



Two-way Trauma in Paul's Letter to the Galatians

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Abstract: This essay considers the blunt and controversial statement of Paul at the conclusion of Galatians (Gal 6:17). Paul says, “from now on, let no one trouble me, for I bear on my body the marks (stigma, brand or tattoo) of Christ”. Scholars agree that Paul is speaking metaphorically about the scars he received in ministry. By calling his scars “tattoos”, Paul makes an odd sort of honour claim, since tattoos typically were inflicted on low-status slaves in the Roman empire as a mark of ownership and punishment. This essay looks at a common thread of trauma and violence in the letter to the Galatians. Paul works through the traumas he received in two ways. First, he presents a variety of traumatic episodes in the Galatian community – at times, lashing out at his opponents. Second, he deliberately inverts honor and status categories. By boldly claiming to be Christ’s slave Paul asserts his status and finds meaning and vindication in his suffering. This essay takes a more wholistic view of the letter to the Galatians that has previously been done.

Keywords: Paul; Galatians; Trauma; Therapy; Stigma; Crucifixion; Scar; Tattoo; Slave; Violence; Freedom; Status

1. Introduction

As noted in the Introduction to the series of papers in this issue, this essay was originally part of a panel discussion at the 2022 Canadian Society of Patristic Studies on themes of trauma and therapy in early Christianity. When I proposed this panel project, I thought my essay would be straight-forward: establish that Paul’s reference in Gal 6:17 to the marks of Christ on his body was an allusion to the scars he acquired in his preaching activity. The word Paul uses is *stigma* (literally “puncture mark, tattoo”), and I argue that Paul uses this word to claim honor in the traumas and wounds he had received in service to Christ. Paul finds meaning in his suffering, and this declaration was a kind of self-created therapy for him. I continue to think this is the case. But as is often the

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way with Paul, things are more complex and interrelated than they appear at first.

In the modern world, people choose to get tattooed as a sign of independence. They select or even create a distinctive design which affirms their freedom and identity. This practice and view may predispose modern readers toward an anachronistic and positive (perhaps even glamorous) view of what tattooing meant in the ancient world. In the western Roman empire, a tattoo or *stigma*² usually was associated with slaves who had no choice in the marks they bore and no freedom. With slaves, there was always a background of violence, trauma and abuse, and loss of identity. Based on these issues, I broadened my investigation and considered themes of violence and trauma throughout Paul's letter to the Galatians.

I came to see an interesting pattern: the letter to the Galatians has many references to violence and trauma, perhaps more than any other of Paul's letters. Consider the following list. Circumcision was urged on adult males by Paul's opponents. In response, Paul wishes that his opponents would castrate themselves. Paul curses his opponents. Paul makes laconic reference to his shameful bodily affliction. Paul uses the term slave (*doulos*) and related themes throughout the letter (see discussion below). Slavery brought with it certain connotations: slaves were beaten and abused, slaves lack freedom, slaves lack autonomy – they submit their will to another person, and slaves are owned by another, they are property. Their marks denote ownership by another person. Finally, tattooing and beating were painful and possibly traumatic acts. Tattoo drawers in the ancient world did not have the high-speed implements we have today.

Here is a point often downplayed in modern Christianity (perhaps more in Protestantism than Roman Catholicism)³, there is trauma associated with crucifixion. This is obviously the case for the person being tortured, but also for those who witnessed such an agonizing, slow death inflicted on criminals. Crucifixion was well known in Roman society but it is mentioned very little in literature or art⁴. So, when Paul preaches the crucified Christ, he deliberately evokes a searing and degraded image of

² The word *stigma* has a negative connotation in English today.

³ Compare the empty cross in Protestant churches with the bleeding corpus crucifix in Roman Catholic churches.

⁴ The two earliest depictions we have of crucifixion are early second and early third century Roman graffiti, and these mock the degrading spectacle. See J.G. Cook, *Crucifixion as Spectacle in Roman Campania*, "Novum Testamentum" 54 (2012) p. 68-100 and

abuse and torture and places it in front of his audience⁵. In a published article, I argue that Paul's enigmatic reference to Christ's crucifixion being depicted before the Galatians (Gal 3:1) is best understood as a reference to Paul's vivid preaching style⁶.

Our challenge is to read Paul with fresh eyes. Here, I want to strip away interpretations which tame his rhetoric. I want to encounter the texts as they were first written: vivid and passionate expressions of a man who often felt himself and his teachings to be under attack. I propose that the letter of Galatians is a case study of a person working through their own trauma.

