
Reassessing The Interplay of Faith and Law in Pauline Theology: An Exegetical Inquiry into Galatians 3:11 And Its Theological Implications

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at addressing the misconception of Paul's theology on justification by faith alone apart from the law; however, the researcher attempts an in-depth analysis and examination of the relationship between faith and law in Pauline thought. This exegetical study explores the complex relationship between faith and law in Pauline theology through an exegetical analysis of Galatians 3:11. The study is guided by four research questions. To answer the research questions, the researcher employed a qualitative design as well as a hermeneutical and exegetical approach, pointing us to some problems surrounding the understanding of Paul's theology on faith and law, which led to the significance of this study. The findings show that Galatians 3:11 prioritizes faith over works of the law and that justification is by faith alone and not faith plus works. The knowledge gap identified in this research work is "consciousness of the law after being redeemed from it and the sinful guilt that torments a soul as a result of law-breaking," which Paul is vehemently against. At the end, the researcher recommended that further research should be carried out on the concept of faith and law for deeper comprehension.

Keywords: theology, faith, law, interplay, exegesis and implication.

Introduction

The connection between faith and law in Pauline theology is a central theme of Paul's writings, especially in his epistles to the Romans and Galatians. very clear that Paul advocates justification by faith in Christ Jesus over justification by works of the Mosaic law. In this perspective, Paul rejected and disregarded the first-century Judaism's uncontaminated and legalistic religion.²⁴⁸ For Sanders, Paul's letters do not address good works but instead question Jewish religious practices such as circumcision, nutritional laws, and sabbath law, which were the margin lines that set the Jews apart from other ethno-religious groups in the world. He further argues that first-century Judaism was not a "legalistic community", nor was it oriented to "salvation by works" but "people of the covenant". And as God's "chosen people", following the Mosaic Law was not a way of entering the covenant but of staying within it.²⁴⁹ The above Sander's assertion is a wrong approach to Paul's theology of faith and law, which is one of the misconceptions of Paul's theology that this research paper seeks to address. According to Clebsch, who quoted William Tyndale's view that "after fall, we are sinners not because we break the law, instead, we break the law because we are sinners," Tyndale believed humans are inherently sinful, and this sinfulness leads to law-breaking. This view, therefore, stresses that human nature is flawed and that every member of Christ's congregation is a sinner who sins daily.²⁵⁰ Tyndale's

²⁴⁸ Roetzel J. Calvin, *The Anatomy of the Letters" 6th ed., chapter 3 The Letters of Paul: Conversations in Context* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press 2015), 84.

²⁴⁹ E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1977), 627.

²⁵⁰ William A. Clebsch, *England's Earliest Protestants* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), 144

view aligned with Paul's theology that says, "It's not the law that makes us sinners, but our sinful nature that leads to law-breaking" (Romans 7:18).

The Concept Mosaic Laws

Biblical law refers to the set of rules found in the Jewish Tanakh. Tanakh is an acronym for the three sections of the canonised Hebrew Bible and thus, the Torah (the Five Books of Moses), Nevi'im (Prophets), and Ketuvim (Writings). The Hebrew word for the first five books of Moses is "*Torah*", which means "law", and was translated into Greek as "nomos" or "Law", referring to the same five books of Moses, which are termed in English "Pentateuch" from Latinised Greek "five books", implying the five books of Moses. According to some scholars, the use of the name "*Torah*" to signify the "Five Books of Moses" of the Hebrew Bible is clearly documented only from the 2nd century BCE. Therefore, in modern usage, *Torah* can refer to the first five books of the Tanakh.²⁵¹

According to the Old Testament, the Law is God-centred, and the Bible is the written revelation of God, speaking not only about individual matters, but also about social and cosmic matters as well. The Bible was written for mankind, and thus everything it says is relevant to humanity. The main purpose of man, however, is to glorify God and to enjoy Him. Fallen man glorifies himself and enjoys himself, or tries to do so. The question is, "What does it mean to glorify someone?" Basically, two things. First, it means to praise him. When we sing the praises of God, our Creator and Saviour, we glorify Him verbally. Second, it means to do things that please God. When we glorify God, through life and lip, we find that we enjoy Him,

²⁵¹ Frank Crüsemann, *The Torah: Theology and Social History of Old Testament Law*, trans. Allan W. Mahnke (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 331.

and that we enjoy life.²⁵² There are three types of Mosaic laws and thus, moral laws, civil laws and ceremonial laws.

The moral laws refer to the Ten Commandments, which are foundational to the rest of the Law. They mirror God's character and his plan for the world. The Ten Commandments cover the vertical relationship between God and his people and the horizontal relationship between man to man or woman to woman in the community. This includes commands regarding murder, adultery, theft, and covetousness.

Civil laws or judicial laws refer to regulations that govern the day-to-day life of the Hebrew people. They govern marriage, divorce, sexual conduct, property rights and set penalties for various crimes. All nations need civil laws to help deal with disputes between citizens and enforce morals.

Ceremonial laws refer to regulations that deal with worship. These are instructions on how to offer sacrifices, perform rituals and celebrate festivals. They also governed what was considered "clean" and "unclean".²⁵³

The Idea of Biblical Faith

The word "faith", translated from the Greek πίστις (*pístis*), meaning "faith", and Latin *fidēs*, meaning "trust", "faith", "confidence". The verb form of *pi'stis* is *pisteuo*, which is often translated into English versions of the New Testament as

²⁵² James B. Jordan, *The law of the covenant the law of the covenant An Exposition of Exodus 21-23* (Published by Institute for Christian Economics Tyler, Texas, USA), 1-3. copyright 1971 by the Lockman Foundation.

