

# **Circumcision and Persecution: A Pauline perspective according to Gal. 5:11 and 6:12**

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## **Declaration**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own original work, that I am the authorship owner thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## Abstract

Paul's position regarding circumcision has been one of the most controversial issues in Pauline studies. This position has been interpreted theologically in traditional readings and has been ethically focused on in the reading of the new perspective on Paul. In this study Paul's position regarding circumcision was interpreted through the connection between circumcision and persecution presented in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12.

A study of the historical background and an exegetical analysis were made to analyse the meaning of circumcision and persecution in Paul's world. Circumcision was an important factor in Judaism in Paul's age. It was the sign of being sons of Abraham and Jewish custom compelled circumcision for those who entered the Jewish community. Circumcision played an important role in the understanding of salvation and in this community's life. However, Paul, following his conversion, appears to have reconsidered the concept of circumcision. His changed position regarding circumcision is shown clearly in his autobiographical narratives, for instance in not compelling Titus's circumcision (Gal. 2:3). Gentiles became people of God through faith in Jesus Christ. In this sense Paul did not preach circumcision to the Gentile believers in Jesus, but Paul's opponents in the Galatian Churches preached circumcision to Gentiles. The Galatian churches were deluded by his opponents' teaching that added circumcision to the true gospel.

Paul and his opponents were exposed to persecution if they failed to preach circumcision. In this situation, Paul's behaviour is contrasted with that of his opponents. Paul did not compel the Gentile believers in Jesus to undergo circumcision despite persecution (Gal. 5:11). However, his opponents added the requirement of circumcision to the gospel and preached this teaching to Gentile Galatians. In Gal. 6:12 Paul suggested that they preached circumcision in order to avoid persecution. Paul's important teaching has to do with enduring persecution because of not preaching circumcision so as to be true to the gospel.

The contrast highlighted in Paul's statement provided a good model of ethical life to Gentiles in Galatia. Conversely, preaching to ensure own comfort, like Paul's opponents, is to not live according to the true gospel. Paul's teaching plays a pivotal role in Christian life. His pronouncement in these verses encourages Christians to adhere to the true gospel and to endure suffering that may result from being true to the gospel.

## Opsomming

Paulus se posisie ten opsigte van besnydenis was nog altyd een van die mees omstrede kwessies in Pauliniese navorsing. Hierdie posisie is teologies geïnterpreteer in tradisionele werk maar is eties gefokus in die nuwe perspektief op Paulus. In hierdie studie word Paulus se posisie ten opsigte van besnydenis geïnterpreteer deur die verband tussen besnydenis en vervolging in Gal. 5:11 en 6:12 te ondersoek.

'n Studie van die historiese agtergrond en 'n eksegetiese analise is gebruik om die betekenis van besnydenis en vervolging in Paulus se wêreld te ontleed. Besnydenis was 'n belangrike faktor in die Judaïsme van Paulus se tyd. Dit was die teken om seuns van Abraham te wees en Joodse gebruik het aangedring op besnydenis vir diegene wat die Joodse gemeenskap binnegekom het. Besnydenis het 'n belangrike rol gespeel in die verstaan van verlossing en in die lewe van die gemeenskap. Paulus het skynbaar egter na sy bekering die konsep van besnydenis heroorweeg. Sy veranderde posisie ten opsigte van besnydenis word duidelik in sy outobiografiese vertellings, byvoorbeeld in weiering van die besnydenis van Titus (Gal. 2: 3). Nie-Jode het mense van God geword deur geloof in Jesus Christus. In hierdie sin het Paulus nie besnydenis aan die heiden-gelowiges in Jesus verkondig nie, maar Paulus se teenstanders in die Galasiese kerke het wel besnydenis aan heidene verkondig. Die Galasiese kerke is bedrieg deur sy teenstanders se leer wat die besnydenis tot die ware evangelie toegevoeg het.

Paulus en sy teenstanders was blootgestel aan vervolging as hulle nie die besnydenis verkondig het nie. In hierdie situasie word Paulus se gedrag gekontrasteer met dié van sy teenstanders. Hy het nie die heiden-gelowiges in Jesus gedwing om besnydenis te ondergaan nie, ten spyte van vervolging (Gal. 5:11). Sy teenstanders het egter die eis van besnydenis aan die evangelie bygevoeg en hierdie lering aan heidense Galasiërs gepreek. In Gal. 6:12 gee hy te kenne dat hulle besnydenis verkondig om vervolging te vermy. Paulus se belangrike lering het te make met volgehoue vervolging omdat hy nie die besnydenis verkondig het nie ten einde getrou te wees aan die evangelie.

Die kontras wat in Paulus se stelling uitgelig is, het 'n goeie model van etiese lewe aan heidene in Galasië gegee. Omgekeerd, prediking om eie troos te verseker, soos Paulus se teenstanders, beteken dat daar nie volgens die ware evangelie geleef word nie. Paulus se leer speel 'n deurslaggewende rol in die Christelike lewe. Sy uitspraak in hierdie verse moedig Christene aan om aan die ware evangelie te voldoen en om

lyding te verduur wat mag voortspruit uit die nastreef van die waarheid van die evangelie.

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## Abbreviations

1 Cor.	1 Corinthians
1 Thess.	1 Thessalonians
2 Cor.	2 Corinthians
Ex.	Exodus
Gal.	Galatians
Gen.	Genesis
Jer.	Jeremiah
Jos.	Joshua
Lv.	Leviticus
Phil.	Philippians
1 Macc.	1 Maccabee
Ant.	Josephus, Jewish Antiquities
AB	Anchor Bible
<i>BBR</i>	<i>Bulletin for Biblical Research</i>
<i>BDAG</i>	Bauer et al. (2000), <i>A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>BDF</i>	Blass et al. (1961), <i>A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JSNT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the New Testament</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	Liddell et al. (1996), <i>A Greek-English Lexicon</i>
LXX	Septuagint
<i>TDNT</i>	Kittel and Friedrich (1974), <i>Theological dictionary of the New Testament</i>
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Studies analysing Paul's ethical teaching have been conducted over many years. Such studies on his ethical teaching are related to the broader issue of how Paul understood the law. This current study focuses on circumcision, which was one element of the law. The question regarding the most appropriate understanding of the circumcision as referred to in Galatians 5 and 6, is probably the most controversial issue in the letter to the Galatians.

From Luther onwards, the traditional reading on the issue of the circumcision was largely focused on the theological issue of salvation. Such a reading regarded Paul's assertion about circumcision as basically a theological, doctrinal dispute. This understanding entailed that circumcision dispute was about a deed primarily related to salvation, rather than being about ethical teaching. While in Gal. 1 to 4 it is plausible that the circumcision debate can be related primarily to a theological issue, that is, salvation, it is insufficient to claim that Paul's assertion on the circumcision in Gal. 5 and 6 is primarily a theological concern. This is at least partly so because this section is best described as exhortation or instruction, which refers to ethical teaching. This part relates to more practical, ethical teaching. However, if circumcision is only regarded as a theological issue, it is difficult to understand circumcision in terms of an exhortation. Thus, the researcher studied the assertion on circumcision in Gal. 5 and 6 as Paul pointing out the problem regarding the opponents' teaching in terms of an ethical way of life.

On the other hand, according to the new perspective on the law in Paul, a different approach to the traditional reading has been developed. This perspective focuses more on ethical teaching in terms of the circumcision than the traditional reading does.

Dunn (1998:354) understood circumcision as a fundamental identity marker for the people of the covenant. He contended that this identity marker served to clarify the separation between Jews and Gentiles. Dunn (1998:355) regards circumcision as a measure serving to maintain the status of God's children, but this also does not provide a sufficient explanation about the understanding of circumcision. This is because such an interpretation defines circumcision as part of the law of purity, but it is not clear that Paul in Galatians separates circumcision from the whole law. In Gal 5:2-6, Paul regards circumcision equally as the law. Thus, in terms of the argument on circumcision, Paul shows in Gal 5:4 that those who would be justified by the law have fallen from grace.

The argument of this study therefore is that it is necessary to reconsider the relation between circumcision and persecution according to Paul. In this sense, this thesis seeks to analyse the connection between circumcision and the persecution as Paul refers to it in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12, and does so from the viewpoint of ethical teaching.

A large number of New Testament studies has focused on the letter to the Galatians (Tolmie, 2012). Recent studies focus on the understanding of Paul's ethical teaching in Galatians. Gal. 5 and 6 as exhortation or ethical teaching play a pivotal role in understanding the Christian ethical way of life. This study will examine Paul's ethical teaching (Gal. 5 and 6). The researcher accordingly chose two verses, namely Gal. 5:11<sup>1</sup> and 6:12, for this study. Each verse focuses on circumcision and persecution. The researcher planned to investigate Paul's rhetorical aims with and in this letter through these repeated concepts of circumcision and persecution, and their relationship to the ethical way of life. In short, the researcher researched the nature and content of the connections Paul makes between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12.

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<sup>1</sup> Gal. 5:11 presents some interpretive difficulties, thereby various interpretations are possible, both exegetically and theologically (Cambell, 2011:326).

## 1.2 Hypothesis and Research Questions

The hypothesis is that the contrast between what Paul says about circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 plays an important role in the understanding of Paul's ethical teaching. In Galatians 5 and 6, Paul encourages a way of life in Christ which did not include circumcision. For this reason, this way of life in Christ inevitably involved persecution. Some sort of persecution of those who believed in Jesus seems to have been taking place, although its nature and scope is not clear. In Galatians the situation of persecution appears, as seen, for example, in Paul's early life (Gal 1:13-17), the episode in Antioch (Gal. 2:11-14), and the contrast presented between circumcision and persecution in 5:11 and 6:12. The reason why those who believed in Jesus were persecuted was because their way of life did not include circumcision. The important thing to consider is that Paul preaches the gospel without circumcision despite persecution (Gal. 5:11), but his opponents forced gentile believers to be circumcised in order to avoid persecution (Gal. 6:12). In this sense, a comparison of the two verses reveals the life of Paul in contrast to that of his opponents. As a result, it appears that Paul contends that he preached his message according to the revelation of Jesus, and this gospel that he preached is the true gospel, but that Paul identified the teaching of his opponents as not adhering to these measures.

The hypothesis of this thesis is that the contrast found in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 regarding circumcision and persecution is pivotal in the understanding of Paul's teaching in the letter, and for comparing Paul's life with that of his opponents.

The hypothesis of this dissertation can be broadened out as follows:

- The contrast between the statements on circumcision and persecution in 5:11 and 6:12 can be understood as the life of Paul and that of his opponents respectively.
- The relation between circumcision and persecution can be understood as revealing what the true gospel is.

- The connection between circumcision and persecution can be understood as showing who the true teacher is.

It is said that Paul used the contrast between his statements on circumcision and persecution in order to provide important teaching.

The research questions which flowed from the hypothesis are as follows:

- How should the connection between circumcision and persecution as found in Gal. 5 and 6 be interpreted?
- What is revealed through the contrast between Gal. 5:11 and 6:12?

### **1.3 Methodology**

Epistolary analysis and rhetorical analysis are used to analyse the problem statement of this thesis.

#### 1) Epistolary perspective

Understanding form and content plays an important role in the study of any writing. (Longenecker, 1990:ci). Epistolary analysis is especially useful for the understanding of the form of Galatians. Weima (1994) suggests that the examination and interpretation of any Pauline letter begins with an analysis of the letter's epistolary structure. In this regard, Weima (1994:11) argues that epistolary analysis plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of Pauline letters. First, this study examined the form of the letter on the basis of epistolary analysis. The letter to the Galatians also has the form of a Hellenistic letter of the time. Hellenistic letters typically were divided into three sections: opening, body, and closing. Like the Hellenistic letters, the letter to the Galatians consists of three parts. Since the document addressed to the Galatians adheres to the conventional form of the Hellenistic letter, it can be regarded as a letter. Secondly, the genre of the letter to the Galatians suggests a letter of request or a  $\theta\alpha\upsilon\mu\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega$  letter. Galatians has the form of a request letter and the body of Galatians

begins with θαυμάζω. White (1972) examined the body of Pauline letters in his research, comparing it to the body of Hellenistic non-literary letters. Then, he identified the functional features of the letter's body. Gal. 1:6 begins with θαυμάζω. With this word Paul expressed his astonishment for the bad behaviour of the Galatian churches (Arzt-Grabner, 2010:156). From this phraseology, White identified the body-openings as requests (White, 1972:19). Using an epistolary analysis, I therefore examine Galatians based on the features of letters of request. Using this epistolary approach, this study focuses on the hortatory parts of Galatians as found in Chapters 5 and 6.

## 2) Grammatical analysis with attention to rhetorical aspects

Even though Greco-Roman rhetorical analysis plays a pivotal role in interpreting the moral exhortation in Galatians, there are disadvantages when one chooses a particular ancient model of rhetorical analysis to interpret the text in the Pauline letters (Anderson, 1996:129). Kern (2004:90) also points out: "Many rhetorical critics now agree that parts of Galatians do not follow the advice of the handbooks – leading to alternative readings." Thus, the researcher did not choose the approach of a particular model of rhetorical analysis, but used the approach of grammatical analysis with attention to rhetorical aspects in order to interpret the letter to the Galatians. This grammatical analysis focused on the exegesis of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 against the background of Jewish views of circumcision. In the exegesis of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 the researcher used an analysis of the text itself, as Tolmie (2005:27) applies it to Galatians, and which he calls a text-centred rhetorical analysis. Tolmie (2005) chooses to reconstruct Paul's rhetorical strategy from the text itself, using the letter itself as the starting point. Tolmie (2005:27) assumes that Paul tried to persuade the Galatians to accept his point of view, or, if they shared his point of view, not to accept the view of his opponents. In this regard Tolmie (2005:28) focuses on the text itself, in an attempt to delineate Paul's rhetorical strategy.

In the proposed study, the researcher undertook to examine Gal. 5 and 6 by doing exegesis of the Greek text. With Tolmie's assumption that Paul's purpose for the Galatians was to not accept the view of his opponents, but to accept his view of the gospel, the researcher planned exegesis of the texts to be studied. In terms of the

exegesis of Greek texts, this study aimed to interpret Galatians by studying the Greek words, the related elements of Greek grammar and the letter's rhetorical features.

To summarise, this study used these two analytical approaches. These analyses can aid the understanding of the form and content of Galatians. Firstly, from the epistolary perspective, Galatians is defined as a letter of rebuke, which means that this letter is the response to an exigency of this(ese) church(es) (Gal 1:6). This is related to the purpose of the letter. This perspective helps in the understanding of the purpose of the letter, as well as to understand Paul's ethical teaching in Gal. 5 and 6. Secondly, the researcher interpreted the text by means of grammatical analysis with attention to rhetorical aspects. The study analyses the meaning of Galatians 5:11 and 6:12 according to this analysis. This approach helps one to understand the nuances and specifics of Paul's meaning and the all-important contrast between circumcision and persecution.

## **1.4 Outline of Research**

Chapter 1 presents the introduction to this thesis. Chapter 2 provides the history of the interpretation of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 and background analysis of circumcision and persecution. The text analysis of Gal. 5:11 and Gal. 6 is presented in Chapter 3. In this chapter, Gal. 5:11 firstly is examined along with an exegetical study of Gal. 5:1-12. Secondly, Gal. 6:12 is commented on exegetically with reference to Gal. 6: 11-16. The researcher compares the selected verses and interprets the meaning of these verses in this chapter. The connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 is presented in Chapter 4 and the researcher reveals the significance of the contrast between the two verses and Paul's intentions in light of this study. Chapter 5 concludes the thesis.

## Chapter 2

### Background study of Galatians and its interpretation

#### 2.1 History of interpretation of Gal. 5 verse 11 and 6 verse 12

This chapter presents selected interpretations of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. The researcher provides a summary of selected significant earlier interpretations of these verses in order to lay the foundation for the current study. This brief survey helps to determine what the issues in the interpretation of Galatians are and how these verses have been interpreted in previous studies.

##### 2.1.1 Betz

The researcher examined Betz's interpretation of Gal. 5:11. Betz (1979) interprets Galatians with the use of ancient rhetorical criticism. He especially defines Galatians as forensic rhetoric, one of the three strands of the ancient rhetoric tradition. He regards Galatians as belonging to the genre of an apologetic letter. Betz's work is characterised by the fact that he analyses Galatians by means of Greco-Roman rhetoric and epistolography (Tolmie, 2005:2).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tolmie (2005:2) explains ancient rhetoric as consisting of three classes identified by Aristotle, namely: forensic, epideictic and deliberative rhetoric. Forensic rhetoric dealt with courtroom oratory, in particular speeches of accusation and defence, the basic issue being guilt or innocence. Epideictic rhetoric focused on ceremonial oratory, in particular speeches of praise and blame, the basic issue being the honourable and the shameful. Deliberative rhetoric dealt with counselling the audience on a future course of action, usually within a political context, the basic issue being the expediency or harmfulness of a future act.

Betz divides Gal. 5:11 into two parts: 11a is “but if I, my brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?” and 11b is “then, the stumbling block of the cross has been removed.”

In analysing 11a, Betz (1979:268) explains that Paul makes a statement about himself by using the emphatic ἐγώ (“I”). Then, the statement reveals two facts:

- (1) Paul informs that he is still being persecuted,
- (2) Paul denies that he “still” preaches circumcision.

Betz (1979:268) explains that Paul insists that he does not preach circumcision as proven by the fact that he is still being persecuted. This obviously reveals Paul’s view on the relationship between circumcision and persecution.