Let's think about the following questions. First, what does it mean for a person to interpret the trauma of insults and injuries as a badge of honor? Trauma is more than injury – it can bring feelings of shame, dishonor, and lack of self-worth. The wounds from the oppressor's blows may heal, but scars and emotions remain. Second, what does it mean for a person to invert conventions of social honor, and claim dishonor as a higher or more authentic honor? Third, what does it say about personal autonomy and self-image when a free person chooses the title of slave? Fourth, what is the significance of a traumatized person using language of violence and trauma – even for what he thinks is a good end? Is this forceful rhetoric – or is it more? Is this the traumatized person inflicting trauma on others, in self-healing, to balance the scales? Finally, we consider whether slavery, with its connotations of violence and trauma, has been poorly understood or ignored and its centrality in Paul's rhetoric has thus been underestimated. In the modern world, we are coming to recognize that unacknowledged abuse and trauma continue to be problematic in people's lives. So, perhaps we are entitled to come with fresh eyes to Paul's letter of long ago and find new and relevant meaning to our world in it.

2. Why the focus on slavery here?

As I noted above, a key issue in Gal 6:17 is Paul's use of the term *stigma* (tattoo, brand). Scholars of Paul are generally agreed that Paul

E. Ferguson, *Alexamenos [graffito]*, in: *Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, New York 1997, p. 29-30.

⁵ A scandal (*skandalon*) and foolishness (*mōrian*) (1Cor 1:23).

⁶ S. Muir, *Vivid imagery in Galatians 3:1 – Roman rhetoric, street announcing, graffiti, and crucifixions*, "Biblical Theology Bulletin" 44/2 (2014) p. 76-86.

uses this word metaphorically, to refer to the scars he has endured in his preaching and other activities in Jesus-movements, rather than literally talking about any tattoos. This is straightforward. The debate among scholars is the context or background connotation of this word. Among the possibilities there are two proposals which receive most discussion: tattoos as a sign of affiliation or membership in a religious group, or tattoos as a sign of slavery.

Having reviewed secondary scholarship and the main primary texts cited in favor of religious affiliation versus slavery, I estimate that the background of slavery is a much better explanation for Paul's statement in Gal 6:17 than any religious affiliation signaled by body marks. I base this assessment on Paul's Jewish background⁷, the linkage of tattooing or branding with slavery in the Roman empire, and the dominant trope of slavery in Paul's writing (see below).

Paul uses this term not to simply claim membership in a group (i.e., I am one among many in this marked group) but rather to assert leadership and special status in the group. He does this through his typical 'making lemonade out of lemons' approach – inverting honor claims in a bravura show of rhetoric. "I am a slave – the BEST slave – the slave of CHRIST".

I strategically focus on the slavery aspect rather than that of religious group identity. At the end of the day, the two realms may not be so far apart. Whether one is the servant of the god, or the possession of an owner; in each case a powerful being carves his identity on the slave/servant with visible signs. The slave/servant bears these identity-markers on their body.

Focusing on the slave aspect rather than religious affiliation has several advantages. It brings in the trauma topic I wish to explore. It is a more realistic understanding of tattooing in the western Roman empire than the voluntary, free-choice (anachronistic? modern?) aspect of displaying one's allegiance through choosing to be marked. The irony and strength of Paul's claim is that the involuntary traumas he has endured become badges of honour. Paul cannot choose that the marks have been made, but he can choose how they are interpreted.

⁷ Leviticus 19:28 prohibits Israelites from deliberately marking their bodies, see next section.

3. Implicit reference to slavery in Gal 6:17

The statement in Galatians 6:17 comes at the end of Paul's letter. Paul has scolded and lectured the recipients of the letter, often with an underlying tone of defensiveness. Now, his rhetorical ammunition is almost spent. His final shot is an unusual and rather bellicose statement⁸: "Finally, let no one cause me trouble. For I bear on my body the marks of Jesus" (NIV) – Τοῦ λοιποῦ κόπους μοι μηδεὶς παρεχέτω, ἐγὼ γὰρ τὰ στίγματα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῷ σώματί μου βαστάζω. Even before we consider what Paul means by "the marks of Jesus on the body", it is apparent that Paul mentions them to assert his status and honour, possibly to claim protection.

