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NO OTHER GOSPEL:  
DISTINGUISHING FAITH AND WORKS IN PAUL'S LETTER  
TO THE GALATIANS FOR THE STUDENT  
MINISTRY OF BETHEL CHURCH

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A Project  
Presented to  
the Faculty of  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

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by  
Foster James Toft  
May 2023

**APPROVAL SHEET**

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MINISTRY OF BETHEL CHURCH

Foster James Toft

Read and Approved by:

Faculty Supervisor: Brian J. Vickers

Second Reader: Joseph C. Harrod

Defense Date: February 23, 2023

To my beautiful wife, Emily. You model grace and peace to me every day.

To our three amazing sons, Boston, Denver, and Rio. I pray you grow strong in the Lord.

To Verge Student Ministry. I pray you continue to grow strong in the Lord; knowing  
there is no other gospel. We are justified by faith.

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## PREFACE

I praise God for his salvation. From Eden to Revelation, God orchestrated his great plan of redemption for his people. God saves us not through merit, or favoritism, or good deeds, but through faith alone. Because we are saved by faith alone, we are a new creation, set a part for his good works. As Galatians 2:20 states, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” Salvation is more than gaining a “ticket” to heaven. Rather gaining God himself. Paul proclaims that salvation is a complete renewal of the self, an altered life, a shifted reality, an utter recreation. Simply, we are in Christ and are put back into a proper relationship with him through Jesus’s death and resurrection.

It is hard to list the many individuals who have shepherded me and helped me throughout my faith journey. Growing up in a small local church, I cannot emphasize enough how vital Sunday school class was for me. My fifth grade Sunday school teacher, Mr. Allen, created a card game for his students so they learned about the characters of the Bible and memorized Scripture. It was through that process I learned and understood the gospel. I discovered Jesus through wanting to collect print out cards. I am thankful for caring teachers who took the time to invest in me.

I ended up in that class because of my parent’s faithful call to a local church. I am thankful for my parents’ constant encouragement and instruction in the faith I had in my early years. Through their love for Christ, I gained a love for Christ. They inspire me to this day to live for the other person and seek to be pleasing to Christ in everything they do.



I would be nowhere without the tender love and support of my wife, Emily. She sacrificed, encouraged, assisted, and helped me every step of the way. I would not have been able to accomplish this project without her care and support. I am indebted to her. Thank you, Emily, for encouraging me in every step. She has partnered with me in learning about Christ and ministering to others in everything I do.

Lastly, I want to thank my professors at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Dr. Chase, Dr. Vickers, Dr. Hamilton, and Dr. Gentry inspired me to search the depths of God's Word for truth and beauty. They taught me that the good news of Jesus Christ is a beautiful story from which all of Scripture points to and proclaims. Thank you for taking the time to answer every question, every email, and every care. I am indebted to your wisdom and grace.

Foster Toft

Crown Point, Indiana

May 2023

## CHAPTER 1

### HAVING BEGUN BY THE SPIRIT, ARE YOU NOW PERFECTED BY THE FLESH?

The words of Hosea ring true in churches today: “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge” (Hos 4:6).<sup>1</sup> I teach a midweek Bible study for high schoolers at my church. Students come from all sorts of cultures that influence the way they perceive God, let alone salvation. I commonly have conversations with students and their families regarding the relationship between faith in Jesus Christ and the works they perform. Most students know that Jesus died for their sins, but when asked how is someone right with God, students commonly respond with “following the ten commandants and being a good person, right?” Students seem to divorce the doctrine of sanctification with atonement. In other words, students believe they start their spiritual journey by faith, but maintain it by works. Paul encountered the same problem in Galatia (Gal 3:2). New believers heard the gospel and believed it but were deceived into believing that to maintain their righteous status they must adopt aspects of the Mosaic law. Paul proclaims to the Galatians that it is only by faith is someone reconciled to God and it is only by faith one is maintained in proper relationship with God. Paul wrote to the Galatians his beautiful letter to instruct them to know the proper relationship between faith and works in their lives. Galatians is important for churches today because Christians still become deceived over how they are made right with God. I chose to preach through Galatians for these reasons.

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

## **Biblical Theology Definition**

Biblical theology aims to understand the unfolding of progressive revelation in Scripture, viewing each text in its appropriate epoch. Biblical theology studies how God has revealed his truth to humanity.<sup>2</sup> Brian Rosner suggests,

Biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus.<sup>3</sup>

This section unpacks the various elements of Rosner's understanding of biblical theology.

**For the church.** Biblical theology is for all Christians. God did not reveal himself in Scripture primarily written for historians, critics, or academics, but for the edification of the local church. Rosner believes that “the primary location for a theological interpretation of Scripture is the church rather than the university.”<sup>4</sup> Because biblical theology endeavors to benefit the church, its theological interpretation of Scripture must connect to every aspect of the believer's life. Worship, faith, acts of service, and ethics represent the examples of how biblical theology shapes the life of the believer. God does this when Christians humbly come to him and crave to know how God reveals himself to them. God reveals himself through his Word, which biblical theology studies for the theological interpretation in the local church.

**Historical and grammatical exegesis.** Biblical theology requires parameters. To understand how to do biblical theology properly, one must practice historical and grammatical exegesis. Rosner explains, “The task of biblical theology is to present the teaching of the Bible about God and his relations to the world in a way that lets the biblical

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<sup>2</sup> Brian S. Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 3.

<sup>3</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 10.

<sup>4</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 5.

texts set the agenda.”<sup>5</sup> Biblical theology lets the Bible set its exegetical agenda in several ways; notably, through analysis and synthesis.

Analysis seeks to understand a particular text in its own context. For example, if a Christian desires to know more about the book of James, then he should read James and focus on his letter alone first. The Christian should investigate how James himself builds on concepts within his own letter before expanding the study to other texts. Rosner explains, “It is tempting at times to read one passage in light of another before due diligence has been done with the text at hand.”<sup>6</sup> Christians need to approach every text in its exegetical-historical setting. Once that is done, the Christian can move onto synthesis.

Synthesis focuses on how a particular passage fits within a larger body of Scripture. For example, if one desires to know how faith and works pair together in Scripture, then he would read James’s writing paired with Paul. James and Paul harmonize with each other. Though many believe James and Paul might be at odds with each other, biblical theology teaches that the two authors are compatible. Biblical theology uses synthesis for concepts between the Old and New Testament. If the Christian desired to know how the Sabbath functions in the New Testament, then he would synthesize Scripture to see how the two covenants build on the topic of Sabbath.

**Symbols and concepts.** Biblical theology primarily focuses on concepts rather than word studies. Performing a word study is shaky ground to build any type of theology because texts may teach on a concept while ignoring certain words. For example, if a Christian desires to study love in Scripture, then he should see that some passages teach about the concept of love without actually saying the word itself, such as with the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Additionally, the Gospels teach about the local church even though the word *church* does not appear in particular contexts that address local church

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<sup>5</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 5.

<sup>6</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 10.

theology. Rosner explains, “In most cases the concept is in fact far bigger than the words normally used to refer to it, even when the words in question appear frequently.”<sup>7</sup>

Biblical theology also explores how symbols develop across the biblical storyline. Symbols are developed using imagery and patterns that occur in repetition. James Hamilton notes, “If we don’t understand a book’s symbolism, we won’t understand its author’s message. The Bible’s symbolism summarizes and interprets the Bible’s big story.”<sup>8</sup> Symbols are designed to communicate concepts that the biblical authors would intend their readers to understand. Symbols reflect the biblical authors’ perspective on their reality through the use of imagery, types, and patterns. Symbolism then adds layers and texture to the metanarrative of Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

**Metanarrative.** The Bible is filled with different types of literature and themes. God is communicating one unified story within the multi-dimensional facets of Scripture. Rosner explains, “The Bible is about humankind falling into sin, and God’s determination to put things right. It is about salvation, God’s rescue plan for human beings under judgment. It is about the worship of the one true God and the rejection of gods that fail.”<sup>10</sup>

When Christians approach the Bible using grammatical and historical exegesis and symbols and concepts, they can approach every type of literature and theme knowing that it fits within the greater story. For example, many Christians read Proverbs in isolation. At first glance, Proverbs looks like a series of wise sayings and concepts for Christians to implement into their lives. Biblical theology desires to understand how Proverbs fits within the greater story of Scripture. Biblical theology does this through

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<sup>7</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 6.

<sup>8</sup> James M. Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible’s Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 62.

<sup>9</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 64.

<sup>10</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 9.

direct quotes and allusions found across the metanarrative. Proverbs contains many quotes and allusions found all over the Bible. Biblical theology sees Proverbs not as a stand-alone book, but as a key development in God’s progression of Scripture.

**Christocentric focus.** Biblical theology maintains the belief that the Bible focuses on Christ. Biblical theology does not believe that Christ encompasses every passage or is found in unlikely places. Rather, biblical theology notes God’s faithfulness, wisdom, and purpose in the progress of salvation history.<sup>11</sup> The Bible is a book *about* Jesus. Biblical theology believes that Jesus is the center of God’s Word because all Scripture is leading toward him. Rosner explains, “The Messiah is the theme which unites the Old and New Testaments.”<sup>12</sup>

### **The Purpose of Biblical Theology**

Biblical theology uncovers what themes and multi-dimensional stories mean; that is its purpose. Christians need to understand the organic development of the Scriptures so that they can interpret every genre of Scripture in light of the whole metanarrative. Biblical theology explores the worldview of the biblical authors. By exploring the worldview of biblical authors, Christians are practicing the same interpretive perspective the biblical authors had. When Christians do this, they approach Scripture with the same assumptions, questions, presuppositions, truths, and understanding of history.<sup>13</sup> Hamilton says, “Biblical theology employs the interpretive perspective reflected in the way the biblical authors have presented their understanding of earlier Scripture, redemptive history, and the events they are describing, recounting, celebrating, or addressing in narratives,

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<sup>11</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 10.

<sup>12</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2003), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 15.

poems, proverbs, letters, and apocalypses.”<sup>14</sup> Christians need to study biblical theology so that they can interpret every genre and doctrine that God reveals to them. Biblical theology also helps people know God and themselves.<sup>15</sup> When Christians know themselves properly, they will respond to God rightly. Scripture outlines the progressive revelation of God’s promises through a particular agenda. Rosner says, “The task of biblical theology is to present the teaching of the Bible about God and his relations to the world in a way that lets the biblical texts set the agenda.”<sup>16</sup>

Scholars need to follow the agenda of Scripture. When they do, God’s Word becomes applicable because Scripture proclaims God’s promises. God’s promises shape the lives of Christians. The biblical authors looked at God prior working in history and rightly assumed God would act similarly with them as they faced trials. They interpreted their lives by looking at prior revelation and modeled their hermeneutics from God’s character as manifested in the past.<sup>17</sup> In other words, God operates in patterns to show how he typically works.<sup>18</sup> Biblical theology seeks to uncover those patterns so that New Covenant Christians can apply them to their lives.<sup>19</sup>

### **Preaching Biblical Theology: One Unified Story**

Every book of the Bible contributes toward one unified goal. Some books may seem out of place, but they highlight a different aspect of development. The Bible’s plot

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<sup>14</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 15.

<sup>16</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 3-4.

<sup>17</sup> Rosner, “Biblical Theology,” 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 27-30.

contains four developments: creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. The story of Scripture comes from somewhere (creation and fall), is going somewhere (consummation), and will get there in a particular way (redemption). By looking at Scripture this way, the reader will know how the different genres of literature fit together.

Thomas Schreiner highlights how biblical theology produces better preaching when he writes, “Biblical theology focuses on the storyline of Scripture, the unfolding of God’s plan of redemption in history, so that in every passage we preach we consider the place of the text in relationship to the whole storyline of the Bible.”<sup>20</sup> Seeing every text in light of the metanarrative is not optional for the preacher. Schreiner continues, “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.”<sup>21</sup> Preachers must show his people how every passage in Scripture fits into the overall story of God’s redemptive plan.

### **Survey of Literature**

The following section is a brief survey of the literature that most heavily informs this project. Other sources will be consulted as necessary, but these primary ones best aid in a thematic-canonical exposition of Galatians. These resources are divided into three categories. First are commentaries, which give detailed discussions of language, structure, background, history of interpretation, and theology of the book. Each of the works listed are scholarly works, yet some will be more technical than others. Second are whole biblical theologies. The texts here focus on larger portions of Scripture that speak about particular thematic themes. Lastly, monographs and articles provide an in-depth analysis

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

<sup>21</sup> Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 28.



of a topic within a select portion of verses. I will interact with each at different levels and in different capacities through the project.

### **Biblical Commentaries**

To summarize the commentaries for this project, I have broken down the commentaries into three sections: first, grammatical-historical exegesis commentaries;<sup>22</sup> second, thematic commentaries that focus on the unfolding of Scripture;<sup>23</sup> and third, commentaries that focus on the technical/critical setting in the text.<sup>24</sup>

### **Biblical Theologies**

To study how Paul interacts with the Old Testament, resources that examine Galatians and Paul's other letters from a theological analysis need to be examined.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014); Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Dallas: Word, 1990); Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979); Martinus C. de Boer, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Testament Library (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011); Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1982); Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Broadman & Holman, 1994); Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Melrose Park, PA: Jewish Publication Society, 1989); Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, The New American Commentary, vol. 7 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996); David Toshio Tsumura, *The Second Book of Samuel*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2019); David Arthur DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018).

<sup>23</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1982); James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Continuum, 1993).

<sup>24</sup> Ernest DeWitt Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians*, The International Critical Commentary on the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments (repr., Edinburgh: Clark, 1980); Robert Alter, ed., *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2018); J. B. Lightfoot, *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians: With Introductions, Notes and Dissertations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981); Richard N. Longenecker, L. Ann Jervis, and Peter Richardson, eds., *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament 108 (Sheffield: Sheffield, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); Beale, *We Become What We Worship*; Gentry

Furthermore, literature that interacts with themes such as new covenant,<sup>26</sup> people of God,<sup>27</sup> the law,<sup>28</sup> and justification.<sup>29</sup> Lastly, literature that considers Pauline theology more generally.<sup>30</sup>

### Local Context

The gospel is of first importance (1 Cor 15:3). Paul proclaimed these words to his readers which ignite a flame in me to do the same. The students of Bethel church have had ten years of failure in the pulpit. The two previous youth pastors were disciplined from

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and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013); George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993); James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010); Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003); S. Lewis Johnson and John S. Feinberg, eds., *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988); Alexander et al., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*; James M. Todd, *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017); Walter C. Kaiser, *Recovering the Unity of the Bible: One Continuous Story, Plan, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009).

<sup>26</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, "Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perfective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 583 (2015): 445-85.

<sup>27</sup> Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Israel, The People of God, and the Nations," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 451 (2002): 35-57; Marc Cortez, "4 Things the Law Does for God's People (What's the Law For, Part 2)," *Transformed*, May 7, 2012, <https://www.westernseminary.edu/transformedblog/2012/05/07/4-things-the-law-does-for-gods-people-whats-the-law-for-part-2/>.

<sup>28</sup> Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013); Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993); Thomas R. Schreiner, *40 Questions about Christians and Biblical Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010); Douglas J. Moo, "'Law,' 'Works of the Law,' Legalism in Paul," *Westminster Theological Journal* (1983): 73-100. Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanly N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 319-76; Douglas J. Moo, "Paul and the Law in the Last Ten Years," *Journal of Theology* 40 (2009): 287-307.

<sup>29</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul: A Biography* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2018).

the church, leaving dozens of students shepherd-less and wandering. The heartbreak goes deep. As students wander leaderless, they wander with poor understanding of the gospel. Preaching through Galatians to the students of Bethel church will address the nature of the gospel and its practical effects on the students' lives.

Understanding the practical effects of the gospel is important. As previously mentioned, students were taught a skewed version of the gospel. Particularly, a gospel of antinomianism. Students adopted a view of Scripture where God fully accepts them for who they are without God expecting any change or devotion from them. Paul makes it clear in Galatians that any addition to justification by faith, whether it be tradition or law, is a completely different gospel (Gal 1:6-7). Paul at the same time instructs Galatians in how to practically live after they have trusted in the crucified Christ (Gal 2:20; 5:24; 6:14).

Legalism and antinomianism are wrong. Not only do they damn culture, but they also affect the local church greatly. Galatians provides the students of Bethel Church with the biblical literacy needed to know what the true gospel is and how it demands practical action. Paul grounds his argument in biblical theology. He expounds covenant after covenant to show how the gospel and its relation to the law has always had one intended purpose: to glorify Christ. Paul expounds the covenants by teaching the role of the law in the promises of God to Abraham, the function of the Sinai Covenant, and Christ's fulfillment. By preaching Galatians this way, the students of Bethel Church in how the Bible fits together.

### **Sermon Series Outline**

Galatians covers the relationship between law and gospel arguably more than any other New Testament book. Preaching through the book in seven sermons may prove to be difficult, but main lines of Paul's argument can be preached in a single paragraph. With that in mind, I desired to preach eight sermons over the relationship between law and gospel in Galatians. The first sermon highlights how Abraham became justified before

God by faith, while the proceeding seven sermons focus on Galatians and its exposition of the relationship between faith and works. A summary of each section is next.

**Sermon 1: No Other Way  
(Gen 12, 15, 17)**

Paul understood salvation to be by grace through faith—always. The gospel preached to the Galatians is the same in essence that was preached to Abraham centuries ago (Gal 3:8). Because salvation has always been by grace through faith, there truly is no other way to be made right before God. To prove that Paul is right in his assessment of salvation, I examined the Abrahamic Covenant through the Old Testament and to see how the gospel of salvation by grace through faith is evident there. I explored the narrative development from Adam and Eve’s rebellion in the garden to Abraham’s arrival to show the need for the Abrahamic covenant and how it functions as the crutch by which every covenant proceeding should be understood. To understand salvation in the Old Testament is to understand it in the New Testament—always by grace through faith. In other words, no other way.

**Sermon 2: No Other Gospel  
(Gal 1:1-10; 6:11-18)**

Paul bookends his letter with the conflict facing the Christians in Galatia. Dunn argues, “It is in the introduction that indicators were likely flagged up of what Paul considered to be the central importance. Similarly, the final parting was likely to ensure that the central concerns of the letter were recalled in summary.”<sup>31</sup> The opening and closing of Galatians reveal that churches in Galatia were turning to a different gospel (1:6) preached by those who forced them to be circumcised (6:12). Paul curses those who preach to the Galatians a gospel contrary to the one Paul preached to them (1:8)—in this case, a gospel that requires adherence to the mosaic law. The false teachers in Galatia

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<sup>31</sup> Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 19.

required circumcision from gentile Christians because they were seeking to avoid being persecuted for the cross (6:12) and want to make a good showing in the flesh (6:12). Paul proclaims that neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but a new creation (6:15). The false teachers in Galatians were missing the point in the relationship between the law and gospel. What counts is being a new creation in Christ. From this sermon, the students of Bethel church knew how to identify the true gospel.

### **Sermon 3: Justified by Faith (Gal 2:11-21)**

Paul demonstrates that his teaching is in agreement with the apostles in Jerusalem (2:1-10). After that, Paul recounts how he persecuted the church for years before becoming a follower of Christ (2:11). Paul reflects on how he rebuked Peter to his face when he stood condemned for acting hypocritically by pulling away from the Gentile believers and migrating toward his fellow Jews (2:12). Because Peter acted in this way, other Jews joined Peter in what Paul calls hypocrisy and not in step with the truth of the gospel (2:13-14). The truth of the gospel is that a person is not justified by works of the law but by through faith in Jesus (2:16). To suggest that Gentile Christians must live like Jews to be accepted by God is contrary to the gospel of grace through faith. From this sermon the students of Bethel church knew how works of the law contract the message of faith in Jesus.

### **Sermon 4: The Blessed Nations (Gal 3:1-14)**

False teachers taught that Peter's actions were right because he was following the Mosaic law. Paul explains that they did not receive the Spirit through works of the law, but by when they heard the gospel and believed. Paul connects their experience with Abraham when he says Abraham believed and it was counted to him as righteousness (3:6). Because Abraham's belief comes from his faith in God, 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). Gentile inclusion has been preached beforehand to Abraham (Gen 12:3) and comes through Christ who redeemed us from the curse of the law so that in Christ the blessings of Abraham might come to the Gentiles (3:13-14). By doing this, Paul says that those who trust in works of the law, instead of the blessings of Christ, are still under a curse and have not received the blessings of Abraham. From this sermon the students of Bethel Church were able to assess their works in light of the gospel.

### **Sermon 5: Saints and Sinai (Gal 3:15-29)**

Faith in Jesus Christ is the only way to bring the blessings of Abraham. To trust in the law means to remain under its curse. Paul is compelled then to explain the relationship between the law and gospel in God's redemptive plan. Primarily, Paul seeks to teach that the law does not contradict or supersede the promises made to Abraham when he says, "Even with a manmade covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified" (3:15). The law does not replace the Abrahamic covenant but operated as a guardian until Christ came. But now, that faith has come, Christians are no longer under a guardian (3:25). The temporary function of the law has been fulfilled once Christ had come. The promises made to Abraham's offspring are fulfilled in Christ (3:16), and everyone who is in Christ are Abraham's offspring according to the promise (3:29). From this sermon, the students of Bethel church understood how the Old Testament law functions with New Covenant Christians.

### **Sermon 6: From Slave to Son (Gal 4:1-11)**

Paul further clarifies what he means by being an heir to the Abrahamic covenant in Galatians 4:1-11. Paul reminds the Galatians that before they knew Christ, they were slaves. He taught this when he says, "Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods" (4:8). Paul turns to the Jews and says, "But we, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world (4:3). Paul goes on to say that "Christ was born and died so that we might receive adoption as sons (4:5). Paul creativity

connects the Jewish background with the Gentile background. Both are enslaved to formal living outside of Christ. As a result of Christ's work on the cross, Paul proclaims, "You are no longer a slave, but a son" (4:7). Paul reminds the Galatians that for them to turn back to a different gospel would be the same as returning to slavery (4:9-10). From this sermon the students of Bethel church were able to know that the only title that matters is the one given by Christ.

### **Sermon 7: A Tale of Two Women (Gal 4:21-5:1)**

Paul returns to his conversation over the Abrahamic covenant's relationship to the law with a new illustration. Paul focuses on Sarah and Hagar and their two sons. Paul says the story may be interpreted allegorically (4:24). Paul draws from this allegory to show the Galatians that for them to remain under the law corresponds with Hagar's son and they are enslaved (4:24-25). Paul desires to teach the Galatians that they are sons of the free woman, Isaac, which corresponds with born according to the Spirit (4:29). Paul commands the Galatians to cast out the slave woman, that is, the different gospel (4:30), and no longer be under the yoke of slavery (5:1). From this sermon, the students of Bethel church were able to trace the promises that apply to them through Scripture.

### **Conclusion**

Galatians is a mine of instruction for the local church. Paul clarifies the nature and implications of the law and gospel on new covenant believers by showing that persons have always been justified the same way, in both the Old and New Testaments, by faith. Paul demonstrates how the gospel he preached to the Galatians was promised long ago to Abraham and does not change in light of the law. The law does not annul the covenant. Preaching through Galatians with the aid of biblical theology serves the students of Bethel church greatly. I desire for the students of Bethel Church to know how the gospel instructs them to apply the law to their lives properly and to live a life pleasing to Christ, trusting in no other gospel but Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 2  
NO OTHER WAY:  
THE GOSPEL IN THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Paul passionately wrote to the Galatians exhorting them to stick to the original gospel—the only gospel (Gal 1:6). Infiltrators had crept into the churches of Galatia and began teaching that there were additional requirements for someone to have genuine salvation other than faith in Jesus Christ alone. The infiltrators, known as Judaizers, taught that circumcision was required for Christians to have salvation (Gal 5:2-6).<sup>1</sup> Paul proclaimed that this was not in step with the gospel and that salvation has been by grace through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 3:10-14).

Paul wrote that salvation had consistently been the same when he compared Abraham’s belief in God with the Galatians’ current faith in Christ (Gal 3:1-9). The Galatians came to know God by faith but were trying to perfect themselves by the flesh (Gal 3:3). If the mosaic covenant is prioritized, salvation becomes distorted because it is no longer a faith system but merit one. In other words, the Judaizers were teaching the covenants backward.

