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TRANSFORMATION IN LOVE IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

ABSTRACT

Paul's Letter to the Galatians is known as a bitter defence of his "true" gospel of faith against opponents who wish to impose their "false" gospel of works on the faith community. This focus on the faith-works controversy has not been conducive to attempts to read it in terms of the notion of love. This article seeks to reconsider this position and to spell out the special role of love in the letter and its transformative nature. In a first section, the approach to the theme is explained. After a discussion of the polemical nature of the letter, the article analyses Paul's presentation of divine love in the letter as the origin of God's salvific and transformative action and of love as a divine characteristic, and how divine love marks the identity of the believing community. The significance of love in the ethos and ethics of the faith community is spelled out.

1. INTRODUCTION

Biblical Spirituality and Spiritual Hermeneutics,[1] as its subdiscipline, assume and build on historical-critical approaches. It also resonates with a development within Biblical Studies that in recent years displayed a growing interest in theological readings of Biblical texts[2] and in scholarly

1 Cf. Waaijman (2002:685-766) who coined the term "spiritual hermeneutics" for theoretical reflection on interpretations of spiritual texts in various religious traditions.

2 Cf. Green (2006:72-83) for the relationship of Biblical Spirituality to these methods. Many examples of such theologies from various traditions and countries can be mentioned. These include Stuhlmacher (1991-1999); Dunn

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work on the transformative consequences of these texts in contemporary settings and societies. In the case of Galatians, such work has addressed topical issues such as gender, race, colonialism and socio-political issues. Recently, Tolmie (2012a:118-157) has provided a plethora of examples of such scholarly work on this letter. In fact, there seems to have been an explosion of such studies on the meaning of the letter for contemporary life.

These new studies, with their transformative readings of the Bible, can be linked with major hermeneutical developments in Biblical Studies as a discipline. Reflecting the influence of Ricoeur, this approach moves beyond meaning as sense (as informational interpretation) to pursue reflection on meaning as reference. It is also concerned with and develops Gadamer's well-known remarks about the fusion of horizons where the world of the text and the world of the reader intersect. In Biblical Spirituality, the transformational impact of the text is considered a key issue, as is clear from the work of Waaijman (2002:685-766) and from Schneiders' influential publication with the telling title, *The revelatory text*. Insisting that one should use all existing canons and methods of interpretation, she finds it necessary to go further by adding that one should also appropriate its meaning and be open to its transformational impact. This could have far-reaching consequences: "To engage the meaning of the text at this level is to court conversion" (Schneiders 1999:16).[3] Whilst Schneiders has not developed the notion of transformation in detail, it is to the credit of Waaijman (2002:427-442) that he presented a well-designed model of transformation as a key element in spirituality. This has special value for the interpretation of Biblical texts. In this article, his notion of transformation in love, as one of the five dimensions of Waaijman's model, will provide a methodological tool with which to analyse the textual information in Galatians.

This article is to be located within this development. It approaches the text of Galatians from the perspective of Biblical Spirituality. This comprehensive task requires attention for the spiritual aspects of the text that reveals its transformational nature within its original and contemporary contexts. In the

(1993; 2006); Gnilka (1994); Hübner (1990-1993); Strecker (1996); Schnelle (2001-2005); Marshall (2004); Hahn (2005) and Watson (2013). For other examples, cf. Morgan (2009) and the discussions in Rowe (2006) and Carson (2010).

3 Fundamentally, this research is concerned with the validity of interpretation, with the value and use of Scripture for the religious quest, and with a fruitful understanding and appropriation of Scripture (Schneiders 1999:16-23). Schneiders (2003) illustrated her approach further in her equally significant book *Written that you may believe* in which she shows how an appropriation of Johannine material challenges existing power structures and invites readers to participate in the transformative dynamics which Scripture promotes.

light of the limited space, only one aspect of the transformational impact of Galatians will be discussed. The focus will be on transformation in love, and the intention is to illuminate love as an important spiritual theme.[4]

This article will also address some insights in the field of New Testament Studies. Though Schrage (1982:213) underlines the central position of love in Pauline texts, the motif of love has been given less prominence in recent research. Houlden (1992:73), for example, commented that not all early Christian circles were as single-mindedly dedicated to a "love morality", as is often supposed, and that even those which might be thus described meant many different things, ranging from the intra-community love of the Fourth Gospel to the devotion to the Torah in Matthew. Recently, Hays (1992:274-275) denied that love is a unifying image in the New Testament or a central thematic emphasis. Such remarks ask to be tested through textual analyses of early Christian writings.

It is certainly true that New Testament documents offer various interpretations of love. The notion of love is diverse, contextually determined and, therefore, dynamic in nature. In some instances, such as the Pastoral Epistles, the Greek word for love (ἀγαπή) is hardly mentioned,[5] whereas others differ among themselves in their portrayal of the character and function of love. Some documents radically promote love for the enemy, while others, such as John 13:34, are more restrictive, linking love only with fellow believers. Even within the Pauline corpus, there is diversity. Paul's chapter on love in 1 Corinthians 13 is unparalleled and unique in its celebration of love. Romans 12-13 offers the closest example of the important role of love in Paul's thought, but it is decisively different in the way that it links the love motif with other virtues and themes. This is one reason to approach any discussion of love first and foremost in terms of a particular letter of Paul before trying to reconstruct an overview that may not be supported by the textual evidence.