The Greek word *stigma* is *hapax legomenon* in the New Testament, occurring only in Gal 6:17⁹. Thus, it is unusual for Paul, and indeed is not part of any conventional early Christian discourse. In the Greco-Roman world the usual meaning of *stigma* is the mark inflicted on a slave as a sign of ownership¹⁰. The consensus among scholars is that Paul uses the term in Gal 6:17 to refer to the scars and wounds he has received as a result of his preaching and missionary activity¹¹.

The connotation of religious tattooing has been over-emphasized by some commentators on Paul. I say that because that context would be unusual for Paul whereas the slavery connotation fits within Paul's discourse. Religious tattooing was viewed as idolatrous and prohibited

⁸ H.D. Betz (*Galatians: A Commentary*, Minneapolis 1979, p. 323) says this is a "strange" remark.

⁹ Rare in the Septuagint, only at Cant. 1:11. See H.D. Betz, *Stigma*, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, v. 7, ed. G. Friedrich, tr. and ed. G.W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids 1964, p. 660-661.

¹⁰ *Stigma*, in: H.G. Liddell – R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford 1996, p. 1645: "Branded marks were carried especially by domestic animals, slaves, criminals [...] A man who bore the stigma was everywhere regarded as dishonored in antiquity". Cf. *Stigma*, in: W. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, tr. W. Arndt – F. Gingrich, Chicago 1979, p. 768; H.D. Betz, *Stigma*, in: *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, v. 7, ed. G. Friedrich, tr. and ed. G.W. Bromiley, Grand Rapids 1964, p. 657-664. *Stigma* literally means tattoo mark, and coming from *stizō* (prick, engrave) it implies something inscribed or punctured on a surface. Paul's use here likely is metaphorical rather than literal.

¹¹ See Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, p. 768; Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary*, p. 324-325.

in Lev 19:28 and generally prohibited in later rabbinic writings. It just doesn't seem like a go-to point for Paul¹².

I want to probe the issue of stigma as scar linked to slavery. Paul does not use *he oulē* (scar, mark) or *he amuxis* (scarification) or *he smōdix* (bruise) – well-attested words in Greek usage. Paul deliberately wants to make a particular point through use of the word *stigma*, and I argue that that point is linked to slavery.

In Roman era rhetoric, a recommended strategy was to commend someone's worth by pointing out scars earned valorously in battle. Quintilian notes that Cicero and Asinus both used this tactic¹³. Paul does something like this in his famous hardship catalogue of 2Cor 11:21b-30¹⁴. But Quintilian also "[...] warned the aspiring orator not to give himself a slavish aspect", even in gestures (let alone words)¹⁵. So, what are we to make of Paul's unusual statement in Gal 6:17? This is not a reference to a warrior's scars; it is cry of a self-professed slave.

Stigma had negative social connotations. Betz discusses *stigma* in the Greco-Roman world¹⁶. A Hellenized Jewish author notes the dishonour associated with the marks of a slave¹⁷.

The *stigma* mark clearly signified ownership by a superior and the subjugation of the person so marked. In effect, the person or thing marked was less than a full person and was considered the property of the owner. Thus, Paul's use to make an honour claim in Gal 6:17 is striking, even paradoxical¹⁸. But, those who have worked with Paul know that paradox is a typical rhetorical tactic for him. Armed with this information, we are now prepared to consider the larger aspects of slavery which informed Paul and his audience.

¹² See O. Mendelson, *Tattoo*, in: *Encyclopedia Judaica*, v. 19, ed. M. Berenbaum – F. Skolnik, New York – Jerusalem 2007, p. 526-527 and Betz, *Stigma*, p. 661-662.

¹³ Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary*, p. 323-324.

¹⁴ See also 2Cor 6:4-5; 12:7-10.

¹⁵ K. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, Cambridge 1994, p. 27.

¹⁶ Betz notes (*Stigma*, p. 658) that some soldiers (I suspect from the lower social classes) were tattooed on their hand with the Emperor's name, but this is of the later imperial period and probably not in Paul's world-view.

¹⁷ Pseudo-Phocylides, *Sententiae* 225: "Do not brand (your) slave, thus dishonoring him", tr. P.W. Van der Horst, in: *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, v. 2, ed. J.H. Charlesworth, New York 1985, p. 582.

¹⁸ Paul is aware of conventional honor codes, and at times cites them in approval – see 2Cor 11:20 and the competitive aspect of Rom 12:10.

