, for Paul's overtly saying so would have won the game in a more effective manner. Paul did not say so. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul identifies certain propositional forms of Jesus' sayings as the command or the words of the Lord (1 Cor 7:10; 9:14). He sometimes makes a certain form of teaching sound like actual words from the Lord (1 Cor 14:37, 1 Thess 4:15). In Galatians, however, we cannot find any such direct identification of the doctrine Paul militantly argues for with the words of the Lord, except a vague and confusing allusion in Gal 1:11-12.

It is most likely that the gospel Paul preached to the Galatians, before the issue of the law and circumcision arose, was the same message he proclaimed in other Gentile missionary settings. Paul in

⁹Beker compares the use of the motif between Romans and Galatians to demonstrate the “contingency” in Paul's theology. See J. Christiann Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 94-108.

¹⁰It is not difficult to date the writing of 1 Thessalonians to about 50/51 CE owing to Paul's mention of specific situations (1 Thess 2:2, 2:17-3:6) in terms of Acts' report of Paul's extended stay in Corinth (Acts 18:5-11). The date for the writing of Galatians, however, is complicated because it is hard to fit Paul's two visits to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18 and 2:1-2) into Luke's account of Paul's story, which includes at least 5 visits to Jerusalem. As we consider the time span Paul mentions in his letter to the Galatians, which includes a certain period of opposition to Christians (1:13-14), his first visit to Jerusalem after 3 years (1:18), his second visit to Jerusalem after 14 years (2:1), and the afterward incident in Antioch (2:11f), it is not reasonable to date the writing of Galatians prior to that of 1 Thessalonians. However, there are some commentators who argue for an earlier date by identifying Paul's own mention of the second visit to Jerusalem with Luke's account of a famine visit in Acts 11:27-30 as well as opting for the “South Galatian” theory—based on Luke's account of Paul's visit to the southern area on his first missionary journey (Acts 13-14)—for the destination of the letter. See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 3-18, 43-56; D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 290-94; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 9-28; Longe-necker, *Galatians*, lxi-lxxxviii; James Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (London: A & C Black, 1993), 7-8.

Galatians recalls that he “placarded [προεγράφη, portrayed in public] before their eyes Jesus Christ as crucified” (Gal 3:1).¹¹ This fact signifies that he preached the Christ event as God’s way of salvation when he came to the people in Galatia. Paul may not have told the Galatians about the significance of the law for their personal conversion except for the need of Scriptural commandments in the ethical sense and of Scriptural proof for the Christ event as is shown by 1 Cor 15:3-4 (κατὰ τὰς γραφάς).

The emphasis on faith was a natural consequence of the missionary preaching, for the proclamation would be in vain unless the hearers responded in positive acceptance of the message. Only when “the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:5, 14) was threatened by some people who insisted on the necessity of the law and circumcision did Paul set up the concept of faith against the concept of the law. The argument we read in Galatians, therefore, is Paul’s interpretation of the gospel he preached for a newly developed situation in which a crisis for the identity of the gospel broke out owing to some law-observant and circumcision-demanding missionaries.

C. The Christ Crucified as the Essence of the Gospel

The revelation-call experience in Gal 1:11-12 is best identified with Paul’s encounter with the risen Lord in other writings. In 1 Corinthians, Paul insists that he has apostolic authority because he saw Jesus Christ: “Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?” (1 Cor 9:1). In the list of resurrection witnesses (1 Cor 15:1ff), Paul identifies himself as the least of the apostles as the risen Christ appeared also to him (15:8-9). The Pseudo-Clementine Homilies of the second century, an anti-Pauline literature, also mention Paul’s experience of a vision in regard to his apostolic authenticity.¹² If Christophany, to which Paul himself refers to when seeing the risen Christ, is related to Paul’s apostleship in other writings, we do not see any ground to deny that the revelation of Jesus Christ in Gal 1:11-12 is Paul’s experience of Christophany, the encounter of the risen Lord.