Yet there are other developments that require a re-evaluation of scholarly pronouncements about love in the New Testament. Especially

4 The study of Spirituality revealed that spiritual texts are, generally and materially speaking, characterised by such key themes as fear of God, holiness, mercy and perfection (Waaijman 2002:320ff.). In these themes, the motif of love plays a seminal role. It is, as Waaijman also argued, a major dimension of transformation as a key notion in Spirituality. In Christian spirituality, love is often a major theme in its own right. Cf. De Villiers (2008, 2010, 2011) for more research on love in the Revelation of John, in the Letter to Philemon and in the Letter to Romans.

5 Cf. Louw & Nida (1988:293) for several examples of other words for love and affection in the Pastoral Epistles.

important is the growing understanding that the New Testament should be read in terms of recent linguistic insights that provide new data for the study of love. Love is namely not only expressed in Greek words for love, as seems to have been assumed in various scholarly analyses. Too often love has been studied in terms of a particular word rather than in terms of the semantic field to which love belongs. It should be noted that the significance of love is not determined by a word count of the word "love" in a particular text. Even where the word group of love and its cognates are not specifically used in a text, other terms of intimacy and endearment presuppose or indicate love. These include, for example, sibling terms such as child, brother, sister, father as well as emotional terms. Love should, therefore, be considered part of the semantic field of love, affection and compassion. At the same time, the meaning of love is also determined by the use of terms that indicate the lack of love and are, therefore, antonyms of love (for example, hatred). This indicates the framework for the following analysis.

2. LOVE IN GALATIANS?

Paul's pronouncements on love reflect his conviction that love is the highest state attainable in life – both now and in the future. A seminal example is the well-known passage in 1 Corinthians 13, which celebrates the transformation in love that results from the divine touch and the intimate union of love that this touch initiates. Of the three major anthropological characteristics of faith, hope and love that Paul mentions in this chapter and elsewhere in his letters (for example, 1 Thess. 1:3, 5:8), love is for him the greatest. In this chapter, Paul lists an endless number of features in order to show the thickness of the concept of love. For him, love is the most fitting term with which to reveal the special depth of the relationship between God and humanity and the perfect bond that results from this relationship. In love one reaches one's ultimate destination, not only in the sense that love is the highest of all (1 Cor. 13:13), but also in the sense that it remains forever (1 Cor. 13:8). As Paul's writings show, love "prompts God and man to rest completely in each other" in an intimate relationship of mutual affection and intimacy (Waaijman 2002:316).[6]

This general picture may cause one to view the Letter to the Galatians with apprehension. On the face of it, Galatians does not seem to be one

6 Closely linked to this is Paul's extensive use of the notion of peace, which is, for him, the end result of the reconciliation process between God and humanity. Cf., for example, Rom. 5:1; 8:6. For a full discussion, cf. De Villiers (2009).

of Paul's most loving letters.[7] On the contrary, the letter seems to be permeated by a bitter, even hostile atmosphere, because of the dispute with opponents on the law. Even the argumentation of the letter and its formal appearance seem to indicate this polemical, confrontational and even hateful tone. Tolmie (2012:74), who studied the rhetorical strategies of the letter in depth, noted that "(F)rom a rhetorical perspective, one of the conspicuous aspects of the letter is its aggressive tone". In this vitriolic polemical style, Paul strongly attacks the other gospel of some false (Gal. 2:4; 5:10, 12) opponents of his gospel of grace (especially Gal. 2:16), of Christ (Gal. 1:2) and freedom that, to his mind, threatens his gospel, "a heavenly revelation of Christ Jesus (Gal. 1:12) and made the believers slaves of the Law. At the very beginning of the letter, Paul uses threatening, accusatory words, "If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!" (Gal. 1:6). The letter is a frontal attack on those who have brought believers back into the state of bondage from which the gospel of grace liberated them.

This impression is, however, deceptive and needs to be reconsidered. A closer reading of Galatians will indicate that there is another, gentler side to the letter that often goes unnoticed. At key moments in this relatively short letter, Paul uses the important Greek term ἀγάπη (Gal. 2:20, 5:6, 13, 14, 22). If Louw and Nida's semantic field of love, affection and compassion is taken as guideline,[8] other words and motifs can be added. They all point to a central[9] place of love in Galatians, and would bring the letter in line with what is found in other Pauline letters. This now requires further investigation.

3. DIVINE LOVE

In the first explicit reference to love in Galatians 2:20, Paul depicts Jesus as "the Son of God" who loved and gave himself to Paul (ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ). With the term "Son of God" in this sentence, Paul speaks of Jesus from the perspective of the divine. He simultaneously characterises him in terms of

7 Paul's Letter to the Philippians illustrates how he expresses love with other terms than, for example, ἀγάπη. For example, he writes with intense affection and intimacy when he uses friendship language. Equally striking is the seminal place of love in the Letter to Philemon. Cf. De Villiers (2010).