²⁵³ Keith Mack, *The Mosaic Law: A Foundation Of Judaism*: Law Shun 17 June 2025, <https://lawshun.com/article/what-is-the-law-of-moses-most-commonly-known-as#:~:text=The%20Law%20of%20Moses%2C%20also%20known%20as%20Mosaic,category%3A%20moral%20laws%2C%20civil%20laws%2C%20and%20ceremonial%20laws>

'believe'. The adjectival form, *pistos*, is almost always translated as 'faithful'. The New Testament writers, following the translators of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), rendered words in the Hebrew scriptures that concerned 'faithfulness' using the *pi'stis*-group words. In Christianity, faith is often discussed in terms of believing God's promises, trusting in his faithfulness, and relying on God's character and faithfulness to act. Some denominations, such as the Lutherans, believe in the New Covenant and in the doctrine of salvation by faith alone (*sola fide*). In the Protestant tradition, faith is generally understood to be closely associated with ideas of belief, trust, and reliance.²⁵⁴

Christian Apologetics View of Faith

In contrast to Richard Dawkins' view of faith as "blind trust, in the absence of evidence, even in the teeth of evidence", Alister McGrath quotes the Oxford Anglican theologian W. H. Griffith Thomas (1861–1924), who states that faith is "not blind, but intelligent" and that it "commences with the conviction of the mind based on adequate evidence."²⁵⁵

British Christian apologist John Lennox argues that "faith conceived as a belief that lacks warrant is very different from faith conceived as a belief that has warrant". He states, "the use of the adjective 'blind' to describe 'faith' indicates that faith is not necessarily, or always, or indeed normally, blind". "The validity, or warrant, of faith or belief depends on the strength of the evidence on which the belief is based." "We all know how to distinguish between blind faith and evidence-based faith. We are well aware that faith is only justified if there is evidence to

²⁵⁴ A. J. Wallace, R. D. Rusk, *Moral Transformation: The Original Christian Paradigm of Salvation* (New Zealand: Bridgehead, 2011), 120

²⁵⁵ Dawkins Richard, *The Selfish Gene*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 198

back it up." "Evidence-based faith is the normal concept on which we base our everyday lives²⁵⁶

Denominational View of Faith

In the Catholic Church, the four-part *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) devotes Part One to "The Profession of Faith". This section describes the content of faith. It elaborates and expands, particularly upon the Apostles' Creed. CCC 144 initiates a section on the "Obedience of Faith". For example, in the theology of Pope John Paul II, faith is understood in personal terms as a trusting commitment of person to person and thus involves Christian commitment to the divine person of Jesus Christ²⁵⁷

Lutherans belief is that the Bible teaches that *faith* is a state of the heart where one acknowledges and trusts the gospel's promises, God's forgiveness and eternal life through Jesus Christ

In Methodism, faith plays an important role in justification, which occurs during the new birth. The Emmanuel Association, a Methodist denomination in the conservative holiness movement, teaches, "Living faith is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8; Romans 4:16) imparted to the obedient heart through the Word of God (Romans 10:17), and the ministry of the Holy Ghost (Ephesians 2:18). This faith becomes effective as it is exercised by man with the aid of the Spirit, which aid is always assured when the heart has met the divine condition (Hebrews 5:9). Living faith is to be distinguished from

²⁵⁶ Lennox John, *Gunning for God; Why the New Atheists Are Missing the Target* (United Kingdom: Lion, 2011), 55

²⁵⁷ Dulles Avery, *The Splendour of Faith; The Theological Vision of Pope John Paul II* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), vii–viii

intellectual confidence which may be in the possession of any unawaken soul” (Romans 10:1–4).²⁵⁸

Who was Paul?

Paul, also known as Saul of Tarsus, was a Christian apostle who spread the teachings of Jesus in the first century. He is generally regarded as one of the most important figures of the Apostolic Age, and he also founded several Christian communities in Asia Minor and Europe from the mid-40 AD to the mid-50 AD. Paul was actually born as Saul. He was born in Tarsus in Cilicia, a province in the southeastern corner of modern-day Turkey. He was of Benjamite lineage and Hebrew ancestry (Philippians 3:5–6). His parents were Pharisees, dedicated and devoted Jewish nationalists who adhered strictly to the Law of Moses. Saul’s family were Roman citizens²⁵⁹ but considered Jerusalem as their holy city. Paul speaks Greek and passable Latin, though his household would have spoken Aramaic, which was the official language of Judea. (Acts 22:22–29). At age thirteen, Saul was sent to Judea to learn from a rabbi named Gamaliel. It was during this time that he developed a question-and-answer style of teaching known in ancient times as “diatribe.” This method of articulation helped rabbis debate the finer points of Jewish law to either defend or prosecute those who broke the law. Saul went on to become a lawyer, and all signs pointed to his becoming a member of the Sanhedrin, the Jewish Supreme Court of 71 men who ruled over Jewish life and religion. Saul was zealous for his faith, and this faith did not allow for compromise. It is this zeal that led Saul down the path of religious extremism. He was present during the stoning and death of Stephen. He held the garments of those who did the stoning (Acts 7:58). After Stephen’s death,

²⁵⁸ “*Guidebook of the Emmanuel Association of Churches*” (Logansport: Emmanuel Association 2002), 7

²⁵⁹ Murphy O. Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford University Press, 1996) 46–48

