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NOT SLAVES BUT SONS: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
OF GALATIANS FOR MINDEN BAPTIST CHURCH
IN MINDEN, TEXAS

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NOT SLAVES BUT SONS: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
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I dedicate this project to my wife, Sarah, without whose encouragement and support I would not have been able to begin this work, much less complete it.

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PREFACE

My heart overflows with gratitude as I consider all those who made it not only possible, but a joy, for me to complete this project. My wife comes first because she was the first one to whom I mentioned Southern's new D.Min. in Biblical Theology. I will never forget that her immediate response was, "You should do it." It cost her more than anyone, but she was for it from the beginning, always supported me, and never complained. Our kids, Grace, Will, and John (whose arrival postponed my start date for this degree) have brought more joy to me than any credentials or accomplishment ever could. I pray the time away from them in study, research, and writing will bear fruit for their good in the days to come.

My parents, Glen and Tina Pitts, were unfailingly supportive from the beginning even though it meant less time for my family to travel (and therefore fewer opportunities for them to see their grandkids). Not only my parents, but also my wife's parents, Rick and Mary Beth Corbin, helped bear the extra load over the last few years, especially during the weeks I was away for classes. Scott and Jessi Corbin's superb hospitality during my first two trips to Louisville made all the difference for me. They gave me a home rather than a hotel, friendship rather than loneliness, and conversation rather than idleness, and they shared their church, their friends, and some of their favorite places with me (like Black Swan Books in Lexington). The night they hosted the whole cohort at their home for dinner was probably the night that turned a group of students into a circle of friends. Though they had to leave Louisville before my degree was finished, I will never be able to think of my time at Southern without thinking of them.

When I needed help relearning Hebrew and strengthening my Greek, the Lord had already placed in my life an able and willing friend in Joe Orr. He enthusiastically

took up the challenge and we've been reading Greek and Hebrew together ever since. The Lord also provided me with a new circle of friends in the Biblical Theology cohort of 2015. Brian, David, Jeremiah, Harvey, and Art, your friendship and fellowship has enriched my life. From day one I was grateful to have entered a new company of like-minded men. Today I am grateful to call each of you friend.

I am aware more than ever how much a man's church situation affects his ability to complete a project like this. The folks at Minden Baptist Church supported me in every possible way and made it easy for me to devote the necessary time to studying and writing. It is a blessing to be their pastor. I hope I love them as well as they have loved me.

Jim Hamilton was teaching me through his books before I had the privilege to meet him, so I was thrilled to study under him. His love for Scripture and his enthusiasm for the riches of its interconnected story of God's glory is contagious. His encouragement throughout the program and his willingness to supervise this project made a good experience even better. The mark he has left upon me is indelible.

Ultimate thanks and all the praise go to the sovereign Lord and only savior who redeemed me by grace and whose kind and unerring providence has guided me every step of the way. To him be the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Matt Pitts

Minden, Texas

May 2018

CHAPTER 1
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND THE
BOOK OF GALATIANS

Does anything sound more archaic, irrelevant, and potentially uncomfortable than arguments about circumcision? Most people would rather talk about something else—anything else. Yet at the center of Paul’s vigorous debate about the nature of the gospel was the place of circumcision, and indeed the whole OT law, for Gentile Christians. Though circumcision may not be an issue in most churches today, the place of the OT law and the nature of the gospel are. This is what makes Galatians perennially relevant—not its debate over circumcision—but its focus on the nature of the gospel, the role of the law, and the Christian life. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to preach through the book of Galatians for this project.

Why Galatians?

The gospel is of “first importance”¹ (1 Cor 15:3) according to Paul and therefore making sure that the members of Minden Baptist Church and those who visit us are clear on the nature of the gospel is of great importance as well. Even those who regularly attend church are not always clear regarding the content of the gospel. Galatians is painstakingly clear about what the gospel is and is not. Preaching through Galatians will therefore address the need for clarity in the church about the nature of the gospel.

Clarifying the gospel always provides an opportunity to confront the twin errors of legalism and antinomianism. In rural contexts like Minden legalism often comes in the form of traditions that have turned into laws for Christians to obey. On the other

¹All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

hand, antinomianism seduces professing Christians with the lie that as long as a person has made a profession of faith in Jesus that he should not be held to any code of behavior. Galatians addresses both of these errors. Paul makes clear in Galatians that any gospel that adds tradition or law to faith in Christ as a condition of salvation is “a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all,” (Gal 1:6–7 NIV). At the same time, he demonstrates that those who have trusted in the crucified Christ must now live a crucified life (Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14) and that true faith in Christ leads to a life animated by love (Gal 5:6).

Legalism and antinomianism are worrisome, but so is the problem of biblical illiteracy which affects not only the culture, but even the church. Preaching Galatians provides ample opportunity to counter this biblical illiteracy because of its extensive engagement with the Bible’s own story. Because Paul grounds his argument about the role of the law in the promises of God to Abraham, the function of the Sinai covenant, and the coming of Christ, the preacher must help the congregation understand this storyline so that they can understand Paul’s argument and how it applies to them. Preaching Galatians this way will help the congregation better understand how the whole Bible fits together and will require a biblical-theological approach.

Biblical Theology: A Way of Reading the Bible

Biblical theology has been described as “a catchphrase, a wax nose that can mean anything from the historical-critical method . . . to a theological interpretation of Scripture.”² This spectrum of possible definitions makes it necessary to define what is meant, at least in this project, by biblical theology. If Edward Klink and Darian Lockett’s five-fold taxonomy is the guide, the approach to biblical theology adopted here is closest to what they call “Biblical Theology as History of Redemption,” which focuses on

²Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 13.

“God’s (historical) progressive revelation.”³ This understanding of biblical theology includes the claim that “because biblical theology is the progressive (historical) self-disclosure of God himself, this revelation constitutes a unified message.”⁴ This is a good place to start, but even within this category there is room for a more detailed understanding of biblical theology. I will argue that biblical theology is a way of reading the Bible that recognizes the Bible as one grand, self-interpreting,⁵ eschatological story.

One Grand Story

One of the greatest stories written in the twentieth century is J. R. R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*.⁶ Over the course of six books Tolkien tells the story of Frodo Baggins, whose journey to Mount Doom to destroy a powerful ring will determine the fate of Middle Earth. But even these six books do not contain the whole story. The reader who wants to fully understand the world that Tolkien created must also be familiar with Tolkien’s earlier book, *The Hobbit*,⁷ various tales found in *The Silmarillion*⁸ (a collection of seemingly disconnected stories about the early history of Middle Earth), and Tolkien’s letters.⁹ This story is not communicated in one genre or even in one place, but comprises

³Klink and Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology*, 22-23. The five categories they use are “Biblical Theology as Historical Description,” “Biblical Theology as History of Redemption,” “Biblical Theology as Worldview-Story,” “Biblical Theology as Canonical Approach,” and “Biblical Theology as Theological Construction.” Whether these categories are all helpful and whether they all even describe something that can be legitimately called biblical theology are both questions worth debating. However, this taxonomy does at least provide a starting place for attempting to define biblical theology.

⁴Ibid., 62.

⁵Though I have phrased it in a slightly different way, my understanding of the Bible as self-interpreting is indebted to James Hamilton’s definition of biblical theology discussed below. Also, well after phrasing my definition this way, I discovered that Graeme Goldsworthy also use the word “self-interpreting” to describe God’s word, though to my knowledge he does not use it as part of his definition of biblical theology. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 43.

⁶J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004).

⁷J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966).

⁸J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 2nd ed. (New York: Ballantine, 1999).

⁹For an example of a letter of Tolkien’s that can aid in understanding the story of Middle Earth, see Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader’s Companion*

one unified story nonetheless. The more you understand the various bits and pieces scattered about, the more you are able to understand the whole. In the same way, the Bible's story is found not only in the narrative portions of Scripture but also in its poetry, proverbs, letters, prophecies, and apocalyptic visions that were written down by multiple authors over a period of more than a thousand years. Across these various pieces of literature one grand story is told, greater than even the greatest epics produced by men.

The Bible's grand story is frequently summarized in four movements: creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. The story has not only come from somewhere (creation and fall) but is going somewhere (restoration) and will get there through a particular means (redemption). Understanding the story this way helps the reader to understand the various pieces (for example: the exodus, the exile, and the eschatological promises) and how they fit together. That the various pieces fit together is implied by the presence of an overarching story, but perhaps it should be stated explicitly—the Bible's one grand story is a unified story. This is what provides “the immediate appeal of biblical theology,” namely, “that it provides a ‘big picture’ that makes sense out of the bewildering bulk and variety of biblical literature.”¹⁰ All the parts are interrelated, all the pieces are interconnected and even mutually interpretive.¹¹

A Self-Interpreting Story

This is what I mean when I say the Bible's story is self-interpreting: as the story of the Bible progresses later parts of the Bible interpret earlier parts of the Bible. As James Hamilton puts it, “biblical theology [is] . . . the interpretive perspective reflected in the way the biblical authors have presented their understanding of earlier Scripture,

(Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005), 742-49.

¹⁰Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 19.

¹¹For a book-length explanation of how the whole Bible fits together, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

redemptive history, and the events they are describing.”¹² The fact that the biblical authors are interpreting earlier Scripture is evident, particularly in the NT, by the numerous OT quotations that are present throughout the NT.

The goal of biblical theology is not simply to recognize that interpretation is going on but to “attempt to understand and embrace the interpretative perspective of the biblical authors.”¹³ Therefore a biblical-theological approach to the Bible aims to understand how the authors of Scripture interpreted earlier portions of Scripture and adopt that same approach in one’s reading of the Bible.

An Eschatological Story

Finally, the story the Bible is telling is going somewhere—it is ‘an eschatological story,’ one that is still awaiting a conclusion, and thus a story in which we are participants. Hamilton maintains, “The Bible’s story and symbolism teach us as the church to understand who we are, what we face, and how we should live as we wait for the coming of our king and Lord.”¹⁴ To borrow an illustration from N. T. Wright, it is as though we are actors in a Shakespearean play that is missing its final act. In order to understand how we should act in the unscripted final scenes, we must understand the earlier portions of the play.¹⁵ Biblical theology helps us understand our place and our role in this story as we await that great day, which is precisely what Paul does in Galatians, particularly in chapters 3 and 4. Paul writes to help the Galatians understand how to rightly interpret the story of the Bible and their place in it as they await the King’s return.

¹²James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 16.

¹³James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 21.

¹⁴Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 97.

¹⁵N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 140.

Biblical Theology: An Aid for Preaching the Bible

Biblical theology is not only a way of reading the Bible, it is also an aid for expositional preaching of the Bible. The preacher's primary task is to make known the meaning of a text of Scripture to the congregation.¹⁶ Uncovering the meaning of the text will require a grammatical and historical analysis of the text, determining the meaning of words in the passage and their relationship to each other as well as what those words would have meant in the historical context in which they were written. However, this approach can easily become atomistic, analyzing a verse or passage in isolation from the rest of the book or even the rest of the canon. Biblical theology guards the preaching from erring in this direction because "biblical theology is nothing more nor less than allowing the Bible to speak as a whole."¹⁷ Since the Bible tells one grand story and the meaning of that story is unfolded and interpreted as the story progresses, failing to connect a particular passage to that broader story means failing to recognize part of its meaning. More than that, when a biblical author quotes or alludes to an earlier passage, ignoring that connection is to disregard the author's intended meaning. The discipline of biblical theology helps the preacher avoid these errors by focusing his attention on the connection between the sermon passage and the rest of the canon.¹⁸ This is why Goldsworthy can assert that biblical theology "is absolutely indispensable in expository preaching."¹⁹

¹⁶Brian Chapell defines an expository sermon this way: "*The technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of listeners.*" Brian Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 132. Italics in original.

¹⁷Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 7.

¹⁸This is why Hamilton says, "Biblical theology is exegesis of a particular passage in its canonical context." James M. Hamilton Jr., "Biblical Theology and Preaching," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, ed. Daniel L. Akin, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010), 213.

¹⁹Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology*, 23.

Schreiner likewise highlights the aid that biblical theology gives to preaching when he says, “Biblical theology focuses on the storyline of scripture—the unfolding of God’s plan in redemptive history, so that in every passage we preach we consider the place of that text in relationship to the whole storyline of the Bible.”²⁰ Connecting a particular text to the larger story of Scripture is not an optional extra but a vital element of faithful preaching. “Our task as preachers is to proclaim the whole counsel of God. We will not fulfill our calling if as preachers we fail to do biblical theology. . . . We are not faithfully serving our congregations if they do not . . . gain a better understanding from us of the whole storyline of the Bible.”²¹ The pastor must show the congregation how the sermon text fits into the grand narrative of Scripture. We now turn to Galatians and its place within this story.

Galatians in Biblical-Theological Context

Paul’s argument in Galatians presumes at least a working knowledge of the OT, especially the Abraham and exodus narratives and their relationship to each other. In addition, Paul assumes that he and the Galatians recognize they have entered a new era that dawned with the coming of Christ.²² Understanding the relationship between these three epochs and their covenants (the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and New covenants) is essential for understanding the OT.²³ As Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum argue, “In

²⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 22.

²¹*Ibid.*, 28.

²²See Gal 1:4; 6:15. Schreiner argues similarly: “The present evil age is not the only reality, for the ‘fulfillment [ends] of the ages’ . . . has now dawned in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 10:11).” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 77. Bracketed section in original. Recognizing that a new era has dawned does not require going as far as J. Louis Martyn in his apocalyptic reading of Galatians. He takes Paul’s mention of new creation in Gal 6:15 to mean a “radical, uncompromising newness.” J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 565.

²³Interpreters have attempted in multiple ways to explain how these three covenants fit together. To argue for one approach over another at this point would go beyond the scope of this project. Instead, I will be generally following the approach laid out by Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum in

order to construct a metanarrative that is true to the biblical text, we must . . . listen to what the text says about the interrelationship between two or more covenants.”²⁴ Paul himself has paid careful attention to how the OT communicates the relationship between these three covenants and makes this relationship a key part of his argument in Galatians, particularly in chapter 3. Therefore, a brief summary of each of these covenants may be helpful before examining how Paul explains their relationship.

Abrahamic Covenant

God called Abraham out Ur of the Chaldeans where he and his family had worshiped idols (Josh 24:2) and commanded him to go to a land that he would show him.²⁵ God promised Abraham three things: seed (offspring), land, and blessing. More specifically God promised to make him a great nation, to give him the land of Canaan, and to bless him and all the families of the earth through him (Gen 12:2–3, 7). These promises indicated that God’s earlier promise of a seed of the woman who would overcome the serpent (Gen 3:15) would be fulfilled through Abraham’s line.²⁶ These promises were not fulfilled immediately or even in Abraham’s lifetime. Abraham’s advanced age and his wife’s barrenness cast doubt on God’s promise of offspring to Abraham. Attempting to bring about the promised seed in their own way and in their own time, Sarah gave her servant Hagar to Abraham and from their union Ishmael was born (Gen 16). But God was not pleased with Abraham’s attempt at producing his own seed. God reiterated his promises to Abraham, particularly the promise of seed, and gave him

Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).

²⁴Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 388.

²⁵Although the man later called Abraham was first called Abram when God summoned him to leave his family and country, I will refer to him only as Abraham for the sake of simplicity.

²⁶For an article-length development of this claim, which cannot be made here, see James M. Hamilton Jr., “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 253-73.

the sign of circumcision as a physical reminder of his covenant with him (Gen 17). Then he allowed Abraham to see the beginning of their fulfillment in the birth of his son Isaac (Gen 21:1–7).

Isaac was the son of promise; Ishmael was not. The conflict that arose between the two meant that Hagar and Ishmael had to be sent away (Gen 21:8–14). Though Ishmael would also be a great nation because he was Abraham’s son, the full range of promises God made to Abraham were not passed on to Ishmael but only to Isaac (Gen 21:10–14; 26:3–4). Then those promises were passed on to Isaac’s son Jacob (Gen 35:11–12). And when Jacob and his sons sojourned in Egypt the world was blessed through Joseph, a seed of Abraham, who had stored up grain in Egypt where many came to buy during a long and far-reaching famine (Gen 41:47). The promise of seed was being fulfilled as well in Jacob’s twelve sons and the massive multiplication of their offspring that took place while they sojourned in Egypt (Exod 1:7). Yet in Egypt they remained and the promise of land seemed to fade.

About 400 years later, God spoke to Moses and identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod 3:6). He promised to bring the seed of Israel out of Egypt and into the land he had promised to Abraham so long ago (Exod 3:16–17). This covenant God had made with Abraham was the basis of God’s action against Pharaoh to redeem his people from slavery in Egypt and bring them to the land of promise (Exod 6:2–8). This is why Gentry and Wellum can say that “the exodus from Egypt is a fulfillment of the covenant with Abraham.”²⁷

God’s promises to Abraham are the promises that form the bedrock of God’s commitment to Israel and to the world. As Gentry and Wellum state, “The covenant with Abraham is the basis for all of God’s dealings with the human race from this point on,

²⁷Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 388.

and the basis of all his later plans and purposes in history.”²⁸ Everything from Joseph’s high position in Egypt, to the massive multiplication of offspring that troubled Pharaoh, to the exodus, to the conquest of the land rests on the solid rock of God’s promise to Abraham and has as its ultimate aim the blessing of all the nations. But on that bedrock was raised another covenant that God made with Israel at Sinai.

Mosaic Covenant

After the exodus from Egypt God brought his people to Sinai to meet with him and enter into a covenant with him (Exod 19:2–6). This covenant, though it contained promises, consisted mainly of commands and required obedience (Exod 19:5, 8).

Obedience to the covenant would bring blessing, but disobedience to the covenant would bring curses (Deut 27–28). There is no hint that this covenant replaces the promises made to Abraham. Instead it assumes them and is built upon them. Gentry and Wellum argue,

God’s plan and purpose . . . have not changed. He wants to bless the descendants of Abraham and, through them, all the nations. . . . As they come out of Egypt and before they enter the land, God makes an agreement with Israel. The purpose of this agreement or covenant is to enable them to enjoy the blessings he wants to give them and to be the blessing to the other nations. . . . We might say, then, that the Mosaic covenant is given at this time to administer the fulfillment of the divine promises to Abraham and to the nation as a whole, and through them to the entire world.²⁹

In other words, the covenant God made with Abraham is not superseded by the covenant he made with Israel at Sinai. Rather, the Sinai covenant was designed to aid Israel in experiencing and (in a sense) accomplishing God’s promises to Abraham. This relationship between these two covenants will be central to Paul’s argument in Galatians chapter 3.

Though the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises is never in doubt, it is clear from the Pentateuch itself that Israel will not be able to keep the Mosaic covenant. The

²⁸Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 295.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 304.

covenant is broken almost before it has begun when Israel worships a golden calf shortly after hearing God speak directly from Sinai forbidding idolatry. Moses tells the people of Israel that he knows they will turn away from the covenant after his death (Deut 31:29). God has declared it beforehand (Deut 31:16). As Wright states, “[Deut 27–30] envisage the curse not just as a possibility but as a certainty.”³⁰ The Mosaic covenant is not a permanent solution to the problem of sin. Something else, something new, must be done.

New Covenant

The prophets recognized the need for a new covenant and spoke of a coming day when God would establish this new covenant with his people. Jeremiah declares that the new covenant that will be different than the Sinai covenant that Israel broke (Jer 31:31–32). Ezekiel proclaims that in this new covenant God will give his people a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek 11:19–20), and not only a new spirit, but his own Spirit (Ezek 36:27). This new covenant, which Jesus inaugurated by his death and resurrection (Luke 22:20), “*supersedes* all the previous covenants,” according to Gentry and Wellum, since “it is the new covenant which all of the previous covenants anticipate and typify.”³¹ This means that the Mosaic covenant will no longer be binding on God’s people as a covenant and that through the new covenant the promises to Abraham will be fulfilled.³²

Paul and the Covenants

Paul’s argument about the role of the Mosaic covenant (and therefore the law in general and circumcision in particular) and the position of Gentile believers in Jesus hinges on the relationship between these three covenants: the Abrahamic covenant, the

³⁰Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 261.

³¹Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 644-45. Emphasis in original.

³²*Ibid.*, 605, 644-45.

Mosaic covenant, and the new covenant. The relationship between these three covenants presented above is vital for understanding Paul's argument.

Familiarity with Literature

Galatians has been subjected to vigorous study and debate at least since the time of the Reformation. Five hundred years later the debates have shifted from the Catholic-Protestant divide over the nature of justification to the debate over old and new perspectives on Paul, but the intensity of study shows no sign of abating.³³ Mastering all the literature on Galatians is beyond the scope of this project, but the volumes listed below are those considered essential for a thorough study of Galatians.

Commentaries

The most recent of these is the commentary by A. Andrew Das in the Concordia Commentary series.³⁴ This series is written from a Lutheran perspective and has distinguished itself with several outstanding contributions in recent years. One of those is Andrew Das's volume on Galatians. Das gives particular attention to Paul's first century context (something New Perspective advocates have criticized Lutheran scholars of failing to do in the past) and to understanding Paul's letter to the Galatians in that light.

Shortly before the publication of Das's commentary, Douglas Moo contributed the volume on Galatians to the Baker Exegetical Commentary series.³⁵ Moo is an accomplished Pauline scholar and this volume has been one of the most highly praised commentaries in recent years.

³³This is not to say that the Catholic-Protestant divide over the nature of justification is no longer an issue. It is simply no longer the primary issue being addressed in Pauline scholarship.

³⁴A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014).

³⁵Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013).

Also noteworthy is Thomas Schreiner's work on Galatians published in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary series.³⁶ Here Schreiner brings his decades of work in Pauline studies to bear on the book of Galatians with special reference to the structure of the text. Though not a commentary on the Greek text, *Galatians* (along with the other works in this series) does give attention to certain features of the Greek text that are vital for faithful exegesis.

Not as recent but still significant is Richard Longenecker's *Galatians* in the Word Biblical Commentary series.³⁷ As with other volumes in this series, there is no lack of information about any significant aspect of the text. His approach to Galatians utilizes the rhetorical conventions of Paul's day as a key to the structure and purpose of the text.

Two older works that merit inclusion in any serious study of Galatians are Hans Dieter Betz's commentary in the Hermeneia series³⁸ and J. Louis Martyn's commentary in the Anchor Bible series.³⁹ These works come from a more critical perspective than those mentioned above and have distinguished themselves as notable contributions to the study of Galatians.

Also writing from a critical perspective are Martinus De Boer in his commentary on Galatians in the New Testament Library⁴⁰ and Charles Cousar's contribution on Galatians to the Interpretation series.⁴¹ An older volume than these but still worthy of consideration is the volume in the International Critical Commentary

³⁶Schreiner, *Galatians*.

³⁷Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990).

³⁸Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979).

³⁹Martyn, *Galatians*.

⁴⁰Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

⁴¹Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1982).

series by Ernest De Witt Burton.⁴² Older still but a classic protestant treatment is Luther's *Lectures on Galatians 1535*.⁴³

One unique commentary that is particularly useful for a biblical-theological reading of Galatians is the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson.⁴⁴ This commentary addresses citations of and allusions to the Old Testament in the New Testament. The section on Galatians was written by Moisés Silva.

Another substantial commentary is the New International Greek Testament Commentary on Galatians by F. F. Bruce.⁴⁵ Though perhaps somewhat dated now, it remains valuable because of its attention to the Greek text.

Second Temple Judaism

The New Testament and the People of God by N. T. Wright not only gives a survey of the various groups and worldviews present in the Second Temple period, but also lays a hermeneutical foundation for discerning an author's worldview.⁴⁶ Both of these works provide necessary background information for understanding the world Paul was engaging with his gospel.

The *OT Pseudepigrapha* and the *Apocrypha* are essential primary sources for the Second Temple period. *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha* provides a critical edition of the *Apocrypha*⁴⁷ while the second volume of James Charlesworth's *The Old*

⁴²Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977).

⁴³Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelican, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963).

⁴⁴G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

⁴⁵F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

⁴⁶Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*.

⁴⁷Michael Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, 4th ed. (New York:

Testament Pseudepigrapha contains an important document for the study of Galatians known as *The Letter of Aristeas*.⁴⁸

Other Significant Works

N. T. Wright's work on Paul is both insightful and controversial. Whether one agrees with his conclusions or not, what he has attempted in *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* cannot be ignored.⁴⁹ In terms of understanding Paul's worldview and theology in light of Second Temple Judaism, nothing like it has been attempted on this scale. His analysis is particularly relevant for this study because of his focus not only on what Paul said, but how what Paul said arose from his understanding of Israel's story in the Hebrew Bible and his own encounter with the risen Christ.

One of the few book-length treatments of the theology of Galatians is James D. G. Dunn's *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*.⁵⁰ Central to his analysis of the letter is his claim to discern between those elements of the gospel Paul and his opponents agreed on and those they did not. This allows him to pinpoint the precise areas of controversy in Paul's preaching.

Brian Rosner in *Paul and the Law* has provided a fresh take on a complicated subject that is at the heart of Paul's argument in Galatians, namely, how the law relates to Gentile Christians.⁵¹ According to Rosner, Paul's seemingly contradictory statements about the law actually describe his consistent three-fold approach to the law which he

Oxford University Press, 2010). All quotations from the Apocrypha are from this edition.

⁴⁸James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the "Old Testament" and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983).

⁴⁹N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013).

⁵⁰James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁵¹Brian Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013).

describes as “repudiation,” “replacement,” and “reappropriation.”⁵² This taxonomy of Paul’s use of the law arises from Rosner’s attempt at “*a hermeneutical solution to the puzzle of Paul and the law,*” which seeks to do justice to all that Paul says about the law.⁵³ Since, as Brian Vickers has stated, “Biblical theology is hermeneutics,”⁵⁴ this hermeneutical approach is particularly valuable for a biblical theology of Galatians.

Jason Meyer also addresses the complicated question of the law in Paul’s theology in *The End of the Law*.⁵⁵ He devotes an entire chapter to Galatians 3–4 with particular emphasis on Paul’s allegorical interpretation in Galatians 4:21–31.

At the heart of Paul’s argument in Galatians is the relationship between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants and their relationship to the new covenant. So, although it does not address Galatians in any detail, *Kingdom through Covenant* is relevant to this discussion because it thoroughly engages with the relationship between these covenants within the OT, thus illuminating how Paul’s understanding of them is based the OT itself.

Another volume pertinent to this project is *She Must and Shall Go Free* by Matthew Harmon.⁵⁶ G. K. Beale explains its significance saying, “Harmon has observed that Isaiah 49–55 may broadly be the main conceptual substructure within which Paul conceived what he was writing in the entire Epistle to the Galatians.”⁵⁷ Such an OT background is helpful for investigating a biblical theology of Galatians.

⁵²Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 39.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 30. Emphasis in original.

⁵⁴Brian Vickers, class lecture, Old Testament Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, July 9, 2015.

⁵⁵Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009).

⁵⁶Matthew S. Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free: Paul’s Isaianic Gospel in Galatians* (New York: De Gruyter, 2010). I was alerted to this source by G. K. Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

⁵⁷Beale, *Handbook on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 86.

Finally, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11* by Richard Hays should not be overlooked in a thorough study of Galatians.⁵⁸ The subtitle of the book indicates its particular significance for a biblical-theological study of Galatians. Galatians 3:1–4:11 is the heart of the epistle and the portion of the letter that deals with the most biblical-theological issues. Consequently, Hays’s proposal will be a valuable conversation partner for this project.

Outline of Galatians

Covering Galatians in seven sermons is no easy task, despite the fact that Galatians is fairly short. Whole sermons could be preached on sections that cannot be addressed in this project. Yet, it is possible to communicate the main lines of Paul’s argument in Galatians without preaching every paragraph. With this as my aim, I propose to preach Galatians in the seven segments listed below. A summary of each section accompanies the outline below:

Galatians 1:1–10; 6:11–18

These opening and closing sections of the letter are where Paul highlights and summarizes what is at stake in the conflict he addresses in the rest of the letter. As Dunn argues, “It is in the introduction . . . that indicators were likely to be flagged up of what Paul considered to be of central importance.”⁵⁹ Similarly, “the final parting . . . was likely to ensure that central concerns of the letter were recalled in summary.”⁶⁰ These sections reveal that the churches in Galatia “are turning to a different gospel” (1:6) preached by those “who would force [them] to be circumcised” (6:12). Paul pronounces a curse against those who “preach to [them] a gospel contrary to the one [Paul] preached to

⁵⁸Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

⁵⁹Dunn, *Theology of Galatians*, 19.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*

[them]” (1:8), in this case a gospel that requires circumcision and submission to the Mosaic covenant. These teachers require circumcision of Gentile followers of Jesus because they are seeking to avoid “[being] persecuted for the cross of Christ” (6:12b) and “want to make a good showing in the flesh” (6:12a). But Paul asserts that “neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (6:15). The false teachers and the Galatian believers are missing the point by focusing on circumcision. What counts is being made new in Christ.

Galatians 2:11–21

After demonstrating that his gospel is not opposed by the apostles in Jerusalem (2:1–10), Paul recounts an instance where he opposed an apostle over the gospel (2:11). Paul recounts how Peter “was eating with Gentiles in Antioch; but when [certain men from James] came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (2:12). Other Jewish believers joined Peter in what Paul saw as “hypocrisy” and “conduct . . . not in step with the truth of the gospel” (2:13–14). What makes Peter’s behavior contrary to the gospel is “that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (2:16). To act as though “Gentiles . . . [must] live like Jews” (2:16) in order to be right with God and fit for fellowship with Jews is contrary to the gospel.

Galatians 3:1–14

The Galatians are being told that Peter’s conduct was right and that they must become Jews by circumcision. Paul reminds them that they received the Spirit when they heard the gospel and believed, not because they performed certain works. In this way their experience is the same as Abraham’s who “believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness” (3:6, quot. Gen 15:6). Since Abraham believed and was blessed Paul can say “it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (3:7) and that “those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham” (3:9). This blessing of Gentiles who believe was “preached . . . beforehand to Abraham” in Genesis 12:3 and comes only through

Christ who “redeemed us from the curse of the law . . . so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles” (3:13–14). By contrast, those who “rely on works of the law” like circumcision rather than on Christ “are under a curse” and do not receive the blessing of Abraham.

Galatians 3:15–29

Since faith in Christ brings the blessing of Abraham and attempting to live according to the law brings the curse, Paul is compelled to explain the law’s place in God’s plan. Most importantly, the law does not negate or supersede the promises made to Abraham since “even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified” (3:15). The law “was added because of transgressions” (3:19) and “imprisoned everything under sin” (3:22). The law functioned as a “guardian until Christ came. . . . But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (3:25). The temporary role of the law has been fulfilled. Now that the promises “made to Abraham and to his offspring . . . who is Christ” (3:16) have been fulfilled, all who belong to Christ “are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (3:29).

Galatians 4:1–11

Paul signals that he is restating and expounding on his argument from 3:23–29 in this section when he begins with “I mean that” (4:1). He reminds the Galatians, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods” (4:8). But though we “were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (4:3), Christ was born and died “that we might receive adoption as sons” (4:5). As a result, Paul tells them “God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts” (4:6) and assures them of their status by saying, “You are no longer a slave, but a son” (4:7). For the Galatians to “turn back again” (4:9) and “observe days and months and seasons and years” (4:10) according to the Mosaic law is to return to slavery.

Galatians 4:21–5:1

Paul returns again to the story of Abraham in these verses, but this time his focus is on Sarah and Hagar and their two sons. He tells the Galatians that “this [story] may be interpreted allegorically” (4:24). Paul argues that those who remain under the law correspond to Hagar’s son and are enslaved (4:24–25). By contrast, the Galatian Christians correspond to Isaac “who was born according to the Spirit” (4:29) and was “the son of the free woman” (4:23). Paul calls the Galatians to “cast out the slave woman and her son” (4:30) and refuse to “submit again to a yoke of slavery” (5:1).

Galatians 5:2–15

Anyone “who accepts circumcision . . . is obligated to keep the whole law” (5:3). Indeed, to “accept circumcision” (5:2) is to return to “a yoke of slavery” and forfeit the freedom given to them by Christ (5:1). This freedom is not a libertarian freedom—freedom from all constraints. It is true that “in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything,” but what does count is “faith working through love” (5:6). Therefore, the Galatians’ freedom should be expressed in love and service (5:13). They are not to be lawless for the love Paul calls them to fulfill the law (5:14)

Conclusion

As discomfiting as some of the subject matter of Galatians might seem at first, it is in fact a rich mine of instruction. In Galatians Paul not only clarifies the nature and implications of the gospel, but he demonstrates how the gospel he preached was anticipated by and now fulfills the promises made to Abraham. Preaching from Galatians with the aid of biblical theology will provide the opportunity to help the members of Minden Baptist Church grow in their understanding of the nature and implications of the gospel while at the same time deepening their appreciation for how the gospel relates to the OT.

CHAPTER 2

WHEN THE GOSPEL IS AT STAKE GALATIANS 1:1–10; 6:11–18

Hamlet's father, the king, is dead. Hamlet's mother is now married to the late king's brother. They waited a whole two months after the king's death to say their vows. Life is moving swiftly on for everyone except Hamlet. He is still mourning his father's death and looks with contempt on his uncle's swift marriage to his mother. Meanwhile a watch is kept against a nearby nation with a grudge looking to take advantage of the transition from one king to another.

But things are far worse even than they appear. Hamlet's father speaks to him in a vision claiming that he was poisoned by his own brother—the very man who now sits on his throne and has claimed his wife as his own. Hearing this, Hamlet is compelled to avenge his father's death. The king is no less determined to be rid of Hamlet once and for all. Scheming, intrigue, madness, and murder all come to a head with a sword fight and another batch of poison. When another nation approaches for war, will anyone be left to stand against them? Great things are at stake.

But far greater things are at stake in Galatians than a mere kingdom or even life and death.¹ The gospel itself is at stake and with it the fate of people in Galatia who will either suffer the curse of God or experience the blessing of his fellowship forever. Hamlet is home to some of the highest drama and most impassioned speeches in all of English literature. Galatians is likewise home to some of the most highly charged language and dire warnings in all of the New Testament. When the stakes are high,

¹See the discussion in ch. 1 for why I have brought the opening and closing passages of the letter together in one sermon.

emotions run high. When life and death, heaven and hell are on the line, we cannot be dispassionate and disinterested. We are bound to enter the fray with heart and soul for the sake of life and truth. That is precisely how we must read this letter because that is how Paul has written it. He has entered the fray with a heart and mind aflame for truth, knowing that nothing less than heaven and hell is on the line for the Galatians.

Those same things are on the line for us no less than they were for them. In every life, in every church, heaven and hell hang on whether we get the gospel right. That is why we need Galatians and why it deserves our rapt attention. In order to grasp what is at stake in this letter we will focus our attention on the beginning of the letter in 1:1–10 and the end of the letter in 6:11–18. In 1:1–5 we will see that the gospel is “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3). Then in 1:6–10 we will see that some in Galatians are deserting God as a result of others distorting the gospel. Finally, in 6:11–18 we will see that the problem in Galatia boils down to a choice between circumcision and the cross. Paul’s point in these verses is this: when the gospel is at stake we cannot afford to compromise.

Christ has been crucified and risen, the Spirit has been poured out, churches are being planted, and the gospel is spreading. The spread of the gospel to Gentiles has given rise to a high stakes debate about whether the Gentiles can be justified and included in the people of God without becoming Jews through circumcision and obedience to the law of Moses. Paul preached justification and inclusion in the family of God through faith in Jesus the Messiah without the requirements of circumcision and obedience to the law. But as we will see, there were some in Galatia preaching a different message and causing trouble. The stakes had perhaps never been higher for Paul than they were when he wrote this letter and they could not be higher for us.² We cannot afford to get the gospel wrong.

²Though the stakes had never been higher for Paul, there were other occasions where the stakes were equally high because the gospel itself was at stake just as it is in this letter. One thinks of the meeting

The Gospel Is “of First Importance” (1 Cor 15:3; Gal 1:1–5)

When the gospel is at stake, we are dealing with an issue “of first importance” (1 Cor 15:3). That priority is sensed and seen throughout Paul’s letter to the Galatians, but is perhaps particularly visible in the opening verses of the letter.³ As we will see soon the Galatian Christians are in danger of abandoning the gospel for another message brought by another set of missionaries.⁴ Paul is compelled to confront this challenge head-on, and he starts with the first line of the letter.

Paul: Apostle of the God of the Gospel (Gal 1:1)

Paul identifies himself as an apostle, but he is careful to qualify the origin of his apostleship. An apostle is one who is sent as an authorized messenger on someone’s behalf, not unlike an ambassador.⁵ So an apostle’s message is bound up with his credentials. Evidently as Paul’s gospel was challenged so were his credentials as an apostle.⁶ That is why he asserts at the start that his commission as an apostle did not come

in Jerusalem described in Gal 2:1–10 where the gospel was at stake (see especially 2:2–5) and the Antioch incident described in Gal 2:11–14 where the gospel was also at stake.

³For a summary of the usual form of an introduction in Greco-Roman letter writing and how Paul diverges from it, see Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 19-20.

⁴Rather than coin my own term to describe Paul’s opponents in Galatia, in what follows I will use many of the terms already found in the literature. Rather than cite each term each time I use it I have cited them all here: “the Teachers” (J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary [New York: Doubleday, 1997], 14); “the opponents,” “troublemakers,” and “agitators,” (James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 8); “the other missionaries” (Dunn, *Theology of Galatians*, 11); “false teachers” (Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013], 2); “the new preachers” (De Boer, *Galatians*, 10); and “the rivals” (A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 2014], 10).