Salvation has always been by grace through faith from the Abrahamic covenant. Paul makes this clear in Galatians as he links right standing before God with faith (Gal 2:16). Paul says God spoke the gospel in advance to Abraham (Gal 3:8). Paul believes salvation comes only by faith. Faith is not blind or wishful thinking; rather, it is directed toward what God has done through Christ (Gal 5:1). Paul mentions in Galatians

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology Series 52 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 85.



that Abraham's righteousness was given by faith, not by his obedience (Gal 3:6).<sup>2</sup> In Galatians, Paul argues for salvation by grace through faith.<sup>3</sup>

The Abrahamic covenant is necessary for Paul's soteriology.<sup>4</sup> Understanding the Abrahamic covenant and its place in redemptive history provides a foundation for understanding the nature of salvation. The Abrahamic covenant teaches how God plans to restore the relationship between humanity and himself. To appreciate God's covenant with Abraham, an historical study must be done to determine why God entered into a covenant with Abraham in the first place. An examination Adam and Eve's rebellion in the garden will show how humanity became alienated from God and how it influences the Abrahamic covenant. Once the origin of sin in humanity is seen, an historical study of humanity leading up to Abraham will be done. Genesis 4-11 shows how humanity has become more sinful and why God alone can restore the broken relationship.

God progressively relays the stipulations of the covenant with Abraham over the course of three chapters. Genesis 12:1-3, 15:1-21, and 17:1-17 outline the covenant and how it should be understood. Each chapter will be examined in the order they come as well as reflect on Abraham's journeys between the texts. Abraham's life between the covenantal developments suggests the reasons for God's promises and Abraham's response to those promises.

Once humanity's alienation is discovered and how the Abrahamic covenant responds to it, Paul's use of the Abrahamic covenant in his soteriology will be understood. For Paul, Christ fulfills the Abrahamic covenant, and salvation comes by grace through faith.

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<sup>2</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 452.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 84.

<sup>4</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 45 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 208.

## From Creation to Chaos

God's created order went into chaos after humanity rebelled. Humanity is alienated from God because they listened to the serpent and doubted God's promises. The beginning chapters of Genesis anticipate Abraham's arrival because the plot is set. Humanity needs salvation and only God can make it happen. God promised that an offspring would crush the serpent; providing the soil for the gospel message.<sup>5</sup>

### United to Alienated

Paradise flees at humanity's first bite. Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent by listening to him contradict God, questioning God's goodness, and ultimately believing the lie that they could be like God (Gen 3:1-7). Because Adam and Eve obeyed the serpent, God pronounced judgment on all guilty parties by explaining the consequences of their choices (Gen 3:14-19). The man and the woman are given specific judgements that effect them personally.<sup>6</sup> Men will have hard labor and will return to dust (Gen 3:17-19), while women will have increased pain in childbirth as well as desires to rule their husbands (Gen 3:16). Furthermore, because Adam and Eve rebelled, they will be alienated from God's presence (Gen 3:23-24).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> L. Michael Morales writes,

Yahweh declares that he will put hostility between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman and that the woman's seed will crush the head of the serpent even as the serpent bruises his heel (Genesis 3:15), a prophecy that establishes a major facet of God's agenda for human history. Although the divinely established enmity applies to communities broadly, the final battle has a particular focus: between a singular seed of the woman—*he* will crush the serpent's head and *his* heel will be bruised—and the serpent itself. Within the community of his people, Yahweh's word of judgment to the serpent would bud into a hope that the Messiah would come and slay the dragon, conquering Satan definitively. Indeed, Yahweh God's victory at creation, relived, as it were, in his defeat of Pharaoh in the historical exodus, adumbrates the final conquest of the forces of darkness and death. (L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020], 63)

<sup>6</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 76.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 67.

God cursed the serpent by being placed below all other livestock but given an additional curse that contributes to redemptive history. The serpent's offspring and the woman's offspring will have enmity ending with the woman's offspring crushing the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). In this way, Genesis begins to use offspring as an important theme in the book. The promised offspring will defeat the serpent. Through judgment, God will bring salvation. As John Goldingay notes, "Adam and Eve's disobedience affected their relationship with God and it cut them off from the garden, but it did not cut them off from God."<sup>8</sup> There will be an offspring of the woman who will defeat the serpent and restore humanity to God.<sup>9</sup>

### **God Pours Out Grace**

While humanity rebelled, God showed grace to Adam and Eve. He clothes their nakedness after they sinned (Gen 3:21). He promises an offspring that will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15). They continue to live even though they deserved to die immediately (Gen 2:17).<sup>10</sup> Adam and Eve will die someday, but that too is a way God shows grace. God did not desire for Adam and Eve to continue living as sinners forever so he guarded the tree of life (Gen 3:22). If Adam and Eve ate from the tree of life in their fallen state, they would continually live as sinners. God shows grace even within the judgment of Adam and Eve.<sup>11</sup> By withholding the tree of life from them, Adam and Eve's ability to experience life again will have to come through God's grace, not their effort.

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<sup>8</sup> John Goldingay, quoted in Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 23 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 51.

<sup>9</sup> Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Adam and Eve did die spiritually the moment they ate of the tree.

<sup>11</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 78.

If humanity's punishment is alienation from God's presence, then salvation is humanity being restored to God's presence.<sup>12</sup> Adam and Eve, as well as their descendants, need a proper relationship with God now that they have broken God's covenant in the garden.<sup>13</sup> God's purpose for humanity will not be interrupted by sin but will overcome it with grace.

### **Grace Meets Faith**

Adam and Eve responded to God's grace with faith.<sup>14</sup> Adam and Eve's faith is expressed in two primary ways. First, Adam names his wife *Eve*.<sup>15</sup> Eve translates to "mother of all the living" (Gen 3:20). Adam named Eve after God told them they would live under the curse, believing that God would not kill them immediately.<sup>16</sup> Second, Eve communicates faith in God at the birth of Cain (Gen 4:1). Faith is realized here because Eve says she conceived with the Lord's help (Gen 4:1).<sup>17</sup> Eve's recognition of Cain as a male offspring by the means of the Lord's help reminds readers of God's promise in Genesis 3:15. Eve had faith that God would provide offspring, and he did.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 44.

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 69.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton explains, "In the announcement of judgement, Adam and Eve hear that they will have a seed, he (note the masculine singular pronoun) will crush the head of the serpent. It is apparently on the basis of this hope adam names his wife Eve 'because she was the mother of all living' (Gen 3:20). Adam and Eve are judged, and in the judgement they hear a word of promise, which as Eve's name indicates, Adam believes." Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 79.

<sup>17</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 69.

<sup>18</sup> Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles*, 20.

Adam and Eve failed to believe God in the garden. The remedy for their unbelief is to have faith in God.<sup>19</sup> Genesis 3 begins the conversation of salvation by grace through faith by focusing on God's grace toward Adam and Eve and their response to him. Adam and Eve did not seek restoration with God. They fled from him after they sinned (Gen 3:8-13). God showed grace despite their response. God's grace compelled Adam and Eve to respond in faith.

### **Humanity Spiraling and God's Plan**

The Abrahamic covenant restores the broken relationship between man and God. It is a solution to humanity's rebellion against him. But before Abraham, Genesis 4-11 shows the downward spiral of humanity. Humanity still sins against God, it did not stop in the garden. After judgment comes through the flood, God remains faithful by keeping the offspring of the woman's line alive through Noah (Gen 6:9).<sup>20</sup> Noah emerged from the ark, became drunk, and failed as God's representative, just as Adam did.<sup>21</sup> After Noah, history shows that the woman's offspring live in an ever-growing sin-cursed world. Humanity unified together to make their name great (Gen 11:4). This attempt is significant because chapters 4-11 show that humanity strived to make their name great by

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<sup>19</sup> G. K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2008), 135.

<sup>20</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 80.

<sup>21</sup> Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J Wellum state,

The covenant with Noah "affirms" the divine image. This is to be discussed next. As we shall see, it entails a covenant relationship between God and humans on the one hand and between humans and creation on the other. The human community must express obedient sonship in faithful, loyal love to the creator God and must rule over the creation with humble servanthood and responsible stewardship. Worship is a priority in achieving these purposes. The narratives of Genesis 6-8 begin by depicting Noah as an obedient son and steward of animal life on the earth. He also offers significant worship in a sacrifice that appeases the anger of the Lord and turns away further judgment. Nonetheless, like the first Adam, he ends up as a disobedient son whose nakedness reveals shame rather than full integrity. (Peter John Gentry, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018], 174)

their means by creating their mountain sanctuary to God.<sup>22</sup> The tower of Babel symbolizes humanity's desire to reach the heavens and make their name equal to God's.<sup>23</sup>

As the woman's offspring is traced through Genesis, the line makes an intentional stop at Abram the son of Terah (Gen 11:27-32). It is intentional because it ends with Abram and disrupts the flow of previous genealogies by highlighting Sarai's barrenness. N. T Wright puts Abram's appearance in Genesis this way: "Abraham emerges within the structure of Genesis as the answer to the plight of all humankind. The line of disaster and of the 'curse,' from Adam, through Cain, through the flood to Babel, begins to be reversed when God calls Abram and says, 'In you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.'"<sup>24</sup> Abram arrives on the scene as the instrument God will use to redeem humanity as well as to be an example of how someone will be made great—by God's power alone. God continues to be gracious toward sinful humanity. Sin still exists, but faith in God's Word is present and his promised offspring still lives.

### **Genesis 12:1-3—The Covenant Established**

Genesis 12:1-3 communicates that the covenant between God and humanity is established.<sup>25</sup> God is beginning the solution to humanity's alienation from himself and providing a new creation through Abram.<sup>26</sup> God calls for Abram to leave his country, home, and family and go to a land that he will show him (Gen 12:1). Abram obeyed God and departed with his family (Gen 12:4a).

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<sup>22</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 15.

<sup>23</sup> Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 55.

<sup>24</sup> N. T. Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 262.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Thielman, *The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 35-36.

<sup>26</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 225.

## **Abram's Name Made Great**

God tells Abram that his name will be made great; not by his means but by God's divine intervention (Gen 12:2). Abram's ancestors were Enoch, who walked with God (Gen 5:22), and Noah, who was righteous and blameless in his generation (Gen 6:8-9), but no status or acclaims were given to Abram. Brian Vickers notes, "Abraham's only claim is that the Lord chose to call him from the line of Shem and bring him into special relationship through which the Lord would save the world."<sup>27</sup> Because Abram has nothing to boast in regarding God's divine action, readers can confidently observe that Abram's call was by grace through faith.

God expounds on Abram's name being great by pronouncing five types of blessings (Gen 12:2-3).<sup>28</sup> God's five blessings contrast with the five curses he gave humanity in chapters 3-11 (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). Sin's effect in chapters 3-11 caused loss of freedom and power (Gen 3:14), division between humans and soil (Gen 3:17), estranged human relationships and wandering (Gen 4:11), and brought shame on humanity through wickedness (Gen 9:25).<sup>29</sup> The Lord pronounces a reversal on the curses by a five-fold blessing. Peter Gentry notes, "The fivefold repetition of the word blessings in Genesis 12:1-3 indicates that the call of Abram will change the situation: broken relationships are to be potentially and progressively repaired. The ruptured relationship that had developed between man and God and man and man are to be eventually restored."<sup>30</sup> God brought Abram out of chaos into order (Gen 12:1). God kept the promised seed alive (Gen 11:10-32). God promises to bless all the families of the world through a promised seed (Gen 12:3).

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<sup>27</sup> Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Morales, *Exodus Old and New*, 20.

<sup>29</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 242.

<sup>30</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 242.

Genesis 12:3 supports an understanding of salvation by grace through faith because God promises to create a distinct nation from Abram's offspring. This nation represents a new people group who will occupy land where the curses described in chapters 3-11 are undone. It is important to note that this great nation is not ethnic-specific but instead produced by faith (Gen 12:3). The great nation God is formulating will commune in his presence.<sup>31</sup> Paul explains that those who place their faith in Jesus are children of Abraham because they too have faith (Gal 3:7-9).<sup>32</sup>

God promised judgment in Genesis 3, while in Genesis 12 he promises salvation.<sup>33</sup> Genesis 12:1-3 reveals a reversal of the curses given in chapters 3-11, teaching salvation by grace through faith.<sup>34</sup> Scripture later teaches that Abram's obedience to leave his country, home, and family was caused by his faith in God's Word (Heb 11:8).

God alone is directing the steps for humanity to come back into his presence and guiding those who walk by faith toward redemption.<sup>35</sup> The land Abram is promised is not disclosed yet, but hints are found that it represents a new Eden (Gen 3:8; Lev 26:11-12; Deut 23:15).<sup>36</sup> This is supported by the way Israel is later described as they set up

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<sup>31</sup> William R. Osborne, *Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life in the Presence of God*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 64.

<sup>32</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 82.

<sup>33</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 82.

<sup>34</sup> John H. Walton, *Genesis*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 393.

<sup>35</sup> Keith H. Essex writes,

This covenant promises Abraham personal, national, and universal blessings. Because He based this covenant on Himself alone, the final fulfillment of the promises to Abraham has no human conditions. However, the faithful obedience of man determines the participants in and timing of its final fulfillment. Although Abraham experienced personal blessings from the LORD in the past and some Israelites and Gentiles enjoy spiritual blessings at present, the full and final fulfillment of the covenant, particularly the "great nation" promises, await the future coming of Jesus Christ. (Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *The Masters Seminary Journal* 10, no. 2 [1999]: 212)

<sup>36</sup> L. Michael Morales explains, "The progress toward inheriting Caanon is nothing less than a groping toward the Edenic presence of God. While the chronological movement from Abraham to the sons of Jacob will be characterized by a gradual distancing from the experience of God's presence, yet Abram's



camp in the promised land (Gen 2:8-10; Num 24:5-6).<sup>37</sup> God will walk with his people and all the curses described in Genesis 3 will be mended through the promised seed of Adam.<sup>38</sup> Abram will father a new nation where its residents will walk uprightly by the power of God alone.

Genesis 12 presents the solution to the catastrophes of Genesis 3-11. Humanity desired to be the center of the world. This desire was met with judgment as God scattered humanity across the globe (Gen 11:9).<sup>39</sup> Genesis 12 presents God as the center of the universe by outlining a political structure founded on his Word, not humanity's achievement.<sup>40</sup> For Paul, God's people occupy God's place under God's rule through Jesus (Gal 4:1-7). The promises of Genesis 12 find their climax in Paul's declaration of the freedom found in Christ's righteousness (Gal 5:1-2). The remedy was given in Eden, promised to Abram but fulfilled in Christ (Gal 3:23-29).

### **Genesis 15:1-21—The Covenant Declared**

God promised Abram that humanity would experience blessings through his offspring.<sup>41</sup> Genesis 15 presents Abram waiting for God to fulfill the promise of offspring given in chapter 12. Since then, Abram has defeated five different kings in the east to deliver his nephew, Lot, out of their grasp (Gen 14:13-16). Abram took nothing from them even though it was offered. Abram believed his wealth would come from the Lord.

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initial movement toward the Promised land—westward from Ur—is characterized as an incipient return to Eden.” L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 37 (Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2015), 69.

<sup>37</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 81.

<sup>38</sup> Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 83.

<sup>39</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 244.

<sup>40</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 244.

<sup>41</sup> Jason S. DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 583 (2015): 445-85.

That is why he rejects the King of Sodom's gifts (Gen 14:20-24).<sup>42</sup> Abram did not want his wealth to come from earthly powers, but from God (Gen 14:22).

After Abram defeated the five kings of the east, God came to Abram in a vision and reminded him of the promises he made in the past (Gen 15:1).<sup>43</sup> God begins his reminder by communicating that he will be Abram's shield and will reward him (Gen 15:2). God as Abram's shield reminds readers that God will protect Abram from foreign powers that could arise again.<sup>44</sup> Abram had these past invaders in mind since God is approaching Abram soon after he returned from battle (Gen 15:1).

### **Hopeful Expectation**

Abram responds to God's divine protection and great reward with a question: "What will you give me?" (Gen 15:2). This question shows Abram's desire to know how God's promises will ultimately come to pass if he does not have a biological son.<sup>45</sup> Abram is only aware of his present reality in that he assumes Eliezer may be the promised seed (Gen 15:1-4). God mentions two things here that give readers insight regarding soteriology in the Abrahamic covenant. First, Abram's offspring will be his very own son (Gen 15:3-4). Second, God connects his literal son to a collective group who will make up a nation residing in a promised land (Gen 15:5-6). God's promise to Abram that his offspring will be like the dust of the earth corresponds with God's original ordinance in the garden to

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<sup>42</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 249.

<sup>43</sup> Osborne, *Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life*, 62.

<sup>44</sup> Gentry and Wellum note, "God commands Abram not to be afraid. This is backed up by two statements: (1) God will protect him, and (2) God will reward him. Both the command and the promises relate directly to the events of chapter 14. Will the 'Four Big Bad Guys from the east' be back next year and take vengeance on Abram? Certainly, the fear of reprisal is both real and significant." Gentry, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 243.

<sup>45</sup> Walton, *Genesis*, 420.

Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28).<sup>46</sup> Abram's offspring will populate the earth with descendants who will inherit the promised land (Gen 15:17-21).<sup>47</sup>

Genesis 15 brings to focus the eternal tie between genealogy and geography.<sup>48</sup> God's people will occupy God's presence. God makes this clear by reminding Abram that he will have a son.<sup>49</sup> The literal son described in Genesis 15:4 is the same promised in Genesis 3:15 with added dimension.<sup>50</sup> The offspring mentioned in Genesis 3:15 is both an individual who defeats the serpent and a collective group who do the same.<sup>51</sup>

### **Declared Righteous by Faith**

After God reminds Abram of his promised son and innumerable offspring, the text says Abram believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). This passage is vital for the conversation of salvation by grace through faith. The

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<sup>46</sup> Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 166-67.

<sup>47</sup> K. A. Matthews notes,

The promise of a "great nation" (12:2) implied a large population, but Sarah was barren (11:30). The question of an heir for Abraham and Sarah is the major tension in the Abraham story. Although the prospects for the promise's fulfillment were dim, Abraham believed God and responded obediently (15:6; also 12:4; 22:16-17). A decade later Isaac was born to Sarah as the appointed heir of the blessing (21:12b). The creation ordinance called for humanity to increase in number (1:28; 9:1, 7), and in the patriarchal promises God said that Abraham's descendants would flourish as the "dust of the earth" (13:16; 22:17; 28:14; 32:12) and the "stars of the sky" (15:5; 22:17; 26:4). Genesis anticipated the founding of Israel as the future realization of this promise (Exod 1:7; 3:15-17; 6:2-8; 32:13; Deut 1:10; 10:22)." K. A. Matthews, "Genesis," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000], 143)

<sup>48</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 79.

<sup>49</sup> Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 34 (Nottingham, England: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 71.

<sup>50</sup> Hamilton explains,

The seed conflict that runs through Genesis and into the rest of the Bible takes both an individual and collective shape. The individuals in the line of promise are the seed of the woman, and at points an individual seed of the woman is opposed by an individual seed of the serpent. There are also instances where the collective seed of the woman, the righteous remnant, is opposed by the collective seed of the serpent. (Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 82)

<sup>51</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 83.

text supports this in two ways. First, Abram believed in God (Gen 15:6a). Fundamental for a proper relationship with God is the belief God is whom he says he is. Abram's belief here stems from a life of trust in God's character.<sup>52</sup> When God counted Abram righteous, it shows that God views him as someone who embodies God's righteous standard.<sup>53</sup> God has not given Abram a biological son nor has he given him the promised land. He has only told Abram what he will. Abram took God at his word and lived by it (Gen 14:1-16). As Brandon Crowe notes, "Abram's faith thus looked outside of himself to the God who provides the righteousness needed for salvation."<sup>54</sup> Second, God counted Abram's belief as righteousness (Gen 15:6b). Faith is not a work, but instead a belief that God will work. Abram is not passive toward God, but dependent on God. Abram did not become righteous but was seen as righteous.<sup>55</sup> God's declaration of Abram's righteousness is solely based on Abram's belief in God's word.<sup>56</sup>

### **Righteousness Promised to Many**

After God showed Abram the stars, a visible representation of his future descendants, and counted Abram righteous for his faith, God reminds Abram of who he is.<sup>57</sup> God says, "I am the LORD who brought you out from Ur of the Chaldeans to give you this land to possess" (Gen 15:7). Vickers notes,

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<sup>52</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 47.

<sup>53</sup> Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 58.

<sup>54</sup> Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 33.

<sup>55</sup> Vickers states, "Abraham's faith is counted to him as something it inherently is not, righteousness. Reading the words together this way means that it is not simply because one can find examples of righteousness used in a forensic or legal sense in the Old Testament, but because when paired with counted and faith, righteousness here refers to a judgement and declaration about Abraham's position before God." Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 60.

<sup>56</sup> Crowe, *The Path of Faith*, 33.

<sup>57</sup> Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 61.

Whatever God has or will promise Abraham for the future is grounded in God's action in the past. It is worth noting that this statement comes just one verse after the first mention of Abraham's faith; this marks the basic pattern of faith expressed in the rest of the Bible. Biblical faith in God and his promises is hope for the future based on God's work in the past that transforms life in the present. Faith is always an intersection of past, present, and future.<sup>58</sup>

As God responds to Abram's faith, Abram asks, "How will I know I will inherit the land?" (Gen 15:8). This question does not mean that Abram is responding faithlessly; rather, he is responding out of faith.<sup>59</sup> Abram's question embodies faith because he saw the realities of heaven in the stars but wondered how this would be possible on earth. Abram's question is a response to God's incredible promise. In other words, in Abram's bewilderment, he desires to know how eternal realities can be realized in tangible ways.<sup>60</sup>

### **Guaranteed Promises**

God instructs Abram to bring different animals to sacrifice (Gen 15:9). God continues to instruct Abram to cut the animals in half except the birds and lay each half over against each other (Gen 15:10). This strange ritual is a visual display to show what will happen to the figure who does not keep his end of the covenant (Jer 34:18). Whoever passes through the carved-up animals commits to uphold the stipulations of the covenant. Interestingly, Abram does not walk through the animals; God does. The smoking pot and fire torch represent God's presence and signify his action in the ritual. Later in Scripture, the reader again sees God's presence represented through the smoking pot and fire torch. God first appeared to Moses in a burning bush (Exod 3:2). God appeared to Israel as a pillar of fire and cloud (Exod 13:21). Before Sinai, God's presence was seen as smoke and fire (Exod 19:18). The book of Genesis would have been given to Israel after they had experienced God manifest himself in these two elements already. Thus, it is completely valid to interpret the smoking pot and fire as God's presence in Genesis 15 since God had

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<sup>58</sup> Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 61.

<sup>59</sup> Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 79.

<sup>60</sup> Matthews, "Genesis," 144.

made those pictures of his presence known to Israel throughout history. As the smoking pot and fire torch appear, God puts Abram into a deep sleep. In a vision, God instructs Abram that his offspring will inherit the promised land (Gen 15:17-21).<sup>61</sup>

God promised to bring all his promises to fruition by putting his own life on the line.<sup>62</sup> As noted, later Scripture reveals that walking between the two animals communicates the punishment due if someone breaks the covenant. What is remarkable about Genesis 15 is that only God walks through the carved-up animals. The entire covenant is then dependent upon God's ability to keep it. The covenant is not dependent on Abram's obedience but on God's power. This fits well with the previous verses because God can declare Abram righteous. After all, Abram looked outside of himself and trusted God's Word. Thus, Abram's faith can be described as Abram recognizing that God is capable and trustworthy to bring all he had promised to fruition because God had revealed himself to him personally.

Abram had assurance that God would bring all that he hoped for to fruition because God put his life on the line when promising to keep his covenant. Genesis 15:6-21 shows that Abram's righteousness was counted to him solely because of God's word. Abram did not obey to earn righteousness; instead, God graciously counted it to him based on provision to keep his end of the covenant. Thus, God puts redemption upon himself to bring humanity back to his presence.

### **Genesis 17:1-27—The Covenant Confirmed**

In Genesis 17:1, Abram is ninety-nine years old. It has been twenty-five years since God first spoke with him in Genesis 12:1-3, and Abram does not have a biological son. Abram and his wife, Sarai, grew restless and tried to bring about God's promises through their efforts. Sarai suggests that Abram sleep with her maidservant, Hagar, and

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<sup>61</sup> Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 251.

<sup>62</sup> Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 86.

through her, she would have a son for Abram (Gen 16:2). Abram listened to the voice of his wife, slept with Hagar, and had a son named Ishmael. Hagar looks at Sarai with contempt since she is carrying the child not conceived in faith but in sin. The curses of Genesis 3 are brought to light as Sarai regrets her decision and immediately blames Abram for his actions (Gen 16:5). Abram and Sarai sought to bring the fulfillment of God's promises by their means and instead reaped hardship and bitterness.<sup>63</sup> God responds to Abram's sin by reminding him of his promise.<sup>64</sup> God will give Abram a child by his power alone.

### **Faith Before Obedience**

After God has already counted Abram righteous, he commands Abram to walk before him blamelessly. Is God requiring Abram to be perfect for the covenant to happen? No, God pledged himself that the covenant will happen when he walked between the animals (Gen 15:17). God is commanding Abram to walk in such a way that reflects his belief in God's character. Thomas Schreiner says that Genesis 17 "functions as a concrete reminder to Abraham that his children were the result of the grace of God, not Abraham's sexual virility. Furthermore, the rite signified that all of Israel was consecrated to God."<sup>65</sup> God declares Abram righteous because he had faith, not because he was morally upright himself.