"a great persecution broke out against the church in Jerusalem" (Acts 8:1). Saul became determined to eradicate Christians, ruthless in his pursuit as he believed he was acting in the name of God. Arguably, there is no one more frightening or more vicious than a religious terrorist, especially when he believes he is doing the will of the Lord by killing innocent people. This is exactly what Saul of Tarsus was: a religious terrorist. Acts 8:3 states, "He began ravaging the church, entering house after house, and dragging off men and women, he would put them in prison." The significant passage in Paul's story is Acts 9:1–22, which recounts Paul's meeting with Jesus Christ on the road from Jerusalem to Damascus, a journey of about 150 miles. Saul was angered by what he had seen and filled with murderous rage against the Christians. Before departing on his journey, he had asked the high priest for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for permission to bring any Christians, "Followers of the Way" as they were known back to Jerusalem to imprison them. On the road, Saul was caught in a bright light from heaven that caused him to fall face down on the ground, and this encounter marked his turning point. Saul immediately went into the synagogues and proclaimed Jesus as the Son of God (Acts 9:20). The people were amazed and sceptical, as Saul's reputation was well known. The Jews thought he had come to take away the Christians (Acts 9:21), but he had in fact joined them. Saul's boldness increased as the Jews living in Damascus were confounded by Saul's arguments proving that Jesus was the Christ (Acts 9:22). Saul took his first of three missionary journeys in the late AD 40s. As he spent more time in Gentile areas, Saul began to go by his Roman name Paul (Acts 13:9). Paul wrote many of the New Testament books. Most theologians are in agreement that he wrote Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, Philemon, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. These thirteen "letters" (epistles) make up the "Pauline Authorship" and are the primary source of his theology. The apostle Paul spent his life proclaiming the risen Christ Jesus throughout the Roman world, often at great

personal peril (2 Corinthians 11:24–27). It is assumed that Paul died a martyr's death in the mid-to-late AD 60s in Rome.²⁶⁰

The Theological Perspective of Paul

In order for one to fathom Paul's thoughts on faith and law, it is of great importance to be aware of his theological perspective.

Justification by Faith: Paul advocates justification through faith in Jesus Christ over justification through works of the Mosaic Law. During the Protestant Reformation, this theological principle became known as *sola fide* ("faith alone"). According to Paul, good works performed by Christians would not factor into their salvation; only their faith in Jesus Christ would save them. In this perspective, Paul countered and dismissed the 1st-century Judaism legalistic religion.

God is the Fundamental Presupposition of Paul's Theology: Paul regards God as an axiom, for a systematic study of Paul's theology has confirmed it. This is not simply because the term "theology" means "study or speech about God" as its widely defined but because God is the fundamental presupposition of Paul's theology. The word "God" itself occurs 548 times in the Pauline Archive, 153 in the book of Romans alone. As a rule in the Pauline letters God is mentioned at once as the primary legitimating factor behind Paul's life work, examples "Paul, called to be an apostle . . . through God's will" (1 Cor. 1.1), "Paul, Apostle . . . through God the Father" (Gal. 1.1), the one which becomes almost stereotypical thereafter, "Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus through God's will." and the regular greeting in his letters is of "grace to you and peace from God our Father," followed by a thanksgiving to God.²⁶¹

²⁶⁰ Ryan Nelson, *Who Was the Apostle Paul?* 28 February 2019, <https://overviewbible.com/apostle-paul/>

²⁶¹ James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (William. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, U.K. 1998), 28-29. ©1998

Humankind Under Indictment: For Paul, the human condition is marked not only by weakness but by ungodliness, that's the term he had used in the opening of the indictment (Romans 1:18). In Greek, "sōma" (σῶμα) refers to "body, physical form, or bodily structure." It always carries positive meaning e.g (1 Corinthians 6:19-20 and Ephesians 1:22-23). The Biblical contexts described the body as the Temple of God and the body of Christ. Whereas, "sarx" (σὰρξ) refers to flesh, often in a more negative sense, implying weakness, sinfulness, or worldly nature. It can also be described as the sinful or carnal nature of humanity. E.g (Romans 7:25, Galatians 5:16-17). Often used in contrast to the flesh and the spirit. Understanding the distinction between these two words provides insight into the nuances of biblical teachings on the nature of humanity and spirituality. Paul's theology indicates that humankind is under indictment due to their sinful nature. No sarx (flesh) can inherit the Kingdom of God because it is perishable and mortal (1 Cor. 15:50). It is "mortal" (2 Cor. 4:11), subject to affliction and weariness (2 Cor. 7:5) ", the weakness of the flesh" (Gal. 4:13-14). For Paul, nothing good lives in the flesh. No man or woman can produce the righteousness that God requires except Jesus Christ, the second Adam, who is the righteousness of God that is by faith to faith (Romans 1:17).²⁶²

Law and Sin: Romans 7:7-25 presents one of Paul's most complex and contested discussions of the Law and sin, and thus, Paul maintains a clear affirmation of the Law's divine origin as spiritual and good. This positive affirmation of the law appears in verse 12 of Romans 7: "So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (ὥστε ὁ μὲν νόμος ἅγιος καὶ ἡ ἐντολὴ ἁγία καὶ δικαία καὶ ἀγαθή). The above verse shows Paul's reverence for the Law as God's revelation. It's clearer in verse 14, Paul calls the Law "spiritual" (πνευματικός/pneumatikos), indicating its

