

## PAGAN AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TIME-KEEPING SCHEMES IN GAL 4.10 AND COL 2.16

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Exegetes often cite the list in Gal 4.10 (ἡμέρας καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἐνιαυτοὺς; days and months and seasons and years) as parallel in content and function to the list in Col 2.16 (ἑορτῆς ἢ νεομηνίας ἢ σαββάτων; a festival or a new moon or Sabbaths).<sup>1</sup> J. B. Lightfoot provides the most extensive explanation of the content and function of these lists, and he reaches two conclusions that permeate the exegetical tradition of these two verses.<sup>2</sup> First, he concludes that the content of the list in Galatians describes a Jewish time-keeping scheme since the list in Colossians clearly does so.<sup>3</sup> His rationale is strengthened by Paul's polemic against the Judaizers in Galatians.<sup>4</sup> Second, he deduces that the Colossian list functions to describe the non-Christian practices of the opponents since the list in Galatians is clearly a non-Christian temporal scheme that should be rejected.<sup>5</sup>

The present essay argues that both of Lightfoot's conclusions are misleading since the two lists are parallel neither in content nor in

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard Delling explains, 'Finally, μῆν occurs in Gl. 4.10 in connection with Judaising aberrations in the churches, cf. the νεομηνία of Col. 2.16. The two statements correspond in structure; for the observation of months naturally consists in the celebration of the feast of the new moon, as does that of years in the celebration of New Year's Day. . . . If the error of the Galatians is not exactly the same as that of the Colossians, the latter approximating closer to syncretism, it is still possible to treat the two passages together from our standpoint' ('μῆν, νεομηνία', *TDNT* 4 [1967] 641).

<sup>2</sup> J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Zondervan Commentary Series; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 193–4.

<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Schlier concurs, 'Diese Forderungen verraten nach Geist und Inhalt wieder die Art eines Judentums, dessen Spuren wir noch im aeth. Hen. und bei judenchristlichen Sekten finden. . . . Daß solche Anschauungen in christliche Gemeinden auch sonst eindrangen, bestätigt wiederum der Kolosserbrief. Vgl. Kol 2.16–23' (*Der Brief an die Galater* [MeyerK 7; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965] 204, 206).

<sup>4</sup> Franz Mußner argues, 'Da die Gegner judaisierende Judenchristen sind, muß eine Fährte, die ins Frühjudentum zurückführt, aufgenommen werden; diese Aufnahme bleibt nicht ohne Erfolg. Es gab im Frühjudentum, speziell bei den Apokalyptikern und den Qumranessenern, eine Kalenderfrömmigkeit', die nicht am Rande, sondern im Zentrum der religiösen Glaubensüberzeugung stand' (*Der Galaterbrief* [HTKNT 9; Freiburg: Herder, 1988] 298–9).

<sup>5</sup> Joachim Gnilka, *Der Kolosserbrief* (HTKNT 10.1; Freiburg: Herder, 1980) 146 n. 9; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Ephesians and the Colossians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 244.

function.<sup>6</sup> The content of the list in Colossians is exclusively Jewish while the list in Galatians could be either Jewish or pagan. Functionally, the Galatian list describes a calendar categorically rejected by Paul whereas the Colossian list represents a calendar not so easily disassociated from the Pauline communities. Consequently, this essay contends Gal 4.10 cannot substantiate that the calendar in Col 2.16 belongs to the opposition and neither can Col 2.16 establish the Jewishness of the list in Gal 4.10. In contrast to the exegetical tradition influenced by Lightfoot, this essay carefully examines the content and function of each list within its own context before comparing one list with another.

#### THE LIST IN COL 2.16

The content of the list in Col 2.16 is unquestionably Jewish. The temporal categories of festival, new moon, and Sabbaths are characteristic of a Jewish religious calendar.<sup>7</sup> These same categories frequently occur in Jewish documents, and all three categories occur together in the LXX in 1 Chron 23.31, 2 Chron 2.3; 31.3, and Hos 2.13. In these passages, these categories designate the segments of time marked out by the Jewish religious calendar. Jewish Sabbath celebrations mark the time-segment of a week;

<sup>6</sup> Exegetes who argue for syncretistic Judaizers at Galatia frequently appeal to the non-Jewish formulations in Gal 4.8–11 and either implicitly or explicitly distinguish between Gal 4.10 and Col 2.16. These interpreters represent an exception to the tradition influenced by Lightfoot. See note 40 below. Philip Vielhauer discusses these interpreters and refutes their principal argument based upon the term στοιχεῖα ('Gesetzesdienst und Stoiicheiadienst im Galaterbrief', *Oikodome* [TBü 65; ed. G. Klein; Munich: Kaiser, 1979] 183–95). More recently, Dieter Lührmann explains these lists as emphasizing different dimensions of the Jewish Torah. The cosmic calendar in Gal 4.10 is based upon the courses of the heavenly bodies and reflects the cosmic order established by the Torah. The festival calendar in Col 2.16 arises from the historical experiences of Israel and emphasizes the cultic aspect of the Torah. According to Lührmann, the former calendar more effectively than the latter serves the interests of the Jewish proselytization of Gentiles ('Tage, Monate, Jahreszeiten, Jahre (Gal 4,10)', *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments* [ed. Rainer Albertz and others; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980] 430–1). The dependence of the Jewish festival calendar upon the heavenly bodies and the cultic celebrations connected with the cosmic calendar minimize Lührmann's distinction between these lists in Jewish practice. Either the sun (*Jub* 2.9) or the moon (*Sir* 43.6–7) or both (*1 Enoch* 82.9) determine the times of the feasts. Nevertheless, Lührmann's distinction is useful in theory as long as both lists are considered to be Jewish. Unfortunately, Lührmann does not seriously consider that the list in Gal 4.10 may be pagan instead of Jewish. Robert Jewett has also depicted the differences in these lists as an attempt by the Galatian agitators to present Jewish cultic activity in Hellenized terms so as to win converts more quickly ('The Agitators and the Galatian Congregation', *NTS* 17 [1971] 208). As the present essay demonstrates, none of these explanations adequately explains the differences since all incorrectly connect the list in Gal 4.10 with Judaism and the list in Col 2.16 with the opponents.