### **From Son to Nations**

God goes on to further elucidate his covenant with Abram by revealing to him the magnitude of his offspring (Gen 17:4). God changes Abram's name to Abraham, communicating that he will not solely be a father of one nation, but many nations. The

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<sup>63</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 109.

<sup>64</sup> Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 64.

<sup>65</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 19.

people of God will encompass the globe. Abraham's singular seed will mediate blessings to all the nations.<sup>66</sup> Creation overtones are in Abraham's new name. When God created Adam and Eve, he instructed them to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:22). Here, God promises Abraham that he "will make Abraham exceedingly fruitful" (Gen 17:6). God is establishing a covenant by his power by the means of grace.<sup>67</sup> It is not through Abraham's own ability to produce offspring that will make up the people of God; instead, only God can make a righteous people.

Furthermore, God instructs Abraham that kings will come from him. God's reign will be manifested through Abraham's global domination.<sup>68</sup> Abraham's influence will expand around the globe through his literal son and the nations of the world will identify with him (Gen 17:8). God will reign with his people in a place where humanity properly walks with God (Gen 17:12-14).<sup>69</sup> It is important to note that Abraham's offspring do not have to be descended from Abraham to identify with him (Gen 17:11-13). God says that Abraham's biological sons and foreigners are united as his offspring if they walk by faith (Gen 17:12-14). Inclusion with Abraham does not come through the outward practice of genealogy. To be an offspring of Abraham in Genesis 17 is to share in the faith that God will accomplish his promises by his power (Gal 3:7). God will act through a literal son of Abraham but will unite the nations to him by faith.<sup>70</sup>

### **Circumcision in Context**

God commands Abraham to circumcise his offspring in obedience. Many misunderstandings of salvation, particularly by grace through faith, have risen from a

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<sup>66</sup> Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land*, 71.

<sup>67</sup> Wright, *Christian Origins and the Question of God*, 263.

<sup>68</sup> Patrick Schreiner, *The Kingdom of God and the Glory of the Cross*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 35-36.

<sup>69</sup> Thielman, *The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture*, 100.

<sup>70</sup> Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles*, 21.



skewed understanding of God's instruction of circumcision. To that end, an examination of circumcision must be done to see why circumcision was given as a sign of the covenant and why God requires all his followers to be circumcised.

First, the very nature of circumcision as a symbol can be tied to the promise of a future seed. As an act of faith, Abraham must take a knife to the very member of his body that produces seed, to show he believes God will bring about his promise.<sup>71</sup> As Karl Deenick notes, "The sign was not only a reminder of the promise but also a reminder that the promise would become a reality through the promised seed."<sup>72</sup>

Second, circumcision does not mean that one identifies with the promised seed. It signifies that one is a recipient of the blessings of the covenant with the seed. This is evident in God's covenantal lineage through Isaac and not Ishmael. Both sons received the sign of circumcision, but only one was given the promise with it. Both experienced blessings, but only one experienced God's presence. Thus, all covenant members of God are circumcised, but not all who are circumcised are covenant members.<sup>73</sup>

Why does God require circumcision then? Is God contradicting himself by requiring outward practice? I believe circumcision teaches two fundamental ideas. First, faith is not a prerequisite to receiving circumcision. Abraham circumcising himself and his offspring surely is an act of faith but receiving circumcision does not communicate the recipient has faith. Circumcision reflects outward obedience but does not show perfect obedience. The Old Testament shows this by explaining that God's people ultimately need circumcised hearts, not bodies (Deut 10:16, 30:6). To have a circumcised heart means for an individual to be perfectly clean from within (Lev 26:40-42). The New Testament makes this abundantly clear when it says circumcision done by human hands cannot perfect the actions of people (Col 2:11).

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<sup>71</sup> Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 48.

<sup>72</sup> Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 49.

<sup>73</sup> Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 43.

Genesis 17:18-21 solidifies that circumcision does not make one a member of the covenant because God declares Isaac as the recipient of the covenant, not Ishmael (Gen 17:19). Isaac was brought by faith, not Ishmael. Genesis presents Isaac as the literal son who will come from Abraham, as well as the manifestation of faith because he came by God's power alone. God will have one people who will receive the covenant by faith and be the instruments God uses to bring his people back to his presence.<sup>74</sup> That is why God promises Israel that He will circumcise their hearts (Deut 30:6). Circumcised hearts shows that people have been completely changed because of their faith (Ezek 36:22-37). Thus, circumcision shows outward obedience but does not ultimately show inward surrender.

Second, those who walk by faith walk in obedience to God. God can command circumcision as a part of this covenant because genuine faith in God's promises produces obedience to walk in his promises. If someone does not receive circumcision in the old covenant, they are cut off from the covenant because they communicate through their actions that they are not trusting in God's promises (Gen 17:14). If salvation is gained by outward practice, then God did not have to walk through the butchered animals (Gen 15:12-21). If outward practice is glorified more than inward dependence, then Abraham's offspring, Jesus Christ, accomplished nothing. Thus, circumcision does not teach that works are required for salvation. Rather, works reflect the salvation one already possesses.

God pledged by himself to accomplish all he said he would, he is commanding Abraham to outwardly obey him to maintain the covenant with him. This implies that the covenant made between God and Abraham is conditional and unconditional in nature.

Schreiner writes,

Ultimately, the covenant will be fulfilled. God himself pledges that it will be so. The unconditionality of the covenant does not remove the need for human obedience. Any person who fails to obey will not enjoy the covenant blessings, and hence the demand for obedience remains in all its starkness. Nevertheless, the grace of God, not the

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<sup>74</sup> Matthews, "Genesis," 144.

obedience of human beings, remains central, for God will see to it that the covenantal demands are fulfilled by his grace.<sup>75</sup>

The covenant is unconditionally based on God's provision to make it happen, but it is conditional whether the individual will experience it.<sup>76</sup> God is sovereign and will provide everything humanity needs and will personally make the covenant come to pass despite Abram and others' shortcomings. Humanity is responsible to walk in obedience, but obedience as the text teaches is faith produced and sustained. Genuine faith is always paired with outward obedience.

God ends his conversation with Abraham by declaring Isaac as the recipient of the covenant, not Ishmael (Gen 17:19). Genesis 17:18-21 solidifies that circumcision does not make one a member of the covenant, faith does. Faith makes one a member of the covenant because Isaac is the offspring promised through faith. Genesis presents Isaac as the literal son who will come from Abraham, as well as the manifestation of faith because he came by God's power alone. God promised Abraham that a singular seed would become a global priesthood of saints. The nations that will come from Abraham truly are one people of God because they walk by faith.<sup>77</sup> God will have one people who will receive the covenant by faith and be the instruments God uses to bring his people back to his presence.

### **Salvation by Grace through Faith**

Genesis 12-17 teaches that God alone will bring his people back to his presence. Humanity's biggest problem is that they are alienated from God. Salvation is restoration to God's presence. Jesus Christ bridges the gap between humanity and God by perfectly walking in obedience and being perfectly righteous. Jesus Christ is the promised seed of Abraham. All ethnicities are Abraham's children when they believe in faith (Gal 3:29).

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<sup>75</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 19.

<sup>76</sup> Vickers writes, "God is going to keep his word, but Abraham and his children must show themselves to be God's people. It appears that for Abraham and his children, obedience is necessary part of gaining the inheritance that God promises." Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 65.

<sup>77</sup> Matthews, "Genesis," 144.

The Abrahamic covenant teaches that unity with God cannot be accomplished by human effort, only through God's power. When humanity tries to bring about God's promises on their own, they receive judgment for salvation.<sup>78</sup>

The rest of the Bible is dependent upon a proper understanding of the Abrahamic Covenant. If Abraham was counted righteous because of his obedience to God, then Paul would be wrong in his assessment of justification by faith (Gal 2:15-21).<sup>79</sup> A simple reading of the Abrahamic narrative teaches that covenantal order matters. The sequence in which God promises and interacts with Abraham matters. Simply put, because Genesis 15 comes before Genesis 17 chronologically and contextually, Paul can confidently say that salvation from its very genesis was by grace through faith.

### **The Gospel Preached to Abraham**

Paul confidently says that God preached the gospel to Abraham (Gal 3:8). This idea of gospel is not to be understood as Jesus's death and resurrection; rather, what the means of true restoration looks like. The Galatians did not come to know Christ through works, but hearing of faith (Gal 3:2-5). Abraham did not earn righteousness through works, but hearing of faith. The gospel preached in advance to Abraham is responding to God's Word by faith. Thus, the means by which someone is justified before God is the same regardless of which point in history one is located. Paul proclaims the Galatians are in a better position redemptively because they saw Jesus crucified (Gal 3:1). Nevertheless, Salvation has always been by grace through faith because both parties, Abraham and the Galatians, had to look outside of themselves for salvation. For Abraham, it was the belief that God would provide offspring. For the Galatians, it was Christ is that offspring.

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<sup>78</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 89.

<sup>79</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 92.

## Conclusion

Paul continues to draw out why salvation by grace through faith is important in his letter to the Galatians. Correct soteriology is needed to know what salvation is. One cannot add to it or subtract from it. Paul can trace the fulfillment of the promised seed to Christ because he knows the Abrahamic covenant. Jesus is the seed from whom all the nations of the earth are blessed. Jesus is the seed who became the king of kings. Jesus is the seed from whom all God's people are led back to his presence. Jesus is the seed from whom salvation rests, just as Paul reminded the Galatians. The next chapter demonstrates how Paul compares the Abrahamic covenant to the Mosaic covenant to show that the two fit together in redemptive history. Paul reminds the Galatians that there truly is *no other gospel*.

## CHAPTER 3

### NO OTHER GOSPEL (GAL 1:1-10; 6:11-18)

The churches of Galatia was on the cusp of apostasy. Judaizers pressured the Galatians to follow the Mosaic covenant for God to accept them truly. Paul wrote to the Galatians in a heated letter, communicating his concern toward the false teachers. They were leading the Galatians down a path of destruction.<sup>1</sup> The Galatians were too easily manipulated into believing that works would save them in addition to faith. For Paul, the gospel itself is at stake. Either the Galatians follow the instruction of the Judaizers and suffer the law's curse or trust in the Apostolic gospel and experience the blessings of fellowship with God.

Paul bookends his letter with the same thought: there is only one gospel. Paul is not concerned whether the Galatians are circumcised or uncircumcised.<sup>2</sup> Instead, he is concerned about how the Galatians view their right standing before God (2:15-16).<sup>3</sup> Paul argues that salvation has always been from faith by outlining the gospel in his greeting (1:1-4) and invoking a curse on anyone preaching another gospel (1:6-10). Paul ends his letter by exposing why the false teachers are leading the Galatians in such a way (6:13).

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology Series 52 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 84.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Thielman explains, "Paul focuses on three dimensions of the gospel that are incompatible with the agitators' "different gospel": a chronological dimension, an anthropological dimension, and an ethical dimension." Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 265.

<sup>3</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden write, "The question about whether Gentile believers must be circumcised was the surface issue revealing the deeper question about whether a person is righteous before God by works of the law or by faith in Christ." Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 85.

The Judaizers desire the Galatians to depend on them (6:12). The Judaizers wanted the benefits of Christ without the cost of following him (6:12). Paul proclaims that the Judaizers themselves do not keep the law (6:13). Thus, Galatians' primary theme is to remind readers that salvation is by faith alone. Paul rebukes the Galatians because they abandoned the gospel. He instructs that they can either have circumcision or the cross. With circumcision comes the curse; with the cross comes salvation. To accept circumcision is to deny the cross of its power and reject Jesus as the fulfillment of the Old Testament promises.<sup>4</sup>

Paul connects conclusions with his introductions. Paul's first ten verses show that he explicitly relays the gospel, reminds readers of his previous message, and alludes to Old Testament patterns. Paul ends his letter with the same purpose of starting it: to expose false gospels and those who teach them. The Galatians were saved only through Christ (Gal 2:20). The Galatians, and Christians today, have the same choice regarding their salvation. Believers exchange freedom for bondage and life for death if they abandon the gospel for a false gospel.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Gospel Greeting (Gal 1:1-5)**

Paul's greeting to the Galatians includes Paul's apostleship, Christ's resurrection by the power of God, the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the present evil age, and God's will to glorify himself (Gal 1:1-3). Paul's mention of these topics is significant because it establishes the framework for readers to understand Paul's letter. Paul quickly transitions to astonishment over the Galatians' ability to forego the original gospel and operate under the Mosaic law by mentioning these gospel reminders.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology (2000)," in *Pauline Perspectives: Essays on Paul, 1978-2013*, ed. Joel B. Green and Max Turner (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013), 201.

<sup>5</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 45 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 186. "p

<sup>6</sup> Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 265.

## **Paul's Apostleship**

Paul opens his letter by communicating his apostleship to his readers. He contrasts himself with his opponents and verifies his credentials as an apostle. An apostle is someone God commissions to be his agent of divine authority.<sup>7</sup> An apostle's message is tied to their credentials. Paul mentions his credentials because the Judaizers challenged his authority and accused him of false soteriology.<sup>8</sup> Paul conveys that his commissioning was not done by man but by God.<sup>9</sup>

## **The Father and the Lord**

The Old Testament teaches that there is one God (Deut 6:4). Paul seems to view God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ as equals. Furthermore, identifying Jesus as Lord includes an intimation that Jesus is Yahweh. Matthew Harmon notes, "By identifying Jesus as Lord, Paul is both affirming his identity as Yahweh and asserting Jesus' universal dominion over all creation originally intended for Adam."<sup>10</sup> It is because Jesus is Lord and he and God the Father share the exact nature that believers can experience true grace and everlasting peace.<sup>11</sup> True grace and peace come from faith in God's Word.

## **The Perfect Substitute**

Paul expands on the new covenant reality by proclaiming that Jesus gave himself for the Galatians' sins to deliver them from the present evil age. Paul's soteriology and eschatology are addressed here separately to understand how Paul views Christ's deliverance from Christian's sins and the present evil age (Gal 1:3).

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<sup>7</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 27.

<sup>8</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 50.

<sup>10</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, "Covenant in Paul," in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, Nicholas Reid and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 243.



**Christ gave himself for believer’s sins.** James Hamilton writes, “The sacrifice of Christ was a judgment that accomplished deliverance.”<sup>12</sup> The judgment placed on Christ was the reproach of humanity’s sins. All humanity is born sinful and unable to reconcile themselves to God. Humanity can pay for their sins by either taking the wrath of God onto themselves or trusting in Christ and submitting to him as Savior and Lord. Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross for those who trust in him reveals that Jesus’s death was substitutionary.<sup>13</sup> For those who trust in Christ, God the Father identifies them in Christ’s death and sees his righteousness in them (2:20). Paul connects Jesus’s giving of himself to the Galatians’ current salvation (3:1). If Christ’s death and resurrection are not enough, Christians’ salvation is in vain (2:18; 3:3-5).

Christ’s giving of himself is not only found in Galatians, but in 1 Corinthians 15:3 as well. Paul uses this exact phrase in 1 Corinthians 15:3 as he outlines Jesus’s death as the fulfillment of Scripture. Christ’s giving of himself for sins is of first importance for Paul. Christ’s work on the cross inaugurated the new covenant. It should not be surprising that Paul included Christ’s sacrifice in his argument to the Galatians because the Judaizers prioritized the Mosaic covenant above the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>14</sup>

When covenantal disorder prevails, Christ’s work becomes secondary while humanity’s contribution to salvation takes preeminence. Humanity’s works are prioritized when there is covenantal disorder. The law was temporary and unable to deliver humanity

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<sup>12</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 470.

<sup>13</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 15.

<sup>14</sup> The Judaizers interpreted the Abrahamic covenant in light of the Mosaic Covenant. When this is done, salvation is altered from faith to works-based. Paul makes this explicit in his assessment of the Galatians’ salvation in chap. 3. Salvation becomes works based if the Abrahamic covenant is seen through the Mosaic covenant. The law functioned as an overflow of the faith individuals intended to have in Yahweh. In other words, the works of the law were designed to show what a redeemed community looked like, not how the community became redeemed. Brian Vickers agrees as he outlines the goal of the law. In his words, the law teaches justice and righteousness, but Adam Israel cannot attain the goal of the law. Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 97.

from their sins (3:19-20). Instead, its function to increase transgressions has ceased due to Christ's work on the cross and his inauguration of the new age (Gal 3:19). Thus, Christ giving himself for their sins rescued Christians from this present evil age.<sup>15</sup>

**Deliverance from this present evil age.** Paul connects Jesus's death and resurrection to the Galatians' deliverance from this present evil age. It is not uncommon for Paul to speak in this way. Paul addresses the idea of two ages in Ephesians 1:21 where he proclaims Jesus is at the right hand of God, "above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come." 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 to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage." The present age and age to come are connected by the resurrection of Christ.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the New Testament views history as split between two ages.<sup>17</sup> The new age has arrived by Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>18</sup>

Deliverance from this present evil age is further noteworthy because it amplifies the freedom achieved through Christ's death and resurrection.<sup>19</sup> Craig Keener says, "Christ died not only to free us from sin's penalty forensically (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:11, 13) but also liberate us from its dominion behaviorally (Gal 2:20; 5:16-25), a message that counters a common charge against Paul's gospel."<sup>20</sup> Since the age to come has entered the present

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<sup>15</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 7.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 80.

<sup>17</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 102.

<sup>18</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 55.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 69.

<sup>20</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 55.

age, everything has changed, including the function of the law.<sup>21</sup> The deliverance Christians have in this age is more than freedom from the power of sin and Satan; it is freedom from the condemnation of the law.<sup>22</sup>

The Judaizers' misunderstanding was that Christians are still commanded to live under the authority of the last age when Christ has come and inaugurated the age to come.<sup>23</sup> The resurrection of Christ positions Christians to function in a way that mirrors life in the new age while still in the present evil age.<sup>24</sup>

**All according to God's will.** The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were all according to God's decreed will.<sup>25</sup> God the Father's divine will and Jesus's voluntary sacrifice for sins find their purpose in God's glory (Gal 1:5). In his greeting, Paul reminds the Galatians that righteousness comes only through the gospel, apart from their works.<sup>26</sup> The Galatians cannot go back to the age under the law. The Galatians were delivered from the present evil age and were called to live under the age of Christ.<sup>27</sup> It is from this greeting Paul transitions to his astonishment toward the Galatians and pleads with them to repent and turn to the original gospel.

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<sup>21</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 69.

<sup>22</sup> Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 50.

<sup>23</sup> David Arthur DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 120.

<sup>24</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 9.

<sup>25</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 80.

<sup>26</sup> Matthew W. Bates, *Salvation by Allegiance Alone: Rethinking Faith, Works, and the Gospel of Jesus the King* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 120.

<sup>27</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 70.

### **A Different Gospel (Gal 1:6-10)**

In bewilderment, Paul expresses urgency that the Galatians would desert the glorious realities of Christ and turn to a gospel of slavery and bondage (1:6). Paul mentions that the Galatians are not rejecting him but Christ. Paul removes himself from the Galatians' error and wants them to see what they are indeed leaving. The Galatians are not exchanging one system for another; they abandon a person for slavery. Paul continues this thought by rehearsing how the Galatians were brought to salvation—by grace.<sup>28</sup>

### **Nowhere Else to Go (Gal 1:6-7)**

The Galatians cannot turn from one good news to another. Jesus Christ and his sacrificial work on the cross is the only redemptive work that brings salvation for humanity. Since there is only one gospel, the only thing false teachers can do to the gospel is distort it (1:7). The Galatians know the gospel. If they were ignorant, Paul would not respond as passionately as he does. The Galatians were believing the Judaizers that grace alone could not reconcile sinners to God.<sup>29</sup> Paul hints at what he will expound on later in his letter when he says the Judaizers seek to trouble the Galatians with this different gospel (Gal 1:7). The Judaizers do not desire to disciple the Galatians to embrace Christ. Instead, they seek to bother them and ultimately lead the Galatians to embrace them. Paul clarifies this in chapter 6 when he conveys that the Judaizers want to boast over them rather than serve them (Gal 6:13). Thus, the gospel of Christ is the only gospel, and anything else added to Christ's message of salvation is a distortion and should be rejected as such.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 60.

<sup>29</sup> Deserting (*μετατίθημι*) is in the present middle tense indicating that the Galatians abandonment of the gospel is ongoing, not yet completed.

<sup>30</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 87.

### Only One Way (Gal 1:8-9)

Paul's proclamation here is fascinating because he says if "we" or an "angel" should distort the gospel, then let them be accursed. Paul may be referring to his partners with him or the apostolic community. If he addresses apostles, then his confrontation with Peter comes to mind in the next chapter (2:11). Peter hindered the Galatians by operating out of fear and endorsing the law by separating himself from Gentile Christians.<sup>31</sup> Paul confronts Peter and rebukes him for being out of step with the gospel (Gal 2:14). If Paul is merely addressing his patrons with him, then he would simply acknowledge that if anyone adds or subtracts to the original teaching they heard, they should be rejected.<sup>32</sup> Paul desires to teach that no one is above sound doctrine.

Paul's readers would have understood the reference to angels since God repeatedly used them to deliver messengers to his people (Ezek 8:2ff.; Dan 10:5). Paul does not entertain the thought of supernatural participation. He simply wants his readers to know that whoever speaks a gospel different from the one they have heard should be accursed.

Paul's assertion of being *accursed* in this text expresses his seriousness.<sup>33</sup> Paul uses the word twice and seems to want to draw his readers to a reality associated with it. The text literally says, "a curse be on him!" It seems Paul is drawing from previous Scripture here when he employs the word accursed (*anathema/Anathema*). Anathema appears 26 times in the LXX and 21 of its occurrences translate to mean what is "banned

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<sup>31</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 87.

<sup>32</sup> The book of Acts serves as a valuable source to see what Paul's previously preached to the Galatians. Acts teach that Paul went through the region of Galatia (Acts 16:6) and while going through preached Jesus Christ and him crucified (Acts 17:3). Furthermore, the Jerusalem council directly addresses that salvation has always been by grace through faith (Acts 15:8-11). Circumcision functioned as an outward symbol of being a part of national Israel, not possessing a regenerate heart. Paul's message previously taught to the Galatians is the same one defended in Paul's letter to the Galatians, salvation by grace through faith.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 575.

or devoted to the Lord to be destroyed later.”<sup>34</sup> *Anathema* is associated with the Hebrew word הָרֵם (*he-rem*) to portray something cursed before God. The item is condemned before God because it impedes God’s work and shows that the individual (or community) does not have faith in God’s Word (Josh 7:1). An example of this type of curse is found in Joshua 7 where Achan took some of the things that were devoted to God for himself (vv. 10-11). Because Achan stole, Israel was defeated by their enemies (vv. 2-5). Joshua perplexingly asked God why they were defeated (vv. 6-9), and God declares that Israel had transgressed his covenant by devoting themselves to materials meant to be destroyed (vv. 10-15). Achan was found guilty, and he and his family were killed (vv. 16-26).

Whether Paul has this narrative in mind or not is not essential. Nonetheless, it illustrates the nature of *anathema*. If the Galatians’ trust in something other than Christ, then they commit the same error Achan did by disobeying God’s Word. The Judaizers function like Achan by enticing the Galatians to abandon the true gospel for a distorted one.<sup>35</sup>

### **Servant of Christ**

Paul concludes his opening argument with two rhetorical questions about his credibility as an apostle.<sup>36</sup> Paul asks his readers, “For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man?” (v. 10a). These questions are interesting because nowhere up to this point has Paul been accused of being a people-pleaser, nor has he given any indication of desiring approval from man.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> James D. G. Dunn writes, “To be meaningful to Paul’s readers, they would have been aware of such passages as Lev 27:28-29 (relating to the cult), Deut 7:26 (regarding Israel’s treatment of the idols of other nations), and Joshua 6:17-18, 7:1-13 (the story of Achan).” James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians*, New Testament Theology (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 37.

<sup>35</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 46.

<sup>36</sup> DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 89.

A key to understanding his first question is to discern what Paul means by “approval.”<sup>38</sup> The Judaizers added to the gospel by teaching that circumcision was required to be made right before God. It seems that “approval” here communicates a level of persuasion.<sup>39</sup> In other words, it appears that Paul refutes the idea that he diminished the gospel to win the Galatians. Likewise, Paul did not persuade God to accept the Galatians on lesser terms than Israel had with the mosaic covenant. Paul is defending the gospel by saying that faith is required for both Jews and Gentiles.<sup>40</sup> Paul does not have to persuade God to accept Gentiles by lowering salvific requirements or persuade the Galatians to accept a simpler version of the gospel. There has only been one gospel—by grace through faith.