⁵For a brief discussion of apostleship including a possible Hebrew background to its meaning here, see De Boer, *Galatians*, 21.

⁶While certain dangers come with mirror-reading Paul’s letters, some attempt must be made in the interest of interpretation. For an article length treatment of this issue, see John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73-93. For the conclusion drawn here about Paul’s apostolic credentials, see Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 74 (citing several others) and James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 25; contra Das, *Galatians*, 75.

from men, nor was he sent by a particular man.⁷ Instead he was commissioned and sent by “Jesus Christ and God the Father” (Gal 1:1). Already he is eager to remind the Galatian churches that the God who commissioned him is the God of the gospel, the God “who raised [Jesus Christ] from the dead” (Gal 1:1). If Paul’s claim is true (and I believe it is), then the gospel he preaches and the commands he gives ultimately come from God with the authority of God.⁸ If his claim is not true, then there is no reason to listen to what he has to say. A man who lies (or is deluded) about being sent from God is not the sort of person we should trust. But a man who has been genuinely commissioned by God to deliver the message of God to the people of God deserves our utmost attention no less than the prophets of old. And that is exactly what Christians believe and have believed. That is why Paul’s letters are in the canon of Scripture.⁹ And that is why we read them and preach them in the church. These are the words of a man sent from God. Are you listening?

Gospel-filled Greeting (Gal 1:2–5)

After Paul reminds the Galatians that he was commissioned by God the Father and Jesus Christ he greets them with grace and peace “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:3). This is a standard greeting that we see in Paul’s letters, but that should not cause us to overlook it or treat it as a mere formality.¹⁰ If we do we may miss the stunning fact that this greeting is not from Paul but from God. As an apostle commissioned by the Father and the Son he speaks on behalf of the Father and the Son

⁷I take this use of *διὰ* to indicate “agency.” For this possibility, see Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 368, who gives “by” as an appropriate translation.

⁸Similarly, Das, *Galatians*, 74, and G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians*, IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 32.

⁹For an early witness to the division between canonical and non-canonical books, see the text of Athanasius’s letter in David Brakke, “A New Fragment of Athanasius’s Thirty-Ninth *Festal Letter*: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon,” *Harvard Theological Review* 103, no. 1 (2010): 47-66.

¹⁰For the significance of the words “grace” and “peace” in Gal 1:3, see Moo, *Galatians*, 70-71.

and sends greetings of grace and peace “from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:3). Already the words “grace” and “peace” point toward the gospel since we receive grace from God and peace with God through “the gospel of God” (Rom 1:1; cf. Rom 5:1, 15, 17).¹¹ But that is just the beginning of Paul’s gospel-filled greeting.

Jesus’ death as gift. Paul reminds the Galatian churches that Jesus gave himself in his death on the cross.¹² His death was a gift of grace.¹³ And as one scholar has shown, to give a gift in Paul’s day created a bond between the giver and the receiver of the gift.¹⁴ This priceless gift of Jesus’ life given for us is an act of grace that ties us to him, which is part of what makes their departure from God and the gospel so troubling as we’ll see in a moment.

Jesus’ death as a substitute. Though we might expect Paul to say that Jesus gave himself for us, instead he says he “gave himself for our sins” (Gal 1:4). The reason he says it that way is that our sins are what made the gift necessary. It was because of sin that we needed him to give himself in his death on the cross.¹⁵ Our sins merited death, but he gave himself as a sacrifice, a substitute who died our death for our sins.¹⁶

¹¹Similarly, but more thoroughly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 75-76.

¹²John Barclay has highlighted the “gift” aspect of grace and Christ’s death and resurrection in John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). For “gift” in Galatians, see pp. 331-33, and for “gift” in Gal 1:1–5 in particular, see pp. 351-53.

¹³For a lexical study linking “grace” (χάρις) and “gift” (δίδωμι and related words), see *ibid.*, 575-79

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 22-32. For example, Barclay says, “We should assume, unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, that gifts carry expectations of a return. . . . Some form of reciprocity is likely to be present, since gifts have generally functioned to create social bonds, which can only be recognized and reproduced through return” (23).

¹⁵“For our sins’ means ‘for the forgiveness or expiation of our sins.’” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 75.

¹⁶For the possibility that ὑπὲρ indicates substitution here, see Moo, *Galatians*, 72 (citing Wallace and others).

Purpose: Deliverance from present evil age. Jesus' purpose in giving himself for our sins was to deliver us.¹⁷ His death was intended to rescue his people just as he rescued the Israelites from Egypt.¹⁸ So what were we rescued from? Paul says that Jesus died "to deliver us from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4).¹⁹ What does he mean by "the present evil age" (Gal 1:4)? One scholar puts it this way: "'The present evil age' presupposes the Jewish apocalyptic schema which saw world history as divided into two ages, the present age and the age to come, and the present age as one dominated by evil, in contrast to the glories of the future age."²⁰ So what does Paul mean by saying Jesus died "to deliver us from the present evil age" (Gal 1:4). Well he does not mean that Jesus has rescued you from time and space, he means that he has rescued you from one age and brought you into another.²¹ That idea may be new to you, but it is not uncommon in the NT. You can hear this idea of two ages in passages like Ephesians 1:21 where Paul says that Jesus has been seated at God's right hand "above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come."²² Jesus says in Luke 20:34–35, "The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage." So there is the present age and there is an age to come that is connected to the resurrection. What Paul is saying is here is that we have

¹⁷For the use of ὅπως to indicate purpose, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 676.

¹⁸The word for deliverance here, ἐξαπέσω, is also used in the LXX in Exod 3:8; 18:4, 8, 9, 10. Perhaps too much should not be made of this since, as Dunn notes, "The verb . . . occurs frequently in the LXX." Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 35. However, Schreiner says that here it "probably recalls the Lord's work in rescuing his people from Egypt [citing the same verses listed above]." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 77.

¹⁹For the seminal article on the "apocalyptic" approach to Galatians (which can claim its first signal in Gal 1:4), see J. Louis Martyn, "Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians," *New Testament Studies* 31, no. 3 (1985): 410-24.

²⁰Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 36.

²¹Contra Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 42.

²²See also Matt 12:32.

been delivered from the present age and therefore he is implying that we have been somehow brought into the age to come already.²³

Plan: according to God's will. Lest we think that this was all Jesus' doing Paul affirms that all this was done by Jesus "according to the will of our God and Father." Christ's death and our deliverance were not carried out by Jesus in isolation but in accord with the Father's desire. Christ showed his love for us by laying down his life for us. God showed his love for us by desiring and planning to give up his Son for our deliverance.

Deserting God and Distorting the Gospel (Gal 1:6–10)

As it was in Hamlet's Denmark, "something is rotten in" Galatia. Even in his greeting Paul was preparing to address the heart of the problem and the reason he wrote the letter: the Galatian believers are deserting God under the influence of preachers who are distorting the gospel.

Turning from the Gospel Is Turning from God (Gal 1:6a)

Paul registers his shock at the surprising switch that is underway in Galatia in the opening words of the body of his letter. He is surprised not only by what has happened but by how quickly it has happened.²⁴ What has happened is the believers in Galatia are turning to a gospel different from what Paul preached to them.²⁵ But this was not merely a turning from one set of doctrines to another; it was a turning from God

²³"Temporally, the age to come, the resurrection age, still lies in the future; spiritually, believers in Christ have here and now been made partakers of it, because they share the risen life of Christ (cf. 2:19f.), who has already entered the resurrection age." Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 76.

²⁴Some see here a (possible) allusion to Exod 32:8 and the episode with the golden calf. So Das, *Galatians*, 100; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 40; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 85.

²⁵The present tense of the verb μετατίθημι indicates this is an ongoing and not yet a completed action. So Hansen, *Galatians*, 36; Betz, *Galatians*, 47; Das, *Galatians*, 101; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 40. Schreiner cautions: "The Galatians are in the process of departing from the gospel, but some lean too heavily on the present tense to defend this notion [here he cites Longenecker and Dunn]. What indicates a process is the context of the letter as a whole." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 84.

himself.²⁶ When someone turns their back on the gospel, they are not simply turning away from a particular church or denomination or set of doctrines. They are turning away from God himself.

“A Different Gospel” Is a Distorted Gospel (Gal 1:6b–7)

So to what exactly were the Galatian Christians turning? Paul calls it “a different gospel” but is quick to clarify that this “different gospel” is really no gospel at all (Gal 1:6).²⁷ It is another message claiming to be good news, but it is not good news. It was brought to them not by heralds of good news but by “some who trouble you” and who “want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7). Their message did nothing but distort the good news that Paul had preached to them before.

Paul does not describe what this distorted message was at this point. He does not need to. The churches he was writing to had heard it. Some of them were beginning to believe it. They knew what he was talking about without him describing it. We on the other hand need some help from the rest of the letter to understand what the problem was. The most basic explanation of the problem was this: they were being persuaded that it was necessary for them to be circumcised.²⁸ That is why in 5:2 Paul tells them, “Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you.” That is also why when he is summing up his argument in the closing section of the letter he says in 6:12, “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised.”

This is important for us to grasp. What Paul means in these verses when he speaks of the “gospel” is more than the person of Christ and the historical facts of his

²⁶De Boer, *Galatians*, 40. For God as the referent for “him who called you” (Gal 1:6), see also Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 41.

²⁷De Boer, *Galatians*, 41.

²⁸For a more detailed (but still brief) explanation, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87.

death and resurrection or even the deliverance that comes from his death (Gal 1:4). There is no hint anywhere in Galatians that the believers in Galatia were denying or turning from any of these things.²⁹ If we limit the definition of the gospel to the death of Christ for our sins and his resurrection then the problem Paul is addressing is not a gospel problem.³⁰ But Paul says it *is* a gospel problem. The gospel problem in Galatia is that they are turning to a different gospel by beginning to accept the idea that circumcision is necessary. This gives us a hint of what we will see more fully in the sermons to come: The gospel Paul preached included not only the person of Christ and his death and resurrection but also the message that our standing with God is not based on any work done according to the law but is based on faith in Christ (see Gal 2:16; 3:9, 26).³¹ Whenever that core message is altered what we are left with is a distortion of the gospel that is really no gospel at all.

Preaching a Distorted Gospel Puts You Under a Curse (Gal 1:8–9)

Some might think that Paul is merely jealous that his converts are now following another set of teachers. But Paul rules out that possibility in verses 8 and 9. He is not upset that the Galatian Christians are turning from him, the messenger who brought them the gospel. He is upset that they are turning away from the message of the gospel. As Luther said, “Here Paul is breathing fire.”³² He tells them, “Even if we [Paul or his

²⁹See Dunn’s argument that the things uncontested in the letter are the things that Paul, the Galatians, and even the opponents agreed on. Dunn, *Theology of Galatians*, 34-35.

³⁰I am responding here to what seems to be a truncated definition of the gospel in Wright’s *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*. Focusing on Rom 1 and 1 Cor 15, Wright states, “When Paul spoke of ‘gospel’ he thereby denoted a message which . . . declared the ‘good news’ of God’s kingdom in and through the life, messianic achievement and supremely the death and resurrection of Jesus. . . . ‘The gospel’ is God’s good news, promised long ago, about his dying and rising son, the Messiah, the lord of the world.” N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 915-16.

³¹To be fair, Wright does point to ‘grace’ as what is being abandoned by those who adopt circumcision. But the fact that ‘grace’ does not seem to factor into his definition of the gospel remains significant. *Ibid.*, 1141.

³²Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelican, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 55. This quote was brought to my attention by De Boer,

coworkers] . . . should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8). Even if Paul showed up in Galatia preaching a different message than the gospel he preached to them at first they should not listen to him. Not only should they not listen to him, but he would fall under his own curse if he should do such a thing. Paul even goes so far as to say that “if . . . an angel from heaven” should preach another gospel to them, that angel would be under a curse.³³ It is not the messenger that matters most but the message that messenger brings.³⁴

The real punch of Paul’s pronouncement is the repeated statement, “Let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8b, 9b). But the weight of Paul’s words will not land on us until we recognize the significance of the word Paul has chosen to use here. This is not just any word for being cursed. It is not the same word that Paul will use later in Galatians 3:13 to say that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us.”³⁵ This is the word used over and over in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) to describe things that have been “devoted to the LORD for destruction” like the city of Jericho (Josh 6:17).³⁶ Twenty-three times some form of this word appears in the Septuagint.³⁷ There it “often has the meaning ‘an object devoted to God in order that God

Galatians, 45.

³³For the possibility that Paul’s mention of angels is drawn from Gen 18, see Seth M. Ehorn, “Galatians 1:8 and Paul’s Reading of Abraham’s Story,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 64, no. 2 (October 2013): 439-44.

³⁴Das, *Galatians*, 79, 106

³⁵Das notes similarly that a different word is used in Gal 3:10. *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁶Betz, citing others, says, “The Greek term ἀνάθεμα (in classical Greek ἀνάθημα, in Hebrew ׀רר) signifies something which has been withdrawn from profane use and consecrated to the deity, either as a votive offering or for its destruction. Paul means it in the latter sense of the term.” Betz, *Galatians*, 53. See also Wright on the same term in Rom 9:3 in Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1189.

³⁷This count is based on a search performed in BibleWorks. Twenty-six occurrences of the word were found but I have not included here the three found in the Apocrypha. The references counted here are (according to the LXX): Lev 27:28 (2x); Num 21:3; Deut 7:26 (2x); 13:16, 18; 20:17; Josh 6:17, 18 (3x); 7:1 (2x), 11, 12 (2x), 13 (2x); 22:20; Judg 1:17; 1 Chron 2:7; Zech 14:11.

can curse it.”³⁸ Paul is not merely calling for bad things to happen to people who preach a different gospel. He is calling for them to be set apart as a thing to be destroyed like an idol or an idolater. Just as a city in Israel that is led away from the true God to worship idols was to be devoted to destruction,³⁹ so those who lead the people of God to “desert him who called you in the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6) are likewise to be devoted to destruction. That does not mean, of course, that Paul intends for the believers in Galatia to carry out such destruction like Israel did. Paul is emphatic that “we do not wrestle against flesh and blood” (Eph 6:12) and that the sword we bear is “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:18). The sentence Paul pronounces is not one that the church is called to carry out. At least not in that way. “The only proper response, should the Galatians heed Paul’s warning,” Das argues, “would be to exclude the rival teachers from the Galatian assemblies, which is exactly what Paul demands in 4:30.”⁴⁰ But that does not lessen the weight of what Paul has written. The worst form of judgment shall fall on all who distort the gospel and lead others away from the truth.⁴¹

We should also notice that Paul is not addressing a hypothetical scenario with a hypothetical curse. When he says in verse 9, “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed,” we cannot forget that just a couple verses ago Paul said “there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7). Verse 9 then seems to be a way for Paul to say, “I’m looking at you, ‘troublers’ and ‘circumcision-promoters,’ and ‘flesh-boasters’” (Gal 1:7; 6:12–13).⁴² If

³⁸De Boer, *Galatians*, 45.

³⁹See Deut 13:12-18.

⁴⁰Das, *Galatians*, 108.

⁴¹Schreiner argues that “excommunication by the church is not in view here but eschatological judgment by God.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87-88. However, it is hard to imagine how excommunication could be excluded from view. Are the Galatians to allow teachers under the curse of God to remain in their churches? Surely not. An either/or is not necessary. Both “excommunication by the church” and “eschatological judgment by God” are in view.

⁴²Schreiner, *Galatians*, 88 (and citing others); De Boer, *Galatians*, 46. Paul’s opponents in Galatia are described by various names in the literature as noted above. So far as I am aware none of the

they are doing what Paul has heard they are doing, they too fall under the terrible curse Paul pronounces. When the gospel is at stake, the consequences for leading people astray are terrible. We cannot afford to get this wrong.

A True Servant of Christ Stands for the True Gospel (Gal 1:10)

If Paul's aim was to help everyone get along and to give everyone a reason to like him, he has certainly gone about it the wrong way. But that is not his aim. His aim is to be a faithful servant of Christ just as we should aim to do the same. But note that faithfulness to Christ may mean calling out error and announcing God's judgment. To borrow from a phrase from *Hamlet*, we must "be cruel only to be kind," so to speak. We serve others best at times by telling them what they least want to hear. As Paul will show later, wanting to please men is a path to gospel distortion (see Gal 6:12–13). You cannot be a faithful servant of Christ and try to please men all the time. Paul has chosen his path; which one will you take? Are you committed to following Christ even if it means having to take a stand against popular and influential people? Or will you willingly compromise the truth to try to make everyone happy. You cannot have it both ways. When the gospel is at stake, a true servant of Christ will not back down from the conflict but will boldly speak the truth.

Circumcision or the Cross? (Gal 6:11–18)

When Paul comes to the end of his letter he brings his case to a conclusion by clarifying the choice before the Galatian believers: will they choose circumcision or the cross?⁴³ Paul's boast is in the cross and his concern is for new creation (Gal 6:14–15).

terms used here are used by others.

⁴³Das, *Galatians*, 632; Dunn, *Theology of Galatians*, 29. After writing the title of this section, I discovered it is very similar to the title used by Das for this section in his commentary. Das, *Galatians*, 627.

But the “other missionaries”⁴⁴ care about circumcision and saving their own skin. Who will the Galatians follow? What will they choose? With apologies to Shakespeare we may say, Circumcision or the cross—that is the question.

Motives for Mangling the Gospel (Gal 6:11–13)

Paul has already revealed that the missionaries in Galatia “want to distort the gospel of Christ” (Gal 1:7) but he did not explain in those early verses what would motivate them to mangle the gospel in this way. In these final verses Paul takes the pen in his own hand (Gal 6:11) and pulls back the curtain not only on their method of mangling the gospel but also on their motivations for doing so.⁴⁵

Mangling the gospel by adding circumcision (Gal 6:12–13). It becomes increasingly clear as you move through the letter that at the root of the problem in Galatia is the issue of circumcision. That circumcision is central to the conflict is confirmed by Paul’s focus on it in his closing argument.⁴⁶ This is the issue that has clouded the gospel and caused so much consternation on Paul’s part. Others have mangled the gospel by requiring believing Gentiles to be circumcised. But why have they done it?

Motive 1: Avoiding persecution (Gal 6:12). Paul does not cut his opponents any slack. He sees through them and he reveals to the Galatians what he has seen. Their real motivation is not the good of the Galatians or a desire to keep the law but “to make a good showing in the flesh” (Gal 6:12) – the Galatians’ flesh! – in order to save their own skin.⁴⁷ No doubt they claimed they were acting in the best interest of the Galatian

⁴⁴Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 335.

⁴⁵It is not immediately clear why Paul writes with “large letters” (Gal 6:11). For a brief overview of the main options, see Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 335; De Boer, *Galatians*, 395.

⁴⁶“The closing passage of the epistle . . . is the clearest indication of the identity of the new preachers and their gospel.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 54.

⁴⁷Das cautiously comments, “The rivals could very well be seeking to make a good showing in

believers. But, as we are reminded in *Hamlet*, “one may smile and smile and be a villain.” What they really want is to avoid persecution themselves on account of the cross. Paul does not spell out for us who might persecute them, but it seems likely that the teachers are Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah⁴⁸ but fear persecution from other Jews for associating with uncircumcised Gentiles.⁴⁹ The cross has made circumcision unnecessary (see Gal 6:14–15; Col 2:11) and therefore invites persecution from those who still believe circumcision is essential.⁵⁰ So in order to avoid persecution, these troublemakers in Galatia want the Galatian believers to be circumcised contrary to the message of the cross so that they themselves will not be persecuted. Whatever arguments these teachers may have made from Scripture to persuade the Galatian Christians to submit to circumcision, their real concern was practical rather than scriptural.⁵¹ They did not want to face persecution on account of the cross.

Whatever these teachers might claim, their attempt to compel the Galatian Christians to be circumcised did not come from Jerusalem. Or if it did, then the policy of Jerusalem has changed since Paul’s visit there recounted in Galatians 2. There Paul uses the same word as here to say, “But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek” (Gal 2:3).⁵² If Titus was not “forced” to be

the Galatians’ flesh!” Das, *Galatians*, 634. Emphasis in original.

⁴⁸De Boer says, “The new preachers . . . are . . . Jews as well as Christians.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 54.

⁴⁹Das argues that “the larger Jewish community in Galatia likely held in suspicion fellow (Christ-believing) Jews who seemed to be abandoning the fundamental convictions of their ancient religion by accepting Gentiles without circumcision.” Das, *Galatians*, 636-37. See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 377. For a thorough rebuttal of the proposal made by Bruce Winter that there is a pagan as well as Jewish background to this persecution, see A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 184-215.

⁵⁰Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 337.

⁵¹Betz similarly says, “If [the opponents’] purpose is to avoid persecution, their goal is merely tactical” though he expresses uncertainty about whether Paul has represented the opponents accurately in this regard. Betz, *Galatians*, 315.

⁵²In both verses the word translated “forced” is ἀναγκάζω. Schreiner notes this connection between Gal 2:3 and 6:12 and adds 2:14 as well. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 377.

circumcised by the apostles in Jerusalem, why should the Galatian Christians be “forced” to do so by these teachers?

It is easy to shake our finger at these teachers from the comfort of our pews, but is it not possible that we too would be tempted to sacrifice truth and distort the gospel if it meant avoiding persecution for ourselves and our families? Would it not be easy to make excuses and justify our actions? Paul has done us a great service by telling us plainly the cost of such a compromise. Those who distort the gospel to save their own skin invite the curse of God upon themselves. Decide now, before the threat of persecution comes, that you will not compromise the truth for the sake of your own safety. When the gospel is at stake and persecution is the cost, we must remain faithful or face a worse consequence than persecution.

Motive 2: Boasting in circumcision (Gal 6:13). The second motive driving these teachers is the desire to boast in the circumcision of their “converts.” Again, their desire is not to promote obedience to the law since “even those who are circumcised do not themselves keep the law” (Gal 6:13a). Instead their reason for forcing circumcision upon the Galatian believers is so “they may boast in your flesh” (Gal 6:13b). Why would the circumcision of Gentiles be a reason for them to boast? It seems unlikely that they were boasting in the circumcision of Gentiles as some kind of good work that merited reward from God.⁵³ Instead the boasting was likely in their presumed Jewish identity as one who had joined the covenant people of Israel by circumcision.⁵⁴ In other words, it was not a good work done to subvert grace and earn God’s favor so much as a deed done

⁵³Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 340.

⁵⁴Ibid., 339-40.

to signal inclusion in the people of God by circumcision rather than by the cross.⁵⁵

Borrowing from the great playwright once more, we may say, “Ay, there’s the rub.”

The Cross, Crucifixion, and New Creation (Gal 6:14–18)

The troublemaking teachers in Galatia are clearly on the side of circumcision and compromise for the sake of security and ethnic pride. But Paul will have none of it. He wants none of it. For Paul, all boasting should be in the cross, circumcision no longer counts, and persecution is something he has already willingly endured.

Paul’s boast: The cross (Gal 6:14). Paul counters the teachers’ desire to boast in the flesh of the Galatian believers with his own statement about boasting. While his opponents want to boast in circumcised Galatians and avoid being “persecuted for the cross of Christ,” (Gal 6:12–13) Paul says, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14).⁵⁶ While circumcision and safety and ethnic identity are what matter to the teachers (whatever they might say they believe about the cross), what matters to Paul is the cross and Christ himself. The cross was not just the instrument of Jesus’ death, it was also an instrument of death for Paul.⁵⁷ Through the cross the world is dead to Paul and through the cross Paul is dead to the world.⁵⁸ The world, not in the sense of the planet itself but in the sense of the people and systems arrayed in rebellion against God, no longer holds either appeal or threat for Paul.⁵⁹ It is dead to him.

⁵⁵Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 340.

⁵⁶Betz says, “What are the ‘achievements’ the Christians can and should be proud of? They can only be his salvation—but this was not achieved through his own efforts but through Christ’s death and resurrection. The Christian ‘boasting’ would then have to take the form of a glorification of the cross of Christ.” Betz, *Galatians*, 318.

⁵⁷For a discussion of whether “Christ” or “cross” is the proper antecedent here, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 294-95.

⁵⁸In light of this verse Martyn writes of “the triple crucifixion—that of Christ, that of the cosmos, [and] that of Paul.” Martyn, “Apocalyptic Antinomies,” 420.

⁵⁹Similarly, Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 272; Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 340.

Moreover, the world counts Paul as dead since he has turned his back upon it and aligned himself with the cross of Christ. If Paul is dead to the world and the world is dead to Paul and yet Paul is clearly alive, what can this mean other than that Paul is in a new world?⁶⁰

What counts? New creation (Gal 6:15–16). That is exactly where Paul believes himself and those who believe his message to be. Paul says that it is not whether one is circumcised or uncircumcised that matters. What matters is “a new creation” (Gal 6:15). Paul does not explain what he means by “a new creation” presumably because he does not have to. He has already reminded the Galatian Christians that Jesus died “to deliver us from the present evil age” (Gal 1:4) which implies they have been delivered into the age to come.⁶¹ And what can this mean but that they are already part of the age to come which is the new creation?⁶² With the dawning of the new creation and the age to come, circumcision has become irrelevant.⁶³ Paul does not boast in circumcision, but neither does he boast in the uncircumcision of Gentiles. Neither one matters. What matters is whether one has been made part of the new creation and been ushered into the age to come through the cross of Christ.

This reduction of circumcision to irrelevance is earth-shattering for many of Paul’s Jewish contemporaries (not least the false teachers) and Paul knows it. But he does not shrink back from it. In order to register the shock that such a statement would have caused among many of Paul’s fellow Jews we need to understand how many of them would have viewed the importance of circumcision.⁶⁴ As early as the book of Genesis the

⁶⁰Das, *Galatians*, 87, 642.

⁶¹Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 76.

⁶²For ‘the age to come’ as synonymous with ‘new creation,’ see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 77 (though he uses “new age” rather than ‘the age to come’). On these issues, see also Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 477-78.

⁶³Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 395-96.

⁶⁴For further comments on the significance of circumcision, see Dunn, *Theology of Galatians*, 30-31.

sons of Jacob are able so say, “To give our sister to one who is uncircumcised . . . would be a disgrace to us” (Gen 34:14).⁶⁵ And though there was some debate about the necessity of circumcision for Gentile converts, a male convert to Judaism would likely need to be circumcised.⁶⁶ The book of 1 Maccabees gives us an idea of how essential circumcision was to Jewish identity when it relates that some of the Jews “built a gymnasium in Jerusalem, according to Gentile custom, and removed the marks of circumcision, and abandoned the holy covenant. They joined with the Gentiles and sold themselves to do evil.”⁶⁷ By contrast, Mattathias, who is one of the heroes of 1 Maccabees, “and his friends . . . forcibly circumcised all the uncircumcised boys that they found within the borders of Israel.”⁶⁸ The point is obvious enough: good Jews made sure other Jews kept the law, and especially circumcision. At least that is the message of Maccabees. Paul, however, is saying that this central issue of circumcision that has created so much conflict in the past and has served to separate the Jews from the Gentiles since the time of Abraham has become a non-issue. Whereas once the polarizing issue was circumcision, now it is the cross of Christ. The “Israel of God” (Gal 6:16) is now marked off not by circumcision but by Christ and his cross.⁶⁹

Paul’s persecution (Gal 6:17). The teachers are holding on to the old way of reckoning things by insisting on circumcision in order to avoid persecution, but Paul has

⁶⁵Of course, this was part of their plot to get revenge against Shechem for defiling their sister, but it seems likely that at least this part of their statement was entirely true.

⁶⁶See Jdt 14:10 as an example. For an example of contradictory opinions among Jews about the necessity of Gentile circumcision, see De Boer, *Galatians*, 58, citing Josephus.

⁶⁷1 Macc 1:14–15. Evidently there was a strong temptation for some of the Jewish people to compromise with the Greek culture around them and to remove the evidence of their circumcision. But those who did so were viewed unfavorably to say the least.

⁶⁸1 Macc 2:45–46.

⁶⁹The interpretation of this verse is of course strongly debated. For the view expressed here, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 382. For a thorough discussion of three different interpretations of this phrase (and reaching a conclusion different than the one offered here), see Das, *Galatians*, 646-52.

already endured persecution for his commitment to the cross and the new creation instead of circumcision.⁷⁰ One person summed up the situation this way: “While the false teachers were preoccupied with the mark left by the ritual of circumcision, Paul drew attention to the marks left by the reality of serving Christ.”⁷¹ Earlier in the letter he asks, “If I, brothers, still preach circumcision, why am I still being persecuted? In that case the offense of the cross has been removed” (Gal 5:11). It is precisely because he no longer preaches circumcision that he is “still being persecuted” and therefore can say “I bear on my body the marks of Jesus” (Gal 6:17). On account of this Paul says, “From now on let no one cause me trouble” (Gal 6:17). His opponents in Galatia should stop troubling him.⁷² They want to justify their insistence on circumcision in order to avoid persecution, but Paul has willingly endured it for the sake of the gospel. He expects it to be evident by now who is in the right and worthy of imitation.

Conclusion

When the gospel is at stake the choice before us is clear—will we choose the cross or compromise? The consequences of that choice are massive not only for those who bear the message of the gospel but also for those who follow. Nothing less than life and death, heaven and hell are on the line. For the servant of Christ there can be only one choice: “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal 6:14).

⁷⁰“Paul is most likely referring to the scars and wounds he suffered because of his witness to the gospel.” Das, *Galatians*, 653.

⁷¹Hansen, *Galatians*, 202.

⁷²“We may not fail in assuming that the troubles are those which caused him to write the letter.” Betz, *Galatians*, 324.

CHAPTER 3

UNITED OR DIVIDED: WHAT DOES JUSTIFICATION HAVE TO DO WITH IT? GALATIANS 2:11–21

When the United States was deeply divided by slavery and the fate of the nation hung in the balance, Abraham Lincoln saw in the words of Jesus a principle that put the nation’s problem in perspective.¹ “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” Lincoln said.² “I believe this government cannot endure,” he went on to say, “permanently half *slave* and half *free*. I do not expect the Union to be *dissolved*—I do not expect the house to *fall*—but I *do* expect it will cease to be divided. It will become *all* one thing or *all* the other.”³ Of course he was right. He had a hand in making it so. But the divided house did not become united without much conflict.

That same conviction—that “a house divided against itself cannot stand”⁴—seems to have animated the apostle Paul.⁵ Of course Paul was fighting for something much greater than the preservation of the Union; he was fighting for a church united around “the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:5). He went up to Jerusalem to “set before them

¹I began writing this chapter on Martin Luther King Jr. Day, January 16, 2017. That seemed appropriate considering the text and its application to racial division in the church. That is also what inspired the quotations from and allusions to the words of Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King Jr. found throughout this chapter.

²Abraham Lincoln, “‘House Divided’ Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” in *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings 1832-1858* (New York: Viking, 1989), 426. The words of Jesus are found in Matt 12:25 and Mark 3:25. Lincoln’s wording is closer to Matt 12:25 in the KJV but not identical to either passage. Jesus was addressing the charge that he cast out demons by the power of the prince of demons (Matt 12:24). Lincoln was of course addressing a quite different context.

³Lincoln, “‘House Divided’ Speech at Springfield, Illinois,” 426. Italics in original.

⁴Ibid.

⁵This same conviction could be written over many pages of the NT where one reads of the conflict over including uncircumcised Gentiles. For example, Acts 10–11, 15; Rom 3–4; Gal 2–4.

. . . the gospel that [he proclaimed] among the Gentiles, in order to make sure [he] was not running or had not run in vain” (Gal 2:2). If the apostles and elders in Jerusalem had insisted on circumcising believing Gentiles, the house would have been divided, Paul’s labor among the Gentiles would have been in vain, and the “truth of the gospel” would have been lost (Gal 2:5).⁶ However, “even Titus, who was with [Paul], was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek” (Gal 2:3). The meeting ended cordially with “James and Cephas and John . . . [giving] the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and [Paul]” and it was agreed that “[Paul and Barnabas] should go to the Gentiles and [James and Cephas and John] to the circumcised” (Gal 2:9). Assuming that what Paul recounts next in Galatians occurred after this meeting,⁷ it is likely that it did not answer or perhaps even consider all the questions that could be raised about the relationship between believing Gentiles and believing Jews. Still, the question of whether it was required for believing Gentiles to be circumcised seems to have been answered, at least implicitly, in the negative.⁸ The full ramifications of that decision not even Peter seems to have understood at that point.

In Galatians 2:11–14 we will encounter all the drama of a house divided. In those verses Paul recounts his conflict with Peter over believing Jews sharing meals with believing Gentiles. Then in Galatians 2:15–21 we will engage Paul’s justification for a

⁶Longenecker says that “any rupture between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles on the essentials of the gospel . . . would be disastrous for both the mission to Jews and that to Gentiles. The unity of the church even amidst its diversity was of great importance to Paul. . . . It was for this unity that he feared.” Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 49. See also John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 363–64. Of course, Paul was not for unity at any cost. That is why he stood firm against the “false brothers” (Gal 2:4) present at the meeting in Jerusalem “who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery” (Gal 2:4).

⁷See Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 141–42, 144–45.

⁸There is a well-known and well-worn debate over the relationship between Gal 2:1–10 and the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15:1–21. For a look at the evidence on both sides by a scholar who favors (as I do) the view that Gal 2:1–10 does not describe the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 but an earlier visit to Jerusalem, see A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 36–43.

house united. Paul argues believing Jews and Gentiles can eat together as equals before God because both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith. This passage will make clear that what we believe about how a man is justified before God has everything to do with who is welcome to fellowship with us around the table. Would the same Paul who rebuked Peter ignore what Martin Luther King Jr. found “appalling,” namely, “that the most segregated hour of Christian America is eleven o’clock on Sunday morning.”⁹ Do we believe that when the house of God is wrongly divided against itself it cannot stand? Does Paul’s concern over the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church have anything to say to us about the composition of our congregations on Sunday mornings? If it is still true, as I believe it is, that “the church has a schism in its own soul that it must close” then the sutures that we need can be found in Galatians 2:11–21.¹⁰

“A House Divided” (Gal 2:11–14)

Something unheard of happened in Antioch in the early days of the church.¹¹ Jews and Gentiles who were formerly divided from one another began to share meals together because they had a common faith in Jesus the Messiah.¹² Peter was among those

⁹Martin Luther King Jr., “Stride Toward Freedom,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 479. This statement is difficult to prove or disprove. There appears to be increased ethnic diversity among churches in the cities, but King’s critique still has some sting in my little community out in the country. The membership of the church I pastor is almost entirely (if not entirely) white while just a short distance up the road there is another Baptist church whose membership is almost entirely black. The separation of these churches at this point is not due to hostility or racism (as evidenced by the fact that we joyfully worshiped together recently), and yet one cannot deny that while the schools in this area were integrated long ago, the churches remain largely segregated.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹I am indebted to Jarvis Williams for a personal conversation early in my studies that helped frame my thinking about the book of Galatians and particularly the second chapter. That is not to say, of course, that he would agree with all my arguments here.

¹²It was not unheard of for Jews to eat in the presence of Gentiles before this time. The *Letter of Aristeas* records how the delegation of Jews summoned to Egypt to translate the Hebrew Bible dined with the King of Egypt. This meal was nevertheless prepared according to Jewish law (Das, *Galatians*, 225) and therefore does not provide evidence of Jews eating with Gentiles without heeding the Jewish food laws as Peter was doing in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14). See especially lines 181–82 of *The Letter of Aristeas* in James H. Charlesworth, ed., *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 2, *Expansions of the “Old Testament” and Legends, Wisdom and Philosophical Literature, Prayers, Psalms, and Odes, Fragments of Lost Judeo-Hellenistic Works* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 7–34. See also Das, *Galatians*, 225–26

in Antioch who shared meals with believing Gentiles. So were Paul and Barnabas and others. Paul and Peter and the rest ate with believing Gentiles in Antioch as if nothing mattered but their joint faith in Christ. Whether they were circumcised or not did not matter. Keeping the food laws was not required.¹³ They were the people of the Messiah, Jew and Gentile alike.¹⁴

It is easy to miss the enormous significance of these meals—and what it would mean when they were disrupted—if we do not understand what we are communicating when we share a meal with someone.¹⁵ It has been rightly said that there is “nothing like the act of eating for equalizing men.”¹⁶ The truth of that statement is perhaps most poignantly felt when inequality, rather than equality, is what men intend to communicate. One of the earliest pains one experiences in childhood is rejection in the lunchroom. To say “you can’t sit here” usually means “you’re not wanted” and even “you’re not worthy.” The sit-ins at lunch counters in the 1960’s were not about food as much as they were about men and equality.¹⁷ With whom we eat really does matter.

for further comments on *The Letter of Aristeas* and its connection with Gal 2:11–14.

¹³Gal 2:14 indicates that these meals were not kosher. Dunn, in order to maintain his suggestion that “it is unlikely that *all* the Jewish Christians would have abandoned so completely their whole religious heritage on this crucial point [meaning, the food laws],” has to argue that in Gal 2:14 the phrase “‘living like Gentiles’ was probably the language of intra-Jewish polemic – more scrupulous Jews condemning those who were relatively less scrupulous as unfaithful to their common heritage.” James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 121-22. Italics in original. Why Paul, who is not taking the position of a “more scrupulous Jew” over against Peter, but rather the reverse, would use such language to rebuke Peter is unclear.

