

Paul and the Gift of Sonship

ISAAC AUGUSTINE MORALES, O.P.

Providence College

Providence, RI

In recent years, the world of Pauline scholarship has seemed like a competition to publish the longest book on the apostle or on one of his letters. One thinks, for example, of the nearly one-thousand-page tome of Douglas Campbell, focusing primarily on the Letter to the Romans.¹ Not to be outdone, N. T. Wright subsequently published roughly sixteen hundred pages in two volumes on the thought of the apostle, the lengthiest in his ever-expanding series *Christian Origins and the Question of God*.² Among commentaries, there is, of course, Robert Jewett's massive 2006 commentary on Romans, weighing in at over eleven hundred pages.³ While John Barclay's recent contribution to the discussion does not quite attain to these unwieldy page counts, neither is it a slender volume.⁴ Given the relatively narrow range of the topic (grace and gift) and its limited discussion of the Pauline corpus (the work covers only Galatians and Romans), one might be tempted to chide Barclay for excessive verbosity. To do so, however, would be a failure to see the significance of Barclay's project for Pauline scholarship, and indeed, for theology in general.

¹ Douglas A. Campbell, *The Deliverance of God: An Apocalyptic Rereading of Justification in Paul* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009).

² N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God 4, 2 vols. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2013).

³ Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007).

⁴ John M. G. Barclay, *Paul & the Gift* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015). With bibliography and indices, the book comes to 656 pages. Unless otherwise noted, subsequent parenthetical page numbers in this essay refer to Barclay, *Paul & the Gift*.

Grace and Gift in Contemporary Context

The reason for the heft of Barclay's work can be seen in one of the primary targets of his argument: E. P. Sanders's classic *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*.⁵ It is fitting that the two works come out to roughly the same length, as they share similarities in both approach and aim. Both authors seek to situate Paul in his Jewish context, as well as to offer a fair-minded assessment of the Judaism of Paul's day. One of Sanders's goals in writing the book was, in his own words, "to destroy the view of Rabbinic Judaism which is still prevalent in much, perhaps most, New Testament scholarship."⁶ Later in the introduction, Sanders notes the reason for his strident tone: "Milder statements [about the nature of Judaism] have fallen on deaf ears and are now cited as if they supported views which in fact they opposed."⁷ In order to accomplish his goal, Sanders devotes some four hundred pages to discussing various Jewish texts from the early rabbinic and Second Temple periods, nearly four times the space devoted to his discussion of Paul.⁸ Toward the end of the first section on Judaism, Sanders concludes: "On the assumption that a religion should be understood on the basis of its own self-presentations, as long as these are not manifestly bowdlerized, and not on the basis of polemical attacks, we must say that the Judaism of before 70 *kept grace and works in the right perspective*, did not trivialize the commandments of God and was not especially marked by hypocrisy."⁹ A little later in the same paragraph, he notes: "By consistently maintaining the basic framework of *covenantal nomism*, the gift and demand of God were kept in a healthy relationship with each other."¹⁰ One of the central points Sanders seeks to make in his monumental work is that Judaism, no less than Christianity, is a religion of grace.

All of this may seem like a digression, but it actually touches on the heart of Barclay's project. While Barclay agrees with Sanders that Judaism is indeed a religion of grace, he nevertheless suggests that Sanders's work flattened out the meaning of grace and that discussions of both Judaism and the apostle Paul have suffered from imprecision ever since. In the prologue to *Paul & the Gift*, Barclay asks: "If 'grace' is everywhere in

⁵ E. P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1977).

⁶ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, xii.

⁷ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, xiii.

⁸ More than one reader of Sanders has suggested that the book would be more aptly titled "Palestinian Judaism and Paul."

⁹ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 427 (emphasis added).

¹⁰ Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism*, 427 (italics original).