<sup>7</sup> Lührmann, 'Tage', 430–1.

new moon, the month; and festivals, the seasons of the year. As these passages and other Jewish documents indicate, the list in Col 2.16 is Jewish.

The function of this list is more difficult to ascertain. The Colossian author warns his readers not to permit anyone to criticize or judge them in regard to eating or drinking or in respect to a festival, a new moon, or Sabbaths. It is unclear as to whether these practices form the object or the basis of the opponents' critique. The critics may condemn the Colossian Christians for engaging, not engaging, or engaging incorrectly in these practices. The function is ambiguous.

Although commentators disagree as to whether eating and drinking are practices of the Christians or their opponents, all commentators agree in ascribing the religious calendar to the opposition.<sup>8</sup> Interpreters appeal to the Pauline notion of Christian freedom to contend that Pauline Christians at Colossae would never submit to observing sacred days and times.<sup>9</sup> According to these commentators, the Colossian author exhorts his readers not to permit anyone to condemn them for their non-participation in these religious celebrations.<sup>10</sup>

Christian freedom is certainly an important tenet of Pauline theology. However, the Pauline conception of freedom does not mean removal of all constraints but fulfilling one's communal and ethical responsibility.<sup>11</sup> If Christian responsibility involves

<sup>8</sup> E. F. Scott states, 'In this respect the heresy plainly shewed its Jewish affiliations. Three kinds of festival were recognized in Judaism – annual, monthly, weekly. These all, as we can gather here, were adopted by the heretical sect' (*The Epistles of Paul to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians* [MNTC; London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930] 52).

<sup>9</sup> Norbert Hagedé, *Commentaire de l'Épître aux Colossiens* (Genève: Labor et Fides, 1968) 143; Adolf Schlatter, *Die Briefe an die Galater, Epheser, Kolosser und Philemon* (Erläuterungen zum Neuen Testament 7; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1963) 285. For a discussion of how the notion of Christian freedom functions in the argument in Galatians, see Schlier (*An die Galater*, 207).

<sup>10</sup> As the perceptive interlocutor in Calvin's commentary observes, however, 'We [Christians] still keep some observance of days' (John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians* [Calvin's Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965] 337). Calvin's unconvincing response to this interlocutor argues that Christians observe these days out of pragmatism, not obligation.

<sup>11</sup> Hans Dieter Betz explains, 'Paul's . . . Corinthian correspondence is almost entirely preoccupied with his attempts to interpret Christian freedom as communal and ethical responsibility' (*Paul's Concept of Freedom in the Context of Hellenistic Discussions about the Possibilities of Human Freedom* [Protocol of the Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture 26; Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1977], 11). See also F. Stanley Jones (*Freiheit in den Briefen des Apostels Paulus* [GTA 34; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987]); Samuel Vollenweider (*Freiheit als neue Schöpfung* [FRLANT 147; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989]).

adherence to a specific religious calendar and avoidance of unacceptable alternatives, then these commentators' argument based upon Christian freedom collapses.

Since commentators acknowledge Paul's Gospel requires a rejection of pagan calendars built upon idolatrous presuppositions, the question of how Paul's communities reckon time arises. Their options are limited. Only by avoiding time-keeping altogether as many exegetes uncritically assume or by adhering to a Jewish calendar can the Pauline communities escape idolatrous alternatives.<sup>12</sup> Other calendrical systems name the days and the months after pagan deities and mark out the seasons by pagan rites.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the Jews distinguish the seasons by festivals that obviously have no pagan connotations. They recognize the months by new moons and name these months using agricultural terms.<sup>14</sup> They designate the week by Sabbaths; beginning from the Sabbath, they number, instead of name, the days of the week one through six.<sup>15</sup> Jewish, pagan, or no time-keeping system at all are the only options available to Paul and his communities, and the evidence indicates they opt for the former.<sup>16</sup>

The references to time in Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians exclusively reflect the adoption of a Jewish calendar. Even in a place like Corinth, Paul speaks of the first day from Sabbath (κατὰ μίαν σαββάτου; 1 Cor 16.2), not the day of the sun.<sup>17</sup> He builds an elaborate argument based upon the festivals of passover and unleavened bread (1 Cor 5.6–8) in order to exhort the Corinthians, 'Let us keep the festival' (1 Cor 5.8). Although the temporal references in Paul's letters are sparse, 1 Corinthians provides strong

<sup>12</sup> Paul constantly warns his communities against idolatrous practices. See 1 Cor 5.10–11; 6.9; 10.7, 14; and Gal 5.20.