¹⁴Schreiner sums up the situation and its implications this way: “When Peter was in Antioch he did not observe the Jewish purity laws. He did not focus on the boundary markers that separated Jews from Gentiles. Gentiles who believed in Christ were considered to be equally members of the people of God, and Peter placed no emphasis on Jewish distinctives like circumcision or food laws. He enjoyed table fellowship with Gentiles and ate their food, and hence implicitly taught that observing purity laws was irrelevant for belonging to the people of God.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 146-47.

¹⁵Dunn’s exhortation is appropriate: “We need to recall . . . the importance of the shared meal as an expression of acceptance.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 117.

¹⁶Elizabeth Gaskell, *North and South* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 354.

¹⁷An anecdote from this period highlights the significance of sharing meals together. Taylor Branch records that the mayor of Nashville addressed a crowd of people who had marched to city hall in the wake of a bombing at a local attorney’s house. “[The mayor] defended his leadership in the sit-in crisis by saying that he lacked the power to tell the store owners what to do. ‘We are all Christians together,’ he

This truth applies not just to Jew and Gentile or black and white, but also to rich and poor, working class and upper class. In the novel *North and South* Elizabeth Gaskell animates this principle in the story of a mill owner named Thornton and a laborer named Higgins. Higgins and his fellow laborers are poor and do not believe that their masters are paying them enough. So they unite and strike. The laborers suffer without their regular pay, but the mill owner, Thornton, suffers too, and it seems likely he will be bankrupted by the strike. The tension is terrible, animosity runs high, and neither side is willing to give an inch. Neither the laborers nor the master sees the other's side and both look on the other as an enemy and the architect of their downfall. But there is a young woman, a minister's daughter, who has befriended both Thornton and Higgins, and through her the two men begin to see each other in a different light. After the strike Higgins goes to work for Thornton, who has become more aware of the plight of his employees. A plan is made whereby food can be purchased cheap and in bulk and then prepared for the workers. Thornton approves the plan and leaves Higgins and the others to run the operation themselves. But the real change in their relationship comes when Higgins asks Thornton to come in and join the men for a meal one day. Thornton knows he cannot not refuse, so he eats with them. He is invited again and again until he is able to tell a friend, "I am really getting to know some of them now, and they talk pretty freely before me."¹⁸ Men who were enemies, suspicious of one another, are now sharing meals and talking freely. This sounds like Antioch. Then come those important words: "[There is] nothing like the act of eating for equalizing men."¹⁹

said in the end. 'Let us pray together.' At this a student shouted out, 'How about eating together?'" Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954-63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 295.

¹⁸Gaskell, *North and South*, 354.

¹⁹Ibid.

What would it signal to the laboring men if Thornton began to turn them down when they invited him to eat with them? Would that not begin to rebuild the old divisions and reignite the old hostilities? Of course it would. I tell that story in order to give us a sense of why it was so perilous when Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles in Antioch.

The Battleground: Antioch (Gal 2:11)

With the little word “but” (Gal 2:11) Paul signals the contrast between the unity he and the Jerusalem apostles experienced in 2:1–10 and the conflict he is about to relate between himself and Peter.²⁰ Perhaps the Galatians had heard of this little episode and would have called into question Paul’s otherwise positive narrative of his relationship with the apostles if he had left it out. Since Antioch was one of the first places where Jews preached the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 11:19–26) and was the launching pad and hub of Paul’s missions to the Gentiles (see Acts 13:1–3, 46–49; 14:24–28)²¹ it is not surprising that a conflict over Jew-Gentile fellowship arose there.²² What is surprising is that it appears to have arisen after Paul and Peter had an understanding about the inclusion of the Gentiles.

The Players: Paul and Peter (Gal 2:11)

Peter himself was among the first to preach the gospel to Gentiles (Acts 10) and defended his actions before his critics in Jerusalem (Acts 11:1–18). He was also among those who met with Paul when he visited Jerusalem and parted with him in fellowship on the understanding that they had distinct missions but the same gospel (Gal

²⁰Dunn says, “The juxtaposition of the two events is abrupt. . . . He wanted to set the contrast between the amicable picture of ii.9 and that at Antioch as sharply as possible.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 116. Moo also notes the contrast but calls it a “mild” one. Moo, *Galatians*, 144.

²¹Similarly, Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 130.

²²Moo calls Antioch “a laboratory for Jewish-Gentile relationships in the early church.” Moo, *Galatians*, 143.

2:6–9). They were not strangers to one another but brothers-in-arms, albeit with different fields of action. Their former fellowship made the conflict all the more poignant.

The Conflict: Paul Opposed Peter (Gal 2:11)

Paul did not mince words with Peter, nor did he do so when he recounted the conflict to the Galatians. He told them plainly, “I opposed [Peter] to his face” (Gal 2:11).²³ This was not a minor affair to be handled in private conversation but a major breach of conduct that required a public rebuke, so he reprovved him “before them all” (Gal 2:14; see also 1 Tim 5:19–20).²⁴ Paul had claimed that he was not a man-pleaser but “a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10), and that he was not swayed by the status or position of others—even those “who seemed to be pillars” in Jerusalem (Gal 2:6, 9). His bold rebuke of Peter proves that all that was not mere talk.

Peter Condemned by his Conduct (Gal 2:12)

Peter was not condemned by Paul but by his own conduct (Gal 2:11). His behavior is a reminder “that even the greatest and most gifted of leaders may at times fail and fall.”²⁵

Eating with Gentiles. For a time, Peter had been in the habit of eating with the believing Gentiles in Antioch.²⁶ Presumably this meant that he not only shared with them

²³Dunn, commenting on this statement, proposes that “the use of the idiom in Jewish history (Deut. vii.24; ix.2; xi.25; Josh. i.5) may suggest a sense on Paul’s part that the issue was of epochal significance and its outcome dependent on God’s being with him.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 117.

²⁴Similarly, Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 127. Schreiner says, “A public rebuke in this instance was warranted because Peter’s sin was committed in the public sphere, and it had public consequences in that others followed his example.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 139. This rebuke is also a milder example of Paul’s response to those “preaching a gospel contrary to the one you received” (Gal 1:8-9). Peter is not preaching “a different gospel” (Gal 1:6) but his “conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:14) and it does not matter whether he is an apostle or even an angel—something had to be done (Gal 1:8).

²⁵Das, *Galatians*, 201.

²⁶Note the imperfect verb. De Boer and Schreiner also note the significance of the imperfect.

the same table but also the same food.²⁷ If this happened after the events of Acts 10, and I think it reasonable to assume that it did, then this is not surprising.²⁸ Peter had been told by the Lord to eat food that was unclean according to the law of Moses (Acts 10:13–14). When Peter objected the reply came back, “What God has made clean, do not call common” (Acts 10:15). When this vision was followed by the Spirit instructing Peter to go with some men who had come looking for him to bring him to the house of a Gentile named Cornelius, he concluded that the vision was not merely about food. “God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean,” Peter said (Acts 10:28). Just as Peter’s vision had symbolic significance beyond the eating of previously unclean food,²⁹ so Peter eating with Gentiles had symbolic significance beyond the mere fact of sharing a meal. It meant that Peter, a believing Jew, was on equal footing with believing Gentiles. It meant that believing Gentiles were just as “clean,” just as accepted before God, and just as much a part of the people of God as the believing Jews were.³⁰ If a white person sat down next to a black person at a lunch counter in 1960, or drank out of the same water fountain, or got into the same swimming pool at the same time, he was doing more than sharing space or food or drink. He was communicating his conviction that “all

De Boer, *Galatians*, 130; Schreiner, *Galatians*, 139.

²⁷Schreiner suggests that it was not only the same food, but food that Jews would not normally eat when he says, “Apparently Peter regularly ate foods forbidden by the OT law. . . . The most natural reading [of Gal 2:12] suggests that Peter was no longer observing the OT food laws and was eating meals with Gentiles.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 139-40. Contra Das, *Galatians*, 216-18.

²⁸It is not likely Peter would have protested the way he did in Acts 10:14 if he had previously eaten with Gentiles—even if he had later changed his mind about it. Acts 10 implies that this was a new step for Peter, not a return to a practice picked up and then abandoned. Dunn also views Acts 10-11 as “the previous experience of Peter,” that is, previous to the confrontation in Antioch. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 122.

²⁹Darrell Bock says, “Peter interprets the vision’s provision to eat food as freeing him to associate with Gentiles.” Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 394.

³⁰On the issue of Gentiles being “clean,” John Polhill says, “Peter’s vision had led him to this basic insight that God does not discriminate between persons, that there are no divisions between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ people from the divine perspective.” John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 260.

men are created equal.” Peter was doing something similar. He was communicating his conviction that “there is neither Jew nor Greek . . . for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). Unfortunately, his conviction did not hold up under pressure.

Separating himself from Gentiles. Something changed. It had been Peter’s habit to share meals with the believing Gentiles in Antioch, but then “he drew back and separated himself” from them (Gal 2:12). This does not seem to have been a one-time event, a momentary lapse of conviction, but a new settled position.³¹ The key word here is “separation.” The gospel brings unity between Jews and Gentiles (Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11–22), but Peter has brought about separation. This is an anti-gospel move. Anytime anyone intentionally separates what the gospel is designed to bring together it is an anti-gospel act. For rich to separate from poor, for white to separate from black, is to walk contrary to the gospel.

Ensnared by the fear of man. What was it that led Peter to take such a significant misstep? He was ensnared by the fear of man. There were “certain men who came from James” in Jerusalem and their coming precipitated Peter’s about face. The reason? He was afraid of “the circumcision party” (Gal 2:12).³² Why the men came in the first place and what, if anything, they did or said that caused Peter to fear is not stated in

³¹Note once again the imperfects. See again De Boer, noting the imperfect verbs, who states, “Cephas then made a practice of withdrawing . . . and separating himself.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 130.

³²For a survey of the interpretive options for identifying “the circumcision party” (Gal 2:12), see D. A. Carson, “Mirror-Reading with Paul and Against Paul: Galatians 2:11–14 as a Test Case,” in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo*, ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014): 99-112.

the text and is therefore up for debate.³³ What is clear is what motivated Peter: fear.³⁴ Proverbs 29:25 says, “The fear of man lays a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is safe.” Peter was afraid of what others would think of him and that fear led him into a trap. His fall in Antioch is the foil for Paul’s declaration, “If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Gal 1:10). If Peter had not been afraid of displeasing man, he would have continued eating with the Gentiles. Instead, “he stood condemned” (Gal 2:11) and he brought others down with him.

The Fallout of Peter’s Folly (Gal 2:13)

Peter’s actions were nothing less than hypocritical “and the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him” (Gal 2:13). Peter did not become an isolated detractor from the Jew-Gentile fellowship meals; he tore in two the entire fabric of their fellowship. The more influence you have the more careful you must be. “Even Barnabas,” who had been there in the early days of Gentile evangelism and who brought Paul to Antioch (Acts 11:20–26), “was led astray by their hypocrisy” (Gal 2:13). The believing Jews re-segregated themselves from the believing Gentiles as if the cross of Christ had never brought them together. We might be inclined to give them the benefit of the doubt, but Paul did not. He said that Peter “stood condemned” (Gal 2:11), that he “acted hypocritically,” that “the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him,” and that Barnabas “was led astray” (Gal 2:13). There was no good excuse for what they did.

³³Das argues that “James was in all likelihood concerned that Peter’s witness to fellow Jews in and around the Jewish homeland was in jeopardy” because he was eating with Gentiles. Das, *Galatians*, 232. Schreiner suggests that “‘those of the circumcision’ could refer to Jewish Christians or, alternatively, to Jews who were not believers.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 143. In regard to the latter view Schreiner suggests, “Perhaps the men from James arrived and said that the threat of persecution against Jewish Christians was increasing because of reports that Jewish Christians in Antioch were departing from food laws and eating with Gentiles.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 144.

³⁴Similarly, De Boer says, “According to Paul, Cephas withdrew and separated himself not from conviction but from fear.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 132.

The Reason for the Rebuke (Gal 2:14)

Paul, and apparently Paul alone, saw clearly what was happening and what was at stake. Whatever their motivation for withdrawal from table fellowship with Gentiles, “their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel” (Gal 2:14). The gospel Paul preached put believing Jews and Gentiles on an equal footing before God and with one another (Rom 4:11–12; Eph 2:11–22). The action Peter and the rest of the Jews in Antioch took told the Gentiles that part of the gospel they had heard was a lie. After joining with the Gentiles in the fellowship won by the cross, Peter and “the rest” (Gal 2:13) started marching in the wrong direction.

Since Peter was the one responsible for this mass defection from gospel truth Paul addressed his rebuke to him—and did so publicly.³⁵ Peter’s position was untenable and indefensible. With one question Paul exposed the folly and hypocrisy of Peter’s actions: “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” (Gal 2:14). Peter lived like a Gentile as he ate with Gentiles without any regard for Torah regulations about clean and unclean food. He was not living like a Jew. He was not keeping the Torah.³⁶ Yet when he withdrew from fellowship with Gentiles he was communicating to them that they must live like Jews in order to have full fellowship with him and, by implication, with God.³⁷ How could a Jew living like a Gentile tell a Gentile he has to live like a Jew? It was completely inconsistent. Worse than that, it was a distortion of the gospel. Peter may not have preached a different gospel, but his actions were communicating the same message as the

³⁵A public rebuke was justified because of Peter’s stature as an apostle and elder (see 1 Tim 5:19–20; 1 Pet 5:1). See also n. 23 above.

³⁶De Boer: “Here . . . ‘to live in a Gentile manner’ . . . means ‘not to observe the law,’ with the added implication of unhindered social intercourse with Gentiles.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 136–37.

³⁷Similarly, Schreiner argues, “If Peter would only eat with Gentiles on the condition that they observed the food laws, he was saying in effect that they were not true believers unless they observed the purity laws. . . . [Peter] was now implying that Gentiles had to live like Jews to become part of the people of God.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 146–47.

false teachers in Galatia: You must keep the law. Paul even uses the same word to describe what Peter was doing and what the false teachers were doing. Peter, by his actions, “[forced] the Gentiles to live like Jews” (Gal 2:14) while the false teachers “would force [the Galatians] to be circumcised” (Gal 6:12).³⁸ Peter was not a false teacher but his false steps were communicating a false gospel to the Gentiles in Antioch. Peter divided a house that had been united. If it was to stand it would have to be united again—not only in Antioch, but also in Galatia.

Justification for a House United (Gal 2:15–21)

The whole Antioch episode has a place in Paul’s letter to the Galatians because the same trouble Peter caused in Antioch the false teachers were causing in Galatia—only in their case, it was deliberate and vocal.³⁹ If Paul’s only point in recording the conflict in Antioch was to show that he was willing to stand up to an apostle when necessary or to give his version of what happened, then there would be no need for Paul to devote any more space to it in his letter than he already has. But that episode had in it the same fault line that was sending tremors through Galatia even as Paul wrote.⁴⁰ He continues his argument against Peter’s actions in verses 15–21 in order to address the similar situation in Galatia.⁴¹ These problems in these places would not be remedied without a compelling

³⁸In both instances the lexical form of the verb translated “force” is ἀναγκάζω. Das notes this connection as well. Das, *Galatians*, 215. De Boer, noting that the same verb is also used in Gal 2:3, argues that “the practice of circumcision by Gentile believers is the specific issue in Galatia ([Gal] 5:2–4; 6:12–13; cf. 3:3); it was the specific issue at the conference in Jerusalem ([Gal] 2:3); given the parallels between 2:3; 6:12; and 2:14, it was probably also the specific issue in Antioch.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 138. On the other hand, Dunn claims that “the usage elsewhere distinguishes ‘judaizing’ from ‘being circumcised’” and that it is “[not] likely that Peter and Barnabas had so completely reneged on the central point of the Jerusalem agreement (ii.3–10).” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 129.

³⁹For an excellent paraphrase of these verses that more or less matches the interpretation offered below, see Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 371.

⁴⁰Similarly, Dunn argues that “from the way Paul follows through from his description of [the Antioch] incident and leads into the main argument of his letter (ii.15–21), it is also evident that the Antioch incident had particular relevance to the situation in Galatia which the letter was intended to address.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 4.

⁴¹Whether Gal 2:15–21 records words that Paul said to Peter in Antioch or Paul’s later expansion of the problem he saw with Peter’s position makes little difference to the exegesis of the text. Among the possible ways to read these verses Das suggests that “Gal 2:15–21 may even be what Paul

argument, without establishing some firm ground already accepted in principle by both sides upon which a united house could be rebuilt. Great leaders know how to do this. When Martin Luther King Jr. spoke of his dream “that one day . . . sons of former slaves and sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood,” he laid its cornerstone on the foundation of the Declaration of Independence.⁴² “It is a dream,” he said, “deeply rooted in the American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed—we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”⁴³ Abraham Lincoln did the same. As he sanctified the ground in Gettysburg where so many died divided over slavery he justified the continuance of the war by recalling the birth of our nation which was “conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”⁴⁴ These men appealed to truths that people on both sides agreed upon in principle in order to bring them together on an issue where they were divided. Paul took a similar approach though the issue he was addressing was much greater and the consequences were more significant than the Union cause or the civil rights cause. Paul was fighting for gospel-forged unity in the church and so he grounds his claim not in the truth that all men are created equal, but in the gospel doctrine of justification by faith which makes men equal not merely as creatures but as children of God.⁴⁵

wishes he had said at Antioch.” Das, *Galatians*, 238. Italics in original. Wright says regarding this text, “The case for reading the whole paragraph, through to the end of the chapter, as precisely Paul’s commentary on the Antioch table-fellowship controversy, closely cognate as it was with the problem in Galatia, is overwhelming.” N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 968. For an argument in favor of “[seeing] all of 2:14–21 as addressed to Peter,” and yet addressing the situation in Galatia, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 150.

⁴²Martin Luther King Jr., “I Have a Dream,” in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: HarperCollins, 1986), 219.

⁴³Ibid.

⁴⁴Abraham Lincoln, “Address at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania,” in *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings 1859-1865* (New York: Viking, 1989), 536.

⁴⁵What has often been missed in treatments of justification and of the book of Galatians in particular is that Paul brings up justification precisely to address the issue of Jew-Gentile fellowship and Gentile inclusion in the people of God. Galatians is not about justification as much as it is about the full inclusion of Gentiles. Justification by faith is one of the grounds upon which Paul is able to make that

Jews and Gentiles Justified by Faith (Gal 2:15–16)

When Paul wants to justify Jew-Gentile fellowship and expose the egregious error of compelling Gentiles “to live like Jews” (Gal 2:14), he does not go to the doctrine of creation.⁴⁶ It is true that both Jews and Gentiles are made in the image of God and therefore equal (Gen 1:26–27), but that did not stop God himself from making a distinction between Israel and the rest of the nations for a time. Instead, Paul goes to the doctrine of justification.⁴⁷

Jews are “not Gentile sinners” (Gal 2:15). Paul begins his argument on justification by saying of Peter and himself, “We . . . are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners” (Gal 2:15). The distinction Paul makes here is vital for understanding this passage.⁴⁸ Paul is not saying that he and Peter are not sinners; he says they are “not *Gentile sinners*” (Gal 2:15, italics added).⁴⁹ Gentiles as a class were considered unclean—as Peter’s vision in Acts 10 demonstrates. The vision was about unclean animals but the

claim. For more on this point, see note 59 below. In this respect I agree with Wright that “the unity of the church is, arguably, the main theme of Galatians.” N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 340.

⁴⁶De Boer also appears to play on the meaning of justification when he says, “Paul gives a theological justification and elaboration of the truth of the gospel in 2:15–21. De Boer, *Galatians*, 128.

⁴⁷Wright (*Paul and His Recent Interpreters*) argues at length that “when Paul starts talking about how one is ‘justified’ in 2.15–16 the exegete has a choice. Either we say he has just changed the subject after the dispute described in 2.11–14. Or we conclude that his talk of ‘justification’, both in 2.16 and then in 2.17–21, is the continuation of the discussion of 2.11–14, which is not about ‘how I get saved’ or ‘how I can find a gracious God’, but about whether uncircumcised gentiles who believe in Jesus as Messiah should not eat at the same table with Jewish believers” (339-40). What Wright appears to rule out or ignore is the possibility that ‘justification’ is about ‘how I get saved’ and that ‘how I get saved’ has everything to do with who I can eat with. Wright is correct to argue that “being declared ‘righteous’ and being welcomed at the table seem to be directly correlated” (340). However, an interpreter can agree with that statement (as I do) and yet assert that who is “welcomed at the table” is founded upon how a person is made right with God.

⁴⁸For the significance of “sinners” in v. 15 and v. 17 and how this effects the interpretation of this passage, see Moo, *Galatians*, 165.

⁴⁹So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 154. Regarding “sin” in this text Wright argues, “Here the word ‘sin’ has a meaning which goes somewhat beyond the normal two categories, actual human wrongdoing on the one hand and a cosmic power on the other. ‘Sin’ here is also the *sociological* category which demarcates the gentile world from the Jewish point of view.” Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 342. Italics in original.

point of the vision was really about unclean people—Gentiles. Those born Jews are not born outside the pale, but Gentiles are (see Eph 2:11–13).⁵⁰ Gentiles are outside God’s law, outside God’s people, and therefore unclean. The Jews have God’s law, are part of God’s people, and therefore are holy.⁵¹

Yet even Jews are not justified by works (Gal 2:16). Paul and Peter share a privileged position as Jews and yet they both know that not even a Jew is “justified by works of the law . . . because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16). The phrase “works of the law” here means the deeds required by the law of Moses.⁵² These are the works that Peter had flouted when he lived “like a Gentile and not like a Jew” and the works he implied that Gentiles must perform when he withdrew from fellowship with them (Gal 2:14). Peter knows that keeping those laws is not what justifies him or anyone else. That is at least part of why for a time Peter was able to live without reference to those laws and fellowship with those who did not keep them. But this is also why Peter’s withdrawal from fellowship with them is both inexcusable and unjustifiable. Peter is not required to keep the law in order to be justified. He may live like a Gentile, like one no longer under the Mosaic covenant. How then can he explain acting as though Gentiles must keep the Mosaic covenant when he knows that is not how they will be justified either? He cannot. There is no justification for it. And speaking of justification, what exactly does it mean here?⁵³

⁵⁰So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 154.

⁵¹Paul will demonstrate later that the identity of God’s people is not defined by birth but by faith (Gal 3:6–29). Yet there is still a sense in which we may speak of the Jews as God’s people since God still has a plan for ethnic Israel (Rom 11:25–32).

⁵²Schreiner says, “‘Works of law’ refers to all the deeds or actions mandated in the Sinai covenant, in what is often called the Mosaic law.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 100.

⁵³For a hearty and respectful debate over the doctrine of justification, see John Piper, *The Future of Justification: A Response to N. T. Wright* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007) and N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009).

The classic Reformed understanding of justification argues that to be justified means “God declares those who are sinners to be in the right before him if they trust in Jesus Christ.”⁵⁴ Others argue that justification is about covenant membership—being part of God’s covenant people.⁵⁵ As compelling as some of those arguments are, they end up flattening out Paul’s argument. Paul will argue fervently for Gentile inclusion in the people of God and he will use the doctrine of justification to undergird and explain their inclusion, but he does not say that justification is the same thing as membership in the people of God.⁵⁶ At the same time, to ignore the connection between justification and covenant membership is to ignore the very context in which Paul deploys the doctrine of justification in the argument of Galatians.⁵⁷ Justification is about our standing before God

⁵⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 156. For an overview of “the meaning of justification in Paul” that supports this perspective, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 155-57. For a brief but helpful historical survey of the doctrine of justification, see Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 21-94.

⁵⁵N. T. Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch: The Role(s) of Abraham in Galatians and Romans,” in *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), is perhaps the strongest advocate for this view. For example, he argues regarding Genesis 15:6 and justification this way: “I suggest that one should read (and that one should understand Paul as reading) Genesis 15.7–21 as *epexegetic* of 15.6. . . . When . . . we read in verse 6 that Abraham believed a promise . . . and that God ‘reckoned it to him as righteousness’, the context strongly suggests that ‘reckoned it to him as righteousness’ means, more or less, ‘God reckoned this in terms of covenant membership’, ‘God made a covenant with him on this basis,’” (565, italics in original). Wright then goes on to say “‘justification’ would seem, then, to be Paul’s way of denoting either the *bringing into the family* of those outside or the recognition or demarcation of newcomers as being within that family. Either way, it has to do with covenant membership,” (569, italics in original).

⁵⁶Stephen Westerholm correctly summarizes his argument thus: “Modern scholars are correct in noting that Paul first focused on language of justification in response to the question whether Gentile believers in Christ should be circumcised. They are right to emphasize the social implications of Paul’s doctrine of justification (what it meant ‘on the ground’) in his own day, and are free to draw out its social implications for our own. But the doctrine of justification *means* that God declares sinners righteous, apart from righteous deeds, when they believe in Jesus Christ.” Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 98-99. Italics in original.

⁵⁷Michael Bird, “Justification as Forensic Declaration and Covenant Membership: A *Via Media* Between Reformed and Revisionist Readings of Paul,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 57, no. 1 (2006):109-30, summarizes the problem with both camps by saying that “proponents of the New Perspective attempt to squeeze all ‘righteousness’ language under the umbrella of ‘covenant’, whilst Reformed adherents divorce Paul’s talk of righteousness from the social context of Jew-gentile relationships in the Pauline churches” (109). He summarizes his own position by saying, “I agree with the Reformed view that justification is a vertical category dealing with man’s legal relationship to God, but with the New Perspective I affirm that justification is Paul’s primary weapon to argue for the inclusion of the gentiles *as gentiles* into Christian fellowship” (110, italics in original). His argument reaches a rhetorical crescendo as he argues, rightly in my view, that “Paul’s theology of justification was applied immediately to the context of Jew-gentile relations in the early church. . . . I am not proposing that Paul’s conception of justification was spawned out of a polemical engagement with the Judaizers. What I am advocating is that a denial of the covenant dimension means that justification is artificially removed from the social context in which Paul rigorously prosecuted justification by faith as a mandate for Gentile inclusion. . . . Galatians and Romans delve into

and it is our standing before God that provides the ground for our fellowship with one another (see Eph 2:16).⁵⁸ It is not “works of the law” (Gal 2:16) that put one in the right before God and therefore “works of the law” (Gal 2:16) should not be the basis of our fellowship (or lack of it). Moo rightly argues that

here [Paul] wants to establish the bedrock principle that all people . . . can be pronounced “just” before God through faith in Christ alone and not on the basis of “works of the law.” And because this is so, it is wrong . . . to impose circumcision on Gentile believers, it is wrong for Peter to refuse to eat with Gentiles, and it is wrong for the agitators to insist that the Galatian Christians submit to the law.⁵⁹

Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith (Gal 2:16). If even Jews are not justified by their obedience to the Mosaic law, then surely Gentiles cannot be justified by such obedience either. If even Peter and Paul “have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified” (Gal 2:16)⁶⁰ then surely Gentiles cannot be justified by works either. Indeed, Paul says, “A person [any person, not just a Jewish person] is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16).⁶¹ So if a Gentile is

the issue of the righteous status believers have before God, but such theology is enlisted in the aid of achieving the unity of Jews and gentiles. This regard for Jew-gentile unity deserves more than a footnote in a textbook on Pauline theology, but constitutes the socio-rhetorical glue that links Paul’s epistles to their historical context” (116).

⁵⁸For a fuller treatment of Eph 2:16 and its implications, see Jarvis J. Williams, *One New Man: The Cross and Racial Reconciliation in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010). Williams states, “Ephesians 2:16 is the key verse of my thesis: Jesus’ death is the foundation of Paul’s theology of racial reconciliation” (126).

⁵⁹Moo, *Galatians*, 161. The full quote includes the statement that “it is wrong for the Jerusalem authorities to impose circumcision on Gentile believers.” If this refers to Paul’s stance in Gal 2:1–10, which the leaders in Jerusalem seemed to agree with, well and good. But if it refers to what the men who came from James in Gal 2:11 meant to communicate it perhaps goes beyond the evidence.

⁶⁰It is debated whether the phrase translated here and other places as “faith in Christ” would be better translated “faithfulness of Christ.” In Gal 2:16 there is no doubt that Paul speaks of the believer’s “faith” since the meaning of the word translated “believed” in the phrase “so we also have believed in Christ Jesus” is not disputed. For this verse at least, the debate comes down to whether Paul is saying a person believes in Christ in order to be justified by the faithfulness of Christ or that a person believes in Christ in order to be justified. The difference is not great but I have followed the traditional reading of “faith in Christ.” For a brief summary of the arguments in favor of each view from one who holds the traditional view, see Schreiner, *Faith Alone*, 124-132

⁶¹For an allusion to Ps 143:2 here, see Das, *Galatians*, 255-57.

made right with God by faith and not by keeping the law of Moses, then on what grounds can Peter exclude believing Gentiles from fellowship with him? His standing before God has the same basis as theirs: faith in Christ and not obedience to the law. He has no ground for his withdrawal and this is Paul's point. "Peter, you have communicated by your actions that works of the law are essential for Gentiles to have fellowship with Jews, but you and I both know that neither we nor they are justified that way. The gospel you are preaching by your actions is not the gospel you and I believe." If Jews and Gentiles both stand before God on the same footing—justified by faith in Christ—then surely they can sit together as equals.

Justification Is Not the Problem (Gal 2:17–21)

If justification by faith leads to Jews living like Gentiles, then it is not hard to imagine some among the Jews seeing justification by faith as a problem. Paul anticipates that objection, answers it in verse 17, and then turns it on its head for Peter in verse 18 as he moves toward his climactic declaration that "if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Gal 2:21).

Is Jesus justifying sin? Never! (Gal 2:17). If Paul is correct that being justified by faith means that a Jew can live like a Gentile and fellowship with Gentiles, then someone might object that justification is turning Jews into "Gentile sinners" (Gal 2:15) and claiming Jesus' endorsement for such behavior.⁶² That is the kind of objection Paul is anticipating when he says, "But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin?" (Gal 2:17). Peter was living like

⁶²N. T. Wright's reading of Gal 2:17–18 was the first one I encountered that made sense of verses which had long puzzled me. The basic outline of his interpretation of those verses, which I more or less follow here, is as follows: "[In] Galatians 2:17–18 . . . we find the ironic choice facing those Messiah-believing Jews who follow Paul's line of thought. Either they must come with the Messiah and his people, and be, in the technical sense, 'sinners', joining uncircumcised 'gentile sinners' at the single table. Or they must 'build up once more the things which you tore down', in other words, the fence of Torah which kept Jews and gentiles separate, even in the Messiah's family." Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 341.

a Gentile sinner all because of justification by faith in Christ. From the perspective of one who believed the Mosaic law was still in force this would look and sound like justifying sin in the name of Jesus.⁶³ Paul rejects such a conclusion in the strongest possible terms.⁶⁴ Seeing the Gentiles as a class called “sinners” is an Old Covenant perspective that has become irrelevant in Christ. Peter is not a sinner for living like a Gentile; neither is Jesus endorsing sin through Peter living like a Gentile. Justification is not the problem. On the contrary, it is Peter’s about-face that is the problem.

Rebuilding the wall of division is the problem (Gal 2:18). Paul explains in verse 18 his confident conclusion in verse 17 that Peter (or any other believing Jew) living like a Gentile is not a problem.⁶⁵ It is not living like a Gentile that makes Peter a sinner but going back to living like a Jew under the law that would “prove . . . [Peter] to be a transgressor” (Gal 2:18).⁶⁶ What Peter “tore down” (Gal 2:18) was the barrier between Jews and Gentiles erected in the Mosaic law but torn down by the death of Christ (Eph 2:14).⁶⁷ There was nothing wrong with that. His actions were consistent with the gospel. But when Peter built those things up again by re-erecting the barrier between himself and the Gentiles, that was the problem. It was then that Peter “proved [himself] to be a transgressor” of the law because if the wall is standing and should have been standing all along, then when he tore down the wall and lived as if there were no wall he was transgressing the law (Gal 2:18). So it is not Peter living like a Gentile that is sinful,

⁶³Moo comments, “It is likely that this question [in v. 17] reflects an actual accusation flung at Jewish Christians such as Paul and Peter. . . . Paul asks if Christ, in, as it were, requiring Jewish Christians to abandon their allegiance to torah as the authoritative revelation of their conduct, is ‘serving’ or ‘leading others to commit’ sin.” Moo, *Galatians*, 165.

⁶⁴Moo says, “Paul rejects this implication with his typically strong negative.” Ibid.

⁶⁵Moo says, “Verse 18 is closely tied to verse 17, providing the reason . . . for Paul’s strong rejection of the logic of verse 17.” Ibid., 166.

⁶⁶Moo suggests that “the ‘I’ in this verse” may have “particular reference to Peter, in light of his conduct at Antioch.” Ibid.

⁶⁷So also Moo, though more cautiously. Ibid.

but Peter going back to living like a Jew. Where Peter fell into sin was not when he started eating with the Gentiles but when he stopped eating with them. If the law of Moses is still in force, then for a time Peter was living as a rebel. When he went back to following the law he might as well have said as much.

Paul died to the law to live to God (Gal 2:19). Paul’s mention of the law in verse 19 confirms that our reading of verse 18 is on the right track. Furthermore, his statement “I died to the law” (Gal 2:19)⁶⁸ corresponds to tearing down the barriers of the law in verse 18. The law no longer defines Paul’s life (though it has come to define Peter’s again). Paul even goes so far as to say that he died to the law “so that [he] might live to God” (Gal 2:19). To many Jews that would have sounded like nonsense. Living to God required following God’s law. But Paul insists that dying to the law was necessary for him to live to God. For Paul to “preach . . . among the Gentiles” as God had called him to do (Gal 1:16) and to make known that “a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16) required him to “[die] to the law” (Gal 2:19). It was the only way for him to live in accordance with his calling. If that sounds like Paul experienced a death and resurrection of sorts, it’s because he did. Nothing less dramatic could explain his new way of life.

Paul died with Christ and Christ lives in Paul (Gal 2:20). Paul died. He was “crucified with Christ” and no longer lives (Gal 2:20).⁶⁹ This explains how Paul “died to the law” (Gal 2:19). Paul’s identity is no longer tied to his obedience to the law because it is now tied to the crucified and risen Christ “who lives in [him]” (Gal 2:20). His life is no longer one of doing “works of the law” (Gal 2:16) but one he lives “by faith in the Son of

⁶⁸Barclay states, “What is announced here is not the cessation of the Torah itself, but the end of its claim of ultimate authority in the life of Paul. . . . It has ceased to exercise a definitive or normative role.” Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 385.

⁶⁹The first part of v. 20 in our English translations is actually the last part of v. 19 in the Greek text.

God” (Gal 2:20). It is not works but faith that characterizes Paul’s new life. It is not the law but Christ who defines Paul’s new identity. And not just Paul’s but Peter’s and yours and mine.⁷⁰

The need for the cross (Gal 2:21). Paul brings this argument about the law and justification to a resounding close with this statement: “If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose” (Gal 2:21).⁷¹ “Peter, if the way you are acting is right, then why did Jesus die?” That is the question Paul forces on Peter. “If the Gentiles can be right with God and have fellowship with us by keeping the law, then what is the point of the cross?” Some might have claimed that Paul was rejecting God’s grace in turning from the law since the law was a gracious revelation of God’s will. But Paul is adamant: grace is inseparable from the cross. The cross creates a new identity for all those who trust in the crucified Messiah. It is reverting to a pre-cross identity that is the problem. It is going back to the way things were before the Messiah came that is causing the trouble. Justification is not the problem but the solution—the solution to man’s need to be made right with God and the solution to the division between believing Jews and believing Gentiles.

Conclusion

The problem Paul addressed in Antioch and Galatia was more than a racial problem, but it was not less than a racial problem. The Jew-Gentile divide combined history (the separation of Jews and Gentiles was centuries old), race (Jew vs. Gentile), and religion (circumcised vs. uncircumcised) in a way that does not match precisely the

⁷⁰Wright says, “When [Paul] speaks in 2.19–20 of his own co-crucifixion, and his own messianic new ‘life’ the other side of that, he is not saying, ‘I have had this experience; you should have it too’. He is saying, rather, ‘this is what it means *for everyone* that Israel’s Messiah was crucified and raised’ . . . The whole point of what Paul says . . . is that *all this is true for Peter as well, and for all other Jewish Messiah-believers.*” Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1425. Italics in original.

⁷¹Wright adds, “To put it the other way round, a crucified Messiah means that ‘righteousness’ is not to be had any other way.” Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 342.

division between black and white in the American church. Our division has its own historical, racial, and religious complexity, but that does not make it any more difficult than their problem. More to the point, the way Paul addressed the problem in Antioch shows us at least one way to address the problem in our own day: through the doctrine of justification by faith. That is not to say that believing and even applying the doctrine of justification will solve everything. But it is to say that justification by faith is the foundation upon which we must build if we are to be a house truly united. If the dream of a church where there is no Jew or Greek, no black or white is to be realized (cf. Gal 3:28), it must be “deeply rooted” not merely “in the American dream” or even in “the proposition that all men are created equal.” It must be rooted in nothing less than the cross of Christ and the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Nothing else can unite this “house divided.” So, “fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray” that as we apply the doctrine of justification by faith we may display more unity in the church tomorrow than we do today.⁷²

⁷²Abraham Lincoln, “Second Inaugural Address,” in *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings 1859-1865* (New York: Viking, 1989), 687.