Then the gospel Paul received through the revelation and in turn preached to the Galatians turns out more clearly to be “the Christ crucified.” Paul’s opposition to the people who followed the crucified Messiah, which had been understood by Paul as an ignominious curse (Gal 3:13), came to an end when the crucified one was revealed to him by God as the risen Lord. It was the moment when the crucified Christ was identified with the risen Lord, the resurrected Christ for Paul.

The Jewish Paul must have regarded this Christ event as the prolepsis of God’s apocalyptic inbreaking.¹³ Epistemologically, the Christophany was the moment of understanding God’s will in Jesus Christ and his crucifixion. It was the moment of knowing for Paul, as he recalls it as the moment of “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (τῆς γνώσεως τῆς δόξης τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν προσώπῳ [Ἰησοῦ] Χριστοῦ, 2 Cor 4:6). As the revelation of the crucified-risen Christ was accompanied with God’s call to the Gentile mission (Gal 1:16) in a certain way, Paul began to preach the Christ event, that is, the crucified Christ as God’s way for salvation. Likewise, the gospel Paul

¹¹Sanders, *Paul* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 22.

¹²The author of the Pseudo-Clementine Homilies criticizes Paul for seeing Jesus only in a doubtful vision: “But can anyone be made competent to teach through a vision . . . but if you were visited by him for the space of an hour and were instructed by him and thereby have become an apostle, then proclaim his words, expound what he has taught, be a friend to his apostles and do not contend with me, who am his confidant. . . .” Excerpted from “Appendices,” of Betz, *Galatians*, 333.

¹³Ibid., 67-74.

preached to the Galatians is the Christ crucified (Gal 3:1), the story of the Christ the *Auto-euangelion*.¹⁴ This is the gospel Paul received from God through the revelation of Jesus Christ, not mediated through human tradition (Gal 1:11-12).

IV. What Happened in Galatia

The major theme of Galatians is “righteousness by faith apart from law,” although the concept does not constitute the content of the gospel Paul insists to have received through the revelation of Jesus Christ. Paul’s implicit claim, however, is that not only the Galatians but his opponents as well should recognize that the thesis of “righteousness by faith apart from law” also has been given to Paul “through” the revelation of the Christ because it is a necessary conclusion of the gospel he received through revelation.

For Paul, God’s revelation not only initiates his apostolate but also legitimates his authority to formulate apostolic tradition. Paul implicitly claims his epistemological authenticity in the formation of veracious knowledge on the ground of God’s revelation of Jesus Christ. The statement in Gal 1:11-12 virtually buttresses Paul’s activity of adding up authentic tradition, which eventually resulted in the letter to the Galatians. Paul’s argument of the antithesis between faith and the works of the law was not the presentation of a pre-pondered doctrinal system, though we may suppose that there had been increasing sharpness over the possible theological issues since the call.¹⁵ The issue was brought up by the challenge of Paul’s competitors, and Paul accordingly exercised his authority as an apostolic interpreter of the gospel for the situation. Revelation bears the gospel, and in turn the gospel produces authentic tradition as Paul the apostle is involved in the interpretation of the gospel for the crisis management of his community.

There must have been a different line of Gentile mission that was in competition with Paul’s position, affecting Paul’s community in Galatia.¹⁶ Though Paul cynically negates its being a gospel, it

¹⁴Knox Chamblin, “Revelation and Tradition in the Pauline *Euangelion*,” *The Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (Spring, 1986): 6-8. Chamblin sees that “the gospel” in Gal 1:11 is equated with “Christ,” as it is shown in 1:16, ἵνα εὐαγγελίζωμαι αὐτόν [Christ]. However, we need to make a distinction between Paul’s revelation as “Christophany” and his gospel to Gentiles as “message.” Gospel as “message to Gentiles” (2:2) may include some of the “story” that Paul takes for granted, especially that the God of Israel is the one God of the universe and that he sent Jesus, his son, to save humanity, as summarized in 1 Thess 1:9-10. Hughes points out that “gospel” was a flexible term not merely in its meaning but also especially in the way it was used by Paul (“The Gospel and Its Rhetoric in Galatians,” 221). In 1 Thessalonians, it connotes “the Christian message,” that is, “a shorthand description of what it is that he as an apostle has been believing, teaching and living” (ibid., 220). For a possible narrative structure embedded in Paul’s letters, see Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, 85-137; idem, “Crucified with Christ,” 232-233. For a short discussion of the content of Paul’s “gospel,” see our footnote 22 in this paper.