<sup>13</sup> For examples, see E. J. Bickerman (*Chronology of the Ancient World* [Ithaca: Cornell University, 1968] 20, 50, 59).

<sup>14</sup> Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1964) 34–46.

<sup>15</sup> The only exception being the day before the Sabbath that became known as the day of preparation for the Sabbath (Finegan, *Handbook*, 15).

<sup>16</sup> N. T. Wright perceptively notes Paul never says in Colossians or in Galatians that Christianity has nothing to do with Judaism even though such a statement would clinch his argument against observance of Jewish regulations (*Colossians and Philemon* [Tyndale New Testament Commentaries; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986] 119).

<sup>17</sup> Herbert Jennings Rose states, 'Strictly speaking, neither Jews nor Christians observe a week, since both officially reject astrology, but a festival (Sabbath and Sunday respectively) which occurs at intervals of seven days' ('Time-Reckoning', *OCD* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1970] 1075). For a discussion of the Jewish Sabbath practices, see Robert Goldenburg ('The Jewish Sabbath in the Roman World up to the Time of Constantine the Great', *ANRW II: Principat* 19/1 [1979] 414–47).

evidence for the Pauline adoption of the Jewish practice that marked time by festivals and Sabbaths.

In addition to 1 Corinthians, the portrait of Paul and Christian communities in the book of Acts demonstrates that Christians adhered to the Jewish calendar.<sup>18</sup> Paul enters the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia on several Sabbaths and proclaims the Gospel (Acts 13.14, 44). According to Acts, it was Paul's custom to enter the synagogue on the Sabbath, and in Thessalonica he reasoned for three Sabbaths from the Scriptures (Acts 17.2).<sup>19</sup> Paul addresses the community at Troas on the first day from Sabbath (Acts 20.7). Concerning feasts, Paul sails from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread (Acts 20.6) and intends to arrive in Jerusalem by the feast of Pentecost (Acts 20.16). The portrayal of Paul in Acts supplies clear evidence that Christians mark time by the segments of festivals and Sabbaths.

Evidence from Acts that substantiates the observance of new moons in the Christian time-keeping scheme is less obvious because Acts uses the term μήν [month] instead of νεομηνία [new moon] (Acts 18.11; 19.8; 20.3; 28.11). This preference does not confirm that Acts adopts a non-Jewish temporal scheme since Jewish documents written in Greek use both terms when referring to the time segment of a month.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the use of μήν in Jewish materials presupposes νεομηνία since Jewish practice marks the month by the new moon.<sup>21</sup> The lunar month is indispensable for determining the appropriate times for the feasts, especially Passover. The Christian adoption of the Jewish festivals as a temporal marker implies they also designated the month by the new moon. Thus, Acts provides indirect evidence that the Christians in Asia

<sup>18</sup> These events support the Christian adoption of the Jewish time-keeping system whether or not these events actually occurred.

<sup>19</sup> The RSV's translation *three weeks* is incorrect. The text reads, '*three Sabbaths*'. Since the Jews number inclusively, three Sabbaths would only designate two weeks.

<sup>20</sup> T. C. G. Thornton explains, "The word: μήν, as well as meaning "month", can also be used to refer to a new moon or New Moon festival. . . . Both Biblical and Rabbinical writers use the same word (שָׁחַד) to refer to both "new moon" and "month" ('Jewish New Moon Festivals, Galatians 4.3-11 and Colossians 2.16', *JTS* 40 [1989] 99 n. 13).

<sup>21</sup> Emil Schürer states, "The Jewish months have continued always to be what the "months" of all civilized nations were by origin; namely, genuine lunar months' (*The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ* [revised edition, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1973] 1.588). He further specifies the Jewish practice at the time of Jesus Christ by saying, ". . . they [the Jews] still had no fixed calendar, but on the basis of purely empirical observation, began each new month with the appearance of the new moon, and similarly on the basis of observation, intercalated one month in the spring of the third or second year in accordance with the rule that in all circumstances Passover must fall after the vernal equinox' (*History*, 1.590).

Minor in which Colossae is situated designated the month by the new moon.<sup>22</sup>

More directly, the late second century Quartodeciman debate in which Pope Victor excommunicated the entire church in Asia Minor for its observance of Easter on the fourteenth day of Nisan rather than the Sunday nearest the fourteenth confirms the practice of beginning the month with the new moon. According to Jewish reckoning, the fourteenth day of Nisan could not be calculated without counting from the appearance of the new moon.

Acts and 1 Corinthians as well as other Christian writings demonstrate that the Pauline communities and other early Christians adopted a Jewish time-keeping scheme in order to avoid the idolatrous systems of the pagans around them.<sup>23</sup> The segments of time designated by this calendar are festival, new moon, and Sabbaths as listed in Col 2.16.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the Colossian author's use of new moon (νεομηνία) in his temporal scheme rather than month [μήν] is probably an attempt to further specify the Jewish system in contrast to its pagan counterpart.<sup>25</sup>

The adoption of the Jewish religious calendar by Paul and his communities does not necessarily mean that they also practice Jewish religious rituals.<sup>26</sup> Following the destruction of the Jewish

<sup>22</sup> The exegetical insistence upon interpreting νεομηνία exclusively as a Jewish New Moon festival fails to distinguish between the dual uses of this term as a temporal marker and as the name of a religious festival. Delling cites examples of both usages ('μήν', 639–40).

