PAUL’S ASSERTION OF OBEDIENCE AS A FUNCTION OF PERSUASION

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ABSTRACT

The validity of the theme of this paper may be questioned due to two reasons: (i) By his opening rhetorical question in Galatians 1:10 Paul implies that he does not wish to persuade men. (ii) The word obedience (cf for example ἴππακονί) does not occur in this passage. The motif of obedience is, however, important in this passage and finds expression in the concept of 'being a slave of Christ'. A responsible exegesis of this passage suggests that Paul's assertion of obedience has an important persuasive function when one allows for the text being interpreted on more than one level.

1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The theme of this paper implies that Paul’s assertion of obedience in Galatians 1:10 has a persuasive function. Paul’s first statement in this passage (Ἀρτι γὰρ ἀλήθωπους πιθώ…;) in which he implies by means of a rhetorical question that he does not wish to persuade men seems, however, to point to the contrary. The question now arises whether the theme of this paper is a legitimate one. This question can only be answered in the light of a responsible interpretation of Galatians 1:10. Before taking a closer look at Galatians 1:10, the pericope Galatians 1:10 to 1:12 will be located within the macrostructure of Galatians and a few general remarks will be made on this pericope. The concept of being a slave of Christ is used by Paul in this passage to describe his obedience and will therefore receive special attention. In conclusion it will be argued that an affirmative answer to the question regarding Paul’s assertion of obedience as a function of persuasion can only be given when one allows for the text being interpreted on more than one level.

2 LOCATION OF GALATIANS 1:10 TO 1:12 WITHIN THE MACROSTRUCTURE OF GALATIANS — A FEW GENERAL REMARKS ON THIS PERICOPE

The pericope on which this paper focuses (Gl 1:10-1:12) follows immediately on the introductory section of Paul’s letter to the Galatians (1:6-1:9). Instead of an expression of praise and thankfulness, as found in his other letters, Paul
reprimands the Galatians and even warns them of a possible curse (or curses).

Verse 10 serves as a link between the introduction and the first main part. Borse (1984) and Schlier (1962) consider it as part of the introduction, while Egger (1988), Mußner (1986) and Oepke (1957) regard it as already forming part of the ensuing section. It seems, however, justified to view verse 10 as part of the pericope 1:10 to 1:12, due to the fact that the important actant διὸ πρωτόσ ὁμοίως occurs in sections A and B of this pericope (cola 10, 11, 12a, 13c and 14) in opposition to the actants θεός (colon 10) and χριστός (colona 12b and 16). The pericope Galatians 1:10 to 1:12, therefore, seems to form a coherent unit. Galatians 1:13 to 2:21 serves as a substantiation of Paul's claim in 1:11 to 12 concerning the nature of the gospel's origin (cf Lategan 1983:423; Hong 1991:2).

In pericopes 3 to 6 (Gl 1:10-2:21) Paul primarily presents a defence of his gospel which is then closely linked to his self-defence regarding his apostolate. Lategan (1988) argues that the main issue in Galatians is not the defence of Paul's apostolic authority, but the nature of his gospel, a 'remarkable gospel which presupposes the "Umwertung aller Werten" ' (Lategan 1988:430). It must, however, be borne in mind that a very close relationship exists between Paul's ministry and the gospel, as Borse (1984:53) correctly affirms: 'Der Dienst an seinen Gemeinden ist für Paulus nicht nur die Erfüllung eines Amtes, sondern auch eine zutiefst persönliche Angelegenheit. Wer vom Evangelium abweicht, wird deshalb nicht nur Christus untreu, sondern er bereitet auch Paulus selbst Leid und Mühsal....'. This intimate relationship between Paul's apostolic ministry and the gospel is also emphasised by Kertelge (1970:169-173, cf especially 172): 'Paulus denkt immer von der sachlichen Einheit von Apostolat und Evangelium aus.' Stuhlmacher (1968:68) points out that Paul views his gospel as the only valid message, since it proclaims the dawn of the new era of God. The curses in Galatians 1:8 and 9 are to be understood from the perspective of the eschatological claim of Paul's gospel as well as his apostleship's corresponding claim to validity. He experienced his gospel and apostolic office as the grounding of a holy law. 'Evangelium und Apostolat sind in sakralrechtliche Relationen einge- fügt' (Stuhlmacher 1968:69).

In verse 10 Paul states the reason for his stern warning in verses 6 to 9. His uncompromising zeal for the truth of the gospel has its basis in the fact that he is responsible to God alone. Paul's affirmations in verses 6 to 9 clearly show that he is neither accountable to, nor does he try to please man. His accountability is only towards God. He does not hesitate to take such a firm stand, as he considers the truth of the gospel to be endangered (cf Lategan 1986:25). As has already been pointed out, the contrast between God (Christ) and man is one of the main motifs of this pericope and, in fact, of the whole passage Galatians 1:1 to 2:20 (cf Lategan 1988:418-419). This contrast also has profound implications for the theme being dealt with in this paper.
This brings us to the crucial issue this paper has to deal with: Does the obedience towards God, which Paul so strongly emphasises, have a persuasive function?