4. The slavery motif and its connotations

Here are some informative comments from Keith Bradley's *Slavery and Society at Rome* (1994). Bradley is a recognized authority on slavery in the Roman empire. I present them to give us the same sense of slavery which Paul's audience had. Often, the harshness and dishonor of this condition is lost. Sometimes, translators render *doulos* as "servant" rather than slave – softening the force of the term¹⁹. An awareness of these issues gives us interpretive keys to unlock some subtle points of Paul's rhetoric. Emphases in bold below are mine. We see in these points a portrait of an abused and traumatized person, not the 'dignified butler' sometimes imaged in some analyses.

[1] "[...] any Roman slave, as a matter of course, could become the object of physical abuse or injury at any time [...] [there was] the strong association between slavery and violence that always held a place in the Roman mind"²⁰.

[2] "From the slave it was complete submission that the master expected [...]"²¹.

[3] Bradley notes that the Roman medical writer A.C. Celsus says that a particular affliction, "[...] is relieved more easily in slaves than in freemen, for since it demands hunger, thirst, and a thousand other troublesome treatments and prolonged endurance, it is easier to help those who are easily constrained than those who have an unserviceable freedom"²².

¹⁹ *Doulos* = slave. *Diakonos* = servant.

²⁰ Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 4. See his discussion on p. 28 regarding sexual exploitation and physical abuse. Bradley cites Quintilian's commonplace V.xi.34-35 on sexual exploitation. See also Patterson, *Slavery and social death*, p. 13 "slavery is the permanent, violent domination of [...] generally dishonored persons". See also R. Saller, *Corporal Punishment, Authority, and Obedience in the Roman Household*, in: *Marriage, Divorce, and Children in Ancient Rome*, ed. B. Rawson, Oxford 1991, p. 151-165.

²¹ Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 5. The concept of submission is intriguing, given Gal 2:5 (see below).

²² A.C. Celsus, *De Medicina* 3, 21, 2, cited in Bradley. The implication is that the slave is accustomed to pain and hardship. This list bears a striking similarity to Paul's hardship list in 2Cor 11:21b-29 where Paul openly boasts of his hardships, beatings etc. in an extended honor claim. The portrait of the abused apostle Paul carries forward into the book of Acts, see Acts 14:19; 16:22-24, also Acts 9:16.

[4] “Powerlessness and isolation, rightlessness and degradation were the hallmarks of servitude”²³.

[5] Slavery was equated with a living death²⁴. The slave existed only at the behest (or whim) of the master²⁵.

5. Paul’s use of slave terms

Before focusing attention on the text and issues of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, I review Paul’s use of the term *doulos* and cognate terms (*douloō*, *douleuō*, *katadouloō*) throughout his written works. I have sorted the occurrences into categories which are distinct but not always mutually exclusive. Paul combines senses and meanings. How does Gal 6:17, with an implicit reference to slavery, fit into the overall Pauline corpus of letters?

At the outset, I note that Paul uses the term *doulos* in a variety of ways. He is not consistent – or we might say that he adapts the term to whatever point he wishes to make. Below is a complete survey of Paul’s use of slave terms. Sometimes he uses the idea positively with the connotation of disciplined and complete service. But even in this sphere, it would be unusual for a free-born man to enthusiastically make the sort of statements Paul makes. The range and extent of statements relating to slavery show the ubiquity of the practice in Paul’s time – it is a ready reference point.

There are cases where Paul (or Deutero-Paul) refers to actual slaves: Philemon 1:16, and the *Haustafel* or domestic codes of Eph 6:5-9 and Col 3:22-4:1. Here, the sense is straightforward and refers to the institution and practice of slavery. The slave has a definite, subordinate place in the social order²⁶.

²³ Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 29. In speaking of enslaved prisoners of war, Bradley notes: “The degraded slave was the symbol therefore of all that was abject and without honour”. Prisoners of war were formerly freeman, captured and now in servitude. Does this give any insight into Paul’s rhetoric, since he as a freeman takes on the title of slave?

²⁴ Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome*, p. 25-26. See Patterson’s insightful cross-cultural analysis of slavery (Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, p. 35-76).

²⁵ Here, I will simply point out the insights this might bring to Gal 2:19; Rom 6:1-11. This could be an essay in itself.

²⁶ Paul’s reference to slavery in relation to the bonds of marriage (1Cor 7:15) is interesting but I do not comment on it further.