<sup>23</sup> Philip Carrington has studied the Christian time-keeping scheme in detail. He provides evidence that 'a Liturgical Year of the Hebrew type' was established in early Christian communities (*The Primitive Christian Calendar* [Cambridge: University, 1952] 37–44). Carrington then reconstructs the Christian Liturgical Year beginning with the seventh new moon from Passover and includes the temporal segments of Sabbaths, months demarcated by new moons, and festivals that determine seasons of the year (*Calendar*, 117–202). In contrast to Carrington, Thornton cites the *Ep. of Diognetus* (4.1) and *Kerugma Petrou* (Clement of Alexandria *Strom.* 6.5.41) as evidence that Christians reject the Jewish temporal scheme ('New Moon', 98). However, these passages as well as the *Ep. of Barnabas* (2.5; 15.8) merely object to the Jewish practices performed on the days of Sabbath and new moon without denying the time-segments determined by these days. All these passages demonstrate is that Christian practices on these days differed from Jewish practice by the time these documents were written.

<sup>24</sup> Lightfoot notes, 'The same three words occur together, as an exhaustive enumeration of the sacred times among the Jews' (*Colossians*, 193).

<sup>25</sup> Although almost all the peoples of the Mediterranean world mark the month by the appearance of the new moon, several civil calendars with fixed months that ignored the moon gained prominence among many other peoples but not the Jews (Bickerman, *Chronology*, 17). See Finegan's discussion of the Jewish calendars in *Jubilees* and *1 Enoch* as well as at Qumran (*Handbook*, 44–57). Finegan concludes that these calendars were solar and reacted against the reliance upon the moon for determining the feasts and holy days. Nevertheless, these solar calendars never gained prominence among the Jews of the first century, and the sectarian reaction against lunar calculations actually confirms the importance of the moon to Jewish time-keeping in general (Schürer, *History*, 1.599).

<sup>26</sup> Paul Gsem correctly distinguishes between the cultic practices and sacrifices that

temple in 70 CE, the Jewish temporal system remains intact even when the Jews are no longer able to offer the prescribed sacrifices. Furthermore, the Gentile adoption of Sabbath observance that Josephus reports does not involve a concomitant adoption of all Jewish rituals.<sup>27</sup> Even if Paul and his communities adopt the Jewish religious calendar, they may either practice, modify, or reject the Jewish religious rituals associated with it.<sup>28</sup> The type of religious rituals practiced by Paul and his communities is a separate issue from the recognition that they adopted a Jewish liturgical calendar.<sup>29</sup>

Only a precise identification of the opponents at Colossae can definitively settle the question of whose practices are described by the temporal scheme in Col 2.16. Nevertheless, this essay provides evidence that the Pauline community at Colossae, not the opponents, practices the temporal scheme outlined by Col 2.16. The significance of this proposal can only be assessed within the context of a more comprehensive investigation of the situation at Colossae, and the explanation of how and why this Judeo-Christian calendar falls under the critique of the opposition belongs to a more extensive study that transcends the purposes of this present essay.<sup>30</sup> This investigation into the function of the list in Col 2.16 indicates that the Colossian Christians, not their critics, participate in a religious calendar that includes festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths.

#### THE LIST IN GAL 4.10

Whereas Col 2.10 is exclusively Jewish, the list in Gal 4.10 describes either a pagan or a Jewish temporal scheme. This list is completely compatible with pagan time-keeping systems. In pagan chronography, the smallest unit larger than a single day is a group

occurred on Sabbaths and festivals and the days themselves ('Sabbaton in Col. 2.16', *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 [1981] 195–210). Unfortunately, he incorrectly argues that this list refers primarily to cultic practices.

<sup>27</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.282; H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus* [LCL; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1926] 1.404–7). Indeed, Sabbath practices were not uniform in the various Jewish communities. See Goldenburg ('Jewish Sabbath', 415, 424–6).

<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor 5.8 indicates some modification of the Jewish rituals by the Pauline communities.

<sup>29</sup> Schlier notes a similar distinction in the Galatian list between the time-segments and the religious practice associated with them (*An die Galater*, 203).

<sup>30</sup> A complete argument for the Christian practice of the calendar in Col 2.16 requires an investigation of the phrase ἃ ἐστὶν σκιὰ τῶν μελλόντων in 2.17 and an identification of the practitioners of the humility, worship of messengers, and eating and drinking in 2.16, 18. I am currently engaged in such a study and hope to submit it for publication soon.

of nine or ten days.<sup>31</sup> In the majority of systems, these are the ten days respectively of the waxing moon, full moon, and waning moon.<sup>32</sup> These three groups of ten days comprise a month of thirty days. Three months make one of the four seasons, and four seasons make a year.<sup>33</sup> The years are then grouped into Olympiads of four years or eras of varying lengths.<sup>34</sup> When Paul refers to days, months, seasons, and years in Gal 4.10, he lists categories most characteristic of a pagan time-keeping system.<sup>35</sup>

This list in Gal 4.10 is not as easily related to Jewish practice, as the wide discrepancies among commentators prove.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, Jewish texts such as Gen 1.14, *Hymn of the Initiates* 1–10, and *1 Enoch* 75.3; 79.2; 82.7 establish the Jewish nature of this list even though its precise correspondence with the Jewish festival calendar is debatable.<sup>37</sup>

Since the list in Gal 4.10 can be either pagan or Jewish, only its context in Galatians can determine the issue. The immediate context of Gal 4.10 argues for the pagan character of this list.<sup>38</sup> In 4.8, Paul mentions the former pagan life of the Galatian Christians. In 4.9, he asks them how they can desire their former life again. He then proposes their observance of the time-keeping

<sup>31</sup> The astral week of seven days named after the sun, moon, and five planets is another alternative. However, this alternative would have been just as repulsive to Paul and his communities as any other non-Jewish system.