8 Louw & Nida (1988:288-296) integrate the subdomain of love, affection and compassion within the domain of attitudes and emotions, revealing its intense, experiential nature.

9 Cf. Schrage (1982:213) for other examples of the central position of love in Pauline texts.

love. These remarks are integrated in a context that speaks clearly about the relationship of God with humanity which transformed believers from bondage to freedom in and through the divine love. In this relationship of two poles, love is spelled out as belonging to and characterising the divine pole. It is part of the sphere of the divine in an originary sense of the word. It precedes, motivates and qualifies the salvific actions of God. Love thus becomes an important aspect of the character of God.

There are two important dimensions to this pronouncement: it shows that love finds its origins from beyond human existence and is greater than human nature, as will be discussed presently. Both dimensions also illustrate the transformative power of love. Humanity is changed from its state of bondage to radical freedom because of a deep desire of the divine for an intimate relationship.

3.1 A love from beyond human deformity

The reference to the love of the Son of God for Paul is of special significance because of its location and nature. This reference to the love of Christ is part of a key passage in his letter (Gal. 2:14-21). Using a carefully chosen rhetorical strategy, Paul portrays himself in this passage as a fighter for the truth of the gospel on various fronts (Gal. 2:14). He fought for the truth in Antioch and then also in Galatia. It is a struggle for the true nature of faith – a key motif in the letter. The importance of the passage is further underlined by the fact that it echoes central ideas in early Christian thought (Tolmie 2005:94). Paul thus claims the support of Scripture and tradition for his struggle (Tolmie 2005:99-100) and for his theological understanding of faith. He uses metaphorical language about life and death to "heighten the impact" of his proclamation that only faith without works of the law justifies someone (Tolmie 2005:99; Gal. 2:16). He finally stresses that believers are empowered by their ongoing, life-giving relationship with Christ.

The contents of this passage also underline its significance. In it, Paul describes the link between God and humanity in terms of a relationship. God stands over against humanity as the One who desires an intimate relationship. The relationship is not about the divine decrees that have to be obeyed. Rather, it is a personal relationship that displays a mystical union, is initiated by God, is characterised by mutuality and reciprocity, and continues during the spiritual journey of believers.

Paul's language in this passage illustrates the transformation in love as intimacy and mutuality. On the one hand, Paul has been crucified with Christ to live "for God" (Gal. 2:19). It is no longer Paul who lives. He recedes into nothingness. This represents the response of the human pole to the

divine, loving touch. On the other hand, Christ lives in him in an ongoing, life-giving existence. Paul is now completely at "rest" in and because of the presence of Christ in his life. All this finds its origins in the love of the Son of God for humanity. As a result of the love of Christ and his self-giving, Paul is conformed to Christ who died for him on the cross, but who is also the Son of God. The conformity is ultimately to Christ as Son of God, so that humanity takes on the image of the divine. Human existence becomes the space for divine indwelling. Love reflects the outgoing movement of God toward humanity to take up residence in them (Waaijman 2002:469).

This description of the ongoing and intimate divine-human relationship is closely linked with the previous sections of the letter. It is useful to investigate these, since they illuminate the nature of love further. The tone was set at the beginning of the letter. Galatians 2:20 thus continues his prominent opening remarks in Galatians 1:4 about Christ "who gave himself for our sins". In this instance, too, Paul links this redeeming work of Christ with the divine character, when he combines it with a reference to the will of "our God and Father" (Gal. 1:3). There is complete union between what God desires and the self-giving act of Christ. In Galatians 2:20, Paul embeds the salvific work within his references to the theme of faith. Faith is the way towards the union with the divine whose love is to be seen in the Son of God's gift of himself. Galatians 2:20 and 1:4 together indicate that the redemptive events are actions of God and the Son. This intensifies the involvement of the divine. God and the Son are both at work in the liberation of humanity. In both instances, Paul focuses on the divine nature of the salvific events. The divine Father and Son lovingly desire a relationship with humanity.[10] Equally significant is that Paul links all this with his other major theme of grace, when he expresses his surprise in Galatians 1:6 that his readers so rapidly deserted God who called them to live in the grace of Christ. The close union between Father and Son is illustrated by the fact that Paul speaks in this verse of the grace of Christ (ἐν χάριτι Χριστοῦ). In this way, both faith and grace are not so much themes of discussion or independent topoi, but ways of describing the actions of God and Christ who, in unison and driven by love, seek a relationship with humanity. Love reveals God's grace, and faith is the response of humanity to this love.

By focusing on the divine, Paul further illustrates his often repeated remarks in this letter that the divine-human relationship is not dependent on human endeavour through observance of the law. Righteousness finds

10 Cf. Rom. 8:37, but also 2 Cor. 5:14. "The love of Christ compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died". On Christ as mediator, cf. Gal. 3:20. Cf. Gal. 4:9 for the divine initiative.

its deepest beginnings in the work of the divine. He also emphasises the loving nature of this relationship.