Then Betz (1979:269) contends that κηρύσσω περιτομήν (“preach circumcision”) is Paul’s language, so that it is uncertain whether his opponents ever attributed “preaching circumcision” to him. However, Paul seems to respond to what his opponents say about him. Thus, Betz suggests that there was a time when Paul preached circumcision. Betz (1979:269) suggests that Paul preached circumcision during his pre-Christian time, or that Paul refers to an earlier period in his Christian life, when he held a Jewish Christian view of circumcision which was contrary to his position at the time of writing to the Galatians. Betz (1979:269) contends that Paul’s comments in Galatians on circumcision can be interpreted as pro or contra circumcision. Paul is understood to deal differently with people who are Jews and those who are Gentiles by birth when circumcision is concerned. In Paul’s view, those who are Jews by birth can continue to practice circumcision if they want to do so. This is because circumcision is not relevant and not a condition for salvation. However, his opponents may have misunderstood Paul’s position either by mistake or by intention. Paul’s view on circumcision as revealed in Gal. 5:6 and 6:15 is that circumcision is not a condition for salvation.

In analysing 11b, Betz (1979:270) explains that “the stumbling block of the cross” sums up several essential aspects of his theology of the cross. Thus Betz (1979) interprets this phrase theologically, which is that salvation is possible on the basis of Christ’s crucifixion and death. Since salvation is promised through faith in Christ

Jesus, Paul's theology of the cross is offensive to the Jews, and makes the Jewish relationship between salvation and the observation of the Torah precarious. Then Betz (1979:270) contends the theology of Christ's cross is the integrity and identity in the Christian message.

Paul attacks his opponents in Gal. 6:12. This attack reveals the real aims of the opponents, at least as understood or presented by Paul. Betz (1979:314) explains that Paul rebukes his opponents not only as heretics, but also as morally despicable. This means that Paul, in these verses, criticises his opponents' shortcomings on ethical grounds.

Betz divides verse 12 into three parts:

12a: those people want to make a good showing in the flesh,

12b: these people compel you to become circumcised,

12c: only that they may not be persecuted because of the cross of Christ.

In verse 12a and 12b the actions of the opponents are identified: 12a reveals that his opponents are those people who want to make a good showing in the flesh, and these people compel Galatian Christians to become circumcised (in 12b). These are caricatures of the opponents. Accordingly, Betz (1979:315) insists that their real goal is revealed in this verse, namely that their goal is to force the Gentile Galatians to accept circumcision.

In verse 12c the intention of the opponents is revealed. Their intention is to avoid persecution. Betz (1979:315) suggests that, if they preach circumcision to avoid persecution, their goal is tactical. This means that their actions are not on behalf of the Galatians, but on behalf of themselves (Gal. 4:17). Paul criticises these opponents for their goal and intention. This interpretation points out the fault of Paul's opponents in terms of their ethical life. Betz (1979) therefore shows that Paul, by revealing the opponents' goal and intention, points out their actions as not on behalf of the Galatians, but, in comparing Gal 5:11, Paul's intention is for the benefit of the Galatians despite his own persecution.

### 2.1.2 Bruce

Bruce (1982) interprets Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 by means of historical, grammatical, and theological perspectives. In terms of his interpretation of Gal 5:11, Bruce (1982:236) believes that Paul responds to some allegation by the opponents. The allegation suggested that Paul still preached circumcision. In other words, Paul's statement of "if I still preach circumcision" is a reply to an allegation that the opponents levelled at him, namely that he used to preach circumcision and he still preached circumcision as his opponents knew about Paul's teaching before his conversion. Bruce (1983), however, insists that this allegation is preposterous because, although Paul would have preached circumcision before his conversion, he preached a circumcision-free gospel as the apostle of Christ following his conversion.

Bruce (1982) also explains Paul's perspective on circumcision. From the opponents' view, Paul might seem to maintain a neutral attitude towards circumcision. Paul held that circumcision per se was neither here nor there (Gal. 5:6). Thus, his opponents accused Paul of recommending circumcision on some occasions and forbidding it on others. In the view of his opponents, Paul's attitude concerning circumcision was seen to be negative, because this view suggested to the opponents that Paul neglected circumcision or the law.

However, Paul's teaching (Gal. 5:6) and actions in his letters and in Acts (Acts 16:3) show Paul's view regarding circumcision, namely that circumcision is not essential for salvation, but optional in the Christian life.

In terms of persecution, Bruce (1983:237), in verse 11b (τί ἔτι διώκομαι), indicates that Paul was persecuted due to his proclamation of a gospel that was free of the law. Paul implies that he would be exempt from persecution if he included some element of law in his preaching (Bruce, 1983:237). This means that persecution concerned Paul as well as his opponents. Bruce (1983:237) insists that the opponents' zeal was reinforced by a desire to avoid persecution, as stated in Gal. 6:12. Bruce thus understands the persecution in relation to circumcision as mentioned in Gal. 6:12.

In his interpretation of Gal. 6:12, Bruce considers circumcision to be the key concept.

With regard to verse 12a (ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί), Bruce (1983:268) indicates that σάρξ is related to circumcision, because the literal sense of σάρξ cannot be excluded where circumcision is the subject. Persecution also appears to be due to circumcision. A gospel without circumcision involved persecution, because to exclude circumcision from salvation became a stumbling block in the eyes of the opponents (Gal. 5:11). Those who refused to require circumcision from their Gentile converts were liable to be persecuted. Conversely, those who demanded that Gentile believers should be circumcised wanted to avoid such persecution. Bruce also indicates the opponents' motive as being directed towards themselves.

### 2.1.3 Longenecker

In the reformed tradition, Longenecker (1990:232) explains Paul's statement in Gal. 5:11 as due to the false claim made by his opponents. This claim is that Paul believed in circumcision and preached circumcision during his missionary journeys, but he withheld from preaching this to the Galatians in order to win their approval. Paul, however, denies seeking the approval of humans in Gal. 1:10.

In terms of circumcision, Longenecker (1990) explains that Paul writes a response to a charge by his opponents.<sup>3</sup> Verse 11a, περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω ("to preach circumcision still"), seems to be Paul's own way of expressing the situation. The adverb, ἔτι ("yet", "still"), plays an important role in this interpretation. Longenecker (1990:233) explains that the claim that Paul makes in "I still preach circumcision" is an acknowledgement on his part that there was a time when he preached circumcision, but Paul denied that he advocated circumcision when it suited his purpose. As there is no information in any of his letters that he ever advocated circumcision after he became a follower of Jesus, Longenecker (1990:233) explains that Paul preached

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<sup>3</sup> With regard to the cause of the false claim of opponents, Longenecker presents three possibilities; 1) the treatment of circumcision of Titus, 2) their knowledge that Paul approved of Jewish believers in Jesus expressing their faith in the traditional forms of Judaism, 3) their awareness that Paul himself continued to live a Jewish lifestyle. However, the charge of his opponents is that, while Paul regarded it as perfectly appropriate that Jewish Christians represented their faith in Jesus through the traditional Jewish practices, he strongly denied the command of those practices for Gentile Christians, either for full acceptance by God or as a normative way of life.

circumcision before his conversion to Christ or in an earlier phase of his missionary journey. This statement indicates that Paul had preached circumcision before, but not any longer, whatever his opponents had to say about him.

Longenecker (1990:233), in addition, contends that Paul's rhetorical question has something to do with Gal. 4:29. Paul and his converts were persecuted because they did not advocate circumcision any more.

Longenecker (1990:291) explains that Gal. 6:12 presents Paul's perception in terms of his opponents' reason and motivation for forcing circumcision on Gentile believers in those churches. Paul states that the reason why his opponents forced Gentile believers to be circumcised was because they intended to avoid persecution. Longenecker (1990:291) insists that Paul therefore highlights his perception of what really lies behind the activities of his opponents. In this regard, Longenecker suggests that Paul indicates the problem of his opponents' motivation. Paul's understanding of his opponents' activities accordingly is presented in Gal. 6:12. What Paul understands about the actions of his opponents is that their activities obviously involve avoiding persecution, which means that, in Paul's estimation, they preach circumcision on their own behalf and not for the sake of the Galatians.

#### **2.1.4 Dunn**

Dunn is associated with the New Perspective on Paul, along with E.P. Sanders and N.T. Wright. Dunn (1993) interprets Gal. 5:11 through historical reconstruction. He focuses on the historical situation of the phrase "If I still preach circumcision". Thus, Dunn presents the following possible interpretations of the phrase:

1) Paul had preached circumcision during his time in Judaism. Dunn (1993:278), however, insists that this interpretation contradicts the evidence that second-Temple Judaism was not missionary minded.

2) Paul's circumcision-free gospel was not known among the more traditionally-minded Christian Jews, so that the claim that he "still preached circumcision" was simply mistaken. However, Dunn (1993:278) admits that this interpretation is hard to accept because the task of the other missionaries is likely to have been directed to remedying a mission strategy and situation, which was only too well known among

Christian-Jewish traditionalists.

3) Paul considers the possibility of adopting the principle of circumcision for Gentiles in the future. This case interprets his phrase as “If I am yet to preach circumcision, why am I still or yet (—‘despite this’) persecuted”. This infers a possibility that should cause his opponents to refrain from persecuting him in the hope of winning him to their cause. Dunn (1993:279) however contends that this is a less natural reading, because this interpretation requires a different meaning for the two uses of ἔτι, which otherwise are nicely balanced in sense and give the question its force. The suggestion that Paul envisaged a purely hypothetical case, while technically possible, likewise runs aground on the repeated ἔτι.

4) Paul cites other opponents who accused him of not being free enough of Jewishness in this phrase, but this disrupts the sequence of thought entirely.

5) Paul’s opponents were referring to Paul’s warnings against the desires of the flesh, which involves the ethical meaning of circumcision. However, this introduces confusion, because this section indicates the idea of literal circumcision.

6) Paul was accused by the other missionaries of being inconsistent, which implies that he continued to preach circumcision among Jews although he preached a circumcision-free gospel to the Galatians. Dunn (1993) admits that this explanation is plausible. This is because Paul, when writing this letter, spoke openly of his principle. That principle was “to those under the law I became as one under the law... to those outside the law I became as one outside the law” (1 Cor. 9:18-21). Such a principle must have appeared unprincipled and inconsistent to his opponents (Dunn, 1993:279). Therefore, Dunn (1993) insists, this verse is Paul’s answer to the opponents who accused him of inconsistency.

In this sense, Dunn (1993:280) interprets verse 11 as, if Paul did indeed ‘preach circumcision’, then he should not be persecuted. Thus, even though the response is not very strong, the key fact remained, that he did not preach circumcision to the Gentiles. Accordingly, Paul did not preach circumcision to Gentiles in the Galatian churches.

Dunn (1993:280) interprets verse 11 as that, if Paul continued to regard circumcision as essential to the gospel and participation in the inheritance of Abraham, the

stumbling block of the cross had been removed. In this interpretation, Dunn regards the cross as marking the end of a clear dividing line between the covenant Jew and the outlaw Gentile. Dunn therefore contends that the cross was the stumbling block between Jew and Gentile. Thus, though Christian Jews could accept the redefinition of the Messiah which Jesus's death and resurrection made necessary, they could not accept that the redefinition between Jew and Gentile was also necessary. This means the law or circumcision concerned the issue of distinction between Jews and Gentiles. Dunn (1993:281) understands that the stumbling block of the cross was regarded not only as salvation, but also as an ethical way of living.

In addition, Dunn, in terms of interpreting Gal. 6:12a, suggests that those who want to make a good showing in the flesh probably referred to those who wanted Gentiles to be circumcised (cf. Gal. 5:12) and 12b indicates that Gentiles were forced to be circumcised. Dunn (1993) interprets this compulsion as emphasising ethnic identity, which is distinguished by the rite of circumcision.

When it comes to persecution in 6:12, Dunn (1993) contends that persecution by Jews or Christian Jews such as Paul was carried out before his conversion. This verse implies that, if other Jewish missionaries succeeded in circumcising those Gentiles drawn into the Nazarene movement, they would escape such persecution, because their success thus drew these Gentiles fully into the covenant people removed the reason for the persecution.

Dunn (1993:337) contends that the problem confronted in the heart of this letter is the Jewish conviction that faithfulness to the covenant with God involved the distinguishing between Gentiles and Jews. This understanding of the central problem in the letter is derived from the New Perspective on Paul. The problem of the letter is that circumcision involved the factor of distinction between Jews and Gentiles. This perspective infers that Paul's perspective on law or circumcision is not in opposition to salvation with regard to people's deeds, but to the problem of separation between Jews and Gentiles.

### **2.1.5 Nanos**

Nanos (2002) suggests a reading based on the historical context of the recipients and Paul's opponents in the letter. Nanos (2002) reconstructs the historical context of the letter to Galatia and the matter of Paul's opponents. He (2002) refers to Paul's opponents as "influencers" and insists (2002:258) that Paul's opponents are not necessarily Christians, but Jews who are in Jewish communities.

Nanos (2002:217) interprets Gal. 6:12 and points out that Paul in this verse characterises the motives and actions of the influencers negatively. He (2002:218) describes the identities of influencers as from verse 12. Firstly, the influencers want to make a good showing in the flesh. Nanos (2002) explains that the influencers' interest lies in gaining the addressees' compliance in an effort to enhance the influencers' own status. In other words, they want to gain or confirm their honour by bringing the Gentile addressees to a completion of proselyte conversion (Nanos, 2002:219). This means their motives and actions are on behalf of themselves – not for the Galatians.

Secondly, identity concerns are also involved in the influencers trying to avoid persecution for the cross of Christ. Through Gal. 6:12 it becomes clear that those whom Paul accuses of fearing persecution because of the cross of Christ, are not addressees but influencers. Paul's comment plays a pivotal role in demonstrating the identity of the influencers. In this regard, the motive of the influencers also is revealed. Their claim for certain identities might suggest that they too are preaching the good news of Christ, but they actually preach their own good news for themselves. They obtain their status by forcing the Galatians to be circumcised. Nanos (2002) insists that the influencers' motive is for themselves, not for the sake of the Galatians.

### **2.1.6 Oakes**

Oakes explains Gal. 5:11 as seeming to be a response to an accusation that Paul is preaching circumcision. However, it is not clear what the accusation refers to, thus Oakes suggests two possibilities. One possible explanation is related to the accusation inferred in Gal. 1:10, which is that Paul tried to please people. If Paul was all things to all people (1 Cor. 9:22), he could be commanding circumcision, seeking to please his audience, to try to win them over. The second explanation is that Paul's opponents did

not think of themselves as opposing Paul at all, but said that what they were teaching was what Paul taught generally, as the next step for a maturing Christian to take.

Oakes (2015:165) advocates the second explanation as more relevant than the first explanation. He explains that “preaching circumcision” in this context presumably means ethical teaching for the Galatians.

On the other hand, Paul’s response makes it clear that he would not preach circumcision to Gentiles. Oakes (2015:165) contends that Paul introduces the topic of persecution in order to use the fact of persecution as evidence in support of the assertion. This is effective, because the Galatians knew that Paul was persecuted, so they could infer that he could not be preaching a message acceptable to Jewish authorities. In the context of this verse, preaching Gentile circumcision also would remove the offensive element from the cross.

Oakes (2015) thus insists that the key offence of the cross as it concerned Paul was that it led to preaching to Gentiles without preaching circumcision. In other words, the preaching of circumcision meant that Gentiles became part of the Jewish community, so that Jews and Paul’s opponents might have preached that Gentiles should become part of the Jewish community. In terms of circumcision and persecution in this verse, Oakes therefore explains that Paul did not preach circumcision to Gentiles and he was persecuted for this reason. Oakes (2015) insists that the opponents’ preaching had something to do with becoming part of the Jewish community in observing the law, but Paul’s preaching focused only on the cross, which meant that becoming a Jew was not of key importance, but becoming a new creation in Christ was true to the gospel.

The opponents’ attitude comes to the fore in 6:12. Oakes (2015) indicates that the opponents no doubt presented it as being for the Galatians’ benefit, but Paul sees this as a deceptive cheat: the opponents were only thinking of themselves. Their motive was to avoid persecution.

Oakes (2015:187) suggests that, when it comes to persecution, the most possible reading of Gal. 6:12 is that the opponents, who were Christian Jews, feared persecution from non-Christian Jews if Gentile Christians did not undergo circumcision. Oakes (2015:187) additionally explains that, if the opponents were

members of the synagogue who had come to believe in Jesus as Messiah, their association with Gentile members of the Jesus movement could easily be seen as problematic by the authorities and other members of the synagogue. Thus, the opponents' attempt to bring the Gentile Christians into Jewish life would seem positive in itself, but Paul points out the error in their motive. In their mind they tried to make a good showing in the flesh and avoid persecution because of the cross.

### **2.1.7 Tolmie**

Tolmie (2005) suggests a rhetorical strategy as most suitable for reading Paul's arguments and tries to interpret Gal. 5:11 according to Paul's purpose in writing the letter. Paul's statement in Gal. 5:11 concerns reacting to an allegation in a situation. Tolmie (2005) assumes that the reason why there is very little information is because the Galatians were aware of the allegation, which involved inconsistency regarding Paul's view of circumcision. The allegation is that Paul preached a circumcision-free gospel to the Galatians but still preached circumcision to Jewish Christians. From this assumption, Tolmie (2005:186) explains that what Paul contends in this verse is that his opponents accused him of inconsistency regarding circumcision, that is, that Paul preached circumcision in Galatia, but responded that it was not true. If this had been true, Paul would no longer have been persecuted. In this sense Paul did not preach circumcision any more. Through the rhetorical question Paul stated that he did not preach circumcision any more, and this resulted in his being persecuted.

When it comes to understanding the connection between circumcision and persecution from this verse, Tolmie (2005) insists that the issue was whether there was persecution or not, and whether persecution because of circumcision existed. In other words, the problem appears to be that Paul preached circumcision-free gospel despite persecution, and that Paul presented his gospel as the true gospel.

In Gal. 6:12 and 13, Tolmie (2005:222) explains that Paul did not provide his argument about the gospel, but presented accusations against his opponents through the extensive use of the technique of vilification. According to Tolmie (2005:222), there are five accusations against his opponents in the two verses:

They are people who only wish to make a good showing in the flesh.

They are compelling the Galatians to be circumcised.

They are insincere, because their real motive for trying to persuade the Galatians to be circumcised is to avoid being persecuted for the cross of Christ.

They do not practise what they preach, because they do not keep the law themselves.

They are insincere, because their real motive is to boast in the flesh of the Galatians.