CHAPTER 4

THE BLESSING OF ABRAHAM, GALATIANS 3:1–14

Nobody wants to be cursed—especially not by God. We want to be blessed. We want the life God has promised his people. But do we want those things badly enough to find out what God says about who will be blessed or why someone might be cursed? The presence of false teachers in the church (in Paul’s day and ours) who tell people they will be blessed for doing what will actually bring upon them a curse means that even those who want to know may be led astray. That is what happened to the churches in Galatia, and we don’t want it to happen to us. So what must we do? We need to listen to the apostle Paul and to heed what he says so that we will be blessed and not cursed.

So far Paul has spent most of the letter focused on events that happened outside of Galatia, but now he turns his full attention to the Galatians themselves. Those who grasped Paul’s response to Peter in Galatians 2:11–21 should have an idea of how Paul will now respond to them. Paul begins with a series of rhetorical questions about works versus faith in Galatians 3:1–6. Then he identifies the true sons of Abraham in Galatians 3:6–9 before explaining who will inherit the blessing of Abraham and on what grounds in Galatians 3:10–14.

Works or Faith? (Gal 3:1–6)

The force of Paul’s rhetoric in Galatians 1:6–9 returns upon the Galatians’ heads once again in 3:1–6. They should have known better. Their experience in the past, their experience in the present, their understanding of the cross, and the OT scriptures all bear witness against the course they are taking. To take upon themselves obedience to the

law and circumcision in particular is to walk contrary to all the evidence—so much so that only bewitchment could explain it.

Bewitched Fools (Gal 3:1a)

Paul’s anguish and distress at the Galatians’ turn from the gospel is evident from the first words of chapter 3: “O foolish Galatians!” (Gal 3:1). No doubt the Galatians believe they are taking the path of wisdom and faithfulness to God, but in reality the false teachers have led them into sheer folly.¹ So shocking is their sudden turn from the gospel to the law (see Gal 1:6) that Paul wonders aloud “who has bewitched” them (Gal 3:1).² No one in their right mind would act as the Galatians are acting.³ They must be under some kind of spell.⁴

The Crux of the Problem (Gal 3:1b)

Paul’s preaching of the cross should have been sufficient to protect them from following the false teachers into such folly. Paul’s statement that, “It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified,” (Gal 3:1b) indicates why Paul was so baffled. Through his preaching Paul showed them the crucifixion of Christ.⁵ That

¹The words of Martyn sum up Paul’s view of the matter admirably: “Paul sees only one true antidote to foolishness: the proclamation of the crucified Christ. With the genuine hearing of this proclamation wisdom begins, and with the departure from this proclamation foolishness sets in. The Galatians are foolish, therefore, because, by moving toward an observance of the Law which they think will be salvific, they are losing sight of the event that makes the world what it really is, Christ’s atoning death and resurrection (6:14–15).” J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 282.

²Martyn says, “Given Gentile aversion to circumcision, the Teachers must indeed have been virtual magicians to have made the Galatians long to come under the Law.” *Ibid.*, 282-83.

³Betz likewise says, “Something ‘irrational’ must have happened to [the Galatians].” Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 132. De Boer’s paraphrase is also apt: “Have you Galatians lost your (Christian) minds?” Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 171.

⁴Schreiner, citing Chrysostom, Calvin, and others says, “Ultimately Paul may be saying that Satan himself stands behind the deception of the Galatians.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 181.

⁵The language of “publicly portrayed” (Gal 3:1) does not imply a re-enactment or dramatization of the crucifixion but the power of Paul’s words to cause the Galatians to see in their mind’s eye as it were the historical event of Jesus’ crucifixion. Schreiner argues similarly, saying, “It does not

should have been enough. If they had understood the Messiah's death, they would have known that chasing circumcision was madness. When the Galatians heard the words of Galatians 3:1 Paul expected Galatians 2:21 to still be ringing in their ears: "If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for nothing."⁶ Paul passionately proclaimed to them the death of Christ; how could they now turn to the law for righteousness? The choice between faith and works, grace and law, is answered by the cross. If we are confused about which to choose, it is because we have not understood the cross as we should.

The Question of Experience (Gal 3:2)

Since the preaching of the cross did not protect the Galatians from the false gospel of circumcision like Paul thought it would, he has just one thing to ask them: "Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?" (Gal 3:2).⁷ Paul believes that the answer to this one question should settle the whole issue.⁸ This is a striking question in part because it assumes the Galatians knew when they received the Spirit.⁹ Perhaps Paul assumed they knew this because when they received the Spirit it

mean that the crucifixion was physically portrayed in Paul's preaching. Rather, it means that the significance of Christ's cross was vividly communicated when the gospel was announced." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 182.

⁶Lightfoot's paraphrase captures the connection between Gal 2:21 and 3:1 well: "Christ's death in vain? O ye senseless Gauls, what bewitchment is this?" J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians: with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 133.

⁷Other interpreters who use the language of "experience" here include Betz (*Galatians*, 132), Dunn (James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentary [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993], 150-58), and De Boer (*Galatians*, 173, 184). Contra Wright (N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013]), who argues that interpreting this as "basically 'an appeal to experience' . . . ignores the strong link between the spirit . . . and the promise to Abraham" (971). He suggests Paul "is not simply saying, 'You had an initial and exciting spiritual experience without getting circumcised, so why not carry on in that way?', but more particularly, 'You already received the guarantee of your Abrahamic inheritance without getting circumcised, so why should you need a different kind of guarantee now?'" (972).

⁸Betz calls it "the main point of Paul's defense." Betz, *Galatians*, 132. Dunn argues, "Their own experience of receiving the Spirit simply through faith should have been enough to fix for them the character of the gospel and the life of faith." Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 151.

⁹Dunn: "The appeal is clearly to an event which Paul could expect them vividly to remember." Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 153.

was a dramatic experience with a visible manifestation of the Spirit's presence like those recorded in Acts 2, 10, and 19. Or perhaps he assumed they knew because of the transforming effect of the Spirit's presence as Paul describes it in Galatians 5:16–23.¹⁰ Either explanation is possible. What we do know is that Paul was confident *they knew* when they received the Spirit and that it was before the false teachers came preaching circumcision. He was confident they knew they received the Spirit when he preached Christ crucified and they heard and believed. And if that is so, what would possess them to begin pursuing the law as though there was something significant they lacked?

It appears from the argument of Galatians 3:1–5:1 that the Galatians were pursuing obedience to the law in order to be assured they were included in God's people. But this is precisely what the gift of the Spirit should have assured them of already. Dunn, after surveying the various ways the gift of the Spirit may have been experienced, argues convincingly that

such experiences, understood in the context as the consequence of 'hearing with faith', were evidently adjudged to be proof sufficient that God had given to those concerned his Spirit. . . . That meant in turn that God had accepted them—and accepted them without waiting for them (or perhaps requiring them first) to be induced formally to his people by the appropriate ritual act. Since God had thus united them to his eschatological people, on whom the Spirit had been poured (e.g. Isa. xxxii.15; Ezek. xxxvii.4–14; Joel ii.28–9), nothing more than that common participation in the Spirit was necessary for them formally to be recognized as part of that people (cf. Acts x.47–8). This clearly is the logic of the appeal which Paul here starts to make.¹¹

The gift of the Spirit should have clued them in to their place in the people of God. And since that place came as a result of hearing and believing rather than working and doing

¹⁰Betz does not consider this second option. He argues instead that "we can conclude that 'receiving the Spirit' meant an enthusiast's or ecstatic experience." Betz, *Galatians*, 132.

¹¹Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 153–54. Similarly, Schreiner argues that the "main idea" of Gal 3:1–5 is that "the Galatians do not need to be circumcised and to observe the works of the law in order to belong to the people of God because they have clearly received the Holy Spirit; the reception of the Spirit *is the mark* that signifies that one belongs to the people of God." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 178. Italics in original.

they should have recognized as false any claim that law observance was required for their full inclusion.

A Footpath of Fools (Gal 3:3–4)

Paul is persuaded the path the Galatians are on is a “foolish” one (Gal 3:1, 3).¹² The Galatians are acting as though what is necessary for the completion of their Christian life is something different from what was necessary for the beginning of their Christian life.¹³ They started with the Spirit and are trying to finish with the flesh.¹⁴ Paul sees this as folly (Gal 3:3).

When Paul mentions beginning by the Spirit in Galatians 3:3 he is referring to the Galatians’ conversion. That follows from verse 2. But what does he mean by “being perfected by the flesh” (Gal 3:3)?¹⁵ Paul was speaking of “works of the law” before (Gal 3:2), so where did “flesh” come from and what does he mean by it? He could be contrasting the Spirit with the sinful flesh as he does later in chapter 5, but there is

¹²Note that Paul uses the word “foolish” to describe the Galatians for the second time in only three verses (Gal 3:1, 3).

¹³Schreiner says, “Surely, they must know that the Christian life continues the way it begins: through faith and by the Spirit!” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 180.

¹⁴According to Das the words translated “Spirit” and “flesh” in verse 3 “may be instrumental datives (“by the Spirit/the flesh”) or datives of manner (“with the Spirit/the flesh”). The question does not impact the meaning of the passage.” A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 277. Similarly, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 150.

¹⁵One of the difficulties in interpreting Gal 3:1–5 is determining whether the issue in Galatia is who belongs to the people of God (as seems to be the case in most of the letter) or how one makes progress as a Christian (as seems to be the case in Gal 3:3, but perhaps nowhere else). Schreiner’s explanation clears away the fog of confusion and is worth quoting at length: “One could argue here that the issue in Galatians was not how to get into the people of God but how to stay in the people of God. We must carefully sort out Paul’s view in this matter and distinguish it from the view of the Judaizers. The false teachers were not giving advice about progress in the Christian life, for their view, as in Judaism, was that circumcision was required for *entrance* into the people of God. Therefore, the Judaizers argued that those uncircumcised were not part of the covenant. . . . The Judaizers argued that the Galatians must be circumcised to belong to the people of God. Paul, however, believed that the Galatians were Christians because they had already received the Spirit. Hence, he frames the matter in terms of progress in the Christian life. In other words, Paul writes from his perspective; he was not even willing to grant the premise of the false teachers. He assumes that the Galatians are Christians, and thus he describes their desire to be circumcised as a misguided attempt to make progress in the Christian life on the basis of the flesh instead of the Spirit.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 184.

nothing in the context to suggest that meaning of “flesh” here.¹⁶ In the context the issue is “works of the law” (Gal 2:16; 3:2) and specifically circumcision and the food laws.

Therefore, what Paul means by “flesh” here is simply the body (such as what foods you do or do not put into your body) and perhaps most particularly a man being “circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin” (Gen 17:14).¹⁷ The Galatians have received the new covenant gift of the Spirit; why would they go back to the old covenant sign of circumcision and see that as progress?¹⁸ It’s foolish. You cannot be perfected by what you do with or to your body.

The significance of adopting or rejecting circumcision is evident in the response it brought from others. The Galatians had evidently suffered¹⁹ for believing in the Messiah but not practicing the law just as Paul had suffered for preaching the cross rather than circumcision.²⁰ Since adding the law would nullify their suffering, it seems reasonable to conclude their suffering must have been on account of not practicing the law. Paul is hopeful that their suffering has not been in vain (Gal 3:4). He is hopeful that they have not fully crossed over to the dark side. He is hopeful that they will see that the path they are on is not one that will bring to completion what started at their conversion

¹⁶So also Das, *Galatians*, 295. Contra Schreiner, who argues that “the term ‘flesh’ here is used in the technical Pauline sense, referring to reliance on the Old Adam, the unregenerate person.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 184.

¹⁷In both Gen 17:14 (LXX) and Gal 3:3 the word translated flesh is σάρξ. De Boer also draws attention to the connection between Gal 3:3 and Gen 17. De Boer, *Galatians*, 177. Betz asserts that, “Ultimately, of course, Paul alludes to the rite of circumcision.” Betz, *Galatians*, 132.

¹⁸Schreiner (*Galatians*) argues similarly that, “The opposition between the Spirit and the flesh represents the eschatological contrast between this age and the age to come (cf. 1:4), with the flesh representing the old age and the Spirit the age to come. The age to come has penetrated this present evil age, and hence it does not make sense for the Galatians to turn back to the old age now that the new has arrived,” (184). Later, he also uses the language of “new covenant” when he says, “The Galatians are the people of the new covenant precisely because the Spirit has been poured out in their midst,” (186).

¹⁹Schreiner (*Galatians*) acknowledges that “the verb used here (πάσχω) could mean ‘experienced,’ as many commentators take it, rather than ‘suffered,’” (185). Nevertheless, he argues that “this word (πάσχω) elsewhere in the NT means ‘suffered,’” (185). In response to the objection that “the letter says nothing about the Galatians suffering,” Schreiner argues that “4:29 suggests that they did experience persecution,” (185).

²⁰See Gal 5:11; 6:12–15.

but is instead an abandonment of the gospel they heard at first. Paul does not want their suffering for the sake of the gospel to come to naught and he assumes they do not want that either.

Has God Changed? (Gal 3:5–6)

If it is foolish to start with faith and the Spirit and then seek to finish with the law and the flesh, is it not also foolish to think that God, who gave the Spirit in response to faith, will now give the Spirit in response to obedience to the law?²¹ Of course it is.²² God does not deal with us differently now than he did at our conversion. Nor does he deal with us differently now than he did with Abraham. That is the point of bringing in God's dealings with Abraham in verse 6 and linking it to verse 5 with "just as" (Gal 3:6).²³ Das is right to argue that "Abraham serves as . . . a precedent for the Galatians' experience. . . . The patriarch's reception of God's blessings in faith is analogous to the Galatians' reception of God's blessings. Abraham benefited from the promises given to him by faith *just as* the Galatians received the promised Spirit by faith."²⁴ God gave the Spirit when the Galatians heard the gospel and believed. God counted Abraham righteous when he heard God's promise and believed. God has not changed. His gifts and blessings come in response to faith. That has always been the case. Before the old covenant faith was expressed in reliance on God's promises to Abraham. Under the old covenant faith was

²¹In my treatment of verse 6 here and below I borrow extensively from a class paper I wrote on Paul's use of Abraham in Galatians.

²²The manner of Paul's argument here is similar to verse 3 and builds on verse 4. The "therefore" (οὖν) at the beginning of verse 5 (which the ESV leaves untranslated) links verse 5b back at least to verse 4. Schreiner claims that 3:5 provides an "inference . . . drawn from 3:1–4." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 180. De Boer summarizes the thrust of Paul's argument in Gal 3:1–5 well when he says, "The overall point is that observing the law is totally irrelevant to God's activity of providing the Spirit to the Galatians. . . . God is no more tied to the law than the Galatians ought to be!" De Boer, *Galatians*, 181.

²³Dunn says that "the implicit equation of 'receiving the Spirit' and 'being reckoned righteous' (different ways of describing the opening up of a positive relationship with God) is confirmed in iii.14." Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 160.

²⁴Das, *Galatians*, 301. Italics in original.

expressed in obedience to the law. In the new covenant faith is relying on Christ and his work rather than on any work we can do, even a work of the law. God has not changed and his ways have not changed. To think otherwise is utter folly.

Sons of Abraham (Gal 3:6–9)

Abraham plays such a large role in Galatians 3–4 that if we do not have a good grasp of Abraham’s place in God’s plan as it unfolds in the story of Scripture, it will be very difficult to follow Paul’s argument and even more difficult to understand why his argument matters.²⁵ Why does it matter if the Gentiles are “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7)? Why does it matter who is “blessed along with Abraham” (Gal 3:9)? These are not categories commonly used by Christians today to describe their place in God’s family and yet Paul argues for them vehemently. So what is the big deal about Abraham?²⁶

The big deal about Abraham is this: the promises God made to Abraham indicate how and through whom God is going to bless the world. In the wake of the curses and judgments that fell on the world as a result of Adam’s sin, God tells us it is through Abraham’s family that he will bless the world (Gen 12:2–3).²⁷ That is why our

²⁵In this section I use material from a class paper I wrote on Paul’s use of Abraham in Galatians.

²⁶De Boer (*Galatians*) is probably correct to claim that “one probable reason [for introducing Abraham in Galatians 3:6] is that the Galatians have been hearing much about Abraham from the new preachers in Galatia, who claim that by practicing circumcision as Abraham did and thereby committing themselves to doing the law the Galatians will become ‘sons of Abraham,’ thus heirs of ‘the promises’ (3:16, 21) God made to Abraham” (186-87). However, it does not follow from this that the categories of Abrahamic sonship and Abrahamic blessing are categories Paul cared about only in response to the claims of the false teachers. He could have dismissed the categories as unimportant or irrelevant if he considered them to be so. Since he did not do this but instead argued at great length about the identity of the “sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7) and who it is that is “blessed along with Abraham” (Gal 3:9) and who are the “heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29), we must assume that Paul himself considered these categories to be of vital importance. See also Wright who argues that “Paul could, of course, have responded to the ‘agitators’ by denying that belonging to the family of Abraham had any relevance at all. . . . But in fact Paul does offer a positive place for the patriarch, as we can see already from the end of [Galatians] chapter 3. . . . Being in Abraham’s family . . . matters.” N. T. Wright, “Paul and the Patriarch: The Role(s) of Abraham in Galatians and Romans,” in *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 572-73.

²⁷It is worth noting Wright’s (“Paul and the Patriarch”) point that “it is a mainstream Jewish understanding of God’s purpose in choosing Abraham that he was to be the one through whom the problem of human sin and its effects would be dealt with,” (563) and that “Paul fully affirms the standard Jewish belief that when God wants to save the world and humankind from the plight of Genesis 3–11, he calls Abraham and makes promises to him, promises which are then kept, ultimately, in the Messiah” (591). See

relationship to Abraham matters. When Jesus the Messiah came God did not scrap his plan to bless the world through Abraham. On the contrary, the coming of Jesus was a climactic moment in the fulfillment of God's plan to bless the world through Abraham.

Reckoning Abraham Righteous (Gal 3:6)

Paul's quotation²⁸ of Genesis 15:6 in Galatians 3:6 is one of those hinge verses that is hard to separate from the paragraph before it or the paragraph after it.²⁹ It brings the argument of 3:1–5 to a conclusion while also launching the argument that begins in verse 7 and continues (arguably) to 5:1. Galatians 3:6 gives us Paul's first mention of Abraham in the letter and from this point forward Abraham dominates much of Galatians 3–4. So what does Paul's use of Genesis 15:6 here tell us about how Paul interprets the story of Abraham?

Significance of Genesis 15:6 for Paul. Schreiner argues that “it is vital to observe that Paul quotes Gen 12:3 *after* Gen 15:6. Therefore, Gen 15:6 functions as the lens by which Gen 12:3 is interpreted.”³⁰ Indeed one could argue that Genesis 15:6 “functions as the lens by which” Paul interprets the whole Abraham story.³¹ Paul's

also James Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 253-73.

²⁸Though Paul does not use a quotation formula here as he does in 3:10, or even indicate that Scripture is speaking as he does in 3:8, it is clear that he is quoting Gen 15:6 which says, “And he [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.” The reason this is clear is Gal 3:6 follows the LXX of Gen 15:6 almost exactly (so Betz, *Galatians*, 140-41), the one exception being that the name “Abraham” has been moved from after the verb “believed” to before it.

²⁹Das argues that 3:6 ends the paragraph begun in 3:1 and does not begin a new paragraph. But then he goes on to say that “Gal 3:6 is, in some ways, a ‘janus’ (two-faced) verse. Not only does the verse connect with 3:1–5, but it also introduces the personage of Abraham.” Das, *Galatians*, 300-302.

³⁰Schreiner, *Galatians*, 190. Italics in original.

³¹Schreiner argues similarly when he says, “Genesis 15:6 takes center stage in Paul's understanding of Abraham.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 192. That Paul read the Abraham story in light of Gen 15:6 is further confirmed by his use of that verse in Rom 4. There he cites Gen 15:6 near the beginning of his engagement with the story of Abraham (as he does in Galatians) and then references it again near the end of his interaction with the Abraham story. This *inclusio* indicates that the whole story (and consequently the whole argument) is to be read in light of that verse.

emphasis is on Abraham's faith.³² That much is clear not only from the quotation itself but also from the context Paul uses it in. He cites Genesis 15:6 to buttress his argument that God gave the Spirit in response to the faith of the Galatians and not in response to their law-keeping. In the verses that follow Paul's emphasis is once again on Abraham's faith. Given the opposition Paul faced from his fellow Jews for his preaching,³³ it should not surprise us that Paul's interpretation of the Abraham story differed from other Jews of the same period.

Genesis 15:6 in Second Temple Judaism. Paul's emphasis on Abraham's faith noticeably differs from the typical reading of the Abraham story found in writings from the Second Temple period. Perhaps the most often cited interpretation of the Abraham story from the Second Temple period is 1 Maccabees 2:52 which says, "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?"³⁴ Part of what is significant about this statement is that it includes a quotation from Genesis 15:6 just as Galatians 3:6 does. The phrase "was reckoned to him as righteousness" follows the LXX of Genesis 15:6 exactly, just as Paul's citation does. But there is a distinct difference between the citation in Maccabees and the citation in Paul. Paul's citation includes the statement about Abraham believing God. The verse from 1 Maccabees does not mention Abraham believing God but instead refers to Abraham being "found faithful (πιστός) when tested," almost certainly referring to the test of offering up Isaac in Genesis 22.³⁵ This represents a significantly different reading of the

³²De Boer states that "the key for Paul is that the passage makes no mention of the law or of a commandment at all in connection with justification. Abraham receives justification simply on the basis of his belief in God." De Boer, *Galatians*, 188.

³³See Acts 13:50; 14:19; 15:1–2; 2 Cor 11:26.

³⁴Michael Coogan et al., eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Apocrypha*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

³⁵Das (*Galatians*) mentions 1 Macc 2:52 as well as texts from Sirach and Jubilees as passages that show that "some Jewish authors in Paul's era directly link Abraham's faith in Genesis 15:6 with his obedient near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22" (303). By contrast, my argument is that 1 Macc 2:52 connects Abraham's being reckoned righteous with his faithfulness rather than his faith. De Boer agrees

Abraham story than what Paul presents in Galatians. What is more, the reading found in 1 Maccabees appears to be representative of how the Abraham story was read by other Jews of the time.³⁶ Betz, after citing texts from Sirach and Jubilees and referencing 1 Maccabees 2:52, says, “Abraham’s faith is, according to Jewish theology, in no way opposed to his deeds; rather, it is this unyielding trust in God’s promise and his steadfastness in all his temptations that make up his works, and thus qualify him for the reward of righteousness.”³⁷ Again, to read the story of Abraham as though his deeds were the reason for reckoning him as righteous seems to be typical of Second Temple writings, but that is not how Paul read the Abraham narrative. Das notes Paul’s lack of emphasis on Abraham’s faithfulness when he says,

He does not draw any attention to Abraham’s faithful obedience in his going to the land of promise or in his near sacrificing of Isaac. Paul does not draw any attention to Abraham’s obedience with respect to his circumcision. The apostle’s purpose is to draw attention to the *promise* God made to Abraham, a promise in which he simply trusted.³⁸

Unlike much of Second Temple Judaism Paul emphasizes Abraham’s faith, not his faithfulness.³⁹

and states that according to 1 Macc 2:52 “the reckoning of justification to Abraham follows from his obedience to God in connection with the requested sacrifice of his son Isaac.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 188.

³⁶See, for example, the long list of texts cited by Das who draws this conclusion from them: “Thus a frequent motif in Jewish treatments of Abraham was his perfect or nearly perfect obedience to God’s will. Abraham was a model . . . of faithful behavior.” Das, *Galatians*, 303-4. For the relationship between 4QMMT and Gen 15:6 as well as other texts, see Dunn, “4QMMT and Galatians,” *New Testament Studies* 43 (1997): 147-53 (but especially 151-52).

³⁷Betz, *Galatians*, 139.

³⁸Das, *Galatians*, 309. Italics in original.

³⁹Paul’s use of Gen 15:6 also gives us, as Schreiner says, “a powerful argument supporting the objective genitive reading ‘faith in Christ’ here. . . . The verb ‘believed’ . . . in 3:6 . . . leaves no doubt that the focus is on Abraham’s *believing*, not his *faithfulness*.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 193. Italics in original.

Following in the Footsteps of Faith (Gal 3:7)

Paul's reference to Abraham in verse 6 provides a transition to a new angle of his argument in verse 7: the identity of the sons of Abraham. Since much of Galatians 3–4 revolves around the identity of the sons of Abraham it is likely that the false teachers had something to say about this.⁴⁰ If so, we can assume their view included the necessity of circumcision. Paul, on the other hand, argues that those who believe as Abraham did are Abraham's sons—circumcised or not.⁴¹ He bases this (note the “then” in Gal 3:7) on God's reckoning Abraham righteous when he believed (Gal 3:6).⁴² Paul's claim is that the sons of Abraham are not necessarily the sons of physical descent (circumcised Jews) but those who act like sons. This sonship is evident not by genealogy but by imitation—‘like father, like son.’⁴³ This also reinforces the conclusion drawn above from Paul's quotation of Genesis 15:6, namely, that for Paul the dominant attribute of Abraham is his faith.

⁴⁰Dunn, for example, suggests that “it is very arguable that Paul was responding to arguments he knew had been put by the other missionaries, or were likely to be put by them, and that it was they who introduced the theme of sonship of Abraham.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 159.

⁴¹Here we have further evidence that the doctrine of justification by faith was not the doctrine the false teachers were attacking directly. What they were attacking directly was the claim that Gentiles are included in the people of God by faith in Christ with no requirement to keep the law of Moses. The doctrine of justification by faith is brought in by Paul to show that there is no work of law required for Gentiles to be right with God and therefore accepted as children of Abraham. This is why Peter's withdrawal from table fellowship with believing Gentiles is rebuked by the doctrine of justification by faith (Gal 2:11–16). This is why the doctrine of justification provides the ground in Gal 3:6 for the claim in Gal 3:7–9 that those who believe are the children of Abraham. Furthermore, since Abrahamic sonship is at the heart of the conflict Paul is addressing (see Gal 3:6–29; 4:21–31), that means the gospel is at stake (Gal 1:6) and is distorted (Gal 1:7) when Gentiles are told they must obey the Mosaic law and adopt circumcision not only in order to be right with God but also in order to be included in the people of God.

⁴²De Boer says, “From this text [Gen 15:6], Paul will in the next verse draw the conclusion that only ‘those who are from faith’ are truly the ‘sons’ (heirs) of Abraham.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 187–88.

⁴³Jesus argued similarly in John 8:39–44. Perhaps Irenaeus means something similar when he says, “God has recapitulated in us the faith of Abraham.” St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, trans. John Behr (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), 97.

Foreseeing the Family of Faith (Gal 3:8)

Paul not only claims that the sons of Abraham are those who believe like Abraham believed, he also claims that the Scripture saw the justification of Gentiles by faith coming.⁴⁴ What evidence does he have for this extraordinary claim? The answer is simple: God’s promise to Abraham that “in you shall all the nations be blessed” (Gal 3:8). This is a direct quotation of God’s original promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3.⁴⁵

Because the Scripture foresaw the justification of Gentiles by faith, it “preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham” (Gal 3:8).⁴⁶ And how did it preach this gospel? By promising the blessing of the Gentiles in Abraham. Here again we see that the inclusion of the Gentiles by faith is part of the gospel message itself.⁴⁷ The gospel the Scripture preached was the message of blessing for the Gentiles in Abraham. Of course that blessing in Abraham ultimately came through his “offspring,” the Messiah (Gal 3:16),⁴⁸ and only flowed to the Gentiles through the death of Christ (Gal 3:13–14). But the point here is that their inclusion is part of the good news itself. Moreover, this inclusion is grounded in the certain knowledge “that God would justify the Gentiles by faith” (Gal 3:8). This is why Paul regards the compulsory circumcision of Gentiles (Gal 6:12) as a distortion and ultimately a denial of the gospel (Gal 1:6–7). Paul’s doctrine of

⁴⁴Das rightly notes that Gal 3:8 indicates “Paul . . . has a high view of the Scriptures as God’s own voice.” Das, *Galatians*, 307.

⁴⁵Paul’s citation has no introductory formula but is unquestionably a direct quote. Paul has changed the *φυλαί* of the LXX to *ἔθνη* (Paul’s preferred word for non-Jewish peoples) which results in a change of the form of *πᾶς*. Otherwise the quote follows the LXX. There is considerable discussion about the source of this change. Moo (Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013]) suggests the possibility that “[Paul] conflates Gen. 12:3 with other roughly parallel promises in Genesis that refer to ‘all the nations’ . . . as in Gen. 18:18” and other texts in Genesis (199). However, I prefer Moo’s earlier suggestion that “Paul may himself change the wording to suit his argument, since an explicit reference to Gentiles obviously provides better support for his point than the LXX rendering” (199).

⁴⁶Thus Moo can say, “This verse shows that ‘justification by faith,’ while not exhausting the meaning of ‘gospel,’ is certainly foundational to it.” *Ibid.*, 199.

⁴⁷Similarly, Schreiner says: “Paul identifies the promise of universal blessing as the gospel in Gal 3:8 and he interprets this blessing in terms of justification by faith.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 190.

⁴⁸So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 194.

justification by faith for Jews as well as Gentiles is not an innovation but a revelation long foreseen by Scripture itself (Gal 3:8).⁴⁹ As far back as Genesis 12 the Scripture foresaw and spoke about the worldwide family of faith that would be found in Abraham.⁵⁰ The one trait that everyone in the family of Abraham shares is faith.

Blessing for the People of Faith (Gal 3:9)

As the citation in verse 6 leads to the conclusion of verse 7, so the citation in verse 8 leads to the conclusion of verse 9. The quotation of Genesis 12:3 does not specify how the Gentiles will be blessed in Abraham, but Paul infers that it will be through believing like Abraham. “So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham” (Gal 3:9).⁵¹ Not only are those who believe blessed “in” Abraham (Gal 3:8) but they are blessed “with” Abraham (Gal 3:9).⁵² The blessing that God promised to Abraham in order to undo and overcome the curse of Genesis 3 is now shared by all who believe “as Abraham believed God” (Gal 3:6).⁵³ Faith so characterizes Abraham that Paul can even call him “the man of faith” (Gal 3:9).⁵⁴ The family of “the man of faith” (Gal

⁴⁹St. John Chrysostom highlights the significance of this for the controversy in Galatia when he says, “Attend to this point. He Himself who gave the Law, had decreed, before He gave it, that the heathen should be justified by Faith.” St. John Chrysostom, “Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 13, *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 26.

⁵⁰This is language I borrowed from Wright (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*) who says about Gal 3, “The opening of the main argument (3.6–9) declares that the ‘family’ is the *covenant* family, the *worldwide* family of many nations and the family of faith” (861, italics in original). Though I adopted a portion of his language I have not adopted all his conclusions about this passage.

⁵¹De Boer asserts that “in v. 9 Paul draws a conclusion from the way in which he has conjoined Gen 15:6 and Gen 12:3.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 196.

⁵²Moo, citing Dunn and others, argues that “the claim that Gentiles will be blessed ‘in’ Abraham is unclear. The underlying Hebrew may have the sense of ‘accompaniment’: the nations will be blessed via their association with Abraham. And verse 9 could suggest that this was Paul’s understanding.” Moo, *Galatians*, 200.

⁵³Once again, see Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” 253-73.

⁵⁴Schreiner acknowledges that “the construction ‘the believing Abraham’ (τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ) could refer to Abraham’s *faithfulness* rather than his *faith*. But as we have already argued, such a reading is unlikely contextually, for the paragraph was introduced with Abraham’s believing (ἐπίστευσεν), not his

3:9) is made up of all “those of faith” (Gal 3:7) who are justified by faith (Gal 3:8; 2:16) “just as Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” (Gal 3:6).⁵⁵

Cursed or Blessed? (Gal 3:10–14)

In Galatians 3:1–5 Paul juxtaposed works and faith. Then in Galatians 3:6–9 he argued from Scripture that those who believe like Abraham are the ones who belong to Abraham’s family and share in Abraham’s blessing. He has established from Scripture that faith is paramount but he has not yet established from Scripture why works of the law must be ruled out.⁵⁶ Nor has he established on what grounds those under the curse of the law (Gal 3:10) can be blessed. In Galatians 3:10–14 Paul addressed all of these concerns, continuing his tightly woven and Scripture-laden argument about the inclusion of the Gentiles by faith.⁵⁷

The Curse of the Law (Gal 3:10)

After claiming that it is “those who are of faith [who] are blessed along with Abraham,” (Gal 3:9) Paul explains in verse 10 why it is those of faith and not those of the law who are blessed.⁵⁸ Stated bluntly, those who attempt to do the law cannot be blessed because they “are under a curse” (Gal 3:10).

faithfulness (3:6).” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 195. Italics in original.

⁵⁵Das rightly asserts that “both 3:7 and 3:9 emphasize ‘faith’ as the basis for sharing in Abrahamic blessings and descent.” Das, *Galatians*, 310.

⁵⁶In this section I have used material from a class paper I wrote on Paul’s use of Hab 2:4 in Gal 3:11.

⁵⁷Chee-Chiew Lee notes that, “The highest concentration of OT quotations and allusions [in Galatians] occurs in Galatians 3 and 4, especially in Gal 3:6–13, where six scriptural citations are compacted within a short span of eight verses. It is no wonder that Gal 3:6–13 has received so much attention from such a considerable number of scholars.” Chee-Chiew Lee, *The Blessing of Abraham, the Spirit, and Justification in Galatians: Their Relationship and Significance for Understanding Paul’s Theology* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 2.

⁵⁸Contra Schreiner who calls verse 10 an “assertion.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 203.

Deuteronomy 27:26 in context. Paul defends this claim by going to the law itself. He quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26 which is the final statement in a string of curses which were to be pronounced when the people of Israel entered the promised land (Deut 27:12–14). This final and climactic statement does not pronounce a curse on those who break a particular commandment as the previous statements do (Deut 27:15–25), but instead pronounces a curse on those who do not keep the law as a whole, saying, “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them” (Deut 27:26).⁵⁹ Paul’s quotation of this verse is very similar to the Septuagint translation and brings out the significance of this curse as the final, climactic, catch-all curse for breaking the law. “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them” (Gal 3:10).⁶⁰

Paul’s use of Deuteronomy 27:26 in Galatians 3:10. At first this argument may seem to play into the hands of the false teachers who are urging obedience to the law. “See,” they might say, “if you do not keep the law you will be cursed. If you want to be blessed, you must keep the law.” But Paul has guarded against this misreading of Deuteronomy 27:26 by prefacing it with the statement that “all who rely on works of the law are under a curse” (Gal 3:10). How is it that Deuteronomy 27:26 demonstrates that

⁵⁹Similarly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 203-4. Peter Craigie rightly comments, “The twelfth and final curse has a summary and all-inclusive nature. . . . There is a sense in which the previous eleven curses are only examples, the twelfth curse making it quite clear that any action that does not *elevate the words of this law* brings an offender under the curse of God.” Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 334. Italics in original. Daniel Block likewise asserts that “the imprecations conclude with a general curse on all who will not uphold ‘the words of this law.’” Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 636. It is worth noting that although the NIV Application Commentary prides itself on applying the text to believers today, Block appears to make no reference to Gal 3:10 in his comments on Deut 27.

⁶⁰Paul follows the LXX almost word for word, though there are some significant differences (for the details of these differences, see Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1990], 117). None of these differences change the meaning of Deut 27:26 in any significant way (so also Longenecker, *Galatians*, 117). A possible explanation for part of the difference in wording is Schreiner’s suggestion that along with Paul’s citation of Deut 27:26 “Paul likely alludes to Deut 28:58 as well, which also emphasizes doing ‘all the words’ written in the book of the law.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 203.

those who try to keep the law in order to be blessed are actually cursed? The answer is in the little word “all,” which admittedly is not present in the Hebrew text of Deuteronomy 27:26 but brings out the meaning of that text as the climactic curse pronounced against law breakers. No one can keep all of the law; that much is to be assumed.⁶¹ Since no one can keep all the law, and keeping all the law is precisely what the law requires, everyone who tries to keep the law ends up cursed rather than blessed.⁶² That is why it is “those of faith who are blessed along with Abraham” (Gal 3:9) rather than those attempting to keep the law. Trying to keep the law so that God will bless you is a dead end. You will only end up cursed because you cannot keep the whole law.

The Righteous Live by Faith (Gal 3:11–12)

Not only does a curse abide on all who try to do the law, but Paul also claims “it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for [Habakkuk says,] ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Gal 3:11). How is it that Habakkuk, which is not one of the books of the law and does not appear to be speaking about the law, can tell us that “no one is justified before God by the law” (Gal 3:11)? The answer does not come from the Habakkuk citation alone but also from Paul’s next statement and citation in verse 12 where he says, “But the law is not of faith, rather [as Leviticus 18:5 says,] ‘The one who does them shall live by them’” (Gal 3:12). So how do these two citations come together to make Paul’s point? This is a perplexing part of Paul’s argument and to understand it

⁶¹Schreiner surveys various interpretations of Gal 3:10 before concluding that “the idea that Paul is assuming that perfect obedience to the law is impossible in Gal 3:10 is the most satisfactory, for such a view explains most adequately the context and argument of Gal 3:10–14, and it is also in significant agreement with Paul’s theology as he expressed it in Romans.” Thomas R. Schreiner, “Is Perfect Obedience to the Law Possible? A Re-Examination of Galatians 3:10,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27, no. 2 (June 1984): 160. So also Longenecker, *Galatians*, 118. For a lengthy list of those who agree with this position, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 204.