¹⁵James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus, Paul, and the Law* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 100-101. Dunn thinks that the antithesis owes a good deal to the debate over circumcision at Jerusalem (Gal 2:1-10) and the confrontation about covenant restraints on social intercourse at Antioch (Gal 2:11-18).

¹⁶Louis Martyn names Paul’s opponents as “the Teachers” who were said to carry out a law-observant Gentile mission. Martyn attempts to connect Paul’s opponents in Galatians with the mission of Christian Judaism that was theologically related to the Pseudo-Clementine literature, *The Ascents of James* and *The Preaching of Peter*. The teaching of these Teachers, constructed from the allusions from Galatians, can be summarized by six points: 1) The law is the absolute point of departure for their theology (5:3-4, 6:2); 2) The law is good news for the Gentiles; 3) God’s reaching out for the Gentiles is marked by the fact that God bestows the Spirit to the communities of Gentiles “if their communal life is ordered by correct exegesis of Scripture and thus by true observance of his

may have been a gospel of a different theological line (Gal 1:6-7). Their mission is shown to highly uphold the validity of the law (4:21) and to require circumcision for becoming full participants in the people of God (2:12; 3:3; 5:2-3; 6:12). Their preaching was very eloquent and persuasive to the extent that Paul could not hide his emotional disturbance in the letter (1:6-7; 3:1; 4:17-20; 6:11-12, 14). Their eloquent exegesis of Scripture appears to center on how to be “the descendants of Abraham” (οἱ υἱοὶ Ἀβραάμ). The concept is not found in other letters of Paul, and the issue seems to be how to belong to God’s covenant people.¹⁷

A. Theological Confusion at the Time of Transition

The Galatian situation was, in a sense, an unavoidable passage that the Christian gospel had to necessarily go through as it moved to the Gentiles beyond the boundary of Palestine. According to the report of Acts, Jesus’ disciples thought the gospel was only for the Jews. Their concern was nothing but the restoration of Israel. The question they asked when Jesus was about to ascend into heaven was: “Is this the time when you will restore the Kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). It appears that they were still anticipating the restoration of the unified Kingdom of Israel that would be composed of full twelve tribes.¹⁸ The first thing they did after Jesus’ ascension was to fill the number twelve that had been broken by Judas Iscariot’s suicide (Acts 1:15-26). They did not know at all that the gospel was also for the Gentiles. Only through the incident of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-11:8) did believing Jews in Jerusalem reluctantly admit that God’s plan includes the Gentiles. “When they heard this, they were silenced. And they praised God, saying, “Then God has given even to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life”” (Acts 11:18).

The existence of the Gentile believers opened a new phase in Christian history. For the Jews, becoming Christians did not change their status as part of the Jewish people. They did not change their God. The God of Israel was still their God even though they believed in Jesus as their Messiah (Christ). We do not see anywhere that they gave up being Jews when they became Christians. In a sense, they were just Christian Jews. Their circumcision, as the physical symbol of their covenant relationship with God, remained as it had been. They still lived according the Torah, which they thought was a privileged gift from God.