Sometimes, Paul uses the term as a contrast of opposites (slave/free born) as Paul portrays the apocalyptic shattering of conventional social norms. Gal 3:28 is a good example of this, see also 1Cor 12:13 and cf. Col 3:11²⁷. The negative connotation is still there, but it is superseded by identity in Christ. Probably also 1Cor 7:21-23 (which also refers to actual slaves).

In metaphorical usage, Paul often refers to slavery in a negative sense, for its connotations of lack of freedom and lack of autonomy. In Galatians, he calls covenantal Torah-obedience a form a slavery – a bold assessment by a Pharisee²⁸.

In some metaphors, Paul uses slavery to refer to obedience²⁹. Here we see a hyperbolic or exaggerated metaphor. The slave is obedient to his/her master. Paul's discussion in Rom 6:6, 15-22 and Rom 7:25 is nimble, contrasting slavery (obedience) to sin-impurity with slavery (obedience) to righteousness. In this passage the action itself is neutral, becoming positive or negative depending on its object or focal point³⁰.

In Gal 5:13 we see a hyperbolic and positive use of the term, to describe a high degree of selfless service in the community. This use is also in 1Cor 9:19, 2Cor 4:5 and Philippians 2:22 (which are also leadership claims), as well as Rom 12:11; 14:18; 16:18³¹. In the kenotic hymn of Philippians 2:6-11, Christ is held up as a role model of obedience and humility when he takes the form (*morphēn*) of a slave (2:7).

The most interesting positive use of *doulos* is when Paul refers to himself or another leader as a slave. Although a typical salutation in his letters is *apostolos* (1Cor 1:1; 2Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; cf. Eph 1:1; Col 1:1), there are times where he opens the letter with self-reference as a *doulos* or slave of Christ (Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1 with Timothy)³². The salutation in

²⁷ These appear to be baptismal formulas.

²⁸ Gal 2:4; 3:22, 23, 25; 4:1-9; 4:21-5:1. This is part of Paul's adoption theology. Also, Rom 7:6, 25.

²⁹ There is one case of a metaphorical comparison of slavery to bodily discipline (asceticism) (*doulagōgeō*, lead into subjection) 1Cor 9:27. The body is subjected to the will of the person. This may inform Jerome's understanding of Gal 6:16, see Jerome's commentary on the *Epistle to the Galatians* III 6, 17.

³⁰ See 1Cor 7:23; Eph 6:6.

³¹ Cf. Eph 6:5-6.

³² See also Col 4:12 with a reference to the greeting of Epaphras. Outside the Pauline canon, and of a later date, we see James 1:1 and Jude 1:1 where the term appears in the salutation. 2 Peter 1:1 intriguingly combines slave and apostle. The later dates suggest an influence by persecutions arising against Christians at the end of the first century. Also,

a letter establishes the author's credentials. So, in those cases, we see Paul clearly using the degraded term 'slave' paradoxically as a sign of honour and a claim to leadership³³. Paul uses it in a self-reference and honour claim in Gal 1:10³⁴ and implicitly in Gal 6:17.

6. Paul's use of confrontation and violent motifs and terms in Galatians

We now turn from a broad survey of slave terms in Paul's writings to a detailed examination of violent motifs in his letter to the Galatians. The letter is of such items. We might characterize violence as an underlying theme of the letter.

First, we consider Paul's description of the Jerusalem conference (2:1-10). This chapter reverberates with tension, confrontation and aggressive terms³⁵. We wonder, is Paul exaggerating or dramatizing for rhetorical effect? Was he traumatized by these events? Paul paints a vivid and somewhat sinister scene of power struggles in a closed-door session, with surveillance, spies and informants³⁶. In his account, Paul questions and undercuts the authority of those who brought him to trial. We wonder if Paul's words here are *esprit de l'escalier*, something Paul wished he had the courage to say to his accusers at the time³⁷. Paul declares that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised³⁸. We might imagine strong men grabbing poor Titus, strapping him down, and performing an *ad hoc* surgery. I may be dramatizing, but I want to convey the force of Paul's

James and Jude were not generally considered to be apostles and so an apostolic salutation would not have been credible.

³³ This is a bold rhetorical move. What other groups in the Roman world were led by 'slaves'? Particularly since we assume that Paul's groups were made up of mixed-status persons.

