

Chapter 10 considers the grammar of grace in relation to the gift of Christ. Barclay continues to engage with texts from Galatians and Romans, but now also includes 1 Corinthians. A key conclusion is that, while many today think of gift-language in terms of *things* given, “for Paul, the Christ-gift is most fundamentally not the giving of a thing but the giving of a person” (119). “Paul understands the self as defined by relation: people are constituted by their relationships and derive their selfhood not from some independent or pre-existing essence but from their relationships to other people and other powers” (121). Paul’s “in Christ” language—shorthand for identification or solidarity with Christ—and his use of spatial metaphors and terms, therefore, are not concerned with physical things or actual spatiality, but represent a state of being in relationship with Christ

The final three chapters consider, firstly, an application of what has been previously discussed to Christian community and Christian ethics. The Christian community is to not only embody God’s gift of grace but effectively express it in their relationships with one another—especially those on the margins of community—and with Creation as a gift in itself. Chapter 12 considers how various perspectives on Paul have interpreted his gift language. Chapter 13 considers further how contemporary communities can appropriate and apply the idea of gift today. In contrast to Western individualism, Paul’s message of grace is “incongruous and circular” (149), providing a way of challenging structures that undermine the value of individuals and communities, and of fostering different ways of giving worth to and supporting others.

A major strength of *Paul and the Power of Grace* is its clarity, making it accessible to both academic and non-academic audiences. While it is still formally presented with footnotes and transliterations of the Greek, it is written with a simplicity that most could follow without losing its scholarly integrity. *Paul and the Power of Grace* is very informative and does enough to sufficiently stand on its own. However, when read in concert with *Paul and the Gift*, it is itself a gift worth giving and having; a book to be read time and again.

GRANT BUCHANAN  
Alphacrucis University College, Melbourne

NEIL MARTIN, *Regression in Galatians: Paul and the Gentile Response to Jewish Law* (WUNT 2/530; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020). Pp. xvi + 306. Paperback. €84.00.

---

The study of Paul’s letters and theology continues to produce an immense volume of scholarly work. Much of this presents a rehearsal of previous ideas and one is often struck by a lack of originality that comes from this broad scholarship

base. A piece of work that stands in contrast to this, is a breath of fresh air. *Regression in Galatians* is one of these.

Over seven chapters, Martin explores how Paul employs regression language in Galatians as a rhetorical tool in his argument. Regression language in Galatians includes among other things, explicit ideas such as: turning back (ἐπιστρέφω; 4:8), implicit regression in the parallel language of beginning (ἐνάρχομαι) and completing (ἐπιτελέω) in 3:3, submitting again (πάλιν ... ἐνέχεσθε) to slavery in 5:1, and falling (ἐκπίπτω) from grace in 5:4. According to Martin, Paul employs this language to urge the Galatian believers to recognise that if they accept the Jewish law as part of their new creation life, then they are effectively returning to a form of slavery indicative of their own cultic past; a previous life involving ritual practices that were “habituated in their pagan past.” The strong emotive nature of Paul’s regression language reflects the inefficacy of these former practices to achieve the outcomes the believers think such adherence to Jewish law would provide (4).

Although this thesis may echo what others have already said about Paul, Martin argues that many of the previous assumptions about how Paul views the Jewish law and Judaism are in fact not his main focus. Instead, Paul’s rhetoric of regression is intended as a pastoral and missiological disputation. Rather than a purely theological argument against the law or the influencers per se, Paul’s purpose is to help the Galatian believers recognise their *own* presuppositions about what adherence to the Jewish law provides. This is where Martin makes a unique contribution to Pauline scholarship.

Drawing on biblical and extra biblical data, Martin outlines who the Galatian believers were (Chapter 2), their relationship with the broader pagan religious contexts of Asia Minor (Chapter 3) and their relationship to the Jewish religious context of Asia Minor (Chapter 5). Chapter 4 presents the way in which the potential choice of the believers to turn away from Paul’s gospel is in fact a regression rather than a progression of their faith—a return to paganism indicative of their life under the elements of the cosmos (Gal 4:3).

After laying out the geographical and historical context at the start of Chapter 2, Martin then asserts that the Jewish Christianity promoted by the influencers is not the same as the Jewish Christianity that was received by Paul’s readers. Instead, “there was some ‘slippage’ from the one to the other, such that in Paul’s eyes the ‘Galatianised’ version of Jewish faith in Christ looked more like a regression to his readers’ pagan past than the thing itself” (45).