Second Temple Judaism—in the celebration of divine beneficence, goodness, and mercy—is it everywhere the same?” (2). This question drives the study, leading inexorably to the conclusion that “grace is everywhere in the theology of Second Temple Judaism, but not everywhere the same” (565). Barclay arrives at this conclusion after a careful and nuanced study that traverses the history and anthropology of the gift, the history of Pauline interpretation, five Second Temple Jewish authors, and close readings of Galatians and Romans. The result is a magisterial study on grace in Paul and in antiquity, one that should benefit both exegetes and theologians interested in the topic. Because of the richness and the importance of Barclay’s work, I will spend the bulk of this essay highlighting some of the major advances it presents—in methodology, in the study of Second Temple Judaism, and in the reading of Paul—before offering one humble suggestion for moving the discussion forward. In particular, I will suggest that Barclay’s treatment of grace could itself use some more precision by specifying the content of the “gift” of his title. I propose that interpreting the gift as sonship would provide a clearer definition and can connect various aspects of Barclay’s study to the important Pauline category of participation in Christ.

Grace and Gift in Historical Context

Barclay begins the work with a historical and anthropological consideration of the category of “the gift.”¹¹ Attempts to incorporate theory into exegetical studies can often seem gimmicky or faddish, but Barclay’s appropriation of the anthropology of the gift pays significant dividends. One of the main goals of this first section is to problematize and challenge the widespread modern understanding of “gift” as something that is given with no expectation of a return. Surveying the various ways that ancient Mediterranean cultures (Greek, Roman, and Jewish) practiced and understood gift giving, Barclay shows that the notion of giving a gift with no expectation of a return would have been utterly foreign to most ancients. In contrast to the modern notion of “no-strings-attached” gifts as the ideal, Barclay notes from the outset: “Even the slightest knowledge of antiquity would inform us that gifts were given with strong expectations of return—indeed, precisely in order to elicit a return and thus to create or enhance social solidarity” (11). Gifts in antiquity formed an integral part

¹¹ It is important to note that *Paul & the Gift* is not a simple word study, but rather a treatment of the *concept* of the gift. Understandably, much of the discussion hinges on the Greek word *χάρις*, which can mean either “gift” or “grace,” depending on context.

of a system meant to establish bonds between the givers and the receivers. Far from being opposed to the notion of gift, then, obligation and reciprocity play a central role in gift giving. In most ancient cultures, then, people discriminated carefully when bestowing gifts upon a recipient. As Barclay notes, in the mentality of the Romans, “one does not want to tie oneself to a disreputable, ungrateful, or otherwise worthless beneficiary” (39). For this reason, giving to the poor, although not totally absent from Roman society, was uncommon.

As Gary Anderson has shown in two recent works, however, giving to the poor played a fundamental role in ancient Judaism, and thus in early Christianity.¹² This emphasis on the practice of charity might seem to set the Jews (and the early Christians) apart from the reciprocal understanding so prevalent in the ancient world, but a closer look at the dynamics of charity shows otherwise. While it is true that the poor were unable to repay in kind for gifts received, according to the Jewish Scriptures, gifts to the poor nevertheless included the expectation of a return. In the case of charity, God is the one who completes the cycle of the gift. Thus, Barclay notes, “Jewish giving to the poor is fully enmeshed in the expectation of reciprocity, and its distinctive elements are justified not by an ‘anti-reciprocal’ ethos but by the modulation of the reciprocity-ethos into the expectation of reciprocity from God” (44). Across Mediterranean cultures in antiquity, then, reciprocity was a firmly ensconced aspect of gift giving.

How, then, did the idea of the “pure” gift that is so commonly accepted today arise? Several complex social, theological, and ideological factors played a role, but Barclay suggests that the two figures most responsible for this shift were Martin Luther and the Lutheran philosopher Immanuel Kant (56–59). Luther was driven by theological motivations, resisting the reciprocal understanding of gift still prevalent in Catholic circles. For the reformer, Christ’s love for his people, exemplified in his sacrifice on the Cross, was a gift with no strings attached, the quintessential modern understanding of the gift. Kant transposed Luther’s theological ideal into a philosophical key, turning the notion of the pure gift into a “universal ethical ideal” (57). This notion reaches its epitome in the thought of Jacques Derrida, for whom any kind of reciprocity renders a gift null. For Derrida, “what makes [something] *gift* (as opposed to economic exchange) is that *it does not come back*” (61; original emphasis). On his definition, then, the giving of gifts becomes impossible. In light of the history and anthropol-

¹² Gary A. Anderson, *Sin: A History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009); Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013).

ogy of the notion of gift giving, however, Barclay concludes that Derrida's understanding is a historical anomaly, one that "speaks of everything but the gift" (63).