²⁶² Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 72

divine origin and character. These affirmations reflect Paul's Jewish heritage, where Torah represented God's gracious gift revealing divine will and wisdom. Despite his affirmation of the Law's divine origin of being good and holy, Paul also presents the Law as a burden that human beings, in their sinful nature, cannot successfully bear. According to Paul, the Law creates and provides consciousness and awareness of sin without providing the power to overcome it. First of all, in Romans 7:7-11, the Law brings knowledge of sin: "I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet' for 'sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness". Paul again presented law as a temporary guardian and the revealer of sin. Paul's argument in Galatians 3:15-25 presents one of the Law's primary functions as revealing, defining, and even intensifying sin. This diagnostic role appears most explicitly in 3:19, where Paul states that the Law "was added because of transgressions" This understanding aligns with Paul's more elaborate discussion in Romans 7:7-13, where he states, "If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin... sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness."²⁶³

The Gospel as the Core Message: Paul's theology is deeply rooted in the gospel, which he defines as the death and resurrection of Christ. He stresses that these events fulfil the Old Testament scriptures and are central to the Christian faith.

the Role of the Holy Spirit: According to Paul, the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in believers by enabling them to

²⁶³ Austin W. Duncan, *The Role of the Law in Pauline Theology; A Study of Romans and Galatians*, 6 June 2020, <https://www.austinwduncan.com/exegetica/the-role-of-the-law-in-pauline-theology/03/28/2025> © 2020

produce and bear fruit called "Spiritual Fruits" (Galatians 5:22). Unlike the law, which exposes sin without providing the means to overcome it, the Spirit transforms believers from within and out to live in obedience to God. Paul still emphasizes the Spiritual gifts or abilities that edify the Church. (1 Corinthians 12:8-10).

The Church as the Body of Christ: Paul uniquely describes the Church as the body of Christ, with each believer as a member. This metaphor highlights the unity and diversity within the Church, stressing that all members are essential and called to serve one another in love. (1 Corinthians 12:12-28).

Transformation and New Creation: Paul speaks of the believer's transformation through faith, describing them as new creations in Christ. This change signifies a shift from the old self, characterised by sin, to a new self that reflects the image of Christ. This transformation is a key aspect of living out one's faith, e.g 2 Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live,

but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."²⁶⁴

Different Perspectives on Faith and Law

The New Perspective on Paul (NPP) View on Faith and Law:

Recently, the New Perspective on Paul led by Ed Parish Sanders claimed that the reformers, such as Martin Luther and John

²⁶⁴ John D. Harvey *Paul's Theology*, The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/pauls-theology/> © 2025.

Calvin, have misunderstood and misconstrued Paul's teaching and thought on justification in both Romans and Galatians, by wrongly proposing and propagating justification by faith alone without works of the law (*Sola Fide*). Sanders further claimed Paul was not in conflict with Judaism in a soteriological sense but in an ecclesiological sense. He saw it as a religion of grace, a concept he called covenantal nomism. He challenged the traditional interpretation that Paul opposed the Jewish law and that Christianity was a religion of grace versus Jewish legalism. Sanders saw the law as the proper response to God's grace, and that Paul was more focused on critiquing the use of ethnic markers to define God's community.

Sanders outstanding views are as follows:

Covenantal Legalism: He asserted that in ancient Judaism, keeping the law was understood as a response to God's grace and the covenant with Israel, not as a means to earn salvation. Therefore, Paul was not primarily against the law itself but was concerned with the question of who belonged in God's community.

The limitations of ethnic categorization: For Sanders, Paul's focus was that the resurrection of Jesus extended the covenant to all people, and ethnic markers were no longer the defining criteria for inclusion.

Faith and law: Sanders asserted that for Paul, faith and works were not in tension or conflict but were two sides of the same coin, with good works as the result of faith.

According to Sanders, Paul's letters do not address good works but instead question Jewish religious observances such as circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath laws, which were the "boundary markers" that set the Jews apart from other ethno-religious groups in the Levant.²⁶⁵ This frontal attack

²⁶⁵ Dunn James D. G, *The New Perspective on Paul* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co 2005), 59

seems directed primarily at Luther and Calvin. E. P. Sanders agrees with the writing on Galatians 2–4 and Romans 3–4. He argues that in these passages, “The subject matter is not ‘how can the individual be righteous in God’s sight?’ but rather ‘on what grounds can Gentiles participate in the people of God in the last days? According to the New Perspective on Paul movement, Reformers viewed the apostle Paul’s writings through a works-righteousness lens of medieval times and perspectives.²⁶⁶ In doing so, they misunderstood, misconstrued, and mistook the true perspective of Second Temple Judaism, resulting in a radical misinterpretation of Paul’s true teaching. Attempting a more direct hit on the Reformers, Sanders contends that Luther interpreted Paul’s teaching on justification through the eyes of a guilt-ridden conscience. He writes, “Luther, plagued by guilt, read Paul’s passages on ‘righteousness by faith’ as meaning that God reckoned a Christian to be righteous even though he or she was a sinner. Luther’s emphasis on fictional, imputed righteousness, though it has often been shown to be an incorrect interpretation of Paul, has been influential. Luther sought and found relief from guilt. But Luther’s problems were not Paul’s, and we misunderstand him if we see him through Luther’s eyes.²⁶⁷

Simply put, Sanders is arguing that first-century Judaism was not a religion that taught “self-reliance” justification, i.e., the Pharisees were not teaching a works-based righteousness. According to the New Perspective of Paul, the Judaism of Paul’s day understood salvation in terms of the covenant community of Israel, a community brought together by God’s grace. Sander continues to argue that Paul’s concern is not Judaistic legalism for Justification in early Judaism, from a First-Century Perspective. Therefore, the concept of justification is not to be

²⁶⁶ E. P. Sanders, *Paul the Apostle’s life, letters and thought* (Oxford: University Press, 1991), 50.