Martin’s engagement with extra-biblical material in Chapter 3 is a strength of this work. It helps locate the Galatians in their cultic context. Martin outlines key ideas in pagan culture that include such things as cultic adherence to time and seasons and the expectation of religious responsiveness to the cultic spiritual powers. Based on John Barclay’s work on the concept of reciprocity in grace, Martyn highlights where reciprocity that defines human relationships is central to understanding the background to what Paul is addressing in Galatia. The

diversity of pagan cultic practices reveals important contextual considerations for Paul's argument. In order to ensure freedom and life, the Galatians were well versed in the need to please the gods, evoke blessings and curses from the gods and provide offerings of devotion. In the central portion of Chapter 3, Martin critiques recent scholarship that identify elements of this diverse, religious context—elements that include the Emperor cult, Anatolian spirituality and the Cybele cult, each with their own unique requirements and practices. He argues that none of these options adequately explain Paul's regression language.

Forming the crux of Martin's argument, chapters 4–5 explore biblical and extra biblical material comparing concepts within both Gentile and Jewish contexts such as conversion and regression. Chapter 4 considers Paul's response to Gentile believers and potential challenges pastoring Gentile converts from within a Jewish framework would bring. Central to Chapter 4 is a discussion of the *Stoicheia*. Chapter 5 identifies elements in Jewish tradition that mirror similar cultic ideas and practices. After discussing ideas contemporary to the Galatian church, Martin concludes that both Jewish and pagan past ritual practices ultimately lead to similar enslaved outcomes. He further argues that Paul does not view the actual past practices of either group as issues in themselves. Instead, common themes and past practices in both Jewish and Gentile are problematic only “*for Gentile converts*” (139, emphasis in original), especially when these practices are returned to in the form of Torah observance.

In Chapter 6, Martin begins with a brief discussion of recent scholarship on Paul within Judaism. He then presents his main thesis: that the idea of regression was a rhetorical ploy by Paul to convince the Galatian believers to avoid any turning away from his gospel. The issue was not that “the Galatians were in danger because they had come to think about the relationship with God in the same way the influencers did” but that adhering to the influencers' message evoked ideas and reflexes that would draw them back into their *own* pagan practices (208). Thus, Paul's issue is less with the influencers but with how the Galatians perceive the influencers' message. This is reiterated in Martin's conclusion in Chapter 7.

*Regression in Galatians* is well-written and well argued. Martin compellingly argues to forefront regression language when interpreting Galatians. The inclusion of various tables, maps and ancient engravings and coins helps locate the message of Galatians in its historical and cultic context. Martin's work adds an important voice in the interpretation of Galatians, its recipients and its socio-religious context. A concern I see with his work is that a majority of the latter part of Galatians is devoted to positive practices of walking in the Spirit in Gal 5–6. While there are elements of regression language here as well, I do not think the contrast between the regression language and Paul's positive language is adequately addressed. If regression language is a key focus of Galatians, more work needs to be done to consider this in these latter passages. Nevertheless,

*Regression in Galatians* is a great read and well recommended to all studying Paul.

GRANT BUCHANAN  
Alphacrucis University College, Melbourne

N. T. WRIGHT, *Galatians* (Commentaries for Christian Formation; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021). Pp. xix + 419. Hardback. US\$39.99.

---

This recent offering on Galatians in the Commentaries for Christian Formation (CCF) series from N.T. Wright presents a simple yet well-developed exposition on this important letter of Paul. Although it is far more expansive than his previous commentary in the *Paul for Everyone* series and goes into more detail and background than that earlier offering, it is still written in the clear and eloquent narrational style expected of Tom Wright and evident in his other popular works for general readership.

The CCF series aims at focusing on Christian formation as the key outcome of the commentaries in the series and is a fresh attempt to bring together the skills of good exegesis, preaching, teaching and application to help a reader in their theological and faith formation. For Wright, this commentary on Galatians provides this opportunity. As he notes in the preface, his previous works include more detailed scholarly engagement with textual issues and scholarly debates. This particular commentary offers the opportunity to distil that previous research into something applicable for readers in today's world.

Wright first considers how Galatians helps with Christian formation. According to Wright, “the Bible tells the story of God, the world, Israel, and above all, Jesus. It tells it in such a way, from many angles and in many genres, as if say to its readers: *this is your story. This is your home. Learn what it means to live here*” (3, emphasis original). Galatians is no exception. Even though many today do not face the precise challenges of the early church in Galatia, merely reading and applying the book by taking general lessons or principles can lead to “creating an abstract de-historicised world” (4). In doing so some of the key narrative themes and concepts in the letter miss the true importance of these themes within Paul's argument. Recent research into Paul's wider world and worldview—including his Jewish context—have helped alleviate such abstractions and challenge anachronistic and atomised readings of the text. Consequently, spending time working *through* the text as a coherent whole, as Wright does here, is an important facet of Wright's exposition of the text.

To that end, throughout *Galatians*, Wright discusses each verse in what has become his trademark narrative style. He also ensures that his exposition connects to the overall aim of the commentary. He clearly explains key themes and textual issues, but he does so without spending inordinate amounts of space