The second question is straightforward. Paul asks his readers if he is trying to please man or God. The first question addresses Paul’s ability to win both parties (God and man) to a particular position. The second question focuses on Paul’s aim in the process. The second question contributes to Paul’s declaration of being a servant of Christ because it draws his readers to ask, who is Paul serving? Paul defends his apostleship, at this moment showing his readers that he would not be an apostle if he misled them or omitted information about the gospel. In other words, because Paul seeks to please Christ, he did not fail to present the gospel rightly.

Paul proclaims that his words can be trusted because he is a servant of Christ. Paul bookends the opening of his letter by rounding out his argument that the gospel he

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<sup>38</sup> DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 131.

<sup>39</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung and Philip S. Henman, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 48.

<sup>40</sup> Harmon explains,

The adverb “now” (ἄρτι) may suggest that Paul is (perhaps sarcastically) responding to a charge by the false teachers that he was seeking the approval of people (especially gentiles) by preaching his Torah-free gospel. Calling down God’s curse on any (including himself!) who preach a different gospel than the one he first preached to the Galatians is clear evidence that Paul is far more concerned about pleasing God than he is about pleasing people. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 50)

presented the Galatians is not from man but through Jesus Christ and God the Father (1:1). To be a servant of Christ draws from Old Testament expressions of having a close relationship with God.<sup>41</sup> Paul's apostleship joins the ranks of individuals who have come before him in declaring the true gospel, which has always been by grace through faith in God's promises.<sup>42</sup>

### **Summary**

Paul outlines the gospel in his opening verses. God the Father raised Jesus from the dead and sealed Christians' victory (1:1-2). Paul declares Jesus is Lord and equal in deity to God the Father. Because Jesus is Lord, Christians' sins are forgiven and delivered from the present evil age (1:3-4a). All redemption is according to the will of God (1:4-5).

Because of these gospel realities, Paul is shocked that the Galatians turned to a distorted gospel that brings bondage instead of freedom (1:6). To add circumcision is to deny Christ (1:7). Paul pronounces judgment on anyone, including himself, if they preach a gospel counter to the one they heard before (1:8-9). The judgment of distorting the gospel is separation from God's blessings. Paul declares he is a servant of Christ, making his message authoritative. Paul seeks only to please God and submit to God's rule. Because Paul's apostleship is true, the Judaizers are seen as false (1:10). Paul desires God's approval; the Judaizers wanted the Galatians' praise.

### **Be Warned (Gal 6:11-13)**

Just as Paul began his letter rebuking the Galatians for abandoning the gospel for a distorted one, Paul ends his letter with why Judaizers teach a false gospel. Galatians 6:11-18 wraps up Paul's theological defense of the gospel with a word of caution and pronouncement of judgment. Paul cautions the Galatians not to believe the Judaizers

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<sup>41</sup> Harmon states, "Since Paul draws upon the servant language from Isaiah 49 in Galatians 1:15-16 and again in 1:24 to portray his apostolic calling and ministry, it is likely that here in 1:10 he refers to himself as a "servant of Christ" (Χριστοῦ δοῦλος) to anticipate that description." Harmon, *Galatians*, 51.

<sup>42</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 89.



because they have alternative motives for the Galatians' adherence to the law (6:12-13). It does not concern Paul whether someone is circumcised or not. Instead, they are a new creation in Christ (6:15).<sup>43</sup> The Galatians are the true Israel<sup>44</sup> by following Christ by faith (6:15b).<sup>45</sup> The Judaizers desire the benefits of Christ without the cost; Paul delights in the cross because Jesus is worth everything (6:14).<sup>46</sup> Paul concludes his letter by reminding his readers that he bears the marks of Jesus (6:17). Because Paul bears the marks of Jesus, his apostleship is authenticated.<sup>47</sup> I will explore Paul's final warning and benediction to show that he concludes with the same thought as he started: there is only one gospel.

### **Personal Address**

Paul concludes his letter by reminding his readers that he himself is writing to them. Paul does this elsewhere, such as 2 Thessalonians 3:17, to show he is authentic in his writing and addressing his audience personally.<sup>48</sup> Considering Paul's ambition to distance himself from his opponents and show he is genuinely writing to the Galatians, it seems that Paul makes mention of his large letters to further demonstrate to his readers that he personally is speaking to them.<sup>49</sup> Paul's distinction from his opponents further supports Paul's concern for the Galatians' abandonment of the gospel.

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<sup>43</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 84.

<sup>44</sup> Gal 4:21-31 supports this reading.

<sup>45</sup> Hans K. LaRondelle, *The Israel of God in Prophecy: Principles of Prophetic Interpretation*, Andrews University Monographs 13 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1983), 111.

<sup>46</sup> G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 269.

<sup>47</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B & H, 2016), 502-3.

<sup>48</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 633.

<sup>49</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 357-58.

## To Make a Good Showing

Although Paul is not concerned with whether the Galatians are circumcised or not, the doctrinal issues affecting them are related to circumcision. For Paul, to keep circumcision as a requirement for salvation means one is obligated to keep the whole law (v. 6:13a; 3:10). What is the reason for the Judaizers' desire to instruct circumcision? Paul makes it clear: to make a good showing (v. 12a). But why are the Judaizers concerned with boasting in the flesh?

To make a good showing in the flesh seems to focus on social honor instead of righteous living. To “make a good showing” (εὐπροσωπήσαι) is a rare verb and used only one time in a papyrus manuscript. The Judaizers plan to make a good impression by forcing the Galatians to be circumcised. It seems that Paul is contrasting the Judaizers' desire to force the Galatians to be circumcised with his refusal to force Titus to be circumcised. Paul earlier conveyed that false brothers sought to have Titus circumcised for him to be under the law of Moses in addition to Christ (Gal 2:3). Paul refused to have Titus, a Gentile, circumcised because it retracts Christ's work on the cross and diminishes humanity's need for a savior. Paul rebuked Peter in Galatians 2:14 as well because Peter's actions conveyed that he desired Gentiles to be forced to live like Jews in light of Christ's work on the cross. Thus, Paul's three usages of “forced” in his letter refer to false teachers desiring Gentile Christians to live under the Mosaic Covenant in light of the new covenant inaugurated by Christ.<sup>50</sup>

By showing that the Judaizers are concerned with worldly status instead of righteous living, Paul appears to show how corrupt the Judaizer's teaching is. By highlighting their focus is not on the Spirit, or on the role of the law, but on the Galatians' genitals (Gal 6:12).<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 393.

<sup>51</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 174.

## **Avoid Persecution**

Paul gives readers the reason why the Judaizers seek to have the Galatians circumcised: to avoid persecution (6:12b). If fellow Jews are the ones the Judaizers fear, then it makes sense that circumcision is the primary means they are enforcing to avoid persecution. The cross has made circumcision unnecessary (6:14-15; Col 2:11). Circumcision is unnecessary because Christ fulfilled the requirements of the law through his righteous life.<sup>52</sup> The Judaizers sought to avoid persecution whereas Paul accepted it (6:17). The Judaizers sought to boast in outward practice whereas Paul boasted in Christ's crucifixion. To avoid persecution is to renounce Christ's work on the cross.

## **Boast in the Galatians' Flesh**

The Judaizers sought to boast in the Galatians' flesh instead of Christ. Paul reveals the error of this thinking. Even though the Judaizers have been circumcised, they themselves do not keep the law (6:13). Jesus taught in Matthew 23 that the Pharisees were incapable keeping the law due to their corrupted hearts. Paul teaches elsewhere the inability to keep the whole law on grounds of human effort (3:10; 5:3; Rom 1:18-3:20).<sup>53</sup> Romans 2:17-24 instructs readers how to understand boasting in the flesh. It appears that the Judaizers were claiming to know truth without living out truth. As Paul quotes, "For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (Rom 2:24). The Judaizers were blaspheming God by proclaiming the law brought salvation, not Christ.<sup>54</sup>

### **From the Cross to the New Creation (Gal 6:14-18)**

The Judaizers are on the side of ethnic status and security while Paul is on the side of the cross. What the Judaizers sought after and encourage others to do, Paul rejects

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<sup>52</sup> DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 506.

<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 378.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 378.

and condemns. For Paul, boasting in the cross is the only source of victory because circumcision counts for nothing anymore and he bears the marks to prove it.

### **Boast in the Cross**

The Judaizers sought to boast in the flesh and avoid persecution (6:12-13). Paul says, “Far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (6:14). The Judaizers desired security and status; Paul desired Christ. Paul is concerned with what people boast in.<sup>55</sup> People can either boast in something within themselves or boast in the work of another. To boast is to place one’s confidence in something to achieve moral and ethical high ground on another. Keener notes, “Instead of self-deceptively boasting in ourselves (6:3), we should examine our work and come to a realistic self-appraisal (6:4).”<sup>56</sup> To boast in anything other than the cross is to have an unrealistic view of self-worth and the law itself.<sup>57</sup> Paul boasts in the cross of Jesus Christ because he alone achieved salvation for his people.

The implications of boasting in the cross are to identify with its effects on worldly systems. Paul proclaims that he boasts in Christ because he has been crucified to the world and the world to him (6:14b). The cross is more than just a symbol of Jesus’s

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<sup>55</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 543.

<sup>56</sup> Keener explains, “Men in ancient Mediterranean urban society competed for honor; self-praise was unacceptable unless the speaker followed particular conventions to make it appear necessary or profitable. This boasting often involved comparison with others.” Keener, *Galatians*, 544.

<sup>57</sup> Harmon writes,

As he often does, Paul uses the word cross as shorthand for the totality of what Christ did to redeem his people, though with a particular emphasis on his sacrificial death (compare 1 Cor 1:17-25). It is as the Lord incarnate that Jesus of Nazareth went to the cross as the Messiah, the suffering servant who became a curse for us so that the curse we deserved for disobeying God might be exhausted (Gal 3:13-14). The contrast between boasting in the flesh (6:13) and boasting in the cross of Christ (6:14) parallels what Paul would later write to the Philippians. From a worldly perspective, Paul had grounds for boasting in the flesh based on his ethnicity and zeal for the Mosaic law (Phil 3:2-6), but he counted all those things as dung in comparison to knowing Christ and experiencing the power of his resurrection (Phil 3:7-11). (Harmon, *Galatians*, 361-62)

death; it becomes an instrument of Paul's as well.<sup>58</sup> Reality is radically different in light of the cross. Paul uses the perfect indicative passive of "has been crucified" (*ἔσταύρωται*) to convey how Christ's past work on the cross has present results in the lives of all who follow him.<sup>59</sup> Scholars differ on what Paul means by "the world" here. Keener argues that Paul being crucified to the world means that he is separated from sinful humanity and its value system.<sup>60</sup> Richard Longenecker argues that Paul is crucified not to sinful humanity *per se*, but to the mode of life regarding earthly advantages as a means of righteousness.<sup>61</sup> Both convey what Paul desires to teach his readers. Paul's crucifixion to the world means he is free from its value system and separated from sinful humanity as well as free from having to earn merit through self-righteousness. Galatians 2:20 tells readers that Paul is dead to the world because he is alive in Christ. Paul's citizenship is in the age to come, not this present evil age.<sup>62</sup> The cross marks the death of everything Paul once was and shows how someone can become a new creation.<sup>63</sup>

### **A New Creation**

The earliest parts of Scripture show that circumcision as an outward symbol identified the recipient as a follower of Yahweh (Gen 17). The Judaizer's taught circumcision marks someone as a follower of Yahweh. Paul conveys that circumcision does not matter within the new covenant because the Spirit is what makes someone a new creation. Further, Paul argues that circumcision is obsolete because it fulfills Old Testament

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<sup>58</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 294.

<sup>59</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 295.

<sup>60</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 572.

<sup>61</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 295.

<sup>62</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 572.

<sup>63</sup> L. Michael Morales explains, "He boasts in his spiritual union with Jesus and his crucifixion because it is the means of Paul's departure, of his own exodus—the cross, by which 'the world is crucified to me, and I to the world' (Galatians 6:14)." L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 192.

expectations of followers of Yahweh being circumcised of the heart, not of the flesh (Deut 30:6). To be a new creation is to be in the new age. To be circumcised as a matter of making one right before God ironically does not place the individual in a favorable position; rather, it connects them still to the evil age.<sup>64</sup> Circumcision in the new age does not communicate faith in God. It merits righteousness to oneself.

The idea of new creation is found within Old Testament Scripture. Although, Harmon suggests, “Through the work of Jesus, God has accomplished the promised Isaianic new exodus and inaugurated the new creation, resulting in the redemption of believers from the elements of the world into the family of God as sons with an inheritance (Gal 1:4; 3:13-14; 4:1-7).”<sup>65</sup> Thus, to be a new creation is not to draw identity from ethnic, moral, or status positions but to identify with Christ and his resurrection (Gal 3:27-28).

### **Israel of God**

To be a new creation is to embrace the true gospel. As stated in chapter 1, Paul ends in chapter 6: there is only one true gospel and still one people of God—those who walk by faith. Paul instructs his readers to “walk by this rule” (6:16). It seems that Paul is linking the Spirit’s work in the Galatians in light of the new creation. Paul uses the same language in 5:25 when he instructs his readers to keep in step with the Spirit. Here, in 6:16, Paul is instructing his readers to keep in step with the new creation. It seems that Paul desires to parallel the work of the Spirit with the truth of the gospel.<sup>66</sup> The true community of God continues through the resurrection of Christ who inaugurated the age to come.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Harmon states, “It is this work of new creation that ultimately transcends the categories of this present evil age such as circumcised or uncircumcised, Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female (3:28). As Paul succinctly states elsewhere, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, and see, the new has come!” (2 Cor 5:17).” Harmon, *Galatians*, 364.

<sup>65</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 364.

<sup>66</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 365.

<sup>67</sup> Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*, 553.

The term *Israel of God* is debated, but Paul's intention desired understanding can be seen from the text. The debate regarding the understanding of *Israel of God* rests on the use of the Greek word *kai*.<sup>68</sup> Scholars debate whether *kai* connects the pronoun *them* and *Israel of God* to be the same entity or if it conveys the two nouns to be two separate groups. It appears it would be out of step for Paul to highlight differences between two people groups after conveying through an entire letter that there are no differences in people within Christ.<sup>69</sup> Thus, Paul redefines the people of God around Christ as opposed to national Israel or law adherence. The Israel of God then are those who have always walked by faith. Those who walk by faith Paul prays will receive peace and mercy (Gal 6:16). Peace and mercy only come through faith in God. Thus, Paul bookends his letter with the same thought: there is only one gospel that produces one people of God.

### **Marks of Christ**

Paul concludes his letter in the same way that he started it—with his credentials. To distance himself from his opponents in the beginning of his letter he outlined his apostleship in terms of qualifications and commissioning. Ending his letter, Paul draws on his credentials by showing his qualifications. The Judaizers avoided persecution while Paul

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<sup>68</sup> Harmon states,

On grammatical grounds it is true that the exegetical use of *καί* is rare, but it is not unprecedented (e.g., Rom 1:5; 1 Cor 2:2; see further examples in BDAG s.v. *καί* 1.c). Theologically it is true that the NT nowhere explicitly and unambiguously refers to the church as Israel, but there are at least three examples where the term Israel may have a non-ethnic referent (Rom 9:6b; 11:26; 1 Cor 10:18). More importantly, there are countless places where the NT applies to the church language that in the OT referred to Israel (e.g., Rom 9:25–26; 1 Pet 2:9–11). Of course, the church is only the Israel of God because Jesus himself is the true Israel, the one who embodies everything Israel was called to be and obeyed where the Israelites failed. But most decisive here in Gal 6:16 is the context. Paul's central argument throughout has been that in Christ both Jew and gentile alike are the seed of Abraham, adopted sons and heirs in God's family, children of the heavenly Jerusalem, and recipients of the eschatological Spirit who experience the new creation. So in this final section that summarizes the main themes of the letter, it seems highly unlikely that Paul would suddenly introduce a new development—a distinction between Jew and gentile within the one people of God. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 462)

<sup>69</sup> The 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.

bears the marks of one persecuted. Paul desires for no one to cause him trouble not because he is tired, but rather because his opponents do not share his ministry or credentials. By reminding his audience of his scars he pronounces grace to his readers through Jesus Christ (6:18). The Judaizers emphasized the works of the law; Paul proclaimed grace from God (1:3; 6:18). God's grace delivers people from the present evil age (1:4; 6:15). God's grace commissioned Paul to proclaim the gospel to the Galatians (1:15-16; 6:11-18). The marks of Christ convey that Jesus truly died for humanity's sins and rose from the dead. Paul serves the resurrected king and encourages others to do so as well. In other words, there is no other gospel.

### **Conclusion**

Paul begins and ends his letter with the same thought: there is only one gospel. Paul does this by showing the difference between his message and his opponents and conveys the reason behind the Judaizers' instruction. Paul desires the Galatians to trust in his original instruction and cling to Christ as their only hope for salvation. The Judaizers seek to boast in the Galatians' adherence to the law. Boasting in Christ is the only thing that can truly produce the confidence an individual needs for their salvation. In other words, everyone is only justified by faith.



CHAPTER 4  
JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (GAL 2:11-21)

Paul begins and ends his letter by exposing the Judaizer's true colors. The Judaizers preached their message to the Galatians for personal status. Paul points the Galatians to Christ by the gospel. The Judaizers desired to boast in the Galatians' flesh and have them adhere to the Mosaic law to escape persecution (Gal 6:12). Paul bears the marks of Christ as a true apostle (Gal 6:17). Paul grounded his apostolic credentials in the gospel and Christ's commissioning of him to the world (Gal 1:1-5).

Paul combats the Judaizers' instruction not simply because it is bad orthopraxy; rather, it corrupts the gospel entirely. The Judaizers desired to make Gentiles take on parts of the law to be accepted before God. Justification is not about creating divisions amongst ethnicities but creating a new people in Christ. Thus, outward practice does not make someone righteous, but faith in Jesus Christ does (Gal 1:6-10).<sup>1</sup> Justification is God declaring someone right before himself.<sup>2</sup> Paul conveys faith is evidence of justification because it is the belief that God is who he says he is and will do what he says he will do. For Paul, there is no salvation if justification is wrong.<sup>3</sup> Justification is the foundation upon which everything is built for followers of God. Paul addresses the important issue of justification because it is from justification that a proper view of God's people comes.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 576.

<sup>2</sup> Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 90.

<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 13.

<sup>4</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 80.

Justification by faith alone encourages ethnic unity within the new covenant inaugurated by Christ. For Gentiles and Jews to coexist, there must be something more than ethnic lines or cultural norms to bring people together. Paul insists that to force circumcision as a rite to enter or gain a proper relationship with God imprisons people under the law—the very thing God freed the Jews (and the world) from. Faith in God leads people to Jesus Christ. Paul does not teach that the Law is wrong or unnecessary. Yet, the Law is not the means of uniting people to Christ. That union comes through justification.<sup>5</sup>

To outline how justification encourages ethnic unity within the new covenant, an examination of Paul's confrontation with Peter and its theological implications will be done. Peter's right hand of fellowship given to Paul in Galatians 2:9 stands in opposition to Peter's separation of Gentile brothers in Galatians 2:11-14. Paul shows in Galatians 1:11-2:10 a pure gospel that draws people to Christ, not specific dinner tables.

Once the contrast between gospel unity and disunity is seen, a study Paul's defense of justification not being by the law will be done. Paul believes the law teaches that it was never intended to justify a person (Gal 2:16). Justification has always been by faith (Gal 2:15).<sup>6</sup> The covenants do not overlap. Christians cannot proclaim Christ and live by the Old Testament law as the primary covenant. The law kills where Christ brings life (Gal 2:19). Paul's declaration of justification and how it influences how he lives will be examined (Gal 2:20-21). Paul capitalizes on the blood of Jesus as the only means someone is made righteous (Gal 2:20). Faith in Jesus is the only thing that can justify a person before God. Thus, unity to all people groups comes from one name—Jesus Christ.

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<sup>5</sup> Brian Vickers, *Jesus' Blood and Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Imputation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 208.

<sup>6</sup> Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 132.

### **Unified or Divided (Gal 2:11-14)**

Paul's gospel is from God (Gal 1:11).<sup>7</sup> The Judaizers' gospel is from man. Paul began his letter with astonishment that the Galatians were too easily manipulated into believing a false gospel. The false gospel taught by the Judaizers was that aspects of the Mosaic covenant were still in place, and Gentiles needed to first become Jews before they could identify as Christians. Paul combats the Judaizers' misinformation with not only where his gospel is from but with who agrees with his gospel.<sup>8</sup> Paul had no reason to meet with other apostles immediately because he received his gospel from Jesus Christ himself.<sup>9</sup>

### **Paul's Message Is True**

Paul highlights two trips he and others made to Jerusalem (Gal 1:18; 2:1). Paul's first visit to Jerusalem seems to have happened three years after his conversion.<sup>10</sup> Christ commissioned Paul to share the gospel with gentiles, kings, and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15). After three years of sharing the gospel, Paul spent fifteen days with Peter and James in Jerusalem. The text does not share what was discussed, but what is seen is Peter and Paul share a common interest in being together, and people noticed Paul's involvement with Peter, which led to the worship of God (Gal 1:24).

The second trip happened fourteen years later. It is unclear whether this fourteen-year span is linked to Paul's fifteen-day visit to Peter or some other ministry marker (Gal 2:1-10). Regardless, Paul recounts his years in ministry and shows that he

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<sup>7</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 39.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 112.

<sup>9</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 113.

<sup>10</sup> Richard N Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 37.

has always preached the same gospel as the apostles.<sup>11</sup> Paul recounts two significant encounters that further distance himself from his opponents in Galatia. First, false teachers were present in Jerusalem seeking to have Titus, a Gentile, circumcised because he was not an Israelite by practice. Paul responded to their message by proclaiming that they sought to bring people back to slavery (Gal 2:4).<sup>12</sup> Paul declares that he did not give in to the false teachers for the same reason he combats the Judaizers who are before the Galatians today: so that the true gospel would be preserved for them (Gal 2:5).<sup>13</sup> Paul reminds his readers that God does not show partially (Gal 2:6). It does not matter whether someone is rich, poor, Gentile, or Jew; the gospel addresses everyone equally.<sup>14</sup> The second encounter Paul mentions is that Peter, James, and John themselves extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul (Gal 2:9). Peter recognized that Paul's message was in step with theirs, so he supported Paul in all his efforts. The text tells that the apostles specifically asked Paul to remember the poor, which he says was the very thing he was eager to do (Gal 2:10).

### **Fear Corrupts the True Gospel (Gal 2:11-14)**

Paul's controversies are not only with the Galatians but with men from James who arrived in Antioch, causing Peter to separate himself from his gentile brothers. In contrast to the right hand of fellowship given in Galatians 2:6-10, Peter stands condemned because he operated out of step with the gospel.<sup>15</sup> Paul's confrontation with Peter further

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 133.

<sup>12</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010). 471.

<sup>13</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul's Letter to the Galatians*, New Testament Theology (New York: Cambridge University, 1993), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 45 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 185.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 98-99.

defends his apostleship because it conveys that his message goes beyond human position.<sup>16</sup>

### **Together at the Table**

Paul publicly rebuked Peter because Peter publicly hindered the gospel. Peter separated himself from eating with gentiles (Gal 2:12). Eating with gentiles conveys that Peter was regularly fellowshiping with them and not following the Mosaic dietary laws.<sup>17</sup> Peter's separation conveys that he, when approached by men of James, acted in fear which conveyed to others that the Mosaic covenant still should be practiced. Peter, the rock of the church, acted hypocritically against the gospel due to fear and thus communicated a different gospel.

### **More than a Dinner Table**

Paul confronts Peter because he knows Gentiles are invited to a community with God based on the vision he received from God (Acts 10:9-16). He spoke with the Jerusalem council and agreed with them that Old Testament customs were not needed for salvation, but others could still practice them (Acts 15:6-25). Peter knows that justification is by faith alone in Christ. A proper view of justification will teach that ethnic diversity exists within the people of God because the union of people groups comes not through observance of the law but through faith in Jesus.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 135.

<sup>17</sup> Συνεσθλω (eating with) in the ESV is in the imperfect, active indicative tense, which communicates he ate with gentiles for an ongoing period.

<sup>18</sup> Hamilton writes, "On that occasion, Peter behaved in a way that was consistent with what the false teachers apparently advocated in Galatia, separating himself from Gentiles on the basis of Mosaic prescriptions regarding clean and unclean table fellowship." Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 471.

## **Justification Alone Makes Someone Right before God**

Paul traced his apostle journeys and showed his readers that he has always taught the same message and agreed with other apostles regarding the original gospel. Paul's opponents do not have such a resume or his credentials. Paul conveys that his loyalty is first and foremost to the pure gospel. Paul shows that he is loyal only to the gospel by confronting Peter when he operated outside the true gospel. For Paul, it does not matter if one is a Judaizer or a/the rock of the church; the true gospel, justification by grace through faith, must be proclaimed.