Paul accordingly attacked his opponents through these accusations. Paul accused them of moral depravity in an ethical sense.

### **2.1.7 The current position**

The researcher has offered an overview of selected interpretations from Galatians commentaries on Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. The researcher presented the views of Betz, Bruce, Longenecker, Dunn, Nanos, Oakes and Tolmie regarding Paul's position of circumcision and Paul's intention in these verses.

Betz (1979) explains Paul's position that circumcision is not a condition for salvation. Bruce (1982) also determines Paul's view of circumcision, which that circumcision is not essential for salvation, but optional in the Christian life. Longenecker (1990) suggests that Paul regarded circumcision as theological issue in terms of salvation. These views represent the traditional view. However, Dunn (1993) suggests that Paul's view of circumcision regards the issue of distinction between Jews and Gentiles. He insists that Paul regards circumcision mainly as an identity marker. Also influenced by the New Perspective on Paul, Nanos (2002) and Oakes (2015) reconstruct the historical situation of Galatians. Nanos (2002) explains that circumcision in Jewish community gave privilege, which means that Paul's view of circumcision is related to the way of life in the community. Oakes (2015) insists that circumcision make Gentiles become part of the Jewish community. Betz, Bruce, and Longenecker have the traditional view that is that Paul's position of circumcision is related to salvation theologically, but Dunn, Nanos and Oakes focus on the way of life regarding Paul's view of circumcision ethically. Therefore, the researcher tries to

examine Paul's position on circumcision with regard to these interpretations. Paul's position of circumcision is not only in terms of salvation theologically, but also in terms of the Christian way of life ethically. The researcher takes his cue from the two groups, so that Paul's statement of circumcision is taken to refer to an ethical position based on a theological view. Lastly, Tolmie (2005) provides an interpretation of these verses according to Paul's rhetorical strategy in the writing of the letter to the Galatians. In reference to Tolmie's (2005) in study on Paul's position on circumcision, the researcher investigates circumcision within Paul's rhetorical strategy in the context of the Galatian churches.

## **2.2 Context of circumcision and persecution in Galatians**

This section examines the background to circumcision and persecution for the important role that it plays in understanding Gal. 5:11 and 6:12.

First of all, the researcher attempts to determine the background to circumcision and then investigates the perception of circumcision in order to understand the role of circumcision in the time of Paul. In order to understand circumcision in Paul's time, the researcher studies circumcision as described in the Old Testament, and its function within Judaism. Secondly, the researcher examines the background to persecution. This study limits persecution to how it is presented in Galatians.

### **2.2.1 Circumcision in the Old Testament**

In the Old Testament the usage of circumcision in the LXX is presented through the verb περιτέμνω (to circumcise) and the noun περιτομή (circumcision). Firstly, the verb περιτέμνω (to circumcise) is used (Gen. 17:10 to 14; Ex. 4:25; 12:44 and 48; Lv. 12:3; Jos. 5:2 to 8; 21:42; 24:31) (Meyer, 1964:73). Secondly, the noun περιτομή (circumcision) is used (Ex. 4:25, 26) (Meyer, 1964:74). These two words are largely used as a ritual. For this usage of circumcision in the Old Testament, the researcher chose four narratives and then examined the four important narratives featuring circumcision in the Old Testament.

The first narrative concerns the bloody bridegroom (Ex. 4:24 to 26). The Lord met Moses and tried to kill him (Ex. 4:24). Ex. 4:25 reports how Zipporah circumcised his son and said: “Truly you are the bloody bridegroom to me!” This story has many different interpretations. It is the most vexing of the stories concerning circumcision (Hall, 1992:1026). There are two puzzles in this story: 1) What does the phrase “bloody bridegroom” mean? (Ex. 4:25) and 2) Does God seek to kill Moses or Moses’ son? (Ex. 4:24) (Hall, 1992:1026).

The puzzle is derived from the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “bridegroom” (קַדְוָן). Since Moses and Zipporah have at least one child, the bridegroom refers to Moses (Hall, 1992:1026). Also, in Arabic, bridegroom refers one who is circumcised (Hall, 1992:1026). Zipporah’s claim thus is interpreted as “you are [a] blood-circumcised one for me” (Kosmala, 1962:27). Verse 26 also suggests that the bloody bridegroom is a reference to circumcision. Therefore, the meaning of bridegroom refers to Moses having been circumcised and then the circumcision indicates that Zipporah circumcised her son (Ex. 4:25).

Another puzzle related to who God seeks to kill is the following: Ex. 4:24 says that the Lord met him and tried kill him. There are (masculine) singular pronouns “him” in this clause of verse 24. Do the pronouns refer to Moses or Moses’ son? (Hall, 1992: 1026). Although the pronouns hardly define who is indicated, the important meaning of the sentence is that God tried to kill someone because of the uncircumcision of Moses’s son. According to the context of this story, Moses’s son is more relevant (Hall, 1992:1027). This is because the previous story is about God threatening to kill the firstborn son of Pharaoh (Ex. 4:23). In this context it is plausible that God proposed to kill Moses’ son because of his uncircumcision. Before God killed Pharaoh’s son he tried to kill Moses’ uncircumcised son, so that Zipporah circumcised his son with blood to save him from death. The story thus foreshadows the later events of Passover (Hall, 1992:1027). The circumcision associates him with the people of Israel. The circumcision in this story signifies an apotropaic, sacrificial ritual, according to the relationship with the Passover (Ex. 12, 13), which relates to God’s judgment.

The second narrative concerning circumcision in the OT deals with the circumcision

of Abraham. This has the characteristic of a covenant between God and God's people. With regard to the meaning of the event and the purpose of circumcision, these events serve to explain the reason why the people of Israel had to circumcise their children. Gen. 17 explains that Abraham had no son, but begot Isaac after circumcision and then Isaac was blessed by God. After this, circumcision ensured many offspring who would be blessed by God. This means that God would bless God's people with many offspring due to circumcision. Circumcision became a mnemonic sign of the covenant with God (Hall, 1992:1027).

The third narrative reports an event involving circumcision that occurred at Gilgal (Jos. 5:2-9). The circumcision took place near Jericho, at the sanctuary of Gilgal, called the hill of foreskins (Jos. 5:3) (Meyer, 1964:76). This circumcision was practised before entering into the land of God's promise. Jos. 5:5 says that the people of Israel who were not circumcised needed circumcision because those who were circumcised before had died in the wilderness. This was a very important rite, as circumcision served as a mark of identity and proof of a tribal or national identity apart from other nations (Meyer, 1964:76). The meaning of circumcision at Gilgal therefore was in determining a national mark of Israelite identity.

Finally, in the fourth narrative, in Jeremiah, in the days of Josiah (639-609 B.C.), refers to circumcision in: "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD and remove the foreskins of your heart" (Jer. 4:4) and "Behold, their ears are uncircumcised" (Jer. 6:10) (Meyer, 1964:77). Jeremiah provides a figurative understanding of circumcision, which concerns heart circumcision. These verses also initiate a theological understanding of circumcision. At the time, Jeremiah revealed the theological problem of a rite like circumcision. He suggests that the theological meaning of circumcision is not in the importance of a rite with an external mark for the people of Israel, but in the importance of remembering God's covenant promise through circumcision. Therefore the figurative, theological understanding of circumcision is as a symbol reminding the people of God's covenant promise to make Israel a great nation and as recognition of their obligation concerning the law. This means that the people of Israel had to remember not only physical circumcision, but also heart circumcision. Therefore circumcision in Jeremiah suggests a figurative, theological understanding of circumcision, which required remembering God's covenant promise

and the recognition of the obligation to the law.

Through these events, the meaning of circumcision is revealed as a mnemonic sign of the covenant with God, a national mark of Israelite identity, and a religious rite of redemption.

### **2.2.2 Circumcision in Judaism**

Circumcision in Judaism is consistent with circumcision the Old Testament. In Judaism it was the primary external sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17) (Sanders, 1990:17). However, circumcision was an unacceptable rite for Greeks and Romans in ancient times. The researcher briefly explains how Greeks and Romans understood circumcision in the Hellenistic Roman period by providing a very short historical survey of circumcision.

Circumcision was regarded as ridiculous in this period and a restriction was placed on it in society. As circumcision at times was viewed as a horror, it was targeted with contempt, scorn and ridicule throughout the period (Hall, 1992:1027). This means that there was cultural pressure against circumcision. Since Jews were widely known to practice circumcision, they were often ridiculed and ostracised (Hall, 1992:1027). This mark was clearly revealed in the Greek gymnasium and Roman baths and Jews had to accept the disadvantage and cultural pressure resulting from circumcision.

The precariousness of circumcision in ancient times was especially visible during historical instability such as the religious conflicts which Antiochus IV Epiphanes (176/5-163 CE) initiated. He even executed women who circumcised their children and babies marked with the covenant sign were put to death (1 Macc. 1:60-62). Hence, circumcision, which had become an essential expression of Jewishness and a national religion, was increasingly seen as worth dying for. In addition to this, Hadrian, the Roman emperor from 117 to 138, limited circumcision, which even made this practice a ground for persecution (Ferguson, 1993:513). Circumcision accordingly was an unacceptable rite in the period and involved pressure and persecution – not necessarily implying violence but more often social ostracism. Jews, however,

endeavoured to uphold circumcision despite cultural pressure because they understood it as a sign of the covenant between God and Israel.

The consequences of the cultural pressure and because of Hellenistic sensibilities, some Jews were led to come to regard circumcision as a ridiculous rite. Thus the severe social pressure against circumcision in the Hellenistic Roman period influenced some Jews to associate more strongly with Hellenistic Roman culture, and to cease practising circumcision (Hall, 1992:1029). Many Jews also restored their foreskins (1 Macc. 1:15).

In this situation, some tried to defend circumcision although Judaism was continually under pressure because of circumcision. Philo tried to defend circumcision on other grounds, insisting that circumcision was hygienically necessary, which made circumcision acceptable for a priestly people, and that circumcision gives birth to higher thoughts and ensures a richer progeny (Meyer, 1964:79). Philo also explained that circumcision combats sensuality, but he resisted the idea that the power of procreation conferred divine likeness (Meyer, 1964:79). This means that Philo seemed to emphasise both spiritual and physical circumcision. In this sense, Philo says that the real proselyte did not circumcise his uncircumcision but his passions, although he probably wished proselytes to submit to circumcision (Betz, 1979).

This approach to circumcision seems to be more of a form of apology for full conversion than the covenant-based form of circumcision. Josephus explains that one could not be thoroughly Jewish unless one was circumcised (Ant. 20.38). Circumcision after all, was the mark that distinguished Gentile proselytes from others. The meaning of circumcision in Judaism at the very least meant that it was a rite of conversion to become a Jew (Ferguson, 1993:512). Thus circumcision was an obstacle to apologetics in the Hellenistic Roman period and also limited missionary work and propaganda. On the other hand, other groups in Judaism indicated the limitation of circumcision in terms of full conversion. For them, the rite of circumcision could not eliminate the genealogical distinction between Jew and Gentile (Thiessen, 2010:177). Regarding this meaning, Thiessen (2010) analyses the meaning of circumcision in the Old Testament, early Judaism and early Christianity. His study shows that the meaning of circumcision in Judaism is not the rite of

conversion to Judaism, and that this meaning affected the meaning of circumcision in early Christianity (Acts 7, 21). His research shows the limitation of the meaning of circumcision.

Lastly, circumcision in Judaism also had a figurative understanding derived from Jeremiah (Jer. 4:4, 6:10). Jeremiah introduced the figurative understanding of circumcision that is circumcision of the heart. This meant that some did not belong to God if they lived according to their own will despite physical circumcision. Jeremiah therefore preached removing the foreskins of the heart. In the Hellenistic period, however, the figurative understanding of circumcision was banished from official theology (Meyer, 1964:80) and physical circumcision was emphasised in terms of the covenant of the Jews and the full conversion of Gentiles.

The result was that circumcision in Judaism was consistent with circumcision in the Old Testament, with circumcision in Judaism having three meanings, namely the covenantal, the apologetic and the figurative meanings. In Judaism, the significance of circumcision refers to a preconditioned sign and seal of participation in the covenant between God and Abraham. In other words, circumcision was the identity marker of the people of the covenant (Gen. 17:9-14) (Dunn, 1998:356), so that Gentiles who wanted to convert to Judaism had to be circumcised. Understanding circumcision as covenantal and apologetic, related the circumcision to physical external features. The figurative understanding, though, plays a pivotal role in theological significance. The emphasis on circumcision of the heart as derived from Jeremiah indicates that the figurative understanding of circumcision is probably as important as physical circumcision in the Old Testament. This emphasis on figurative circumcision in the Old Testament was transmitted to Judaism during the Hellenistic Roman period. As circumcision in Judaism is the key concept of this study, these three understandings of circumcision play a pivotal role in interpretation in Galatians.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Paul also contends the figurative use of circumcision in his letters. In Rom. 2:28-29 Paul emphasises circumcision of the heart and then Paul regards circumcision of the heart as redemption by Christ. Paul also insists that the physical circumcision does not matter in faith in Christ. Paul focuses on the figurative understanding of circumcision.

### 2.2.3 Persecution in Galatians<sup>5</sup>

The study of circumcision in the Hellenistic Roman period involves persecution, inter alia under Antiochus IV Epiphanes and Hadrian. Section 2.2, above, has shown that the prohibition of circumcision and cultural pressure resulted in many Jews experiencing ridicule because of circumcision. While persecution was experienced under Greek as well as Roman governments, the focus here is more on the persecution of Christians by Jews, as referenced in Acts 5:17 to 42; 6:8 to 8:1; 17:1 to 14; 18:12 to 17 and 21:27 to 36; 2 Cor. 11:24; Gal. 5:11 and 6:12; and 1 Thess. 2:14 to 16. The researcher discusses the persecution of Christians in the context of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. This persecution resulted from preaching a gospel without circumcision. The focus therefore is on Paul's persecution of God's church (Gal. 1), the persecution of Paul (Gal. 5:11; 2 Cor. 11:24, 26), and persecution of other Christians (Gal. 6:12).

Firstly, when it comes to Paul's persecution, Paul admitted that he had persecuted the church of God (Gal.1:13) (Moo, 2013:114). Paul, as mentioned, knew that he was known to Christians as a persecutor of the church (Gal. 1:23). Paul also described to them what he did to those who believed in Jesus and why he did so: "I advanced in Judaism beyond many among my people of the same age, for I was far more zealous for the traditions of my ancestors" (Gal. 1:14). Paul characterises himself as passionately zealous for the Torah prior to his encounter with Christ (De Silva, 2004:478). Paul therefore persecuted those who believed in Jesus because of his zeal for the tradition of his ancestors. Paul accordingly gained a reputation in Judea as a persecutor (Watson, 2007:82). In addition, the persecution resulted from an uncompromising position with regard to the law. The law resembles the covenant with God for the blessing of His chosen people, and also a means of life in distinguishing between the chosen people and the sinful nations (Becker, 1993:67). According to Acts 15:1, the Jewish leaders were adamant that one could only be

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<sup>5</sup> In this section persecution in Galatians is explained. Persecution in Galatians is related to Paul's position on circumcision. Paul's position on circumcision in Galatians is that circumcision does not matter in becoming God's people (Gal. 5:6, 6:15). Paul's position on circumcision in Galatians and elsewhere in the New Testament texts (1 Cor. 7:18, 19; Phil. 3:3) is that the significance of circumcision is not in keeping physical circumcision, but rather walking in the Spirit and having faith (Moorthy 2014:217).

saved if circumcised according to the custom of Moses. Paul was a Pharisee before conversion, so he probably held the same position as the Pharisees with regard to the law and circumcision (Schnelle, 2005:64). Therefore Paul, in his zeal for Jewish tradition, persecuted the believers in Jesus, the church of God.

The persecutors of Paul are mentioned in Galatians, but they are not identified. According to Paul's writing about the persecution (Gal. 5:11), though, the persecutors are likely to have been those from the Jewish community who insisted that Gentiles needed to be part of Jewish life for full conversion. Like Paul during his life in Judaism, the persecutors had zeal for God and thus persecuted Paul (De Silva, 2004:479). They also informed the Galatian churches that males had to submit to circumcision to ensure full participation in the life of the Christian community (Watson, 2007:114), but Paul did not teach Jewish life or circumcision to the Galatian churches in teaching the gospel. Hence Paul did not preach circumcision to the Gentiles, and Jews persecuted Paul. In this sense it is obvious that the persecution and affliction of Paul resulted from preaching the gospel without demanding circumcision.

Persecution of other Jewish Christians might have been practised by Jews from the same group as those who persecuted Paul. In Galatians, other Jewish Christians might refer to Paul's opponents. They were at risk of persecution unless they preached circumcision, therefore they preached circumcision as a way of avoiding persecution. Hence, they preached the gospel as requiring circumcision in opposition to Paul. By this, they could avoid persecution by Jews. According to this view, Paul was persecuted because he preached the gospel of the cross (Gal. 5:11), while his opponents avoided persecution and thus abolished the scandal of the cross (Gal. 6:12) (Schnelle, 2005: 431).

Paul and other followers of Jesus who did not insist on circumcision appear to have been persecuted by Jews. Jews forced Gentiles to submit to circumcision in order to become proselytes and join the Jewish community (Ferguson, 1993:512). Joining the Jewish community meant submitting to circumcision, but Jews persecuted Paul and other Jesus followers for not preaching circumcision. In this regard Paul proclaimed the gospel without circumcision despite persecution, while other Christians or Paul's opponents proclaimed the gospel with circumcision in order to avoid persecution by

Jews (Gal. 6:12). Therefore, persecution on account of a position on circumcision was a threat, not for Paul only, but also for other Christians. In this sense it is apparent that there was persecution related to circumcision in Paul's time.