Now, they came to include Gentile believers, which was unexpected and surprising. They may have asked, what is happening? How can it be they are so easily turning to God? What does it mean for them to receive the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit we Jewish believers experienced? As Peter confessed in front of those who criticized him against his successful mission to the household of Cornelius, it was God’s act! “If then God gave them the same gift [the Holy Spirit] that he gave us

law (3:1-5); 4) Paul misled the Galatians in regard to full participation in the people of God; 5) In order for the Gentiles to participate in the people of God, they need to submit to circumcision, as Abraham did when he became the first proselyte; 6) “They necessarily view God’s Christ in the light of God’s Law, rather than the Law in the light of Christ, and this means that Christ is secondary to the Law” (Louis Martyn, “A Law-Observant Mission to Gentiles: The Background of Galatians,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 [1985]: 314-16).

¹⁷Beker, *Paul the Apostle*, 48.

¹⁸An eschatological expectation for the restoration of the twelve tribes, which had substantially disappeared in history after Babylonian captivity (586/7 BC), was a wide-spread hope in the first century Judaism (Sirach 35:11; Baruch 4:37; 5:5; 2 Macc 1:27f; Jubilee 1:15; 11QT 8:14-16; 1QM 2:2f). Such a hope was grounded on Ezekiel 37:15-23 and Isaiah 49:6 in the Old Testament. The fact that Jesus’ disciples were called “the Twelve” (οἱ δώδεκα) also points to the same phenomenon. For further reference, read E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE-66 CE* (London and Philadelphia: SCM Press and Trinity Press International, 1992), 291.

when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could hinder God” (Acts 11:17)? A question still remains. What does all this mean to Israel, the chosen people of God? What is the relationship between the Jews and those Gentiles God accepted in the Spirit?

B. Are Believing Gentiles Part of Israel Now?

Many of them must have concluded that the Gentile believers became part of Israel. They are joining Israel, the covenant people chosen by God, through Jesus Christ. Even Paul thought in a similar way. He used a metaphor of an olive tree to explain the Jew-Gentile relationship.

But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in their place to share the rich root of the olive tree, do not boast over the branches. If you do boast, remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you (Rom 11:17-18; NRSV).

Paul means in the metaphor that the Gentile Christians were grafted into the original olive tree to be a part of Israel.

Observed in the eyes of the Jewish Christians, the Gentiles, who had not known God before, were now participating in Israel, the chosen people of God. Then it was a necessary corollary that the Gentile believers should be circumcised and be law-observing people of God, for circumcision and law-observance are the very signs of being God’s people.¹⁹ We read in the story of Acts that some believing Jews followed such reasoning. “Then certain individuals came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers [Gentile Christians in Antioch], ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved’” (15:1; NRSV).

Eventually the church in Antioch sent their representatives to Jerusalem to discuss the issue. In Jerusalem, they met some Pharisaic Christians who argued for the same opinion. “But some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees stood up and said, ‘It is necessary for them to be circumcised and ordered to keep the law of Moses’” (15:5). As we clearly see, these people are Christian Jews. It means that they believed in Jesus crucified and raised from the dead as the saving Christ. They were demanding the Gentile believers, who had come to the Lord by the same way as theirs, to live as Jews, for they became part of the Jewish people in Jesus Christ. Salvation for them meant being a Jew in the Kingdom of God restored in Christ Jesus. This represented a theological line that stood against the theological position of Paul the apostle to the Gentile. This was an inevitable theological confusion at the time of transition, which Paul and early church leaders had to overcome.

C. Circumcision and Law Plus Christ?

We read the same situation in Galatians. There were Christian missionaries who preached a different line of the gospel (1:7). They seemed to be the same ones who came from James and of whom Peter was afraid (2:12). Certainly they demanded Galatian Christians to have the rite of circumcision (2:12; 3:3; 5:2-3; 6:12) plus believe in Jesus Christ. Paul criticized them as “false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us” (2:4). He also warned the Galatian Christians not to be tempted: “Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?” (3:3). Paul’s warning is quite strong. “Listen! I, Paul, am telling you that if you let yourselves be circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you” (5:2). To be circumcised means to return to the old covenant. “Once again I testify to every man who lets himself be circumcised that he is obliged to obey the entire law” (5:3). These people of course required the Gentile believers to observe the Jewish law with the result that Paul had to lead a

¹⁹John Hyrcanus conquered Idumea (Edomites) and forced them to be circumcised in order to make them part of the Jewish nation. See Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1987, 1993), 386.

rigorous argument for “the righteousness by faith apart from the law” throughout the entire letter. Paul here told them of freedom. “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1).

