

The Rhetorical Function of Galatians 5:2-6

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During the last few decades, several scholars have analyzed the letter to the Galatians by means of the rhetorical approach.¹ Pioneering rhetorical criticism to the letter, H. D. Betz claims that Galatians is an “apologetic letter.”² Although Betz’s analysis has been welcomed by some scholars,³ a considerable number of scholars have criticized his analysis. Some scholars claim that the letter fits better within the deliberative genre.⁴ J. D. Hester considers that it is an “epideictic letter.”⁵ R. Longenecker argues that Paul’s letter to the Galatians is a “rebuke-request” letter.⁶ However, R. D. Anderson argues that the letter cannot

1. For recent scholarship, see R. D. Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul* (Kampen: Pharos, 1996) 111-167; D. F. Tolmie, *Persuading Galatians*, WUNT 2.190 (Mohr Siebeck: Tuebingen, 2005), 1-23; and P. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians: Assessing an Approach to Paul’s Epistle*, SNTSMS 101 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 43-56. For a helpful survey of a definition of rhetoric, see Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, 7-38. Here I use “rhetorical” as “strategic persuasive communication.”

2. H. D. Betz, “The Literary Composition and Function of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians,” *NTS* 21 (1975): 353-379; and H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul’s Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 14-25.

3. In particular see B. H. Brinsmead, *Galatians: Dialogical Response to Opponents*, SBLDS 65 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982).

4. J. Fairweather, “The Epistle to the Galatians and Classical Rhetoric: Parts 1 & 2,” *TynB* 45 (1994): 1-38; J. Fairweather, “The Epistle to the Galatians and Classical Rhetoric: Part 3,” *TynB* 45 (1994): 213-243; R. G. Hall, “The Rhetorical Outline for Galatians: A Reconsideration,” *JBL* 106 (1987): 277-287; G. A. Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1984), 144-152; J. Smit, “The Letter of Paul to the Galatians: A Deliberative Speech,” *NTS* 35 (1989): 1-26; and Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary of St. Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

5. J. D. Hester, “Placing the Blame: The Presence of Epideictic in Galatians 1 and 2,” in *Persuasive Artistry: Studies in New Testament Rhetoric*, ed. D. F. Watson (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 281-307; and J. D. Hester, “The Use and Influence of Rhetoric in Galatians 2:1-14,” *TZ* 42 (1986): 386-408.

6. R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990). It was fol-

be classified into any one of the three most popular rhetorical genres (apologetic, deliberative, epideictic).⁷

Recently, P. Kern has also challenged the widely accepted view that the letter to the Galatians should be understood in light of Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks.⁸ He claims that the letter cannot be analyzed according to Greco-Roman rhetoric not only because Galatians does not conform to Greco-Roman rhetorical handbooks or to extant speeches, but also because these handbooks cannot assist the search for a distinctly Pauline rhetoric.⁹ J. L. Martyn contends that the letter is a highly situational sermon.¹⁰

Concerning the current rhetorical approach to the letter, J. D. G. Dunn argues that Galatians does not accord closely with any ideal rhetorical type. He points out the importance of studying Galatians according to its natural flow of argument and cautions against analyses that forcefully try to fit Galatians onto a grid drawn from elsewhere. Dunn also denotes danger in placing too much emphasis on rhetorical considerations which might blur the extent to which the letter is driven by theological logic and passion.¹¹

In particular, some commentators have disputed the rhetorical function of Galatians 5:2-6 within the letter. The material in Galatians 5:2-6 has sometimes been regarded as being part of Paul's paraenesis in Galatians 5:1-6:10.¹² Others have taken it as a part of a "request section."¹³ Many scholars have treated this section as a summary and a conclusion to the main body of the letter.¹⁴ Moreover, some have regarded the sec-

lowed by G. W. Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts*, JSNTSup 29 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989).

7. Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul*, 167.

8. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*.

9. Kern, *Rhetoric and Galatians*, 259.

10. J. L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 23.

11. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 20.

12. Betz, *Galatians*, 253; E. D. Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 269; G. Ebeling, *The Truth of the Gospel: An Exposition of Galatians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 239-245; D. Guthrie, *Galatians*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 127; Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism*, 147-151; and J. Ziesler, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Epworth, 1992), 71.