²⁶⁷ Sander, *Paul the Apostle’s life, letter and thought.*, 49

understood in a soteriological sense but in an ecclesiological sense.²⁶⁸

However, the following texts (Acts 13:38-39, Luke 18:14, and Rom 9:30-32) show that Judaism of that day was definitely legalistic. Let's explore further to know more about the Rabbinic Perspective and the Reformers' Perspective.

The Rabbinic Perspective on Faith and Law

The rabbis taught that mankind could, by some means, acquire merit with God by personal efforts. A rabbinical account, dated at the end of the first century A.D., stated, "When Rabbi Eliezer fell ill, his disciples went in to visit him. They said to him, Master, teach us the paths of life so that we may through them win the life of the future world. He said to them: Be solicitous for the honor of your colleagues, and keep your children from meditation, and set them between the knees of scholars, and when you pray know before whom you are standing and, in this way, you will win the future world."²⁶⁹

The context of Paul's warnings and the clear statements expressed by some first-century Rabbis indicate that Judaism of that day was teaching that justification before God required human effort or merit. That is what Paul was objecting to so tenaciously. His concern was not ecclesiology; it was soteriology.

²⁶⁸ Nicholas T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said?* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1997), 114

²⁶⁹ Philip S. Alexander, *Torah and Salvation in Tannaitic Literature; Justification and Variegated*, 13th ed (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 173

Martin Luther's Perspective on Faith and Law

The Reformers are charged and blamed by the New Perspective on Paul for misreading and misconstruing Paul's instructions on the role of the law in justification. That accusation is directed against the Reformers in general, but the attack is aimed most directly at the writings of Martin Luther. Luther's firm stand against the ecclesiastical giant of his day, his theological wisdom, his articulate preaching, and his prolific pen placed him at the forefront of the Reformation, and thus put him in the target of all who might take blame. The impact of this former monk for more than half a millennium, together with his contribution to the discussion of Paul and the law, cannot be underestimated. Therefore, Luther in his writings on justification by faith alone (*Sola Fide*) stated that Apostle Paul in his teaching on the law in the Epistle to the Romans, a book that he calls "the chief part of the New Testament and the very purest Gospel," provides a reasonable summary, and thus Abraham was justified by faith alone, without any works. The Scriptures, in Genesis 15:6, declare that he was justified by faith alone, even before the work of circumcision. But if the work of circumcision contributed nothing to his righteousness, though God commanded it and it was a good work of obedience, then, surely, no other good work will contribute anything to righteousness. Luther further stated that, "the Jews cannot be Abraham's heirs merely because of their blood, still less because of the works of the law, but must be heirs of Abraham's faith, if they would be true heirs" For before the law, either the law of Moses or the law of circumcision, Abraham was justified by faith and called the father of believers. Therefore, it is faith alone that is required to obtain the grace promised to Abraham.

For Luther, the law is meant to crush self-righteousness and to drive sinful mankind to seek the mercy of the Saviour. Luther taught that the law was designed as a "great hammer" used by God to drive man to utter despair and show man his need for the Saviour. He writes that the law "is the hammer of death, the thundering of hell and the lightning of God's wrath, that beats

to powder the obstinate and senseless hypocrites, bringing them under the feet of Christ. This is indeed the proper and absolute use of the law, “to beat down and rend in pieces that beast which is called the opinion of righteousness”. Therefore, for Luther, mankind is justified before God, not by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.²⁷⁰

To Luther, commenting on Gal 2:16, he writes, The Law is a good thing. But when the discussion is about justification, then there is no time to drag in the Law, for believers, though declared righteous in the eyes of God, remain sinners throughout their earthly lives. Luther views sin as a present fact of life for the believer. The believer is both sinner and saint at the same time (*simul justus et peccator*). “Sin is always present, and the godly feel it. But it is ignored and hidden in the sight of God, because Christ the Mediator stands between.”²⁷¹

John Calvin's Perspective on Faith and Law

Calvin defined “law” in two different ways. In one sense, he believed that it could refer to “the whole form of religion handed down by God through Moses. “This Mosaic religion was a reminder or a renewal rather than a replacement of the covenant of mercy God made with Abraham. Thus, when the ‘entire law’ is in view, the gospel itself must be seen as confirming, not substituting it.”²⁷² In addition to these, Calvin contends that the law has three primary uses or roles in the lives of mankind. Calvin borrows Luther’s view of the two uses

²⁷⁰ Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, trans. Theodore Graebner (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1949), 68; Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. T. Mueller (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976) 139-41.

²⁷¹ Luther, *Galatians* 26:133 (Cf. Westerholm, Paul), 36-37

²⁷² John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 1st ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960) 2,7,1, 2,9,4

of the law (though in reversed order),²⁷³ and then adds a third use for Calvin, the purpose of the Law is to:

Reveal mankind's sinfulness and depravity: Calvin asserts that Justification before God is unattainable apart from divine intervention in regeneration. "This punitive function of the law serves both to terrify the wicked and make the believer realize how dependent upon God one really is."²⁷⁴

Restrain the lawlessness of mankind: The law protects society in general from the criminal element of the unregenerate person. He writes, the second office of the law is to cause those who, unless constrained, feel no concern for justice and rectitude, when they hear its terrible sanctions, to be at least restrained by a fear of its penalties. And they are restrained ... because, being chained as it were, they refrain from external acts, and repress their depravity within them, which otherwise would have wantonly discharged.²⁷⁵

Exhort and admonish believers: Luther only alluded to the idea that the law could instruct believers on how to live. After all, he was writing to people who felt the full burden of the wrong use of the law under Roman Catholicism. He wanted to avoid having people feel that, after they had believed, they would again need to work at obtaining heaven.²⁷⁶ Calvin, on the other hand, makes this third use the principal role of the law. He writes that this use "finds