Paul seems to expand on his rebuke with Peter by showing that the law never was designed to justify (Gal 2:15-16). Paul grounds his argument in history itself (Gal 2:15a). Paul assumes his readers know that justification was never promised through the law because the law was created to increase transgressions (Gal 3:19).<sup>19</sup> The people of God throughout redemptive history were always brought together through faith that justified, not the law.<sup>20</sup>

Paul continues his conversation with Peter by appealing to his heritage. Paul writes, "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners" (Gal 2:15). Paul's assertion to Peter and his shared heritage is designed to show where the accurate doctrinal lines should be as well as remind Peter how the Scripture has consistently shown justification to be one way.<sup>21</sup> Ronald Fung notes, "This characterization at once focuses attention on the sharp distinction between Jew and Gentile, for what made the Gentiles sinners in the estimation of the Jew was not only that they did not observe the law but also that they did not even possess it and consequently lacked the possibility of obtaining

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<sup>19</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 112-13.

<sup>20</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 238-39.

<sup>21</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 170-71.

righteousness through it.”<sup>22</sup> If Peter and the Judaizers operated in a way that conveyed that the law always was included in justification, then gentiles were incapable of knowing God.<sup>23</sup> The law functioned as an outward expression of the faith possessed by an individual. What made someone a gentile sinner was not a lack of Jewishness but a missing faith in Jesus.<sup>24</sup>

### **Faith versus Works of the Law**

Paul asserts the true distinction between Jews and Gentiles by highlighting that being a faithless sinner is what separates people from one another (Gal 2:15). Paul transitions now to defending the true distinction between people by conveying how people are justified before God—by faith. Paul reminds Peter that they know how someone has consistently been justified before God, and it has never been by the works of the law. Three times in verse 16, Paul mentions that works of the law cannot and were never designed to justify a person before God; faith in Jesus Christ does. Again, the issue for Paul was not the denial of faith in Jesus as the means of justification, but the addition of works to keep or maintain it.<sup>25</sup> Faith has always been the sole means of justification, and Paul sought to remind Peter of it. In other words, Paul is not instructing Peter that Gentiles should conform to Judaism to be accepted by God; rather, Jews are like Gentiles in terms of justification. Jews and Gentiles are both sinners whom the law could not redeem. Douglas Moo writes, “Their (the Galatians’) obedience to the covenant stipulations cannot put them right with God; only a total reliance on Christ, by faith, can do so.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung and Philip S. Henman, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 113.

<sup>23</sup> Frank Thielman, *The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 87.

<sup>24</sup> James M. Todd, *Sinai and the Saints: Reading Old Covenant Laws for the New Covenant Community* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 17.

<sup>25</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 157.

<sup>26</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 157.

It is important to understand what Paul means by *works of the law*. The phrase, works of the law, occurs six times in Galatians (2:16; 3:2, 5:10) and twice in the book of Romans (3:20, 28). In each case, the term is associated with the goal of attaining justification.<sup>27</sup> This phrase is interesting because it does not appear in the Septuagint or any other Greek literature. Looking at Paul, it seems that he desires to convey the message of doing what the law requires, or simply doing the law.<sup>28</sup> Thus, to do the works of the law is to practice what the law commands people to do.

### **Why Cannot the Law Save?**

If works of the law simply mean doing what the law requires, then readers of God's Word ask, "Why can't the law justify?" Faith is the sole means by which someone is justified, but the question still stands. For what reason do the works of the law lack the power to justify? Scholars differ in answers here because different schools of thought place emphasis on different portions of the phrase. Scholars interpret Galatians 2:16 in one of two ways. Faith is the only factor that justifies people—but whose faith? The ESV renders Galatians 2:16a as, "Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ (Gal 2:16a). N. T. Wright, on the other hand, argues that it should be translated, "We know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah."<sup>29</sup> The key differences between the two is the emphasis on whose faith does the saving ultimately and what concerns Paul more: disturbance of table fellowship or someone believing righteousness could be attained by the law. The following are the different views pertaining to Paul's thought process concerning Galatians 2:16.

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<sup>27</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 158.

<sup>28</sup> This is supported by Paul's usage of it in Rom 2:4, 25, 27; Gal 3:10; 5:3; 6:13; cf. Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12).

<sup>29</sup> N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 97.



**Reformed tradition regarding works of the law.** Reformed tradition scholars such as Stephen Westerholm, Richard Gaffin, and Douglas Moo would say Paul’s concern is not focused on boundary markers within the law, Sabbath, circumcision, or food laws. Instead, he is concerned with someone believing works need to be added to Christ’s work on the cross.<sup>30</sup> Scholars argue that works of the law cannot justify an individual merely because the law is a work.<sup>31</sup> Paul’s focus is not to practice aspects of the law but to try to gain righteousness outside of faith.<sup>32</sup> Paul’s other letters are helpful in determining what works of the law are and how they fit within salvation. The law never offered salvation in the law covenant. Nowhere else does Paul bring up the issue between works of the law and salvation.<sup>33</sup> Thus, works of the law refer to doing what the law requires people to do. Paul implores the Galatians that the law does not govern the new covenant just as it did not govern the old covenant. Faith led followers of God to practice the law just as faith leads Christians within the new covenant to trust in Christ.

**Faith in Jesus.** Because faith in God has always saved followers of God, reformed tradition scholars would argue the objective genitive is the favorable translation. Martin Luther even argues that if Paul had Christ’s faithfulness to the law in mind, he

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<sup>30</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered: Rethinking a Pauline Theme* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2013), 78.

<sup>31</sup> Guy Prentiss Waters, “Covenant in Paul,” in *Covenant Theology: Biblical, Theological, and Historical Perspectives*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, Nicholas Reid and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 235.

<sup>32</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 78.

<sup>33</sup> Schreiner writes,

The most convenient way to summarize Paul’s teaching is to speak against salvation by works. But such a summary would be ineffective if “works of law” focused on ethnocentrism and nationalism, for these ideas are lacking in the term *works* in the later Pauline writings. By referring to “works” in a general way, the later Pauline writings furnish evidence that the term *works of law* designates all the deeds or actions commanded by the law. (Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ*, 113)

would have addressed it elsewhere to prove it.<sup>34</sup> Likewise, it is important to view Paul's letter as a whole and see how and who Paul uses as an example of justification and how it came. Moo writes,

The traditional reformation emphasis on justification *sola fide*, "by faith alone" is a legitimate theological derivation from the antitheses of Gal 2:16 . . . in the care of Gal 2:16, it is important to see that the key and even programmatic link between faith and justification was taken up again in Gal 3 where Paul cites Abraham's believing for righteousness.<sup>35</sup>

Moo draws readers' attention to the fact that Paul does not root justification in works of the law but within Abraham's personal faith in God. Moo argues this way because it positions justification to be solely by faith in an anthropological way instead of a salvation-historical one. In other words, to be justified in the reformed position is to focus on humanity's incapability to do what the law requires.<sup>36</sup> Scholars who hold this position argue that to achieve righteousness through the means of human effort would be counter to believing in God's Word.

Lastly, Moo claims that an exegetical analysis of the text favors the translation of faith in Christ. Moo writes, "When we add to this syntactical uncertainty the lexical uncertainty about the meaning of *pistis*—faith or faithfulness, it is claimed, are both options – the situation becomes quite complicated."<sup>37</sup> It becomes complicated because if the text is translated to focus on Christ's faithfulness, Christians would be instructed to join faith *with* Christ in an unspecific way.<sup>38</sup> Moo argues that an objective genitive

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<sup>34</sup> Martin Luther, *Preface to the Epistle to the Romans*, in *Luther's Works*, ed. E. Theodore Backmann (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1960), 35:370, see also pp. 365-80.

<sup>35</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 160-61.

<sup>36</sup> Douglas J. Moo, "The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View," in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, ed. Stanly N. Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 328.

<sup>37</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 380.

<sup>38</sup> Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 381.

understanding of the text is the best way to determine Paul's message.<sup>39</sup> Moo believes his construction clarifies the text because nouns are always clearly subjects or objects: "In the case of 'faith' language in Paul, then, the situation is fairly clear. Paul often makes believers the subject of the verb 'believe' but he never makes Christ the subject of the verb. In Paul, Christians 'believe;' but Christ does not (at the linguistic level)."<sup>40</sup> Thus, reformers believe Paul's concern is justification pertaining to faith. Paul desired to show that people are regarded righteous because of their faith *in* Christ not because of Christ's faithfulness displayed.<sup>41</sup>

**Faithfulness of Jesus.** Some scholars, such as N. T. Wright and James Dunn, who hold to a new perspective on Paul, would argue the issue related to works of the law should not be focused so much on the idea of works as a means of righteousness but on the law itself.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned, scholars who hold this view believe Paul is concerned with conditions of the law in terms of what separates people groups as opposed to someone believing they can make themselves righteous by works.<sup>43</sup> Dunn would contest that Paul

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<sup>39</sup> Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 381.

<sup>40</sup> Moo writes, "This semantic pattern should determine how we should interpret the ambiguous genitive in this construction here and elsewhere. I also think that the relationship in both Romans 3 and Galatians 3 between this Christ faith and the faith of Abraham supports an objective-genitive view." Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 381.

<sup>41</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 244.

<sup>42</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Continuum, 1993), 134-41.

<sup>43</sup> Wright states,

The force of his statement is clear: "yes, you are Jewish; but as a *Christian* Jew you ought not to be separating on ethnic lines." Reading Paul strictly in his own context—as John Piper rightly insists we must always ultimately do—we are forced to conclude, at least in a preliminary way, that "to be justified" here does not mean "to be granted free forgiveness of your sins," "to come into a right relation with God," or some other near-synonym of "to be reckoned 'in the right' before God," but rather, and very specifically, "to be reckoned by God to be a true member of his family, and hence with the right to share table fellowship." This does not clinch the argument for my reading of the whole doctrine. But the first signs are that, for Paul, "justification," whatever else it included, always had in mind God's declaration of membership, and that this always referred specifically to the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in faithful membership of the Christian family. (Wright, *Justification*, 96)

had God's prior covenant with Israel in mind as opposed to just outward action.<sup>44</sup> Paul was not concerned with the Galatians practicing works of the law, but rather was opposed to the Judaizers nationalism.<sup>45</sup> By looking at works of the law this way, this perspective desires to focus on the torah itself as a marker of the people of God.<sup>46</sup> It focuses on the Mosaic covenant as the issue more than physical actions.<sup>47</sup> Simply, the works of the law

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<sup>44</sup> Schreiner explains,

A very different understanding of the term has been proposed by James Dunn, in what has come to be called "the new perspective" on Paul. Dunn, influenced by the work of E. P. Sanders, claims the notion that Judaism is legalistic is a myth imposed on the Pauline material by those who read Paul through the lens of the Reformation. *Works of law* is not shorthand for *legalism*, according to Dunn. The term focuses instead on the parts of the law that separate Jews from Gentiles, particularly circumcision, sabbath and food laws. Paul's rejection of works of law in Galatians occurs immediately after the incident at Antioch where the proper stance toward food laws was debated (Gal 2:11-14, 16). We also know from both Galatians and Romans that the necessity of circumcision was the subject of intense controversy. When we put Paul in his first-century context, says Dunn, we see that he denied righteousness by works of law because such works separated Jews from Gentiles. Paul objected to the idea that Gentiles had to become Jews to enter the people of God. (Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 110)

<sup>45</sup> E. P. Sanders writes,

This is the meaning that the main topic of Galatians requires. The subject of the letter is the circumcision of Paul's gentile converts. This is a question of membership in or entry into the people of God in the last days—or, as we might phrase it, membership in the body of Christ. Paul's opponents were arguing that his gentiles were not actually "in." They had faith in Christ, but they lacked the second membership requirement, circumcision, which would make them truly in the people of God. That is the biblical requirement for membership in God's chosen people, Israel. Paul's argument was that his gentiles had fulfilled the one and only requirement to be in the right group. Of course the converts relied on Christ's fidelity, but *his fidelity alone did not transfer some people and not others into membership in his body*. To enter, they had to make a definite commitment of heart, soul, mind, and strength. He called this commitment "faith in Christ." This clinches the dominant meaning of "faith in/of Christ." It was what the converts did: they put their faith in him. (E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015], 511)

<sup>46</sup> Wright explains,

He is talking about *ethnic identity*, and about the practices that go with that. And he is about to show that in the gospel this ethnic identity is dismantled, so that a new identity may be constructed, in which the things that separated Jew from Gentile (as in Ephesians 2:14-16, on which see below) no longer matter. This, and only this, is the context in which we can read the famous and dense verse 2:16 with some hope of success. (Wright, *Justification*, 95)

<sup>47</sup> Harmon writes,

Scholars such as James D. G. Dunn have argued that works of the law refer to those requirements of the law that specifically mark the person as a member of the Jewish nation. As such the focus of the phrase is not obedience to the law in general but specifically those obligations that distinguish Jews from gentiles, such as circumcision, food laws, and keeping the Sabbath. Understood this way, Paul

cannot justify within the new perspective on Paul's paradigm because they are torah works.<sup>48</sup> To enforce the works of the law would be to go back in time and operate in covenantal chaos.<sup>49</sup>

When translating Galatians 2:16, holders of the new perspective on Paul believe that Christ's faithfulness should be in view to combat divisions between Jews and Gentiles. N. T. Wright argues, "If we are 'not justified by works of the law,' how *are* we 'justified?'" Paul's answer opens up the now famous question of *pistis Iēsou Christou*, which can be translated either as 'the faithfulness of Jesus Christ' or as 'faith in Jesus Christ.'"<sup>50</sup> Wright favors the former translation because he admirably wants to focus on Jesus as humanity's representative who perfectly obeyed the law and fulfilled all the requirements pertaining to righteousness. Jesus's death on the cross redefines the boundary markers of the people of God. Wright continues, "The achievement of Jesus as the crucified Messiah is the basis of this redefinition. The faith of the individual is what marks out those who now belong to him, to the Messiah-redefined family."<sup>51</sup> Understanding Paul's argument this way takes the attention off works-based righteousness and focuses on Christ's perfect obedience as humanity's representative.<sup>52</sup>

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is not describing an effort to earn God's favor through obedience to the law, but an effort to maintain the distinction between Jew and gentile. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 110)

<sup>48</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 158.

<sup>49</sup> Sanders states,

Paul's argument was that his gentiles had fulfilled the one and only requirement to be in the right group. Of course the converts relied on Christ's fidelity, but *his fidelity alone did not transfer some people and not others into membership in his body*. To enter, they had to make a definite commitment of heart, soul, mind, and strength. He called this commitment "faith *in* Christ." This clinches the dominant meaning of "faith *in/of* Christ." It was what the converts did: they put their faith in him. (Sanders, *Paul*, 511)

<sup>50</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 97.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, *Justification*, 97.

<sup>52</sup> Sanders writes,

We note that in Gal. 2:14-16, the first part of Paul's rebuke to Peter as he recalled it, perhaps with elaboration, there was nothing at all about individuals earning enough merit points to force God to

**Paul's concern.** The new perspective is attractive because it highlights the importance of covenantal order but lacks the context Paul seems to expound on regarding works of the law and justification.<sup>53</sup> In other words, as interesting as the new perspective on Paul is, it appears that Paul is not concerned with Judaism as much as he is with human effort.<sup>54</sup> Hinted here and expounded on later, it seems that Paul draws the reader's attention to individual action.<sup>55</sup> Stephen Westerholm says, "The fundamental question addressed by Galatians thus is not 'What is wrong with Judaism (or Sinaitic law)' but 'what is wrong with humanity that Judaism (and Sinaitic law) cannot remedy?'"<sup>56</sup> Paul sees past the appeal to follow the historical covenantal practice and brings it to the heart issue—human achievement. Matthew Harmon notes, "While the social function of the law to separate Jew and gentile is a crucial part of the Galatian crisis, Paul sees a more fundamental issue beneath it. The foundational issue is that it is impossible for any human being to be declared right before God on the basis of any kind of works, not even those commanded by the Mosaic law."<sup>57</sup> To keep the law to attain righteousness is not an act of love for Christ but a denial of his work (Gal 2:21).

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save them. When Paul writes "not by works of law" (three times in 2:16), only one point of law is at issue: circumcision, the entry rite to Judaism. There is nothing about doing more and more legalistic works, piling up meritorious deeds, and the like. The question is whether or not Paul's gentile converts must also convert to Judaism by being circumcised. (Sanders, *Paul*, 513)

<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 96.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 120.

<sup>55</sup> Westerholm, *Justification Reconsidered*, 53.

<sup>56</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The "Lutheran" Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 381.

<sup>57</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 11.

## No One Is Righteous

In addition to Paul's focus on justification done by faith alone, it seems that Paul is alluding to Psalm 143:2.<sup>58</sup> The psalmist writes, "Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you." The allusion is present in the final line in verse 16: "Because by works of the law no one will be justified." It appears that just as David knew his merit could not justify himself before God, Paul is applying it to the Galatians' current situation in light of the works of the law. Just as David relied on God's mercy and grace to count himself right before God, Paul conveys to the Galatians the same gospel reality—which is only one. The Mosaic covenant is good (Rom 7:12), but it cannot make one righteous.

Paul's allusion to Psalm 143 and its theological principal fits Paul's argument of justification by faith alone and my thesis statement that justification by faith alone encourages ethnic unity within the new covenant inaugurated by Christ. Harmon notes, "The point of disagreement between Paul and Peter is not on the basis of justification; it is whether requiring gentiles to keep the Mosaic law is consistent with justification by faith."<sup>59</sup> The proper doctrine of justification encourages ethnic diversity because inclusion within the people of God is not dependent upon adherence to the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup> Thus, works of the law should be understood as doing what the law requires but doing what the law requires does not make one justified before God.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Keener states,

At first this reason might sound tautological, but Paul is providing an implicit argument for those familiar with Scripture, at least with the Psalms used in worship; he is evoking biblical language. The psalmist pleased with God not to judge his servant, because no one living is righteous by God's standards (Ps. 143:2). Paul evokes the passage in the Greek translation (LXX 142:2) familiar to his hearers, which renders the second line, "because no one living will be justified/found righteous before you," overlapping with Paul in the words nobody will be righted with God. The Psalm is indeed apropos to Paul's larger message. (Keener, *Galatians*, 189)

<sup>59</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 113.

<sup>60</sup> Frank Thielman, *Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 124.

<sup>61</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 166.

The Mosaic covenant cannot justify a person any more than the Galatians' past paganism could. Justification comes through faith.

## Summary

Paul's rebuke to Peter is summed up in Galatians 2:14: "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" James Hamilton notes, "When Paul indicted Peter for living like a Gentile and not like a Jew (Gal 2:14b), he had in view Peter's abandonment of total adherence to the Mosaic law (Acts 10:9-15)."<sup>62</sup> Peter's actions were in line with the Judaizers because it was drawing lines within the new covenant community in terms of acceptance before God.<sup>63</sup> Paul condemns Peter for forcing Gentiles to become Jews because adherence to the law does not make one justified; faith does.<sup>64</sup> If justification is understood wrongly, then all other teachings in Scripture diminish in value. Brian Vickers notes, "Justification is not the whole of salvation or of the gospel, but it provides what is necessary to make us right before God and reorients us toward God's ultimate goal in creation and salvation of having a people who trust him and, as a result of that trust, obey him from the heart."<sup>65</sup> The proper doctrine of justification promotes ethnic unity because of Christ's work, not the works of the law's demands.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 471.

<sup>63</sup> David Arthur DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 206.

<sup>64</sup> Hamilton explains,

The idea is that on certain points the Gentiles were required to adhere to the demands of the law of Moses. Paul's implicit objections to the man-made requirements of the non-gospel preached by the false teachers, then, are not indicators that Paul view's the Mosaic requirements man-made. Rather, in Paul's view the section of certain Mosaic requirements as necessary for salvation is man-made. For Paul, now that Christ has come, those who would be saved through the law of Moses must attain perfect obedience to the whole law (3:10-12). (Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 471)

<sup>65</sup> Vickers, *Justification by Grace*, 2.

<sup>66</sup> DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 212.



Paul's defense of Gentile inclusion of the people of God is not found in works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. When justification is rightly understood, ethnic diversity within the people of God is embraced. The Israel of God is made up of those who walk by faith, not by the works of the law. To be a child of God is not to become a Jew but to place one's faith in Jesus Christ.

### **The Irreversible Covenant (Gal 2:17-19)**

Paul rebuked Peter for being out of step with the gospel by showing that justification does not require obedience to the law but faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>67</sup> To further his argument, Paul appears to come alongside Peter and remind of life before Christ. Paul's continual usage of the pronoun "we" conveys that he is still addressing Peter. It appears that Paul is using the Judiazers' and Peter's fear-influenced logic against them. Paul, in verses 17-19, desires to teach that *if* the law is the lens through which one views justification, then Peter and Paul are transgressors. Because Peter and Paul were found to be sinners when all they had was the law. They did not think of themselves as justified by the law in the old covenant. Thus, *if* works of the law did justify, Christ would be a servant of sin because Peter and Paul would be seeking justification through a means other than what God gave. But the law does not justify. Peter and Paul were found to be sinners under the law because the law exposes sin. The law provides the path of eternal life, but it does not produce life. People are found to be sinners under the law because the law increases transgressions (Gal 3:19).

In addition, Paul says that *if* he rebuilds what he tore down, he would be a transgressor (Gal 2:18) Paul is teaching that if Gentiles are not required to keep the law, if indeed it could justify, then Jesus encourages sin. Here, Paul teaches that the covenant inaugurated by Christ is irreversible because faith in Christ is the grounds for justification, not the law. In other words, the Mosaic covenant does not define sin anymore, but the lines

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<sup>67</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free*, paperback ed. (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2000), 189.

have been redrawn in light of Christ. Covenantal acceptance is not through works of the law but through Jesus's work on the cross. If the law is mandated within the new covenant, then divisions are made within the people of God. Justification would not be by faith alone.<sup>68</sup> Justification creates ethnic unity around a person, not a practice.

### **Found to Be Sinners**

As mentioned, Paul engages in a rhetorical argument addressing how someone is justified. There are two debated views when studying verse 17. One argues that Paul is focusing on Peter and Paul's conversion in light of Christ. The other focuses on Peter and Paul's pre-conversion experience. The pre-conversion interpretation is favorable because it fits within Paul's greater argument of seeing the law of works-based righteousness with Judaism.<sup>69</sup> Further, Paul says, "We too were found to be sinners" (Gal 2:17b). Paul conveys that Peter and himself "prove to be" sinners when they were under the Mosaic covenant.<sup>70</sup> Operating under the law did not justify them; faith in God's promises did.

Paul implores Peter that when they came to Christ, they did not do it through the law but through faith. Having Psalm 143:2 in mind, Paul continues to show that Jews and Gentiles are all found to be sinners prior to faith in Christ. Verse 17a further supports this reading because it conveys that when Peter and Paul sought to be justified, they did it through Christ, not the law. All are sinners before God, regardless of whether they are keeping the law or not.

### **Servant of Sin**

The men from James, Judaizers, and Peter may be tempted to view Jesus as a servant of sin if they view the torah as a rite of what is clean and what is not. All parties agree that Jesus is the justifier of all people groups, but he becomes a servant of sin if the

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<sup>68</sup> DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 242.

<sup>69</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 168.

<sup>70</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 235.

Mosaic covenant takes precedence over faith. Jews and gentiles can coexist together not because outward obedience is kept but because inward faith is expressed.<sup>71</sup> Christ is not a servant of sin because the old covenant has passed, and the new covenant is irreversible.

### **To Rebuild Is to Go Back**

Verse 18 further answers why Jesus is not a servant of sin. Paul desires to show that a life lived under the old covenant is fruitless because it seeks to return individuals to bondage rather than freedom. Paul continues to turn the table on his opponents by saying it is not Jesus who promotes sin within the new era but those who teach adherence of the law. Those who depend on the law for justification are transgressors.

Paul is clever in his response by using the pronoun “I” here to convey that he identifies himself as representing Israel. Paul desires to teach that he would be a transgressor if he tried to rebuild the Old Testament covenant in light of Christ. To rebuild is to go back in redemptive history because it would be to deny Jesus as the Christ and operate outside the will of God.<sup>72</sup> The old covenant is categorized by sin and death, whereas the new covenant is life and righteousness.<sup>73</sup> To tear down what Christ has established within the new covenant would be to rebuild the “dividing walls of hostility” between Jews and Gentiles again (Eph 2:14).<sup>74</sup>

### **The Law Kills**

Before transitioning into his gospel proclamation of who he is in Christ, Paul briefly outlines how the law kills, so that may be attained life in Jesus. Mark Seifrid notes,

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<sup>71</sup> George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 546.

<sup>72</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 170.

<sup>73</sup> Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 114.

<sup>74</sup> Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 85.