13. G. W. Hansen, *Abraham in Galatians: Epistolary and Rhetorical Contexts* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 53-54; G. W. Hansen, *Galatians*, IVPNT 9 (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 30; and Longenecker, *Galatians*, cix.

14. C. A. Amadi-Azuogu, *Paul and the Law in the Arguments of Galatians* (Weinheim: Beltz, 1996), 296-297; Anderson, *Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Paul*,

tion as a climactic piece that culminates the previous arguments and foreshadows what follows.¹⁵ D. F. Tolmie argues that Galatians 5:2-6 is a part of “fifth objective” in which Paul tries to convince the Galatians not to be circumcised.¹⁶

Although there are some elements of truth in the views above, I argue that these views are not completely satisfactory because the scholars mentioned above have missed an important dimension of the problem. They have not paid appropriate attention to the function of the section within Galatians, and the way in which Paul deals with the crisis and the specific issues at stake in Galatia.

In this paper, I basically concur with Matera’s suggestion that Galatians 5:1-6:17 is the culmination of the entire letter. His analysis, however, fails to notice the significance of the antitheses in Galatians 5:2-6 for understanding the rhetorical function of the passage. As Dunn rightly observes, Galatians 5:1-12 and 6:11-17 “serve more to underline the climactic character of 5:1-12.”¹⁷ Dunn, however, does not pay sufficient attention to the rhetorical force of the antitheses. Let us then turn to the analysis of Galatians 5:2-6.

Analysis of Galatians 5:2-12

In Galatians 5:2-12, one can find significant data to motivate an investigation into the rhetorical function of Galatians 5:2-12 within the letter. It is striking to note that in Galatians 5:2-6 that there are six antitheses that summarize and recapitulate most of the pivotal theological themes and issues of the letter. It might at once be said that these

158; R. Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 221; D. Lührmann, *Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 98; S. McKnight, *Galatians*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 251; O. Merk, “Der Beginn der Paränese im Galaterbrief,” *ZNW* 60 (1969): 100; H. Ridderbos, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 186; and H. Schlier, *Der Brief an die Galater*, 5th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1971), 229.

15. F. J. Matera, *Galatians* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1992), 185; F. J. Matera, “The Culmination of Paul’s Argument to the Galatians: Gal 5:1-6:17,” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 79-80; and Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 359-60. Although Dunn views Gal 5:1-12 as the conclusion to the main argument, he also notes the climactic character of the section in Galatians. See Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 260-261.

16. Tolmie, *Persuading Galatians*, 177-182. Despite how Paul tackles the problem of circumcision in Gal 5:2-6, Tolmie misses that Gal 5:2-6 deals with the issue of justification, which was one of the most critical issues at stake in the church in Galatia.

17. Dunn, *Galatians*, 261.

antitheses are not very clear, except for the antithesis in Galatians 5:6. And it is true that Paul does not use his typical “antithesis formula” οὐκ (οὐδέ, οὔτε) A ἀλλὰ B (Gal 1:1, 12; 4:7, 31; 5:6; 6:12, 15) in the passage, except in Galatians 5:6. Nevertheless, the other five antitheses become more apparent when we carefully analyze Paul’s argument.¹⁸

First, it is clear that Paul opposes circumcision through the contrast between circumcision and Christ (Gal 5:2-3). Paul tells the Galatians, Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει (5:2). He further says, μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι (Gal 5:3). Here Paul argues that circumcision forfeits the benefits of Christ (Gal 5:2) and makes those who want to undergo circumcision debtors obliged to follow the entire law (Gal 5:3). But Christ is of sufficient benefit to the uncircumcised believers. Thus, Paul contrasts circumcision and Christ in terms of “benefit” in Galatians 5:2-3;¹⁹ the benefit of Christ is contrasted with the uselessness of circumcision through the intentional word-play between ὠφελήσει and ὀφειλέτης.²⁰ The theme of Christ’s salvific benefits plays an important role as Paul’s persuasive strategy and theological rationale for his opposition to the circumcision of the Galatians.²¹ Paul wanted them to know that the benefits of Christ are sufficient for their salvation and make circumcision unnecessary. The benefit of Christ is Paul’s solution to the issue at stake in Galatia: what is the valid condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God, either

18. While N. Schneider, *Die rhetorische Eigenart der paulinischen Antithese* (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1970), comprehensively investigates the rhetorical characteristics of the Pauline antithesis, it is astonishing that he does not notice the other five antitheses in Gal 5:2-5.