It may seem that I have devoted excessive space to one chapter out of eighteen, but this opening chapter is crucial for the project. Barclay concludes by noting that any analysis of the language of grace and gift must take into account the historical context of the writings that use this terminology (64). Such an approach is particularly important for modern interpreters, all of whom have been influenced to one degree or another by the notion of the "pure" gift of Kant and Derrida. If we are to understand premodern uses of the language of gift, we must be aware of the different connotations and implications the term had in earlier times. While a plea for historical awareness may seem obvious, perhaps even banal, given the stark contrast between ancient and modern understandings of gift, it is perhaps nowhere more important than in interpreting gift language.

The Perfect Gift

Building on his historical analysis of the concept of "gift," Barclay develops a taxonomy of gift and grace relying on the notion of "perfection." Barclay borrows this term from Kenneth Burke, describing it as "the tendency to draw out a concept to its endpoint or extreme, whether for definitional clarity or for rhetorical or ideological advantage" (67). Barclay proposes six different modes of perfecting the concept of "gift." Some concern the nature of the gift itself, others the nature of the giver. A gift might be perfected in "superabundance." On this understanding, the perfect gift is the most excessive, the most lavish, the all-encompassing gift (70). A gift can also be perfected with respect to the giver. Barclay calls this perfection "singularity," a term that refers to the giver's character as purely benevolent (70–71). The perfection of "priority" concerns the timing of the gift. This perfection has at least three features: it is given spontaneously, not in response to anything; it is, therefore, "free," since nothing precipitated it; and it indicates the superiority of the giver (71–72). "Priority" seems to be the primary perfection that drives Sanders's study, leading him to the conclusion that Judaism was indeed a "religion of grace." A fourth perfection, "incongruity," points to the lack of merit on the part of the receiver. The giver bestows gifts in spite of the lack of worth in the recipient (72–73). This perfection was rare in antiquity, since it seemed unfitting, given the reciprocal nature of gift giving. The fifth perfection, "efficacy," focuses on the effectiveness of the gift. The efficacious gift accomplishes that which its giver intended (73–74). The final perfection, "noncircular-

ity,” was rare in antiquity. As the name implies, this perfection implies that a gift expects nothing in return (74–75). The modern conception of the “pure gift” is the most obvious example of this sixth perfection.

Barclay follows this taxonomy of perfections with a number of qualifications and implications. First, it is not necessary to perfect grace in any one of these modes, either in the human sphere or in the divine sphere. In fact, doing so can lead to problems such as eliminating notions of justice or mutuality (75). Second, these perfections are not mutually exclusive. While it is rare for an interpreter to embrace all six perfections, it is not uncommon to choose two or three when interpreting grace, and some of the perfections tend to cluster together (76).¹³ Third, and perhaps most importantly, Barclay suggests that disagreements between interpreters of Paul on the question of grace—as well as between Paul and his contemporaries—stem not from a denial of grace or of its importance, but rather from their different *definitions* of grace (77).

This taxonomy is one of the most significant contributions of Barclay’s work, a twenty-first-century analog to the medieval *distinguo* (“grace” can be said in many ways, Thomas might say). Exegetes and theologians alike would benefit from applying these categories to the endless debates about grace. In the rest of the study, the taxonomy functions as an analytical tool, applied in turn to the history of interpretation, a variety of Second Temple Jewish texts, and finally to two of Paul’s letters, Galatians and Romans.