Persecution was related to circumcision in Paul's time. It resulted especially, because of preaching the circumcision-free gospel, or law-free gospel. In Judaism, community circumcision was a very essential factor in the covenant of God and in the Jewish lifestyle. Paul had also persecuted believers in Jesus during his life in Judaism (Moo, 2013:99). Paul mentions that he persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it (Gal. 1:13). Before Paul's conversion, he regarded circumcision as a very important factor, both theologically and ethically. Like Paul in Judaism, some Jews thus persecuted Paul and those who believed in Jesus through zeal for God and the law (De Silva, 2004:479). Gal. 5:11 presents Paul's action in accepting persecution because of not demanding circumcision, but Gal. 6:12 indicates that the opponents had a desire to avoid persecution (Bruce, 1982:237). It is shown in the letter that persecution because of circumcision existed.

### **2.3 Chapter Summary**

In this chapter the researcher has explained selected interpretations of Galatians derived from commentaries on the text, and the context of circumcision and persecution in terms of a study of the background to the letter to the Galatians. Various interpretations of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 from the selected commentaries on Galatians were presented.

Bruce (1982) interprets Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 according to the traditional view. Betz (1979) also takes a traditional view of circumcision in interpreting Galatians according to the genre of ancient rhetorical criticism, regarding circumcision as a requirement for salvation. Longenecker (1990) provides interpretations of these verses from a reformed perspective. The traditional interpretations emphasise the theological significance of circumcision for salvation. Dunn (1993), in addition, suggests understanding circumcision from the position of the new perspective on Paul. Also from the influence the new perspective on Paul, Nanos (2002) and Oakes (2015)

reconstruct the historical situation of Galatians. Interpretations relying on the new perspective on Paul focus on Judaism in the first century. Tolmie provides an interpretation of these verses according to Paul's rhetorical strategy in the writing of the letter to the Galatians.

This research presents the background to circumcision and persecution with the help of these and other interpretations since these concepts play a role in this study. In order to understand the background of circumcision in Paul's time, this chapter has explained circumcision as recorded in the Old Testament and some prevailing tendencies regarding circumcision in Judaism. Circumcision in Judaism is consistent with circumcision in the Old Testament. Circumcision in Judaism also had three significant meanings, the covenantal, the apologetic and the figurative. Circumcision in Judaism referred to the sign of the covenant that God entered into with Abraham. Circumcision reminded Jews of God's blessing. In other words, circumcision signified the identity marker of God's people (Gen. 17:9 to 14), therefore circumcision was seen to enable Gentiles to become full proselytes in Judaism. Thus, covenantal and apologetic circumcision seems to refer to the physical external feature and the figurative understanding plays an important role with regard to the theological significance of circumcision. The concept of circumcision of the heart is derived from Jeremiah. The emphasis on circumcision of the heart indicates that the figurative understanding of circumcision is as important as physical circumcision in the Old Testament. The three meanings of circumcision play a pivotal role in understanding circumcision in Galatians.

The Jewish community persecuted Paul and other Christians because of circumcision, according to Paul's claims in Galatians. As Paul had persecuted others who believed in Jesus because of his zeal for the tradition of the fathers (Gal. 1:13), some Jews persecuted Paul and other Christians. Accordingly, persecution was a threat to Paul and other Christians, but Paul proclaimed the gospel without circumcision despite this persecution, while other Christians or Paul's opponents in Galatians proclaimed the gospel with circumcision in order to avoid persecution by the Jews.

On the basis of the initial studies presented in this chapter, I present the results of my exegesis of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 in the following chapter.

## Chapter 3

### Text analysis of Gal 5(11) and 6(12)

This chapter examines the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. In order to examine the meaning of these verses properly, Gal. 5:11 is studied in the context of Gal. 5:1-12 and Gal. 6:12 is analysed in the context of Gal. 6:11-16. This chapter thus presents an exegesis conducted on Gal. 5:1-12 and 6:11-16 in order to formulate a better understanding of the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12.

#### 3.1 Exegesis of Gal. 5:1-6

The researcher conducted an exegesis of 5:1-6. In terms of demarcation of sections in Galatians, Gal. 5:1-12 seems to pose the most problems (Tolmie, 2005:177). Tolmie (2005:177) presents six ways in which scholars demarcate these verses.<sup>6</sup> Tolmie thus regards the verses of 5:2 to 6 and of 7 to 12 as two separate units. Tolmie separates this section from verse 2 because a change in rhetorical strategy occurs in verse 2, starting with “[I]δε ἐγὼ Παῦλος” (Tolmie, 2005:177). However, the researcher begins by focusing on Gal. 5:1, because the first verse in Galatians Chapter 5 is related to the beginning of Gal. 5, in spite of Gal. 5:1 seeming to be the conclusion of the allegorical narrative of Sarah and Hagar. Betz (1979:255) explains that, though there is no transitional phrase or particle for the starting point in Gal 5:1, Paul emphatically places verse 1 at the beginning of the section on ethical exhortation and thus in the centre of the argument. Hence the researcher, in examining verse 1, regards it as the beginning of the ethical exhortation.

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<sup>6</sup> The six ways Tolmie (2005:177) identifies are as follows: 1) 5:1-12 as a single unit; 2) 5:2-12 as a single unit; 3) 5:1-6 and 7-12 as two separate units; 4) 5:2-6 and 7-12 as two separate units; 5) 5:2-10 as a separate unit, followed by 5:11-6:13 (subdivided as 5:11-13a; 5:13b-6:10 and 6:11-13) as a separate unit; and 6) 4:21-5:6 as one unit.

### 3.1.1 Gal. 5:1

Τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν· στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε. (Gal. 5:1)

“For freedom Christ set you free. Then stand firm and do not be subject to a yoke of slavery again.” (Gal. 5:1)<sup>7</sup>

This verse is divided into two phrases: 1a (τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ ἡμᾶς Χριστὸς ἠλευθέρωσεν) and 1b (στήκετε οὖν καὶ μὴ πάλιν ζυγῷ δουλείας ἐνέχεσθε). In 1a, the main theme is freedom. Gal. 5:1a seems to be related to the conclusion of the narrative of Sarah and Hagar according to “freedom”. However, Betz (1979:177) and Longenecker (1990:223) propose that freedom is not only the main theme of the allegory in the previous chapter, but also of theological significance for believers in Christ. Thus freedom is also the basic concept underlying Paul’s argument in the whole letter (Betz, 1979: 255). Gal. 5:1b begins with the imperative στήκετε (“stand firm”). In Paul’s letters, this verb is used as ethical teaching in hortatory contexts (1 Cor. 16:13; Phil. 1:27, 4:1; 1 Thess. 3:8) (Longenecker, 1990:224; Moo, 2013:320). Accordingly this verse seems to be regarded as the beginning of the hortatory section, so that the researcher includes the verse in the section on ethical teaching. Therefore Gal. 5:1 plays a pivotal role, not only in concluding the allegory, but also for the beginning of the ensuing ethical teaching.

The notion of freedom is repeated at the end of Gal. 4:31 and is used as the first word in Gal. 5:1a. The figure of speech is anastrophe, which is a kind of hyperbaton and means that a word in the final position in a previous clause is repeated in the initial position in the next clause (Tolmie, 2005:276). In Gal. 5:1a, then, freedom appears at the beginning and at the end of the sentence through the noun ἐλευθερία (freedom) and the verb of ἠλευθέρωσεν (to set free). It is called a *cyclus* that is *inclusio* in Latin, which means that the same word is repeated in the beginning of the sentence and at the end of the sentence. Tolmie (2005:176) insists that these techniques enhance the perceptibility of the notion of freedom, thus focusing the attention of the audience very effectively on it. Paul’s use of the rhetorical figure aims to help the audience to

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<sup>7</sup> The researcher presents his own interpretation in following each verse.

understand the theme of freedom effectively. This verse also begins with the imperative *στήκετε*. Paul calls on his readers to “stand” in the freedom that Christ has won for them and uses this verb to exhort the readers (Moo, 2013:320). This verse thus may be regarded as the beginning of the ethical teaching. In verse 1, already, Paul begins to write exhortations to the Galatians. Paul describes the exhortation in verse 1b by writing “then stand firm and do not be subject to a yoke of slavery again” in the following verses.

### 3.1.2 Gal. 5:2

Ἴδε ἐγὼ Παῦλος λέγω ὑμῖν ὅτι ἐὰν περιτέμνησθε, Χριστὸς ὑμᾶς οὐδὲν ὠφελήσει. (Gal. 5:2)

“Look! I, Paul, says to you that if you get circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you.” (Gal. 5:2)

Verse 2 contains a strong warning (Tolmie, 2005:179). The verse begins with *ἴδε*, which is used for drawing attention to what follows. This means it is appropriate to use for the beginning of Paul’s argument. The word *ἴδε*, thus, plays a role in showing the beginning of the argument and drawing the audience’s attention. Also, Paul uses *ἐγὼ* and *Παῦλος*, which are used for emphasis. With the words *ἐγὼ* and *Παῦλος* Paul emphasises his view of circumcision against his opponents’ view of circumcision. Paul, thus, mentions that if you get circumcised, Christ will be of no benefit to you. In this verse Paul shows the relationship between circumcision and Christ. This emphasises that Christ and circumcision are not coexistent in any way. Paul therefore warns the Galatians not to get circumcised. The opponents’ teaching of circumcision does not belong to the true gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7 and 2:5),<sup>8</sup> which means their advice is not good for the Galatians. In this verse the first three words *Ἴδε*, *ἐγὼ* and *Παῦλος* are used as part of the rhetorical technique in order to capture the audiences’

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<sup>8</sup> The researcher interprets *ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου* as the true gospel because it is possible to interpret this genitive as the attributed genitive. The attributed genitive is defined as the head noun, rather than the genitive, is functioning (in sense) as an attributive adjective (Wallace, 2011:89). The researcher thus regards the previous *ἀλήθεια* as an adjective, and then interprets *ἡ ἀλήθεια τοῦ εὐαγγελίου* as the true gospel.

attention and help the audience to focus on the warning. Tolmie (2005:179) interprets these words as a way of enhancing the effectiveness of the warning.

### 3.1.3 Gal. 5:3

μαρτύρομαι δὲ πάλιν παντὶ ἀνθρώπῳ περιτεμνομένῳ ὅτι ὀφειλέτης ἐστὶν ὅλον τὸν νόμον ποιῆσαι. (Gal. 5:3)

“And I testify again to everyone who receives circumcision that he is under obligation to practice the whole law.” (Gal. 5:3)

Paul continuously warns the Galatians against following the message of his opponents. Paul testifies that everyone who receives circumcision is under obligation to keep the whole law. Paul is warning them that, if they decide to be circumcised, they have to be well aware of the fact that they will be obligated to do everything the law requires (Tolmie, 2005:180).

Paul uses several techniques in this verse. He uses the verb μαρτύρομαι, which is an emphatic affirmation in the sense of “insist” (Tolmie, 2005:179). He uses this verb in order to draw attention to what he says (Moo, 2013:322). With this word Paul is emphasising what he is saying. This verse also contains alliteration in the repetition of the same letter, in the repetition of π-sounds (mention the p-words in brackets).

In verse 3, Paul reveals his view of circumcision clearly. He indicates the insufficiency of his opponents’ teaching, emphasising that adding circumcision to the gospel is unnecessary.

### 3.1.4 Gal. 5:4

κατηργήθητε ἀπὸ Χριστοῦ, οἵτινες ἐν νόμῳ δικαιοῦσθε, τῆς χάριτος ἐξέπεσατε. (Gal. 5:4)

“You were alienated from Christ, you who are justified by the law, you have fallen from grace.” (Gal. 5:4)

In verse 4 the personal pronoun is changed into the second person plural “you”. Paul warns the audience more directly and strongly in this verse that everyone who tries to be justified by the law is alienated from Christ. In verse 2 Paul warns that Christ and circumcision do not take the same direction, so that Paul explains Christ and circumcision as divergent. The third warning reveals clearly that those who are justified by the law no longer have a relationship with Christ. This means they are severed from the relationship with Christ.

In this verse the rhetorical technique is still strongly at work. Paul uses words suggesting a similar idea in the beginning and at the end, that is, *κατηργήθητε* and *ἐξέπεσατε*, which mean to sever and to fall away. This repetition emphasises that following the message of his opponents severs their relation with Christ.

Paul accordingly indicates that circumcision diverges from Christ. Through this warning in Gal. 5:2-4, Paul reveals that circumcision is not a salvific requirement for the Galatian audience. Therefore Paul suggests proof that external circumcision is not a sign of God’s children for salvation in the ethical section. Paul criticises his opponents’ message which demands that the Galatians receive circumcision in the gospel as wrong and not theologically true to the gospel.

### 3.1.5 Gal. 5:5

ἡμεῖς γὰρ πνεύματι ἐκ πίστεως ἐλπίδα δικαιοσύνης ἀπεκδεχόμεθα. (Gal. 5:5)

“For we, with the Spirit by faith, are waiting for hope of righteousness.”

(Gal. 5:5)

Paul’s warnings are followed by a positive explanation of the opposite point of view in verses 5 and 6 (Tolmie, 2005:181). Verse 5 begins with *γάρ* and the personal pronoun is changed to first person plural *ἡμεῖς* (we), which is inclusive language. In verse 5 Paul provides the positive view. Paul’s logic is the fact that he suggests concepts opposite to circumcision and the law. These concepts are Spirit, righteousness and faith with futurist eschatological context (Tolmie, 205:181). The

interpretation of the verse is that, for we, with the Spirit, by faith, are waiting for hope of righteousness.

In this verse the rhetorical technique comes to the fore. Paul begins with ἡμεῖς, which might be omitted. This also is a kind of hyperbaton. Paul uses ἡμεῖς in the beginning to focus the change of the positive view.

In verse 5 Paul insists that what the true gospel is, is not circumcision and justification by the law, but waiting for the hope of righteousness with the Spirit by faith. This is of course related to the purpose of Paul's argument in this letter, which is that Paul asserts that Galatians should not receive his opponents' advice, but rather remember the gospel as preached by Paul.

### 3.1.6 Gal. 5:6

ἐν γὰρ Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ οὔτε περιτομή τι ἰσχύει οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ πίστις δι' ἀγάπης ἐνεργουμένη. (Gal. 5:6)

“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision count for anything, but faith working through love” (Gal. 5:6)

Verse 6 also begins with γὰρ. Dunn (1993:270) insists that γὰρ indicates that it is the logical complement of the previous statement. The previous verse shows what believers in the true gospel do, which is that they are waiting for the hope of righteousness, with the Spirit, by faith. Verse 6, thus, shows Paul's understanding of circumcision. This means that circumcision does not matter; what matters is faith working through love. This understanding of circumcision also makes perfect sense in light of the concern that Paul presents in verses 2 to 4 (Moo, 2013:329). Circumcision is not a requirement for salvation and the Christian way of life.

Rhetorical figures occur in this verse. The first one is hyperbaton. Paul places the phrase ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ at the beginning of the verse, which means his focus is on Christ Jesus in his argument. Secondly, Paul uses antithesis as a tool for emphasis. Antithesis (οὔτε... οὔτε... ἀλλά) occurs several times in the letter (1:1, 11-12, 15-17;

4:14; 5:6; 6:15) (Tolmie, 2005:249). Tolmie (2005:34) explains that this structure is more persuasive than a mere positive statement. Paul, thus, emphasises his view regarding circumcision in this verse by using antithesis. Paul stresses that the most important thing for believers in Christ is not circumcision nor uncircumcision, but faith working through love. In this regard Paul's intention is to preach to the Galatians and persuade them not to accept his opponents' message, but to remain in the gospel that Paul preaches.

## 3.2 Exegesis of Gal. 5:7-12

In the previous section, Paul mentions that the message of his opponents demands unnecessary requirements for belief in Christ, revealing the insufficiency of a gospel that requires circumcision. In Gal. 5:7-12 Paul vilifies his opponents (Tolmie, 2005:183). Tolmie (2005:183) explains that a change of rhetorical strategy is revealed in this section. Paul attacks the teaching of his opponents while recognising its persuasive power (De Boer, 2011:319). In this section Paul criticises the teaching of his opponents, thereby indicating its danger to the Galatians.

### 3.2.1 Gal. 5:7

Ἐτρέχετε καλῶς· τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψεν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι; (Gal. 5:7)  
 “You were running well. Who hindered you from being obedient to the truth?” (Gal. 5:7)

In verse 7 Paul begins with the metaphor of running a race “ἐτρέχετε καλῶς”. This presents their progress before the Galatians were influenced by the opponents (Tolmie, 2005:183). This metaphor infers a negative meaning, in the sense that Tolmie (2005:183) indicates that it suggests a basis for rebuking the Galatians for wasting the good thing they had done, as Paul did in Gal. 3:3. Also, the metaphor is followed by a rhetorical question “τίς ὑμᾶς ἐνέκοψεν τῇ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι;”. The rhetorical question means that someone hindered the Galatians from being obedient to the truth. With this rhetorical question, Paul views his opponents as those who hindered the

Galatians from being obedient to the truth. The truth is related to the true gospel (Gal. 2:5, 14). In this sense, the truth might also refer to the message of Paul's gospel. In the rhetorical question Paul affirms that his gospel is the gospel of the truth, but the opponents' gospel is not of the truth.

Paul uses the metaphor of a race and a rhetorical question to enhance his position that the gospel he preached is the truth. This purpose of the metaphor and the rhetorical question is that Paul contrasts the time when the Galatians accepted Paul's gospel with the time when they followed the different gospel that required their circumcision. In this way Paul aims to reveal that the message of his opponents is an obstacle to the truth. Therefore, by presenting the teaching of his opponents deviant from the truth and that his opponents in effect hinder the Galatians from obeying the truth, Paul informs the Galatians that they should not accept the different gospel, but to accept his version of the gospel.