Redemption illustrates the initiative of God. It is the divine touch of humanity that transforms in recreation. Paul thus elaborates more on the nature of this close relationship by referring to the divine love that lies behind it. Christ "in" the believer and the life "for God" all became a reality because of the love of the Son of God[11] who gave himself to the sinner. In this instance, love is an indication of an affectionate divine attitude that is expressed towards humanity as its object in order to bring about an intimate and life-giving relationship. Faith, as the opposite of works, is the consequence of the divine love. Faith, and the freedom it brings, finds its beginnings and its deepest foundation in divine love.

Previous remarks in Galatians prepared the readers for this transformative relationship. Love transforms and inhabits the inner being of an individual where it creates a space for the work of the Spirit. In Galatians 1:15, Paul presents his theological views on this love in personal, experiential terms as a transformational gift that came to him in his calling by God which gave him a completely new form of existence and changed him from a violent, hateful person with a destructive attitude and lifestyle (Gal. 1:13) to one who lives "for God". It should not go unnoticed that the existence outside Christ is depicted in this passage in terms of hatefulness, persecution and destruction. The nature of sinful humanity stands in stark contrast with the loving action of God who desires a relationship with them. While human existence is destructive and hateful, God reaches out, without any human intervention, to lovingly transform it. In this sense, love finds its origins in God.

Paul thus integrates his reference to divine love in the framework of his discussion about the personal, intimate divine-human relationship and links it first and foremost with the divine pole of this relationship.[12] He develops this when he mentions the Spirit of God's Son in another short passage. This passage is regarded as "the theological center of the entire epistle" (Martyn 1997:406). It also mentions the history of salvation (Gal. 4:4-7) and, in this instance, Paul uses traditional Christological statements to speak in a formulaic, solemn manner about God sending out the Spirit of "his Son into our hearts" (Betz 1979:205; Martyn 1997:389, 406; cf. also

11 Cf. Gal. 4:1-7 for Paul's understanding of sonship.

12 De Boer (2011:163) correctly indicates that, although Paul refers to himself, "he expects the new preachers and the Galatians to say it after him and to apply it to themselves". However, it remains striking, in this instance, that Paul speaks in such an individualistic mode. The tone is more intimate than it would have been if he used the plural "we".

Gal. 3:3, 5).[13] The Son of God, representing the divine pole, reaches out and rests as the Spirit in the innermost being of humanity, letting them call out in prayer:[14] "Abba, Father". The endearing, familial terms of "Father" for God, mentioned twice in this instance, and "Son" for Jesus, illustrate the loving nature of the divine-human relationship. Though the unusual repetition of the term in Greek and Aramaic could reflect the bilingual character of the early church, it is also an "inspired acclamation" that shows "both the inspiration of those who pray and their self-understanding as sons by those who address him 'Father'" (Betz 1979:211). As sons, they are inspired to love God, to live for God, and to acclaim their wonder at the intimacy of their relationship. This is made possible by the indwelling of the Spirit, by the divine initiative and the desire of God for a relationship with humanity.

One of the most important aspects of Galatians is that no one can earn the gracious love of God.[15] Redemption is given out of love to those who were prisoners of sin (Gal. 3:22). Paul stresses this elsewhere when he writes in Galatians 3:9 about the Galatians "who know God", but then adds, "or rather having become known by God". De Boer (2011:273) describes Paul's correction as "most fascinating". Paul reveals his awareness of the fact that his language may reflect contemporary thought about "the religious quest for a proper relationship with God". By correcting himself, Paul shows not only his sensitivity for language, but also his choice for language that speaks "of God's own initiative, of God's invasive self-disclosure on the earthly stage". Paul's spirituality is, therefore, a spirituality of divine love, given by the divine, unconditionally and undeservedly, to human beings. This love comes to humanity from beyond it and, as an originary action of God, decisively distinguishes both the divine and the human pole from each other.

3.2 Love as a divine characteristic

The pronouncement in Galatians 2:20 about the loving Son of God is not an isolated reference to the salvific actions of the divine and the divine-human

13 Betz (1979:210) describes the "traditional idea" of the Spirit in the human heart as follows: "The heart was considered the organ responsible for the control of the will".

14 Martyn (1997:392): "One sees, then, the folly of asking whether this vocal cry is an act of the Spirit or of the baptizands. It is the act of the Spirit just sent into their hearts, and in this way it is their act."

15 Love in Graeco-Roman times reflected a bond of friendship between people who share mutual affinity and care. In Paul's case, love is not dependent on qualities in other people. The divine love is given to sinners (Gal. 3:22), or to those who do not deserve it.

relationship. Other pronouncements offer a portrait of God's loving character. From the beginning of the letter, Paul uses kinship terminology to speak of God.[16] He repeatedly portrays God as "Father".[17] In fact, the tone of the letter is set by the two references to the Fatherhood of God when Paul notes that he has been commissioned by God the Father (Gal. 1:1), when he greets the Galatians with grace and peace from God the Father (Gal. 1:3), and when he refers to the salvific will of "our God and Father" (Gal. 1:4).