3 A CLOSER LOOK AT GALATIANS 1:10

It is necessary to pause for a moment at the interpretation of verse 10.\(^1\) A study hints at the transitional function of verse 10, while Paul justifies his stern admonition in verses 6 to 9 with γὰρ. Betz (1979:54) asserts that the phrase ἀνθρώπους πείθω is a definition of rhetoric. Since Plato the art of persuasion (ἡ πρακτικῆ τέχνη) has been regarded as something negative and unfitting. Mußner (1988:63) speaks of ‘menschliche Überredungskunst’. This passage may, however, not be interpreted apart from its immediate context in which the contrast between man and God (Christ) functions so prominently.

The phrase ἀνθρώπους πείθω ἦ τὸν θεόν presents the interpreter with a number of difficulties. In verse 10a one finds an incomplete parallelism:

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\begin{align*}
\text{ἀνθρώπους πείθω} & \\
\text{τὸν θεόν} & \\
\text{ἀνθρώπους ἀρεσκεῖν} & \\
\end{align*}
\]

This passage may therefore be translated: Do I try to persuade men by winning their favour or by winning the favour of God? Paul’s use of πείθω is therefore immediately qualified by ἀρεσκεῖν.\(^2\) The apostle therefore states that he evidently preaches to please God (cf Mußner 1988:63). His gospel is not in accordance with human standards, but a proclamation backed by the authority of God (Stuhlmacher 1968:69). Semantically verse 10 is structured climactically and concludes with the phrase Χριστοῦ δοῦλος οὐκ ἂν ἦμιν. A person whose conduct is dependent on the acclamation of men cannot be a slave of Christ. The distinction between interpreting this passage theologically or biographically (cf Mußner’s [1988:64] criticism of Oepke [1957]) does not seem to be profitable in the light of the intertwining of Paul’s biography and theology, his ministry and the gospel. Paul does not say that he paid much attention to the approval of men earlier in his life. He, however, emphasises the obligation he has taken upon himself through his commitment to Christ, namely that his whole life now has to

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1 The \(\tilde{\eta}\) in verse 10a has a disjunctive sense (Suhl 1987:3090; cf also Egger 1988:15).

2 Betz (1979:55) asserts that the expression ‘persuade God’ turns out to be a polemical definition of magic and religious quackery. Mußner (1988:63), however, is of the opinion that the only way in which this phrase can be interpreted meaningfully is to consider it grammatically as a Zeugma (cf also Blass, Debrunner & Rehkopf 1976:409). The implied answer to the question \(\tilde{\eta}\) τὸν θεόν already stands under the influence of the second verb ἀρεσκεῖν.
be conducted in line with the will and approval of the Lord. The approval of men is of no importance to him. Whether Paul is here reacting to accusations by opponents cannot be stated with certainty. In 1 Thessalonians 2:3-6, where there is no direct reference to opponents, Paul also affirms that the apostles do not try to please men, but God. It is therefore clear that Paul is here stating a conviction which is of fundamental importance ('grundsätzliche Bedeutung') to him (cf Borse 1984:51-52).³

4 OBEDIENCE TOWARDS GOD AND THE PERSUASION OF MEN
The attentive listener will have observed that, although this paper deals with the motif of 'obedience', this word (i.e. the Greek word ὀφειλέω) does not occur in this pericope. This, however, does not mean that the motif of obedience is not an important aspect of the pericope Galatians 1:10 to 12. It is, however, defined in a very specific way, namely as pleasing God (in contrast to men) and being Christ's slave. The reason for Paul's obedience is further explicated in verses 11 and 12 from the perspective of the nature of the gospel and the way in which he has received it. These aspects will probably be dealt with in the short paper dealing with the role of the disclosure in 1:11 to 12 in the persuasive procedure.

As far as the theme of this paper is concerned, the crucial issue in verse 10 is therefore the fact of being Christ's slave which is only possible through a lifestyle and ministry that is solely directed towards God and his approval and which is not dependent on the acclamation of men.

4.1 Being a slave of Christ
It is interesting to note that the expression δοῦλος θεοῦ is seldom used of Christians in the New Testament. References to the δουλεύειν of Christians is generally made in relation to Christ. δοῦλος θεοῦ is almost always used in connection with the righteous of the Old Testament in their relation to God, or in quotations (Rengstorf 1935:276).