### 3.2.2 Gal. 5:8

ἡ πεισμονὴ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ καλοῦντος ὑμᾶς. (Gal. 5:8)

“the persuasion is not from him who calls you” (Gal. 5:8)

Verse 8 begins with πεισμονή, which is a NT *hapax legomenon* (Tolmie, 2005:183). This means the word occurs only once in the New Testament. The word is used as paronomasia to support Paul's logic: πείθεσθαι in verse 7 and πεισμονή in verse 8. Paul uses two words with the same root. The meaning of πεισμονή is interpreted as persuasion. The persuasion refers to the message from those who hinder the Galatians from being obedient to the truth. Verse 8 means that the persuasion is not from God (Bruce, 1982:234). In this verse, Paul therefore insists that the message of his opponents does not reflect the truth from him who calls the Galatians. Paul's assertion accordingly is meant to indicate what the persuasion is, in order to help the Galatians not to accept a different gospel, but the true gospel.

### 3.2.3 Gal. 5:9

μικρὰ ζύμη ὅλον τὸ φύραμα ζυμοῖ. (Gal. 5:9)

“a little leaven ferments the whole dough” (Gal. 5:9)

Verse 9 contains a proverb, namely “a little leaven ferments the whole dough”. This means that a small amount of yeast eventually permeates a lump of dough in its entirety (De Boer, 2011:321). Paul applies this proverb to the situation in Galatia (Tolmie, 2005:184). Tolmie (2005:184) suggests that the interpretation of this verse is related to the situation of the Galatian churches, so that ζύμη refers to Paul’s opponents or their teaching. Dunn (1993:275) also interprets ζύμη as a symbol of something unacceptable to God, seeing fermentation as a process of corruption. If the leaven is the message of the opponents, this verse might mean that the message of the opponents leads the Galatians into a way of corruption. Therefore the opponents’ teaching is not the truth, but a view that corrupts the Galatians. In using this proverb, Paul warns that the Galatians should not accept the opponents’ view.

### 3.2.4 Gal. 5:10

ἐγὼ πέποιθα εἰς ὑμᾶς ἐν κυρίῳ ὅτι οὐδὲν ἄλλο φρονήσετε· ὁ δὲ ταράσσων ὑμᾶς βαστάσει τὸ κρίμα, ὅστις ἐάν ᾤ. (Gal. 5:10)

“I trust in you in the Lord that you will think no other view, and one who disturbs you will bear the judgment, whoever he is” (Gal. 5:10)

Verse 10 presents the confidence formula, which is “ἐγὼ πέποιθα” (White, 1972:64). Paul uses πέποιθα, which is the perfect form of the verb πείθω. This means “I am confident” or “I trust in”.<sup>9</sup> The verb πείθω is generally interpreted as “I persuade”. However, this perfect tense of πείθω is interpreted as “I am confident” or “I trust in”. This verse also begins with ἐγώ, an emphatic “I”, in order to emphasise the expression of confidence. Paul, thus, expresses his confidence that the audience will understand and do something in the Lord, which is not to follow the message of Paul’s opponents, but to follow Paul’s gospel message. In relation to the previous verse, Paul expects

<sup>9</sup> In this study the researcher interprets πέποιθα in verse 10 as “I trust in”.

the Galatians to understand what the truth is, which signifies that Paul's gospel is the truth and the teaching of the opponents is not truth. Paul persuades the audience not to yield to the view of the opponents, but to his gospel, which is the truth.

In verse 10a Paul uses a rhetorical technique, which is an expression of confidence (Tolmie, 2005:184). This rhetorical technique functions in a way that suggests that Paul acts like a father who is speaking to his child. Paul uses this technique to encourage the Galatians to do what he wants them to do (Tolmie, 2005:184).

Verse 10b explains "and one who disturbs you will bear the judgment, whoever he is". Paul uses the participle *ταράσσων* (one who disturbs) that is used in Gal. 1:7. This word refers to the general character of Paul's opponents. Paul also uses *κρίμα*, which means judgment. Here judgment refers to God's judgment. In this verse Paul, then, describes opponents as those who disturb the Galatians and as those who will be punished by God (Martyn, 1998:475). In this sense Paul provides some clues about the identity of the opponents, and then Paul explains that the opponents will apparently be punished by God, because their message is not from God (Gal. 5:8).

### 3.2.5 Gal. 5:11

Ἐγὼ δέ, ἀδελφοί, εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω, τί ἔτι διώκομαι; ἄρα κατήγγηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ. (Gal. 5:11)

"And brothers if I preach still circumcision, why am I persecuted still?

Then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished." (Gal. 5:11)

Verse 11 also begins with *ἐγώ* that is emphatic "I", just like verse 10. This emphatic "I" highlights that Paul's view is in focus in this verse. Paul also uses *ἀδελφοί*, which is to indicate affection (Tolmie, 2005:187). With the use of rhetorical techniques, Paul expresses the significance of his argument in this verse. With these techniques in the beginning of the verse, Paul shows his affection for the Galatians.

De Boer (2011:322) explains that the emphatic *ἐγώ* (I) and affectionate *ἀδελφοί* (brothers) is used in order to signal the absurdity of the allegation. An *εἰ* clause in verse 11, which is a "real" condition in form but an "unreal" condition in meaning,

indicates that the opponents are claiming that Paul still proclaims circumcision (De Boer, 2011:322). Thus, the sense of verse 11a is that Paul responds to the allegation. Dunn (1993:279) suggests that Paul responds to the accusation of inconsistency, which is that Paul preached circumcision to Jewish Christians, but preached a circumcision-free gospel to Gentiles. However, Tolmie (2005:186) explains this verse with the rhetorical question in verse 11b “why am I persecuted still?” suggests its interpretation to be that, if it was true that Paul still preached circumcision, Paul would no longer have been persecuted, as the stumbling block of the cross would then have been removed. Tolmie (2005:186) indicates that Paul uses this rhetorical question as a proof that he no longer preached circumcision. Accordingly, Paul’s main point in this verse is to indicate to the Galatians that he no longer proclaims circumcision, in order to insist that the allegation is absurd (De Boer, 2011:323). Paul also presents the fact that he preaches the cross despite persecution.

The second point of emphasis in this verse is 11c, which is ἄρα κατήργηται τὸ σκάνδαλον τοῦ σταυροῦ (“then the stumbling block of the cross has been abolished”). This clause begins with ἄρα, which is interpreted as “therefore”, “then”, or “so”. Longenecker (1990:233) understands this clause as Paul’s conclusion to the entire discussion in Gal. 1:6 to 5:11. Longenecker (1990:233) indicates that ἄρα is used for signalling the conclusion of the section. Betz (1979:269) suggests that this particle, ἄρα, may conclude Gal. 5:1-11 or be the reason for what is stated in 5:11a. Betz (1979:269) also explains that this clause is interpreted as the end and conclusion to the discussion on circumcision in Gal. 5:2-11. According to Betz, this clause thus plays a role in concluding the passage regarding Paul’s view on circumcision.

De Boer (2011:323) contends that the cross, from Paul’s point of view, is an offense – not in some general sense but specifically to Jews, including Christian Jews such as Paul’s opponents, because it has effected the destruction of the law as the reliable basis for justification and life. Paul’s conclusion points out that, if the Galatians submit to circumcision and obedience to the Torah, the stumbling block of the cross is removed for the Galatians (Betz, 1979:269). In this sense it is revealed that the cross is a stumbling block to the law in Jewish life. It may be contended from this verse that preaching only the cross in the gospel is a stumbling block in Jewish life, but adding circumcision to the cross gospel that Paul had preached before would remove a

stumbling block in Jewish life. Verse 11 therefore plays a role in the conclusion of this section and then Paul's view of circumcision apparently is revealed. Paul's view of the circumcision gospel is opposed to the grace of Christ (Gal. 5:4). Including the requirement of circumcision in the gospel is to sever the relationship with Christ.

Paul uses the rhetorical technique to present his view regarding circumcision. He places ἐγώ at the beginning, using hyperbaton, thereby emphasising his stance with regard to circumcision. Then the rhetorical question suggests that he is still being persecuted because of circumcision. According to Tolmie (2005:186), Paul uses this rhetorical question as proof of his attitude towards circumcision. Paul insists that he is preaching circumcision-free gospel despite persecution.

### 3.2.6 Gal. 5:12

Ὅφελον καὶ ἀποκόψονται οἱ ἀναστατοῦντες ὑμᾶς. (Gal. 5:12)

“I wish that those who disturb you would cut (it) off.” (Gal. 5:12)

Verse 12 is regarded as irony or sarcasm. Betz (1979:269) explains that Paul adds a joke in verse 12. Paul, then, presents the opponents as those who disturb the Galatians in this passage. Paul regards them as trouble makers in the Galatian churches. Finally, Paul rebukes them and sarcastically suggests that they cut away the complete bodily part rather than just circumcising it. Tolmie (2005:188) explains the reason why Paul uses this expression: it is a powerful technique for creating distance between the Galatians and the opponents (Witherington III, 1998:375). The primary aim of sarcasm is to serve as a dismissal of the opponents' view regarding circumcision. Paul uses sarcasm in this verse in order to present his view of the opponents' teaching. The sarcasm is aimed at helping the Galatians to distance themselves from the opponents.

## 3.3 Exegesis of Gal. 6:11-16

This section is placed in the closing of the body of the letter. Weima (1994) conducted a close analysis of this section using epistolary analysis since he regarded

this section as an important part of the letter. Betz (1979:313) also emphasises this section as a important part of the interpretation of Galatians though he analyses it using rhetorical criticism. Accordingly, this section plays an important role in the interpretation of the letter. The researcher examined the exegesis of Gal. 6:11-16.

### 3.3.1 Gal. 6:11

Ἴδετε πηλίκοις ὑμῶν γράμμασιν ἔγραψα τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ. (Gal. 6:11)

“See what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.” (Gal. 6:11)

Verse 11 begins with ἴδετε (“see”), which is the second person plural aorist imperative. This functions as a tool to arouse attention and to highlight the importance of what follows (Longenecker, 1990:289). Paul then uses τῇ ἐμῇ χειρὶ (“with my own hand”). According to Longenecker (1990:289), Paul seems to have followed the practice of using an amanuensis for the writing of his letters. Betz (1979:312) explains that this phrase conforms to the epistolary conventions of the time to sum up its main points. This verse, thus, is regarded as a recapitulation section (Weima, 1994:174).

The correlative pronoun πηλίκοις in the dative (“with what large”) and the dative plural noun γράμμασιν (“letters”) have been interpreted in a variety of ways (Longenecker, 1990:289). However, most scholars (Bruce, 1982:268; Betz, 1979:314; Dunn, 1993:335; Martyn, 1998:560) assume that the use of this phrase seems to be interpreted best as another way of emphasising the importance of the ideas Paul expresses in this final part of the letter (Tolmie, 2005:221). Tolmie (2005:221-22) suggests that verse 11 serves as a very effective strategy in two ways; the first one is the fact that what Paul is now writing would indicate to the Galatians that the letter is almost at the end and this would help to refocus the attention of the audience, which means that it functions in a way similar to the word “finally” in a speech or sermon. The second is that verse 11 functions to indicate that something important is to follow. Thus, Paul with verse 11 leads the audience to expect something important.

### 3.3.2 Gal. 6:12

Ὅσοι θέλουσιν εὐπροσωπῆσαι ἐν σαρκί, οὗτοι ἀναγκάζουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι, μόνον ἵνα τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ μὴ διώκωνται. (Gal. 6:12)

“Those who want to make a good showing in the flesh, these force you to be circumcised, only in order that they may not be persecuted because of the cross of Christ” (Gal. 6:12)

Verse 12 begins with ὅσοι, which introduces a correlative pronoun clause. This correlative pronoun clause indicates the same people as the demonstrative pronoun οὗτοι clause. The verb ἀναγκάζουσιν (“they force”) in the demonstrative pronoun clause is conative present.<sup>10</sup> In this sense these clauses are interpreted to say that those who want to make a good showing in the flesh try to force the Galatians to be circumcised. In the relationship between these clauses the flesh might refer to circumcision. Bruce (1982:268) suggests that while ἐν σαρκί (“in the flesh”) may mean externally, the literal sense of σάρξ cannot be excluded where circumcision is the subject. In these clauses the actions of the opponents therefore are openly revealed as they make the good showing in the flesh and compel the Galatians to be circumcised (Moo, 2013:392). Paul tries to show what the opponents did and do. In this sense, their actions are strongly connected to circumcision. They make a good showing with circumcision and then they force the Galatians to also take part in the ritual. Paul thus indicates that their actions are not on behalf of the Galatians, but on behalf of themselves, mentioning their teaching of circumcision.

Paul uses the purpose clause ἵνα, in order to show the motive of the opponents. In using the purpose clause, Paul presents the motive. The motive is to avoid persecution. Paul indicates that the opponents’ motive is not for the benefit of the Galatians, but for the opponent’s own purposes. In this regard, Paul reveals the real goal of his opponents’ actions and their motive as negative. Paul depicts the position of his

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<sup>10</sup> Wallace (2011:534) defines conative present as the use of the present tense to portray the subject as attempting to do something.

opponents on Gentile circumcision clearly. They tried to compel the Galatians to accept circumcision for their own benefit.

Lastly, Paul presents the cross of Christ as a theological argument. Paul elaborates on the cross of Christ as the central focus of the gospel message (Longenecker, 1990: 292). Paul mentions the cross in Gal. 5:11 and he explains it in Gal. 6:14. In this verse the cross of Christ is the antithesis to observing the law or circumcision. Paul insists that the Galatians should not follow the route of circumcision, but the cross of Christ theologically. Paul also criticises his opponents' actions on ethical grounds, in that they tried to avoid persecution rather than preach the cross of Christ. The cross of Christ therefore is confirmed as a very important theme in Paul's theology and his ethical life.

The rhetorical technique of hyperbaton is used in the ἵνα purpose clause. The separation of the negative μή ("not") from ἵνα ("in order that") is somewhat unusual, for the normal practice in Greek is to place μή in a negative ἵνα purpose clause immediately after ἵνα (Longenecker, 1990:291). Hyperbaton accordingly is used in this clause to emphasise the key issue of Paul's theology, namely the cross of Christ.

### 3.3.3 Gal. 6:13

οὐδὲ γὰρ οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι αὐτοὶ νόμον φυλάσσουσιν ἀλλὰ θέλουσιν ὑμᾶς περιτέμεσθαι, ἵνα ἐν τῇ ὑμετέρᾳ σαρκὶ καυχήσωνται. (Gal. 6:13)  
 "for those who are circumcised themselves do not keep the law, but they want you to be circumcised, in order that they may boast in your flesh."  
 (Gal. 6:13)

Verse 13 begins with γάρ ("for"), which indicates the reason. The postpositive connective γάρ serves to confirm what Paul expressed in the purpose clause of the previous verse (Longenecker, 1990:292). In this verse, Paul, with γάρ, presents another reason to show that the opponents' purpose is not to act on behalf of the Galatians, but for themselves. Paul refers to the opponents as οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι. He does not name his opponents but simply refers to them by the substantival participle

οἱ περιτεμνόμενοι, which is interpreted as “those who belong to the circumcision” or “those who are circumcised” (Longenecker, 1990:292).

Paul states that they, the opponents, do not keep the law. To keep the law is another way of saying to observe the law (Gal. 5:3) (De Boer, 2011:400). Those who force the Galatians to receive circumcision need to observe the whole law (Gal. 5:3). Paul rebukes the opponents’ actions and he teaches the Galatians what he reckons they need to know.

Paul presents the action of the opponents with the adversative ἀλλά.<sup>11</sup> This ἀλλά clause means that the actions of his opponents indicate that they just want the Galatians to be circumcised, though they do not keep the law. In Gal. 6:12, Paul criticises the actions of his opponents.

Paul uses the purpose clause ἵνα clause to reveal his opponents’ real goal. The clause is interpreted as “in order that they may boast in your flesh”. This means that Paul continues to rebuke his opponents on account of their motive. The motive is to boast in the flesh with regard to the circumcision of the Galatians, as flesh in verse 13 may refer to circumcision of Gentile Christians in the Galatian churches. The opponents have the ultimate goal of getting the Galatians to adopt the practice of fleshly circumcision (De Boer, 2011:400). Paul informs the Galatians that his opponents are those who force them (the Galatians) to be circumcised in order to boast about the circumcision of the Galatians. Paul therefore shows that the opponents do not try not to seek the welfare of the Galatians but their own (Nanos, 2002:228).

In Gal. 6:12 and 13 Paul criticises his opponents for their actions in that they boast about the circumcision of Gentile Christians and for their motive, namely that they want to avoid persecution (Longenecker, 1990:290–91). In the ethical sense, Tolmie (2005:223) also insists that Paul has accused his opponents of not being willing to suffer for the cross of Christ. This assertion focuses on the way of life in the cross of Christ. Verses 12 and 13 therefore present Paul’s criticism of his opponents for their actions and motive.

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<sup>11</sup> It appears most frequently as the contrary part to a preceding οὐ (BDF: 448).

### 3.3.4 Gal. 6:14

Ἐμοὶ δὲ μὴ γένοιτο καυχᾶσθαι εἰ μὴ ἐν τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, δι' οὗ ἔμοι κόσμος ἐσταύρωται καὶ γὰρ κόσμῳ. (Gal. 6:14)  
 “May it never be for me to boast except in the cross of our Lord, Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.” (Gal. 6:14)

Verse 14 begins with δέ, which is an adversative particle used as contrast. Paul thus contrasts this verse with the previous verses (12 and 13), which indicates a shift from blaming the opponents for their action and motive to a positive presentation of his own attitude and the gospel as he preaches it (Tolmie, 2005:223). In verse 14, Paul places ἐμοί in a prominent position, which is hyperbaton (Tolmie, 2005:223). This signifies that Paul emphasises his position in this verse. The word ἐμοί is used as the subject of the infinitive καυχᾶσθαι.<sup>12</sup> This means that Paul focuses on his behaviour in comparison with his opponents’ actions and motives highlighted in verses 12 and 13. Paul then repeats the verb καυχόμαι that is used in verse 13. Longenecker (1990:293) suggests that Paul, in verse 14, contrasts wrongful, misguided boasting in verse 13 with boasting in the cross of Christ as rightful, healthy exultation. The optative expression μὴ γένοιτο, which expresses a strong wish, here indicates abhorrence of a statement just made or of an inference that could be falsely drawn from Paul’s teaching (Longenecker, 1990:293). Paul insists that he boasts of nothing except the cross of Christ. Paul’s aim is to boast in the cross of Christ. This is also contrasted with opponents’ actions.