19. While J. M. Gundry-Volf in *Paul and Perseverance* does not develop the antithesis, she correctly notes it: “The benefit which the Galatians might think to derive from circumcision is here played off against the benefits which Christ bestows.” See J. Gundry-Volf, *Paul and Perseverance: Staying in and Falling Away*, WUNT 2.37 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1990), 208.

20. Paul contrasts circumcision with Christ by creating a phonetic parallel between ὠφελήσει and ὀφειλέτης. Phonetic parallelism is likely to be one of his literary styles (e.g. Rom 5:15-19). Several scholars have observed the word play. See, for instance, Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 265; G. Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia*, SNTSMS 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 16; Lührmann, *Galatians*, 81; Matera, *Galatians*, 182; and Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 368.

21. The salvific benefits of Christ in Galatians are righteousness (2:15-21), redemption (3:13; 4:4-5), the blessing of Abraham (3:14), adoption (4:5) and divine sonship (3:26), oneness between Jew and Gentile (3:28), Abraham’s offspring and heirs (3:29), freedom (2:4; 5:1), forgiveness of sins (1:4), deliverance from the present evil age (1:4), and the promise of the Spirit (3:14).

through circumcision (the law) or through Christ?²² If circumcision were necessary, effective, and beneficial for salvation, salvation would come by accepting Jewish customs and by living like Jews and thus the Christ-event would not have been necessary. But for Paul, circumcision is without value and useless because it forfeits the salvific benefits of Christ and leads the circumcised Gentile believers to the slavery of the law under which they must obey the whole law. Since the salvific benefits of the Christ-event are necessary and sufficient for salvation, salvation through circumcision must be rejected. This means that non-proselyte Gentiles could be God's people without being Jews through circumcision.

Second, it is equally obvious in Galatians 5:4a and 5:4b that Paul persuades Galatians who want to be justified ἐν νόμῳ (“in the sphere of the law”)²³ not to rely upon the law for their justification by contrasting the law with Christ in terms of “sphere of influence.”²⁴ Paul says, κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε. Here Paul implies that justification ἐν νόμῳ means to be separated from Christ (ἐν νόμῳ vs. ἐν Χριστῷ; ἐν νόμῳ = ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ). Paul attempted to persuade the Galatians that they should not go within the boundary of the law for

22. E. P. Sanders in *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* rightly notes, “The subject of Galatians is not whether or not humans, abstractly conceived, can by good deeds earn enough merit to be declared righteous at the judgment; it is the condition on which Gentiles enter the people of God.” See Sanders, *Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 18. Matera also states that the question of Galatians is “what are the entrance requirements for Gentile Christians who want to be recognized as full members of that portion of Israel which believes in Jesus the Messiah.” See Matera, *Galatians*, 29.

23. Paul employs ἐν νόμῳ as the sphere within which some hope to be justified (Gal 3:11; 5:4). Most commentators have rendered ἐν νόμῳ in Gal 3:11 and 5:4 as “by the law” taking the preposition ἐν as instrumental. See most commentaries and J. C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle: The Triumph of God in Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984) 260; R. B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: An Investigation of the Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, SBLDS 56 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983) 206; H. Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 138, 170; and Gundry-Volf, 210. A few commentators have rendered it as “in the sphere of the law,” taking the preposition as locative. Dunn notes that the phrase could be translated “in/within the law.” See Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 267. See also D. Guthrie, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 129. The phrase in Gal 3:11 is likely to be rendered in a spatial sense because the phrase ἐν νόμῳ (3:11) and ἐν Χριστῷ ἠσοῦ (3:14) are contrasted as two mutually exclusive spheres of righteousness. It is probable that ἐν νόμῳ occurring in Gal 5:4 probably means “in the sphere of the law.” Paul contrasts ἐν νόμῳ (5:4) with ἐν Χριστῷ (5:6) as two antithetical redemptive-historical spheres. These observations make the rendering of the preposition ἐν as instrumental improbable.