Grace Among Christians and Jews

Barclay first turns his attention to the history of interpretation, considering a few representative “theologians of grace” before turning to more recent exegetes. Some of his selections and omissions may surprise the reader. Few would think of Marcion as a “theologian of grace,” but Barclay argues that he exemplifies the “rhetoric and ideology of perfection” (83). Marcion perfects the *singularity* of grace, insisting that God is purely benevolent and contrasting the God of his narrower Christian canon with the evil, wrathful God of the Old Testament (80–85). Less surprising are his selection and analyses of Augustine, Luther, and John Calvin. Barclay rightly notes that Augustine perfects grace with respect to priority, incongruity, and efficacy, and that the bishop of Hippo’s influence has significantly shaped the way that many since his time have understood grace (97). Neither should it surprise us that noncircularity plays a crucial role for Luther (115), marking a decisive step toward the modern notion of the “pure gift.” A bit more

¹³ Barclay suggests that Campbell is the only example he has come across of a reader of Paul who embraces all six perfections of grace (173).

controversially, though not without support, Barclay suggests that noncircularity does not figure into Calvin's understanding of grace. Rather, in his thought, the accent falls on incongruity and efficacy (129–30). Jumping forward to recent history, Barclay then applies his taxonomy to Karl Barth and a number of Pauline interpreters from the twentieth century up to our own day.

This foray into the history of interpretation avoids some of the weaknesses that commonly beset *wirkungsgeschichtliche* approaches, which can easily turn into museum pieces. Barclay does not treat these interpreters out of mere curiosity. Rather, this section shows how his taxonomy can help us better understand longstanding disagreements over grace, as well as how the history of interpretation has influenced these debates. One can quibble over his selection of interpreters. Interesting though the French philosopher Alain Badiou may be, devoting four and a half pages to his thought seems disproportionate to his significance. The selection becomes all the more puzzling in light of the omission of one of the great theologians of grace, Thomas Aquinas. This criticism stems not from Dominican chauvinism, but rather from the close affinities between Aquinas's reading of Paul on grace and Barclay's. One could even argue that, in the history of interpretation, Aquinas comes closest to Barclay's account.¹⁴ Despite this glaring omission, the survey of theologians and exegetes of grace underscores the usefulness of Barclay's taxonomy of perfections.

The same can be said for the second part of the book, which considers the notion of grace in Second Temple Judaism. It is in this section that Barclay most forcefully and effectively problematizes Sanders's characterization of Judaism. As already noted, Barclay sees Sanders's account as overly flattened. While it is true that Second Temple Judaism was a religion of grace, Sanders's presentation can, with some exceptions, make the Jewish texts he considers seem monolithic. Barclay seeks to offer a more variegated description of the Jewish understandings (plural) of grace, exhibiting his mastery of the literature of this period. Not surprisingly, the picture that emerges in many ways reflects wider ancient understandings of the gift. The Wisdom of Solomon, for example, agrees with many

¹⁴ Consider but two examples. Although less detailed, Aquinas's discussion of the essence of grace in the *Summa theologiae* [ST] maps well onto Barclay's discussion in the appendix ("The Lexicon of the Gift") of *Paul & the Gift* (see ST I-II, q. 110, a. 1). Similarly, Thomas's noncompetitive metaphysics supports Barclay's suggestion that "Paul's language requires us to banish 'zero-sum' calculations of agency (the more God, the less the human), it seems better to speak of a pattern of 'energism' in Pauline agency" (442).

Greek and Roman thinkers that an incongruous gift would be unfitting: gifts ought to be given to those who are worthy, and so the text seeks to explain why the Jews deserve to be the object of God's affections. Instead of incongruity, the text perfects the notion of superabundance, the lavishness of God's gift to Israel (211). Similarly, Philo of Alexandria is not interested in perfecting incongruity. Instead, Barclay suggests, he emphasizes superabundance, singularity, priority, and efficacy (237). The Hodayot of Qumran, the *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* of Pseudo-Philo, and 4 Ezra all likewise perfect different aspects of divine grace in a variety of combinations.

While by no means exhaustive, Barclay's study of these texts certainly gives a representative sample of the range of interpretations of grace in the Second Temple period. Significantly, he finds only two areas of agreement among all five authors: "*All of them* perfect the superabundance of divine 'grace'; . . . *none of them* perfect the non-circularity of grace" (314; original emphasis). Apart from these agreements, however, the texts vary greatly in the details. The question then becomes not whether Jews believed in grace as Paul did, but rather *how* they understood grace and where Paul fits on the map of Second Temple Judaism.