³⁴ Cf. 1Cor 7:22 where Paul speaks of the slave as a freed person "belonging to the Lord" and the free person who is called as a "slave of Christ". Also, in Rom 14:18; 16:18. Cf. Eph 6:6 and Col 3:23.

³⁵ The scene is described in much milder terms in Acts 15.

³⁶ Gal 2:4 "False brothers brought in secretly" (παρεισάκτους ψευδαδέλφους) "who stole in secretly" (παρεισῆλθον κατασκοπήσαι). Note the emphasis of secrecy: παρείσακτος, παρεισέρχομαι.

³⁷ Gal 2:2, 6, 9. They seem to be leaders (in the eyes of others, not of Paul/God?): δοκέω, "to seem, to have" reputation.

³⁸ Gal 2:3: ἀναγκάζω compel by force or persuasion, constrain.

statement. Paul paints himself as a hero in this episode, noting that he and his group did not submit to any demands but maintained their freedom³⁹. Such is the response of a free-born Mediterranean male seeking to preserve the honour of himself and his associates⁴⁰. Paul's insistence on resisting submission (the sign of a free-born man) makes his claim of slave status even more amazing. But as I noted above, Paul is enthusiastic but not always consistent in his rhetoric.

The tension continues in Paul's account of his confrontation with Cephas/Peter (2:11-14). Paul claims to have opposed Cephas to his face – publicly dishonoring him⁴¹. In Paul's account, Peter stands publicly shamed and condemned (like a prisoner)⁴². Paul says that Peter was found guilty through his actions (Gal 2:12-13). Whether or not this event happened as Paul says is not the point – in this retrospective account, Paul portrays himself as an accuser and judge of Peter. Ironically (to our eyes) this is the reversal of the situation Paul faced at the Jerusalem conference. Right and wrong are not the issue: accusation and aggressive confrontation are the issue.

Other examples may be dealt with more briefly. In 1:13 Paul admits that he once excessively hunted down the (Jesus-) assembly with the intent to do violence to it⁴³. In 2:18 Paul talks of tearing down or destroying things⁴⁴. In 5:15 Paul characterizes conflict within the group as “biting, devouring, and consuming” – vivid metaphors⁴⁵.

³⁹ Gal 2:5: “we did not yield submission” ὑποταγή “subjection” would be a better translation. A slave or a lower-class man would have to yield submission to his superior.

⁴⁰ Again, I draw attention to Paul's sometime adherence to honor codes, 2Cor 11:20.

⁴¹ Gal 2:11: κατὰ πρόσωπον αὐτῷ ἀντέστην – “to his face” is a dishonoring action.

⁴² Gal 2:11: κατεγνωσμένος ἦν. The New Revised Standard Version says “self-condemned” but that is an unwarranted translation and goes against what Paul says. It is Paul who condemns Peter in 2:11, 14, in effect acting as judge over him.

⁴³ (hyperbolēn, ὑπερβολή excessively Liddell – Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1861) persecuted (διώκω, Liddell – Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 440 pursue, chase; often with hostile intent) and (tried to) destroy (πορθέω, Liddell – Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 1449 destroy, ravage, plunder). The reputation of his former activities impeded him in his leadership (1:13, 24).

⁴⁴ Καταλύω.

⁴⁵ “δάκνετε καὶ κατεσθίετε, [...] ἀναλωθῆτε”.

7. Curse motifs

Cursing was a powerful and aggressive act in the Roman world⁴⁶. It was associated with judgment and sometimes magic. It was never benign. It was an infliction of power in a negative way, to cause harm by invoking supernatural power. Paul curses his opponents (ἀνάθεμα, 1:8-9)⁴⁷ and pronounces judgement on them (5:10; 6:7-8). As mentioned above, Paul's description (2:11-14) of his confrontation with Peter is Paul's judgement upon Peter. Finally, Paul speaks of Torah-obedience as being under the curse (κατάρα 3:10, 13) of the law – harsh terms for a Jew, even an apocalyptically-minded one such as Paul.