Lastly, Paul uses the preposition διὰ (through) with the genitive as means. The genitive relative pronoun οὗ may be masculine or neuter in gender, and so may refer to either our Lord Jesus Christ or to the cross (Longenecker, 1990:294). In this context, the relative pronoun probably refers to the cross. The interpretation of this

<sup>12</sup> Γένοιτο is often used with the infinitive, and the dative or the accusative is used as the subject of the infinitive (BDF: 409)

prepositional clause is that, by means of the cross of our Lord Christ Jesus, the world has been crucified to me and I have been crucified to the world. De Boer (2011:401) explains the meaning of the world that he has earlier characterised as “Judaism” (1:13-14) and as “work of the law” (2:16; 3:2, 5, 10), which includes circumcision (5:2-4; 6:12-13). Paul thus regards this world as of circumcision and the law. With respect to himself being crucified to the world, that is interpreted as that, for Paul, the world of circumcision and the law has been destroyed through the cross (De Boer, 2011:402). This next clause (καὶ γὰρ κόσμῳ) is related to Gal. 2:19, which is “I have been crucified with Christ”. Paul reveals that through the cross, he has been crucified with respect to the world, which has the meaning of separating Paul in the present from his past as a devotee of the law (De Boer, 2011:402).

In this verse, Paul therefore emphasises that he, unlike to his opponents, has boasted in the cross of Christ, which means that he announces the importance of the cross in the gospel that he preaches. This implies refusing to accept the teaching of his opponents, and following the true gospel. This is Paul’s reason for continuously explaining what is important for the Galatians in the next verse.

### 3.3.5 Gal. 6:15

οὔτε γὰρ περιτομή τί ἐστίν οὔτε ἀκροβυστία ἀλλὰ καινὴ κτίσις. (Gal. 6:15)

“for neither circumcision is anything nor uncircumcision, but the new creation.” (Gal. 6:15)

Verse 15 begins with conjunction γὰρ, which serves to introduce a statement (Longenecker, 1990:296). This statement is very similar to Gal. 5:6, where Paul uses the same words (circumcision and uncircumcision) with the rhetorical tool of antithetic presentation (οὔτε... οὔτε... ἀλλά) (Tolmie, 2005: 223). Tolmie (2005:223) explains that Paul uses an antithetic presentation to focus the attention of the Galatians on the crucial notion of the ‘new creation’. In this regard Paul explains that the focus on circumcision in the gospel of his opponents is unnecessary and meaningless among for believers in Christ. Paul emphasises the new creation in this

verse. The new creation plays a pivotal role in the interpretation of the verse. According to De Boer (2011:402), the religious, ethnic, and cultural distinctions resulting from a world divided between circumcision and uncircumcision have been violently replaced by a new creation. Betz (1979:319) explains that the new creation refers to the basis of Christian boasting in verse 14. This means that Paul explains that the Christian new creation is to live in the context of the Spirit in Christ, not in the context of laws (Longenecker, 1990: 296). In this way Paul connects the new creation to the new identity of those who believe in Jesus.

Paul uses a concise statement to state his view on the Christian life according to the true gospel. Paul insists that the teaching of his opponents that adds circumcision to the gospel preached by Paul is not the true gospel. Paul thus preaches that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is relevant, only the new creation. As Paul reveals that the opponents' action and motive are not to favour the Galatians, but are on their own behalf (Gal. 6:12-13), he, through verses 14 and 15, makes it clear that the teaching of his opponents concerning circumcision is no longer necessary in Christ. The most important thing is to understand the cross of Christ theologically, and living as a new creation ethically.

### 3.3.6 Gal. 6:16

καὶ ὅσοι τῷ κανόνι τούτῳ στοιχήσουσιν, εἰρήνη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς καὶ ἔλεος καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν Ἰσραὴλ τοῦ θεοῦ. (Gal. 6:16)

“and those who follow this rule, peace is on them and mercy, on the Israel of God.” (Gal. 6:16)

Verse 16 is regarded as a blessing. The blessing has rhetorical functions. Tolmie (2005:223-24) indicates that a general blessing functions as a way of encouraging people, because the blessing emphasises the notion of divine favour directed to them in Gal. 1:3, but in this case the blessing is conditional and also changes its rhetorical function significantly. With regard to the rhetorical situation in Galatians, this blessing would imply that this is encouragement to those who follow Paul's gospel, and is a warning to those who follow the advice of the opponents (Tolmie, 2005:224).

Additionally, the verb στοιχήσουσιν is used metaphorically, meaning “be in line with a person or thing (BDAG:946) (De Boer, 2011:403). This verb is also used in Gal. 5:25 where Paul exhorts the Galatians to follow the Spirit. In this regard, following this rule is also related to following the Spirit, so that the Galatians who accept the true gospel try to follow the Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23) and this rule. In this verse, this rule is related to becoming the Israel of God, as noted in the next clause.

The understanding of καί (that is, the third one) and the Israel of God in verse 16 plays a role in interpreting this verse. Betz (1979:323) explains that Paul took this expression from his opponents although there is no proof for this claim. This means that the theology of the Israel of God would identify them as the true Judaism in contrast to the official Judaism (Betz, 1979:323). In other words, the opponents would preach their gospel in order to have the Galatians become the true Israel through circumcision, but Paul would teach the true Israel of God to follow his advice according to this rule. In this sense, Betz (1979:323) insists that those who follow this rule become the Israel of God.

Paul provides his view regarding circumcision in the previous verse. Paul again emphasises that the Galatians should follow his advice and his preaching of the gospel. Paul therefore preaches that they should not to follow the opponents’ gospel, but the gospel as presented by Paul.

### **3.4 The meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12**

In this section the researcher examines the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12, being mindful of the preceding exegetical remarks. Firstly, the researcher attempts to determine the meaning of Gal. 5:11 in Gal. 5:1-12. Secondly, the researcher presents his understanding of Gal. 6:12 in Gal. 6:11-16. Then the researcher proposes an understanding of the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 on the basis of the exegesis.

### 3.4.1 Gal. 5:11 in Gal. 5:1-12

This passage consists of various components that include declaiming freedom (1a), exhortations and warnings against accepting circumcision (1b-4), proclamation of the true gospel (5 and 6), the danger of the opponents' preaching (7-10), the conclusion of the passage (11) and the sarcasm expressed towards the opponents (12). The researcher suggests a likely meaning that may be possible for Gal. 5:11 in what follows.

Firstly, the researcher examines the function of Gal. 5:11 in Gal. 5:1-12. This passage contains hortatory statements (Longenecker, 1990:221). The exhortation presents Paul's proclamation of the true gospel and warnings about the opponents' gospel. In this sense, the passage means that Paul insists that the Galatians should not accept circumcision as part of the gospel, but should uphold the true gospel that he had preached to them before (Gal. 1:9). Verse 11 in this passage shows Paul's position regarding circumcision, which is that he did not teach circumcision to the Galatians, despite persecution. In the previous verses (2-4) Paul explained the insufficiency of circumcision theologically. Theologically, those who try to be justified by the law, or circumcision, are separated from Christ (Gal. 5:2-4) and in Gal. 5:5 and 6 Paul summarises his theology as that we, with the Spirit in faith, are waiting for the hope of justification, because, in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision avails anything nor uncircumcision, but faith becomes effective through love (De Boer, 2011:328). The true gospel does not justify through the law, but through Christ. Circumcision thus is not necessary for salvation. Thus Paul explains his action against circumcision as the conclusion of this passage. The conclusion is that Paul did not preach circumcision, but nevertheless suffered persecution. In terms of circumcision, Paul insists that he confronts persecution by Jews with the law and also accepts persecution willingly. Paul shows the Galatians that his action in accepting and learning is a good example or good teaching. Verse 11 is used as the conclusion of the passage (Betz, 1979; Longenecker, 1990; Oakes, 2015:324). Verse 11 plays a central role in the conclusion by apparently revealing Paul's view regarding the circumcision gospel.

Secondly, the meaning of verse 11 is that Paul refrained from preaching circumcision despite the threat of persecution, because circumcision is not necessary in the true

gospel. Paul contends that circumcision is not significant in the true gospel (Gal. 5:6). Paul claims that, if he had preached circumcision, he would not have been persecuted by Jews. In this case Paul uses persecution as a proof that he did not preach circumcision to the Galatians. Paul thus did not preach circumcision and then willingly faced persecution for the sake of the cross of Christ. Verse 11 means that Paul preached the true gospel only, that is, he did not preach circumcision in spite of persecution. Paul then reveals life according to the true gospel, which is to accept persecution for the true gospel willingly. Paul did not work for himself, but for the true gospel. Paul's action sets an example of the ethical life to the Galatian Gentiles.

As a result, verse 11 is used as the conclusion to this passage and Paul, by means of his action, presents life according to the cross, that is, the true gospel. In conclusion, Paul informs the Galatians that he did not preach circumcision despite persecution. Paul thus teaches the Galatians that they should not accept circumcision as the theologically true gospel, but should live according to the true gospel.

### **3.4.2 Gal. 6:12 in Gal. 6:11-16**

This passage presents a recapitulation (Weima, 1994), which provides a summary of Paul's preaching. It consists of three matters (1) the motivation of his opponents in verses 12 and 13; (2) the centrality of the gospel of the cross in verse 14; and, in verse 15, the most important understanding according to the true gospel with the concise statement; and (3) the conditional blessing in verse 16 (Longenecker, 1990:301). The researcher explains the meaning of Gal. 6:12 in this passage.

Firstly, verse 12 in the recapitulation presents the motivation of Paul's opponents negatively. Their motivation entails forcing the Galatians to be circumcised so that they may avoid persecution because an account of the cross. This means that the opponents preached circumcision for the sake of their own reputation and welfare (Oakes, 2015:189). Their motivation is contrasted with Paul's position regarding the true gospel in verse 14 where Paul preaches the centrality of the cross, saying that he never boasted of anything except the cross of Jesus Christ and that the world, through the cross, had been crucified to him and he to the world. Continuing in verse 15. Paul

asserts the important point in the concise statement, which is that circumcision and uncircumcision are of no importance, but the new creation is. In verse 12 Paul therefore emphasises the shortcomings in forcing the Galatians to be circumcised, thereby revealing the motive of his opponents. Verse 12 plays a role in contrasting Paul's gospel with the opponent's gospel. In the recapitulation Paul uses verse 12 for contrasting his opponents' view with regard to circumcision with his own view of this. In this regard, Paul informs the Galatians not to follow the opponents' teaching.

Moreover, focussing on opponents' motivation in the recapitulation is a very effective means for teaching the difference between following Paul's gospel and the gospel of his opponents. Their teaching seemed to be on behalf of the Galatians because it suggested that the Galatians could become full members of the Jewish community by accepting circumcision together with the gospel, but Paul insists that their real motivation is to avoid persecution and their real goal is safeguarding themselves. Verse 12 thus means that his opponents' teaching is not on behalf of the Galatians, but for themselves. According to the purpose of the letter, verse 12 makes it clear that the Galatians should reject the message of the opponents because their teaching was not true to the gospel.

Lastly, verse 12 is used to contrast Paul's action according to the true gospel (Gal. 6:14) with his opponents' motivation. This contrast functions to effectively lead the Galatians to understand what the true gospel is, and to choose between Paul's version of gospel and the opponents' version of it.

### **3.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter the researcher presented the exegesis conducted of Gal. 5:1 to 12 and 6:11 to 16, and discussed the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 based on this exegesis. Paul provides an exhortation, warnings and a proclamation of the gospel in Gal. 5:1-6. The section contained in verses 1-4 focuses on warning the Galatians about the circumcision gospel preached by the opponents by means of the antithesis between circumcision and Christ. The proclamation of the true gospel is presented in verse 5

and 6. It presents what is significant for the Galatians and then verse 6 focuses on faith working through love.

Secondly, Paul exposes the danger of the opponents' teaching in Gal. 5: 7 to 12. In verses 7 to 10, Paul attacks the teaching of the opponents. He explains that the opponents hinder the Galatians from the true gospel and that their teaching is not from the one who called the Galatians. Verse 11 is the conclusion of this passage (1 to 12). In this conclusion Paul portrays his life according to the true gospel. Verse 12 expresses sarcasm directed against the opponents.

Thirdly, Gal. 6:11 to 16 comprises three parts: a statement about Paul's opponents in verses 11 to 13; a statement about the centrality of the true gospel in verses 14 and 15; and a conditional blessing in verse 16.

Lastly, the researcher explained the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. In 5:11 Paul informs the Galatians that he had not preached circumcision despite persecution. The meaning of Gal. 5:11 is that Paul reveals his position with regard to circumcision and persecution. In terms of circumcision, he did not preach it and he faced persecution because of the gospel of the cross. The meaning of 6:12 is that Paul presents the motivation of his opponents because their motivation fit in with life according to the true gospel. They preached a gospel requiring circumcision, not on behalf of the Galatians, but on behalf of their reputation and their welfare.

In the next chapter the researcher examines the meaning of circumcision and persecution, and the links between the two, as found in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. This plays a pivotal role in the understanding of Paul's rhetorical intention in terms of the theology of the true gospel and the ethical life.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12**

In the previous chapter the researcher offered an exegetical argument regarding the meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. This chapter presents what can be described as a Pauline perspective on the link made between circumcision and persecution as presented in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12, based on the earlier exegetical work. In this sense, the thesis seeks to analyse the connection between circumcision and persecution as Paul refers to it in these verses. The researcher thus contrasts the nature and content of the connections Paul makes between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 with the meaning of the connection that Paul makes in Gal. 6:12.

#### **4.1 The connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11**

Paul makes a connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11. In this section the researcher aims to show Paul's position concerning circumcision and then his position on persecution as presented in this particular verse. Following this, the researcher presents the possible interpretive intention of the connection between circumcision and persecution.

##### **4.1.1 Circumcision in Gal. 5:11**

Paul mentions circumcision in verse 11. It is important to understand the importance of the practice of circumcision in Judaism in Paul's world<sup>13</sup> in order to explain Paul's attitude with regard to circumcision. Since Paul was a Jew and a Pharisee (Phil. 3:5),

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<sup>13</sup> Paul's world is everything in the world in which Paul lived and acted, and hence virtually everything that Paul did (Porter, 2008:1).

circumcision was of key importance to him (Porter, 2008:1). This shows that Paul, as a Jew, fully understood the law and circumcision according to a Jewish perspective (Hengel, 1991:27).

To briefly summarise: within Judaism three understandings of circumcision is possible (section 2.2.2). Firstly, circumcision was the primary external sign of the covenant between God and Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17) (Sanders, 1990:17). Secondly, circumcision was the identity marker of the people of the covenant for conversion (Gen. 17:9-14) (Dunn 1998:356). Lastly, the figurative understanding of circumcision was also revealed as heart circumcision. Given that Paul was a Jew and a Pharisee, he understood circumcision very well from the Jewish perspective (Eisenbaum, 2012:150). This study views Paul's argument concerning circumcision in Gal. 5:11 against three understandings within Judaism.

In Gal. 5:11, Paul strongly asserts that he did not preach circumcision. Dunn (1993:280) interprets this clause statement about Paul not preaching circumcision as that he understood circumcision to be the identity marker of God's people. This means that Paul denied circumcision because circumcision facilitated separation between Jews and Gentiles. Watson (1986) explains Paul's understanding of circumcision from a sociological point of view. Watson (1986:34) is convinced that "the abandonment of parts of the law of Moses was intended to make it easier for Gentiles to become Christians; it helped to increase the success of Christian preaching". Watson (1986:36) suggests that the abandonment of circumcision was more a matter of practical expediency, rather than a theological principle. Therefore, Paul's argument concerning circumcision in Gal. 5:11 means that he did not preach circumcision in terms of salvific theology.

However, Paul did not accept circumcision because of a theological perspective (Betz, 1979; Bruce, 1982; Longenecker, 1990) in terms of circumcision. Paul's understanding of circumcision had been influenced by his meeting with Christ (Acts 9). This means that Paul came to know the gospel of Christ through his interaction with Christ on the road to Damascus. The gospel revealed that the people of God simply are those who have faith in Christ Jesus. In other words, Paul understood the significance of faith in Christ for the people of God for their salvation. For Paul,

salvation was not attained by circumcision, but by faith in Christ. Therefore, Paul asserted that circumcision has no meaning theologically in terms of salvation and therefore does not matter. Paul's argument concerning circumcision in Gal. 5:11 means that he did not preach circumcision, because circumcision was not important in terms of salvific theology.

Paul accordingly mentioned circumcision regarding the salvific statement. In Gal 5:3 and 4 Paul states that everyone who receives circumcision is under obligation to practise the whole law and that those who are justified by the law are severed from the grace of Christ. In this sense, Paul's understanding of circumcision, as presented in this letter, was related to salvation connected to observing the law, and his opponents' teaching aimed to add circumcision to the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:6) (Moo, 2013:79). The Pauline opponents apparently wanted to force the Galatians Gentiles to be circumcised for the sake of justification. Paul clearly rejected the teaching that people of God should undergo circumcision. He emphasised faith in Christ Jesus, so he says that, in Christ Jesus, neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, but faith working through love (Gal. 5:6).

For Paul, circumcision was not significant in terms of being people of God or in terms of salvation; the important thing was faith in Christ. Paul also emphasised that circumcision was not a significant requirement theologically for becoming people of God and gaining salvation. Thus, Paul's statement that he did not preach circumcision means that receiving circumcision for the Galatian believers had nothing to do with salvation.

#### **4.1.2 Persecution in Gal. 5:11**

In Gal. 5:11 persecution is connected directly to circumcision. Paul says "if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?" This rhetorical question appears to indicate that Paul was still being persecuted because of circumcision. Tolmie (2005:186) and Moo (2013:336) interpret this rhetorical question as proof that Paul no longer preached circumcision. Paul thus indicated that he did not preach circumcision, in spite of the persecution that resulted from preaching the circumcision-free gospel.