An Incongruous Gift

It should come as no surprise that Paul's characterization of grace is neither unique nor identical to that of his fellow first-century Jews. Barclay sees in the Pauline version of grace three distinctive elements. First, in agreement with some of the Jewish texts surveyed, Paul perfects the notion of incongruity. God gives his gifts "*without regard to worth*" (e.g., 350; original emphasis). Second, the fundamental nature of God's gifts is to be seen in the Christ event, Christ's self-gift on the Cross (e.g., 331). Third, Paul's understanding of grace undergirds his mission to the Gentiles (e.g., 350). It is because God's grace comes to people regardless of their worth and through Christ that this grace is open to Jew and Gentile alike: "Since no one is granted this gift on the grounds of their ethnic work, no one of any ethnicity is excluded from its reach" (361).

Much could be said about the final two parts of *Paul & the Gift*, which treat Galatians and Romans. For the sake of brevity, I would like to highlight three significant aspects of Barclay's treatment before offering a suggestion to develop his reading further and give it greater precision.

The first noteworthy aspect of Barclay's reading is his critique of so-called "new perspective" readings of Paul. According to these, particularly as expounded for the past several decades by James Dunn, the "works

of the law” to which Paul objects refer to boundary markers, those Jewish practices that separate Jews from Gentiles (especially Sabbath, circumcision, and food laws). The problem that Paul addresses with his doctrine of justification, according to Dunn, is nationalism, the insistence that Gentiles become like Jews in order to become a part of the people of God. Barclay rightly suggests that this reading is too narrow and fails to get to the heart of the matter. With Dunn, Barclay agrees that Paul’s concern with the insistence on performing works of the law (the Torah) has nothing to do with works righteousness. Against Dunn, he convincingly argues that the problem is not ethnocentrism, but rather a denial of the incongruity of grace.

While several factors may have contributed to Paul’s understanding of works of the law after the Christ event, Barclay traces its roots to his conversion, which neither took account of Paul’s position in Judaism nor continued it (358–60). Paul’s encounter with Christ was a totally incongruous gift, and in working out the nature of this event, Paul saw that grace, because it does not depend on one’s ethnicity, be it Jewish or Gentile, is open to all. There are two advantages to this aspect of Barclay’s reading. First, it better explains statements, such as those in Galatians 5:6 and 6:15, that devalue *both* Judaism *and* Gentile existence (“neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything”). If the problem for Paul was Jewish ethnocentrism, then there would be no reason for him to devalue Gentile status (393). This leads to the second strength of Barclay’s reading: it not only better explains Paul’s argument but also manifests more clearly its relevance for today. “Because the Christological event of grace is both highly particular and impacts on *any* criteria of worth that are not derived from the good news itself, Paul’s theology does not remain encased within its first-century Jewish context” (573; original emphasis). The gospel of grace challenges any and all systems of worth that rival Christ’s self-gift, and so it has a perennial relevance not seen as clearly in new-perspective interpretations.

A second significant, though narrower, aspect of Barclay’s approach also relates to the new-perspective approach, specifically his reading of Romans 4. Most interpretations of this chapter account for only one part of the argument: either they make good sense of Paul’s emphasis on Abraham’s faith in the opening verses or they explain well the picture of Abraham as the father of a multinational family later in the chapter. A satisfactory reading that accounts for both parts of the chapter is hard to find.

Once again, for Barclay, the theme that unites the chapter, as it does Paul’s theology of grace more broadly, is the incongruity of grace: God’s election of his people does not consider the inherent worth of those chosen.

Paul appeals to the example of Abraham to show that this incongruity is not a new development, but rather the way God has always operated with his people. God chose Abraham not because of any merits on his part, but rather by a completely incongruous gift. This is the point Paul establishes in Romans 4:1–8. On this basis, Paul can then show in Romans 4:9–12 the fittingness of God calling both Jews and Gentiles, since God calls not on the basis of human worth, but simply on the basis of his generosity. This very particular understanding of grace, not universally accepted in antiquity, thus plays a major role in Paul's argument. Barclay wisely notes that, while Abraham appears first in the order of the argument, it was Paul's experience of the Christ gift that made possible this rereading of the Abraham story (486).