⁶²Craigie says, “The reach of the law is so all-pervasive that man cannot claim justification before God on the basis of ‘works of the law.’” Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, 334.

we must consider each of these citations in their own context as well as how Paul uses them.

Habakkuk 2:4 in context. Habakkuk is distressed by the state of affairs in Judah.⁶³ He sees “destruction and violence . . . strife and contention” (Hab 1:3) as well as the perversion of justice (Hab 1:4). Unrighteous men have the upper hand (Hab 1:4) and Habakkuk does not understand why God is not responding to his “cry for help” (Hab 1:2). God’s surprising but not altogether unexpected answer to this problem is to raise up the Chaldeans in judgment against his own people for their sin (Hab 1:5–11).⁶⁴ This answer raised another question in Habakkuk’s mind: How can God look on while “the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?” (Hab 1:13). Will God allow the Chaldeans to go on “mercilessly killing nations forever?” (Hab 1:17). Habakkuk is eager for the Lord’s answer and longs to “see what he will say” in response (Hab 2:1).

The promise that “the righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4b) is part of the response Habakkuk receives from the Lord. The Chaldeans will eventually be judged themselves (Hab 2:6–20), but in the meantime judgment will fall on God’s own people and the circumstances will be trying (Hab 3:17). Yet Habakkuk is resolved to wait and rejoice in the Lord even if God brings the covenant curses upon his people (Hab 3:17–

⁶³Keil argues that Habakkuk is distressed in these opening verses “not, . . . [as some] suppose, over the acts of wickedness and violence which the Chaldeans performed in the land, but over the wicked conduct of the ungodly of his own nation.” C. F. Keil, *The Minor Prophets, Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 10 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 391. F. F. Bruce goes farther and specifies Jehoiakim as the source of the problem in Judah. F. F. Bruce, “Habakkuk,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, vol. 2, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, and Habakkuk*, ed. Thomas McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 844. Contra William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2002), 217-18.

⁶⁴I say ‘not altogether unexpected’ because the law warned Israel this might happen. Moses said in Deuteronomy, “If you will not obey the voice of the Lord your God . . . the Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. . . . A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground. . . . The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away . . . [and] they shall besiege you in all your towns” (Deut 28:15, 25, 33, 49, 52). In light of those covenant curses it seems likely that James Scott is correct when he says that Hab 1:5–11 is a “prediction of the Chaldean invasion . . . as a judgment to be incurred because of Judah’s breach of covenant.” James M. Scott, “A New Approach to Habakkuk II 4-5A,” *Vetus Testamentum* 35, no. 3 (1985): 337.

18).⁶⁵ It is this response from Habakkuk that clarifies what Habakkuk 2:4 is calling for: patient trust in God.⁶⁶ That is why Bruce can say, “Habakkuk himself is a living example of the righteous one who lives by faith.”⁶⁷

More specifically, Habakkuk is calling for the kind of faith demonstrated by Abraham. O. Palmer Robertson has noted that there “appears to be a deliberate echo of Gen. 15:6” in Habakkuk 2:4.⁶⁸ Robertson bases this claim on the appearance of two similar and significant words in the two verses.⁶⁹ Genesis 15:6 says, “[Abram] believed (אָמַן) the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness (צְדָקָה),” while Habakkuk 2:4 says, “the righteous (צַדִּיק) shall live by his faith (אֱמוּנָה).” The differences between the two pairs of words are not great if אֱמוּנָה is translated “faith.”⁷⁰ Moisés Silva supports Robertson’s argument when he says, “A quick look at the Hebrew text suggests that Genesis and Habakkuk may in fact be dealing with the same thought, since the lexical parallels [between Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4] can hardly be a coincidence.”⁷¹ If the connection is not a coincidence, then of course Habakkuk must have had a purpose in it.

⁶⁵The circumstances that Habakkuk anticipates in Hab 3:17 suggest that Habakkuk is contemplating the enactment of the covenant curses. Those curses include drought (Deut 28:23–24) and crop failure, particularly for vineyards and olive trees (Deut 28:38–40). Hab 3:17 may even be intended to recall Deut 28:51 specifically which speaks of a foreign nation who “shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock.” For anyone as familiar with the blessings and curses of the covenant as the prophet must have been, surely such similarity of language was not accidental.

⁶⁶Schreiner is right to assert that “the fundamental call of Habakkuk is to trust in the Lord.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 209.

⁶⁷Bruce, “Habakkuk,” 894.

⁶⁸O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 178.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰In Gen 15:6 “believed” is a verb while in Hab 2:4 “faith” is a noun; “righteousness” is a noun in Gen 15:6 while “righteous” is an adjective in Hab 2:4. For the argument that אֱמוּנָה can be properly translated “faith” in Hab 2:4, see Debbie Hunn, “Habakkuk 2.4b in its Context: How Far Off Was Paul?” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 2 (2009): 219–39.

⁷¹Moisés Silva, “Galatians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 802. Keil likewise says: “It is impossible to mistake the reference in [Habakkuk 2:4] to Gen. 15:6.” Keil, *The Minor Prophets*, 402.

Silva continues, “Although his method may appear subtle to the English reader, the prophet surely was exhorting the people of Judah to follow in the footsteps of Abraham.”⁷² In other words, Habakkuk is telling the people to trust God like Abraham did and that those who do are the ones who are righteous like Abraham.

Paul’s use of Habakkuk 2:4 in Galatians 3:11. If we are on the right track in reading Habakkuk’s promise that “the righteous shall live by his faith” (Hab 2:4) as a call to imitate Abraham’s faith, then it is not difficult to see how this verse fits in Paul’s argument. In Galatians 3:6 Paul cited Genesis 15:6, the very verse to which Habakkuk 2:4 alludes. Paul has affirmed that it is those who believe like Abraham who are his sons (Gal 3:7) and that the Gentiles are justified by faith (Gal 3:8) just like Abraham was (Gen 15:6; Gal 3:6). In Galatians 3:11 Paul equates “the righteous” of Habakkuk 2:4 with the one “justified before God” when he says, “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’” And there is no doubt that according to Paul “a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ” (Gal 2:16). Likewise, righteousness is something Abraham had “counted to him” in Genesis 15 rather than something he was commended for practicing (Gal 3:6). With these connections in view the arguments made by Robertson and Silva above gain added force. After noting the verbal connections between Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4 Silva claimed that, “Although his method may appear subtle to the English reader, the prophet surely was exhorting the people of Judah to follow in the footsteps of Abraham.”⁷³ If that is true, and indeed it seems to be, then Paul has perceived and expanded the subtleties of Habakkuk’s message. No wonder Schreiner says, “Paul is a brilliant interpreter of

⁷²Silva, “Galatians,” 802.

⁷³Ibid., 802.

Habakkuk.⁷⁴ Not only in the story of Abraham but even in the words of the prophet righteousness is linked to faith.

Leviticus 18:5 in context. Leviticus 18:5 is addressed to Israel between the exodus and the conquest of the land. The God of Israel commands his people, “You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you” (Lev 18:3). Instead they are to follow the commandments of their God (Lev 18:4). Then, “if a person does them, he shall live by them” (Lev 18:5), meaning that he will enjoy the life promised to those who keep the Mosaic covenant: abundant life in the land in God’s presence.⁷⁵ But this life is conditioned not upon faith but upon obedience, an obedience that Paul assumes no one (except Jesus) is able to perform (Gal 3:10).⁷⁶

Paul’s use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12.⁷⁷ We must say something here about how Leviticus 18:5 makes it “evident” that “no one is justified before God by

⁷⁴Schreiner, *Galatians*, 209.

⁷⁵See Lev 18:24–28; 26:3–12. Gordon Wenham gets close to this when he says, “For the OT writers life means primarily physical life. But it is clear that in this and similar passages more than mere existence is being promised. What is envisaged is a happy life in which a man enjoys God’s bounty of health, children, friends, and prosperity. Keeping the law is the path to divine blessing, to a happy and fulfilled life in the present (Lev. 26:3–13; Deut. 28:1–14).” Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 253. Rosner likewise suggests that “the promise of ‘life’ to those who obey probably refers to the covenantal blessings of Leviticus 26:3–13.” Brian Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 61.

⁷⁶Indeed, Joel Willits rightly argues that when Lev 18:5 is referenced later in the OT (in Ezek 20 and Neh 9:29) it is invariably used in reference to Israel’s failure and resultant curse. He even goes so far as to say that “Ezekiel and Nehemiah show there was *not* a time prior to the exile when Israel lived out the positive purpose of Leviticus 18:5.” Joel Willits, “Context Matters: Paul’s Use of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no. 2 (2003), 112–14. Italics in original.

⁷⁷Silva acknowledges the difficulty of addressing this subject in such a limited space when he says, “The questions raised by Gal. 3:12 have to do not merely with how Paul quotes a specific text of Scripture, but rather with the very roots of his theology as well as its ramifications. A whole volume would be needed to discuss the matter adequately.” Silva, “Galatians,” 803. Similarly, Schreiner says, “This is one of the most difficult verses to interpret in the entire Pauline corpus. The reason for this is that the interpretation of the verse reflects one’s understanding of the whole of Pauline theology and the relationship between the old covenant and the new.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 210.

the law” (Gal 3:11).⁷⁸ The Mosaic covenant pronounced blessings and curses based on obedience or disobedience, not faith. But Abraham was counted righteous when he believed, not when he obeyed (Gal 3:6), and Habakkuk promises that those who believe like Abraham will live (Gal 3:11). Paul is not pitting Scripture against Scripture by juxtaposing Habakkuk and Leviticus; instead, he is showing that even the prophet recognized that the blessing of life promised in the law is obtained not by obedience to that law but in response to Abraham-like faith.⁷⁹ If justification is by faith, and if the

⁷⁸When Paul sets up the law as contrary to or at least “not of” faith (Gal 3:12), he cannot mean that the Pentateuch as a whole is antithetical to faith. Otherwise, he would be undermining the claim he made based on Gen 15:6 that God deals with the Gentiles in response to faith just as he did with Abraham and the claim he made based on Gen 12:3 that “the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham” (Gal 3:8). For this train of thought I am indebted to the late John Sailhamer (John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009]) who provocatively suggested that “the law given at Sinai neither had the same purpose nor carried the same message as the faith taught by the Pentateuch. . . . The purpose of the Pentateuch is not to teach a life of obedience to the law given to Moses at Sinai, but to be a narrative admonition to be like Abraham, who did not live under the law and yet fulfilled the law through a life of faith. . . . The Pentateuch’s view of the law is similar to that of Paul in the book of Galatians. The law failed, but the prophets saw in the Pentateuch the revelation of a new and better covenant” (13-14, 28). When Paul speaks of the law here I take him to mean the Mosaic covenant established at Sinai. Brian Rosner argues similarly that “Paul takes Leviticus 18:5 to be a summary of the law *as law*.” Rosner, *Paul and the Law*, 60. Italics in original.

⁷⁹Hamilton (“The One Who Does Them Shall Live by Them: Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12,” *Gospel Witness* [August 2005]: 10-12) takes a different approach to this text. He argues, “‘Before faith came’ [Gal 3:23] Leviticus 18:5 meant that the one who *by faith* kept the Mosaic Covenant would live. Now that ‘faith has come,’ [Gal 3:25] the Mosaic covenant is no longer in force, it has served its salvation-historical purpose, with the result that anyone who seeks to live by it must keep all of its regulations flawlessly since its sacrifices are now abolished. Thus, the statement in Lev 18:5 as it is used in Galatians 3:12 is equivalent to Galatians 5:3—the one who submits to the Mosaic covenant in this new period of salvation history ‘is obligated to do the whole law’” (12, italics in original). Though I agree with Hamilton about the salvation-historical function of the law and that the law could only be kept by faith, I have not found this to provide a compelling explanation of Paul’s use of Leviticus 18:5 here in Galatians. While the law could only be kept by those who believed, what the law required was not faith but obedience. Faith was prerequisite to obedience, but obedience was the required response, not faith. This differs from the gospel (including the gospel promises of the OT like Gen 12:1–3) which requires the response of faith with obedience as the necessary fruit of faith. Paul has already made clear that the OT preached the same gospel that he is preaching (Gal 3:8), but that gospel is rooted in the promises (i.e. Gen 3:15; 12:1–3) and not in the Mosaic covenant. That does not imply that the Mosaic covenant was legalistic. I agree with Hamilton’s comments elsewhere (James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010]) when he says, “When Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5 . . . he is not saying that Moses taught a works-based legalism, nor is he claiming that faith was unnecessary for old covenant Israelites who sought to keep the law” (473). This does not mean that Hab 2:4 contradicts Lev 18:5 but that Habakkuk saw what Paul is now showing the Galatians, namely, that blessing comes to those with Abraham-like faith in the promises of God. It is worth repeating the words of Sailhamer quoted in n. 78 above when he says, “The purpose of the Pentateuch is not to teach a life of obedience to the law given to Moses at Sinai, but to be a narrative admonition to be like Abraham, who did not live under the law and yet fulfilled the law through a life of faith. . . . The law failed, but the prophets saw in in the Pentateuch the revelation of a new and better covenant” (Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 14, 28). In regard to the salvation-historical portion of Hamilton’s argument, in Gal 3:10–14 Paul appears to be describing the law on its own terms, not as it should now be interpreted in light of the coming of Christ. The salvation-historical function of the law is not addressed by Paul until Gal 3:15–29. In 3:10–14 Paul quotes what the

blessing comes by faith, then these things cannot come through the law because the law is about what you do and not about faith.⁸⁰

A Curse for Us (Gal 3:13)

One question Paul has not yet answered in chapter 3 is how those who deserve to be under the curse for their failure to keep the law (Gal 3:10) can be “blessed” (Gal 3:9) and “justified” (Gal 3:11). He has made clear that these gifts belong to those who believe, but he has not yet made clear how God can justifiably bless those who believe. He has hinted in verse 1 that it has something to do with Christ crucified, but he has not yet spelled out how the death of Christ makes it possible for those under the curse to instead be blessed. In verses 13–14 he provides a profound response to this conundrum.

The curse of the law falls on all who do not obey the law in its entirety (Gal 3:10). Christ was found perfectly faithful and was not subject to the law’s curse.⁸¹ Yet it is evident that Christ was cursed in his death. Deuteronomy 21:22–23, which Paul cites in Galatians 3:13, says “If a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you

law says about itself but says nothing about how the coming of Christ should change one’s stance toward the law. In my view it is more likely that Paul is highlighting the inadequacy of the law for justification at any time than that he is commenting on the inadequacy of the law now that Christ has come. See also Rosner (*Paul and the Law*) who, while acknowledging that “Paul’s rejection of the law has to do with the arrival of a new economy . . . that replaces the Mosaic law and covenant,” (69) goes on to say, “Paul’s rejection of the law in Galatians 3:10–14 is not just about a new phase in salvation history. Paul’s quotation of Leviticus 18:5 in Galatians 3:12 indicates that his polemic against the law is concerned with a contrast between ‘doing’ and ‘faith’ as alternate paths to life” (70).

⁸⁰Since some might call the interpretation of Gal 3 offered here “Reformed” (in the sense of beholden to the reformation), it is worth noting that this interpretation is in line with that offered by the second century bishop Irenaeus of Lyons. He said about Christ, “Thus He also fulfilled the promise to Abraham, [by] which God promised him to make his seed as the stars of heaven, for Christ accomplished this, being born of the virgin, who was of the seed of Abraham and establishing believers in him ‘as lights of the world,’ making the Gentiles righteous by means of the same faith as Abraham, ‘for Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.’ In the same way, we, believing in God, are made righteous, for ‘through faith shall the righteous live’; so ‘the promise made to Abraham [came] not through the Law but through faith.’ Since Abraham was made righteous by faith, and ‘the Law is not laid for the righteous,’ likewise, we are not made righteous by the Law, but by faith, which receives testimony from the Law and Prophets, and which the Word of God offers us.” St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *On the Apostolic Preaching*, 63. Brackets in original.

⁸¹Although Paul does not state this premise, it is surely implied. For Christ’s obedience and fulfillment of the law see, for example, Matt 4:1–11; 5:17; Rom 5:19; Phil 2:7–8; Heb 7:26–27.

shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God.” Paul condenses these two verses to the essentials: “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” (Gal 3:13). So Christ was cursed, but why? Christ was not cursed because he failed to keep the law; he “[became] a curse for us” (Gal 3:13).⁸² His act of bearing the curse in his death was an act of substitution. He took our place, taking the curse we deserved upon himself. And by doing this “he redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Gal 3:13).

The Blessing of Abraham (Gal 3:14)

Redemption from the curse was not the only reason for Christ “becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). Paul gives us two more statements about Christ’s purpose in bearing our curse in verse 14.⁸³ First, Christ took our curse upon himself “so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles” (Gal 3:14). Paul has already argued that this blessing comes to those who believe, whether Jew or Gentile, in Galatians 3:8–9. Now Paul informs us that this could not have happened unless Christ had borne our curse on the cross. This means not only that the curse had to be dealt with before we could receive the blessing, but also implies that when Genesis 12:3 was spoken it was already God’s plan for Christ to die. The second purpose Paul mentions is “that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal 3:14).⁸⁴ Here Paul’s argument so

⁸²Luther powerfully expounds the significance of this statement when he says, “[Paul] does not say that Christ became a curse on His own account, but that he became a curse ‘for us.’ Thus the whole emphasis is on the phrase ‘for us.’ For Christ is innocent so far as His own Person is concerned; therefore He should not have been hanged from the tree. But because, according to the Law, every thief should have been hanged, therefore, according to the Law of Moses, Christ Himself should have been hanged; for He bore the person of a sinner and a thief. . . . For we are sinners and thieves, and therefore are worthy of death and eternal damnation. But Christ took our sins upon Himself, and for them He died on the cross.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelican, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 277.

⁸³Longenecker says, “Grammatically, the two clauses are pure purpose clauses.” Longenecker, *Galatians*, 123.

⁸⁴Lee, in her book-length attempt to explain the relationship between the two clauses in verse 14, argues “that the promise of the Spirit is not the content of the blessing of Abraham in Gal 3:14.” Lee, *The Blessing of Abraham, the Spirit, and Justification in Galatians*, 210. Contra Betz, *Galatians*, 152-53, Das, *Galatians*, 334, and Schreiner, *Galatians*, 218-19. I have deliberately not taken a strong position on this point because I have not yet been persuaded one way or the other.

far in Galatians 3 comes full circle.⁸⁵ Paul argued in 3:1–5 that the Gentiles received the Spirit by faith; now he argues that this was only possible because of Christ’s curse-bearing death (Gal 3:14).

Conclusion

Paul has condensed into a short span a profound argument for the inclusion and justification of Gentiles who believe based upon the significance of the cross (Gal 3:1, 13), the experience of the Galatians (Gal 3:2), God’s dealings with Abraham (Gal 3:6, 8), and the curse of the law (Gal 3:10, 12). Attempts at obedience to the law will not merit the gift and ongoing work of the Spirit (Gal 3:2, 5) but will instead only bring a curse (Gal 3:10). The believers in Galatia should return to the faith they began with (Gal 3:2) for God has worked in response to faith rather than works since the days of Abraham (Gal 3:6). There is no need for the Galatians to keep the law in order to be included in the people of God and accepted as righteous in God’s sight. These things are granted to those who believe like Abraham believed as established long ago in the Scriptures (Gal 3:6–9). There would have been no need for Christ to die if these blessings could be merited by obeying the law (cf. Gal 2:21). He died to secure these blessings for Jew and Gentile alike (Gal 3:13–14) and therefore there is no need for us to earn them. What is required of us is not works, but faith. Faith in the one cursed for us that we might be blessed (Gal 3:13–14).

⁸⁵Lee notes, “Paul juxtaposes these two clauses [the two *ἵνα* clauses of v. 14], intertwining the main themes of Gal 3:1–5 and Gal 3:6–9 in a climax.” Lee, *The Blessing of Abraham, the Spirit, and Justification in Galatians*, 2.

CHAPTER 5

WHY SINAI? GALATIANS 3:15–29

As Christians we take the Bible seriously. We believe that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable” (2 Tim 3:16). We believe that we are called to “be doers of the word, and not hearers only” (Jas 1:22). But those convictions raise important questions about our relationship to the law in the OT. The law is of course inspired by God, and it is profitable, but is it binding? Is the law something Christians are obligated to obey as the people of God?

The central role of the law in the life of Israel is no secret.¹ For at least some of the Jews in the first century obedience to the law (and the traditions built upon it) were of paramount importance.² But Paul has argued so far in Galatians that all those who try to keep the law are under a curse and can only be blessed by faith in Christ through the death of Christ (Gal 3:10–14). If that is the case, then one might wonder why God ever gave the law in the first place. Paul anticipates that question and in answering it helps us understand our relationship to the law as Christians now that Christ has come.

¹John Barclay touches on this point when he says, “What was entirely *unnatural* for anyone reared in the Jewish tradition was to decenter the Torah, to limit its role in history to an interlude, and to distinguish it categorically from ‘covenant’ and ‘promise.’ But this is precisely what Paul does in Galatians 3–4.” John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 401. Italics in original. This is not to say that there were not good reasons “to decenter the Torah” that could be found in the Jews own tradition. I am grateful to James Hamilton for pointing out in his comments on this chapter that, “Arguably Jeremiah had already done this, following cues from Moses himself.” James M. Hamilton, Jr., personal communication, December 13, 2017.

²For the importance of obeying the Torah, see N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 168, 227-30.

The Law Cannot Nullify the Promise (Gal 3:15–18)

What Paul has said so far about Abraham (Gal 3:6–9) and the law (Gal 3:10–14) assumes that God’s covenant with Abraham, not God’s covenant with Israel at Sinai, is primary.³ Beginning in verse 15 Paul no longer assumes that point but argues for it outright.

Man-made Covenants Cannot Be Nullified (Gal 3:15)

Paul begins this new strain of his argument with an example from normal human experience.⁴ When two human parties enter into a covenant, a ratified agreement of some sort, once it has been signed and sealed it cannot be changed or ignored.⁵ The word “even” in Paul’s assertion that “even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it” (Gal 3:15) indicates that Paul is arguing here from the lesser to the greater.⁶ If this is true of covenants between men, fickle and changeable as we are, how much more is this true of covenants established by God? Surely if men, by general consent, do not go

³I am grateful to James Hamilton for reminding me in his comments on this chapter to note that this perspective is also evident in Genesis and Exodus. Hamilton, personal communication, December 13, 2017. Schreiner (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010]) rightly says, “Paul’s fundamental argument here is the priority of the Abrahamic covenant,” (223). Looking ahead, N. T. Wright is correct, in my view, to argue that “Paul does not respond to his shadowy opponents, whoever they were, by denying that Christianity has anything to do with Abraham or Israel. He attempts to demonstrate that the promises to Abraham, which do indeed form the ground plan of salvation, are inherited not through the Mosaic Torah but in Christ.” N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 163. In this section I have used material from a class paper on Paul’s use of Abraham in Galatians.

⁴J. Louis Martyn (*Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary [New York: Doubleday, 1997]) in his translation calls it “an illustration from everyday life among human beings,” (336).

⁵Douglas Moo (Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013]) acknowledges that it is difficult to find a scenario in the Greco-Roman world that fits Paul’s description, but adds that “the precise situation that Paul has in view is not really important for his purposes. What is important is the unchangeable nature of the agreement” (227-28). For a response to the arguments in favor of translating διαθήκη as “will” that favors the translation “covenant,” see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 226-27.

⁶Schreiner (*Galatians*) states his position more cautiously when he says, “It seems slightly more plausible [than the alternative] to take Paul’s argument here as an argument from the lesser to the greater,” (226). But on the next page he has thrown caution to the wind and says matter-of-factly, “Paul argues from the lesser to the greater from 3:15 to 3:16,” (227). Douglas Moo (*Galatians*) inclines in this direction also since he says the word translated “even” above “thus functions to introduce the comparison with a divine διαθήκη (v. 17),” (227).

back on their covenant agreements, then God will not go back on his. Rather than jumping straight to this point Paul began with a “human example” (Gal 3:15) to show that even from a human perspective the Galatians should acknowledge the weight of the argument he is mounting.

The Abrahamic Covenant and the Messiah (Gal 3:16)

Paul intends to apply this general rule about covenants to the covenant God made with Abraham,⁷ but first he must establish that the Abrahamic covenant is still in operation.⁸ This he does by arguing that the promises were made not only to Abraham but also to Abraham’s seed.⁹ If the covenant provisions were intended only for Abraham himself during his lifetime, then presumably the covenant would no longer be binding or valid after his death. Since the promises were also made to his descendants the covenant remains in force as long as his descendants exist. What is more, Paul argues that ultimately the promises of the Abrahamic covenant were not made to Abraham’s numerous offspring but to one offspring in particular, the Messiah.¹⁰ This line of

⁷So also Schreiner (*Galatians*) who says, “In light of 3:15 it is clear that the promises given to Abraham constitute the covenant that cannot be repealed or supplemented,” (228).

⁸Some might object that Paul has switched from arguing about covenants in verse 15 to arguing about promises in verse 16, but verse 17 indicates that Paul has in mind a covenant that included promises. There is justification for this not only in the Abraham narrative in general but also in Gen 15:18 in particular, which says, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your offspring I give this land.’” Moo (*Galatians*) makes a similar point when he says, “Paul’s argument requires that we identify the διαθήκη in this verse with the Abrahamic covenant. There is ample OT precedent for this identification (Gen 15:[1]8 *sic*; 17:1–21),” (230). In both texts that Moo cites the covenant is expressed (at least in part) in a promise. Martyn (*Galatians*) goes so far to say that in verse 16 Paul is “equating promise and covenant,” (340).

⁹Moo points out that “the phrase ‘and to your seed’ occurs in Gen. 13:15; 17:8; and 24:7 (LXX), while the phrase ‘to your seed’ is found in 12:7; 15:18; 22:18; and 24:7. It is difficult to know which of these texts Paul might have had in mind, although the focus on ‘testament/covenant’ in verses 15 and 17 suggests either Gen. 15:18 or 17:8, since in the context of these two passages both ‘seed’ and ‘covenant’ are found.” Moo, *Galatians*, 228.

¹⁰Contra Wright (*The Climax of the Covenant*) who says, “We might suggest that the singularity of the ‘seed’ in v.16 is not the singularity of an individual person contrasted with the plurality of many human beings, but the singularity of one *family* contrasted with the plurality of families which would result if the Torah were to be regarded the way Paul’s opponents apparently regarded it” (163, italics in original). For pushback against Wright’s proposal, see Schreiner, *Galatians*, 229-30.

argument is notoriously difficult to follow, especially since in the OT the word for “seed” or “offspring” is a collective singular (meaning it takes the same form whether it is referring to one or to many, like “sheep” in English).¹¹ So on what grounds can Paul argue that these promises referred to one particular descendent of Abraham, the Messiah, rather than to all his descendants?

It is important to clarify at the outset that Paul is not denying that God promised abundant offspring to Abraham.¹² Nor can he be denying that at least some of the promises concern Abraham’s descendants (plural) and not merely a particular descendant since there are texts where the “seed” in view is clearly plural. For example, Genesis 17:8 says, “I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” The plural pronoun “their” at the end of the verse indicates that God is speaking of more than one descendant of Abraham.¹³ Paul is not denying that the content of the promises to Abraham included a multitude of offspring. Instead he is arguing that the intended recipient of the promises is one particular descendant of Abraham, the Messiah.

On what grounds can Paul make this claim? The covenant God made with Abraham includes promises of a multitude of offspring and promises about what God will do for Abraham’s offspring, but this covenant is not established with all of Abraham’s offspring. God does not establish his covenant with Abraham’s son Ishmael but with Isaac (Gen 17:18–21). Likewise, Ishmael was not permitted to share in the inheritance with Isaac (Gen 21:10–12).¹⁴ So the covenant was not between God and all

¹¹Similarly, Moo, *Galatians*, 229. On σπέρμα (seed), see A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 338. On זרע (seed), see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 288 or Das, *Galatians*, 351.

¹²See for example Gen 13:15; 15:5.

¹³The plural pronoun in English translates the plural suffix in Hebrew.

¹⁴It is worth noting that Paul cites Gen 21:10 later in Gal 4:30.

Abraham's offspring but between God and Abraham and then between God and Isaac. As Schreiner points out, "the promises made to Abraham were confirmed to Isaac (Gen 26:3–4) and to Jacob (28:13–15; 35:12–13)."¹⁵ When this pattern of passing on the promises to a particular individual is read in light of the OT as a whole, from the promise of a serpent-crushing seed in Genesis 3:15 to the promise of a reigning son of David in 2 Samuel 7 and Isaiah 9,¹⁶ it becomes evident that God's plan was to bring into the world through the family of Abraham a singular "seed" in whom all the promises would be fulfilled (cf. 2 Cor 1:20).¹⁷

This reading of the OT seems to me to offer a satisfying explanation of how Paul can argue the way he does in Galatians 3:16. At the same time, it does seem that Paul is claiming in 3:16 that there is a particular text that proves that the promises were made to a particular offspring of Abraham. The above explanation does not offer a particular text that matches Paul's citation ("and to your offspring," Gal 3:16) and points toward the Messiah as the particular descendent intended to inherit the promises. So is Paul's argument shipwrecked after all? Of course not. There also appears to be at least one place where a promise to Abraham does concern one particular descendant. After Abraham almost sacrificed Isaac, God told Abraham, "Your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies" (Gen 22:17). In this verse both the verb "possess" and the pronoun "his" are singular, indicating that a singular "offspring" is intended.¹⁸ These hints, and by

¹⁵Schreiner, *Galatians*, 228.

¹⁶As should be evident from the footnotes, I am depending heavily on Schreiner here, who says, "We see from the OT that the seed narrows from Abraham to Isaac to a son of David. . . . Paul interprets the OT text typologically and sees its crowning fulfillment in Jesus Christ." *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁷Schreiner argues similarly that "Paul reads the Genesis promises in light of the story line of the OT, which narrows the promise down to a son of David and finds its fulfillment in the one man, Jesus of Nazareth. The 'offspring' texts should be interpreted, then, in terms of corporate representation. Jesus is *the representative* offspring of Abraham and David and the fulfillment of the original redemptive promise in Gen 3:15. Thus, the promise should be conceived typologically, for the offspring promises have their final fulfillment in Christ, so that the offspring promises in the OT point forward to and anticipate the coming of Jesus Christ." *Ibid.*, 230. Italics in original.

¹⁸*Williams' Hebrew Syntax* (Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, rev. and exp. John C. Beckman, 3rd ed. [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007]) states, "Collective singular subjects

themselves they are no more than hints, point to the promises being made to and fulfilled in a particular individual.¹⁹

No matter which one of these approaches might be closer to how Paul understood himself to be handling the text of Genesis, Collins' conclusion seems appropriate: "I do not have a 'theory' of how Paul (or other NT writers) used the OT; but it does seem that we should give more room to the possibility that he saw things that are really there—things that we have not yet found."²⁰ In other words there is good reason to assume that Paul's argument in Galatians 3:16 was founded on a faithful reading of the OT, and of Genesis in particular, even if it is not immediately apparent to those reading Galatians today. This is especially true if we are willing to combine the specific textual hints with the broader pattern of the promises.

The Mosaic Covenant Does Not Nullify the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal 3:17)

After what seems like a digression in verse 16 Paul comes to his point in verse 17: "This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void."²¹ This is the

sometimes use a singular verb . . . and sometimes use a plural verb" (93). That means the use of the singular verb in this verse is insufficient to determine whether the noun has a singular or plural referent. However, the singular pronoun (in Hebrew the singular suffix) indicates that a single descendant is intended. This claim is in line with the research of Jack Collins who argues that "when *zera* ' denotes a specific descendant, it appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives, and pronouns." Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1997): 144. Support for the application of Collins's argument to Gen 22:17–18 is given by T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (1997): 363–67. My argument here is contra Mathews who says that verse 17 "appears to demand the plural sense." Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2005), 299.

¹⁹John C. Collins ("Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no. 1 [2003]) does not shy away from this conclusion either, but says succinctly, "It is proper to take Genesis 22:18 as referring to a specific offspring, and to call that offspring 'Messianic' (because of the connections with Psalm 72:17)," (86). Collins gleaned the connection with Ps 72 from the article by Alexander mentioned above, a connection we have unfortunately not been able to pursue here.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 86.

²¹Douglas Moo (*Galatians*) rightly says "the key point [of verses 15–18] comes in verse 17," and that "verse 16 . . . is parenthetical within the logical flow of this paragraph," (226). Martyn [*Galatians*] sees a stronger connection between verse 15 and verse 16. He claims, "The analogy Paul has just laid out in

argument he was setting up in verse 15 with his example of a covenant established between two men.²² If “a man-made covenant” (Gal 3:15) cannot be broken, then certainly God’s covenant with Abraham cannot be broken. And since the Sinai covenant, also called the “law,” came long after the covenant with Abraham, the law cannot override and invalidate God’s promise to Abraham.²³ The promise preceded the law and therefore cannot be pushed aside as though the law now has pride of place. The sheer volume taken up by the law in the Pentateuch creates the impression that it is of first importance, but Paul argues that time, rather than space, tells us which covenant is primary.²⁴ The promises to Abraham came first and the law cannot change, add to, nullify, or “make the promise void” (Gal 3:17).²⁵ The Abrahamic covenant still stands and is still operative.

v 15—one must stay with the original linguistic precision of a text, not altering it at a later time—is a matter he applies only to one motif of Genesis 17,” (339). However, Paul is not arguing about the interpretation of texts but the inviolability of duly established covenants. Moreover, Martyn’s argument is marred by his claim that Paul applied his own principle inconsistently.

²²Martyn (*Galatians*) claims that “using the term *diathêkê* [in verse 15] to refer to a human being’s last will, Paul began to loosen the connection the Teachers have drawn between that term and the sacred Law of Sinai. . . . Now we see his next step [in verse 17]. Paul retheologizes the word *diathêkê*, using it to refer to God’s promissory covenant mentioned in Scripture,” (341). Das (A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016]) acknowledges that “if Paul is referring to a ‘last will and testament’ in 3:15, then he is using *διαθήκη* in 3:17 in a very different sense within a span of a few verses” (78). However, Das goes on to argue that “*διαθήκη* should nevertheless be translated as ‘last will and testament’” (80) and that “Paul is therefore employing the word in a secular, de-theologized sense before returning in 3:17 to an equally jarring, re-theologized (Abrahamic) ‘covenant’” (81). These explanations from Martyn and Das are far too difficult as they posit a “detheologizing” and then a “retheologizing” of a single word within the space of three verses (as Das himself acknowledges above). It seems far more likely that Paul is using the ambiguity of the word to draw a connection between agreements made by men and the covenant established by God with Abraham. Note the similarity of de Boer’s comment when he says, “The analogy between a human will and God’s covenant with Abraham is facilitated by the fact that in Greek the word for both is the same.” Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 219.

²³O. Palmer Robertson agrees when he says, “The Mosaic covenant did not annul or interrupt the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant continued to function actively after the institution of the Mosaic covenant.” O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980), 33.

²⁴Moo (*Galatians*) rightly explains that “Paul’s argument is based on temporal priority,” (230).

²⁵Betz explains that “[Paul] intends to render impossible the assumption that the revelation of Torah on Mount Sinai could imply a cancellation of the promise made to Abraham.” Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 158.

Here again the manner of Paul’s argument as well as its substance are instructive for the church. Just as Paul’s reading of the Abraham narrative focused on what the text actually said rather than the way the text was later interpreted,²⁶ so now Paul’s reading of the Pentateuch emphasizes a chronological reading of the covenants rather than giving the most weight to the covenant that takes up the most space.

**The Inheritance Comes by Promise,
Not Law (Gal 3:18)**

In verse 18 Paul arrives at the goal he has been reaching for with his argument about the relationship between the two covenants. His aim has been to make plain on what basis the inheritance promised to Abraham is received. Is the inheritance received on the basis of obedience to the law, as the false teachers seemed to be saying? Paul argues that it is not possible for the inheritance to be received on the basis of keeping the law because obedience to the law was not the condition given for receiving the inheritance. “God gave [the inheritance] to Abraham by a promise” (Gal 3:18) and not on the basis of Abraham’s obedience to the law. This implies that law and promise are antithetical like law and faith (cf. Gal 3:10–12).²⁷ More than that, Moo points out that the verb translated “gave” here (χαρίζομαι) refers to “gracious giving.”²⁸ He goes on to say, rightly, that “Paul argues against imposing the law on Galatian Christians, then, not *only* because it belongs to an earlier phase of salvation history. It is also not a channel of blessing or inheritance, because its nature contradicts the fundamentally gracious manner in which God bestows his blessing on his people.”²⁹ God did not offer an inheritance to

²⁶See the discussion of Gen 15:6 above.

²⁷Moo argues similarly. Moo, *Galatians*, 231-32.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 231.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 232. Italics in original.

Abraham as a reward for keeping the law; it was a gift of grace God promised to Abraham.

So Why Give the Law at All? (Gal 3:19–25)

All that Paul has said so far about the law—that it brings a curse on those who try to keep it (3:10), that it is not a means of justification (3:11–12), and that it is secondary to the promises made to Abraham (3:15–17)—makes one wonder why God ever gave the law in the first place. Perhaps Paul anticipated this line of thought not merely as a question from the Galatians but as an objection from the false teachers. Perhaps he imagined his opponents saying something like, “If Paul’s gospel is true, then there was no reason for God to give the law in the first place.” Oh, but there was a reason. Actually, there were several reasons, all of which point toward the gospel.