This verse suggests that Paul's persecutors were present, but their identities are not revealed (section 2.2.3). However, the persecutors were likely to be from the Jewish community (Nanos, 2002). They forced or wanted to force the Galatian Gentiles to practise Jewish life for full conversion. They also informed the Galatian churches that males had to submit to circumcision to ensure full participation in the life of the Christian community (Watson, 2007:114). However, Paul did not preach Jewish life or circumcision to the Galatian churches in his gospel, and was persecuted by the Jewish community for this reason. This verse accordingly indicates that Paul was persecuted because of preaching the gospel without circumcision.

Paul's attitude to persecution is apparent in this verse. He was willing to be persecuted on account of preaching the circumcision-free gospel. There is a reason for Paul acting in this way, which can be derived from his understanding of the gospel of Christ following his meeting with Christ. According to Acts 9:1 and 2, Paul obtained permission from the high priest to persecute the Jesus-followers. Following his conversion, he preached the very same faith he had tried to destroy before (Gal. 1:23). This appears to be the reason for the antipathy against Paul, and the reason why certain Jewish leaders apparently persecuted Paul. In other words, Paul was persecuted because of his understanding of faith in Christ following his conversion. Moreover, Paul believed that he should be willing to accept persecution.

This means that Paul's persecution came about because of the circumcision-free gospel. Paul accepted persecution willingly because of the gospel of Christ following his conversion. Paul's action was derived from the gospel of Christ. Paul thus saw living life according to the gospel as much more important than circumcision. For Paul life according to the true gospel was framed by his attitude to persecution.

#### **4.1.3 The connection between circumcision and persecution**

In the previous sections, the researcher explained Paul's – positive or constructive – attitude to circumcision and persecution. In this section the researcher discusses the connection between circumcision and persecution. Paul argues his intention

concerning circumcision and persecution. In Paul's argument persecution is related to circumcision.

In Gal. 5:11, Paul's statement that he did not preach the circumcision gospel makes it apparent that the circumcision gospel is not the theologically true gospel for him. Paul presents a rhetorical question and statement: Ἐγὼ δέ, ἀδελφοί, εἰ περιτομὴν ἔτι κηρύσσω, τί ἔτι διώκομαι; ("And brothers and sisters if I still preach circumcision, why am I still persecuted?"). Betz (1979:268) indicates that precisely what Paul has in mind is hidden from our knowledge, but Paul presumably refers to matters known to the Galatians as well as to himself. What we derive from the statement are two facts. The first one is that Paul admits that he is still being persecuted and the other one is that Paul denies that he still preaches circumcision (Betz, 1979:268). The statement reveals that Paul denied preaching circumcision and then was persecuted because of not preaching circumcision. This verse which makes the connection between circumcision and persecution has evoked many interpretations. Commenting on this verse, Dunn (1993:279) indicated that Paul was accused by the other missionaries of being inconsistent, which implies that, although he preached a circumcision-free gospel to the Galatians, he continued to preach circumcision among Jews. Betz (1979:269) has interpreted this verse as that Paul deals differently with circumcision when he deals with people who are Jews or Gentiles by birth. Accordingly, Paul's view is that, if they, Jews by birth, want circumcision they could continue to practise circumcision, because circumcision is irrelevant and not a condition for salvation (Betz, 1979:269).

Betz (1979:269) assumed that the opponents misunderstood his position either by mistake or by intention. In this sense, Paul's position regarding circumcision could be understood as that circumcision did not matter for salvation (Gal. 5:6 and 6:15) and Paul did not preach circumcision to the Galatian Gentiles for this reason. Therefore, the background to what Paul asserts in the statement and his rhetorical question was that Paul's opponents rumoured that Paul preached circumcision just like they did, so that their gospel that added circumcision to Paul's gospel was no different to Paul's gospel. Because of this, Paul insisted on his position regarding circumcision to oppose the rumour created by his opponents, by stating that he did not preach circumcision.

Moreover, the important meaning of this verse concerns Paul's attitude to circumcision. This was that Paul did not preach circumcision. Furthermore, Paul pointed out that he was being persecuted because he did not preach circumcision. This means that Paul proclaims that the opponents' claim is not true. Paul denied the opponents' allegation that he preached circumcision. In this situation, Paul uses it as proof of not preaching circumcision, but yet was persecuted (Tolmie, 2012:187). In this sense, by focusing on Paul's action concerning the connection between circumcision and persecution, Paul did not preach circumcision to the Galatians and he accepted the persecution resulting from preaching circumcision-free gospel.

Gal. 5:11 indicates that Paul did not preach circumcision, even though he knew that persecution would be inevitable if he did not preach the circumcision gospel. Thus, the researcher suggests the implied meaning of this statement is that Paul's reaction to circumcision and persecution revealed that Paul tried to preserve the true gospel rather than his own comfort. Paul's way of living and his motive thus are made clear by the statement of the connection between circumcision and persecution. Paul shows how to live according to the true gospel. Paul did not work for his own comfort, but worked to preach the true gospel. In preaching the true gospel, Paul attempted to live a life that reflected the true gospel rather than to ensure his own safety. Paul says two things about himself: that he did not preach circumcision despite persecution and was still persecuted (Tolmie, 2012:187). Hence Paul emphasises what he did with this connection, which is that he did not preach circumcision despite persecution, but preached faith in Christ. This is because preaching faith in Christ only is the true gospel and supports the integrity of the gospel. This is the connection that plays a pivotal role in understanding Paul's reaction. Paul's reaction provides the Galatian Gentiles with the way of life that Galatians Gentiles should follow.

## **4.2 The connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 6:12**

In Gal. 5:11 Paul explains the gospel and his actions according to the true gospel through the connection between circumcision and persecution. Paul also suggests a connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 6:12. In this verse, the

connection is related to the position of his opponents concerning circumcision and persecution. In the following sections, the researcher aims to analyse Paul's intention as revealed through this connection in Gal. 6:12.

#### **4.2.1 Circumcision in Gal. 6:12**

As explained in the discussion of the verse above, circumcision is mentioned in this verse and Paul explains how his opponents understand circumcision. He also explains that his opponents' position with regard to circumcision falls short.

It is important to identify Paul's opponents to understand their position regarding circumcision, but identifying them is a complicated task (Porter, 2009:1–5). This study attempts to define Paul's opponents on the basis of the description in his letter.<sup>14</sup> The opponents seem to have been known as those who compelled the Galatian Gentiles to be circumcised (Gal 6:12). Nanos (2002:258) refers to Paul's opponents as "influencers" and suggests that Paul's opponents are not necessarily Christians, but Jews who are in the Jewish community. Nanos' assumption is that the opponents are not believers in Christ. However, according to the letter (Gal. 1:6), Paul mentioned the opponents' teaching is a different gospel. Accordingly, the opponents seem to be believers in Christ who add circumcision or the works of law into the true gospel. In this sense, the opponents were forcing the Gentiles to undergo circumcision as believers in Christ.

According to this verse, the opponents preached and compelled the faithful regarding circumcision. They appear to have been influenced by Judaism, so that the opponents' understanding of circumcision basically adhered to the perspective of Judaism. They thus naturally understood circumcision as indication and part of the covenant of God and as the identity marker of God's people. They regarded circumcision as the manner by which one joins the family of Abraham and the people of God (De Silva, 2004:502). However, their understanding of circumcision was not altered by the fact

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<sup>14</sup> In this regard, this study uses "mirror-reading" to determine Paul's opponents (Barclay, 1987). However, "mirror-reading" is difficult and dangerous, so that this study carefully determined Paul's opponents by examining Paul's language and his strategy.

that they, like Paul, knew the gospel of Christ. After receiving the gospel of Christ they, unlike Paul, consistently preached circumcision. For them circumcision remained an essential factor in becoming the people of God and an identity marker for entering the Jewish community (Longenecker, 1990:227). This means that they regarded circumcision as an important theological factor for salvation and as an essential ritual for life in the Jewish community.

This is why they, when they preached the gospel to the Galatian Gentiles, added circumcision to the gospel of Christ that Paul had preached previously. It is clear from the letter that Paul regards the circumcision gospel as a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). The opponents included circumcision in their message even though they knew faith in Christ. Paul thus accuses them that they wanted to distort the gospel of Christ (Gal. 1:7).<sup>15</sup> This verse presents their reason for forcing the Galatian Gentiles to be circumcised. After having understood faith in Christ they still regarded circumcision as a necessary factor in salvation, despite this distorting the true gospel. Thus, in the opponents' view, circumcision was an important requirement for Gentiles to become the people of God theologically, and circumcision also was essential for Gentiles to live in the new community of followers of Jesus.

Paul moreover presents his opponents' position with regard to circumcision. He describes them as those who make a good showing in the flesh. Paul portrays their actions negatively. This means that they preached circumcision to the Gentiles in order to earn a good reputation in the Jewish community (Nanos, 2002:218). They took advantage of the Gentiles to gain a good reputation. Paul continuously indicates that the opponents compelled the Galatians to be circumcised. In this verse, the flesh is related to circumcision (Bruce, 1982:268). Those who make a good showing in the flesh compel the Galatians to be circumcised, so that, circumcision being related to the flesh, the opponents make a good showing (Oakes, 2015:186). By preaching the requirement of circumcision to the Gentiles in the Galatian churches, they tried to present a good showing in the flesh.

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<sup>15</sup> Moo (2013:79) explains that, in Gal. 1:7, Paul adds his description regarding opponents, which is that those who are "agitating" the Galatians are doing so by "trying" to "pervert" or "distort" "the gospel of Christ".

Paul views their actions negatively. He points out the theological shortcomings of the opponents in that they compelled the Galatians to be circumcised even though they knew the gospel of Christ and understood the integrity of the gospel of Christ. Paul also rebukes their actions. It was absurd that the opponents, while knowing the integrity of the gospel of Christ, added the requirement of circumcision to the gospel of Christ. In this sense, Paul presents their position concerning circumcision as not a theological shortcoming only, but also as a fault in their actions, and thereby criticises their understanding of circumcision.

#### **4.2.2 Persecution in Gal. 6:12**

This verse shows that the opponents, like Paul, were exposed to persecution (Gal. 5:11). Their persecution seems to have come from the Jewish community. The persecutors are likely to have been those from the Jewish community who insisted that Gentiles needed to be part of Jewish life for full conversion and may be similar to the persecution of Paul as discussed in the previous section (4.1.2). This verse thus indicates that the opponents, like Paul, suffered persecution, as reported in Gal. 5:11. The opponents apparently were persecuted for the same reason that Paul was persecuted (Betz, 1979: 315). This verse shows that persecution occurred because of the cross of Christ (τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Χριστοῦ).<sup>16</sup> Persecution was a threat to the opponents, thus they were afraid of being persecuted, so that their response was to try to avoid it. Betz (1979: 316) explains that they were afraid of the threat from the Jews, because they could and would be accused of admitting converts without subjecting them to the Torah. The opponents' reaction to persecution was to avoid it.

This reaction to persecution was related to their motive to preach circumcision to the Galatian Gentiles (Moo, 2013:393; Tolmie, 2012:222). This verse presents Paul's descriptions of his opponents' motive (Barclay, 1988:37–38). The verse shows that the motive was to make a good showing in flesh and to avoid persecution. Oakes (2015:187) explains that the opponents' motive would be quite understandable. In the Jewish community, opponents and Gentiles could have evaded a problematic situation

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<sup>16</sup> The dative is probably causal (Wallace, 2011:168).

if Gentiles were circumcised (Oakes, 2015:187). However, in Paul's statement, the opponents' motives and actions are characterized negatively (Nanos, 2002:217). Paul suggests that the opponents preached circumcision to make a good showing in the flesh to avoid persecution. Paul's statement implies that their teaching was not to promote the gospel of Christ, but for their reputation and their own safety. This is why Paul rebukes their actions and motives.

Paul presents his opponents' reaction to persecution, which is that they tried to enforce a good showing in flesh by the circumcision of Gentiles and so to avoid persecution on account of preaching the circumcision-free gospel. On the basis of Gal. 5:11, Paul and his opponents were in the same situation, in that they were exposed to persecution. Paul and his opponents reacted differently to persecution, however. For the opponents, persecution was an option to avoid, but for Paul persecution because of not preaching circumcision was the inevitable choice. While Paul accepted persecution willingly, his opponents tried to avoid it.

#### **4.2.3 The connection between circumcision and persecution**

In this verse, as in Gal. 5:11, Paul speaks of circumcision and persecution in a connected way. The connection between circumcision and persecution explains the intention of Paul's argument.

The opponents' way of life is revealed in Gal. 6:12 through the connection between circumcision and persecution. Paul not only describes their actions and motives, but also launches an attack on his opponents. The attack reveals their actions and their real goal. Paul not only denounces his opponents as heretics, but also as morally inferior and despicable (Betz, 1979: 314). Paul thereby exposes how selfish the reasons are that lead the opponents to force the Galatian Gentiles to be circumcised (Nanos, 2002: 217). The opponents' way of life according to their gospel thus is revealed in this verse.

Paul thus criticises their actions in vilifying language (Punt, 2010:12). He Paul describes his opponents' actions with reference to two features: he firstly declares that

his opponents preached circumcision to the Galatians to make a good showing in the flesh. Secondly, Paul declares that the opponents preached circumcision to the Galatians so that they could avoid persecuted on account of the cross of Christ.

Paul firstly identifies the opponents as compelling circumcision in order to make a good showing in the flesh. Nanos (2002:217) explains this as Paul characterising their motives and actions negatively. Paul's charge also shows that the teaching of the opponents seemed to be for the benefit of the Galatian Gentiles, but that their teaching really was only aimed at safeguarding their own reputation; their actions were only meant for themselves. The opponents were only thinking of themselves (Oakes, 2015:187). Paul's assertion therefore makes it clear that their teaching of circumcision was neither for the true gospel, nor for the Galatians.

Paul also defines the opponents' preaching of circumcision as aimed at avoiding persecution. They were also exposed to persecution, just like Paul was (Gal. 5:11). Their persecution would be because of the gospel of Christ. Paul claimed that the opponents tried to avoid persecution because they feared persecution, but he also claimed that their purpose was to avoid being persecuted on account of the cross of Christ (Moo, 2013:393). By requiring circumcision from the Galatian Gentiles, they tried to avoid persecution (Oakes, 2015:187). They therefore preached circumcision for their own comfort and safety. Their motives and the real goal in preaching circumcision were to ensure comfort. Paul's statement thus disclosed the real intention of the opponents (Betz, 1979:315).

Through the connection between circumcision and persecution, Paul exposed the opponents' actions and motives and criticised these actions and motives because their way of life did not adhere to the true gospel. Paul rebuked their wrongdoing in not following the true gospel and conducting circumcision for the sake of reputation and comfort, thereby showing that their way of life did not match the true gospel. Their actions and motives were inconsistent with the teaching of Jesus (Gal. 5:14), who said "you shall love your neighbour as you love yourself." Also, even though their teaching seemed to suggest that circumcision would contribute to the possibility that the Galatian Gentiles could gain the privilege of full membership in Judaism, their intention was to ensure their own safety and their reputation through such

circumcision. Therefore their actions and motive did not embody a life lived according to the true gospel. The opponents' purpose was to save their reputation and ensure their comfort, which is why Paul criticised their wrongdoing.

### **4.3 Pauline perspective on circumcision and persecution in the contrast between Gal 5:11 and 6:12**

In the previous sections, the researcher examined the connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal 5:11 and 6:12 (section 4.1 and 4.2). Through the connection in these verses Paul's actions and opponents' actions are contrasted. This section examines the Pauline perspective on the connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal 5:11 and 6:12 through the contrast between Paul's action and his opponents' action.

#### **4.3.1 The contrast between Paul's and opponents' understanding of the connection**

These verses reveal that Paul and his opponents held opposing views with regard to understanding circumcision. Paul was a Jew by birth, as were his opponents. Paul and his opponents knew and received the gospel of Christ, but they had different views in terms of circumcision. Paul's position regarding circumcision had changed from the Jewish position to the position of the gospel of Christ following his conversion (Dunn, 1998:346). Paul mentions his conversion in this letter (Gal. 1:16) and also says that God revealed his Son in him. Dunn (1998:346) explains that Paul's conversion transformed his view of the law. In other words, this event changed his position with regard to circumcision. For Paul circumcision was not essential to being part of the people of God, the sons of Abraham, or being Christians. Paul focused on faith in Christ or the gospel of Christ for being the people of God (Gal. 2:16). Non-Jews or believers in Jesus were already the people of God through Christ Jesus. (Nanos, 2015a:18).

Paul's opponents regarded the works of the law or circumcision as essential to being the people of God. This means that they also viewed circumcision as the means by which to join the family of Abraham and the people of God (De Silva, 2004:503). In other words, they were obligated to follow the Torah to be the sons of Abraham and circumcision was one of the requirements (Frey, 2012:78). The opponents' thus claimed that circumcision was necessary for inclusion among the people of God (Schreiner, 2010:49). Moreover, the opponents' view had to do with their way of life (Dunn, 1993:336). Paul explains that they compelled the Galatians to accept circumcision in order to gain approval for themselves (Gal. 6:12). They emphasised circumcision to preserve their reputation in the Jewish communities (Oakes, 2015:187). This means that the opponents regarded circumcision as an important means to become part of the people of God and to gain a good reputation on account of circumcision. These verses make it clear that Paul and his opponents took different positions in terms of circumcision.