The kinship language is also extended to Jesus, who, as mentioned earlier, is the Son.[18] This term presents the identity of Jesus as the "Son" in terms of his relationship with God as the Father. In Galatians 2:20, Jesus as Son of God is linked explicitly with the notion of love. It fits this configuration of thought that believers are described as family of God. Paul mentions "the household[19] of faith" in Galatians 6:10 (πρὸς τοὺς οἰκείους τῆς πίστεως; cf. Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15; 5:8). Believers are bound together through their common faith as a family with God as Father. Paul speaks of or addresses his community in this rather short letter ten times as "brothers" – in the first half of the letter only a few times, but more often as

16 Aasgard (2004:244, 311) pointed out that siblingship is a central theme in Pauline letters.

17 The use of "Father" in Biblical texts has become controversial as a result of gender studies and its critique of patriarchy. The debate has made contemporary readers more aware of the problem of male language in the Bible and the way in which it may impede spiritual experiences. In this instance, the term is understood as suggesting intimacy and love without necessarily legitimising patriarchy and sexist language. Cf. Hamerton-Kelly (1979:81) for the link between the description of God as Father and intimacy. He writes (1979:100-101) that the word "Father" suggests and evokes the loving relationship with God. This goes back to Jesus' experience of an intimate relationship with God that made "father" the appropriate symbol of his existence. Through this, "He invited his followers to share in it by giving them the privilege of invoking God as 'Abba', and that privilege became the creative center of Christian worship" (Aasgaard 1979:103). Cf. also Aasgard (2004:24, 311), who describes siblingship as "a fundamental perspective", noting that "clearly (Paul) wants to create an 'atmosphere of love' in connection with this letter". For a discussion of Jesus as Son of God and his loving relationship with the Father, cf. also Bauckham (1978:259-260).

18 Galatians 4:1-7 concentrates on the sonship of Jesus in a striking manner. In this instance, the redemptive work of the Son is in focus (Gal. 4:4). Note Gal. 1:16 where Paul refers to God who "reveals his Son in me". The close relationship is further obvious from the way in which Paul writes about the grace of Christ (Gal. 1:6).

19 De Boer (2011:391) translates this as "housemates".

the letter progresses and the tone becomes less polemical (1:1, 11; 3:15; 4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18).[20] It is further emphasised when Paul speaks of the Galatians as "sons of God through faith in Jesus Christ" (Gal. 3:26, repeated in Gal. 4:5-6) and as "heirs" to the promise given to Abraham (Gal. 3:29). He also speaks of them as "my children" (Gal. 4:19;[19] τέκνα μου). All these speak of intimate, loving relationships.

Finally, Galatians 2:20 reveals how Paul understands love as an act of self-giving. It illuminates the nature of divine love in a special way. Paul refers to the love of Christ for him using an aorist participle (τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με), but immediately adds another participial expression: "who gave himself" (καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ[21]). De Boer (2011:163) correctly notes that the second participle is explanatory of the first, so that one will have to translate: "the one who loved me, that is, gave himself up for me."[22] The self-giving of Christ is important, as is clear from similar references in Galatians 1:4 and 3:13.[23]

How radical this act is, is clear from the fact that this love was shown to Paul despite his hate of Christ and his vengeful actions against the community. Paul formulates this radical nature in Romans 5:8 as, "God demonstrates God's love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us,"[24] or, more strikingly, as love that reconciles those who have been "enemies of God" (Rom. 5:10). The divine love is unconditional, is given despite human behaviour and reputation. It is a love that is alien to human existence in its deformed state.

Love is, therefore, God reaching out as the One who has a compassionate and affectionate character.[25] There is more, however: In Christ, humanity receives the loving presence of God-self who, in the fullness of God's character, lives in complete unity with a person in an ongoing relationship

20 Compare with this the letter to Romans which is the only one of all Paul's letters in which he addresses the readers in the salutation as those "who are loved by God" (πᾶσιν τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν ῥώμῃ ἀγαπητοῖς θεοῦ; Rom. 1:7).

21 Cf. Eph. 5:2, 25.

22 He adds that the love was not a disposition, but a concrete act of self-sacrifice. Though this may be the primary meaning of Gal. 2:20, the divine disposition of love is certainly assumed in the remainder of the letter, and, is also present in this instance.

23 Betz (1979:125) n. 107 gives references in which the love of God and Christ are linked.

24 In Rom. 5:8, 10, the loving nature of God is illustrated by contrasting it with humanity's sinfulness. This verse is one of the most powerful pronouncements on the loving character of God.

25 Note 1 Thess. 4:9-10 where Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they have been taught by God to love each other.

which remains transformative. The person is given possession of God so that God dwells and lives in that person. It is a mystical love, which brings about a unity in which the one is the other and both are one (Waaijman 2002:469). This is true also for the relationships between believers. Paul thus characterises believers as those who continuously strive to live a life of love. This will now be explained in more detail.