“In 2:19 Paul declares that it was ‘through the law’ that he died to the law, anticipating his use of scriptural proofs, in which he finds the law subordinated to the promise and transcended by its fulfillment in Christ (3:15-29).”<sup>75</sup> Paul is about to outline covenantal history to prove that justification is rooted in faith rather than works of the law. The law increases transgressions (Gal 3:19). For Paul to live in Christ, he had to die to the law. Paul dying to the law means he accepts Christ’s work on the cross as the fulfillment of the law. For Paul, Christ became a curse for him so that he may not bear the curse of the law himself.<sup>76</sup> The law and its constraints on the people of God have ended because Christ lived the law, freed people from the law, and paid the penalty the law required—death.<sup>77</sup> Thus, for people to be in right standing before God, Christians must die to self-righteousness and live in Christ righteousness.

### **Summary**

Justification promotes ethnic unity because right standing before God comes by faith, not works of the law. Regardless of whether someone keeps the law or not, right standing is unaffected. Jesus inaugurated the new covenant, making the terms of the law void. To mandate the law is to turn back time on redemptive history, making Jesus’s death and resurrection pointless. To live in Christ is to keep in step with the gospel. Justification is by faith alone.

### **Live by Faith (Gal 2:20-21)**

Paul climactically addresses his renouncement of justification by the law by stating that he has been crucified with Christ, claiming he no longer lives, but Christ lives within him (Gal 2:20a). Paul being crucified with Christ is how he died to the law.<sup>78</sup> Paul’s

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<sup>75</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 79.

<sup>76</sup> Crowe, *The Path of Faith*, 132.

<sup>77</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 171.

<sup>78</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 119.

life now is defined by living in Christ by faith. Faith is how Paul is joined to Christ.<sup>79</sup>

This section will outline what Paul means by being crucified with Christ, the implications of being crucified with Christ, and what it means to have Christ live in him. Paul concludes that he does not nullify the grace of God but trusts solely in Christ's death as the means of his justification.

### **Crucified with Christ**

When Paul declares he has been crucified with Christ, he is conveying the radical change in the people of God. The age of the law is over. Paul being crucified with Christ means the law and its mandatory nature no longer have a hold on him because he identifies with Christ. Because Christ lives in Paul, the Holy Spirit guides and directs Paul's life.<sup>80</sup> By faith, Christians are joined to Christ, participating in the age to come as a new creation.

Having faith in the Son means living by the Spirit. Paul uses himself as an example of what it means to die to law and the world and to live in Christ (Gal 2:20). Paul, once zealous for the law, now regards the law as meaningless not because it is not good but because it causes division within and among the people of God.<sup>81</sup> Having Habakkuk 2:4 in mind, it seems Paul is drawing attention to the reality of what life in the Spirit looks

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<sup>79</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 119.

<sup>80</sup> Harmon writes,

Paul further unpacks the underlying theological framework of Galatians 2:19-20 in Romans 6:1-11. As believers "we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. For if we have been joined with him in the likeness of his death, we will certainly also be in the likeness of his resurrection" (Rom 6:4-5). Our "old self was crucified" with Christ so we are no longer "enslaved to sin" (Rom 6:6). Because believers have "died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him" (Rom 6:8). This parallel passage makes it clear that although Paul uses the first singular pronoun in Galatians 2:19-20, he is presenting his own experience as paradigmatic for all believers, Jew and gentile alike. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 120)

<sup>81</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 196.

like and how it shapes the covenant community.<sup>82</sup> Paul defends the doctrine of justification from a theological perspective. Paul's ability to live in both his current flesh and in Christ becomes feasible due to his death to the world and resurrection in Christ. Paul continues to outline his theological defense of justification promoting ethnic unity by conveying that believers are able to live in the flesh in this current life because they live by faith in the Son of God. Individuals are able to be accepted before God, not through personal merit but faith. Paul's focus is on Christ, not works.

### **To Nullify Grace Diminishes the Cross**

Paul's conversation ends with Peter by tying everything he previously said to this moment. If righteousness were through the law, then the cross has no purpose. The law's purpose was not to give life but to expose death and increase transgressions. The law exposes death by showing sin's presence. The law increases transgressions because it exposes unrighteousness. Paul rebukes Peter with the gospel. To nullify the grace of God is to reject God's generosity of sending Christ to die for humanity's sins. Paul points Peter and all Christians to look at the cross and have it declare how right standing before God is accomplished. By faith, the unrighteous are made righteous. By faith, all people from every tribe can stand before God. Not through adherence to the law but through the blood of Jesus.

### **Summary**

Paul uses himself as an example of what living under the law looks like and how he is justified by faith. Paul was crucified with Christ, so he no longer lives beneath the requirements of the law. To believe the law contributes to justification is to nullify the cross

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<sup>82</sup> Roy E. Ciampa states, "The allusion to Hab 2:4 would fit neatly into the prior statements regarding tearing down and building, death and (resurrection) life, reinforcing the idea that Paul (and all believers in Christ) now lives in the eschatological world of redemption that is on the other side of the death-resurrection divide where the norms of Mosaic law no longer continue to play the same role as they did previously." Roy E. Ciampa, *The Presence and Function of Scripture in Galatians 1 and 2*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen Zum Neuen Testament* 102 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 212)

and diminish God's grace of sending Jesus to die for humanity's sins. Paul argues that justification reaches all ethnicities because it is through faith not works of the law. Proper justification includes Jews and Gentiles because faith alone brings all people groups right before God.

### **Conclusion**

Justification allows for multiple ethnicities because right standing before God comes through faith, not works. Paul argues this reality in his confrontation with Peter by reminding him that justification has always been through faith, not works. Paul's issue with Peter's separation from Gentiles was not due to a lack of Torah adherence but because separation does not exist within the community of God when faith is practiced. For Paul, redemptive history teaches that faith is what makes a Jew a true "Jew." To be a true Jew, for Paul, is to look outside of oneself and trust in God to carry out his plan. Paul uses multiple Old Testament allusions to show that no one is righteous before God despite one's ethnicity. Paul ultimately uses himself as the example of what it looks like to be justified before God. Paul, a Jew, no longer lives but Christ lives within him. Paul does not look at his ethnicity or obedience to the law as grounds for justification but looks to the cross. Paul's faith is in Jesus Christ. Paul declares to his readers and his opponents that it is by faith that justification takes place, not works.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE BLESSED NATIONS (GAL 3:1-15)

Those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background. In Galatians, Paul contends that all who had faith in Jesus, the promised messiah, are justified before God equally. To show that all people experience Abraham's blessings through faith in Jesus, Paul's rhetorical questions for the Galatians will be looked at. Paul questioned the Galatians regarding their salvation to lead them to determine when they received the Spirit. Paul argues his theological understanding of Abraham through the Galatians' encounter with the Spirit. Paul showed that all nations are blessed when they hear by faith.

An examination of Paul's questions for the Galatians and his understanding of the life of Abraham and its implications on the world need to be reviewed. Paul combats the idea that the law makes people children of God by showing who are Abraham's children. Paul connects the gospel he received from God with the same gospel Abraham heard.

Following my discussion of Paul's understanding of Abraham's justification, I will explore Paul's assortment of Old Testament quotations regarding the law's curses and the law's effect on people. Paul draws from multiple Old Testament themes regarding the law to reflect the law's condemning function over against the promise of faith. From the Old Testament, Paul shows the Galatians what they are freed from and for what purpose—to experience the blessings of Abraham. The nations join Abraham in his blessings through faith, regardless their ethnic background.



### **By the Spirit or by the Law? (Gal 3:1-5)**

Paul begins his defense of justification by grace through faith by starting with when the Galatians first believed. Paul designs his rhetorical questions to function as theological proofs for his readers to understand how they initially became followers of Christ.<sup>1</sup> Paul's theological proofs show the Galatians they already have everything the Judiazers are offering them. The Galatians have the Spirit (3:2) and are heirs with Abraham (3:14). The Judiazers promise acceptance before God through circumcision, but the Galatians already have favor from God by faith.

#### **Publicly Crucified**

In Galatians 3:1, Paul directly addresses the Galatians for the first time since the opening of his letter. In utter bewilderment, Paul calls the Galatians foolish and asks them who bewitched them to believe a different gospel.<sup>2</sup> Jarvis Williams notes, "Paul attacks not the Galatians' intelligence, but their lack of spiritual discernment."<sup>3</sup> Paul's confusion stems from the Galatians' knowledge of how they came to know God (1:4). Not only that, but he raised Jesus from the dead (1:1) and personally commissioned Paul to be an apostle (1:15-21). In other words, Paul does not understand how the Galatians could turn to a different gospel promising them life when they have already experienced the fullness of life found in Christ.

Further, Paul is irritated because the Galatians saw Jesus publicly crucified (Gal 3:1). Paul is not saying that the Galatians personally witnessed Jesus's crucifixion, but through the preaching of the gospel they understand Christ's work on the cross and its

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<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 203.

<sup>2</sup> Paul's comments toward the Galatians by calling them foolish may be connected to Old Testament proverbs describing the person who does not love the living God (Prov 1:7). Jarvis Williams notes, "The same adjective (anoetos) in Galatians 3:1 is applied to Israel's enemies (e.g., LXX Deut 32:31). The term is applied to Jews who renounce a Jewish way of life in 4 Macc 8:17." Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 82.

<sup>3</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 82.

significance.<sup>4</sup> Paul conveyed the cross and its meaning when he proclaimed the gospel to the Galatians. When Paul announced Jesus as the crucified messiah, Paul desired to show the Galatians that the law did not deliver them from their sin; a righteous savior did.<sup>5</sup> Thus, the Galatians saw Jesus and his work for them through Paul's gospel.<sup>6</sup>

### **Works or Faith?**

Paul sought to understand who distorted the gospel that led the Galatians to believe a false one. Paul transitions now to ask the Galatians when they received the Spirit. Douglas Moo writes, "By asking about how they received the Spirit, Paul assumes something that is central to his theology: when a person comes to Christ and is justified, that person receives the Spirit of God (cf. esp. Rom 8:9-10)."<sup>7</sup> Paul believes that by answering this question the whole dilemma should end.

For Paul, receiving the Spirit directly relates to the new age of salvation in which the Galatians exist.<sup>8</sup> Old Testament prophets predicted such a day would come,

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Williams writes,

Interpreters differ on the meaning of *prographo*. Each time Paul uses the verb *prographo* in his letters (Rom 15:4; cf. Eph 3:3), it refers to something written in beforehand. In Rom 15:4, it refers to the OT scriptures. In Eph 3:3, it refers to Paul's words. In Gal 3:1 (Paul's earliest use of the verb), the term refers to Paul's gospel proclamation during his first missionary journey with the Galatians (Acts 13-14). On this journey, he preached Jesus' crucifixion as the means by which sinners become right with God by faith (cf. Gal 2:16; 3:10-14). (Williams, *Galatians*, 84)

<sup>6</sup> Matthew S. Harmon states, "Because God revealed his Son in Paul (1:15-16) and because the risen Christ lives inside of Paul (2:20), Paul is able to preach the crucifixion in such a compelling, beautiful, and glorious way that those who saw him preach in effect saw Christ crucified before their very eyes." Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 129.

<sup>7</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 182.

<sup>8</sup> Schreiner writes, "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." Schreiner,

and Paul capitalizes on it to show the Galatians where they stand in redemptive history (Joel 2:28-32; quoted in Acts 2:17-21). The Galatians and Paul know they have the Spirit.<sup>9</sup> The Spirit inhabitation within the Galatians is seen through the new spiritual identity they experienced as said in Galatians 4:6, as well as the miracles seen in the midst, said in Galatians 3:5. The evidence of the Spirit's presence is before the Galatians. They should have renounced the Judaizers offer by seeing what they already have. The Galatians have everything in Christ because they are already children of God by faith, not works. For Paul, the main issue here is not whether the Galatians have the Spirit but rather how they received the Spirit. Paul does not doubt the Galatians' current salvation; he assumes they have the Spirit.<sup>10</sup> Because the Galatians' possession of the Spirit came through faith; Paul can confidently say the works of the law cannot justify (Gal 2:15-16).

### **Spirit or Flesh?**

Paul again calls the Galatians foolish in his third rhetorical question. If indeed the Galatians received the Spirit by faith, which they did, then Paul shows them their poor logic of sanctification.<sup>11</sup> Paul conveys that the Galatians began by the Spirit. They are currently spiritually alive because of the Spirit within them (Titus 3:4-7).

Having begun by the Spirit marks the Galatians' initial conversion. Paul mentions the Galatians' conversion because he wants to show them that their conversion and sanctification happen by the same means, the Spirit. Harmon notes, "By pursuing growth in the Christian life through observing the Mosaic regulations regarding

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*Galatians*, 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).

<sup>9</sup> James D. G. Dunn writes, "Since God had thus united them to his eschatological people, on whom the Spirit had been poured (e.g., Isa 32:15; Ezek 37:4-14; Joel 2:28-29), nothing more than that common participation in the Spirit was necessary for them formally to be recognized as part of that people (cf. Acts 10:47-48)." James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle of the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (New York: T & T Clark, 1993), 153.

<sup>10</sup> Dunn, *Epistle of the Galatians*, 153-54.

<sup>11</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 180.

circumcision and dietary restrictions, the Galatians are turning their backs on the only one able to empower them for the Christian life—the Holy Spirit.”<sup>12</sup> Believing justification can come using the law is covenantal madness.<sup>13</sup> If the Galatians turn to the Mosaic law, Paul asks if their suffering had been in vain.<sup>14</sup> Paul seems to mention the Galatians’ suffering because of the response it has drawn from Paul’s opponents. The Galatians’ suffering appears to be from their belief in Jesus but not adhering to the Mosaic law.<sup>15</sup> Because following the law would nullify the cross and their suffering, it appears that the Galatians’ suffering is their hesitancy in following the law.<sup>16</sup>

The Galatians began their salvation by faith in Christ. Paul does not believe the Galatians have possessed fake faith until now.<sup>17</sup> To suffer in vain would be to live a life in unbelief and drifting away from God. Paul believes the Galatians are children of God but warns them of the consequences of trusting in the law for righteousness. The Galatians have experienced miracles in their midst not because they are ethnically Israel but because they are children of God by faith.

### **Justification Has Always Been the Same**

Paul’s gospel presentation to the Galatians figuratively presented Jesus crucified before their eyes. Through Paul’s rhetorical questions, he confronts the Galatians with the reality of their spiritual genesis and how they have continually grown in their faith.

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<sup>12</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 133.

<sup>13</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 186.

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 185.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiner acknowledges, “The verb used here (πάσχω) could mean ‘experienced,’ as many commentators take it, rather than ‘suffered.’” Nevertheless, he argues that “this word (πάσχω) elsewhere in the NT means ‘suffered.’” 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.” Schreiner, *Galatians*, 185.

<sup>16</sup> Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 145.

<sup>17</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 297.

Conversion and sanctification both happen by faith. For this reason, Paul appeals Abraham in Galatians 3:6 by connecting it to verse 5. Andrew Das writes, “Abraham serves . . . 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.”<sup>18</sup> Abraham heard God’s promises and believed. The Galatians heard the gospel and believed. Faith justifies a person before God. The old covenant looked forward and believed God would fulfill the promises he made to Abraham. Obeying the law expresses faith during the old covenant. The old covenant looked forward to the realities of the new covenant. The Galatians exist in the new covenant. The new covenant focuses on Christ and his death and resurrection. The new covenant proclaims Christ as the true Abrahamic offspring. Because faith brings the Galatians into God’s family, those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

### **Righteousness by Faith (Gal 3:6-9)**

Paul’s entire argument regarding justification by grace through faith rests on Abraham’s experience with God. Abraham believed in God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). Because Abraham was justified by faith, the Galatians (gentiles) can be sons of Abraham (Gal 3:7). Furthermore, they experience the blessings along with Abraham (Gal 3:9). Abraham is significant for Paul because the promises God made to Abraham dictate how and through whom God will bless the world. Jesus Christ was the fulfillment and how the nations will be blessed through Abraham. Thus, those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

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<sup>18</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 301.

## Understanding Abraham's Righteousness

Galatians 3:6 begins by comparing the Galatians' experience with God and Abraham's by stating "just as" Abraham believed, so also did the Galatians believe.<sup>19</sup> Paul draws from Scripture to prove that justification has always been by the same means. Williams writes, "When God reckons someone righteous, he considers something to be true that was previously untrue."<sup>20</sup> God consequently declared Abraham righteous due to his belief. Likewise, the Galatians were declared righteous by their faith in Jesus Christ.

The Judiazers advocated for ethics-based righteousness. In ethics-based righteousness, the Judiazers see works of the law as necessary for justification. Second Temple Judaism teaches that many believed that Abraham was declared righteous through obedience, not faith.<sup>21</sup> Paul combats this poor reading of Scripture with Scripture.<sup>22</sup> Paul does not dismiss Abraham's obedience (Rom 4); obedience matters to

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<sup>19</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 138.

<sup>20</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 88.

<sup>21</sup> Schreiner writes,

Jewish tradition emphasized Abraham's obedience rather than faith. For example, 1 Macc 2:52 says, "Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness?" (NRSV). The sacrifice of Isaac recorded in Gen 22 merged in 1 Maccabees with Gen 15:6, with the result that Abraham's obedience rather than faith is featured. The same emphasis on Abraham's faithfulness and obedience emerges in Sir 44:19-21 "Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory. He kept the law of the Most High and entered into a covenant with him; he certified the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he proved faithful. Therefore, the Lord assured him with an oath that the nations would be blessed through his offspring; that he would make a numerous as the dust of the earth, and exalt his offspring like the stars, and give them an inheritance from sea to sea and from the Euphrates to the ends of the earth." (NRSV). Sirach stresses that the blessing of Abraham was given to him because of his obedience. In doing so he reflects, in part, the message of the OT itself (Gen 22:17-18; 26:5). What is missing however, is the crucial role that faith played in Abraham's life. (Schreiner, *Galatians*, 190-91)

<sup>22</sup> Mark Seifrid explains,

Paul begins by presenting Abraham as the paradigm of salvation, much as he does in Romans. The scripture concerning Abraham sets the terms of divine blessing, "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (Gal. 3:6; Gen. 15:6). As Paul's subsequent argument reveals, he understands this divine word to bear both exclusive and universal implications. On the one hand, *all* who believe are sons of Abraham; on the other, *only* those who believe are sons of Abraham (Gal. 3:7). The promise which "preached the gospel in advance" to Abraham is universal in scope: "in you shall all the nations be blessed" (verse 8). Yet Abraham also provides the pattern to which all who receive the blessing must be conformed: they are blessed *with* the believing Abraham (verse 9; cf. Rom.

Paul. Paul believes obedience is an expression of faith.<sup>23</sup> Thomas Schreiner argues, “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.”<sup>24</sup> Paul views Abraham’s life through Genesis 15:6, and he does this because previous authors of Scripture do the same. Moses depicts God himself as the fire passing between the two animals signifying that God himself will bring to pass his promises: through his Word, not Abraham’s obedience (Gen 15:17-20). Isaiah conveys that God called Abraham and made him righteous through his Word (Isa 51:1-4). Biblical theology shows that justification before God comes through faith in God, not the faithfulness of the follower.

### **Like Father Like Son**

Because Abraham was justified by faith, the Galatians can know they are also justified by the same means (3:7).<sup>25</sup> Faith provides the path by which people are accepted before God and receive the Abrahamic blessings.<sup>26</sup> Paul shows that it was true for Abraham (3:6), for Jews (2:21), and now for Gentiles (3:7). Paul essentially says, “Like father like son.” If Abraham was counted righteous through faith, then the same truth applies to the Galatians. The Spirit marks Jews and Gentiles as offspring of Abraham.

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4:12). In his second appeal to Scripture in this passage, Paul very probably echoes the conclusion of the Genesis narrative of the promise given to Abraham (Gen. 12:3; 22:18). Implicitly, therefore, he has in view both the beginning of Abraham’s faith and its final testing in the offering of Isaac, even if the latter is very much in the background. The blessing of faith is simultaneously unconditioned gratuity and the reward of obedience, just as it is in Romans. (Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 [Downers Grove, IL: Apollos, 2000], 80)

<sup>23</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 190.

<sup>25</sup> Frank Thielman, *Galatians*, in *ESV Expository Commentary*, vol. 10, *Romans-Galatians* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 610.

<sup>26</sup> Jesus seems to argue this same point in John 8:39-44. Those who are Abraham’s decedents act as he did.

People become Abraham's offspring by faith in Christ, not works of the law.<sup>27</sup> The sons of Abraham are not physical descendants, but they mirror their father's faith. Paul's like-father-like-son comparison between Abraham and the Galatians proves that those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

### **The Same Gospel**

What should be simple became complicated for the Galatians. The Judaizers taught that the people of God are marked by obedience to the law.<sup>28</sup> Paul proclaims that faith is the distinguishing mark. Because Abraham and the Galatians are justified the same way, Paul argues that the gospel heard by both parties was essentially the same.<sup>29</sup> Paul argues that Scripture itself claims that Gentile inclusion has always been the plan of redemption. Paul quotes Scripture to prove his point when it says, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (Gen 12:3).

Paul's quote of Genesis 12:1-3 seems to echo Genesis 18:18, 22:18, 26:4, and 28:14 as well.<sup>30</sup> Paul echoes these passages by replacing "tribes of the earth" with "the nations."<sup>31</sup> He positions all aspects of Abraham's obedience in light of his belief in God's promises.<sup>32</sup> Williams notes, "His (Paul's) exegesis likely contrasts with his opponents' exegesis of the Abrahamic narratives and their interpretation of the role of works of the law

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<sup>27</sup> Todd A. Wilson, *Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 103.

<sup>28</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 521.

<sup>29</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 198.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 89.

<sup>31</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 307.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 89.



in the laws of God's covenant people."<sup>33</sup> Paul's contrast reveals that the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham is indeed the same gospel taught to the Galatians because both promised inclusion of all peoples before God through faith in his promises.<sup>34</sup> The gospel preached to Abraham is that Gentiles would be blessed along with him.<sup>35</sup> God foresaw the Gentiles united with Jews as the people of God because faith unites ethnicities together, not outward practice.<sup>36</sup> Gentile inclusion has always been a part of the gospel message.<sup>37</sup> Paul believes Scripture clearly teaches Gentile inclusion in Abraham's blessing. The Galatians sharing familial status with Abraham was not an innovation created later by God but was foretold by Scripture itself.<sup>38</sup> Thus, those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

### **Let the Nations Be Blessed**

Based on Paul's theological defense of justification and its foreshadowing of Gentile inclusion in the Old Testament, Paul proclaims that those of faith are blessed with Abraham. Because justification comes by faith, Paul can say that all believers are blessed with Abraham despite their ethnic background. The blessing Abraham received was right standing before God in a perfect covenantal relationship, which is why being blessed *with*

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<sup>33</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 89.

<sup>34</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung and Philip S. Henman, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 139.

<sup>35</sup> Harmon notes,

Paul sees in God's promise to bless all the nations through Abraham the gospel in a nutshell. From this seed blessing will sprout the mature gospel of the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus Christ. The gospel is not something completely new and without precedent, as if God tried one thing in the Old Testament and then decided to go a new direction when he saw it was not working. With the coming of Christ, believers are now able to more clearly see that this has been God's plan all along. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 143)

<sup>36</sup> Frank Thielman, *Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 122.

<sup>37</sup> N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 101.

<sup>38</sup> Sanders, *Paul*, 521.

Abraham is significant for this study. To be blessed *with* Abraham conveys a shared experience. Paul calls Abraham “the man of faith” because he categorizes Abraham’s relationship with God by his faith, not his works (Gal 3:9).<sup>39</sup> The nations are blessed because, like Abraham, the Galatians and all peoples experience the reverse of the curses of Genesis 3 through the offspring of Abraham—Jesus Christ.<sup>40</sup> The Galatians are not blessed in Abraham or through Abraham but with Abraham (Gal 3:9).<sup>41</sup>

### **Christ Redeemed the Galatians from the Curse (Gal 3:10-14)**

Because faith creates a right relationship with God, Paul transitions his argument to show that the law teaches such. The law conveys that it cannot make someone right before God because it does not possess the means. Paul turns to key Old Testament passages to show that the law brings curses (Deut 27:26), God’s followers have always

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<sup>39</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 195.