We cannot go into a complicated exegesis due to our limitation. However, it should be mentioned that Paul is not fighting against so called “legalistic soteriology” here. Such legalistic view of salvation as Luther and his successors attacked by making use of Paul is not actually found among the common Judaism of Paul’s days.²⁰ After a careful investigation of Tannaitic literature, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and related apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, E. P. Sanders drew a conclusion that the “analysis of Rabbinic and other Palestinian Jewish literature did not reveal the kind of religion best characterized as legalistic work-righteousness.”²¹ The point of Paul’s contemporary Judaism in regard to salvation is rather clear: works cannot achieve salvation; rather, God saves by grace.²² In the issue of works and grace, Paul is rather in agreement with Judaism, while “Paul’s thought can be sharply distinguished from anything to be found in Palestinian Judaism,” in regard to “the total type of religion.”²³ For the Jews, the Torah was not the means to salvation (getting in) but the means to live it out (staying in).

Paul, however, saw a danger of legalism if the Gentiles were required to keep the law plus believing in Christ. For the Jews, the law was given only after they were chosen people of God. The law was not the means to “getting in” for the Jews. However, the situation was different to the Gentiles who would have to get in first. If the Gentiles were required to keep the law as well as to believe in Jesus Christ to get in, that was certainly legalism. That is why Paul was so belligerently against those Jewish missionaries.

The point is that Paul in the Galatian situation did not disregard the significance of good works when he stood against the so-called Judaizers. Paul was strongly against the view that the Gentile Christians were required to be circumcised and to keep the law plus believing in Jesus Christ for salvation. What he insisted was that Christ alone was sufficient enough for them to be saved. Paul was not against the need for appropriate works.

D. Righteousness by Faith Does Not Rule Out Good Works

That Paul does not present the principle of faith against the necessity of good works is shown in the latter part of Galatians. Paul suggests a concept that does not exactly comply with the traditional understanding of “justification by faith alone” even in Galatians. In Gal 5:16, Paul orders the Galatian Christians to “walk.” The Greek word for ‘walk’ is περιπατέω, which corresponds to the concept of the Hebrew *halakh*. *Halakh* (περιπατέω) is “putting into practice in life” in general, from which a Jewish hermeneutical jargon *halakah* originated. Then Paul, following his ardent debate of pro-faith, now turns to “work.” He of course, in order to avoid inconsistency, does not forget to add a word “by the Spirit” (πνεύματι) instead of “by the law.” In Paul’s thought, those who are “righteoused by faith” are the people who “live out by the Spirit.” Those who do not live out by the Spirit are to fulfill the lust of the flesh (5:16b).

²⁰Heikki Räisänen even writes: “Our survey shows, then, that *Paul is alone* in early Christianity in setting up a contrast between the Torah with its demands on one hand and God’s grace or man’s faith in Christ on the other” (Räisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 198).

²¹E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 550.

²²Ibid., 543.

²³Ibid., 548.

What is the destiny of those people who do not live out—put into practice—and gratify the lust of the flesh? Paul’s answer is rather plain:

Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:19-21; NRSV).

Paul warns them: “If your bad life style does not change to a good one, the kingdom of God will not be yours.” If this is what he had in mind as he argued for the “righteousness by faith” in the first part of the letter, his thesis should not be defined as “justification by faith *alone*,” as Luther put it. It should be noted that Paul nowhere in all his letters says it is by “faith alone.” He never uses the adverb “alone” (μόνον), as he discuss the matter. Then his “faith” should include appropriate “good works” effectuated by actual change in behaviors, as is shown in Galatians 5:19-21.

Those who are in faith have *really* changed. The change is not nominal but real, for “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24). We cannot deceive God about the matter.