4. HUMAN LOVE

Galatians is mostly thought to describe the identity of followers of Christ primarily in terms of faith. As pointed out earlier and as is well known, faith is a key motif in the letter and is constantly contrasted with human endeavour and effort in observing the law (Gal. 3:1-5) or circumcision (Gal. 5:2-6). It should be taken into account, though, that Paul offers the notion of love as another profound marker of their identity.[26] Love is a prime characteristic of the human existence in Christ. The identity will form the ethos and ethics of the faith community.

At a key moment in this letter, seminal remarks by Paul suggest that faith does not suffice to understand the identity of believers and has a restricted function in his arguments. In Galatians 5:2-12,[27] Paul summarises all his arguments in the previous chapters. In verses 2-4, Paul warns the Galatians three times that human attempts to achieve righteousness through the law sever the relationship with Christ. In verse 5, he contrasts such attempts once again with faith which is the only way of achieving righteousness. The statement in verses 5-6 "is a very concise summary of Paul's basic argument in the letter. He repeats several concepts that played a key role in his argument in the previous phase, namely Spirit, righteousness and faith" (Tolmie 2005:181).

It is at this seminal moment in the concluding parts of the letter that Paul reintroduces the notion of love. There is a striking difference with

26 Scholars often draw attention to the close link between faith and love in this letter. Thus, Hahn (2005:289) notes that the link between faith and love is constitutive for Pauline ethics. "Lebendiger Glaube konkretisiert sich notwendigerweise im Tun der Liebe." Such remarks are mostly given as asides, rather than developed thematically.

27 Cf. Tolmie (2005:177-179) for a discussion of the place of this passage in the letter as a whole. De Boer (2011:315) notes that "[t]he summarizing quality of these two verses [5-6] is indicated by the complete absence of the definite articles in the Greek text; the nouns are all anarthrous. Paul here uses shorthand formulations as a way to drive the central message of the letter home." It is, then, remarkable, that love is the deepest embedded motif in this summary.

what he wrote about love in the previous parts of the letter. Now love does not refer to divine love, but to love that believers have. Within the context of his discussion in Galatians 5:2-12, there is an unexpected turn when he switches from faith to focus on love: ἐν γάρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλα πίστις δι᾽ἀγαπης ἐνεργουμένη[28] (Gal. 5:6b). In this pronouncement, Paul, for the first time in this letter, develops his notion of faith in more detail by linking it with the significant notion of love. What counts is "faith working through love". The middle ἐνεργουμένη means to become effective, to come to expression, faith working through love (Betz 1979:262; Tolmie 2005:182). Love is the face of faith, and thus a quality of a person who has been transformed into an existence in Christ.[29] In this expression, Paul radically underlines the importance of love, so that it overshadows and even replaces circumcision that was being regarded by the opponents and by Jewish groups as a key identity marker of a believer.

With this expression, Paul paves the way for the last chapters in the letter in which love plays a seminal role in the ongoing life of the faith community. Paul mentions love as a noun three times (Gal. 5:6, 13-14, 22). These references develop his previous observation about the loving self-giving of Christ (Gal. 2:20). Love in this way becomes for Paul "that which most fully defines one's identity as a member of Christ" (Crocker 2004:199). Those who follow Christ find their identity grounded in the divine love (especially Rom. 5:6-8), by the intimate loving relationship with God established by it, and by the loving relationship with others. If one claims to be justified by faith, one will, on a deeper level, come to understand that faith expresses itself in, and through love and that it requires a lifelong existence in love. This theme will form a golden thread in the last part of the letter (Gal. 5-6), with its discussion of the ethos and ethics of the Galatian community. This will now be explained in more detail.

5. SHARING LOVE

An analysis of the motif of love in the second part of Galatians will reveal that Paul considers it as an essential characteristic of the identity of believers. Love is about believers who understand that their relationship with God causes them to reach out to others. It thus implies a movement

28 Martyn (1997:474). The participle can be either passive (faith that is activated by love) or middle (faith is actively expressing itself through love). The middle reading is preferred, although patristic fathers preferred the passive.

29 Cf. the remarks of Dunn (1993:119) about Gal. 2:20 where Paul says that he no longer lives: "The old 'I' has died and been replaced by a new focus of personality, Christ himself. The 'I' which found social identity 'in Judaism' now finds personal meaning and identity in Christ and those who are also 'in' Christ."

away from oneself towards the other. In this movement, one shares oneself with others. As such it is, once again, strongly integrated in a relational setting. This becomes a major theme of the last section of Galatians.