²⁷³ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, 6-13

²⁷⁴ Robert K. Rapa, *The Meaning of 'Works of the Law' in Galatians and Romans*, in *Studies in Biblical Literature*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 18

²⁷⁵ Raper, *The meaning of the works of the law in Galatians and Romans*, 321

²⁷⁶ Paul M. Moyer, *Law and Gospels: Quoted from Luther's Second Disputation Against the Antinomians*, (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 194

its place among believers in whose hearts the Spirit of God already lives and reigns. To this flesh the law serves as a whip, urging it, like a dull and tardy animal, forwards to its work; and even to the spiritual man, who is not yet delivered from the burden of the flesh, it will be a perpetual spur that will not permit him to loiter.” Thus, for Calvin, the law has a much more prominent role in the life of the believer than it does for Luther. For Luther, the law does not prompt good works within the believer; that is the role of the Spirit of God.

The Twenty-First Century Scholars' View on Justification by Faith

The two prominent scholars who have discussed extensively on the justification by faith within the past three decades are Stephen Westerholm and Douglas Moo. Westerholm explores the ongoing debate regarding the concept of justification by faith as upheld by Paul. Westerholm critiques the New Perspective on Paul proposed by scholars such as E. P. Sanders, N.T. Wright, Krister Stendahl, and others, which suggests that justification is primarily about how Gentiles can be included in the people of God without becoming Jews. Instead, he maintains that justification is essentially about how sinners can find a gracious God or attain salvation in the sense of the soteriological aspect. He emphasizes both the strengths and weaknesses of these contemporary perspectives. He argues that justification is about God declaring sinners righteous, apart from works of the law. Westerholm emphasizes that human beings are incapable of achieving righteousness on their own and are in desperate need of divine grace. For Westerholm, Luther was largely correct in that Paul was preaching to answer the human question ‘How do sinners find a gracious God?’²⁷⁷

²⁷⁷ Chris S. Stevens, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 2. 2014.

Douglas Moo highlighted that justification is by faith alone, stressing God's sovereign role in salvation. He argues that faith is not a work, for justification is not earned through human effort or obedience, but is a gift from God received through faith. Moo believes that genuine faith produces good works and that God credits Christ's righteousness to our account. In contrast to some recent reconfigurations of this doctrine, Moo also addresses common debates, highlighting that justification is not by faith and works, but by faith alone. For Moo Paul's teaching on justification in Galatians strongly endorses the traditional Reformation emphasis on justification by faith alone. Moo's brief overview confirms those who find a monergism in Paul's teaching about salvation that stands in contrast to the synergism of covenant nomism. Justification, not only in its initial phase, but in its totality, is "sola fide", and though it has not been a focus of this study.²⁷⁸

Paul's Mission in the Book of Galatians

Considering the religious and cultural context of the Galatians epistle, it's very obvious that Apostle Paul wrote the letter to address and defend his teaching on the justification by faith alone apart from the law as indicated in the exegetical verse of this paper seminar (Galatians 3:11). Before we delve into the exegesis of Galatians 3:11, let's look at some of the reasons why Paul wrote this epistle were:

To deal with the emergence of false teachers: These false teachers are often referred to as "Judaizers," who insisted that Gentile converts must adhere to Jewish laws, including circumcision, to be truly saved.

file:///C:/Users/user/Downloads/Westerholm_Stephen_Justification_Reconsi.pdf

²⁷⁸ Justin Taylor, *Moo on justification in Galatians; The Gospel Coalition*, 19 April 2011 <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/john-wesley-to-a-younger-minister-quit-starving-yourself/>

Paul saw this as a fundamental threat to the gospel's integrity and the freedom it offered.

To passionately defend the gospel of faith alone: For Paul, the true Gospel emphasizes justification by faith alone in Christ Jesus, not by works of the law as claimed by the second Temple Judaizers. He strongly opposed the idea that adherence to the Jewish customs, including circumcision, is necessary for salvation. He articulates that, believers are justified by faith in Christ, not by works of the law (Galatians 2:16). Paul alluded to the story of Abraham, who was justified by faith before the law was given, to illustrate that faith, not law, is the basis of God's covenant with humanity (Galatians 3:6-9).

To clarify that the law was a guardian: For Paul, the law served as a guardian until Christ came, but now that faith has come, believers are no longer under a guardian (Gal. 3:24-25).

To defend the unity and equality believers have in Christ: For Paul, in Christ we are all one, there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female; all are one in Him (Galatians 3:28). This radical equality and unity in Christ were revolutionary in the first-century context, challenging social and religious barriers. For Paul, the issue of marginalization of Gentile converts was not merely theological but existential. The Gospel was at risk of being distorted, and the freedom of believers was threatened. Paul's passionate plea is for the Galatians to stand firm in their freedom and not to submit again to a yoke of slavery (Galatians 5:1).

Luther's View on Righteousness

Martin Luther talked about two kinds of righteousness, and thus, active righteousness, which is based on one's work under

the law. Passive righteousness, which is based on what Christ has done for us (a gift from Jesus on the basis of faith alone).