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up (Gal 6:7-9).

This is what the one who argues for the “righteousness by faith” declares. If you “live” or “act” according to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life. God is not mocked.

The intention of Paul’s debate over “righteousness by faith” was to deny the additional requirements of circumcision and law in addition to Jesus Christ as the way of salvation of the Gentiles. It did not mean to promote such kind of “faith” as that apart from good works. Paul’s faith is the “faith working through love” (πίστις δι’ ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη, Gal 5:6b). Faith in Paul’s letter to the Galatians does not rule out necessary good works.

V. The Implication of *Pistis* in the New Testament

Taking Paul’s faith as “the faith apart from good works in general” is a mistake made by reading the word “faith” only in a Greek rhetorical sense. The Greek word πίστις means “belief” in the sense of “assenting to” something that is said. The concept of πίστις played a significant role in Greco-Roman rhetoric. James L. Kinneavy’s introductory statement in his inquiry of the origins of Christian faith is pertinent enough to quote here.

The juxtaposition of “Greek rhetoric” and “Christian faith” may seem a trifle bizarre, maybe even irreverent—the two notions appear somewhat distant. Yet if we remember that rhetoric is the art of persuasion and that the Greek word for persuasion was *pistis* and that the Christian word for faith was also *pistis*, the embodiment of both meanings in the same word suggests that the two notions may not be too far apart.²⁴

A. *PISTIS* in Greco-Roman Rhetoric

In Greco-Roman rhetoric, the fundamental goal was to bring about πίστις in the mind of the

²⁴James L. Kinneavy, *Greek Rhetorical Origins of Christian Faith: An Inquiry* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987),

audience, as “rhetoric was ‘primarily’ an art of persuasion.”²⁵ Both Plato and Aristotle endorsed the positive function of rhetoric in communicating philosophical truth, though they disliked the rhetoric of the sophists.²⁶ However, both philosophers deemed rhetoric to be inferior to philosophy in terms of epistemology. Rhetoric achieves only the probability (εἰκός), not the certainty, of truth.²⁷ Its aim is to produce faith (πειθῶ . . . ποιεῖν) in the human soul.²⁸ Πίστις is given a derogatory connotation by Plato in regard to epistemology, for it is the kind of knowledge grounded on opinions and probability²⁹ and is considered to be inferior to absolute truth or divine knowledge.

Greek philosophers’ negative view of πίστις in association with δόξα (opinion) or εἰκός (probability) is rejected by the sophists, for they did not believe the possibility that humans can acquire absolute knowledge. “Plato resisted the rhetoric of the sophists because it was largely useless, if not overtly detrimental, to the attainment of ultimate knowledge. But for the sophists there could be no such thing as ultimate knowledge. There was only the relative knowledge of the phenomenal world, which was precisely what rhetoric was designed to handle.”³⁰ As the limit of human knowledge is admitted, πίστις does not need to carry a negative nuance in regard to epistemology. Isocrates was the most influential Greek writer who posited an honorific view of πίστις in this regard.

Isocrates’ view of philosophy is different from that of Plato. At one section of *Antidosis*, which is his defense in the form of a court trial, Isocrates sets out to present his idea of discipline by saying, “It remains to tell you about ‘wisdom’ and ‘philosophy’ (περὶ δὲ σοφίας καὶ φιλοσοφίας).” He continues to say that his philosophy may appear to be different from what is understood in general. “It is appropriate for me, since I am being tried on such an issue, and since I hold that what some people call philosophy is not entitled to that name, to define and explain to you what philosophy, properly conceived, really is.” He has already disdained the philosophy proper as “a gymnastic of the mind and a preparation for philosophy.”³¹ He recommends young people not “to be dried up by these barren subtleties, nor to be stranded on the speculations of the ancient sophists,” but to “banish utterly from their interests all vain

²⁵George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 4.