Added on Account of Sin (Gal 3:19)

In answering the question “why then the law?” (Gal 3:19) Paul emphasizes once again the secondary nature of the law when he says “it was added” (Gal 3:19). The law was not the beginning; the law was not primary; the law did not come first and does not have pride of place; the law “was added” to the promises (Gal 3:19). Why was it added? “It was added because of transgressions” (Gal 3:19).³⁰ This could mean that the law was added in order to curb Israel’s sin.³¹ Or it could mean the law was added in order to make sin known to Israel (cf. Rom 7:7).³² It could also mean that “the law came in to

³⁰Das offers seven possible interpretations of this statement, some of which are addressed below. Das, *Galatians*, 358-61. Luther, with his typical ready wit says, “What, then, is the function of the Law? Transgression. Really a lovely function!” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelican, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 308.

³¹After writing this I discovered that Schreiner uses similar language but argues that “that the law could not curb sin.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 240.

³²Das objects to this view, saying, “Paul is surely not saying that the Law identified transgression as such until Christ came and now no longer does so.” Das, *Galatians*, 360.

increase the trespass” (Rom 5:20).³³ But Paul does not say the law was introduced to add transgressions but was added “because of transgressions.” The simplest and therefore most likely explanation is that the law was given in order to restrain Israel’s sin.³⁴ The law was given because Israel was sinful and rebellious and the law was needed to restrain her for a season.

The Law Was Only Temporary (Gal 3:19)

Before the false teachers can interject that this is precisely why they continue to insist on the law—so that it will restrain the Gentile’s sin—Paul asserts that this was only a temporary function of the law.³⁵ This role was only intended to last “until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made” (Gal 3:19), whom Paul has already asserted is Christ (Gal 3:16).³⁶ So the law was a temporary restraint on sin until the Messiah, Jesus, came.³⁷ Once the Messiah came and the Messiah’s people received

³³Schreiner argues for this view. Schreiner, *Galatians*, 239. See also Betz, *Galatians*, 165. Das not only disputes this view but also this translation of Rom 5:20. Das, *Galatians*, 360.

³⁴So also Chrysostom. St. John Chrysostom, “Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 13, *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 28. The claim that the law was given to curb Israel’s sin may perhaps be strengthened by Sailhamer’s (John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009]) observation that in the Pentateuch “there is an ever-increasing cycle of disobedience and the addition of more laws,” and that this “reflects the argument of the apostle Paul that the law was added to the covenant because of the transgressions of the people (Gal 3:19)” (46-47). It should be noted that in context Sailhamer seems to be using the word “covenant” to refer to the “covenant of grace” (47).

³⁵The temporary role of the law is found throughout this section and not only in verse 19 as Das points out when he says, “The temporary nature of the Law’s . . . role is central to 3:19–25. Paul employs temporal expressions for the Law *five times*, in 3:19; 3:23a; 3:23c; 3:24; and 3:25.” Das, *Galatians*, 357. Italics in original. There may be a hint of the false teachers’ concern that without the law sin will abound in Paul’s argument in Gal 5:13–24 that what the Galatians need is not to walk according to the law but to “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16). However, on such speculative ground we must keep in mind the dangers of mirror-reading mentioned by John Barclay in John M. G. Barclay, “Mirror-Reading a Polemical Letter: Galatians as a Test Case,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31 (1987): 73-93. Schreiner agrees that Paul’s opponents would have viewed the law this way but uses that as an argument against the interpretation that Paul’s statement means “the law was given to restrain sin.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 240.

³⁶So also Betz, *Galatians*, 168.

³⁷So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 241.

the Spirit (see Gal 3:2, 14) we would not be “under the law” but instead be “led by the Spirit” (Gal 5:18). No longer being “under the law” would not lead to sin because “the fruit of the Spirit” is not contrary to the law (Gal 5:18, 22–23). Moreover, “those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires” (Gal 5:24), which does not mean they will no longer sin but does mean that something more effective than placing them under the law has occurred to restrain their sin.

The Law Was an Indirect Revelation (Gal 3:19–20)

Paul further relativizes the place of the law by asserting that as an act of revelation it was inferior to the Abrahamic covenant.³⁸ God’s covenant with Abraham was a direct revelation from God to Abraham. God himself “appeared to Abram” and promised him the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7). When God made a covenant with Abraham his presence was indicated by the “smoking fire pot and . . . flaming torch” in the covenant ceremony (Gen 15:17).³⁹ Even in Genesis 18 when three men appear and two turn out to be angels (Gen 18:2, 22; 19:1) the one who stays and speaks to Abraham turns out to be the Lord himself (Gen 18:22). It is not until the last pronouncement of the promise that Genesis tells us of God speaking to Abraham through an angel (Gen 22:15–18). Throughout most of the story of Abraham it is God himself who speaks directly to Abraham and it is God who initiates and enacts the covenant with Abraham. But it is not so with the law.⁴⁰

Paul tells the Galatians that the law given at Sinai was not a direct revelation from God but involved the assistance of angels and of an intermediary. The intermediary

³⁸So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 241.

³⁹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 335.

⁴⁰Betz says, “The contrast to the promise to Abraham, which was spoken by God himself . . . is of course intended.” Betz, *Galatians*, 168.

was of course Moses.⁴¹ When the people drew near to the mountain on the appointed day and the Lord spoke the Ten Words to the people (Exod 20:1–17), they were afraid and asked Moses to serve as their mediator so that they would not have to repeat the terrifying experience of hearing God speak directly to them (Exod 20:18–20). From that point forward we do not find God speaking his law directly to the people. Instead, we find statements like, “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Thus shall you say to the people of Israel,’” (Exod 20:22) and “Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD and all the rules” (Exod 24:3). Moses served as the mediator between God and the people so that the law came to them indirectly. And not only Moses, but angels were also involved. Peter Craigie suggests that, “In the NT interpretation of the law of Moses, it is probably [Deuteronomy 33:2] . . . that stands behind the view that the law of Moses was mediated through angels (see Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2).”⁴² That verse states, “[Moses] said, ‘The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran; he came from the ten thousands of holy ones, with flaming fire at his right hand’” (Deut 33:2).⁴³ The “ten thousand holy ones” are the angels who accompanied God when he came to give the law (see Deut 33:4). As Craigie points out above, this conviction is expressed by Stephen when he rebukes fellow Jews who “received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it” (Acts 7:53).⁴⁴ Stephen’s connection between the law and angels serves to elevate the law, presumably because it was not the mere revelation of man but a revelation made “through angels” as Paul puts it (Gal 3:19). Paul’s argument

⁴¹Likewise, Betz, *Galatians*, 170. Contra Chrysostom who says, “By Mediator here he means Christ.” St. John Chrysostom, “Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians,” 28.

⁴²Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 393.

⁴³Schreiner says that “the notion that angels were present when the law was given is unclear in the OT, but it may be present in Deut 33:2. . . . A reference to angels is clearer in the LXX of this verse, which speaks of the ‘angels with him.’” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 241.

⁴⁴For a list of extra-biblical sources that connect the giving of the law with one or more angels, see *ibid.*, 241-42.

uses the same truth but from a different angle: the law is lower than the covenant with Abraham because it was put in place through angels rather than solely and directly by God himself. That is the point of saying, “Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one” (Gal 3:20). If something comes through an intermediary, it by definition does not come directly from God himself. And if it does not come directly from God himself, it is in some sense inferior to what does come directly from God.⁴⁵

The Law Was Not Contrary to the Promise (Gal 3:21)

God had a purpose in giving the law. It was a temporary purpose, but there was a purpose. The law was put in place “because of transgressions” (Gal 3:19). But all that Paul has said to contrast or at least separate the law from the promises of God’s covenant with Abraham raises another question: “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God?” (Gal 3:21). Is the law designed to work against the promises? Paul answers with an emphatic denial: “Certainly not” (Gal 3:21). He will argue shortly that the law actually helped bring about the fulfillment of the promises (see Gal 3:22–24). But first he argues that there is nothing wrong with law as a category. “If a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Gal 3:21). The law was not working against the promise; it was simply not able to bring about the life promised to those who believe.⁴⁶ If it had been able to give life, “then righteousness would indeed be by the law” (Gal 3:21). But righteousness is not by the law because no one is able to keep the law (cf. Gal 3:10) and life belongs to those who believe (Gal 3:11) rather than those

⁴⁵Schreiner says, “The covenant made with Abraham is superior because it is given directly by God in contrast to the mediation between parties that we find in the Mosaic covenant.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 242.

⁴⁶Similarly, Schreiner argues that “the law revealed how people should live, but it did not provide the power to enable human beings to live in a way that pleases God.” *Ibid.*, 244.

who attempt to do the law (Gal 3:12).⁴⁷ The law is not the enemy of faith or life or the promises; it simply serves their cause in another way.

The Law Imprisoned All (Gal 3:22)

The law served the promise by “[imprisoning] everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:22). When Paul says “the Scripture” did this, it appears that in this instance “the Scripture” means “the law” (Gal 3:22).⁴⁸ So the law held everything captive “under sin” (Gal 3:22). How did it do that? The law made demands that could not be kept by fallen men and so they fell under the law’s curse and found themselves trapped by sin, unable to escape.⁴⁹ This is what God intended the law to do “so that the promise . . . might be given to those who believe” (Gal 3:22). The law proved that obedience was a dead end route to the promises. Sin is too powerful and too pervasive in the human heart. Attempts to obey the law result in death rather than life and curse rather than blessing (cf. Gal 3:10, 21). That leaves open only one way of escape: faith in Christ.⁵⁰

⁴⁷For more on this reading of Gal 3:10–12, see n. 79 in chapter 4 above.

⁴⁸Similarly, Calvin says that “by the word Scripture is chiefly intended the law itself.” John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, (1854; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 105. Contra Schreiner who says, “It seems likely that the testimony of the Scriptures as a whole is in view. Scripture here personifies God, indicating that it was God’s will that all be imprisoned under sin.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 244.

⁴⁹Cf. Rom 7:7–11, 14. Lightfoot speaks similarly of being “subjected to the dominion of sin without means of escape.” J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians: with Introductions, Notes and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 148.

⁵⁰After writing this I discovered similar language in Das, *Galatians*, 359. See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 244–45, 249 and Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 410. James Hamilton argues similarly that, “In view of the purpose clause at the end of Galatians 3:24, ‘in order that we might be justified by faith,’ it seems that the law ‘was added because of transgressions’ (3:19) and served as a ‘custodian’ (3:24) for the same purpose: to show human inability to be justified by works and thereby lead people to the only available way to be justified, through faith in messiah Jesus.” James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 476.

The Law Was a Temporary Teacher (Gal 3:23–25)

Here again Paul asserts that the role of the law was temporary. In a sense he seems to be expanding on his earlier statement that “[the law] was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made” (Gal 3:19). The law’s role had to do with sin, or transgression, and its sin-related function was meant to last until the coming of the seed, the Messiah, as we saw above. Now Paul writes of “the coming faith” (Gal 3:23) and the coming of Christ (Gal 3:24). Most likely all of these statements refer to the same event from slightly different angles. “The coming of faith” (Gal 3:23) could mean the coming of the gospel (where “faith” means what is believed as in Jude 1:4) or to the time when people would believe in Christ (which could only happen in the sense Paul intends once Christ came).⁵¹ Until that time the law kept us under guard in prison. Again, there was a purpose in this. Just as Paul earlier said the law imprisoned us so that the promise could be given to those who believe (Gal 3:22) so now Paul says that the law imprisoned us so that “when Christ came . . . we might be justified by faith” (Gal 3:24). The law, though it could not bring about our justification (Gal 3:11–12), was not hostile toward our justification. Rather, it was put in place by God in order to bring about our justification at the right time. If that were not striking enough, Paul tells us that now that the law has served its purpose we no longer need its services. “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal 3:25).⁵² As a student is no

⁵¹Similarly, Hamilton says that “These references to the time before ‘faith’ came use ‘faith’ as a shorthand reference to the period of time before the messiah came and justification by faith in Jesus was revealed (cf. 2:16).” Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 476. Schreiner states that “what is a reality in this new era of redemptive history . . . is personal faith in Christ.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 246.

⁵²For a discussion of the meaning of “guardian” (παιδαγωγός) in Gal 3:24–25, see de Boer, *Galatians*, 240–41 and Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 146–48.

longer subject to his teachers once he graduates, so those who believe in Christ are no longer subject to the law. Those days are over.⁵³

Sons and Heirs in Christ (Gal 3:26–29)

If the believers in Galatia had understood their position before God, they would not have been fooled into thinking they lacked something that the law could provide.⁵⁴ Paul’s argument in Galatians 3:26–29 turns again to the issue of identity in Christ just as it did at the end of chapter 2.

Sons of God (Gal 3:26)

The reason the Galatian believers are no longer under the guardianship of the law (Gal 3:25) is that “in Christ Jesus [they] are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:26).⁵⁵ Paul appears to explain the logic underlying the shift from being “no longer under a guardian” (Gal 3:25) to being “sons of God” (Gal 3:26) in 4:1–7, a text we will cover in the following chapter. For now, suffice it to say their sonship makes that role of the law no longer necessary. But how have they become sons? They are sons “in Christ” and “through faith” (Gal 3:26). They have been united to Christ by faith and through their union with him they have come to be in some measure what he is in full measure: son of God.⁵⁶ What Christ is eternally and by nature, they are now by adoption (cf. Gal 4:5). Just as Israel is called God’s son (Exod 4:22), now Gentiles who believe in Jesus are called

⁵³Schreiner says similarly, “The era of the law has ended.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 249.

⁵⁴Hamilton says, “Being united to Christ joins them to the singular seed of Abraham to whom the promise was made (3:29; cf. 3:16). Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 476.

⁵⁵Similarly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 256.

⁵⁶Schreiner states that “it seems that Paul teaches here that believers are God’s sons because they are united with Christ Jesus.” *Ibid.*, 256. Similarly, Dunn (James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993]) states that “[their sonship] was possible in turn because their faith was in fact faith in Christ, which brought them into a living relationship with Christ, wherein they shared in *his* sonship of Abraham, as also in *his* sonship of God” (202, italics in original).

God's sons.⁵⁷ Just as the Davidic king was God's son (Ps 2:7) with a promised inheritance (Ps 2:8), so now believing Gentiles are God's sons with a promised inheritance (Gal 3:26, 29). There is no deficiency in their relationship with God or standing before God that the law could possibly remedy or address. They are already sons through faith in Christ. What could the law possibly add to that?

Clothed with Christ (Gal 3:27)

Paul further explains in verse 27 how it is that these Gentile believers in Christ are now "sons of God" (Gal 3:26). They have been "baptized into Christ" (Gal 3:27), and as a result they are now clothed with Christ. Their former identity as Gentiles has now been swallowed up by Christ so that what is true of Christ is true of them.⁵⁸ Christ is God's son *par excellence*, and now through their union with him they are sons of God too. All who have been "baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (Gal 3:27) so that they are now defined by him.⁵⁹ Once again, if they had understood the meaning of their baptism and applied it to the message of the false teachers, they would have known that there was nothing the law could give them that they did not already possess in Christ.

Distinctions Are Dead (Gal 3:28)

Paul takes the truth of our union with Christ to its logical and radical end: all of the distinctions that divide people outside of Christ have become irrelevant to the identity and standing of those in Christ.⁶⁰ In Christ it does not matter if you are a Jew or a Greek.

⁵⁷Betz notes that "it is exceptional and extraordinary that Paul attributes this status to Gentiles now." Betz, *Galatians*, 186.

⁵⁸Betz (*Galatians*) hypothesizes that "we can assume that at some point in the course of the ceremony [of baptism], the candidates for baptism were officially informed that they now had the status of 'sons of God'" (186). But this hypothesis is unnecessary. Paul's argument does not assume that the Galatian Christians had made the connection between their baptism and sonship. It seems just as likely that they had not made this connection before and that that is why Paul is making it for them now.

⁵⁹Betz calls attention to similar statements elsewhere in Paul, namely in 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:11. *Ibid.*, 182.

⁶⁰Betz (*Galatians*) rightly notes that "Paul makes these statements not as utopian ideals or as ethical demands, but as accomplished facts" (189). However, I would hasten to add that these

In Christ it does not matter if you are a slave or a freeman. In Christ it does not matter if you are a man or a woman.⁶¹ All of those distinctions have been reduced to irrelevancy in terms of our standing before God. This does not mean that we cease to be Jew or Gentile or male or female (an obvious impossibility), but that those markers of distinction (or infamy) must no longer separate us “for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28).⁶² There is no class system in the church with Jews, men, and freemen in the upper class and Gentiles, women, and slaves reduced to second-class status, or worse, disqualified for inclusion in the church at all. The only thing that matters is whether a person is in Christ.⁶³ In Christ we are all united, not divided.⁶⁴ In Christ we are all accepted, not excluded. In Christ we are all full citizens, not outsiders (see Eph 2:11–12, 19).

Heirs of the Promise (Gal 3:29)

Early in Galatians 3 Paul argued “that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham” (Gal 3:7). Now Paul argues that those who are in Christ “are Abraham’s offspring” which makes them “heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29). Here again those united to Christ by faith share in his identity. Christ is the offspring of Abraham (Gal 3:16) and so all those in Christ “are Abraham’s offspring” as well (Gal 3:29). Therefore, the inheritance promised to Abraham (Gal 3:18) and to his “‘offspring,’ who is Christ”

“accomplished facts” do require an ethical response. Betz perhaps points in the same direction when he says, “There can be no doubt that Paul’s statements have social and political implications” (190).

⁶¹It is important to note that Paul’s argument here is about one’s standing before God and how that should be manifested in our fellowship. He has nothing to say here about the distinct roles assigned to men and women in marriage (Eph 5:22–32) and in the church (1 Tim 2:11–12). See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 259–261.

⁶²Schreiner is correct to caution that “Paul is not negating all distinctions between Jews and Gentiles. They are one in Christ, and yet they are still distinct and identifiable groups.” *Ibid.*, 258.

⁶³This is why Schreiner can rightly say, “The solution to problems of race and class and gender is found in the gospel. Some might claim that such an assertion is simplistic, but such a response is itself superficial, for it fails to see the profundity and depth of the gospel.” *Ibid.*, 260.

⁶⁴ Schreiner states, “Paul does not call believers to be unified. Instead, we *are* unified in Christ (cf. also Eph 2:14–18).” *Ibid.*, 260. Italics in original.

(Gal 3:16) also belongs to those who are in Christ and are therefore “Abraham’s offspring” (Gal 3:29). Those in Christ share in “the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world” (Rom 4:13).⁶⁵ This inheritance does not come through the law, but through the promise (Gal 3:18) to those who are in Christ by faith (Gal 3:29).

Conclusion

The law had its place, but it was temporary. It served the promise. It prepared the people of God for the coming of the Messiah. It hemmed them in so that they could not receive the blessing of God through any means other than faith in Christ. Those are just some of the reasons why it is folly to return to the law. What matters is being united to Christ by faith. The promise comes through faith in Christ and our identity is ultimately shaped by Christ. The law no longer has a role to play in defining the people of God. That role belongs to Christ and Christ alone.

⁶⁵Moo (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996]) notes that “this language does not exactly match any promise to Abraham found in the OT but succinctly summarizes the three key provisions of the promise as it unfolds in Genesis: that Abraham would have an immense number of descendants, embracing ‘many nations’ (Gen. 12:2; 13:16; 15:5; 17:4-6, 16-20; 22:17), that he would possess ‘the land’ (Gen. 13:15-17; 15:12-21; 17:8), and that he would be the medium of blessing to ‘all the peoples of the earth’ (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18)” (274). Perhaps Paul is also reading the promises to Abraham through the lens of the Davidic covenant since the Davidic king was told, “Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession” (Ps 2:8).

CHAPTER 6

NOT SLAVES BUT SONS, GALATIANS 4:1–11

We sometimes think fondly of how nice it would be to be a kid again. No responsibility. Plenty of time to play and do as we please. But being a kid is not as easy as all that. Just watch a two or three-year-old. Everyone is always telling you what to do or what not to do. But when *you* try to tell someone what to do you then you get corrected. An older child of say nine or ten has plenty of things he would like to do but most days he does not get to do them all because he has chores to do, school work to do, meals to eat with his family, errands to run with his mom, a bath to take at the end of the day and so on. Childhood is special, but it's also nice to be an adult.

Now imagine that as a child you were a slave. Your whole life belonged to someone else and at any moment, any hour of the day or night, you could be called upon to do some task or run some errand and you would have to do it, whether you felt like it or not. Imagine childhood without freedom. It's a bleak picture. That is what Paul says our life before Christ was like. Before you came to Christ you were like an enslaved child. But now that you belong to Christ you are a son with an inheritance. Why on earth would you ever want to go back?¹

Of course when I put it like that, who would? But the fact is some do. The Galatians were going back. You may be tempted to go back. What's scary is you might

¹Similarly, St. John Chrysostom says, "If then grace hath made us freemen instead of slaves, men instead of children, heirs and sons instead of aliens, is it not utter absurdity and stupidity to desert this grace, and to turn away backwards?" St. John Chrysostom, "Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 13, *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 30-31.

not even realize at first that you are going back.² That’s why we need to hear what Paul has to say: so that we will understand where we have come from, who we are now, and be resolved never to go back.

In this chapter we will see how the Galatians went from slaves to sons in verses 1–5, the sign of their sonship in verse 6, the promise of their sonship in verse 7, and finally their distressing desire to return to slavery once more in verses 8–11.

From Slaves to Sons (Gal 4:1–5)

Galatians 4:1 is an unfortunate chapter break since Paul has not shifted to a new thought or even a new segment of his argument but is merely elaborating on his argument in 3:21–29, approaching some of the same ideas from a slightly different angle.³ More specifically, Paul seems to be expounding the logic underlying Galatians 3:25–26 where he told the Galatians, “But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith.” Why does being a son mean that one is no longer under a guardian?⁴

²Martin Luther articulates a similar concern when he says, “Now who would have ever believed that the Galatians, who had learned a pure and sure doctrine from this great apostle and teacher, could be led away from it so suddenly and be completely overthrown by the false apostles? It is not without reason that I remind you so often how easy apostasy from the truth of the Gospel is, for even devout people do not consider enough how precious and how necessary a treasure the true knowledge of Christ is.” Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelican, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 407.

³Schreiner says similarly, “Galatians 4:1–7 restates from another angle the content of 3:15–29.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 262. See also James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 210.

⁴N. T. Wright (*Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013]) argues that “[Galatians] 4.1–7 is a retold exodus narrative. The ‘son’, presently enslaved, is ‘redeemed’ by the act of the covenantal God, and given the presence of this God as the guide for the journey to the ‘inheritance’. It is the spirit that functions as the divine presence in that journey, enabling the ‘heirs’ of 3.29 to attain their ‘inheritance’ in 4.7” (976). This is a creative proposal that fails to persuade. Though many of the pieces can be associated with the exodus, Paul does not put them together in a way that points to the exodus. His point of reference is not the deliverance from Egypt but a child heir waiting to reach maturity and enter into his inheritance. For a rebuttal of this view (directed mainly at James M. Scott rather than N. T. Wright), see A. Andrew Das, *Paul and the Stories of Israel: Grand Thematic Narratives in Galatians* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 125–45.

A Child Heir (Gal 4:1–2)

Paul provides the Galatians with another illustration from human experience to make his point just as he did in 3:15.⁵ This time the illustration comes from family life. A child who is the family heir and who in some sense “is the owner of everything” (Gal 4:1) is nevertheless “no different from a slave” while “he is a child” (Gal 4:1). He is not free to do as he pleases. He does not yet enjoy all the privileges of his inheritance. Instead, “he is under guardians and managers” (Gal 4:2). Though he is “lord of all” (Gal 4:1, my translation), he is not so in practice but is under others rather than over them. He is not only “under guardians and managers” but also under his father who has set them over him and determined the time when he will enter into his inheritance and no longer be treated as a child (Gal 4:2).⁶

Our Childhood (Gal 4:3)

Paul sees a direct connection between this experience of a child who is an heir and the experience of the Galatians.⁷ That is why he begins verse 3 by saying, “In the same way also, when we were children . . .” (Gal 4:3). Just like the child in the illustration, Paul says “we were children” too (Gal 4:3). Just like the child in the illustration was “under guardians and managers” (Gal 4:2), we too were “under the elements of the world” (Gal 4:3, my translation).⁸ The child in the illustration was “no different from a slave” (Gal 4:1), but we were not merely like slaves, we “were enslaved”

⁵Schreiner says, “Paul provides here an illustration from everyday life regarding the reception of an inheritance.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 265.

⁶There have been various attempts to discover or explain the historical and cultural background to the scenario described here by Paul. See for example A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 427-38 and Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 202-4.

⁷Schreiner argues correctly that “‘We’ (ἡμεῖς) here could be restricted to Jews, but since Paul speaks of the world’s elements, he probably includes both Jews and Gentiles.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 267.

⁸The ESV does not translate the preposition ὑπό in verse 3 (though it does in verse 2). In my translation of verse 3 I have included it in order to make the parallel clearer.

(Gal 4:3).⁹ This period of childhood refers to the time before we came to know Christ, as Galatians 4:4–9 will make clear. But even before we get to those verses we can guess that this is what Paul means since in Galatians 3:19–29 the time of our imprisonment, the time when we were “under a guardian” (Gal 3:25) was the time before the coming of Christ (Gal 3:24).

What is surprising and new about all this is that Paul does not say that we were enslaved to the law as we might expect, but that we “were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:3).¹⁰ This phrase is notoriously difficult to define with any certainty,¹¹ but some attempt at understanding it must be made if we are to grasp Paul’s meaning.¹² The phrase στοιχεῖα του κόσμου occurs three times in the NT, once here in Galatians (4:3) and twice in Colossians (2:8, 20).¹³ The noun στοιχεῖα also occurs in Galatians 4:9. The possible definitions for στοιχεῖον listed by *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* include “element, letter, . . . elements, principles, . . . heavenly body, star,

⁹I am inclined to agree with Martinus C. de Boer (*Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011]), who argues that “the use of the first-person plural in v. 3 suggests that Paul has the pre-Christian situation of *both* Jewish and Gentile believers in view” (258, italics in original). After bringing in the “blurring of the distinction between Jew and Gentile” (258) in verses 5–6a he articulates a strong, but in my view accurate, conclusion: “Paul’s point, evidently, is that everyone (whether Jew or Gentile) was in the same boat prior to Christ and thus also that everyone (whether of Jewish or Gentile origin) benefits from Christ’s redeeming work in the same way, despite initial appearances to the contrary. If Gentile believers were in some sense once ‘under the law,’ just as Jewish believers were . . . , so too Jewish believers were once in some sense ‘under the *stoicheia tou kosmou*’ just as Gentile believers were!” (259).

¹⁰Similarly, de Boer, *Galatians*, 257. Moo argues that “Paul does not equate the law with the στοιχεῖα; nor does he even suggest that the law is a subset of the στοιχεῖα. . . . But the close connection of verses 3 and 4–5 shows that he does associate them in some way.” Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 263. De Boer’s claim that Paul “[equates] the observance of the law with the Galatians’ past veneration of the *stoicheia tou kosmou*” slightly overstates the case. De Boer, *Galatians*, 258. See also Clinton E. Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers: *Stoicheia* as Evil Spirits in Galatians 4:3, 9,” *Novum Testamentum* 38, no. 1 (1996): 68.

¹¹Similarly, Schreiner says, “A decision is remarkably difficult, and good arguments can be made for every position. Perhaps defining the term as the elements that make up the world should be preferred since this is the most common meaning of the term in Greek literature. Such a view may include the worship of the elements. . . . Indeed, demonic powers may be included in the meaning inasmuch as they ruled over the elements of the old creation.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 268–69.

¹²For an overview of some of the more common interpretive possibilities, see Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers,” 55–56, de Boer, *Galatians*, 252–56, and Das, *Galatians*, 439–45.

¹³Col 2:20 has the genitive στοιχειῶν rather than accusative as in the other two occurrences. Das also notes the use of the noun στοιχεῖα in Heb 5:12. Das, *Galatians*, 440.

planet.”¹⁴ We get some help in understanding what Paul means by the term from Galatians 4:8–9 (which we will examine in more detail below) which says, “Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more?”¹⁵ Here Paul says that before their conversion the Galatians “were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods.” This is perhaps the strongest piece of evidence in Clinton Arnold’s argument that “the passage is best explained if one interprets the *stoicheia* as demonic powers.”¹⁶

And yet, as Martyn argues, it is not only the Gentiles who were enslaved to these elements but also the Jews. He says, “Paul considers the elements of the cosmos somehow to include both the falsely deified idols of Gentile religion and the Law. Thus, the formerly Jewish members of the church . . . no less than the formerly Gentile ones . . . were once enslaved to those elements.”¹⁷ The most difficult part of this approach to explain is how the law can be described by the phrase “the elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:3). Longenecker suggests that “Paul . . . building on the view of τὰ στοιχεῖα as being ‘first principles’ or ‘elemental teachings,’ . . . asserts here in 4:3 that the

¹⁴Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*, ed. Madeleine Goh and Chad Schroeder (Boston: Brill, 2015), s.v. “στοιχεῖον.”

¹⁵There is some overlap between the discussion here and the discussion of Gal 4:8–11 below.

¹⁶Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers,” 57. Arnold goes on to say, “In my analysis, the contextual evidence points strongly in favor of my view that the *stoicheia* are angelic beings. In Gal. 4:8, Paul compares the *stoicheia* with beings that the pagans regard as gods” (60). Charles Cousar argues similarly that “the decisive evidence comes in verse 8. . . . When Paul speaks of resorting to this sort of slavery, he then must have in mind demonic forces or elemental spirits rather than basic or rudimentary principles.” Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1982), 92-93.

¹⁷J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 401. Italics in original. See also the quotations from de Boer in n. 9 above.

Mosaic law comprised in the Jewish experience those ‘basic principles’ given by God in preparation for the coming of Christ.”¹⁸

Perhaps instead of trying to decide which interpretation of this difficult phrase is best we should follow the recommendation of Dunn who suggests that “we would do better to suppose that this phrase was simply [Paul’s] way of referring to the common understanding of the time that human beings lived their lives under the influence or sway of primal and cosmic forces, however they were conceptualized.”¹⁹ This will allow us to associate the former idolatry of the Gentiles with the demonic powers without also somehow associating the law with those same demonic powers, while still maintaining that both Jews and Gentiles “were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:3).

Our Adoption (Gal 4:4–5)

So what changed? What was it that brought us out from a period of slavery and childhood into freedom and sonship and inheritance? This transformation of station took place “when the fullness of time had come” (Gal 4:4) which represents the “date set by [the] father” in Paul’s illustration (Gal 4:2).²⁰ Paul does not elaborate on what made the time “full.” Therefore, unless we want to enter the realm of speculation we must be content to say simply that these things occurred when we had reached the time God set for them to occur.

¹⁸Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 165.

¹⁹ Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 213.

²⁰Likewise, Dunn, who also suggests a connection “to the ‘coming of faith’ in the parallel of iii.23–5.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 213.

It was at this time that God sent his Son into the world.²¹ This matches Paul's earlier argument that "the law was our guardian until Christ came" (Gal 3:24).²² The sending of the Son took place at the incarnation when the Son was "born of woman" (Gal 4:4).²³ And he was born not just of any woman but of a Jewish woman since he was "born under the law" (Gal 4:4).²⁴ There was also a dual purpose in this sending of the Son.²⁵ First, he was sent "to redeem those who were under the law" (Gal 4:5). Given all that Paul has said about the law, it is no longer surprising (but is still noteworthy) that those under the law needed to be redeemed. "Those under the law" refers most naturally to Jews but would also cover all those, who like the Galatians, tried to live under the law.²⁶ As long as they were under the law they were also under its curse (see Gal 3:10) and needed to be redeemed (see Gal 3:13).²⁷ Second, the Son was sent "so that we might

²¹Paul's statement that "God sent forth his Son" (Gal 4:4) implies the preexistence of the Son. Schreiner acknowledges that this issue is debated but concludes that "it seems likely that the preexistence of the Son is implied here." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 270. See also Calvin who says, "The Son, who was sent, must have existed before he was sent." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, (1854; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 118.

²²It is also worth noting the observations made by Hays (Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1-4:11*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002]) about the similarities between Gal 3:13-14 and Gal 4:3-6. He says, "The pattern is the same in both cases: Christ's action enables the Jews to receive redemption, the Gentiles to receive blessing/adoption, and Jews and Gentiles alike to receive the Spirit" (108). One does not have to agree with Hays's assignation of one portion of each text to Jews and another to Gentiles to appreciate the parallels he has observed between the two texts.

²³Contra Dunn, who argues that the phrase "refers not to the process by which God's Son became a man (his birth), . . . but simply describes his human condition—one 'born of woman.'" Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 215.

²⁴Moo suggests that "the phrase here . . . means 'subject to the rule of the law'" which fits with the interpretation offered here. Moo, *Galatians*, 266. Similarly, Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 118.

²⁵Dunn likewise identifies both clauses as purpose clauses. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 216-17.

²⁶I encountered a similar argument somewhere in my reading on Gal 3 but have not been able to track it down. Moo, after weighing various options, concludes somewhat tentatively that "Paul has in view Christians generally throughout verse 5." Moo, *Galatians*, 267. Contra Dunn who seems to limit this first purpose clause to Jews. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 216.

²⁷Similarly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 270-71.

receive adoption as sons” (Gal 4:5).²⁸ We are not sons by nature as the Son is. But through God’s giving of his Son he has made us his sons by adoption.

The Sign of Sonship (Gal 4:6)

The Father sent the Son to make us sons, and now that we are sons he has sent the Spirit as the sign of our sonship.²⁹ The gift of the Spirit is a gift God gives to his sons since it is “the Spirit of his Son” (Gal 4:6) and since it is the Spirit who cries out “Abba! Father!” (Gal 4:6).³⁰ Paul does not specify here how the Spirit cries out, but we are on safe ground if we assume he implies here what he spells out in Romans 8:15 where he says, “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, *by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"* (Rom 8:15, italics added).³¹ Now that we are sons of God, he has given us his Spirit who enables us to call on God as Father. This is the sign of our sonship: that we cry out to God as our Father by the Spirit who dwells in us.

The Privilege of Sonship (Gal 4:7)

The status of son granted to us by adoption through the work of Christ comes with a certain privilege.³² To make plain that this privilege applies to each individual believer in the Galatian churches Paul switches to the second person singular and says, “So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal

²⁸Schreiner argues that “The first person plural here (‘we should receive,’ ἀπολάβωμεν) functions as strong evidence that Paul does not use the first person plurals in Galatians to refer only to the Jews.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 271.

²⁹So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 271. The language here is not meant to imply that there is any significant length of time between becoming sons and receiving the Spirit. As Dunn says, “It is most unlikely that Paul wished to suggest that the Spirit was a gift consequent and subsequent upon their being made sons.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 219.

³⁰Dunn says, “Their reception of the Spirit proved that they were sons, because the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son, that is, of him who is both son (seed) of Abraham and Son of God.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 220.

³¹Similarly, Moo, *Galatians*, 270.

³²Schreiner likewise writes of the “privileges of being God’s adopted children.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 273.

4:7). No one in their right mind who had been made an heir and “owner of everything” (Gal 4:1) would want to go back to the time when they were “no different from a slave” (Gal 4:1). In the Galatians’ case, they were not merely like slaves, they “were enslaved” (Gal 4:3), and to turn to the law would be to return to slavery (Gal 4:10; 5:1). As sons they are now “heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29) and “heirs through God” (Gal 4:7).³³ It would be utter folly for them to turn now to the law.

A Return to Slavery? (Gal 4:8–11)

Nevertheless, folly accurately describes the actions of the Galatians (see Gal 3:1, 3). In spite of all they have been given, they are in the process of giving up their freedom in Christ and entering into slavery once again. What is surprising to Paul is that the Galatians, after tasting true freedom in Christ, would return to slavery. What is perhaps most surprising to us is that Paul virtually equates their turn to the law with a return to their idolatrous pagan roots.

Before Their Conversion (Gal 4:8)

Before the Galatians heard and believed the gospel of Christ crucified (Gal 3:1–2) they “did not know God” (Gal 4:8).³⁴ And in their ignorance of God they were “enslaved to those that by nature are not gods” (Gal 4:8). It was not until they came to trust Christ that they experienced true freedom (see Gal 2:4; 5:1). As long as they were separated from God and involved in pagan religion they were slaves. Paul has already said that they were “enslaved to the elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:3) and as

³³De Boer summarizes the point of verse 7 well when he says, “You are no longer a slave of the elements of the world, or of the law, but a son of God, and if you are a son, as in fact you are, then you are also the rightful heir of God’s promise to Abraham, through God’s liberating act of grace in Christ.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 267.