5.1 Love as law

Loving relations is not a matter of choice. This is obvious when one considers love as a characteristic of the life in Christ. Paul is intense about the need of believers to be loving in their relationship with others. One notices the intensity in the emotions with which he argues his case. After having spoken about faith which is expressed in love, Paul, interrupting himself, continues with a digression in Galatians 5:7-12 to attack those who mislead the Galatians. The volatility of Paul's emotions and his intense opposition to the false teachers are evident in the spontaneous, even incoherent style of this passage. De Boer (2011:328) argues that this digression expresses Paul's exasperation with the formidable opposition in Galatia.[30] Soon, however, he returns to the important matter of love. In Galatians 5:13-14, he reiterates the notion of freedom he mentioned in Galatians 5:1, when he reminded his addressees that the liberation that Christ brought about was for their freedom. The freedom is, strikingly, not open. It is, first, a freedom that brings them to give up a sinful life and not to indulge in sin. Then, presenting the positive counterpart of this, he writes that the freedom is given in order for them to love like Christ did. Believers should use their freedom to serve one another in love: *Ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἐπ' ἐλευθερίᾳ ἐκλήθητε, ἀδελφοι. Μόνον μὴ τὴν ἐλευθερίαν εἰς ἀμορφμὴν τῇ σαρκί, ἀλλα διὰ τῆς ἀγάπης*[31] *δουλεύετε ἀλλήλοις* ("but through love become slaves of one another"). Having emphasised freedom and rejected slavery to the law up to this point, Paul now paradoxically[32] writes that the exercise of freedom and love means becoming one another's slave. Rejecting the position of the opponents, he presents loving each other as its alternative.

The Greek word *δουλεύετε* is often translated in the sense of *διακονέω* and then viewed as caring for someone's needs. The word is, however, much stronger. It indicates that love is, for Paul, to be a slave, to be subject to. Paul contrasts the slavery to the law with the slavery to love. The new existence in Christ brings about a different form of slavery. There is a new bondage. The slavery under the law, with fear, submission, suppression

30 Many scholars noted that this passage seems to interrupt the flow of the letter. Cf. the discussion in Tolmie (2005:190-191).

31 Spicq (1978:19) wrote that *ἀγάπη* differs from other words on love insofar as it asks to be manifested, demonstrated, exhibited.

32 Betz (1979:274) remarks, "Obviously, this juxtaposition is intended".

and scrupulosity as its consequences, stands in contrast with the other slavery which is the free and voluntary act of love.

The binding character of this love, is also evident when Paul motivates this appeal in Galatians 5:14 with a reference to the love commandment: *ὁ γὰρ πᾶς νόμος ἐν ἑνὶ λόγῳ πεπλήρωται, ἐν τῷ Ἀγαπήσεις τὸν πλησίον σου ὡς σεαυτόν*. The argument about the law requiring circumcision is replaced by an argument that the law requires love. Though Paul rejects a soteriological function of the law, he still presents love in the form of a commandment.[33] In line with this, Paul stresses the importance in the last part of the letter "to do good". Those who obey the love commandment and thus do good unto others will be greatly rewarded. One should understand this in terms of what Paul tells his readers in Galatians 6:7-10 when he notes that those who do good will earn eternal life.[34]

This love commandment is not merely left hanging. Once again, Paul integrates this in a context of relationships when he explains love in more detail in Galatians 5:15. In their difficult, concrete situation, the Galatian community is to love one another. This means not to bite and devour each other. Love stands in tension and forms the opposite of the vicious infighting among the Galatians. Even if one opposes false teaching, the relationships with each other need to remain loving. Love is about serving others. It means to bring together people of different persuasions, as Spicq (1978:19) indicated, in an attitude of helping, supporting and serving them. Love of a believer is, therefore, once again similar to the sharing, self-giving nature of divine love. The responsibility to act lovingly towards others reflects one's identity in Christ as the One who also acted lovingly.[35]

This can be supported by Paul's personal example. Loving care and support for others are mentioned in Galatians 2:10 when Paul speaks about the intense differences between him and the other apostles. In Galatians 2:10, Paul stresses that, despite the clear division of missions

33 Cf. De Boer (2011:332-333) and Dunn (1993:115-118) for a discussion of the tension between Paul's rejection of the law and his retention of the law of love. It remains striking that Paul links his first ethical exhortation to the Galatians with the law.

34 Note similar remarks in Romans 3:31 where Paul stresses that the law is not overthrown, but upheld. He regards love as the fulfillment of the law (Rom. 13:8-10). As Hahn (2005:290) notes, "Die 'Agape' ist Grundprinzip und Kriterium des Gesetzes." The words of the Law are not the norm, but love as its inner structure.

35 Martyn (1997:524) writes that the law of love "does nothing other than reflect the preeminence of Christ's love". Cf. also Spicq (1978:19) about love which is driven by God's love, referring to Romans 5:8.

between him and Barnabas to the uncircumcised, on the one hand, and James, Peter and John to the circumcised, on the other, they all shared a concern with and mission to the poor. This is the one matter on which they agree. This is an example of how Paul does what he expects his readers to do:[36] even though paths may separate, love remains. The ethos of the community has a loving character.

5.2 Love within the ethics of the faith community

The important place of love is clear from Paul's remarks about ethics. Paul, finally, allocates a special place to love in the spiritual life when he describes it as the first of the "fruit" of the Spirit in Galatians 6:2. In his list of the fruit of the Spirit, Paul places love at the very beginning (Gal. 5:22).[37] He does so as part of the conclusion to the letter in which he discusses the new dispensation of the Spirit that came about in the place of the dispensation under the law. The Spirit, having inaugurated the new dispensation of freedom and equality (Gal. 3:26-29), is at work in the life of love of the faith community. Those who live by the Spirit should keep in step with the Spirit (Gal. 5:25). They should not gratify the desires of sinful nature (Gal. 5:16, cf. 19-21) with vices such as "hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy". These acts represent the opposite of acts of love.