<sup>32</sup> Another system is the Roman market day. Every ninth day was a market day, and each of the days is designated by the letters A–H.

<sup>33</sup> Rose, 'Time-Reckoning', 1075–6.

<sup>34</sup> Bickerman, *Chronology*, 70–9.

<sup>35</sup> Lührmann correctly notes the pagan nature of *season* in contrast to the Jewish *festival* ('Tage', 437–8).

<sup>36</sup> Schlier discusses the enormous divergence of opinion about how this list in Galatians relates to the Jewish liturgical calendar (*An die Galater*, 206 n. 1). Even though he continues to equate the functions of the two lists, H. D. Betz astutely notes distinctions in their content. He comments on Gal 4.10, 'Also, the cultic activities described in v. 10 are not typical of Judaism (including Jewish Christianity, though they are known to both Judaism and paganism' (*Galatians* [Hermeneia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979] 217). Similarly Eduard Schweizer says, 'The Jewish character of the formulation of Gal 4.10 . . . is less evident' ('Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4.3, 9 and Col 2.8, 19, 20', *JBL* 107 [1988] 465). Even Lightfoot, who equates these lists, must admit that seasons, months, and days in Gal 4.10 are more vague than their counterparts of festival, new moon and Sabbaths in Col 2.16 (*Colossians*, 194).

<sup>37</sup> Schlier cites other parallels to Gal 4.10 from *Jubilees* and the Qumran documents (*An die Galater*, 204–5). Even though Jewish authors make various attempts to integrate and correlate this scheme into the liturgical calendar established by the Mosaic covenant, these attempts prove unsuccessful. The hope for precise integration resides largely in the expectation of a new creation when all will be synchronized. Jewett notes, 'The search for exact equivalents has ended in vain' ('Agitators', 207–8).

<sup>38</sup> Mußner, *Galaterbrief*, 301. Mußner's explanation, however, sacrifices the integrity of the immediate context for the broader context.



scheme in 4.10 as a demonstrative proof of their reversion to their old life.<sup>39</sup> Considering only the immediate context of Gal 4.10, the list must be understood as a pagan temporal scheme.

The argument against the Judaizers in the broader context of Galatians, however, leads many commentators to the opposite conclusion.<sup>40</sup> Paul's pronounced arguments against submission to circumcision and the Jewish law cause these commentators to conclude that this list must describe Jewish legal observance expressed by the Galatians' participation in the cultic festivals of Judaism.<sup>41</sup> This assessment of the situation among the Galatian churches encounters several problems.

The traditional explanation of the Galatian situation labours under a major discrepancy. Commentators agree that the Galatians have not yet submitted to circumcision because otherwise Paul's arguments against submitting to circumcision would be pointless. Yet, these same commentators assume that the Galatians are already practicing the opponents' cultic calendar. However, circumcision is the criterion that renders the Galatians acceptable to the opponents; the observance of the opponents' sacred times is useless because the Galatians remain *shut out* (Gal 4.17) unless they take the necessary step of circumcision.<sup>42</sup> This discrepancy is not adequately explained by commentators.

<sup>39</sup> Betz comments, 'Paul submits a test which demonstrates that his evaluation of the Galatians' intent is correct' (*Galatians*, 217).

<sup>40</sup> For example, see Ronald Y. K. Fung (*The Epistle to the Galatians* [NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988] 192–3). A few exegetes, however, refuse to surrender the immediate context to the broader context. Instead, they propose a syncretism in which pagan elements combine with Jewish legal observances. See Frederic R. Crownfield ('The Singular Problem of the Dual Galatians', *JBL* 64 [1945] 491–500); Walter Schmithals (*Paul and the Gnostics* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1972] 43–6; 'Judaisten in Galatien?', *ZNW* 74 [1983] 27–58); Jewett ('Agitators', 207–8). For a discussion of this interpretive tradition, see note 6 above.

<sup>41</sup> Bernard Hungerford Brinsmead argues that if the calendrical observances of 4.10 are non-Jewish, then circumcision must also be non-Jewish (Brinsmead, *Galatians: Dialogical Response to Opponents* [SBLDS 65; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982] 29). Since the latter is unlikely, he contends that the former is also unlikely. Thus, he denies the immediate context in favour of the broader context.

<sup>42</sup> Charles Henry Cosgrove questions whether circumcision is an entrance requirement, a requirement only for full membership, or simply an option for those who desire spiritual perfection (*The Cross and the Spirit* [Macon, GA: Mercer University, 1988] 7). All of these positions are represented among exegetes, but the force of ἐκκλείω in 4.17 argues for circumcision as an entrance requirement. Horst Balz translates, 'They want to shut you out [from the community of salvation]' ('Ἐκκλείω', *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990] 410). See also Schlier (*An die Galater*, 212) and E. P. Sanders (*Paul, the Law, and the Jewish People* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983] 17–29). Sanders comments, 'The debate in Galatians is a debate about "entry" in the sense of what is essential in order to be considered a member *at all*' (*Paul*, 20). Jewett explains, 'The phrase . . . οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμνεσθαι (vi. 12), refers to the "necessity" of circumcision. Apparently for the agitators it was a condition *sine qua non* for salvation' ('Agitators', 200).