Given the emphasis in the first chapter of *Paul & the Gift* on the novelty of the notion of a "pure gift," no discussion of the work would be complete without showing how this analysis influences Barclay's reading of Paul. It should come as no surprise that, for Barclay, Paul does not oppose grace to an expectation of some return: "None of Paul's hearers would have been surprised to learn that as recipients of the divine gift they were placed under obligation to God" (498). He develops this idea with the help of Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*. One of the consequences of the incongruous grace of God is a later congruity in the eschaton (493). Although God chooses people by his grace who are in no way fit for the gift he offers, he renders them fit for reward in the afterlife by means of that same grace. Grace accomplishes this in the body by transforming the dispositions of the baptized, moving them from the "mindset of the flesh" to the "mindset of the Spirit" (506; citing Rom 8:6).¹⁵ This reorientation equips the baptized to live lives worthy of the gift they have received.

This emphasis on *habitus* makes much better sense both of Paul's theology of grace and of his moral exhortations. For Paul, grace is not simply a gift, but rather a *transformative* gift, one that demands a fitting return. Readings that stress the noncircularity of the gift have a much harder time explaining the rationale behind Paul's exhortations: "Christian obedience is thus vital, but only ever in a responsive mode: it arises in conjunction with faith and gratitude as the answer to a prior gift. The gift is entirely undeserved but strongly obliging: it creates agents who are newly alive, required to live the life they have been given" (518). Once again, we see how

¹⁵ Again, one could note the congruence between Barclay's account and Aquinas. Centuries before Bourdieu, Thomas's virtue ethics emphasized the importance of *habitus* as a disposition (see *ST* I-II, q. 49). Thomas himself builds on the much earlier explication of Aristotle.

distorting the modern notion of the noncircular gift has been on readings of Paul. Thoroughgoing fear of “works righteousness” makes it far more difficult to make sense of Paul’s exhortations.

The Gift of Sonship

For all the precision that Barclay’s study offers in the general notion of gift, in understanding the history of interpretation, and in Second Temple Jewish perfections of grace, there remains some ambiguity in his account. What exactly is the gift that Paul has in mind? Barclay speaks at times of Christ’s gift on the Cross, but at other times, the term remains more nebulous. The passage just quoted comes closest to giving a definition of the gift: “the life [the baptized] have been given.” While Paul’s understanding of gift is, no doubt, multifaceted and nuanced, I would like to propose a category that can integrate a number of Barclay’s proposals, as well as connect his reading of Paul with those interpretations that emphasize participation in Christ. For Paul, the gift, particularly in Romans and Galatians, seems to consist in divine sonship, received by the grace of adoption. Reading the gift in this way closely connects it with Christ’s self-sacrifice on the Cross, fits with the incongruity of the gift, and gives clearer definition to the *habitus* that Paul seeks to cultivate in his audiences. Moreover, it accounts for the circular nature of the gift and more clearly connects grace with participation in Christ, one of the lasting contributions of Sanders’s work.

The notions of adoption and sonship, though not frequent in Paul’s letters, nevertheless appear at climactic points in his arguments in Galatians and Romans. There is a hint early on in Galatians that Paul closely associates grace with sonship. In the autobiographical portion of the letter, Paul writes: “But when the one who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace was pleased to reveal his Son ἐν ἐμοί” (Gal 1:15–16a). Interpreters disagree over the translation of the phrase ἐν ἐμοί. Some take the preposition as pleonastic, thus reading the phrase “to me.” Others, however, argue that we should give full weight to the preposition, suggesting that God revealed Christ “in” Paul. If the latter reading is correct, then we see here a close connection between the grace of God and participation in Christ, as well as Christ’s own sonship. While such a reading is intriguing, we should not hang too much on it. Nonetheless, at the very least, Paul’s autobiography connects the grace of God with Christ’s sonship, whether it was manifested *to* him or *in* him.

Later in the letter, Paul twice emphasizes the importance of the Galatians’ newfound status as sons, and in both cases, he connects this newly received sonship with the status of being heirs. At the end of Galatians 3,

in the context of an appeal to baptism, Paul reminds the Galatians: “For you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus through faith” (Gal 3:26). He then grounds their newfound status in baptism, which leads into precisely the kind of statement that reflects the incongruity of the gift: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female” (Gal 3:28). Barclay rightly notes that, in these verses: “What is altered . . . is the *evaluative freight* carried by these labels, the encoded distinctions of superiority and inferiority. In common solidarity with Christ, baptized believers are enabled and required to view each other without regard to these influential classifications of worth” (397; original emphasis). Disappointingly, however, Barclay takes no notice of the new status of sonship with which the passage begins. It is precisely by belonging to Christ as sons of God that earthly distinctions lose their significance and that the baptized become heirs of the promise.