Below is the extraction from Luther's commentary on the book of Galatians, written in 1535,

This is our theology, by which we teach a precise distinction between these two kinds of righteousness, the active and the passive, so that morality and faith, works and grace, secular society and religion may not be confused. Both are necessary, but both must be kept within their limits. Christian righteousness applies to the new person, and the righteousness of the law applies to the old person, who is born of flesh and blood. Upon this latter, as upon an ass, a burden must be put that will oppress the old. This person must not enjoy the freedom of the spirit or of grace unless the old has first put on the new by faith in Christ, but this does not happen fully in this life. Then we may enjoy the kingdom and the ineffable gift of grace. I am saying this so that no one may suppose that we reject or prohibit good works, as the papists falsely accuse us because they do not understand what they themselves are saying or what they are teaching. They know nothing except the righteousness of the law, and yet they claim the right to judge a doctrine that is far above and beyond the law, a doctrine on which the carnal person is unable to pass judgment. Therefore, it is inevitable that they will be offended, for they cannot see any higher than the law. Therefore, whatever is above the law is the greatest possible offence to them."²⁷⁹

The above Luther's view on righteousness is a gateway to understanding the righteousness that has been revealed

²⁷⁹ Rose Gilbert *Two kind of righteousness: crossways to life*,

<https://www.crosswaystolife.org/articles/two-kinds-of-righteousness/#:~:text=To%20help%20make%20his%20point%2C%20Luther%20talked%20about,on%20the%20book%20of%20Galatians%2C%20written%20in%201535.> © 1996

through Christ Jesus, which is from faith to faith and not from faith to works or faith plus works of the law (Romans 1:17).

Analysis of Galatians 3:11

Galatians 3:11, "Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because 'the righteous will live by faith.'" (NIV)

Historical Context of the Book of Galatians

The Epistle to the Galatians is believed to have been written around AD 48-55, making it one of Paul's earlier letters. It was written to the churches in the region of Galatia, which was located in what is now modern-day Turkey. The exact location and identity of the Galatians have been subjects of scholarly debate. The two primary theories are the "North Galatian" and "South Galatian" theories. The North Galatian theory suggests that Paul addressed ethnic Galatians, who were a Celtic group of people living in the northern part of the province. In contrast, the South Galatian theory posits that the letter was directed to churches in the southern part of the Roman province of Galatia, such as those in Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe, which Paul visited during his missionary journeys as recorded in Acts 13-14. The historical setting of Galatians is shaped by the early church's struggle to define the role of the Mosaic Law for Gentile converts. Paul, a former Pharisee and a zealous adherent to the Jewish law, had encountered on his way to Damascus a dramatic conversion to Christianity (Acts 9). He became a fervent and zealous advocate for the inclusion of Gentiles into the Christian faith without binding Jewish customs and traditions on them, such as circumcision or generally, civil and ceremonial laws on them. This was a radical departure and disconnection from the prevailing Jewish thought and practice, which held the Law of Moses.²⁸⁰

²⁸⁰McDonald L Martin, *Introduction to Galatians; The Bible Knowledge Background Commentary*, (Vol. 2. Colorado Springs, Colorado: Victor, 2004), 462.

The Religious and Cultural Context of the Book of Galatians

The context indicates that there was an infiltration of Judaizers into the Galatian churches. These intruders were Jewish Christians who taught that Gentile converts must observe the Mosaic Law, including circumcision, to be truly saved. As a result of this, there was a great marginalization and discrimination against the Gentile convert because it contradicted the gospel of grace that Paul had preached, which stressed salvation through faith in Jesus Christ alone, apart from works of the law. The book Galatians 2:11-13 recounts a confrontation with Peter in Antioch, where he rebuked Peter for withdrawing and exempting himself from Gentile believers under pressure from Judaizers. This incident highlights the tension and complexity of integrating Jewish and Gentile believers into a unified Christian community.²⁸¹

The keywords to be translated in Galatians 3:11 are as follows:

Law: In Greek, the word for law is ‘νόμος’ (nomos), meaning “Law, Regulation or Principle.” The Greek word “nomos” is primarily associated with the concept of law. However, its meaning extends beyond mere rules and regulations. In ancient Greece, “nomos” also refers to legal, moral, and religious norms. It represented an ordered system that aimed to promote justice, maintain social harmony, and guide human behaviour²⁸²

²⁸¹ Keith Maynor, *Social and cultural textures in Galatians 1*; Journal in Biblical perspective in Leadership School of Business & Leadership, Regent University, 2018), 2018.

https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/vol8no1/Vol8Iss1_JBPL_17_Maynor.pdf

²⁸² Beekes Robert S. P. (2010), “νέμω, -ομαι”, in Etymological Dictionary of Greek (Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series; 10), with the assistance of Lucien van Beek, Leiden, Boston: Brill, 1006-1007

Faith: The Greek word for faith is Πίστις, with its transliteration 'pistis', which was the personification of good faith, trust and reliability. Faith also means assurance, belief, fidelity, faith, faithfulness, pledge and proof.²⁸³

Just: Greek word for Just is δίκαιος (dikaios) from equitable (in character or act); by implication, innocent, holy or righteous. The term also signifies someone who is just or in conformity with God's standards. Therefore, to be justified means to be declared righteous. The Greek phrase "dikaioutai" means "justified."²⁸⁴

Life: The Greek word for "life" is "ζωή" (zōé). This term is derived from the verb "ζάω" (zaō), which means "to live". In various contexts, "zōé" refers to both physical and spiritual life, often used in biblical texts to denote the essence of life itself.²⁸⁵

An Exegetical Approach to Galatians 3:11

Galatians 3:11, "But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for the just shall live by faith."

The phrase "the just shall live by faith." (Ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται) - transliteration of it is (Ho dikaios ek pisteos zēsetai) is a direct quotation from the Book of Habakkuk 2:4. Apostle Paul quoted it several times in his epistles to back up his argument that salvation is never by the works of the law but faith alone. Every word is important in the quotation, which is why it was

²⁸³ Bible Hub, "Lexical summary" 4102 pistis, <https://biblehub.com/greek/4102.htm> ©2014.