Furthermore, the traditional explanation produces distinct tensions in the text. Many commentators recognize that some important passages indicate the Galatians have already exchanged Paul's circumcision-free gospel for the opposition's other gospel (Gal 1.6; 3.1–5; 5.7). Nevertheless, commentators minimize this information because the Galatians have obviously not yet submitted to circumcision (Gal 5.1, 10). These commentators attempt to revolve this tension by proposing that the Galatians are only seriously contemplating the exchange. This proposal, however, creates another tension because Paul's severe tone in the letter evinces more than mere consideration of an alternative gospel.<sup>43</sup> These tensions reveal defects in the traditional explanation.<sup>44</sup>

The traditional interpretation incorrectly assumes that acceptance of the opponents' gospel as the valid gospel of Christianity leaves the Galatians with only the one option of submitting to circumcision.<sup>45</sup> This option of circumcision to remain Christian is certainly available to the Galatians, but a complete rejection of Christianity and a return to their former status is just as viable an option. Several factors indicate that the Galatians have chosen the latter option, not the former.

Accepting circumcision as essential to the genuine Christian gospel is one thing; submission to circumcision quite another. The willingness of the Galatians to submit to circumcision must not be presumed.<sup>46</sup> Circumcision and submission to the law were available to the Galatians all along in Judaism, but they like the majority of Gentiles refused to take such steps. Widespread acceptance of Jewish circumcision among Gentiles is not attested except

<sup>43</sup> J. B. Lightfoot discusses the severe tone of the letter (*The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957] 64–5).

<sup>44</sup> After summarizing the traditional interpretation, Jewett states, 'It is a rather puzzling state of affairs' ('Agitators', 209).

<sup>45</sup> For example, B. C. Lategan identifies the basis of Paul's argument as the Galatians' decision to submit to circumcision ('The Argumentative Situation of Galatians', *Neot* 26 [1992] 269).

<sup>46</sup> David J. Lull examines three arguments to explain the Galatians' eagerness to be circumcised (*The Spirit in Galatia* [SBLDS 49; Chico, CA: Scholars, 1980] 29–39). First, the Galatians took religion seriously. This argument fails because much of the ancient world should have been circumcised if circumcision results from religious intensity. Second, the Galatians wanted to be genuinely circumcised Jews. Apart from the traditional interpretation of Galatians, there is no evidence that acceptance of Christianity among Gentiles ever produced such a desire, and Lull's citing Galatians as evidence only results in a circular argument. The example of Izates' conversion to Judaism that Lull mentions is not parallel to the situation in Galatia. Third, the Galatians were frustrated by the inability of the gospel to curb problems with the flesh, and they sought to remedy this defect by circumcision. Even Lull recognizes problems with this argument. Thus, none of the arguments Lull examines is a convincing proof that the Galatians were desiring circumcision.

in instances of military compulsion. Unless the Galatian situation is a phenomenon unique to the Greco-Roman world, the Galatian churches are not contemplating circumcision. It is a Christian prejudice that presumes the Galatians would accept circumcision to be Christians but not Jews. The Gentile abhorrence of circumcision indicates the Galatians do not select the option of circumcision.

The social structure of the Galatian churches also argues against their selecting the option of circumcision. According to the available evidence, the Galatian churches were pre-existing household units before conversion to Paul's gospel.<sup>47</sup> The decision of the head of the household determined the religious status of that household. Paul's argument in Galatians is not directed toward individuals within the churches that are causing the disruption of individual households. His argument is directed toward the churches as a whole and he treats them homogeneously.<sup>48</sup> Bernard Brinsmead states, "There are no literary signals that there are two groups within the congregations."<sup>49</sup> Even if a few of the Galatian churches accept circumcision, the unanimous acceptance of this practice by all of these autonomous units is extremely unlikely.<sup>50</sup> Since Paul's argument makes no distinction among the churches, they either have all agreed to submit to circumcision or none of them have. Among a diverse group of Gentiles, the latter is much more probable than the former. Consequently, it is unlikely the Galatian churches have unanimously agreed to circumcision.

If acceptance of the other gospel is not demonstrated by the Galatians' submission to circumcision or by futile partial participation in fringe aspects of the circumcision gospel, only the reversion to their former pagan lifestyle can signal such acceptance.<sup>51</sup> Confronted with circumcision as a requirement of the true Christian gospel, the Galatians most likely apostatize and return to their former status as Gal 4.8–11 plainly states.

Paul's argument against circumcision in Galatians, therefore, does not arise because the Galatians are seriously considering

<sup>47</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven: Yale University, 1983) 75–7.

<sup>48</sup> For opposing positions, see the discussion in Brinsmead (*Galatians*, 187). Brinsmead, however, argues for homogeneity based upon his dialogical analysis.

<sup>49</sup> Brinsmead, *Galatians*, 28.

<sup>50</sup> Brinsmead's statement that the Galatians as a whole had accepted circumcision is true but not in the way he means it (*Galatians*, 218 n. 54). The Galatians recognize circumcision as a valid requirement of the Christian gospel, but they do not agree to become circumcised.