These remarks are part of a wider framework. Crocker (2004:195) drew attention to two trajectories which can be described in terms of two groups of related concepts "that are central for discerning and deciding things within the body of Christ". The theme of newness (the new creation, knowing one's new identity and freedom from old conventions) is such a group, whereas "the trajectory of inclusivity and love, of peace and unity, of the commandments of God and the law of Christ" forms another group. Of special interest is the "law of Christ"[38] which is "inherent in the gift of God's love. To obey this law, is to live a life of love (Gal. 5:6, 13-14; 1 Cor. 9:21).

36 It is interesting to note how Paul integrates his own personal life with the contents of his letter. Note the call of Paul to his readers to be like him (for example, Gal. 4:12; 5:10).

37 Cf. also 2 Cor. 6:6 where Paul speaks about his own sincere love as an important virtue.

38 On the close relationship between the law of Christ and love, cf. Hays (1987:274-275).

6. CONCLUSION

In Galatians, Paul discusses love in terms of his own faith experience. Faith meant that he experienced a transformation in love. It made him aware of his own hateful past in which he persecuted and destroyed others (Gal. 1:13). The revelation of God's Son in him (Gal. 1:16) made him realise the deeper foundations of the gospel in the divine love. This love inspired him to oppose those who were like him ("extremely zealous for the traditions"; Gal. 1:14) and who sought the re-legalisation of the gospel. He understood how the imposition of traditions objectified the relationship between God and humanity. Instead of seeking merit for oneself before God by boasting about own excellence (Gal. 6:1), faith brings one to move away from oneself, to live in the divine love which is inclusive rather than exclusive (Gal. 3:26-29) and to reflect the caring character of God in one's own life (Gal. 6:2). His gospel of freedom from the burden of the law inspired him against the opponents who wanted to take away the freedom and exclude others who did not fit their false position. Just as he was included in the saving grace and love of God, though a persecutor and murderer, no one should be kept from this divine love. Paul stresses that love cannot tolerate the unloving exclusion of others and the unloving way in which this prejudiced position is promoted. In his strong opposition to their false teaching, he shows that love is not weak, but can challenge prophetically.

Paul takes love far beyond the point where it is merely about the loving acts of God and about reaching out to others in love. He asks his readers to emulate, in their own lives, the loving character of God that he outlines in the first half of his letter. The love that transformed them is also the love into which they are transformed. This life of love is not an option. It is a law and an existence in which they are enslaved to each other in love. It represents a new bondage. This is a motif that is, after all, in line with what Paul writes elsewhere about this love and its consequences. His remarks on the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 and his exhortations in Galatians 6 in many ways equal his profound remarks about love in 1 Corinthians 13 and its ethical implications. The more so, since the situation in Corinth was also characterised by bitter infighting and hostility. Galatians, then, confirms that love can triumph even in times where its light seems to have been completely extinguished.

Yet, the light does not always shine brightly. There remains something disconcerting about the way in which Paul speaks about his opponents in the Letter to the Galatians – as was remarked at the beginning of this article. Our contemporary society is aware that language can be destructive. Verbal violence has destroyed many lives and is not less dangerous than physical violence. Though Paul is no longer physically a hater and persecutor, his

language is not always as loving as one would expect it to be. The real danger is that contemporary readers may feel violated by the aggressive and even abusive tone in Paul's Letter to the Galatians. It will leave them feeling uncomfortable that his celebration of the divine love, which overcomes hate and extremely destructive legalism, is combined with rhetoric that appears violating and destructive. This language, reflecting the vilification used by rhetoricians to weaken the position and question the character of their opponents, does not seem to be very loving in nature. Its polemical character stands in tension with the hymn of love expressed so eloquently in 1 Corinthians 13 and his pronouncement about love in Galatians. Similarly, his call that the Galatians should not bite and devour each other (Gal. 5: 15), ironically, contrasts with his own lack of love and his abusive language against his opponents. This is one issue in which his own life and his teaching lack integration.

For such readers, there is little transformative power to be found in Paul's rhetorical references to his opponents. To them, it could indicate a spirituality that does not seek strongly enough to understand, listen, convince and challenge with fairness.

How one responds to such concerns is a matter of much debate. One can try to exonerate Paul by pointing to his use of rhetorical conventions of his time. One could try to metaphorise the crude parts of his language. Or one could simply accept that his failure on this point reminds one of how frail one's understanding of love can be. Even where one understands its profound nature and its important place in a Christian lifestyle, one could so easily fail to understand love and its full implications. That is why transformation in love is never final. It is, as spirituality underlines, a journey and an ongoing process. Paul himself understood this when he concluded his great hymn on love with the remark, "Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known" (1 Cor. 13:12).

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