²⁸⁴ Bible Hub, "Lexical summary", 1344 dikaios <https://biblehub.com/greek/1344.htm> ©2014.

²⁸⁵ Bible Hub, "Lexical summary", 2222 zōé, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2222.htm> ©2014.

quoted three times in the New Testament, just to bring out the fullness of the meaning. E.g

In Romans 1:17, when Paul quoted this same passage from Habakkuk 2:4, this time the emphasis was on *faith* (Πιστις) - “The just shall live by faith,” or “The righteous shall live by faith.”

In Hebrews 10:38, when the writer to the Hebrews quoted this same passage from Habakkuk 2:4, the emphasis was on *live or life*: “The just shall live by faith.” That means if an innocent or a righteous person desire to live or survive a life tragedy, they must do so by faith in God, not human effort.

In Galatians 3:11, when Paul quoted this passage from Habakkuk 2:4, the emphasis is on *just* (δίκαιος) “The just shall live by faith.” For Paul, a man is not just or righteous *before* the exercise of faith, but he *becomes* just *by* the exercise of it; Strictly speaking, the order is faith, justification, life, meaning the salvation process begins with faith in Jesus Christ, then justification will follow and finally attain the stage of eternal salvation or life.

The book of Habakkuk 2:4 was a foreshadowing or projection of what Christ has fulfilled. Before the coming of Christ, many had been justified before the law was given, e.g., Noah, Job, Abraham, and all the Ante-Mosaic believers, but none of them was justified by their obedience to the law, but by the righteousness they believed they had in God, which is faith. Regarding Abraham, the scripture says, “And Abram believed the LORD, and the LORD counted him as righteous because of his faith” (Genesis 15:6). According to Paul, the law adds nothing to salvation. In Galatians 3:11, “But that no man is justified by the Law in the sight of God, it is evident (ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ). The law doesn’t say believe, but only to do all its demands. Failing to fulfil all the

requirements of the law means you are under a curse. Verse 10 of Galatians 3 states, “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.’” Here, Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy 27:26 to prove his point. Paul understood the principle of perfection, for perfection demands that all the requirements of the law should be kept in its totality or fullness for one to be truly saved. For instance, James 2:10 says, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.” Even the Lord Jesus demands that we should be perfect even as our Heavenly Father is perfect (Matthew 5:48). To be perfect simply means to be without a scar, mark or blemish in your journey of life with God. The apostle Paul states that everyone is guilty and under a curse, for breaking the law stated in Deuteronomy 27. This shows that the Law offers no means of justification at all, but instead it brings condemnation.

To appropriately understand the weakness and burden of the law is when we sincerely look at our failures and shortcomings, which it can feel overwhelming, but this same feeling leads us straight to the heart of the gospel. For it’s not about what we do; it’s about who we believe in that we are justified. This faith allows us to see beyond ourselves, connect us with our Creator, and embrace God’s plans for us through trusting Him.

The Theological Implications

1. Paul believed that the law is good and spiritual, but humans are carnally defiled, and so there is no way a carnal man can fulfil the demands of the law, which is good and spiritual (Romans 7:12,14).

2. Paul is not just against the Jewish customs such as circumcision, dietary laws, and Sabbath laws, which were the "boundary markers" that set the Jews apart from other ethno-religious groups in the world, as claimed by E. P. Sanders and

their NPP movement. But he is against the whole Mosaic laws, including moral laws, as quoted in Deuteronomy 27:26.

3. Paul is totally advocating “sola fide” (faith alone) apart from works, in the context of soteriology.

4. For Paul, the law serves as a guardian before the coming of the promise (Jesus Christ). Now the dispensation of the guardian is over, and what we need is the “promise” which is Jesus Christ.

5. Emancipation from rigid moral codes or legalism: Paul is vehemently and vigorously against legalism, encouraging Christians to focus on Christ, who is our new righteousness, rather than strict rule-keeping. For Paul, this new righteousness revealed through Christ is from faith to faith alone and not from faith to law (Romans 1:17). This shapes ethical approaches that still prioritise rigid moral codes as the basis for salvation.

The above theological themes serve as the premise upon which the researcher was able to build and also filled the knowledge gap identified in this research, and thus, “consciousness of the law after being redeemed from it and the sinful guilt that torments a soul as the result of law-breaking.” In Galatians 2:17-21, Paul stated categorically that through Christ we have died to the law and we now live for God through Christ. The theological implication here is that Christians should completely refrain and desist from the consciousness of law-breaking, and also resist the sinful guilt that torments a believer after breaking the law. A believer should completely embrace and yield himself or herself to the yoke of Christ formation, who is the righteousness that has been revealed from faith to faith. We have died with Christ to the law of dead and therefore, we should henceforth live only for God through Christ.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study on "Reassessing the Interplay of Faith and Law in Pauline Theology: An Exegetical Inquiry into Galatians 3:11 and Its Theological Implications" reveals that Paul's teachings stress justification by faith, not works of the law or human effort. Galatians 3:11 underscores the importance of faith over works of the law in the context of soteriology, not just ecclesiology. Revealing the weakness or burden of the law in the redemptive and atoning plan of God, as well as its inability to save mankind from the bondage of sin, but instead unveiling sin that incapacitated man. The study also demands that Christians should contextualize Paul's theology on faith and law rather than mere legalism. The researcher recommends that further research should be carried out on the concept of faith and law to ensure that the Church in this twenty-first century is totally set free and made free from the danger of legalism, instead of faith alone in Christ Jesus.

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