<sup>51</sup> The option of partial participation in the opposing gospel is unlikely because this option would still leave the Galatians excluded from Christianity. See the discussion of this option above.

circumcision.<sup>52</sup> Paul argues against the circumcision gospel because its acceptance by the Galatians results in their rejection of Christianity and return to paganism since they refuse to be circumcised. Paul argues against circumcision to invalidate the circumcision gospel and thus remove the cause of the Galatians' apostasy to paganism.

In his argument, he first validates his own circumcision-free gospel by an appeal to his call (1.10–24) and his conference with the leaders in Jerusalem (2.1–10).<sup>53</sup> He then proceeds to invalidate the circumcision gospel in favour of his gospel by recounting his confrontation with Cephas at Antioch (2.11–21), the experience of the Galatians themselves (3.1–5), scriptural exegesis (3.6–4.7; 4.21–5.1), his relationship with the Galatians (4.8–20), and the contrast between the spirit and the flesh (5.2–6.16).<sup>54</sup> Thus, the issue of Paul's argument turns upon the Galatians' acceptance of this circumcision gospel as the genuine gospel of Christianity (2.14, 5.7) and their subsequent rejection of Christianity altogether, not their acceptance or even contemplated acceptance of circumcision.

This understanding of the Galatians' response to the opponents' gospel harmonizes the broader context of Galatians with the immediate context of Gal 4.10 without denying the validity of

<sup>52</sup> The exegetical effort devoted to explaining Paul's argument in Galatians is immense. In addition to the older works, dozens of articles have appeared recently, esp. in *Neotestamentica* 26.2 (1992). Unfortunately, this enormous effort rests upon an incorrect understanding of the actual stasis of Paul's argument. The stasis is the Galatians' apostasy from Christianity and return to paganism, both of which are occasioned by their acceptance of circumcision as a requirement of the Christian gospel. In view of this stasis, all previous interpretations of Paul's argument in Galatians require reconsideration. Obviously, this task transcends the present essay.

<sup>53</sup> Gal 1.11–2.21 is generally understood to be a defence of Paul's apostleship in response to the hostile accusations of his opponents. As Bernard Lategan and D. J. Verseput adequately demonstrate, however, the basic purpose of this passage is to validate Paul's circumcision-free gospel. Lategan locates the misreading of Galatians as a defence of Paul's apostleship in the unwarranted influence of the Corinthian correspondence (*NTS* 34 [1988] 411). Verseput remarks, 'Paul employs the story of his own independent calling and career to defend neither his right to preach the gospel nor his authority over the Galatian church, but to support the validity of his converts' salvation without incorporation into the ranks of Jewish Christendom' ('Paul's Gentile Mission and the Jewish Christian Community', *NTS* 39 [1993] 38). Unfortunately, neither Lategan nor Verseput comprehends the significance of their insight for the basic stasis of Paul's overall argument. Furthermore, a sharp dichotomy between the related issues of Paul's apostolic defence and the validation of his gospel should be avoided.

<sup>54</sup> Betz discusses these various aspects of Paul's argument (Galatians, 28, 30–3). For more recent studies of these aspects, see K. Kertelge 'The Assertion of Revealed Truth as Compelling Argument in Galatians 1:10–2:21', *Neot* 26 (1992) 339–50; G. M. M. Pelser, 'The Opposition Faith and Works as Persuasive Device in Galatians (3:6–14)', *Neot* 26 (1992) 389–405; J. van W. Cronje, 'The Stratagem of the Rhetorical Question in Gal 4:9–10 as a Means Toward Persuasion', *Neot* 26 (1992) 417–24; E. A. C. Pretorius, 'The Opposition ΠΙΝΕΥΜΑ and ΣΑΡΞ as Persuasive Summons (Gal 5:13–6:10)', *Neot* 26 (1992) 441–60.

either. As the immediate context clearly states, Paul is worried that he has laboured for the Galatians in vain since they have returned to their former pagan life as evidenced by their renewed preconversion reckoning of time. Because of its association with idolatry and false deities, marking time according to this pagan scheme is tantamount to rejecting Paul's Gospel and the one and only true God it proclaims (4.8–9).<sup>55</sup> Gal 4.10, therefore, stipulates that when the Galatians accepted Paul's Gospel with its aversion to idolatry (4.8), they discarded their pagan method of reckoning time. Thus, the immediate context of Gal 4.10 indicates the Galatians have returned to their former pagan lifestyle because they refuse circumcision even though, as the broader context of Gal 4.10 demonstrates, they are persuaded circumcision is an essential aspect of the Christian gospel.

Three contrary arguments against the preceding interpretation of the Galatian situation must be addressed. Firstly, the term στοιχεῖα in Gal 4.9 does not prove the Jewishness of the list in 4.10 even though it is connected with the Jewish law in 4.3. This term here and elsewhere refers to this present material world as several recent studies demonstrate.<sup>56</sup> For Paul, both Judaism and paganism belong to this world, which is passing away (Gal 1.4); Paul dismisses both as enslavement to this transient, material world.<sup>57</sup>

Secondly, Gal 5.2–5 does not conclusively prove the Galatians are considering submission to circumcision. Paul constructs an argument that hypothetically envisions the Galatians' compliance with the circumcision gospel so he can demonstrate its disastrous consequences. He contends that if the Galatians should circumcise themselves, Christ would be of no benefit to them since worshipping the true God as a Jew was always and continues to be available through proselytization (5.2).<sup>58</sup> However, Paul quickly adds that Gentile Christians who submit to circumcision as a requirement of justification fall under the curse of the law, are separated from Christ, and fall from grace (5.3–4). A gospel that results in such dreadful consequences cannot be the true Christian gospel. Thus, Gal 5.2–5 invalidates the circumcision gospel without

<sup>55</sup> In spite of incorrectly identifying the list in Gal 4.10 as a list of Jewish temporal categories, Mußner correctly observes that astrological associations are the reason Paul would reject this list (*Galaterbrief*, 302).