24. K. Snodgrass, “Spheres of Influence,” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 93-113.

their justification by contrasting the law with Christ in terms of two antithetical spheres of justification. Paul argues that those in the law are alienated from the sphere of Christ and salvation, this is against the agitators' argument that, unless they come within the boundary of the law through Torah-observance, the Gentiles are cut off from the people of God and from salvation. Justification in the law leads to alienation from the realm of Christ and thus those who desire to be justified in the law will receive no salvific benefit of Christ. The rhetorical force of the antithesis is that Paul urges the Galatians to continue to stay within the sphere of Christ in which they can be justified, without being persuaded by the agitators' message of justification in the law. This antithesis is Paul's answer to one of the critical issues in Galatians: whether Gentiles must enter the boundary of Israelites (i.e. the Mosaic covenant) to become God's people. Paul answers that Jews and Gentiles alike must enter the boundary of Christ for salvation. Since Christ is the legitimate boundary of salvation, the boundary of the law must be rejected.

Third, Paul sets the law (Gal 5:4b) in antithesis with grace (Gal 5:4c). Here Paul says, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξέπεσάτε. τῆς χάριτος ἐξέπεσάτε denotes that the Galatians' attempt to depend upon the law is a result of their separation from grace. Thus Paul contrasts the law with grace as two mutually exclusive foundations of justification.²⁵ What Paul intends for the Galatians to realize by his use of the antithesis between the law and grace is that they do not have to undergo circumcision, or to observe the law, in order to become full members of the covenant community. This is not only because they became God's elected people by God's act of calling and knowing but also because they are heirs and children by God's promise and his sending of Christ and the Spirit. In contrast to the agitators who argue that the identity of God's people is determined by the law and circumcision, Paul upholds that it depends upon God's saving activities, such as God's calling (Gal 1:6; 5:8; cf. 5:13), God's promise (Gal 3:8, 15-18, 21, 23, 29; 4:28), God's sending of Christ and the Spirit (Gal 4:4-7), and God's knowing (Gal 4:9). For Paul, to argue for justification through the law would mean nullifying and denying God's graceful saving acts welcoming the Gentiles into God's people apart from the law (Gal 2:21). For the agita-

25. This is properly pointed out by Betz, *Galatians*, 261; Burton, *Galatians*, 275, 277; Dunn, *Galatians*, 269; Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 223-224; J. Moffatt, *Grace in the New Testament* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1932), 182; F. Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 349; A. Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater*, 3d ed. (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1973), 119; Gundry-Volf, *Paul and Perseverance*, 213; H. Räisänen, *Paul and the Law* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 162; and S. Westerholm, *Israel's Law and the Church's Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 113.

tors, God's grace is for the Jews and proselytes, but for Paul, God's grace is for both Jews and Gentiles.²⁶ The antithesis (i.e. justification through the law vs. justification by God's grace) is both a substantial feature of Paul's theology in Galatians and an interpretive clue to understanding Paul's theology in Galatians.²⁷ Justification *sola gratia* is a central point of Paul's gospel (Gal 2:21; 5:4; Rom 3:24; 5:15-17).

Fourth and fifth, two other antitheses can be drawn by inference: the antithesis between the law and the Spirit (Gal 5:4-5) and the antithesis between the law and πίστις (Gal 5:4-5). Paul says, ἡμεῖς γὰρ πνεύματι ἐκ πίστεως ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. It is generally agreed that Galatians 5:5 is in contrast to Galatians 5:4.²⁸ The γάρ (Gal 5:5) introducing an argument *e contrario*²⁹ explains why those who want to be justified ἐν νόμῳ are separated from Christ and have fallen from grace. It is

26. This is certainly Paul's point of view in Rom 3:29 (ἢ Ἰουδαίων ὁ θεὸς μόνον; οὐχὶ καὶ ἔθνῳν; ναὶ καὶ ἔθνῳν) and in Rom 4:9 (Ὁ μακαρισμὸς οὖν οὗτος ἐπὶ τὴν περιτομὴν ἢ καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκροβυστίαν;).