The connection reveals that Paul and his opponents had different views with regard to understanding persecution. Both Paul and his opponents were exposed to persecution, but the thinking of Paul and his opponents differed due to a difference in understanding the gospel of Christ. When Paul and his opponents preached the gospel of Christ, there was persecution. Such persecution seems to have come from the Jews who wanted to retain circumcision. Paul and his opponents used different ways to deal with persecution. Paul said that he had persecuted the church of God during his time in Judaism (Gal. 1:13). This means that Paul persecuted the church when he lived according to Jewish beliefs. However, he accepted the persecution that he had formerly practised on Christians, because of his conversion (Acts 9). He was persecuted because of not preaching circumcision. In this case Paul regarded persecution as a stumbling block of Christ (Gal. 5:11), so that he accepted persecution willingly. He suffered for his teaching, but he did not alter his attitude to gain relief (Nanos, 2017:36). However, the opponents, unlike Paul, compelled the Galatians to be circumcised because they wanted to earn a good reputation in the Jewish community and also wanted to avoid persecution. This reveals that Paul and his opponents followed different approaches to persecution. Although Paul and his opponents understood the gospel of Christ equally, their attitudes are revealed in their different ways. Paul accepted the persecution that followed on preaching a

circumcision-free gospel, but his opponents tried to avoid persecution. It is therefore obvious that Paul and his opponents dealt differently with persecution.

That Paul's view of circumcision differed from his opponents' view is revealed in the contrast between Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. Circumcised or not, the result was the same, in not a living according to the Spirit, but according to the flesh (Loubser, 2017:160). Paul thus teaches that circumcision does not matter in a life lived according to the true gospel (Gal. 5:6). However, even though the opponents were Jews and also followers of Jesus, they recommended circumcision for Gentile followers of Jesus (Hurd, 2009:144). Circumcision remained important in the gospel preached by the opponents and in their lives. They thus added the requirement of circumcision to the true gospel of Christ. Adding circumcision suggested that the true gospel did not provide a sufficient base for acceptance among the people of God (Dunn, 1996:337). For opponents circumcision was the avoidance of persecution. With the contrast between these verses Paul's understanding of circumcision and his opponents' understanding is shown differently.

#### **4.3.2 The contrast between Paul's life and opponents' lives**

The contrast between Paul's life and his opponents' lives is revealed in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. Paul's behaviour as presented in these verses is that Paul did not engage in preaching circumcision because Paul understood that circumcision is not an essential factor in salvation theologically. Paul shows the soteriological worthlessness of circumcision (Frey, 2012:79). Also, regarding the ethical life, Paul indicates that following the true gospel is to live for the gospel of Christ. This means that Paul was not working for his own comfort, but for the true gospel. Paul thus did not avoid persecution by failing to preach circumcision, although his opponents seemingly preached that circumcision enabled the Galatians to become the people of God.

However, his opponents' behaviour as presented in these verses differed from Paul's. Their behaviour included preaching circumcision. Loubser (2017:160) asserts that they feared persecution and therefore practised circumcision. Paul's opponents' view of the need for circumcision differed from his (Hurd, 2009:144). For opponents

circumcision was a means to the avoidance of persecution. Their actions constituted a choice for their own safety and comfort, unlike Paul. The statements indicate that their intention and real goal in preaching circumcision did not favour the Galatians, but that they preached circumcision for themselves. Thus, their actions in compelling circumcision were not for the Galatians, but to avoid persecution, which shows their self-centeredness.

The difference between Paul's action and his opponents' is revealed. Both Paul and his opponents were liable to persecution due to preaching the circumcision-free gospel. In this situation, Paul accepted persecution willingly, but his opponents tried to avoid persecution.

Paul and his opponents understood circumcision differently, so that their behaviour based on those understandings were expressed differently in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. In this sense Paul's statements in these verses helped the Galatian Gentiles to decide which teaching they would follow; whether Paul's teaching or his opponents' teaching. Thus these statements provide good explanations for understanding each's teaching. The statements in these verses similarly show what the way of life is according to the true gospel, or the Christ's gospel. The researcher thus focuses on the way of life according to the Christ gospel and suggests the interpretive orientation to be that Paul's statements in these verses could present examples to the Galatian Gentiles in terms of the way of life that should be followed.

#### **4.3.3 The meaning of the connection between circumcision and persecution in the contrast between Gal. 5:11 and 6:12**

Paul's statements in these verses may present examples of the way that the Galatians should follow and should not follow. One example shows working for the true gospel, like Paul, but the other example shows working for one's own benefit, like the opponents. Through these examples, the statements provide the Galatian Gentiles with what to follow.

Paul writes about himself several times in the letter. He employs the autobiographical narrative toward the exhortative goal of this letter (Gaventa, 1986:313). Paul uses the autobiographical references to encourage the Galatian Gentiles to understand the true gospel. One autobiographical reference states that Paul did not compel Titus to be circumcised when he took him to Jerusalem (Gal. 2:1-5). Paul presents himself as an example in terms of circumcision, as a model, which occurs in the direct instruction “Be like me” (Gal. 4:12) (Oakes, 2015:8). Paul writes about himself in a defensive tone (Oakes: 2015:8). Accordingly, Paul’s mention of himself could be regarded as an example of the ethical life.

The statements in these verses are meant to teach the ethical way of life to the followers of Jesus in Galatia. The statements encourage the Galatian believers not live to ensure their own safety, but to live for the true gospel. Living according to the true gospel at that time meant accepting the possibility of persecution because of the circumcision-free gospel, and accepting it willingly, like Paul.

Paul’s action provides a good example. Paul lived his life according to the true gospel and therefore did not preach circumcision, with the result that he was persecuted. Paul’s example did not portray living for comfort, but living on behalf of the Galatian Gentiles. Paul’s actions thus show how the Galatian Gentiles should live according to the true gospel. In Gal. 5:11 Paul emphasises faith working with love. This is consistent with his teaching. Paul was willing to accept being persecuted when he preached the circumcision-free gospel, which revealed Jesus’ love and his sacrifice to the Gentiles. His ethical orientation in teaching the true gospel is to teach the Galatian Gentiles about what is important in life. The ethical instruction is not to follow the opponents’ teaching for the sake of comfort, but to keep to Paul’s teaching of the true gospel on behalf of the Gentile’s lives and salvation. Although Paul’s acceptance of persecution may look like a foolish action and persecution may look like an option to avoid, Paul preaches that persecution because of the gospel of Christ is appropriate. Paul thus employs the description of his action to persuade the Galatian Gentiles, and presents himself as an example of the working of the true gospel (Gaventa, 1986:313).

The purpose of the letter is to persuade the Galatian Gentiles not to follow a different gospel, but to maintain the true gospel (Tolmie, 2005). Based on the purpose of the

letter, Paul tries to indicate what the true gospel is and which gospel is not, and similarly also to reveal who the real apostle of Christ is and who the false teachers are. The letter thus was meant to help the Galatian Gentiles to understand the true gospel and then to keep the true gospel. The letter also distinguishes between the apostle and the false teachers to let the Gentiles know who the apostle is. Paul's intention in this letter is to reveal himself as the apostle (Gal. 1:1) and his teaching as the true gospel and the opponents as false teachers and their teaching as a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). Therefore, Paul's position regarding circumcision and his reaction to persecution are shown as a good example that helps the Galatian Gentiles to understand life according to the true gospel. Through Paul's action presented in these verses, it is revealed that Paul's position is rooted in the true gospel. However, Paul presents the opponents' actions and motives as a bad example that the Galatian Gentiles should not follow. Accordingly, it is shown that the opponents' actions are not derived from the true gospel, but from their own thinking. By presenting a good example and a bad example, Paul persuades the Galatian Gentiles to understand what the true gospel is and who the apostle of Christ is. The suggestion therefore is that the Galatian Gentiles should choose the good teaching from among of Paul's action and opponents' actions.

#### **4.4 Chapter summary**

In this chapter, the researcher has examined the rhetorical meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. Firstly, Paul's attitude regarding circumcision and persecution as revealed in Gal. 5:11 plays a pivotal role in understanding this meaning. Paul did not view circumcision to be necessary in salvation theologically, because he knew the gospel of Christ. In Paul's time, not preaching circumcision led to persecution. In this sense, Paul's attitude to persecution indicated that he accepted that persecution for not preaching circumcision was to be expected. Based on the connection between circumcision and persecution, Paul's behaviour is revealed in that he preached only the true gospel and willingly accepted persecution.

Secondly, his opponents' position regarding the connection between circumcision and persecution is revealed in Gal. 6:12. His opponents did preach circumcision to the Galatian Gentile believers. This was because they wanted to safeguard their

reputation and ensure safety and comfort, which meant that they preached circumcision for themselves. Accordingly, this connection revealed the opponents' actions and motive as that they preached their gospel with circumcision, because they tried to avoid the persecution that would follow preaching the circumcision-free gospel, the true gospel.

Lastly, the researcher tried to focus on Paul's way of life as revealed through Gal. 5:11 and to focus on his opponents' way of life as revealed through Gal. 6:12. Paul's statements in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 could be seen as presenting Paul's life and his opponents' lives respectively. Based on Gal. 5:11, Paul's life was not centred on himself, but on following the true gospel, so he did not preach circumcision and was persecuted because of the true gospel. However, his opponents' lives were not aimed at following the true gospel; they followed their gospel or a different gospel (Gal. 1:6). That means they compelled circumcision in order to earn a reputation and to avoid the persecution that would follow when preaching the circumcision-free gospel. The researcher thus contrasted Paul's life with the lives of his opponents. This study on Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 suggests that Paul's statements present good and bad examples to enable understanding of what gospel to follow and what the life according to the true gospel is. Finally, Christians have to follow and keep the true gospel, like Paul, and live life according to the true gospel, like Paul. Also, Christians should not follow a different gospel that adds anything to the true gospel. They should not live only for comfort and safety until even abandoning living according to the true gospel. Therefore, this chapter presents the good example of a way of life according to the true gospel.

## Chapter 5

### Conclusion

This chapter concludes this thesis. In it, the researcher summarises the previous chapters and then deals with the research problems of the thesis.

The assumption in this thesis is that not preaching circumcision in the Galatian churches resulted in Paul's persecution, which means that persecution was linked to circumcision. Because of this, the connection between circumcision and persecution is presented twice, in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. Paul's statement regarding circumcision and persecution was therefore analysed in this study. By contrasting what Paul says about circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12, this study then presents an understanding of Paul's ethical teaching.

In order to explain circumcision and persecution as mentioned in these verses, the researcher summarised selected exegetical commentary on these verses and analysed the short historical study in terms of circumcision and persecution in Paul's world in Chapter 2. The researcher studied circumcision within the Old Testament and Judaism. In the Old Testament, circumcision almost coincides with Judaism. Circumcision in the Old Testament and in Judaism share understanding in three significant aspects, namely, covenantal, apologetic and figurative elements. Circumcision as a sign reflects the covenant, which God made with Abraham. Circumcision therefore is related to becoming sons of Abraham. Circumcision also serves as an identity marker of the people of God (Gen. 17:9-14). Particularly in Judaism, circumcision played an important role in Gentiles becoming full proselytes. Lastly, the figurative understanding is in the concept of circumcision of the heart, as derived from Jeremiah. The figurative understanding of circumcision has a most important meaning, especially for our study. In becoming the people of God or sons of Abraham, the important thing is not only the external sign of circumcision, but also the internal circumcision of the heart. These understandings regarding circumcision were derived through a brief historical study of circumcision.

The letter moreover reveals that Paul and other believers were persecuted, the form of which is not evident in the letter. It is not apparent who the persecutors were, but they seem to have been members of the Jewish community. As Paul persecuted Jesus believers under Judaism because of zeal for the tradition of the fathers (Gal. 1:13), so those who were from the Jewish community persecuted Paul and believers in Jesus because of preaching a gospel that did not demand circumcision (Gal. 5:11). Persecution thus was a threat to Paul and other believers. Accordingly, it is fair to say that Paul and his opponents in the Galatian churches were exposed to persecution. In Gal. 6:12, Paul indicates that his opponents were worried about persecution. This short background study has shown that persecution was the outcome of not preaching circumcision in the Galatian churches.

In Chapter 3, the researcher presented an exegesis of Gal. 5:1 to 12 and 6:11 to 16, and then presented the contextual meaning of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12. In conducting an exegesis of these sections, the researcher used both an epistolary approach and a rhetorical approach. The epistolary approach was used to examine the two passages. Part of Gal. 5:1-12 is hortatory, as is part of Gal. 6:11-16, and these passages function as the recapitulation of the letter. In terms of genre, Galatians is a letter of request or a *θαυμάζω* letter (Gal. 1:6). This letter, as a request, reveals a crisis in the churches and suggests persuasion to solve the problem. The Galatian churches were in a crisis because of adhering to a different gospel, which was to emphasise circumcision and the works of the law. Gal. 1:6 suggests that the Galatians churches were deserting the gospel of Christ and were turning to a different gospel. In this situation, the purpose of this letter was to persuade the Galatian churches to refrain from following a different gospel, and to maintain the true gospel. Based on this purpose of the letter, the researcher undertook exegesis of these parts from the rhetorical approach. The researcher thus analysed the rhetorical techniques that Paul used and attempted to reveal Paul's intention as presented through the rhetorical technique.

Firstly, Paul's position regarding circumcision was presented through the exegesis of Gal. 5:1-12. Paul asserts that circumcision is not a theological requirement for salvation, therefore receiving circumcision renders the circumcised severed from the grace of Christ (Gal. 5:3, 4). Then, in Gal 5:11, Paul states that he did not preach

circumcision to the Gentiles. Secondly, Gal. 6:11 to 16 presents a recapitulation of the letter. In this section Paul delivers an attack against his opponents. In Gal. 6:11 to 16, Paul attacks the actions and motives of his opponents. The opponents preached circumcision even though circumcision was not an essential aspect of salvation. They furthermore preached circumcision to boast about themselves and to avoid persecution (Gal. 6:12). In the section, Paul highlighted their actions and motives negatively. Through the exegesis of this section Paul's intention was exposed. Paul criticises their actions and their motives, because their position regarding circumcision was insufficient theologically and their actions and motives were not directed towards ethical life for the Galatians Gentiles, but towards themselves.

In Chapter 4, this thesis focuses on Paul's action and his opponents' actions as presented in these verses. When reading Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 together, the reader can recognise the contrast between Paul's action and his opponents' actions.

Based on the purpose of the letter, Paul's action according to the true gospel is revealed in Gal. 5:11. On the other hand, his opponents' actions are presented in Gal. 6:12. Paul's assertion in Gal. 5:11 helps the Galatian Gentiles to understand the true gospel and life according to the true gospel. The statement in Gal. 6:12 encourages the Galatian Gentiles to gain insight into the gospel of Paul's opponents and their lives. Therefore, the contrast helps the Galatian Gentiles as readers of the letter to understand the difference in teaching between Paul's gospel and his opponents' gospel. The contrast between Paul's action and his opponents' actions also encourages the Galatian Gentiles to understand who the true apostle is and to choose between Paul and his opponents.

The Pauline perspective on circumcision and persecution was presented in these two passages that were investigated. Paul did not preach circumcision and accepted persecution. Paul presents circumcision and persecution, in order that the Galatian churches might recognise the true gospel and what life according to the true gospel is. In this regard, Paul persuades the Galatian churches not to follow a different gospel, but to maintain the true gospel.

To return to the beginning, it bears repeating that this study was undertaken to

investigate the following research problems:

- How should the connection between circumcision and persecution in Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 be interpreted?
- What is revealed through the contrast between Gal. 5:11 and 6:12?

Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 comprise in the hortatory section, aimed at the Galatian believers. In these verses, Paul's action and his opponents' actions are exposed. The claim in Gal. 5:11's that Paul did not preach circumcision despite persecution could be interpreted as a good example in presenting the ethical life according to the true gospel. On the other hand, Gal. 6:12 might be interpreted as presenting a bad example that the Galatian believers should not follow. This study suggests that these verses play a role in understanding the ethical life according to the true gospel. Paul's life mission was to work for the true gospel and to teach the Galatian believers the true gospel at the risk of persecution. His opponents seemed to work for the Galatian Gentiles, but they ultimately worked for their own safety and benefit. This interpretation is crucial in the approach of this study.

The contrast between these verses helps the Galatian Gentiles in crisis to understand the true gospel. Paul's purpose was to persuade the Galatian Gentiles to understand the true gospel. Then, based on Paul's intention, the contrast could serve the Galatian believers in Jesus to choose the true gospel. Observing Paul's action in Gal. 5:11 and his opponents' actions together, the Gentile believers or any reader of the letter could understand that circumcision is not necessary in the true gospel and preaching circumcision is not appropriate to the ethical life of believers. Thus, the contrast between Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 could be understood, not only as Paul's sound teaching regarding circumcision theologically, but also as Paul's ethical teaching.

This study therefore suggests that Paul's statements with regard to circumcision and persecution provide a sound explanation of Christian ethical teaching. Paul shows the importance of living life according to the true gospel. The statements indicate that Paul's teaching is focused on keeping to the true gospel and to love one's neighbours. This is the Christian way of life. In Gal. 5:14 Paul says that the whole law is fulfilled

in one word, which is “love your neighbours as you love yourself”. Paul thus did not deny the true gospel under pressure from Jewish communities and also endured hardship as a result of not preaching circumcision. Christian ethical teaching could be understood from to Paul’s teaching. Part of Christian ethical teaching is that the Christians endured difficulties when preaching the true gospel and that the Christian ethical life in terms of loving neighbours is that Christians do not act on behalf of themselves, like Paul’s opponents, but for the sake of the true gospel and other Christians, as Paul did.

In Gal. 5:11 Paul declared that he did not preach circumcision in spite of the persecution resulting from not preaching circumcision. In Gal. 6:12 Paul apparently explained that his opponents preached circumcision in order to avoid persecution. The Pauline perspective of circumcision has been interpreted theologically in traditional readings and has been ethically focused on in the reading of the new perspective on Paul. However, in this study the researcher analysed circumcision and persecution side by side. The researcher tried to understand Paul’s position regarding circumcision alongside persecution. According to understanding of the connection between circumcision and persecution Paul refrained from teaching circumcision from the position of ethical teaching based on the theological position regarding circumcision. In this study, the interpretation of Gal. 5:11 and 6:12 is that, in Paul’s gospel, circumcision does not matter, because preaching circumcision was theologically inappropriate for salvation, and also because the opponents’ gospel was to ethically avoid persecution of themselves.

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