³⁴In the NT unbelievers are at times identified as those who do not know God (see, for example, 1 Thess 4:5; 2 Thess 1:8), while believers are identified as those who do know God (see, for example, 1 John 4:6–7; cf. Titus 1:16). De Boer says, “The Gentiles in Galatia had moved from ignorance of God to knowledge of God when they heard the gospel that Paul preached (cf. 1:6, 11).” De Boer, *Galatians*, 273.

we saw above it is Paul's words in Galatians 4:8–9 that help us understand what he is referring to. When Paul writes of “those that by nature are not gods” (Gal 4:8), it seems reasonable to assume he is referring to things that were considered gods or treated as gods.³⁵ Otherwise, why deny that they were gods? The contrast is between the true God whom they did not know but now “have come to know . . . or rather to be known by” (Gal 4:9) and those the Galatians apparently considered to be gods but were not gods at all. In other words, Paul seems to be making reference to the idols that the Galatians worshiped before their conversion to Christ. Paul acknowledges elsewhere that “an idol has no real existence” (1 Cor 8:4),³⁶ but if that is so, then how could the Galatians be enslaved by their idols? The answer is that though Paul regards an idol as no real god at all, he nevertheless sees demonic powers at work behind the idols (1 Cor 10:19–20).³⁷ That is why he can say their idolatry was not merely sinful but also enslaving. They were enslaved in their ignorance to the demons attached to their pagan idols.

But Now (Gal 4:9a)

“But now” things are different for the Galatians (Gal 4:9). Now they know God.³⁸ Or better, Paul seems to say, they have come “to be known by God” (Gal 4:9). The change of emphasis in the middle of the verse is clearly not incidental. To say that

³⁵As Longenecker notes, “Before coming to Christ, Gentiles offered worship ‘to those who by nature are not gods,’ though, of course, they then thought them to be divine beings.” Longenecker, *Galatians*, 179.

³⁶These words appear to be a quotation of a statement made by the church at Corinth. However, as Gordon Fee notes, “[Paul] begins as in v. 1, ‘we know that,’ meaning that he is affirming as true what they have said.” Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 370.

³⁷Similarly, Ernest De Witt Burton says, “That Paul conceived of the deities whom the Galatians formerly worshiped as real existences, is neither proved nor disproved by this sentence, . . . but that he did so conceive of them is rendered probable by the evidence of 1 Cor. 8:5, 6; 10:19, 20; Col. 2:15.” Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977), 227–28. See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 277 and Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers,” 60.

³⁸Paul's statement, “But now you have come to know God” (Gal 4:9) may be an allusion to the new covenant promise that says, “No longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest” (Jer 31:34).

the Galatians “have come to know God” (Gal 4:9) could sound like knowing God is something they have done, something they have accomplished.³⁹ That would be antithetical to Paul’s emphasis on grace.⁴⁰ So he places the emphasis on the Galatians coming “to be known by God” (Gal 4:9) which highlights God’s priority and prerogative. “To be known by God” draws attention to what God has done for us.⁴¹ To be known by God means more than for God to be aware of our existence. If that were the case, God would “know” everyone since he is omniscient.⁴² But Paul means something more specific and significant here. To be known by God is to receive his grace and to belong to him.⁴³

“How Can You Turn Back?” (Gal 4:9b-10)

Despite their new status as those who are known by God, the Galatians are turning “back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world” (Gal 4:9).⁴⁴ What a surprising statement this must have been not only for the Galatian believers but also for any Jews who might have heard or read Paul’s letter. First, Paul connects the idols the Gentiles worshiped with the “elements.” No surprise there. But he

³⁹Martin Luther says, “As a matter of fact, our knowing is more passive than active; that is, it is more a matter of being known than of knowing. . . . With the words ‘You have come to be known by God’ [Paul] is disparaging the righteousness of the Law and denying that we obtain a knowledge of God because of the worthiness of our works.” Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 401-2.

⁴⁰Similarly, J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians: with Introductions, Notes and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 171.

⁴¹Burton likewise says, “The purpose of this added phrase . . . is doubtless to remind the Galatians that it is not to themselves but to God that they owe their knowledge of him and escape from idolatry.” Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 229-30.

⁴²Similarly, Burton says, “The apostle must have regarded such knowledge as always, not simply now . . . possessed by God.” *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴³For the connection between being known by God and receiving his grace, see Exod 33:12, 17. Burton says similarly that “the meaning required here [is], ‘having become objects of his favourable attention.’” *Ibid.*

⁴⁴Curiously, the ESV includes the whole phrase “elementary principles of the world” even though in Gal 4:9 there is nothing in the Greek text that corresponds to “of the world.”

also connects the “elements” to the law of Moses. There is no evidence anywhere in Galatians that the believers in Galatia were turning back to paganism and idolatry. All the evidence indicates that they were turning to the Mosaic law. Yet here Paul accuses them of wanting to be slaves of the elements again because they are turning back to them (Gal 4:9). That implies that turning to the law is essentially the same thing as turning back to paganism and idolatry.⁴⁵ And it also implies that being “known by God” (Gal 4:9) is distinct from and incompatible with putting oneself under the yoke of the law.

Further confirmation that Paul is referring to their turn to the law is found in the very next verse. The evidence he gives for their turn to the law (which he describes as a return to the “elements”) is this: “You observe days and months and seasons and years!” (Gal 4:10). Evidently they are not only in the process of adopting circumcision but, as Longenecker argues, have already adopted the Jewish calendar.⁴⁶ It is possible to interpret Paul’s statement in this verse as a reference to a pagan religious calendar,⁴⁷ but only if we are prepared to propose that the Galatians are simultaneously adopting the demands of the law of Moses and turning back to their pagan roots (two completely incompatible positions which would have caused even more distress for Paul than what he recounts in Galatians). Since the only mention of such a thing in the entire letter would be the handful of verses under consideration (Galatians 4:8–11), that proposition seems

⁴⁵Schreiner likewise says, “What is astonishing is that Paul equates subjection to the Torah with paganism. One can only imagine the shock the Pauline assertion would have given the Judaizers!” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 278-79. John Barclay says more precisely that “pagan religious practice and life under the rule of Torah may be classified in the *same* category of subjection to the στοιχεῖα of the world.” John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 409. Italics in original.

⁴⁶Longenecker says, “The present tense of the verb [παρατηρεῖσθε] indicates that the Galatians had begun to observe Torah by keeping certain calendar prescriptions. . . . While not, as yet, submitting to circumcision, Gentile Christians of Galatia seem to have begun to observe the weekly Jewish sabbaths, the annual Jewish festivals, and the Jewish high holy days—all, as they evidently were led to believe by the Judaizers, as a means of bringing their Christian faith to completion.” Longenecker, *Galatians*, 182-83. See also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 279. Contra de Boer, *Galatians*, 275-76.

⁴⁷Luther informs us that at one time it was common to interpret this verse along these lines when he says, “Nearly all the theologians interpret this passage to refer to the astrological days of the Chaldeans. . . . Augustine, whom the later interpreters followed, expounded these words of Paul as a reference to that Gentile practice, although later on he also interprets them as a reference to the days, months, etc., of the Jews.” Luther, *Luther’s Works*, 410.

entirely unlikely. That leaves us with the interpretation that all the rest of the letter would lead us to expect: that the Galatians have adopted for themselves a portion of the law of Moses, namely, the Jewish calendar.⁴⁸

If Paul is indeed referring to the Jewish calendar, then to what do the “days and months and seasons and years” (Gal 4:10) refer? The “days” would most naturally refer to the Sabbaths and perhaps other holy days such as the Day of Atonement. The months might refer to the monthly sacrifice at the new moon or perhaps to adopting the Jewish reckoning of months where the first month of the year is the month in which Israel celebrated the Passover (see Exod 12:1–12).⁴⁹ “Seasons” could refer to festivals or celebrations that lasted more than a single day, such as Passover, the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Weeks, and so on. And “years” would most likely refer to the Year of Jubilee.⁵⁰ Further confirmation of this line of interpretation is given in Paul’s letter to the Colossians where he says, “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath” (Col 2:16).⁵¹ There Paul uses the Jewish terminology of “new moon” and “Sabbath” and even “festival” that he refers to somewhat more obliquely here in Galatians.⁵² For those in our

⁴⁸So also Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, 232 and Schreiner, *Galatians*, 279.

⁴⁹For the Sabbath and new moon as noteworthy in the Jewish calendar, see 2 Kings 4:23; Isa 1:13; 66:23; Ezek 46:1; Amos 8:5.

⁵⁰J. B. Lightfoot offers a similar list of examples. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*, 171. See also Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 162.

⁵¹My view of Paul’s theology of the law is in line with Schreiner’s, who after discussing Paul’s view of OT purity laws says, “Nor does Paul think that the observance of days or special festivals are required for believers. Along with foods in Col. 2:16–19, Paul includes festivals, new moons, and Sabbaths (cf. Gal. 4:10). These too are shadows that point to Christ. The inclusion of the Sabbath is particularly noteworthy because it was a regular feature of Jewish life.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 653.

⁵²De Boer makes a good case for why this is so. He says that “Paul . . . intentionally uses terms that cover both Jewish and pagan calendrical observances, for he wants the Galatians to realize that by turning to the law, they are going back to where they came from.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 276.

own day who have been taught that the Ten Commandments, including the command to observe the Sabbath, are binding on all Christians, this statement of Paul's may bring home his teaching about the place of the law more forcefully than anything else he has said so far.⁵³ Paul did not expect his Gentile converts to keep the Sabbath.⁵⁴ On the contrary, he was distressed by their observance not only of the Sabbath but of the rest of the Jewish calendar.

Paul's Fear (Gal 4:11)

Paul's fear was that his gospel labor among the Galatians would turn out to be for naught. He has labored to preserve their freedom in Christ (Gal 2:4–5) and yet they are “[turning] back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves [they] want to be once more” (Gal 4:9). Not only is circumcision being forced upon them (Gal 6:12), but they are also observing the Jewish calendar prescribed in the law of Moses. These things are incompatible with the gospel and evidence that they are “turning to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6) which is no gospel at all (Gal 1:7). “If [they] accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to [them]” (Gal 5:2) and Paul's labor on their behalf will have been in vain.⁵⁵ Though they turned away from slavery to their

⁵³I cannot enter fully into the argument over Sabbath observance here, but I acknowledge that others do not interpret Paul's statement in the way I have interpreted it above. I am grateful to my friend and fellow cohort member Brian Hart, who reads this text differently, for challenging me to think more deeply and critically about the Sabbath.

⁵⁴However, if we examine the entire Pauline corpus we must also note, as Schreiner does, that “Keeping the Sabbath is not prohibited. If some consider it to be a day of special significance, then they should feel free to observe it (Rom. 14:5), but they must not impose their own private judgment on others.” Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 653. F. F. Bruce likewise notes that, “Many Jewish Christians continued to observe the sacred occasions as a matter of course. . . . But for Gentile Christians to adopt them *de novo* as matters of legal obligation was quite another matter.” F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 205.

⁵⁵Schreiner explains what this means when he says, “Paul contemplates the possibility that his work will be futile if those whom he evangelized do not persevere (1 Cor 15:2; Phil 2:16; 1 Thess 3:5). Such a warning is designed to awaken the Galatians from their lethargy and to call them back to the Pauline gospel.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 279. St. John Chrysostom argues similarly when he says, “[Paul] says not ‘I have labored in vain,’ but ‘lest,’ which is as much as to say, the wreck has not happened, but I see the storm big with it; so I am in fear, yet not in despair; ye have the power to set all right, and to return into your former calm.” St. John Chrysostom, “Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople,

idols (Gal 4:8) at the preaching of Paul, if they turn now to the law they will be slaves once more, only this time under the law (Gal 4:9; Gal 5:1).⁵⁶

Conclusion

No one in their right mind would want to return to slavery after experiencing freedom. That is why Paul labors to explain what it means to be under the law and what it means to be a son and to show that the two are incompatible. No doubt a turn to the law did not seem to the Galatians to be anywhere near the same as a return to their pre-Christian days of pagan slavery, but Paul saw them as virtually the same. That is why he was so distressed by their situation. He did not want them to give up the freedom and sonship and the rich inheritance they had been granted in Christ for “a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Not only had Paul labored on their behalf, but more importantly God had sent his Son and even sent his Spirit for their sake (Gal 4:4–6). Now they are sons and heirs who know God and call him “Father.” There should be no turning back from such grace.

on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians,” 31.

⁵⁶De Boer says, “[Paul] wants the Galatians to see that to turn to the observance of the law is effectively to go *back* to their previous situation, before Christ and apart from Christ.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 275. Italics in original. Arnold likewise states, “By embracing Torah, the Galatians were returning to the powers of the old aeon which would bring them under a yoke of slavery once again and cause them to forfeit their freedom in Christ.” Arnold, “Returning to the Domain of the Powers,” 76.

CHAPTER 7

“CHILDREN OF PROMISE,” GALATIANS 4:21–5:1

Freedom.¹ Just the sound of the word is music to our ears. We all want freedom, but because of sin we try to find it in all the wrong ways. You could argue that when Eve reached for the fruit on the tree she thought she was reaching for freedom. Freedom may be what a man is searching for when he buys a car he cannot afford. Freedom is what the addict started out looking for. All of them ended up enslaved seeking freedom in the wrong place and in the wrong way.

The believers of Galatia were slaves once, enslaved to their idols (Gal 4:8), but Christ had set them free (Gal 5:1). They had true freedom, glorious gospel freedom, but how quickly (see Gal 1:6) they turned back to the chains. Not the chains of idolatry this time, but the chains of the law (cf. Gal 4:8–10). Circumcision (Gal 5:2). The Sabbath (Gal 4:10). The Jewish calendar (Gal 4:10). They thought by adding Moses to Christ they would bring to completion the work of the Spirit in their lives (see Gal 3:2–3). But instead they were exchanging the freedom of the cross for the bondage of the law.

To show them their folly once again, Paul presents them with a surprising allegory of Abraham’s two wives, Hagar and Sarah, and his two sons, Isaac and Ishmael. As we look at this passage we will briefly examine the story of Abraham’s two sons (Gal

¹In this chapter I make use of material from a paper on Isa 54:1 I wrote for the course on the Old Testament Use of the Old Testament as well as a paper I wrote for the course on New Testament Theology.

4:21–23), Paul’s allegory of two covenants (Gal 4:24–28), and the two-pronged response Paul calls for from the Galatians and from us.

Abraham’s Two Sons (Gal 4:21–23)

The story of Abraham has already played a significant part in Paul’s argument against the false gospel of the false teachers in Galatia. Here at the end of Galatians 4 that story once again comes to the fore, but this time in quite a different manner. Most, if not all, of Paul’s claims about Abraham ran counter to the way some of the Jews of Paul’s day interpreted the Abraham story, but surely this one takes the cake.

Do You Listen to the Law? (Gal 4:21)

In their capitulation to a false gospel that requires them to keep the law, Paul sees in the Galatians a “desire to be under the law” (Gal 4:21). The Galatians want what the false teachers are selling, but Paul is convinced that even the law itself indicates that for the Galatians to take that yoke upon themselves is to enter once again into slavery (see Gal 5:1). So he asks a question reminiscent of Jesus: “Do you not listen to the law?” (Gal 4:21). Just as Jesus often asked, “Have you not read?” before recalling a text from the Scripture that if rightly understood spoke to the issue at hand, so Paul asks, “Do you not listen to the law?” (Gal 4:21) implying that if they did they would see their situation from his perspective.²

Two Sons, Two Mothers, Two Different Births (Gal 4:22–23)

Paul calls the Galatians’ attention to a portion of the law that we do not often think of as law at all: the story of Abraham in Genesis. Yet Genesis is the first of the books of Moses, the first book of the law, and to Genesis Paul appeals.³ More

²See Matt 12:3, 5; 19:4; 22:31; Mark 12:10, 26; Luke 6:3.

³Similarly, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 299. See also Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav

specifically, he calls attention to the story of Sarah and Hagar and to the two children Abraham had by these two women. Hagar was “a slave woman” (Gal 4:22), the servant of Sarah, whom Sarah gave to Abraham as a wife because Sarah had been unable to bear a child (Gen 16:2–3). With Hagar Abraham had a son and named him Ishmael (Gen 16:15). Sometime later God enabled Sarah, who was the “free woman” (Gal 4:22), to conceive and she bore a son to Abraham whom they named Isaac (Gen 21:1–3).

The difference between these two sons of Abraham was not only in the status of their mothers (slave or free), but more fundamentally in the manner of their births. The birth of Ishmael came about when Abraham and Sarah took matters into their own hands to try to produce an heir. Ishmael was born outside of Abraham’s marriage and was conceived in the usual way. Paul describes Ishmael’s birth as “according to the flesh” (Gal 4:23).⁴ By contrast, he describes Isaac’s birth as “through promise” (Gal 4:23). As anyone familiar with the story knows, that is because Sarah had long been barren (Gen 11:30) and was at the time beyond her childbearing years (Gen 18:10–11). Yet God had promised Abraham and Sarah numerous offspring (Gen 12:7; 13:16) and in particular a son by Sarah (Gen 15:4; 17:16). Isaac’s birth was not to be expected, nor even possible, from a merely human point of view. Isaac was born by God’s power and in accordance with God’s promise.⁵ That, more than anything, is what distinguishes the two sons. So far

Pelican, vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1963), 433.

⁴Because the word “flesh” (σάρξ) in Paul often has a negative connotation (as in Gal 5:16 for example), it is possible that Paul is referring to the sinfulness of the manner of Ishmael’s birth, coming as it did outside of Abraham’s marriage to Sarah. However, Paul may simply be saying that Ishmael was born in the normal way, through the union of a man and a woman, in contrast to Isaac’s supernatural conception (cf. John 1:13).

⁵My argument in this paragraph is very similar to that of Jason Meyer who says, “The begetting of Isaac required divine intervention through the power of God’s promise. . . . The way the mothers begot their children is massively important. Hagar begot Ishmael ‘according to the flesh,’ while Sarah begot Isaac ‘as a result of a promise’ (Gal 4:23). Paul appears to use ‘according to the flesh’ as a shorthand way of signaling a purely natural birth. Ishmael’s birth did not require any divine intervention, but Sarah is a polar opposite from Hagar in terms of natural ability because she is old and barren. The reality of the begetting of Isaac rests on divine intervention alone.” Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2009), 131.

there is nothing unusual or surprising about Paul’s interpretation.⁶ He is merely recalling the story as it is told in Genesis.

An Allegory of Two Covenants (Gal 4:24–28)

Galatians 4:24 is where things get interesting and not only interesting but challenging and even downright difficult. A. B. Caneday captures the difficulty of interpreting Galatians 4:24–28 when he says, “Among Paul’s uses of the Old Testament, perhaps most complex, baffling, and elusive are his uses of Genesis and Isaiah in Gal 4:21–31, with the phrase ‘these things are ἀλληγορούμενα.’”⁷ It is at this point that Paul diverges from what we might call a surface reading of Genesis and provides a reading that is as unexpected as it is profound.

Paul’s Allegory (Gal 4:24a)

What are we to make of Paul’s allegory—if “allegory” is even the right word for it?⁸ The word ἀλληγορέω which Paul uses here is a *hapax legomenon*, adding to the difficulty of the passage.⁹ Caneday argues that the phrase “ἅτινά ἐστιν ἀλληγορούμενα [should] be understood in the sense, ‘these things are written allegorically,’”¹⁰ while Matthew Harmon argues based on usage in Philo that “[ἀλληγορέω] has the sense of *reading a text through the lens of another textual, philosophical, or theological framework to reveal a fuller meaning.*”¹¹ These and other suggestions may refine our

⁶Similarly, Matthew S. Harmon, “Allegory, Typology, or Something Else? Revisiting Galatians 4:21-5:1,” in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo*, ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 147.

⁷A. B. Caneday, “Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured: ‘Which Things are Written Allegorically’ (Galatians 4:21–31),” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 3 (2010): 50.

⁸In my view, Luther does not give enough weight to Paul’s allegory here when he comments that “allegories do not provide solid proofs in theology; but, like pictures, they adorn and illustrate a subject.” Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4*, 435-36.

⁹Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 116.

¹⁰Caneday, “Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured,” 53.

¹¹Harmon, “Allegory, Typology, or Something Else?,” 150. Italics in original. Harmon’s

understanding of the meaning of the word, but they cannot remove the impression that Paul's argument sounds at first like what we might call a "classic allegory": he assigns a seemingly arbitrary meaning to the two women saying they "are two covenants" (Gal 4:24).¹² But is this as arbitrary as it first appears? Nothing about Paul's use of the OT so far in Galatians would lead us to expect such an interpretation from Paul. Therefore, we should assume Paul is innocent of such a charge unless he is proven guilty.¹³ In what follows it should be evident that the meaning Paul ascribes to the story of Sarah and Hagar is not arbitrary but is a faithful interpretation and application of those events.

Hagar and the Sinai Covenant (Gal 4:24b–25)

The first covenant Paul speaks of here is the Sinai covenant which he associates with Hagar. The Sinai covenant or Mosaic covenant was given "from Mount Sinai" (Gal 4:24) as described in Exodus 19–24.¹⁴ This is the covenant that required

suggestion is compelling, but he fails to demonstrate how Isaiah 54:1 shapes or affects Paul's reading of the Hagar and Sarah story.

¹²Calvin (John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, [1854; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005]) notes that on the basis of this text "Origen, and many others along with him, have seized the occasion of torturing Scripture, in every possible manner, away from the true sense" (135). This is the kind of thing I mean by "classic allegory." Calvin goes on to argue that the kind of interpretation used by Paul here "was not inconsistent with the true and literal meaning" (136). This is consistent with how Paul has used the OT so far in Galatians. Yet there is still something different about what Paul is doing here. Calvin summarizes Paul's approach here this way: "Paul adduces the history, as containing a figurative representation of the two covenants in the two wives of Abraham" (136).

¹³St. John Chrysostom insists that Paul's approach here is typological rather than allegorical when he says, "Contrary to usage, [Paul] calls a type an allegory." St. John Chrysostom, "Commentary of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Galatians," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 13, *Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 34. See also James Hamilton, who says, "Paul calls this an 'allegory' (4:24), but his interpretation looks more like typology than like the allegorical interpretations of Philo, Origen, and others." James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 477.

¹⁴Why does Paul go on to mention that "Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia" (Gal 4:25)? Martinus de Boer (Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011]) gives a compelling answer when he says, "Paul may be trying to indicate that Mount Sinai . . . is in 'Ishmaelite' territory" (299). After citing Josephus and Jubilees, he goes on to say, "Paul is attempting to point out to the Galatians that the law being promoted by the new preachers originated in Ishmaelite territory . . . and consequently belongs in the column with Hagar (and Ishmael) rather than in the column with Sarah (and Isaac)!" (300).

obedience to the Mosaic law which Paul views as enslaving (see Gal 2:4; 3:23–25; 4:1–3; 5:1). The question is, on what basis does Paul associate Hagar with Sinai and the law?¹⁵ The answer seems to be this: Paul has already argued that the law enslaves (Gal 4:3, 9–10); Hagar was herself a slave;¹⁶ therefore, it is not arbitrary to associate Hagar with the law.¹⁷

So the Sinai covenant, which produces children who are enslaved to the law, is represented by Hagar. But Paul’s associations do not stop there. Hagar also “corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children” (Gal 4:25). If one can still be shocked at this point in Paul’s letter, this claim would surely do it.¹⁸ Paul associates “the present Jerusalem,” representing those Jews who have not believed the gospel of Jesus the Messiah, not with Sarah but with Hagar, not with Isaac, but with

¹⁵The difficulty of explaining Paul’s connection between Hagar and Sinai is evident from Schreiner’s comment that “the fundamental reason for seeing the text as having an allegorical component is the identification of Hagar with the Sinai covenant.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁶Martinus de Boer likewise states, “What binds the Sinai covenant to Hagar . . . is slavery.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 299.

¹⁷Similarly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300-301. See also Harmon, “Allegory, Typology, or Something Else?,” 148. Matthew Emerson (Matthew Y. Emerson, “Arbitrary Allegory, Typical Typology, or Intertextual Interpretation? Paul’s Use of the Pentateuch in Galatians 4:21–31,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 43, no. 1 [2013]: 14-22) argues that “Paul’s reading of Genesis 16–17, 21 and Exodus 12–19 in Galatians 4:21–31 is not arbitrary, nor merely an importing of Christian presuppositions onto the text, nor only a typological connection, but is a reading grounded in the intentionality of the text of the Pentateuch narratives” (17). His thesis is that “the promises made to Hagar/Ishmael, along with the covenant made to Israel at Sinai, are essentially *promises made in the desert/wilderness to Egyptian slaves fleeing from a master who cast them out*” (18, italics in original). Whether one adopts Emerson’s reading of the text or not, the evidence he adduces and the argument he makes demonstrates that it is possible to argue from the OT itself that Paul’s association of Hagar with Sinai and the law is not arbitrary. Schreiner likewise argues that “the correspondence Paul sees between Hagar and the Sinai covenant is not arbitrary, for the destiny of the Ishmaelites corresponds to the destiny of those who lived under the law, in that both ended up being slaves to sin.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 300.

¹⁸Even the seemingly dauntless Luther says at this point, “I for my part would not have had the courage to handle this allegory in this manner.” Luther, *Lectures on Galatians 1535 Chapters 1–4*, 438.

Ishmael.¹⁹ Unbelieving Jerusalem does not enjoy the freedom that comes in Christ but remains enslaved under the law, no better off than Hagar.

“Jerusalem Above” and the Abrahamic Covenant (Gal 4:26)

The second covenant in Paul’s allegory is not explicitly named in this passage, but that does not mean it cannot be identified. Since Paul refers often in Galatians to the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, there is good reason to believe it is God’s covenant with Abraham that Paul has in mind.²⁰ But there is more we can say. Paul believes both the Abrahamic covenant (Gal 3:16) and the new covenant (1 Cor 11:25) to be fulfilled in Christ, and he understood himself to be a “[minister] of a new covenant” (2 Cor 3:6). Therefore, it is not venturing too much to say Paul is referring to the Abrahamic covenant as it has been fulfilled in the new covenant.²¹ Paul associates this fulfilled Abrahamic covenant with “the Jerusalem above” (Gal 4:26), which is called by the writer to the Hebrews “the heavenly Jerusalem” (Heb 12:22) and by theologians the eschatological Jerusalem.²² This is the Jerusalem to come at the consummation of the ages and yet, as

¹⁹Here I refer to those Jews who do not believe the gospel in order to cover both those Jews who reject Jesus as the Messiah and those Jews who acknowledge Jesus as Messiah but reject the gospel Paul preaches (cf. Gal 1:6–9). See also Schreiner (*Galatians*) who says, “Older scholarship tended to understand the present Jerusalem as a reference to non-Christian Jewish opponents. It is more likely, however, that the Judaizers are in view” (302).

²⁰De Boer, citing several others, also argues that it is “the covenant of promise with Abraham” that Paul has in view here. De Boer, *Galatians*, 296. See also Martinus C. de Boer, “Paul’s Quotation of Isaiah 54.1 in Galatians 4.27,” *New Testament Studies* 50, (2004): 375-76. However, see n. 21 below.

²¹Harmon says, “Paul almost certainly has in view the Abrahamic covenant fulfilled in Christ.” Harmon, “Allegory, Typology, or Something Else?,” 149. Contra de Boer, who rules out a reference to the new covenant in favor of a reference to the Abrahamic covenant rather than the Abrahamic covenant as fulfilled in the new covenant. De Boer, *Galatians*, 296. Meyer argues the two covenants in contrast are the old and the new covenants, though he does appear to allow that “Paul views the Abrahamic covenant as being fulfilled in the new covenant.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 124-30. Schreiner argues similarly when he says, “Probably the new covenant is in view here, but the new covenant fulfills the covenant made with Abraham, so we should not exaggerate the difference between these two options. The citation of Isa 54:1 in Gal 4:27 signals the eschatological fulfillment of the covenant enacted with Abraham.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 301.

²²Meyer suggests that “Paul may use a ‘present’ versus ‘above’ contrast because the new Jerusalem is eschatologically present alongside the present Jerusalem as part of the overlap of the present evil age and the age to come.” Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 126.

Schreiner notes, “the eschatological Jerusalem has reached down into the present evil age.”²³ She is not enslaved but “is free” (Gal 4:26) and is therefore associated with Sarah (who remains unnamed in our text). Paul says to the Galatians that “the Jerusalem above . . . is our mother” (Gal 4:26).²⁴ The present, earthly city of Jerusalem is not our mother; the future, heavenly Jerusalem is.

Children of the Eschatological Jerusalem (Gal 4:27)

Paul grounds his claim that he and the believing Gentiles of Galatia are children of the free heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26) in the promise of Isaiah 54:1 which he quotes in Galatians 4:27.²⁵ At first this quotation seems merely to further complicate an already complicated argument. However, upon closer examination a number of verbal links between Isaiah 54:1–3 and the Abraham narrative illuminate the significance of Isaiah 54:1 and how fitting it is that Paul should use it here.²⁶ It would take us too far afield to examine all of these links here, but they can be seen in Table 1 below.

²³Schreiner, *Galatians*, 303.

²⁴Some have argued that Paul calls the eschatological Jerusalem “our mother” (Gal 4:26) based on the LXX rendering of Isa 1:26 (see Caneday, “Covenant Lineage Allegorically Prefigured,” 65, and Karen H. Jobes, “Jerusalem, Our Mother: Metalepsis and Intertextuality in Galatians 4:21-31,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 55 [1993]: 310). However, as Paul does not use the same word here and the imagery of the quotation of Isa 54:1 in Gal 4:27 is sufficient to justify Paul’s language, the suggestion remains doubtful.

²⁵Likewise, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 303.

²⁶N. T. Wright arrives at a similar conclusion though his is based on the broader context of Isa 51–55 rather than the details of Isa 54:1–3. He says, “This rich cluster of themes [in Isaiah 51–55] resonates at so many levels with so much that Paul is talking about throughout Galatians that it is hard to imagine that his quotation of Isaiah 54.1 was a random proof-text thrown in for mere rhetorical effect.” N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 1138.

Table 1. Verbal connections between Isaiah 54:1–3 and the Abraham narrative

Hebrew words	Occurrences in Genesis	Occurrences in Isaiah
עָקַר	11:30; (25:21; 29:31)	54:1
לֹא יִלְדָה	16:1; (30:1)	54:1
נָטָה with אֶהָל	12:8	54:2
אֶהָל with מְקוֹם	13:3	54:2
רָחַב	13:17; (26:22)	54:2
אֶרֶץ	13:17	54:2
שָׂמְאוֹל and יָמִין	13:9	54:3
פָּרַץ	(28:14)	54:3
זָרַע	(3:15); 12:7; 13:16; 22:17	(41:8; 48:18–19); 54:3
יָרַשׁ	15:3–4, 7–8; 22:17; (28:4)	54:3
יָרַשׁ with זָרַע	22:17; (24:60)	54:3

Note: Occurrences of these words outside of the Abraham narrative of Genesis 11:27–25:11 or outside of Isaiah 54:1–3 are placed in parentheses

In the three verses of Isaiah 54:1–3, a mere 39 words in Hebrew, the table above shows that at least 13 of the words Isaiah chose are connected to the Abraham story in Genesis. That means fully one third of the words in Isaiah 54:1–3 appear in the Abraham narrative. There can be little doubt, in the face of so many verbal connections, that Isaiah 54:1–3 is intentionally recalling the story of Abraham. Matthew Harmon argues in his work on the influence of Isaiah on Galatians that

the greater the amount of shared vocabulary that exists between a text in Isaiah and a passage in Galatians, the more likely that influence is indeed present. The span of text in which this shared vocabulary exists must be taken into account as well; the

more shared vocabulary there is within a shorter span of text the more likely that influence is in fact present.²⁷

Harmon's argument can also justly be applied to the influence of Genesis on Isaiah. Therefore, on the basis of the numerous verbal connections found within such a brief text, I draw the conclusion that Isaiah is speaking of a future fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises for Jerusalem.

Perhaps two of the verbal connections from the table above will suffice to demonstrate how these textual links point to and support this conclusion. Both the term "barren" (עֲקָרָה) and the phrase "who did not bear" (לֹא יָלְדָהּ) (Isa 54:1) occur for the first time in the Hebrew Bible with reference to Sarah (in Gen 11:30; 16:1, respectively). By using those terms in Isaiah 54 Isaiah associates Jerusalem in her exile with Sarah in her barrenness.²⁸ But Isaiah calls upon this "barren one" to "rejoice" because of the abundance of children she is promised (Isa 54:1). This abundance of children also recalls the promise to Abraham of a multitude of offspring and therefore suggests a fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham. If we are on the right track here, this explains why Paul, who has already argued that believing Gentiles are children of Abraham, can say the Galatians are the children of the heavenly Jerusalem and therefore free like she is (Gal 4:26, 31; 5:1). They are the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham as it was expressed in Isaiah 54.²⁹ How can this OT promise be applied to the believers in Galatia?

²⁷Matthew S. Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free: Paul's Isaianic Gospel in Galatians* (New York: De Gruyter, 2010), 31.

²⁸That Isaiah is speaking of exiled Jerusalem as a barren woman is confirmed by Isa 49:21 where Zion speaks to the Lord and says, "I was bereaved and barren, exiled and put away, but who has brought up these [children]?" Karen Jobes confirms this is what Isaiah must have intended when she notes that "within the historical setting of Isaiah's lifetime, it was a colloquial idiom to personify the capital city of an ethnic population as a female. . . . During times of war when a nation was conquered, its capital overrun and its peoples exiled, the city was considered to be a barren woman. . . . This was precisely the historical situation of Jerusalem to which Isaiah spoke his proclamation of 54:1." Jobes, "Jerusalem, Our Mother," 308.

²⁹Similarly, Wright affirms that "the Sarah/Hagar 'allegory' says again . . . what Paul had been saying throughout [Galatians] chapter 3. The promise to Abraham has been fulfilled; the 'inheritance' is secure for all his 'seed'; and the law of Sinai is quite simply out of date." Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God*, 1140.

Moo says it well: “Isa. 54:1 follows immediately the great fourth Servant Song, which celebrates the redeeming death of the Servant of God. It is no stretch at all, then, to think that Paul would have read Isa. 54:1 as a celebration of a new state of affairs brought about by the death and resurrection of Christ.”³⁰

“Children of Promise” (Gal 4:28)

Since the believing Gentiles are among the children promised to the eschatological Jerusalem, Paul can say to the Galatians, “You, brothers, like Isaac, are children of promise” (Gal 4:28). Just as Isaac’s birth came about by the supernatural working of God (notice the phrase “born according to the Spirit” in Gal 4:29) in fulfillment of his promise, so the inclusion of the believing Gentiles has come about through the supernatural working of God in fulfillment of his promise (see Gal 1:6; 3:2–3, 8).³¹ This adds another layer to Paul’s argument about the Gentiles’ inclusion in the family of Abraham. Not only are they sons of Abraham, they are “Isaac-type” sons rather than “Ishmael-type” sons.³² The Ishmael-type sons are those Jews who have not believed in Jesus the Messiah or who have but nevertheless insist on circumcision for Gentiles. The Isaac-type sons are those Jews and Gentiles who have believed in Jesus the Messiah and received the gift of justification apart from works of the law (cf. Gal 2:16). In Galatia children of the free woman and of the slave woman are currently living under the same roof, so to speak. This situation is just as untenable as Sarah and Hagar’s was. Something

³⁰Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 308.

³¹Here I want to acknowledge once again the similarity of my argument and language to that of Meyer. Meyer, *The End of the Law*, 131.

³²I am borrowing the language of Meyer who rightly argues that “the Galatians are the fulfillment of Isaiah’s promise in that they are Isaac-type children, for they represent the spiritually and supernaturally born children of Sarah. Paul’s opponents can only beget Ishmael-type children.” *Ibid.*, 132–33.

must change. Paul does not leave the Galatians to guess what that change might be, but prescribes for them a two-pronged response in the following verses.

A Two-Pronged Response (Gal 4:29–5:1)

The purpose of Paul’s allegory is not merely to assure the Galatian believers of their status as children of Abraham, though it does do that. It is also to call them to a two-pronged response. Embedded in the story of Sarah and Hagar is not only the identity of the Galatians as “children of promise” (Gal 4:28) but also the call to “cast out the slave woman and her son” (Gal 4:30; citing Gen 21:10). If the Galatians “listen to the law” (Gal 4:21) they will not only reject the false gospel of law obedience, they will also remove the false teachers from their midst.

Persecution Persists (Gal 4:29)

Paul suggests for a second time that the Galatians have experienced persecution (cf. Gal 3:4), but this time he suggests the persecution comes at the hands of the false teachers.³³ “Just as” it was with Ishmael and Isaac, “so also it is now” with the false teachers and the Galatians (Gal 4:29). Although it is difficult to be certain, it seems likely that the persecution Paul is referring to is Ishmael “laughing” (לִצְחָק, Gen 21:9) when “Abraham made a great feast on the day that Isaac was weaned” (Gen 21:8). Not only is this the only suggestion of any hostility between Ishmael and Isaac in Genesis, it also comes immediately before the verse that Paul cites next in his argument. The only real difficulty with this suggestion is that “laughing” hardly seems like persecution. But evidently Sarah saw some threat or menace in it since her response was to call Abraham

³³So also de Boer, *Galatians*, 307.

to “cast out” Hagar and Ishmael (Gen 21:10).³⁴ This is why some translations rightly render the word as “mocking” instead of merely “laughing.”³⁵

Response 1: Cast Out the False Teachers (Gal 4:30)

The first response Paul calls for comes from the Abraham narrative itself. Paul began this allegorical exposition of the story of Hagar and Sarah by asking the Galatians, “Do you not listen to the law?” (Gal 4:21). Now he declares in no uncertain terms what the law calls upon them to do: “Cast out the slave woman and her son” (Gal 4:30; citing Gen 21:10). Hagar, who represents Mount Sinai and therefore the law covenant, is to be cast out.³⁶ And her son, meaning all those who are still bound to the law covenant and seeking to bind others to it, must be cast out as well.³⁷ The false teachers have no place in the churches of Galatia and the Galatians should give them no quarter.³⁸ They are to be turned out and sent packing. The reason is straightforward: “For the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman” (Gal 4:30).³⁹ The believing Gentiles are “heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29) and “[heirs] through God” (Gal 4:7),

³⁴This possibility is supported by the range of meaning possible for the verb translated “laughing” here. The *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* suggests that “the simple stem of [קָחַץ] conveys the idea of laughter, whether in joy or incredulity. The stronger Piel stem connotes positively, play and sport, or negatively, mockery and derision.” R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 763. See also Dunn who notes that “the verb ‘play’ can easily gather to itself darker overtones.” James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 256.