27. This antithesis seems to serve the same role in Paul's letter to the Romans. The antithesis is clearly expressed in Rom. 3:20-24. In 3:20 Paul says, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ. In contrast to 3:20, Paul says in 3:24, δικαιοῦμενοι δωρεὰν τῆ αὐτοῦ χάριτι. The point of the antithesis is that for Paul a right relationship with God is wholly of God's grace, and thus justification through the works of the law must be rejected. The point is restated in Rom. 11:6: εἰ δὲ χάριτι, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἔργων, ἐπεὶ ἡ χάρις οὐκέτι γίνεται χάρις. The antithesis between the human endeavour of Torah-observance and God's grace is embedded in Rom. 9-11 (cf. V. M. Smiles, *The Gospel and the Law in Galatia* [Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998] 238 n. 42). Moreover, the antithesis between the law and grace as two antithetical salvific spheres or realms in Rom. 6:14 (cf. 6:15) indicates that Paul understood law and grace as two contrasting ways of salvation. Paul says, ἀμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γὰρ ἐστε ὑπὸ νόμον ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριν. Paul means that sin will no longer have lordship over believers because they are not under the law but under grace. In light of the observations above, it is fair to say that Paul's argument that a right relationship with God is no longer dependent upon the law but upon God's salvific grace is significant for the interpretation of Romans.

28. This has been supported by a good number of scholars. E.g. D. C. Arichiea and E. A. Nida, *A Translators Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1976), 123; BAGD, 152, F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on Galatians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 231; Burton, *Galatians*, 278; Dunn, *Galatians*, 269; Fung, *Galatians*, 224; Hong, *The Law in Galatians*, 57; T. Martin, "Apostasy to Paganism," *JBL* 114 (1995): 457; J. L. Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 472; A. L. Mulka, "Fides Quae Per Caritatem Operatur," *CBQ* 28 (1966): 185; Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 349-50; and Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, 189. Cf. NIV.

29. See Burton, *Galatians*, 278; Fung, *Galatians*, 224.

because by the Spirit and πίστις “we,” in contrast to those who want to be justified ἐν νόμῳ, are waiting for the hope of righteousness. Here, it seems that Paul deliberately contrasts οἱ τίνες with ἡμεῖς switching the third person plural pronoun to the first person.³⁰ Moreover, he contrasts “the law” with “the Spirit” and πίστις³¹ as the basis of justification because according to Paul’s gospel, the Spirit and πίστις, not the law, are the sufficient bases of justification.³² In other words, Galatians 5:5 is antithetical to Galatians 5:4 because Galatians 5:5 explains why the law is not a valid basis of justification by indicating the two antithetical bases of justification, that is, the Spirit and πίστις.³³ In short, in Galatians 5:4-5 Paul sets the law in antithesis both with the Spirit and with πίστις as incompatible grounds of justification.

What Paul intended the Galatians to understand by the antithesis between the law and the Spirit is that they must not depend upon the law for justification because the Spirit is the means of righteousness (Gal 3:1-5), the medium of the blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:14), and the basis and cause of sonship (Gal 4:6).³⁴ For Paul, the Spirit, and not the law, determines the members of the covenant community. Paul replaces the identity marker of God’s people from the law (and circumcision) by the Spirit. The antithesis is also intended to defend the position that Gentile Christians who have received the Spirit do not have to

30. Cf. Burton, *Galatians*, 277; Martyn, *Galatians*, 472; and Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 349.

31. With regard to the meaning of ἐκ πίστεως in Gal 5:5, nearly all commentators have understood πίστις in 5:5 as the Christian’s act of faith. Surprisingly, most exegetes who argue for “the subjective genitive” interpretation do not explicitly interpret ἐκ πίστεως as “through the faith(fulness) of Christ.” Matera (*Galatians*, 182) is an exception because he claims that the phrase should be interpreted in relation to Gal 2:16 (“through the faithfulness of Christ”). I propose, however, that πίστις in Gal 5:5 refers to “the faithfulness of Christ.” See Hung-Sik Choi, “ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Gal 5:5-6: Neglected Evidence for the Faithfulness of Christ,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 471-482.