<sup>56</sup> Josef Blinzler, 'Lexikalisches zu dem Terminus τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου bei Paulus', *AnBib* 18 (1961) 429–42; Schweizer, 'Slaves of the Elements', 455–68; D. Rusan, 'Neue Belege zu den στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου (Gal 4, 3. 9; Kol 2, 8. 20)', *ZNW* 83 (1992) 119–25.

<sup>57</sup> Albrecht Oepke, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Galater* (THKNT 9; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1957) 102–3.

<sup>58</sup> Betz, *Galatians*, 261.

necessarily confirming the eagerness of the Galatians to receive circumcision.

Thirdly, the address of the letter to the churches of Galatia does not deny their apostasy. Since Christianity was superimposed upon the existing social networks of households, its repudiation would leave the household intact.<sup>59</sup> A social unit, therefore, would remain to which Paul could address his letter. The terse address of Galatians lacks the epithets and polite compliments Paul usually bestows upon his churches.<sup>60</sup> Paul cannot commend the Galatians' apostasy (μετατίθημι, 1.6), their stupidity in turning from the truth (ἀνόητος, 3.1–5), their reversion to their pagan past (ἐπιστρέφω, 4.8–11), or their hindrance in obeying the truth (ἀληθεία μὴ πειθεσθαι, 5.7).<sup>61</sup> Paul is genuinely perplexed about them (ἀπορέω, 4.20), and his concern is adequately explained by a household's resumption of its domestic cult following apostasy from the gospel.

Paul continues to address such a unit as an ἐκκλησία and its members as brothers because he refuses to ratify their apostasy by his rejection of them (4.12). The decision to resume their Christian course (5.7) remains with them, and Paul writes to remove the original cause of their disruption (ταράσσω, 1.7; 5.10) and apostasy by denying circumcision as a requirement of the true Christian gospel.<sup>62</sup> Thus, not one of these three contrary arguments refutes the preceding interpretation that the Galatians apostatized when confronted with circumcision as a necessary prerequisite of Christianity.

Although the list in Gal 4.10 can describe either a pagan or a Jewish temporal scheme, the preceding examination of both its immediate and broader contexts indicates that it refers to a pagan calendrical system. Here, as in Col 2.16, the final determination of the content and function of this list in Gal 4.10 awaits a thorough analysis of the letter as a whole.<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, this essay provides evidence that Gal 4.10 describes a pagan instead of a Jewish time-keeping scheme. If Paul were arguing against observance of

<sup>59</sup> Meeks, *Urban Christians*, 76.

<sup>60</sup> Lightfoot, *Galatians*, 64–5.

<sup>61</sup> Brinsmead states, "Ἐπιστρέφειν (4.9) therefore denotes a complete apostasy from the deep things of religion as does the sequence of beginning and ending in 3.1–5" (*Galatians*, 122).

<sup>62</sup> Brinsmead correctly contends that the Galatians are 'at once judge, jury, and offending party' to Paul's argument (*Galatians*, 235). J. R. Sampley's study confirms Brinsmead's contention because the oath Paul takes in Gal 1.20 is directed to the Galatians and oaths were usually directed to the opposing party in a legal dispute ("Before God, I Do Not Lie" (Gal 1.20), *NTS* 23 [1971] 477–82).

<sup>63</sup> I have completed an analysis of the entire Galatian letter in an article entitled 'Apostasy to Paganism: The Rhetorical Stasis of the Galatian Controversy'.

Jewish sacred days in Gal 4.10, the patently Jewish formulation of festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths more appropriately serves his argument. The conclusion that Paul argues against adoption of a pagan temporal scheme instead of a Jewish one explains why the list in Galatians does not use this exclusively Jewish formulation. A comparison of this list and the list in Col 2.16 is now appropriate.

#### COMPARISON OF COL 2.16 AND GAL 4.10

This essay indicates that Col 2.16 and Gal 4.10 are parallel neither in content nor in function. Concerning content, the Colossian list is exclusively Jewish while the list in Galatians can be either Jewish or pagan. Since the context of the Galatian list designates it as pagan, the two lists are not parallel in content but describe competing calendrical systems. Concerning function, the list in Colossians describes the religious calendar practiced by Pauline communities while the list in Galatians describes a pagan calendar unacceptable to Paul and his communities. The Jewish nature of the Colossian list, however, does not require that Paul's communities necessarily assume the practice of any particular Jewish rituals. A comparison of these lists demonstrates that Gentile conversion to Paul's gospel involves rejection of idolatrous pagan temporal schemes in favour of the Jewish liturgical calendar. Consequently, Col 2.16 cannot be used to prove the list in Gal 4.10 is Jewish. Neither can Gal 4.10 be used to prove the Jewish scheme in Col 2.16 belongs to non-Christian practice. Lighfoot's equation of the content and function of these two lists must be rejected in future exegetical studies.