³⁵For example, the KJV, NASB, and NIV.

³⁶This is not to imply that the law is to have no role in the churches of Galatia, but that the law covenant of Sinai is no longer to be accepted as binding.

³⁷Similarly, Moo, citing others, argues that “the Galatians will ‘cast out the slave woman’ by refusing to have anything to do with those who continue to insist on law observance as necessary for righteousness.” Moo, *Galatians*, 312.

³⁸Contra Schreiner, *Galatians*, 295, 306.

³⁹Note that Paul substitutes “the son of the free woman” (Gal 4:30) for “my son Isaac” (Gen 21:10), apparently in order to preserve the original meaning while paving the way for a more general application. Similarly, de Boer says “Paul make’s Sarah’s words to Abraham into words of ‘the Scripture’ addressed to the Galatians in the present. He adapts the text accordingly, changing the last phrase ‘my son Isaac’ into ‘the son of the free woman’ (cf. vv. 22–23).” De Boer, *Galatians*, 307.

but the false teachers are not heirs and will not share in the inheritance any more than Ishmael shared in Isaac's inheritance. Therefore, they have no place among the people of God.

Response 2: Stand Firm in Your Freedom (Gal 4:31–5:1)

In case they have missed it, Paul states clearly his conclusion for the Galatians: “So, brothers, we are not children of the slave but of the free woman” (Gal 4:31). This is followed by the second response Paul calls for: “Stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1). Since they are “children . . . of the free woman” (Gal 4:31) and since it is “for freedom that Christ has set us free” (Gal 5:1)⁴⁰ they should refuse to submit to the yoke of the law which would make them slaves once more.⁴¹ This is the direction they are headed (Gal 4:9), but Paul calls them to resist and to refuse all attempts to bring them back into slavery by requiring obedience to the law.⁴²

Conclusion

The choice before the Galatians is clear: they can bind themselves to the law and become slaves like Hagar and miss out on the inheritance like Ishmael, or they can reject the law as a path to blessing and instead trust only in Christ so that they may continue to enjoy the freedom Christ died to give them. If we want to be free, the path is clear and the story is as old as Abraham: we must believe the promise and reject any attempt to secure it by works of the flesh. True freedom is found in Christ and in Christ alone. Let those who have ears hear what the Spirit says to the churches (cf. Rev 2:7).

⁴⁰De Boer rightly says, “As many a commentator has noted, 5:1a epitomizes the primary message of Galatians, which is a solemn declaration to its readers of what God has done in Christ.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 309.

⁴¹Schreiner rightly suggests that “this freedom was won for believers by Christ through his redeeming work (explained in 3:13 and 4:5).” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 307.

⁴²De Boer argues that “Paul has a particular form of freedom in view: . . . freedom from the law.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 309.

CHAPTER 8

“FAITH WORKING THROUGH LOVE,” GALATIANS 5:2–15

Shylock the Jew in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* is a vile villain. He lends money to Antonio, a kind-hearted and generous man, but insists he sign a bond promising a pound of his own flesh if he fails to pay back the loan on the agreed upon day. Misfortune befalls Antonio and his friend Bassanio for whom he borrowed the money. Shylock seizes his chance to devour Antonio and insists that he receive the promised pound of flesh. When Shylock and Antonio’s case is brought before the court for judgment, a certain lawyer pleads with Shylock to show mercy to Antonio, counseling him thus: “Though justice be thy plea, consider this: that in the course of justice none of us should see salvation.” Shylock rejects this counsel and cries out, “I crave the law.” He refuses repayment of the loan and insists upon the pound of flesh so intent is he upon his prey.

Just when he thinks his scheme has succeeded, Shylock receives a shock. He is granted the pound of flesh but warned that if he takes any blood with it, which is not included in the bond, then he will violate the law of the state. The same lawyer who urged him to be merciful now warns him that if he proceeds, then “as thou urgest justice, be assured thou shalt have justice more than thou desir’st.” When Shylock changes his mind and decides to settle for the money, he discovers it is too late. The lawyer insists that “the Jew shall have all justice” and denies him the money because “he hath refused it in open court.” When Shylock sees the game is up and seeks to leave, he finds he cannot. The lawyer informs him that his scheme against Antonio violated the law and that now

not only Shylock's goods but also his life is forfeit. Such is the fate of those who put their trust in the law.

Though Shakespeare's Shylock lacks the nuance of the situation in Galatia, his predicament points in the same direction as Paul's warning to the Galatians. "All who rely on the law are under a curse" (Gal 3:10). Those "who desire to be under the law" (Gal 4:21) will find themselves enslaved rather than free (Gal 4:21–5:1). Not only will they not gain what they seek, they will lose what they currently possess (see Gal 5:2–6).

"Faith Working through Love" (Gal 5:2–6)

A few years ago a book was published called *Jesus + Nothing = Everything*.¹ It's a great title. All we need is Jesus and if Jesus is all we have then we have everything we need and more. But it's also true that if we are talking about the gospel and where we put our trust, then *Jesus + Something = Nothing*. What I mean is if we trust in Jesus plus something else, anything else, for our right standing with God, we will have no place to stand and will get no help from Jesus.

This is one of the reasons why getting the gospel right is so important.² This is one of the reasons why the Protestant Reformation and the recovery of the gospel was so important. This is why the problem in Galatia was so important. And this is why it is worth spending sermon after sermon clarifying what the gospel is and what it is not and

¹Tullian Tchividjian, *Jesus + Nothing = Everything* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). Unfortunately, the author's moral failings later disqualified him from ministry.

²Calvin insists that "we must exercise the utmost caution lest we allow any counterfeit to be substituted for the pure doctrine of the gospel." John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, trans. William Pringle, (1854; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 155.

what benefits come when we believe the gospel and how much it will cost us if we try to add to it.

Adding to the Gospel, Losing Christ (Gal 5:2–4)

The false teachers in Galatia were determined to “force [the Galatians] to be circumcised” (Gal 6:12), and the Galatians were apparently poised to “accept circumcision” willingly (Gal 5:2). Paul knew this would have catastrophic consequences. The Galatians would be “severed from Christ” (Gal 5:4), and Christ would no longer “be of advantage to [them]” (Gal 5:2). Nothing less than their connection to Christ and the blessings and benefits that come from him were at stake.

Adding circumcision. But why is so much at stake in whether or not a Galatian believer is circumcised? Someone might object that Paul had Timothy circumcised before taking him along with him to preach the same gospel that Paul is now saying would be compromised by the Galatians being circumcised (Acts 16:1–3; Gal 5:2–4). Has Paul changed his mind or his message? No. Timothy was circumcised by Paul because though his mother was a Jew he had never been circumcised (Acts 16:1). It was known to “the Jews who were in those places . . . that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:3), and so they may have looked askance at Timothy. Paul seems to have considered it prudent to have Timothy circumcised just as he himself “became as one under the law (though not being [himself] under the law) that [he] might win those under the law” (1 Cor 9:20).³ Timothy’s circumcision had nothing to do with his standing before God and

³Similarly, Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 521-22.

everything to do with his acceptance by the Jews Paul was seeking to reach with the gospel.

The situation in Galatia was different. The believers in Galatia were not Jews but Gentiles. For them to practice circumcision was not the continuation of a long-standing cultural and religious practice but the adoption of a foreign and unnecessary religious practice. The only reason the Galatians had for adopting circumcision was to seek to “be justified by the law” (Gal 5:4) rather than by faith in Christ alone.⁴ If they took that step, they would be taking upon themselves not merely the practice of circumcision but would be “obligated to keep the whole law” (Gal 5:3). They cannot simply choose to adopt certain elements of the law and ignore others. If they begin to practice some of it, they must take up all of it.⁵ They would then be “[submitting] again to a yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1) by binding themselves to the law of Moses—a path which Paul has already argued can only end in being cursed (Gal 3:10).

Nowhere does Paul require Jews to cease the practice of circumcision (cf. Acts 21:21 which relates a false rumor).⁶ Nor do his words of warning apply to those who practice circumcision for cultural and medical reasons.⁷ He is addressing those who are

⁴Betz’s comment is perceptive, clear, and persuasive. He says, “Christians who are Jews by birth and are thus circumcised may remain as they are and continue to do what they do as Jews, since by becoming Christians they have demonstrated that being Jewish does not ensure salvation before God. But Gentiles who have become Christians and who wish to become Jews in addition demonstrate that for them ‘grace’ and ‘Christ’ (i.e., the salvation through Christ outside of the Torah) are not sufficient and that to come under the Torah is necessary for their salvation. By implication, then, ‘Christ’ is no longer a savior and ‘grace’ is no longer grace.” Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 261.

⁵Similarly, Das, who observes, “The Law is not some piecemeal affair with optional elements. The Mosaic Law is a comprehensive and indivisible whole. That fact should cause the Galatians to pause.” A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 524. See also Betz, *Galatians*, 261.

⁶Polhill says, “There is certainly no question that [Paul] argued strongly against seeing circumcision as a guarantee of salvation. It could be no substitute for faith in Christ, for becoming a new creation in the Spirit (cf. Gal 5:6; 6:15). Consequently, he adamantly opposed circumcision of his Gentile converts. But there is no evidence that he ever encouraged Jewish Christians to abandon the practice and considerable indication to the contrary (cf. Acts 16:3; 1 Cor 7:18f.)” John B. Polhill, *Acts*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 447-48.

⁷Similarly, Schreiner says, “Circumcision was acceptable for social and cultural reasons as long as it was not required for salvation.” Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical

tempted to practice circumcision as a means of achieving righteousness before God (Gal 5:4) and warning them that such a path will cost them any “advantage” they might have received from Christ (Gal 5:2).

Losing Christ. In three different phrases Paul describes the disastrous results that will inevitably follow if the Galatians “accept circumcision” (Gal 5:2): “Christ will be of no advantage to [them]” (Gal 5:2); they will be “severed from Christ” (Gal 5:4); and they will “have fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4). If they add circumcision to the gospel they will lose Christ. If they add their obedience to the law they forfeit grace. If they add even one work, they cut themselves off from the cross.⁸ If someone were to give you an expensive and generous gift, and you tried to pay them a dollar for it, you would ruin the gift. It would no longer be a gift. Similarly, if we try to add even one work to the gospel of grace, we ruin it.

Paul is not saying that the Galatians are in danger of losing their salvation but that they are in danger of cutting themselves off from the only source of salvation: Christ.⁹ If they do cut themselves off from Christ it will not be because they have lost their salvation but because they never really had it to begin with. The phrase “fallen away from grace” (Gal 5:4) has come to be associated with the idea that someone can lose their salvation, but we must ask whether this is what Paul meant by the phrase. When we take Paul’s teaching as a whole it is evident he does not believe or teach that a person who is genuinely in Christ is in any danger of losing their salvation (see Rom 8:28–39; Phil 1:6). However, he does often remark that some who claim and appear to be in Christ may in

Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 326.

⁸Schreiner summarizes Paul’s argument similarly when he says, “The Galatians will either trust in circumcision or in Christ; no middle ground exists. If they choose the former, they have no profit from the latter.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 311.

⁹Schreiner (*Galatians*) acknowledges that “Arminians understandably interpret these warnings to teach that believers can lose their salvation” but goes on to say, “I would argue that the warnings are the means God uses to preserve the faith of those whom he has chosen” (318).

fact turn out not to belong to Christ as evidenced by their rejection of Christ and the gospel (see 1 Cor 6:9–11; 15:1–2; Col 1:21–23; cf. Gal 4:11). That is what he is warning of here. There is no danger of a genuine believer losing their salvation, but that does not mean that someone can profess faith in Christ and then “[turn] to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6) without dire consequences. Those who turn away and never return never belonged in the first place (see 1 John 2:19).¹⁰

“The Hope of Righteousness” (Gal 5:5)

Paul can say that those who try to keep the law cut themselves off from Christ because those who are in Christ pursue righteousness in a fundamentally different manner. Paul explains this in verse 5.¹¹ Those among the Galatians who “accept circumcision” (Gal 5:2) would be seeking to “be justified [i.e. declared righteous] by the law” (Gal 5:4). Those who are trusting in Christ on the other hand “eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness” and they do this “through the Spirit, by faith” (Gal 5:5).¹² Righteousness is not something they attempt to achieve through keeping the law but something they hope to receive in the future by faith.¹³ Their hope is not merely a wish; it is certain but it remains future (see Rom 8:24–25; Heb 11:1).¹⁴ They have already been

¹⁰Schreiner likewise argues that “those who fall away demonstrate that they did not truly belong to God (1 John 2:19).” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 318.

¹¹Note the “for” (γάρ). Das calls it “a supporting reason.” Das, *Galatians*, 526. Contra Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 315.

¹²For the “adverbial translation” of ἐκ πίστεως, see Das, *Galatians*, 528. Contra de Boer, who says, “There are good reasons . . . for concluding that . . . the meaning of v. 5 is: ‘We, through the Spirit that we received on the basis [ek] of Christ’s faithful death, are waiting for the hope of justification.’” De Boer, *Galatians*, 316–17. Brackets in original.

¹³Schreiner argues that the final judgment is in view not only in verse 5 but beginning in verse 2 where “the [future] verb ‘will profit’ (ὠφελήσει) refers to the final judgment.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 313. On the significance of the future tense in verse 2, see also de Boer, *Galatians*, 312.

¹⁴De Boer observes that “this is the only instance of the term ‘hope’ (*elpis*) in Galatians.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 316.

declared righteous in the present but they anticipate the moment in the future when the verdict “righteous” will be pronounced over them in the presence of God.¹⁵

What Counts (Gal 5:6)

Paul further explains that “in Christ” (Gal 5:6) circumcision has become, as Barclay says, “irrelevant.”¹⁶ It does not “[count] for anything” (Gal 5:6). Instead, when practiced by Gentiles in order that they might “be justified by the law” (Gal 5:4), circumcision causes them to forfeit the advantages that come from Christ (cf. Gal 5:2). A lack of circumcision does not “[count] for anything” (Gal 5:6) either.¹⁷ Gentiles are not better off than Jews because they are uncircumcised. Such distinctions are, once again, irrelevant (see Gal 3:28). What matters is “faith” (Gal 5:6).¹⁸ This has been Paul’s point throughout the letter (see Gal 2:16; 3:2, 6–9, 11, 14, 22), but now he adds a new dimension to his argument.¹⁹ It is not merely faith that counts, but “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6). As Schreiner says, “Justification in Paul is by faith alone, but, as most Christians have seen throughout history, their faith is not alone.”²⁰

Paul’s teaching that we are justified by faith alone (see Gal 2:16) does not mean that faith is all that matters. Deeds matter too, not as the grounds of justification

¹⁵Schreiner (*Galatians*) says, “They are waiting for the eschatological hope of being declared righteous,” (312) and “the hope believers await *is* the final verdict of righteousness,” (316, italics in original). De Boer argues similarly but probably goes too far in adding a mention of “God’s dynamic rectification (setting right) of the world” since there is little, if any, hint of such an idea in this context. De Boer, *Galatians*, 316.

¹⁶John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 338. Similarly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 312. Das observes that “the first half of 5:6 further explains (‘for,’ γάρ) the impossibility of justification by the Law (‘righteousness,’ 5:4–5).” Das, *Galatians*, 530. Betz says, “If that faith [meaning ‘faith in Christ’] has become the decisive basis of salvation, the Jewish cultic symbols [like circumcision] and their implications must become a matter of irrelevance.” Betz, *Galatians*, 262-63.

¹⁷So also Schreiner, *Galatians*, 317.

¹⁸I take “faith” here (as elsewhere in the letter) to refer to human faith rather than, as de Boer suggests, “Christ’s own faith.” De Boer, *Galatians*, 318.

¹⁹Similarly, Betz, *Galatians*, 263.

²⁰Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 203.

(which they could never be), but as the fruit of our faith.²¹ Genuine faith works; it is active. Faith is evident and active through works of love toward God and neighbor (as we will see more fully below) and this is what counts, not circumcision or uncircumcision.

“A Little Leaven” (Gal 5:7–12)

Sometimes things that seem small can cause big problems. One little nail can stop a car. A tiny termite can destroy your house. A little bit of dust in your eye can keep you from being able to see. One gossiping member can wreck the fellowship of a church. And just a little false doctrine can lead an entire church or even an entire denomination astray. That’s why sometimes small things require a lot of attention. You search diligently for the nail you dropped in the garage. You call pest control as soon as you find termites in your house. You stop whatever you are doing to get the dust out of your eye. You confront the gossiping member who is disturbing the fellowship of the church. And you deal with false doctrine rather than sweeping it under the rug.

Identifying the Problem (Gal 5:7–8)

The problem in Galatia was not there at the beginning. The churches of Galatia were not troubled from the start. For a while they “were running well” (Gal 5:7). Paul used running as a metaphor for his ministry earlier in the letter (Gal 2:2) but now he uses it as a metaphor for the Christian life.²² The Galatians were faithfully following Christ for a season, holding fast to the gospel. But someone stepped onto the track and got in their way. Someone interfered and led them off course and Paul wants to know who it was: “Who hindered you from obeying the truth?” (Gal 5:7). It will do us no good to close our eyes to the fact that there are people, even in the church, who will seek to trip us up and

²¹Schreiner says likewise that “love, then, is not the basis of justification but the fruit of faith, the result of faith.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 317.

²²Paul also uses running as a metaphor for the Christian life in 1 Cor 9:24–27 and 2 Tim 4:7. Similarly, F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 234.

keep us from following Christ. Their intentions may seem noble, their personality may be winsome, and their arguments may seem persuasive, but if they lead us away from the gospel and therefore from Christ they are a hindrance and should be avoided.

Paul may not know who it was that got the Galatians off track, but he knows who it was not. It was not God.²³ Since the Galatians were not turning back to paganism but to the law, it seems likely they would have thought they were doing what God wanted, even what God required. Paul has no such illusions. He said in the beginning that their turn from the gospel was also a turning from God (Gal 1:6), and now he assures them that “this persuasion [to embrace the law] is not from him who calls you” (Gal 5:8), namely, God.²⁴ They cannot claim divine sanction for their convictions. Paul knows better. It is not God who has persuaded them to add Moses to Christ but some false teacher “who is troubling” them (Gal 5:10). Sometimes people try to say, “God told me to do this,” when what they are doing goes directly against what God says in Scripture. Paul heads off any such claim from the Galatians. He has already shown that Scripture speaks against them turning to the law, so they cannot blame their change of course on God. God is not responsible for our bad decisions, even if we have a few Bible verses that we think support our position. God will never contradict himself. He will never

²³Calvin’s paraphrase of Paul’s point is apt. He says, “God is never inconsistent with himself, and he it is who by my preaching called you to salvation. This new persuasion then has come from some other quarter.” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 154.

²⁴Paul also refers to God as the one who calls in Gal 1:6, 15. Lightfoot says the phrase translated here “him who calls you” (Gal 5:8) always refers to God in Paul’s writings. J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians: with Introduction, Notes and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957), 206. So also James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), 275.

undermine his own word or the sacrifice of his own Son. If what you are doing contradicts what the Bible says, God did not tell you to do it.

Small Problems Can Become Big Problems (Gal 5:9)

Apparently the problem in Galatia started out small. Perhaps just one person. Perhaps a handful of people.²⁵ But small problems can become big problems. Paul puts it this way, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal 5:9). Both Jesus and Paul use leaven as an illustration of something that begins small but eventually has a broad impact. Jesus taught that “the kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened” (Matt 13:33). The kingdom, like leaven, starts small but does not stay small, not unlike the mustard seed (Matt 13:31–32). Jesus and Paul also both use leaven to represent something insidious and harmful.²⁶ Jesus warned his disciples, “Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy” (Luke 12:1). When Paul heard that within the church at Corinth there was “sexual immorality . . . of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans” (1 Cor 5:1), he warned them “that a little leaven leavens the whole lump” (1 Cor 5:6) and told them to “cleanse out the old leaven” (1 Cor 5:7). However small the problem was in Galatia when it started, however few in number the false teachers may have been, their teaching threatens to infect the whole church.²⁷ They cannot afford to minimize or ignore the problem simply because it

²⁵Contra Calvin, Paul does not separate the men teaching the doctrine from the doctrine itself. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 154.

²⁶Bruce rightly notes that “the use of leaven as a symbol of evil and corrupting influences goes back to the prohibition of leaven for seven days at Passover (Ex. 12:14–20; Dt. 16:3–8).” Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 235.

²⁷Similarly, Lightfoot, although like Calvin he sees the false teachers and their doctrine as distinct possible referents. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*, 206.

seems small.²⁸ If they do, it will only spread until it has affected everything. False teaching is a cancer that must be dealt with swiftly and early before it can spread.

Confident Resolution (Gal 5:10)

Paul is confident that the Galatians will come around to his way of thinking, or better, that they will come around to the truth. His “confidence” that they will come around is “in the Lord” (Gal 5:10). He could mean by this that he is confident that God will bring them back to their senses.²⁹ Or perhaps Paul intends to say that this is not mere wishful thinking on his part but that God has somehow indicated to him that this will be the case. It is also possible that since Paul believes the Galatians are genuinely converted he is asserting his assurance that God will not allow them to be ultimately deceived (cf. Matt 24:24). Whatever his meaning, it is worth noting that Paul’s confidence about the outcome in no way detracts from his use of means to bring it about. His confidence does not make him cocky or lazy. He still writes the letter. He still argues and pleads and persuades.

Paul is also sure that “the one who is troubling you will bear the penalty, whoever he is” (Gal 5:10). Whether or not Paul knows the identity of the false teacher,³⁰ he does know that God will not let him get away with it.³¹ He will be judged. Paul’s

²⁸Calvin says about Paul’s warning here that “it guards them against the mischievous consequences which arise from corruption of doctrine, and warns them not to consider it, as is commonly done, to be a matter attended by little or no danger.” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 154.

²⁹So Calvin, who says, “To bring back the Galatians to the pure doctrine of faith, from which they had turned aside, was the work of God.” *Ibid.*, 155. Similarly, Schreiner says, “Paul’s assurance does not rest on any recent good news from Galatia or confidence in the Galatians themselves. His confidence rests in the Lord, whose grace will sustain the Galatians to the end.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 325.

³⁰Though my initial inclination was to take Paul’s statement to mean he did not know who the source of the trouble was, Schreiner’s comments made me less certain of this position. He says, “Some have construed the words ‘whoever he is’ as if Paul does know the identity of the leader among the false teachers. It seems that Paul is rather well informed about what is happening in Galatia. Instead of confessing ignorance about the leader’s identity, he emphasizes God’s impartiality in judgment.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 326.

³¹Calvin says, “Let all who introduce confusion into churches, who break the unity of faith, who destroy their harmony, lend an ear to this; and if they have any right feeling, let them tremble at his

anathemas were not empty threats (Gal 1:8–9); he knows a curse will fall on all who preach a false gospel and seek to lead God’s people astray. God will not let false teachers go unpunished.

Circumcision and the Cross (Gal 5:11)

Paul follows his pronouncement of punishment for the one causing all the trouble in Galatia with what appears to be a statement reassuring the Galatians that he no longer preaches circumcision. After all he has said in the letter, one wonders why he would need to say this. But perhaps the false teachers were not only claiming that Paul had preached an insufficient message but that Paul himself was preaching circumcision just as they were.³² If so, it would make sense that after predicting judgment for the false teachers he would quickly add that he is not preaching the same message they are. It is impossible to be sure.³³ Whatever the reason, Paul assures the Galatians that he no longer preaches circumcision (though apparently he did at one time; cf. Gal 1:14),³⁴ and that is precisely why he is “still being persecuted” (Gal 5:11). Evidently he is being persecuted by those who oppose his gospel but would be appeased by the addition of circumcision. Perhaps these are the same sort of people whose persecution the false teachers are trying to avoid (cf. Gal 6:12).

What drives the persecution that Paul is experiencing and the false teachers are seeking to avoid is “the offense of the cross” (Gal 5:11; cf. Gal 6:12). If Paul preached that circumcision was required, then “in that case the offense of the cross has been

word.” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 155.

³²Bruce rightly notes that “this argument, not obviously related to anything in the immediate context either before or after, can be explained only as a reply to some allegation which was being made about Paul.” Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 236. Lightfoot plausibly suggests that the circumcision of Timothy by Paul may lay behind this charge. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of Saint Paul to the Galatians*, 206.

³³Dunn lists six different guesses at “what it was [the other missionaries] said about Paul.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 278-79.

³⁴So also Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 336. Contra Das, *Galatians*, 540.

removed” (Gal 5:11). So what is it that makes the cross so offensive? And what is it about adding the requirement of circumcision that removes the offense? Judging from the rest of Galatians, what Paul’s persecutors found so offensive about the cross was the way it relativized all distinctions (cf. Gal 3:28; 5:6; 6:15) and made keeping the law unnecessary (cf. Gal 2:21; 3:23–25).³⁵ Circumcision maintained the distinction between Jew and Gentile (since a Gentile who accepted circumcision on the basis of the law of Moses was a Jewish convert and not merely a circumcised Gentile) which the cross made irrelevant to one’s standing before God and therefore in the church (cf. Gal 3:28). Requiring circumcision presumed the continuing operation and binding nature of the Mosaic covenant. What made the cross offensive was that it made faith in the crucified Messiah the only requirement for right standing with God.³⁶ Obedience to the Mosaic law is not required. Belonging to the Jewish people is not required. All that is required is that one repent of sin and trust in the crucified Messiah alone for righteousness (cf. Gal 2:16; 5:5–6). Some were offended by that. Some remain offended by that. So be it. There is no other gospel (see Gal 1:6–7).

Paul’s Wish (Gal 5:12)

Paul has already pronounced a curse on all who preach a false gospel (Gal 1:8–9), so the wish he expresses in verse 12 is not out of sync with what he has said so far—it

³⁵It seems likely that the persecutors Paul has in mind here would have been Jews since circumcision would have removed the offense (Gal 5:11). Calvin appears to agree not only with this point but with much of the argument above when he says, “When therefore [Paul] says that now, If [*sic*] the preaching of circumcision be admitted, the offence of the cross will no longer exist, he means that the gospel will meet with no annoyance from the Jews, but will be taught with their entire concurrence. And why? Because they will no longer take offence at a pretended and spurious gospel, gathered out of Moses and out of Christ, but will look with greater indulgence on that mixture *which will leave them in possession of their former superiority.*” Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians*, 156. Italics added.

³⁶Similarly, Ernest De Witt Burton explains, “Whatever else there may have been in the fact of Jesus’ death on the cross to make the doctrine of his messiahship offensive to the Jews, that which above all else made it such was the doctrine that men may obtain divine acceptance and a share in the messianic blessings through faith in Jesus, without circumcision or obedience to the statutes of Moses.” Ernest De Witt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1977), 287.

is simply more graphic.³⁷ For those causing trouble over circumcision, Paul wishes they would apply the knife a little more generously to themselves and leave the Galatians alone.³⁸ At times it is appropriate to say hard things, even harsh things.³⁹ Niceness is not listed as a fruit of the Spirit but self-control is (Gal 5:22–23), and it takes self-control to only say these kinds of things at the right times. We must beware of having a higher standard of what is right and good than the Bible and at the same time beware of making a regular habit of what is infrequent in Scripture.

“Serve One Another” (Gal 5:13–15)

Paul returns again in Galatians 5:13–15 to one of the great themes of the letter: freedom. Christ died that we might be free from the law (Gal 5:1). We are free in Christ Jesus, and those seeking to impose circumcision on Gentiles would have us trade our freedom for slavery (Gal 2:4; 5:1). Freedom is not an option for those who desire it but something everyone in Christ has been “called to” (Gal 5:13). To turn to the law is to embrace slavery and to walk contrary to the purpose of God for his people. Instead, we must embrace the freedom purchased for us at the cross (cf. Gal 5:1).

What Freedom Is For (Gal 5:13)

The most pressing and immediate danger in Galatia was the danger of rejecting this freedom.⁴⁰ But Paul was also aware of the danger of abusing this freedom. Perhaps

³⁷At least, it seems more graphic to us who do not have mental images ready to hand of what it means to devote someone to destruction (see comments on Gal 1:8–9 above).

³⁸Similarly, Schreiner, *Galatians*, 327. Perhaps Dunn is right to suggest Deut 23:1 is in the background here. After discussing the significance of circumcision he argues, “More to the point here is the ruling of Deut. xxiii.1 that no eunuch could participate in Israel’s assembly for worship (‘he whose testicles are crushed or whose male member is cut off shall not enter the assembly of the Lord’; cf. Lev. xxi.20; xxii.24). The wish then is a savage one: would that the knife might slip in the hand of those who count circumcision so indispensable to participation in the assembly of the Lord, so that they might find the same rules excluding themselves.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 282-83. Moo, as well as others, notes the similarity of Paul’s statement here to Phil 3:2. Moo, *Galatians*, 338.

³⁹See Prov 26:5; Matt 16:23; Luke 13:32; Acts 13:8–10.

⁴⁰Martyn also uses the language of “freedom from” and “freedom for” that I use in this section and in the section title. J. Louis Martyn, *Galatians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*,

Paul was anticipating an objection from the false teachers in Galatia that if Gentiles were not bound to the law they would live in lawless immorality.⁴¹ Or perhaps Paul anticipated the Galatians themselves heeding his warnings about the law and swinging the pendulum so far the other way that they would live lawlessly.⁴² Whatever may have prompted Paul's words here, he seeks to head off any misunderstanding or misuse of gospel freedom by saying, "Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh" (Gal 5:13). Freedom from the law does not mean freedom to sin. We were not set free from the law because the moral standards of the OT were oppressive and outdated. We were set free because we were not able to keep the law (cf. Gal 3:10), because it enslaved us (cf. Gal 3:23; 4:9–10; 5:1), and because its temporary function came to an end with the coming of Christ (Gal 3:19–25). Freedom from the law is not an excuse to indulge our sinful flesh by reverting to the works of the flesh. Paul even tells the Galatians, after listing some of the "works of the flesh" (Gal 5:19), "that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:21).

So what is our freedom for? Far from the selfish indulgence of the flesh gospel freedom is given to us so that we might "through love serve one another" (Gal 5:13). Freedom is for serving. Freedom is to be used for the good of others. Freedom is for love.⁴³ In one sense my freedom in Christ is not for me but for you. And your freedom in Christ is not for you but for the person sitting next to you. The apostle Peter said

Anchor Bible Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 485.

⁴¹Similarly, Moo suggests that "[Paul] needs to assure the Galatians that the Christian life as [he] understands it is fully able to provide that conformity to the will of God that the agitators were apparently claiming could be found only by submission to the law of God." Moo, *Galatians*, 346.

⁴²As Dunn comments, "Liberty once gained might easily become the occasion for the license of self-indulgence." Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 285.

⁴³Silva rightly comments that "it is quite apparent that Gal. 5:13–14, which warns against the abuse of freedom by emphasizing our obligation to love one another, restates and expands the earlier comment [in Gal 5:6] that faith works through love." Moisés Silva, "Galatians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 810.

something similar, “Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God” (1 Pet 2:16). Freedom from the law is never an excuse for sin. Freedom in Christ is about loving and serving others like Christ loved us.

Love Fulfills the Law (Gal 5:14)

Why is it that we should “through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13) rather than indulge in sin? Paul’s answer is simple and yet surprising (and therefore profound): because love fulfills the law (Gal 5:14; cf. Rom 13:8–10).⁴⁴ Jesus had already made clear in his teaching that the most important commandments were the command to love God and to love our neighbor (Matt 22:37–39). He even laid the ground work for Paul’s claim that “the whole law is fulfilled in one word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14)⁴⁵ when he said, “On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 23:40). Jesus had already taught that the whole law comes down to love. But what is surprising is this: it still seems to matter to Paul that Gentile believers fulfill the law! After everything he has said about the temporary nature of the law covenant and the dire consequences for any Gentile who adopts the law as a means of justification (Gal 5:2–4) how can he now say that the reason we should serve one another in love and not abuse our freedom from the law is because love fulfills the law?

Paul has not forgotten everything he said about the law up to this point;⁴⁶ he is saying something profound about the Christian’s continuing relationship to the law.

⁴⁴Schreiner says “it is astonishing that Paul speaks here of fulfilling the OT law after emphasizing in such detail that believers are no longer under the OT law.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 334. De Boer (*Galatians*) also says, “What makes v. 14 extraordinary is its surprisingly positive appeal to ‘the law,’” (342). Unfortunately, de Boer goes on to argue that “for this reason, ‘the law’ in v. 14 is probably not the Mosaic legislation,” (342) which is highly unlikely.

⁴⁵Silva says about Paul’s citation of Lev 19:18 in Gal 5:14 that “this brief quotation presents no textual problems whatever; in addition, Paul’s use of the OT passage is straightforward, and no one has suggested that the apostle’s handling of the text is inappropriate.” Silva, “Galatians,” 809.

⁴⁶Schreiner says something very similar when he comments, “It is improbable that Paul had forgotten what was said in 5:3. Indeed, Paul has emphasized freedom from the law throughout the letter (even in 5:11!), and hence it is scarcely possible that it has left his consciousness.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 334.

Although believers in Christ are no longer under the law covenant, they still fulfill the law when they live the life of love they have been called to, and this is a good thing.⁴⁷ As suggested above, we have not been set free from the law because its commands were immoral or outdated. As Paul says elsewhere, “the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:12). The problem was not with the law but with us (cf. Gal 3:10, 21). The problem with trying to keep the law is not that the law is bad but that our attempt to keep it undermines the work of Christ and the grace of God (cf. Gal 2:21; 5:4). The fruit of gospel freedom is not only a freedom from the law but also the ability to fulfill the law through the love that flows from faith (cf. Gal 5:6, 13–14).

What counts is “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6) as we saw above. Genuine faith is not fruitless. Nor is it static. It bears fruit in works of love, and those works of love fulfill the law in a way that was not possible so long as we were “under the law” (Gal 3:23) rather than “in Christ” (Gal 5:6). While some might argue that Paul’s gospel of justification by faith apart from works of the law (Gal 2:16) undermined the law and promoted lawlessness, Paul sees things differently.⁴⁸ It is actually those who are justified by faith apart from works of the law who are able to fulfill the law.⁴⁹

Beware the Absence of Love (Gal 5:15)

If the Galatians reject Paul’s counsel of love and abuse their freedom, then they will likely “bite and devour one another” in which case they must “watch out” lest

⁴⁷Dunn says, “What [Paul] is calling for is *not* an abandonment of the law . . . , far less an abandonment of all restraint, but for a different way of ‘doing’ the law.” Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 289. Italics in original. Schreiner summarizes the tension at work by saying, “On the one hand, believers are no longer under the Mosaic law and its prescriptions. On the other hand, believers by the Spirit now fulfill what the law intended.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 337.

⁴⁸Rosner argues similarly that “in Galatians Paul fights on two fronts: against the view that being under the law is essential for justification, and the related position that being under the law is necessary for moral progress and restraining sin.” Brian Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 130.

⁴⁹Similarly, Silva says, “To throw off the yoke of the law for justification leads to its true fulfillment by the power of the Spirit ([Gal] 5:22–23; cf. Rom. 8:4).” Silva, “Galatians,” 810.

they be “consumed by one another” (Gal 5:15).⁵⁰ This is what happens in the absence of love. Freedom without love does not lead to flourishing but to conflict. Freedom used as “an opportunity for the flesh” (Gal 5:13) does not lead to growth but destruction. Instead, the Galatians must “walk by the Spirit” (Gal 5:16) who produces the fruit of love (Gal 5:22).

Conclusion

Those who pursue righteousness “by the law” (Gal 5:4) as the false teachers have urged will forfeit all the benefits of Christ (Gal 5:2). Any Shylock who banks his hope on the law will find that he has lost all he thought he had. But Paul is confident that the Galatians will reject this foolish path and resume their former track (Gal 5:7, 10), turning back to the one “who called [them] in the grace of Christ” (Gal 1:6) and to the one true gospel (see Gal 1:6–7). Even so, they must remember that the freedom granted to them in the gospel is to be exercised in love for others (Gal 5:13–14). What matters in the end is “faith working through love” (Gal 5:6).

⁵⁰Schreiner agrees with others who see in this language a reference to vicious animals when he says, “The Galatians are admonished in colorful terms not to turn into animals that gnaw at and eat one another.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 336.

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ABSTRACT

NOT SLAVES BUT SONS: A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF GALATIANS FOR MINDEN BAPTIST CHURCH IN MINDEN, TEXAS

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This project provides a series of seven sermons expounding the bulk of the book of Galatians from a biblical-theological perspective. The first chapter gives an explanation of what biblical theology is and how it aides our preaching of the Bible. The following seven chapters consist of sermons on major sections of Galatians. Particular attention is given to the doctrine of justification, the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the church, and Paul's use of the OT (especially the Abraham narrative).

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