32. C. Kruse, *Paul, the Law, Justification* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996), 102; Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 349-350.

33. Burton argues, “The whole sentence introduced by γάρ is an argument *e contrario*, confirming the assertion of v. 4 by pointing out that we, i.e., we who hold the gospel of grace, look for the realisation of our hope of righteousness, not in law, ἐν νόμῳ, but on the one side by the Spirit of God and on the other through faith.” See Burton, *Galatians*, 278. Cf. Fung, *Galatians*, 227; J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul’s Epistle to the Galatians*, 3d ed. (London: Macmillan, 1869), 204; Mußner, *Der Galaterbrief*, 350.

34. For a detailed study about the antithesis between the law and the Spirit, see H. S. Choi, “The Law and the Spirit in Galatians: Antithetical Basis of Justification,” *Korea Journal of Christian Studies* 42 (2005): 75-96.

undergo circumcision and keep the law in order to become full members of the covenant community. Through the antithesis between the law and πίστις Paul argues that the valid means of the justification of God's people is πίστις, so the law (and the works of the law) as the means of justification must be rejected. The law as the basis of justification had been superseded by πίστις.

Sixth, the antithesis between "circumcision vs. uncircumcision" and πίστις is clear in Galatians 5:6. Paul says, ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη. Here Paul implies that πίστις³⁵ has completely nullified the old epoch's distinction between circumcision and uncircumcision. Paul contrasts "circumcision/uncircumcision" with πίστις as the two contrasting foundations of righteousness.³⁶ Paul's main argument in the antithesis is that πίστις, and not the privileged Jewish identity as "circumcision," is the soteriological basis of salvation. For Paul, in the sphere of Christ, the Jewish perspective of "circumcision/uncircumcision" which had kept Jew and Gentile apart until then has been brought to an end by the power of πίστις. Paul formulates the antithesis both to argue against the agitators' ethnocentric covenantalism and to achieve his goal of persuading the Galatians to reject the ethnocentric covenantalism of the agitators.

Even such a brief discussion is sufficient to indicate that these antitheses are very significant for understanding the rhetorical function of Galatians 5:2-6 within Galatians. The significance of the antitheses is summarized as follows:

- 1) The antitheses are Paul's polemical response to the agitators' gospel. Paul negates the essential contents of the agitators' gospel (i.e. justification in the sphere of the law and by Torah-observance, especially circumcision). He claims that since salvation is in the sphere of Christ and by God's grace, the Spirit, and πίστις, it is not in the sphere of the law or by the law and circumcision. The agitators hold together circumcision and Christ, the law and Christ, the law and God's grace, the law and the Spirit, and the law and πίστις. Paul,

35. As far as πίστις in Gal 5:6 is concerned, virtually all interpreters of Paul have taken it to refer to the Christian's act of faith. Having understood it as an ethical principle of Christian behavior, they have interpreted πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη as "the Christian's faith expressing itself through love." To our knowledge, no one has explicitly argued that it denotes "the faithfulness of Christ." However, I claim that πίστις in Gal 5:6 have "the faithfulness of Christ" in view. See Choi, "ΠΙΣΤΙΣ in Gal 5:5-6," 482-489.

36. Notably J. D. G. Dunn, "Neither Circumcision nor Uncircumcision, but . . ." (Gal. 5.2-12; 6.12-16; cf. 1 Cor. 7.17-20), in *La Foi Agissant par L'amour (Galates 4,12-6,16)*, ed. A. Vanhoye (Rome: Abbaye de S. Paul, 1996), 79-110; Martyn, *Galatians*, 472-473.

however, separates what they wish to hold together and denies circumcision and the law to be the basis of salvation. For Paul there is no compromise in each antithesis.