By coming to faith in Jesus Christ and through baptism, Christians are freed from the enslaving powers of sin, the law and death, and they become children of God (Rm 6:6-23; 7:25; 8:15; Gl 4:1-5:1; Tt 3:3). Paul, however, emphasises that being children of God does not mean that Christians may act with autonomous freedom. Being children of God entails service of God (Rm 6:22; 7:25; 1 Th 1:9), Christ (Rm 12:11; 14:18; 16:18; Col 3:24) and the neighbour (Gl 5:13) 'in the new life of the Spirit' (Rm 7:6), as well as righteousness (Rm 6:17,18,19). A

³ In 2 Corinthians 5:11 Paul however writes of the persuasion of men in a positive sense. Paul's statement in Galatians 1:10 that he does not strive to persuade men, but to please God, may therefore have been caused by accusations that, through his gospel without the law, he was endeavouring to win the favour of men (Suhl 1987:3094; cf also Becker 1990:15).
profound change of masters ('Herrschaftswechsel') has therefore occurred (Weiser 1980:851; cf also Blank 1968:205 who regards the phrase δούλος Ἰησοῦν Χριστοῦ as the other side of Paul's confession of Christ as his Κύριον). Becker (1990:16) correctly observes that in Galatians 2:19 to 21 (at the end of the section commencing with 1:10) the apostle explains what he understands by 'being a slave of Christ'.

Paul calls himself and his fellow workers, Timothy, Epaphras and Tychikus, slaves (or fellow slaves) of Christ (or God) (cf Rm 1:1, Gl 1:10; Phlp 1:1; Col 1:7, 4:7,12; 2 Tm 2:24; Tt 1:1). In these passages the term δούλος primarily focuses the attention on Paul and his fellow workers' belonging to and obeying of Christ or God. Louw and Nida (1988a:741) affirm that there are probably also important positive overtones in the phrase δούλος θεοῦ or δούλος Ἰησοῦν Χριστοῦ, since in some languages of the ancient Middle East a phrase meaning 'slave of the king' or 'servant of the king' was the title of an important person in the government. It is also possible that the Old Testament title of honour bestowed upon specific chosen people, such as Moses and David, may have exerted an influence upon the meaning of being a slave of Christ (or God) in these passages. 'Die Bezeichnung drückt deshalb auch bei Pls nicht nur ein Dienstverhältnis aus, sondern ist Amts- und Ehrentitel' (Weiser 1980:852; cf also Saß 1941:25-27).

The title 'slave of Christ' is first used by Paul in his letter to the Galatians. In Romans 1:1 it is connected to his calling as an apostle, while in the later letter to the Philippians it serves as the only self-designation of Paul and Timothy (Phlp 1:1). The description of himself as being a slave of Christ has therefore replaced the apostolic title. Perhaps the many sufferings Paul had to endure for the sake of the gospel had brought the concept of being a slave into the foreground (Borse 1984:52).

5 CONCLUSION

In dealing with the whole issue of persuasion in Galatians, this pericope highlights a critical dimension of which we should not lose sight in our search for persuasive rhetorical devices. In Paul's preaching of the gospel it is of crucial importance that a confrontation with Christ implies an 'Umwertung aller Werte' (cf Eichholz 1985:52). 1 Corinthians 2:1 to 5 makes it very clear that in his presentation of the 'mystery of God' to the Corinthians Paul did not avail himself of sophisticated rhetorical techniques, nor did he try to persuade the Corinthians by means of rational philosophical arguments. The confirmation of the truth of his message is neither the result of, nor demanded by logical premises, but is brought about by God himself through the power of the Spirit (cf Gräbe 1990:107-108).

It is true that the situations that gave rise to Paul's affirmations in 1 Corinthians 2 and Galatians 1 were not exactly the same. It, however, seems to me that in
both passages we are dealing with a fundamental conviction of Paul’s, namely that, in the final analysis, the task of persuasion is not his responsibility. In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2 the contrast between worldly wisdom and divine power and wisdom, the apostle’s own weakness and the power of the Spirit is emphasised. In Galatians 1:10 Paul makes it clear that he is not in the first place seeking to persuade men, nor to win their favour. His primal aim is not the applause of men, but the approval of God (Lategan 1986:25). His only ambition is to obey him. In preaching as a slave of Christ’s, he is confident that the task of persuasion will be fulfilled by God through his Spirit (cf 1 Cor 2:4-5).

Of utmost importance for the interpretation of this passage is (as I have emphasised above) the contrast between God (Christ) and man. This approach of Paul’s in which he so strongly emphasises his obedience towards Christ as opposed to any attempt to win men’s favour — or even to persuade men, as he stresses in verse 10 by means of a rhetorical question — has, however, on a very profound level a powerful persuasive force. As is further explicated in the following verses, it is of crucial importance to the understanding of the thrust of this letter to recognise that, because of the intimate bond of obedience between himself and Christ, Paul understood his gospel as being proclaimed with divine authority. The persuasive power of Paul’s preaching stems from this divine authority, confirmed by the powerful working of the Spirit (cf Gal 3:1-5). It is in this profound sense that Paul’s assertion of obedience towards God (explained by the concept of being a slave of Christ) has an important persuasive function.

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