<sup>40</sup> James Hamilton writes,

Jesus is presented in the NT as the seed of Abraham who brings the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles, but is he presented as the seed of the woman who crushes the serpent’s head? In Luke 10:18 Jesus is depicted reporting that he saw Satan fall from heaven, and in the next verse he grants his disciples authority to tread on serpents and scorpions (10:19). The dragon who seeks to kill the male child of the woman in Revelation 12 is one place in the NT where Jesus is presented as the seed of the woman in conflict with the serpent. The statement in Revelation 12:5 that the male child will shepherd all the nations with an iron rod” establishes that this child is Messiah Jesus. The many statements in the NT that the enemies of Jesus will be placed under his feet might also reflect imagery from Genesis 3:15 through the lens of Psalm 110 (Matt. 22:44 and parallels; Acts 2:35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20-22; Heb. 2:5-9, 14-15; 10:13). Adam and Eve were expelled from God’s presence when they transgressed his command. Their action brought a curse on the one who tempted them and resulted in their appointed roles being made more difficult. The blessing of Abraham promised seed, land, and blessing. The promise of seed overcomes the cursed difficulty of childbearing and the loss of harmony between the man and the woman. The promise of land hints at a place where God will once again dwell with his people. The promise of blessing heralds the triumph of the seed of the woman over the seed of the serpent. The blessing is not only for Israel, but for all the families of the earth. These promises fed the hopes, the eschatological hopes, of those who followed in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham, those who considered themselves seed of the woman. The sustenance of these hopes seems to have been the reason the accounts were recorded and passed down,<sup>52</sup> as those who believed God’s promises held to the faith that he would make good on his word. All the promises of God are yes and amen in Jesus the Messiah (2 Cor. 1:20), who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit, ever one God, world without end. Amen. (James Hamilton, “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 [2007]: 272-73)

<sup>41</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 195.

lived by faith (Hab 2:4), obedience to the law is a response to God by faith (Lev 18:5), and disobedience of the law brings death (Deut 21:23). Paul claims faith in Christ is the only grounds for salvation because Christ not only fulfilled the law but was the hidden object of Abraham's faith.<sup>42</sup> The law points to Christ because people under the law need to look outside of themselves for salvation.<sup>43</sup> Paul taught the Galatians that, from Abraham, Scripture teaches that the law does not offer salvation through works but through faith in God's promises.<sup>44</sup>

### **Blessings and Curses**

The Judaizers appealed to the law to bring them blessings, Still, Paul appealed to the law to show its condemnation.<sup>45</sup> Moo writes, "While much of Paul's argument in this letter could be summarized as 'doing is wrong because (and when) it is tied to an outmoded law' Paul here suggests that he has moved to a deeper and more universal issue: the law provides no basis for the blessing because it involves "doing": a doing that humans find to be impossible."<sup>46</sup> Whereas the Judaizers may have thought Paul supported their argument, he actually shows them from their very own proof texts that the law cannot justify them.

Paul cites Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that those who live under the law are under a curse; the curse of judgment.<sup>47</sup> God demanded perfect obedience to the law (Deut

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<sup>42</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 573-77.

<sup>43</sup> Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 95.

<sup>44</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 45.

<sup>45</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 233.

<sup>46</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 72.

<sup>47</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 129.

12:28).<sup>48</sup> Paul's appeal to Deuteronomy seems to indicate that the Mosaic covenant does not justify anyone before God.<sup>49</sup> The law did not make Israel God's people but revealed how God's people maintain a proper relationship with him.<sup>50</sup> Moses prophesied Israel's judgment because Israel cannot keep the law due to their uncircumcised hearts.<sup>51</sup>

The Deuteronomy 27:26 context shapes Paul's interpretation in light of the Galatians' current choices. If the Galatians choose to obey portions of the law, then they are obligated to keep the whole law (Gal 5:3). Under the law, the Galatians would need to

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<sup>48</sup> Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith*, 98.

<sup>49</sup> Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 121.

<sup>50</sup> George Eldon Ladd explains,

The heart of Old Testament religion cannot be categorized as legalism, nor was the law given as the means of achieving a right relationship with God by obedience. On the contrary, the context of the Law was the covenant that preceded and underlay the law; and the covenant was initiated by the gracious act of God. Israel constituted God's people not because of merit gained by obedience to the Law, but because of God's free election. (George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 540)

<sup>51</sup> B Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden state,

As proof of the law's curse, Paul cites Deuteronomy 27:26, the final and summative curse that the Levites were to shout to Israel as a warning against those who would disobey the law: "as it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law'" (Gal. 3:10b). Most interpreters have understood Paul's proof to rely on the unstated premise that no sinful human being can obey the law completely; thus all who rely on it are under this curse. But many modern scholars have been hesitant about this interpretation because it rests on an unstated premise, and because this premise itself seems unlikely given that the law made provisions for atonement and that even Paul viewed himself as having been 'faultless' under the law (Phil. 3:6). The alternative proposals, however, also rest on unstated premises. And there are good reasons to believe that Paul assumes human inability to obey the law. First, Paul chose to quote from the LXX, which unlike the MT contains the word "all" calling for obedience to the entire law: "Cursed be any person who does not remain in all the words of this law to do them" (Deut. 27:26, NETS). Paul apparently wanted to emphasize that every person under the law must obey it entirely. Second, Deuteronomy itself prophesies that Israel will not be able to keep the law and will experience its curse in exile (Deut. 29:4; 30:1-4; 31:14-32:43). Third, Paul also says that the law could not bring life because of human sinfulness or inability to obey (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 3:21-22). Fourth, Paul warns the Galatians that if they attempt to be justified by circumcision, they will be obligated to obey the entire law (Gal. 5:3). Fifth, Paul says that even the opponents do not obey the law (Gal. 6:13). Thus, it seems likely that Paul rests his argument for the law's curse on the unstated premise that no one can keep the entire law. Therefore, "all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse" (Gal. 3:10). (Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 52 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020], 94)

abide by and do everything the law requires to bring salvation.<sup>52</sup> Yet, as shown, the law cannot offer salvation, nor can the practitioner achieve salvation by the law due to an uncircumcised heart.<sup>53</sup> Paul says *all* who rely on the works of the law are cursed because *all* are incapable of keeping the law.<sup>54</sup> The Abrahamic blessings come through faith in God, not adherence to the law. Thus, those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

### **The Righteous Shall Live by Faith**

In response to the Law's condemnation, Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4 when he says, "the righteous shall live by faith" (Gal 3:11). Paul roots his entire argument within the Abrahamic covenant, specifically Genesis 15:6, showing how Scripture supports and follows his claim that justification comes by faith alone. Positioning the law as a means of justification against faith alone, Paul transitions to show how the Old Testament teaches that the righteous still live by faith still in the New Covenant. The Mosaic covenant offers eternal life but through perfect obedience, which Christ ultimately did.<sup>55</sup> For that reason Paul cites Habakkuk 2:4. The righteous have always lived by faith in God's promises.<sup>56</sup>

Paul continues with Habakkuk 2:4 by saying, "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law" (Gal 3:11a). It is evident for Paul because life under the law brings curses (Deut 27:26). Paul draws from Habakkuk to support his claim regarding justification by faith alone and compares circumstances between the Galatians and Old

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<sup>52</sup> Jason Meyer, "Justification, the Law, and the New Covenant," in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 538.

<sup>53</sup> J. G. Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity 2000), 90.

<sup>54</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 150.

<sup>55</sup> G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 260.

<sup>56</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 316.

Testament Israel. Das writes,

According to Habakkuk, the wicked Chaldeans had invaded the holy land as punishment against God's people for their sins. The righteous individual would survive these dark events and "live" by means of his or her "faith(fulness)." The righteous one would be vindicated and justified. This section of Habakkuk encourages perseverance in the face of suffering.<sup>57</sup>

The Galatians, as seen, have and are suffering for their initial refusal to follow the Judaizer's instruction (Gal 3:4). The Galatians are righteous because they have faith in Jesus Christ (3:1-2). Both Habakkuk and Paul see righteous living in light of the faithfulness of God.<sup>58</sup> In other words, when hoping for eternal salvation, Habakkuk, Paul, and all faithful followers of God did not point to the law as assurance for deliverance from sin and death but to God. The Abrahamic blessings come to those who walk by faith, not the law. Those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

### **The Law Is Not of Faith**

Paul's deafening blow to the Judaizer's argument of law-based righteousness is that the Law is not of faith (Gal 3:12a).<sup>59</sup> Paul does not condemn the Law but puts it in its place.<sup>60</sup> Paul communicates elsewhere that the law reveals sin (Rom 7:7). The law exposes God's moral will (Rom 3:19-20). But revealing sin and exposing moral standards do not provide salvation.<sup>61</sup> Everyone under the law is cursed (Deut 27:26). Deuteronomy echoes Leviticus 18:5 by stating the requirement for earning righteousness under the law while conveying that it is impossible with humanity's current heart. In other words, the

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<sup>57</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 318.

<sup>58</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 208.

<sup>59</sup> Richard N Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 120.

<sup>60</sup> Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 29.

<sup>61</sup> Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 549-50.

law offers eternal life in a sense that, if perfectly kept, the individual would experience salvation; however, Scripture pairs the standard of the law with humanity's incapability to keep it.<sup>62</sup> When Paul says that the law is not of faith, he supports his argument that believing rather than doing justifies a person.<sup>63</sup> Knowing that Paul places the law and faith in their proper categories, his citation of Leviticus becomes clear.<sup>64</sup>

Paul relates Leviticus 18:5 to the Galatians context—the new covenant. Abraham was justified when he believed, not when he obeyed. Habakkuk proclaims that the righteous shall live by faith, not obedience. Paul calls the Galatians to live by faith, not obedience to the law for salvation because salvation has been through no other means than grace through faith. James Hamilton writes, “Paul is explaining to the Galatians what they must achieve if they decide to pursue justification by means of obedience to the law of Moses now that Christ has come. Now that Christ has come, there are two possibilities: either trust him for justification and be saved, or rely on works of the law, fail as all sinful will, and be damned.”<sup>65</sup> Ethical practice does not make someone righteous. Becoming a Jew does not make someone righteous. Faith in Jesus makes someone righteous. Those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

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<sup>62</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 211.

<sup>63</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 212.

<sup>64</sup> Lev 18:5 is penned between Israel's exodus of Egypt and the entrance of the promised land. God speaks to Israel and says, “I am the LORD your God. 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). God instructs Israel to act differently than the other nations (Lev 18:4). If Israel follows God's commandments and obeys his law, they will live (Lev 18:5). Readers of God's Word know that Israel cannot follow the law because their sin cripples them. God is right to say that Israel will live if they keep the law, but as Deut 27:26 (and its context of Deut 27-30) teaches, obedience to the law is impossible through human attempt alone.

<sup>65</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 473-74.

## Christ Became a Curse for Christians

Paul has shown that both Jews and Gentiles are under the law's curse through Scripture. Paul now shows how faith in Christ can only justify a person because Christ became a curse for humanity. Christ became the curse by becoming the object of God's judgment.<sup>66</sup> Christ becoming a curse parallels him becoming sin in 2 Corinthians 5:21. Christ represents the thing humanity in itself cannot overcome. Christ, fully capable of keeping the law, took the wrath of God for people who could not keep the law. Just as Christians' sin transfers to Christ, the curse attributed to Christians does as well.<sup>67</sup> That Christ redeemed Christians from the curse means he *bought back* individuals from God's wrath by taking it upon himself. Moo writes, "Paul asserts, Christ has liberated 'us' from our bondage to the curse pronounced by the law."<sup>68</sup>

Paul proclaims that Christ redeemed Christians from the curse by being hanged on a tree. Paul cites Deuteronomy 21:23 to prove his point. Deuteronomy 21:23 teaches what happens when someone commits a crime punishable by death.<sup>69</sup> The hanging on the tree in Deuteronomy 21:23 happened after the individual was killed. People would see the person hanged on the tree and see the punishment of breaking God's law.<sup>70</sup> Craig Keener writes, "If the suffering ascribed to curses in Deuteronomy 27 represents judgments, then, the same could be understood of Jesus's suffering of crucifixion since it too is a cursed state in Deuteronomy."<sup>71</sup> To be cursed is to be judged for sin. Paul shows the Galatians through Deuteronomy (and other Old Testament passages) that the law cannot deliver them

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<sup>66</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 210.

<sup>67</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 255.

<sup>68</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 210.

<sup>69</sup> Millar, *Now Choose Life*, 134.

<sup>70</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 217.

<sup>71</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 253.



from the final judgment (Gal 5:21).<sup>72</sup> Israel never gained eternal life through the law. To believe the law brings life is to live under the judgment of God and prepare to hang on a tree oneself. Christ became cursed so Christians could experience the Abrahamic blessings (Gal 3:14).

### **The Promised Spirit**

Paul directly ties Christ's work on the cross with the Gentile's experience of the Abrahamic blessings (Gal 3:14). Christ had to take the curse upon himself for all people to find acceptance before God. The sign given to those who experience the Abrahamic blessing is the promised Holy Spirit. Jews and Gentiles alike have the Spirit through faith.<sup>73</sup> Genesis 12:1-3 foresaw Jews and Gentiles together. Paul proclaims that promise is a reality today. The Galatians received the Spirit by faith just as Abraham received God's promises by faith (Gal 3:1-6). The Galatians' faith was only possible through Christ's work on the cross. Paul brings his argument full circle by showing the Galatians that their experience of the Abrahamic blessings did not come from the law but through Christ. The Old Testament points to Christ and reveals that the law cannot justify. The Old Testament teaches that those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

### **Conclusion**

Those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background. Paul argues this reality by rhetorically asking the Galatians how

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<sup>72</sup> Williams explains,

The curse of the law refers to eschatological judgment in Galatians, which Paul describes as a failure to participate in the Abrahamic blessing of the Spirit (Gal 3:14) and failure to inherit the kingdom of God (Gal 5:21). He begins the letter highlighting this curse by wishing an anathema upon anyone (human or angel) preaching a gospel contrary to his gospel (1:8-9). Paul appropriates the Deuteronomic curses to the Galatians in light of his revelation of God in Christ (1:15-16), just as he appropriates the physical land promises to refer to eschatological judgment versus eschatological life (5:21). (Williams, *Galatians*, 93)

<sup>73</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 209.

they received the Spirit. Paul conveys that faith justified the Galatians before God, not works. Paul uses Abraham as his case study to show that God has always declared people righteous by faith. Abraham's experience with God foreshadows the Galatians' experience with God. Because that is true, Paul can say God spoke the gospel in advance to Abraham. Once Paul shows justification comes by faith through Abraham's life, he transitions to the law itself in the Old Testament. Paul destroyed the Judaizer's argument of law adherence by revealing the condemning nature of the law. The law cannot bring life because of humanity's sinfulness. Christ became a curse for humanity to take the judgment rightly held over people so that all could have eternal life. Paul showed that the promise of eternal life has always come through faith. Jesus Christ has always been the object of that faith. Thus, those who believe in Christ receive the blessings given to Abraham regardless of their ethnic background.

CHAPTER 6  
SAINTS AND SINAI (GAL 3:15-29)

Paul argues that the Galatians received the Spirit by faith, not by works of the law (Gal 3:1-5). Paul transitions from focusing on the Abrahamic covenant to emphasizing the salvation-historical dimension of the gospel. His focus in Galatians 3:15-29 is to show the fundamental differences between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants and why some aspects of the Mosaic covenant have ceased in purpose.

The Abrahamic covenant is superior to the Mosaic Covenant. God instituted the Abrahamic covenant before the Mosaic covenant. For Paul, historical setting matters because God promised universal blessings through Abraham's faith, not his obedience. Through Abraham's faith, God promised him a single offspring who would bless the nations (Gen 15:1-5). Abraham believed he would receive the offspring by faith (Gen 15:6). Paul connects that offspring to Christ (Gal 3:16). Thus, God determines who his people are, not through works of the law but through faith (Gal 3:17).

Because the Abrahamic covenant is superior to the Mosaic covenant, one covenant does not replace or alter the other (Gal 3:18). The law serves the Abrahamic promises. Covenants keep their stipulations once given. Paul shows that covenants keep their stipulations by conveying the importance of covenantal order. For Paul, covenantal matters when determining soteriology.<sup>1</sup> When our understanding of covenants are displaced, obedience and faith become skewed.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner writes,

The central point in these verses (Gal 3:15-29) is that the Sinai covenant must be subordinated to the Abrahamic covenant. The two are not on an equal plane, for the promise to Abraham preceded the law given to Moses. Therefore, the inheritance is received via the promise given to Abraham, not by means of the law given to Moses. As a result, circumcision cannot be the pathway to blessings since

To combat a skewed understanding of salvation, understanding a historical and theological examination regarding why God gave the law after the Abrahamic covenant will be done. The Scriptures say the law came because transgressions (Gal 3:19a). The law does not alter the Abrahamic covenant or affect salvation, but it came to increase humanity's sins (Rom 5:20).<sup>2</sup> God established the law to function as his link between the Abrahamic covenant and the new covenant.<sup>3</sup> God designed the law's purpose to end when the Messiah arrived (Gal 3:21-25).<sup>4</sup> The law exposes humanity's need for a Savior (Gal 3:19b).<sup>5</sup>

Understanding how the Mosaic covenant functioned within the Abrahamic covenant is needed. Scripture says the law operated within the Abrahamic covenant by imprisoning and guarding humanity until Christ came. How did the law imprison and guard? I will argue the law imprisoned and guarded humanity as a season of expectation and realization.<sup>6</sup> The law held humanity captive until the coming faith would be revealed (Gal 3:23). The law provided guardianship until justification came through faith in Jesus

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it accords with the law. (Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary: New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 224)

<sup>2</sup> Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 31 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2013), 29.

<sup>3</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 235.

<sup>4</sup> Schreiner states, "The Sinai covenant was an interim covenant given 430 years after the promise given to Abraham (Gal. 3:15–18), and it was never intended to be in force forever. God designed the law to function as an authority only until the promised offspring should arrive (Gal. 3:19). Now that the Christ has come, the new creation is present (Gal. 6:15) and the present evil age (Gal. 1:4) has concluded." Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Ada, MI: Baker, 2013), 569.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 77.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden write, "The law was not added as a means by which the Abrahamic inheritance might be attained, in contradiction to the promise. Rather, the law played a temporary, imprisoning role in Israel's history that led to the bestowal of the Abrahamic promise on those who believe in Jesus Christ." Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology Series 52 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 98.

Christ (Gal 3:23). Jesus came into the world under the law so that people may put on Christ and become children of God (Gal 3:27). God defines people by faith, not ethnic background.<sup>7</sup>

### **Inheritance by Faith (Gal 3:15-18)**

Galatians 3:15-4:11 emphasizes the superiority God placed on the Abrahamic covenant over the law.<sup>8</sup> Paul <sup>displays</sup> the superiority of the Abrahamic covenant through an illustration of man-made covenants.<sup>9</sup> He does this to show that one covenant does not alter or replace the other. Paul focuses on the Abrahamic covenant to show that God promised Abraham a singular offspring (Gal 3:16).<sup>10</sup> He conveys that the historical setting and theological outlook of the Abrahamic covenant matters because it is through it that people become children of God. National Israel did not become God's people through the law but inheritance by faith (Gal 3:18).

### **Offspring, Not Offsprings**

Paul begins Galatians 3:15 by highlighting the binding nature of covenants.<sup>11</sup> A covenant cannot be changed or altered.<sup>12</sup> Covenants between two parties were established by an oath that appealed to God and was inviolable (Josh 9:15, 19-20). Paul conveys the sureness of covenants to teach his readers the dependability of the promises

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<sup>7</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 253.

<sup>8</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 112.

<sup>9</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 98.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 79.

<sup>11</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 227.

<sup>12</sup> Peter John Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 92.

given to Abraham and his offspring.<sup>13</sup> Later covenants cannot alter previously made covenants. Because covenants are firm; they are trustworthy and lasting.

Paul knows that covenants are trustworthy and lasting. Because they are trustworthy and lasting, Paul describes the Abrahamic covenant as promises in Galatians 3:16. Promises characterized the Abrahamic covenant. God alone promised to bring about his word by grace.<sup>14</sup> Paul uses the term “promises” to recall God’s work in salvation. God established his promises on his word, not human effort.<sup>15</sup> God’s promises to Abraham included land, universal blessings to nations, and specifically an offspring.<sup>16</sup> God confirmed his promises with Abraham through Isaac, then Jacob, showing that God had a specific singular offspring in mind who would bring forth every aspect of the Abrahamic covenant to the world (Gal 3:8).<sup>17</sup>

Paul emphasizes a singular offspring.<sup>18</sup> Paul is drawing from Genesis 22:17-18 to make his point. The text reads, “I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice” (Gen 22:17-18). Genesis 22:17-18 grammatically supports the idea of a singular offspring in Galatians 3:16 as well as theologically agrees with Paul’s previous argument in Galatians 3:8.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Thielman, *Galatians*, 613.

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 227.

<sup>15</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 227

<sup>16</sup> Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 266.

<sup>17</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 45 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 202.

<sup>18</sup> Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 268.

<sup>19</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden explain,

## Genesis 22:17-18: Grammatical Argument

Desmond Alexander argues that verses 17 and 18 use *offspring* in two different ways. The first way is plural in verse 17 and singular in verse 18.<sup>20</sup> John Collins agrees with Alexander and conveys,

Notice that the Hebrew word יָרַע (offspring) appears three times in this passage—twice in Verse 17 and once in verse 18. This word in the singular can refer to offspring, either in a collective sense or as a specific descendent (much like? the English word, offspring). In the first instance, it is certainly used collectively: the descendants of Abraham will be as numerous as the stars and the gains of the sand.<sup>21</sup>

Alexander argues that the third instance is grammatically different because its clause is not closely tied to the previous clause.<sup>22</sup> The verb יָרַשׁ (he shall possess) is not a consecutive tense.<sup>23</sup> Alexander believes he can support his grammatical understanding of the text with a theological argument found in Psalm 72:17.<sup>24</sup>

## Genesis 22:17-18 and Psalm 72:17

Psalm 72:15-20 connects the promise of a Davidic king with the Abrahamic

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The word “Christ” indicates that Paul is reading God’s promises to Abraham in the light of their later flowering in the covenant with David, a covenant that also highlights God’s promises to “seed” (*sperma*; 2 Sam. 7:12; 22:51). Paul is arguing that the Christ, the seed of David, is the seed par excellence of Abraham. He is the ‘one person’ to whom the promises were ultimately made (Gal. 3:16; cf. 3:19). The reason Paul can make this argument is that he does not view the “seed of Abraham” as merely a physical category but as a theological category referring to the inheritor of God’s promise to Abraham. Ultimately, in the light of God’s covenant with David, this is one “seed,” Christ. And yet Paul still understands the “seed of Abraham” in a collective way: “If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Gal. 3:29). God’s promises to Abraham are given to Christ and all who belong to him by faith. (Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 102-3)

<sup>20</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, “Further Observations on the Term Seed in Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 2 (1997): 363-67.

<sup>21</sup> C. John Collins, “Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 54, no. 1 (2003): 75.

<sup>22</sup> Alexander, “Further Observations,” 365.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander, “Further Observations,” 363-67.

<sup>24</sup> Alexander, “Further Observations,” 365.

offspring.<sup>25</sup> David prays that his offspring would live forever on the throne (Ps 72:15), he would bless the land (Ps 72:16), his name is made great (Ps 72:17a), and that all the nations would be blessed in him and call him blessed (Ps 72:17b). Alexander argues that David foresees the offspring God promised to him and conveys that it is the identical offspring promised to Abraham: “While the psalm’s title associates it with Solomon, its contents clearly envisages a king whose reign surpasses by far that of Solomon. Indeed, this future monarch is described as ruling the entire earth, bringing deliverance to the oppressed by defeating their enemies.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, David observes that his offspring is Abraham’s offspring.<sup>27</sup> The promised offspring who would defeat the enemies’ gates is the messiah from king David. When Psalm 72 is read in light of Genesis 17:17-18 and Genesis 12:1-4, it becomes clear that the biblical authors anticipated a singular offspring who would rescue humanity from the curses presented in Genesis 3.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Frank Thielman, *Paul & the Law: A Contextual Approach* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 131.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander, “Further Observations,” 365.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, “Further Observations,” 363-67. Alexander writes,

Of significance is the fact that these passages form part of a much larger picture in Genesis which centres around a unique line of descendants. The book of Genesis not only intimates that this lineage will eventually give rise to a royal dynasty, but also anticipates that a future member of this line will conquer his enemies and mediate God’s blessing to the nations of the earth. Such expectations are clearly important for appreciating how the book of Genesis contributes to the NT understanding of Jesus Christ. (365)

<sup>28</sup> James Hamilton writes,

David returns to that idea in 72:17 as he calls on the Lord also to keep the 2 Sam 7:9 promise to give him a great name, which reiterates the Lord’s Gen 12:2 promise to Abraham to make his name great. David prays that the name of the king from his line would stand to the age to come, and that in the light of the sun his name would be like a plant sending out shoots of new growth. Translations take this to be a prayer that the king’s fame would spread and last as long as the sun shines. The second line of Ps 72:17 picks up the promise God made to Abraham in Gen 12:3, “in you shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” When that promise is repeated through the book of Genesis, it is clarified that in Abraham *and in his seed* all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). In a profound affirmation that the blessing of Abraham will be brought to pass by the king from the line of David, David prays, “And may they be blessed in him, all the nations call him blessed.” The first statement points to the fulfillment of Gen 12:3 in the seed of David who is the seed of Abraham, blesser of the nations. The second statement identifies this future king from David’s line with the blessed man of Ps 1, as the statement “all nations call him blessed” uses a verb built from the same root



## Paul's Understanding of Scripture

Paul draws from the entirety of biblical history to make his point. Paul reads the Scriptures and draws from previous authors' understanding of God's covenants to support his conclusions.<sup>29</sup> For Paul, the Abrahamic covenant has priority over the Mosaic covenant because of the theme of singular seed promise throughout Scripture.<sup>30</sup> Paul connects Christ to Abraham's promises to emphasize that the age of fulfillment has arrived.<sup>31</sup> When people operate under the law within the new covenant, it shows they misunderstand covenantal order.<sup>32</sup> To believe that the law applies within the new covenant as a means to be accepted before God is a false way to read Scripture.<sup>33</sup>

After Paul conveys the importance of Christ as Abraham's singular offspring, he returns to his point regarding how one covenant cannot alter a previous one (Gal 3:17). The law does not invalidate the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>34</sup> The law came 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant. Because God placed the law 430 years after his promises with Abraham, the promises given to Abraham are concrete.<sup>35</sup> By looking at the placement of

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(אשר) as the term employed in Ps 1:1 to announce, "blessed is the man" (אשרי). The Ps 1 blessed man is the Ps 72 king from David's line, seed of Abraham in whom all nations will be blessed. (James Hamilton, *Psalms*, Evangelical Biblical Commentary [Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021], 1:636)

<sup>29</sup> Hamilton argues that what Paul does in Gal 3:16 is the heart of true Biblical theology: "To summarize, by the phrase *biblical theology* I mean the interpretive perspective reflected in the way the biblical authors have presented their understanding of earlier Scripture, redemptive history, and the events they are describing, recounting, celebrating, or addressing in narratives, poems, proverbs, letters, and apocalypses." James M. Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 21.