- 2) The antitheses play a role as the solution of the crisis in Galatia (i.e. the apostasy of the Galatians and “the other gospel” of the agitators – Gal 1:6-9) in the sense that the antitheses were designed to persuade the Galatians not to defect from the truth of the gospel both by warning them of the fatal consequences of following the other gospel (i.e. forfeiture of Christ’s benefits, slavery under the law, separation from Christ and God’s grace) and by reminding them of the salvific significance of God’s grace, Christ (Christ’s benefits, Christ as the sphere of justification), and the Spirit. In addition, the antitheses negate the central message of “the other gospel”-- justification in the law and through Torah-observance, especially circumcision.
- 3) The antitheses provide the answer to the pivotal issue at stake in Galatia: what are the legitimate conditions on which Gentiles enter the people of God? According to Paul’s gospel, neither circumcision nor the law, but Christ (Christ’s salvific benefits, Christ as the sphere of justification), God’s grace, and the Spirit are the valid and sufficient bases of justification.
- 4) The antitheses are the succinct summaries of Paul’s view of the law and circumcision in Galatians; they encapsulate his view of the ineffectiveness of the law for justification and his reason for the rejection of circumcision (e.g. no justification in and through the law, the uselessness and inefficacy of circumcision).
- 5) The antitheses represent Paul’s theological horizon and conviction in Galatians; they portray the fact that God’s saving act in and through Christ and the Spirit has brought about “the eschatological transition” by which the old belief-system (represented by circumcision and the law) has been superseded by the new (represented by God’s grace, Christ, the Spirit, and πῖστις). The antitheses are central to Paul’s theology because they represent the paradigm shift from soteriology based on the law and circumcision to soteriology based on God’s grace, Christ, and the Spirit.

In Galatians 5:2-12, moreover, there is significant vocabulary that encapsulates various central and pivotal terms appearing in the rest of the letter:

- a. Circumcision (Gal 2:3, 7, 8, 9, 12; 6:12, 13, 15 – 5:2-3)
- b. Being justified (Gal 2:16, 17, 21, 3:11, 24 – 5:4)

- c. Righteousness (Gal 2:21; 3:6, 21 – 5:5)
- d. Law (Gal 2:16, 19, 21; 3:2, 5, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 21, 23, 24; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:14, 18, 23; 6:2, 13 – 5:3, 4)
- e. Christ (Gal 1:1, 3, 6, 7, 10, 12, 22; 2:4, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21; 3:1, 13, 14, 16, 24, 26, 27, 28, 29; 4:14, 19; 5:1, 24; 6:2, 12, 14, 18 – 5:2, 4, 6)
- f. Grace (Gal 1:3, 6, 15; 2:9, 21; 6:18 – 5:4)
- g. Faith (Gal 1:23; 2:16, 20; 3:2, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 14, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26; 5:22; 6:10 – 5:5, 6)
- h. The Spirit (Gal 3:2, 3, 5, 14; 4:6, 29; 5:16, 17, 18, 22, 25; 6:1, 8, 18 – 5:5)
- i. Love (Gal 2:20; 5:13, 14, 22 – 5:6)

In this section, Paul attempts to solve the crisis in Galatia, which is the “Galatian apostasy” and the agitators’ perversion of “the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:6-7 – 5:2-12). The passage also tackles the issue of circumcision first, which is the real bone of contention in Galatians. It is also to be noted that in this section Paul deals with specific issues at stake in Galatia: justification (Gal 2:15-21; 3:6-4:7 – 5:4-5), circumcision (Gal 2:35; 6:12-13 – 5:2-3, 6, 11), the other gospel (Gal 1:6-9 – 5:8-10), and the agitators (Gal 1:7-9; 6:12-13 – 5:7-12). In Galatians 5:2-6 Paul solemnly answers the central issue at stake in Galatia: what is the soteriological ground for the inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God?

In Galatians 5:2-6 Paul uses the Pauline emphatic ἐγώ. (Gal 5:2, 5:10, 5:11) and several formulas of solemn affirmation (Ἰδὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι in 5:2, μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν in 5:3. Galatians 5:2-6 provides a highly-condensed summary of Paul’s previous argument and the truth of the gospel. As Betz perceptively observes, Galatians 5:5-6 “consists of a series of dogmatic formulaic expressions, which function as abbreviations of dogmatic statements.”³⁷ It should be noted that Galatians 5:5-6 is a doctrinal statement that sums up Paul’s theological conviction and arguments in the letter.³⁸ Most importantly, Galatians 5:2-6 seems to