8. The circumcision controversy

One of the main occasions for Paul's letter to the Galatians is that some in the Jesus-movement had been urging circumcision on the Gentile adult males of the assembly. This issue is one of the reasons for the letter, and it may be the catalyst for the violent terms and aggressive tone used by Paul⁴⁸. The circumcision of males is an ancient and continuing identity-marker in Judaism, warranted by the command of YHWH to Abraham in Genesis 17:11-12⁴⁹. As stated in the Genesis passage, it typically was done on the eighth day from birth. So, the operation would be done on infant boys, who had no control or memory of the act. Whatever stress or trauma might have occurred would be on the part of the parents. However, the imposition of this act on adult males (as apparently urged by Paul's opponents) would have been controversial. I cannot imagine there would be a line-up of free-born males eager to have this done – religious fervor notwithstanding. Paul uses violent terms to counsel against this imposition. In Gal 5:12 he wishes his opponents would castrate or mu-

⁴⁶ See R. Edmonds, *Drawing Down the Moon: Magic in the Ancient Greco-Roman World*, Princeton 2019, p. 55-90; *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, ed. J. Gager, New York – Oxford 1992.

⁴⁷ ἀνάθεμα ἔστω said twice.

⁴⁸ Well accepted in scholarship, Betz (*Galatians: A Commentary*, p. 5-9; 253-290) discusses at length.

⁴⁹ Sanders views circumcision as one of the basic elements of 'common' Judaism in the first century. see E.P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice & Belief 63 BCE – 66 CE.*, London 1992, p. 349-350, 388.

tilate themselves (ἀποκόπτω, a hyperbolic echoing of the circumcision process).

9. Co-crucifixion and suffering with Christ

We know that Paul identifies with Christ's suffering. But the extent of this is sometimes underappreciated by scholars. We see Paul's amazing claim in Gal 2:19, "I have been crucified with Christ (literally, συσταυρόομαι "co-crucified"). This is closely followed by the enigmatic statement in Gal 3:1 that Jesus Christ was publicly displayed (perhaps through Paul's teaching) to the Galatians⁵⁰. Paul urges the assembly to crucify the flesh (5:24). Admittedly this is a rhetorical use of metaphor to counter the circumcision issue – but it still is a violent term. We see similar themes in other Pauline writings⁵¹.

10. Paul's reference to a shameful bodily affliction

The last item is intriguing, but our knowledge of it is limited due to the laconic nature of Paul's comment. He says in Gal 4:12-13 that a weakness of the flesh (ἀσθένειαν τῆς σαρκός) was the occasion for his first preaching to the Galatians, and that this condition could have caused shame and scorn (ἐξουθενήσατε οὐδὲ ἐξεπτύσατε). What I find interesting is that some sort of bodily or physical problem started Paul's work in Galatia. My sense is that this condition is something distinct from the "marks of Christ" mentioned in Gal 6:17. This is conjecture, but it is based on the shame vs. a bravado contrast in the two passages. It is tempt-

⁵⁰ Muir, *Vivid imagery*, p. 76-86.

⁵¹ In Romans 8:17 "[...] we suffer with him or co-suffer (συμπάσχω) so that we may also be glorified with him". In Rom 6:3-5,8 "baptized into the death of Christ, buried with him by baptism into death, united with him in a death like his [...] we have died with Christ". In 2Cor 4:10 "we are always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies". In 2Cor 1:5 "for as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too". And finally, we have the enigmatic statement in the Deutero-Pauline Colossians 1:24, "I am now rejoicing in my suffering for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the assembly". See Muir, *Vivid Imagery*, p. 76-86, where I suggest that this statement preserves a memory of Paul's vivid preaching style which re-created the Christ event for his audiences.

ing to draw in other references (equally laconic) and connect the dots between them⁵². I will resist that urge, other than noting that Paul seems to have had one or more bodily challenges and was ambivalent about them.

11. Conclusion

My intent in this essay was two-fold. First, I sought to comment in detail on the slavery motif in Gal 6:17 against the wider issues of slavery, trauma and violent terms in Paul's letter to the Galatians. I limited this analysis to Paul's use in Galatians of slavery and violence/trauma issues. I find that Paul's use of the term *stigma* is part of a much larger background of violence and trauma, and that in Galatians, Paul works through his own trauma and claims personal honour.

My second intent was to provide items for reflection among other contributors to the panel and now in this special publication. I hope to have succeeded in that service.

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⁵² See 2Cor 12:1-10. 2:7 thorn in the flesh (σκόλοψ τῆ σαρκί) which is a messenger of Satan (tormenting spirit? ἄγγελος Σατανᾶ); 2:9-10 references to weakness (ἀσθενεία). Also 2Cor 10:10, Paul's opponents say his bodily appearance is weak (παρουσία τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενής).

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