²⁶Plato, *Phaedrus* 275e-277c. Aristotle writes, “Nevertheless, rhetoric is useful, because the true and the just are naturally superior to their opposites, so that, if decisions are improperly made, they must owe their defeat to their own advocates; which is reprehensible” (*Art of Rhetoric* I 12, trans. by John Henry Freese in Loeb Classical Library).

²⁷Plato, *Phaedrus* 267a. Aristotle, *Art of Rhetoric* II 24.11.

²⁸Plato, *Phaedrus* 271a; *Gorgias* 452d-453a.

²⁹Plato, *Gorgias* 452d, 454c, 459a ff. Bultmann well points out Plato’s view of knowledge from his *Republic*: “Resp., VI 511d-e, where νόησις (‘insight’), διάνοια (‘understanding’), πίστις (‘belief’) and εἰκασία (‘probability’) are listed in their graded relation to ἀλήθεια. In Resp., VII, 533e-534a the sequence is ἐπιστήμη, διάνοια, πίστις, εἰκασία, and the last two are summed up as δόξα, the first two as νόησις; the relation of νόησις to δόξα is that of ἐπιστήμη to πίστις” (Gerhard Friedrich, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol VI, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley [Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1968], s.v. “πιστεύω κτλ.,” fn. 19).

³⁰Duane Litfin, *St. Paul’s Theology of Proclamation: 1 Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 40, referring to Gorgias, *Encomium to Helen* 82.B.11(11), in Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker*, vol II, ed. by W. Kranz Weidmann (1974), 291.

³¹*Antidosis* 266.

speculations and all activities which have no bearing on our lives.”³² What follows then is actually his explanation about the nature of that which we may label “rhetoric.”³³ Isocrates already designated rhetorical training as “philosophy” in *Against the Sophists*.³⁴ The ground of this idea is well expressed by his statement in *Nicoles*: “for the power to speak well is taken as the surest index of sound understanding, and discourse which is true and lawful and just is the outward image of a good and faithful soul.”³⁵ For Isocrates, rhetoric is placed at the center of his philosophy because his concept of knowledge is different from Plato’s. Wisdom is not to know the so-called absolute essence of being, which is not possible for human beings, but it is to reach the things to which a person can persuade others. Rhetoric aims at the occurrence of πίστις in the mind of audience. It is the state of mind consenting to a certain truth claimed by the speaker.

B. A Synthesis of the Two Concepts in the New Testament

In the Bible, however, πίστις has another significant level of meaning. In the Old Testament, the concept of “mental-intellectual assent” is rarely found. The Hebrew word *אֱמוּנָה*, the *Hiph'il* form of the verb *אָמַן* is mostly translated into πιστεύω in the Septuagint. The noun forms of the verb *אָמַן* are *אֱמוּנָה* and *אֱמוּנָה*, whose connotations are faithfulness and truthfulness. For instance, the word *אֱמוּנָה* in Habakkuk 2:4, whose corresponding Greek word in the Septuagint is of course πίστις, should be read “faithfulness” in its context. If Paul took its original context into account, the word πίστις in Romans 1:17 referred to the concept of “faithfulness” as well as of “belief.” Certainly the word πίστις in Galatians 5:22—one of nine fruits of the Spirit—is usually translated “faithfulness” (cf. Rom 1:5; 16:26). The same Greek word is also used to refer to God’s faithfulness in Romans 3:3 and 1 Corinthians 1:9.

The word πίστις within Greco-Roman world basically points to an “intellectual-emotional assent” to a given proposition in a rhetorical situation. However, as the Septuagint adopted the word πίστις to translate the Hebrew word *אֱמוּנָה*, the connotation of the Hebrew word was carried over to the New Testament use of πίστις. We may say there was an unsettled tension in the use of the word πίστις in the New Testament as it refers to “belief” in the sense of intellectual-emotional assent one time and to “faithfulness” in the sense of trust and obedience the other time.