37. Betz, *Galatians*, 262.

38. Longenecker argues, “Paul sets out in vv. 5-6 a series of brief positive statements that are, in fact, largely a résumé or précis of what he said before in the *propositio* (2:15-21) and *probatio* (3:1-4:11).” See Longenecker, *Galatians*, 228. Also, H. Hübner notes that Gal 5:5-6 is “eine ganze Dogmatik in nuce.” See Hübner, *Biblische Theologie des Neuen Testaments: Band 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993): 101-102. Burton also speaks of 5:6: “For the disclosure of the apostle’s fundamental idea of the nature of religion, there is no more important sentence in the whole epistle, if, indeed, in any of Paul’s epistles. Each term and construction of the sentence is significant.” See Burton, *Galatians*, 279.

contain the truth of Paul's gospel because "the truth" in Galatians 5:7 might refer to what Paul has said in Galatians 5:2-6. Furthermore, as several scholars have correctly observed,³⁹ we have significant parallels between Galatians 5:2-6 and 6:11-18 where the concluding remarks of the letter are found.⁴⁰ The parallel indicates that Galatians 5:2-6 is the section which summarizes the theological themes and issues of Galatians and thus serves as the hermeneutical center of Galatians.

Conclusion

On the basis of the analysis of the antitheses in Galatians 5:2-6 and the observations above, it is fair to say that Galatians 5:2-12 is not part of Paul's paraenesis in Galatians 5:1-6:10.⁴¹ Moreover, the section is more than a summary or conclusion of the previous argument. The function of the section can be divided into two parts. On one hand, Galatians 5:2-12 is the climax of Galatians because it summarizes the preceding part and introduces a new phase of argument.⁴² The passage is the climax of Paul's argument within Galatians with regard to the crisis in Galatia in the sense that here Paul attempts to solve the crisis in Galatia and to answer the specific issues at stake in Galatia. Since Galatians 5:2-6 contains the truth of the gospel, it is Paul's climactic statement of his argument to the Galatians. Since Galatians is designed to defend the truth of the gospel,⁴³ Galatians 5:2-12 is the apex of the defense.

On the other hand, the passage is an interpretative key for the interpretation of Galatians in the sense that Galatians 5:2-6 is Paul's truth-claim for his gospel in Galatians. The section not only summarizes the theological themes of Galatians but also presents Paul's theological conviction and horizon. As noted earlier, the antitheses are vital interpretive clues for understanding the substance of Paul's theology in Galatians, Paul's pivotal arguments against the agitators, and Paul's view of circumcision, the law, and justification. The passage also contains Paul's solution to the pivotal issues and crises in Galatia. In light of the

39. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 261; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 222; Matera, "The Culmination of Paul's Argument to the Galatians," 83, 90 n. 14; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 360.

40. Betz, *Galatians*, 313; and J. A. D. Weima, "Gal. 6:11-18," *CTJ* (1993): 90-107.

41. See Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 359-364. *Pace* e.g. Betz, Burton, Ebeling, Lightfoot, Guthrie.

42. See Matera, *Galatians*, 185-186; Witherington, *Grace in Galatia*, 359-364.

43. D. E. Garland, "Paul's Defence of the Truth of the Gospel Regarding Gentiles (Galatians 2:15-3:22)," *RevExp* 91 (1994): 165-181.

considerations above, the thesis that I would suggest is that Galatians 5:2-12, which is the summarizing review of Galatians 1:1-5.1 and the preview of Galatians 6:11-18, is both the climax of Paul's argument to the Galatians and an interpretive key or hermeneutical center for the interpretation of the letter.⁴⁴

44. Compare R. B. Hays who suggests that Gal 2:20-21 looks like the hermeneutical centre of the letter and Weima ("Gal. 6:11-18," 90-107) and Betz (*Galatians*, 313) claiming that Gal 6:11-18 is a hermeneutical key to the Galatian letter. For Hays, see "Crucified with Christ: A Synthesis of the Theology of 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Philippians and Galatians," in *Pauline Theology*, Volume I: *Thessalonians, Philippians, Galatians, Philemon*, ed. Jouette M. Bassler (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 242.