A similar pattern, but without the relativizing of social status, appears in the passage that immediately follows. Developing the contrast between slavery and sonship, Paul describes the purpose of Christ’s redeeming act as leading to divine adoption: “But when the fullness of time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those under the law, in order that *we might receive adoption*” (Gal 4:4–5; emphasis added). This divine adoption is the gift that the redeemed receive in baptism, the gift that transforms them from slaves into sons, and therefore heirs (Gal 4:6–7).

Romans 8 develops the theme of adoption with slightly different nuances. Here Paul connects divine adoption with being led by the Spirit: “For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom 8:14). The Romans received the Spirit as a gift that enables them to call on God as Father: “For you did not receive a spirit of slavery leading again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by which we cry, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Rom 8:15).¹⁶ The Spirit testifies to believers’ new status as children of God (Rom 8:16), and once again, Paul connects this adoption with receiving the status of “heir,” a status believers share with Christ (Rom 8:17). Most significantly, in this text, Paul signals the circular nature of the gift: “And if children, then also heirs, heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ, *provided we suffer with [him]* in order that we might be glorified with [him]” (Rom 8:17; emphasis added). The gift of sonship cannot be earned, but those who receive it are expected to act in conformity with the

¹⁶ It is worth noting that Galatians also closely associates adoption with reception of the Spirit: “And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, ‘Abba, Father!’” (Gal 4:6).

gift. A little later, Paul reiterates that this newfound status hinges on being sons of God with Christ: “For those whom he foreknew, he also designated beforehand to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom 8:29). Again, we see that the fundamental gift from which everything else flows is adopted sonship.

Seeing the gift as sonship neatly ties together several of Barclay’s central categories. For Paul, divine adoption in Christ is utterly incongruous, as can be seen by his references to the Spirit. In both Romans and Galatians, Paul connects adoption with the reception of the Spirit, and in Galatians, he makes it abundantly clear that the Spirit cannot be earned (Gal 3:1–5). Moreover, sonship explains both the circularity of the gift and the bodily *habitus* that should inform the life of believers. Those who have been adopted as sons are expected to act like sons, particularly by conformity to Christ’s suffering and death (Rom 8:17). This is the *habitus* that Paul expects of the baptized: the *habitus* of a son, conformed to the Son. And this *habitus* is nothing other than living out the symbolism of their baptism, whether seen as being clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27) or as dying and rising with him (Rom 6:3–4). Barclay rightly notes: “One could hardly imagine a more effective demonstration of this ‘rescue’ than the physical rite of baptism, which Paul interprets as a transition from death to life *performed on and with the body*” (508; original emphasis). The result of the rescue, though, is not simply death and resurrection, but death and resurrection *as sons and daughters in Christ*, a new status that must be lived out in the body in imitation of and participation with Christ. One of the clearest examples of this participation in Paul’s letters combines gift language with Christ’s status as Son of God: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; but what I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for my sake” (Gal 2:19b–20). In the following verse, Paul asserts, “I do not reject the grace of God” (Gal 2:21a). Here grace, sonship, and participation converge in a compact summary of Paul’s understanding of redemption.

A Gift to Scholarship

As should be clear, my proposal in no way detracts from the abundant merits of Barclay’s magnificent work. It seeks rather to develop the many strengths of his reading and to find a clearer unifying thread that can tie these elements together. Others could be suggested, and Barclay no doubt has thought of some on his own. As he himself notes in the preface to *Paul & the Gift*, there remain aspects of gift giving that he was unable to cover in this book and to which he hopes to devote a future volume (xv). As we eagerly await his next contribution, we can thank Barclay for this gift to

exegesis and theology. The clarity and precision with which he has treated so many important issues stands as a model for all future work on Paul, on the history of interpretation, and on the theology of grace. N.V