Or it may be said that there was a synthesis of both connotations as the word πίστις was adopted by early Christians in the New Testament. Missionary preaching, in which early church preachers attempted to persuade the listeners of the gospel to accept that Jesus Christ as their savior, surely constituted a rhetorical situation. The πίστις expected in the situation was “belief” in a rhetorical sense. However, what was actually expected in the preaching of the gospel was not only an intellectual assent but also turning around to the way of God in obedience. Paul describes his mission as “Jesus Christ our Lord, through whom we have received grace and apostleship *to bring about the obedience of faith* (ὑπακοῆν πίστεως) among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name” (Rom 1:5, cf. 16:26). The faith Paul intended to bring about was a sort of obedience that manifested itself in good works. If Paul used the word πίστις in such

³²*Antidosis* 268, 269.

³³*Antidosis* 270 ff.

³⁴*Against the Sophists* 11, 14, 18.

³⁵*Nicoles or the Cyprians* 7.

a synthetic sense, that Paul appealed to the change of life-style for the entrance of the Kingdom in Galatians 5:16-26 was not at all inconsistent with his argument of the righteousness by faith in Galatians 3-4.

C. *PISTIS* As Sanctification in Romans

This is not different in Paul's letter to the Romans. In Romans 3-4, Paul's thesis on the righteousness by faith is more elaborated. Works for getting merits are clearly denied to uphold the principle of faith in 4:1-8. Here again his keen concern is the dispensability of circumcision. Abraham was righteous when he was not yet circumcised (4:10). The works of Christ are sufficient apart from law and circumcision. However, faith as described in Romans should be a faith that must lead to "sanctification."

Paul makes it clear that a person in faith-grace should not remain in sin.

What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might *walk in newness of life* (Rom 6:1-4; NRSV).

New life in faith is not nominal but real. It is to walk in newness of life (ἐν καινότητι ζωῆς περιπατήσωμεν). As in Galatians, righteousness by faith includes "putting it into practice" or living it out (*halakh*, περι-πατέω). Does living in πίστις mean that you may keep sinning? Negation is super-strong. By no means (μὴ γένοιτο)! Never! Rather you must live out your faith. Paul here calls it 'sanctification'. "For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification" (6:19b).

As for Romans 6:22, it is worthy of reading the Greek version with its literal translation.

νυνὶ δὲ ἐλευθερώθεντες ἀπὸ τῆς ἁμαρτίας δουλώθεντες δὲ τῷ θεῷ ἔχετε τὸν καρπὸν ὑμῶν εἰς ἁγιασμόν, τὸ δὲ τέλος ζωῆν αἰώνιον. Now, having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you have your fruit into sanctification, whose end is eternal life.

In faith one secures eternal life. However the faith that leads to eternal life necessarily goes through sanctification. In Galatians Paul goes on listing good works of the Spirit as necessary outcomes of the righteousness by faith, which will in turn lead to the Kingdom of God (Gal 5:16-24). In Romans he instead mentions "sanctification," in which one gets freed from sin and enslaved to God and which will lead to eternal life, as the outcome of righteousness by faith.

VI. Conclusion

Then for Paul, the πίστις through which one is saved by God in His grace, should be the "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6) or the "faith that leads to sanctification" (Rom 6:22). Or we may say, the Greek rhetorical aspect of πίστις expresses itself in terms of regeneration, and the Hebrew aspect of πίστις manifests itself in terms of sanctification. Πίστις contains both the acceptance of gospel message and the sanctification of life in appropriate good works. Then what is the difference between Paul and James? They are not in disagreement at all. "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. . . For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead" (James 2:24-26). Paul says "Amen" to James' statement. Maybe Luther could be the problem.

Christians in Korea have been relying on a misguided doctrine of "justification by faith alone" in its unique cultural environment. They have been successful in drawing people to church with the result that they have had an explosive growth the last decades. However, they have not been successful in

fulfilling the aspect of “faithfulness” as much. It is about time we dropped the word “alone” as we do not actually see it in the Scripture. Saving faith is the faith that necessarily leads to and contains “sanctification,” which is the aspect of faithfulness in the word πίστις. **“Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14, NRSV).**