<sup>30</sup> Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 26.

<sup>31</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 230.

<sup>32</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 80.

<sup>33</sup> Thielman, *Paul & the Law*, 131.

<sup>34</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 175.

<sup>35</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 175.

the Abrahamic covenant before the Mosaic covenant, Paul is instructing his readers how to interpret and read the Scriptures for themselves.<sup>36</sup> Paul instructs his readers to see the priority Scripture itself places on the Abrahamic covenant.<sup>37</sup> Paul’s opponents sought to have the Abrahamic covenant function as a step within God’s relationship with his people: focusing on the Mosaic covenant as the dominant signifier of who is within the people of God. However, God designed the law to serve the Abrahamic law, not replace it.<sup>38</sup>

Paul concludes his historical and theological journey of the Abrahamic covenant and the law by proclaiming how the Abrahamic blessings are inherited. Complementing Galatians 3:18, Paul teaches in Romans 11 how God keeps his covenant people. Paul notes in Romans 11:6, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (Rom 11:6). Both Galatians 3:18 and Romans 11:6 convey how God promises salvation—by grace.<sup>39</sup> The law cannot offer salvation. If the law provided salvation, then it would invalidate the Abrahamic covenant since it no longer rests on grace.<sup>40</sup> Covenantal order matters to Paul. God promised the land and universal

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<sup>36</sup> G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 261.

<sup>37</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 353.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiner explains,

The Abrahamic covenant focuses on what God does for his people in saving them, while the Mosaic covenant accents human obedience. The Abrahamic covenant celebrates God’s work in delivering his people, whereas the Mosaic summons human beings to keep the law. Paul does not give a complete exposition of the two covenants here, but he does see a fundamental incompatibility. If believers lived under the Mosaic covenant, the promise given to Abraham would be nullified. Human obedience would be fundamental issue for receiving the promise, and hence circumcision would continue to be required. But since the law is subsequent to the promise and inferior to the promise, circumcision and observance of the law are not required in order to belong to Abraham’s family. (Schreiner, *Galatians*, 231)

<sup>39</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 99.

<sup>40</sup> Seifrid writes,

Paul’s earlier statements imply that the promise to Abraham had to wait for its fulfilment (verse 8). He now makes that span of time clear: the promise awaited the arrival of the eschaton in Christ. It is within this “history of the promise” that the law finds its proper function. It was added in order to effect a curse, to prevent the realization of promise before the promised seed arrived (verse 19). By “enclosing all things under sin” the law points to Jesus Christ, the one in whom the promise has

blessings through a literal singular offspring. God promised Abraham an offspring before he gave the Mosaic covenant. Thus, the inheritance promised to Abraham comes by faith, not works.<sup>41</sup>

### **Summary**

The Abrahamic covenant is superior to the Mosaic covenant because God promised to bless Abraham and his offspring. God promised Abraham a singular offspring who would receive the promises.<sup>42</sup> David believes his offspring is Abraham's offspring when he pens Psalm 72. Because Scripture foreshadows a singular offspring, Paul is correct in his exegesis presented in Galatians 3:16. Though the Galatians, and all people, received the benefits of the promises, they were not the recipient of the promises. Jesus Christ is the offspring of Abraham who brings all people to God through faith. Jesus Christ unites all people. Because the promises were made to Christ, his followers can know that those promises are sure and will not change. Inheritance of the Abrahamic promises comes through faith.

### **Why Then the Law? (Gal 3:19-22)**

The Abrahamic covenant provides the foundation regarding how someone is made right before God. God reckons as righteous on the basis of faith in his word, not on works. If faith is the only thing that affects someone's salvation, then why was the law added? What purpose does the law have if it does not contribute to personal faith in Christ? Paul argues that God added the law for historical reasons and theological significance. Paul conveys that the law serves the Abrahamic covenant. The law has much theological

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come to fulfilment (Gal. 3:22). In this way Abraham's faith has come to the Gentiles who believe in Christ, and with it Abraham's blessing. (Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 81)

<sup>41</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 53.

significance because it contributed to the hopeful expectation of a promised offspring who would bless all the nations. The law imprisoned everyone so that anyone could be set free in Christ.

### **Because of Transgressions**

If God had already created a sufficient covenant with Abraham to redeem humanity, then why did God give the law if it does not make someone righteous? Paul notes that God added the law *because* of transgressions (Gal 3:19). The law had effect until “the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary” (Gal 3:19b). Paul conveys that the law was temporary and served as a link between the time of Abraham and Christ.<sup>43</sup> What is unclear is the meaning behind the law being “added for the sake of transgressions.” Troels Engberg-Pedersen argues that the phrase could mean that the “Torah exercises a limiting or restraining force against transgressions.”<sup>44</sup> James Dunn argues that the “Torah provides a means of dealing with transgressions, though not eliminating the transgressions.”<sup>45</sup> Hans Dieter Betz believes the “Torah provokes transgressions”<sup>46</sup> Lastly, Longenecker conveys that the “Torah brings awareness of transgressions by identifying them as such and, thus, of the distance between human behavior and God’s righteousness.”<sup>47</sup>

Betz and Longenecker are correct in assessing why God established the law because of transgressions. Paul’s writing in Romans seems to explain why the law was

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<sup>43</sup> David Arthur DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 315.

<sup>44</sup> Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 106-8.

<sup>45</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (New York: Continuum, 1993), 189-90.

<sup>46</sup> Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 165-66.

<sup>47</sup> Richard N Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 138.

added, and for what purpose it serves humanity.<sup>48</sup> Galatians 3:19 compliments Romans 5:20 in determining that God established the law. Romans 5:20a says, “Now the law came in to increase the trespass.” The close parallel between the two texts gives weight to the theological purpose of the law. The law does not merely define sin. It certainly does that (Rom 4:15; Rom 7:5), but the law goes much further. As Paul argues later in Romans 7, when the law defines sin, it provokes humanity to want to sin more.<sup>49</sup> Descendants of Adam will always choose to sin.<sup>50</sup> Thus, the transgressions added are humanity’s exposure to sin and their desire to sin more.<sup>51</sup>

### **God Is One**

As mentioned, Paul is clear that the law serves as a link between the Abrahamic covenant and Christ. God added the law because of transgressions until Christ came. In addition, the law was temporary. The law’s binding nature to humanity had an expiration date.<sup>52</sup> By pointing out the law’s expiration date, Paul again conveys the superiority of the Abrahamic covenant.

For Paul, the difference between the Abrahamic covenant and the Mosaic covenant is revelation. The Abrahamic covenant came directly from God to Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is superior to the law because God did not have a mediator. God appeared to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant and promised him the land (Gen 12:1:7). God presented himself to Abraham as a smoking fire pot and flaming torch to confirm his promise. Throughout the life of Abraham, God interacted with Abraham and

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<sup>48</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment: A Pauline Theology of Law* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 84.

<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, *The Law and Its Fulfillment*, 84.

<sup>50</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 240.

<sup>51</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 183.

<sup>52</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 183.

initiated and upheld the covenant. Schreiner notes, “The main idea of this verse seems clear in context. On the one hand, the law is inferior to the promise because it required mediation: from God to angels to Moses to the people. On the other hand, the one God spoke directly to Abraham. Hence, the promise is clearly superior to the law.”<sup>53</sup> When Paul says, “God is one,” he recalls the fundamental belief that there is only one God who offers one way of salvation (Deut 6:4). The one way of salvation came through the promise given to Abraham, not the law. The Abrahamic covenant is superior to the law because it promises the only way to salvation.

### **Is The Law Contrary to the Promises of God?**

It is fitting to ask, if the law does not offer salvation and is inferior to the Abrahamic promise, then is the law contrary to the promises of God (Gal 3:21)? Paul mentions that God added the law because of transgressions (Gal 3:19), but did God add the law to work against his promises? In other words, did God know what he was doing? Paul argues that God knew what he was doing by putting the covenants in their proper historical and theological place.<sup>54</sup> As mentioned, Paul places the law in its correct historical setting when he says God gave the law 430 years after the Abrahamic covenant. The law serves as a link between Abraham and Christ. Paul places the law in its proper theological setting by arguing that there is nothing wrong with the law as a category. Paul conveys that the law was not working against the promises given to Abraham; the law simply could not provide what the Abrahamic covenant offered (Gal 3:21).

Paul’s theological category of the law is further explained in Galatians 3:22: “But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin.” It is significant to note the change

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<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 243.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 243.

in wording. Paul substitutes the term *law* for *scripture*.<sup>55</sup> Since Paul does not draw from any Old Testament passages, it seems that he has the entirety of the Old Testament in mind here.<sup>56</sup> Paul can say *scripture* instead of *law* here because scripture personifies the will of God that is conveyed through the law.<sup>57</sup> The scripture's imprisoning everything under sin means that the law's theological purpose is to drive people to faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup> Salvation is offered no other way. The law exposes humanity's sin and provokes humanity to sin. The law is not contrary to the promises given to Abraham because they complement each other. One provides hope where the other only directs people to the only hope.

### **Faith in Jesus Christ**

God imprisoned everything under sin to give all the promises of Christ to those who believe in him (Gal 3:22b). The law set the stage for salvation in Christ.<sup>59</sup> The phrase, "so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe" (Gal 3:22b) is debated. The debate centers around reading the text as subjective genitive or objective genitive. N. T Wright interprets the phrase subjectively, as saying, "the

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<sup>55</sup> Craig S. Keener states,

In support of this understanding, Paul elsewhere marshals Scripture to show that all have sinned (Rom 3:10-18), and he later speaks of God's similar activity without specifying particular references (Rom 11:32). Those who knew Scripture would know that even God's own people had repeatedly disobeyed the law and warranted judgment rather than blessings. Moreover, some argue that the appeal to a particular text about curses in the preceding context (Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10) would not make logical sense, since gentiles cannot be under the law's curse. More importantly, 3:10 is twelve verses earlier, with three quotations and other allusions intervening, so the connection with that verse is less than obvious. Still, Paul might think of this verse more than of other potential ones. (Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019], 287)

<sup>56</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 192.

<sup>57</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 245.

<sup>58</sup> Crowe, *The Path of Faith*, 132.

<sup>59</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 475.

faithfulness of Jesus.”<sup>60</sup> Wright emphasizes Jesus’s faithfulness, not humanity’s faith in Jesus. The objective genitive is correct for a variety of reasons.<sup>61</sup> First, Paul emphasizes the importance of faith in Christ through this letter and others (Gal 3:16).<sup>62</sup> Second, Paul teaches that observance of the law does not require faith (Gal 3:12). Third, Paul’s use of the Old Testament shows God’s promises to Abraham came through faith, not observance of the law (Gen 15:6). Faith in Christ, the offspring of Abraham, is how humanity inherits the promises from God.<sup>63</sup>

### **Summary**

The Abrahamic covenant is superior to the law because it came directly from God to Abraham and not a mediator. God designed the Abrahamic covenant to last forever where he placed an expiration date on the Mosaic covenant. The law functioned as a link between the time of Abraham and Christ. The law does not work against God’s promises but drives humanity toward them. The law does not provide righteousness but directs humanity to the only source of righteousness.

### **All Ethnicities Are One in Christ (Gal 3:23-29)**

Paul explains in Galatians 3:23-29 how the law imprisoned humanity by reiterating the intent behind the law. The law held humanity and creation under bondage until Christ came. Only faith in Jesus justifies a person (v. 24). Paul says that now that Christ has come, the law no longer functions as a guardian over humanity (v. 25). Now that Christ has come, the true offspring of Abraham, all are offspring of God through faith (v. 3:26). Regardless of ethnic background or covenant observance, all in Christ are

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<sup>60</sup> N. T. Wright, *Justification: God’s Plan and Paul’s Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 113.

<sup>61</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 371.

<sup>62</sup> I argued in chap. 5. for the proper translation of Gal 3:16.

<sup>63</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 127.



offspring by faith (vv. 28-29).

### **The Law as Guardian**

Because Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, the law held humanity captive (v. 23). In this captivity, though, the law served as humanity's guardian before faith came.<sup>64</sup> A guardian (*παιδαγωγός*) was a household slave who oversaw the master's children until they grew up.<sup>65</sup> There are different views regarding the law's role as humanity's guardian. One view suggests that Paul calls the law humanity's guardian because the law separated God's covenant people throughout the Old Testament from the world.<sup>66</sup> The law showed who were God's people and who were not. Another view argues that the law served as humanity's guardian to show the interim nature of the law. I believe the latter view is correct. Nowhere in Galatians does Paul place emphasis on the law segregating humanity. Schreiner notes, "The law's role in segregating Jews from Gentiles is present by implication (cf. 2:11-13), but Paul does not explore this particular feature of the law."<sup>67</sup> Reading Galatians 3:24 in light of Galatians 4:1-2 seems to solidify Paul's understanding of guardianship. Just as children have guardians and managers to raise them until they are old enough to live on their own, God placed the law as humanity's guardian to have effect for a limited time in redemptive history.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Hamilton writes,

This custodian was in force "before faith came" (Gal 3:23) which does not mean that the old covenant remnant was saved apart from faith, for even then it was those of faith who were blessed with Abraham (cf. 3:6-9). 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 (Gal 2:16). This can be seen from the way that both this statement at the beginning of Galatians 3:23 and another later in the verse, "until the coming faith would be revealed" have as their point of reference the phrase 3:24, "until messiah came." (Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 476)

<sup>65</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 248.

<sup>66</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *A Commentary on the Epistle of the Galatians*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (New York: T & T Clark, 1993), 197-200.

<sup>67</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 249.

<sup>68</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 249.

## Christians Are Sons of God

Now that Christ has come, humanity no longer needs a guardian. Those who believe in Christ as the Messiah, Abraham's offspring, receive the promised inheritance—sonship (Gal 3:26).<sup>69</sup> Paul circles back to his previous argument regarding sonship by identifying Gentiles as God's people through faith, not works of the law (vv. 6-8).<sup>70</sup> Paul transitions in Galatians 3:26 by focusing on the Galatians' sonship in Christ. To gain the inheritance promised to Abraham, Paul focuses on the Galatians' union with Christ.<sup>71</sup> Moo says, "If this paragraph is central to this part of Galatians, this verse is central to this paragraph and arguably the single most important point Paul makes in his letter."<sup>72</sup> All Jews and Gentiles are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. The law does not offer inclusion to God's family; faith in Christ does. Jesus received the promises told to Abraham. All who believe in Jesus receive Abraham's inheritance.<sup>73</sup> For Paul, to be a son of God is to be in union with Christ.<sup>74</sup>

## Put on Christ

Paul argues the Galatians' title of sons of God by highlighting their baptism into Christ. Paul writes, "as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ" (3:27). As a result of being baptized into Christ, they now identify with Christ. The Galatians' identification as pagan Gentiles no longer defines them. Their former identities wither before the cross. Because Jesus is God's Son, God sees all who trust in Jesus as his

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<sup>69</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 476.

<sup>70</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 74.

<sup>71</sup> Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 74.

<sup>72</sup> Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 74.

<sup>73</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 81.

<sup>74</sup> E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 535.

children as well. Paul mentions their baptism into Christ to declare not only theologically how God justifies someone. It also appears that Paul is leading the Galatians to connect their baptism experience with their faith so that they can see the corrupt doctrine from the false teachers for what it is. Being baptized into Christ means the Galatians already have Christ.<sup>75</sup> The Judaizers cannot offer them anything that they do not already have.<sup>76</sup>

### **Christians Are All One in Christ**

Paul connects the Galatians' position before God with their life as his people. Because faith is the only thing that justifies a person, there are no distinctions between people groups in Christ. It does not matter if someone is ethnically Jewish or Gentile. It does not matter if someone is male or female. It does not matter if someone is rich or poor. In Christ, the only condition regarding right standing before God is faith in Jesus Christ. Paul does not say that there ceases to be differences amongst people. Males remain as males, and females stay as females. In light of Paul's gospel defense, he argues that ethnic or gender categories should not separate followers of Christ. All are one in Christ (2:28).

### **Christians Are Abraham's Offspring**

Since Christ is Abraham's true offspring (3:16), those baptized into Christ also belong to Abraham (3:29). Paul mentions in Galatians 3:7, "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." God blesses those of faith along with Abraham

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<sup>75</sup> Harmon explains,

In baptism the believer publicly testifies that through faith he/she has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection. In addition to visually representing union with Christ in his death and resurrection, it also symbolizes that the believer has been baptized with the Holy Spirit and joined to the body of Christ. This visible act of water baptism was the act of initiation that marked a person as part of the church. While water baptism does not save a person, it was an expected step of obedience for those who professed faith in Christ, so that Paul can speak of believing in Christ and being baptized in almost interchangeable ways. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 204)

<sup>76</sup> Deenick writes, "According to Paul, a promise is received by faith *by definition*, since if it comes by the law it no longer comes by promise (3:18)." Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 203.

(3:29). Because the Galatians are sons of God through faith, they are also heirs with Christ of the inheritance promised to Abraham.<sup>77</sup> The inheritance does not come through the law but through the promises God gave to Abraham through faith.

### **Summary**

The law held humanity captive until Christ came (Gal 3:24). The law also functioned as humanity's guardian (v. 24). The guardianship of the law means that humanity awaited the Messiah to come. The law guarded humanity by anticipating a savior (v. 25). Because Christ is the ultimate offspring of Abraham, all who identify with Christ are offspring of Abraham as well (vv. 26-27). Because the Galatians identify with Christ, their earthly statutes do not define them; instead, their union with Christ does (v. 28). There are no distinctions between people in the kingdom of God. In Christ, the Galatians are heirs to the promises of God (v. 29). In Christ, the Galatians are children of God and accepted.

### **Conclusion**

The law came to serve the Abrahamic promises. Because the law serves the promise, the stipulations of the law by design had a beginning and an end. Paul argues that keeping the law does not matter; having faith in Christ does. The Galatians know they are saved because the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled through Christ, not because they obeyed the law. The law directs humanity to a savior. The law testifies that salvation can come through no other way but Jesus Christ. Through Christ, the Galatians are offspring of Abraham by faith. For Paul, the gospel of Jesus Christ provides the only means of transition from being a slave to sin to being a son of God.

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<sup>77</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 319.

## CHAPTER 7

### FROM SLAVES TO SONS (GAL 4:1-11)

Paul transitions in 4:1-11 to teach the Galatians how Christ came in the fullness of time to end the period of law and usher in a new age (4:4-5). He does this to show the superiority of the new covenant.<sup>1</sup> By comparing Israel's history under the law with the Galatians' former lives without Christ, Paul conveys that neither group became sons through paganism nor the law (4:3; 9).<sup>2</sup> Instead, Israel and the Galatians became sons of God through faith in God's promises.<sup>3</sup> God guaranteed Israel that they would inherit the promised land. To display God's guarantee, Israel practiced circumcision.<sup>4</sup> Israel circumcised their children on the eighth day to declare their faith in God's promises found in Genesis 17 and confirm their faith in obedience in Leviticus 26.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, God guarantees the Galatians' sonship status by giving them his Spirit as a seal of their future

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology Series 52 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 104.

<sup>2</sup> Brandon D. Crowe, *The Path of Faith: A Biblical Theology of Covenant and Law* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 133.

<sup>3</sup> Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 81

<sup>4</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 45 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 54.

<sup>5</sup> Deenick writes,

The idea of blamelessness is intimately connected with righteousness, both in Genesis, in the person of Noah, and the wider OT and NT. In that light, it is clear that even before Yahweh called Abraham to be blameless/righteous in Genesis 17, Yahweh had reckoned him to be that in Genesis 15. Moreover, the link between the covenant ceremonies of those two chapters suggests that circumcision was a sign of the covenant already established in Genesis 15 on the basis of Abraham's faith. In other words, although the ultimate fulfilment of all that God promised Abraham lay in the realization of truly blameless people, the fulfilment of the demand for Abraham and others to be blameless/righteous lies irrevocably within the promise of God. (Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 212)

inheritance (4:6).<sup>6</sup> The Spirit serves God's people as the better seal of their inheritance because Christ has come to fulfill the law and believers live not under the Mosaic Covenant but the new covenant.<sup>7</sup>

The Galatians' transition from slaves to sons of God, and therefore heirs of Abraham's promises, came through Christ's perfect sonship. Paul says this through his illustration in Galatians 4:1-2. Paul says a child and slave are treated no differently because both are under guardianship and managers (4:2). Paul communicates that Israel did not experience the Abrahamic blessings for themselves under the Mosaic law (3:19-29). They were enslaved to elementary principles of the world (4:3). Israel had circumcision as a sign of the inheritance they would receive by faith. They never possessed it because they could not redeem themselves from under the law. Israel, though God's firstborn, could not capitalize on their sonship because it had not yet come (4:2).

The Galatians are heirs because they trust Christ (3:26). Paul argues that sonship brings privileges. The Galatians' adoption means that they live in the new era of privilege. The Galatians do not have circumcision anymore, but the Spirit. There is no buffer between the Galatians and God. Paul's argument against the Judaizers again comes to light here because if the Galatians accept circumcision, they are renouncing the Spirit as the better sign.<sup>8</sup> Paul's illustration teaches that the heir receives their inheritance when they come to age. The Galatians received the Abrahamic inheritance because they had come to age in Christ.

After Paul's use of illustration, he expounds on Christ's arrival and what it means (4:4). Paul says that Christ came in the fullness of time, sent by God, born of a

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 214.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 572.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 93.

woman, and born under the law (4:5). Paul discloses that Christ came at the right time in history to fulfill the law and adopt the Galatians as sons. Unlike Israel, who was an owner of everything (guaranteed promises), the Galatians now possess the promises due to their sonship.<sup>9</sup> Through Christ, God adopted the Galatians to partake in the Abrahamic blessings. Thus, the Galatians' status changed from slave to son (4:7).

Lastly, Paul connects the Galatians' attempt to go back to the law to their former lives of paganism (4:8). To return to the law would be to trust in worthless elementary principles of the world (4:3; 9). To turn back to the law would be to commit Israel's error of turning to slavery.<sup>10</sup> Paul preaches that observance of the law for justification denies the gospel of Jesus Christ just as their former lives of paganism did. Paul mournfully says he worries he labored in vain over the Galatians if they trust in something other than Christ after all his time with them (4:11).

### **Life before Christ (Gal 4:1-3)**

Paul concludes in Galatians 3:29 that if the Galatians are in Christ, then they are Abraham's offspring and, therefore, heirs. Conforming to Jewish law does not justify the Galatians.<sup>11</sup> Rather, faith in God's promises justifies a sinner. Paul expresses in Galatians 4:1-3 that the law cannot justify a person by outlining how God's people in the

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 231.

<sup>10</sup> N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 115.

<sup>11</sup> E. P. Sanders notes,

The scriptural law imprisons, paganism enslaves. Functionally, the two are equated. There is only one state of freedom: becoming one person in Christ. In 4:5, Paul mentions bondage to the law again and expresses the state of freedom as "sonship": he tells the Galatians that God sent Christ to redeem those under the law, "so that we might receive sonship" (4:5). We recall that in 3:26 Paul told the Galatians that, since they are in Christ, they are sons of God. The proof of their status, as it often is, is that God has sent his Spirit into the hearts of believers (4:6). Verse 4:7 repeats their status: "no longer a slave but a son; if a son also an heir through God." (E. P. Sanders, *Paul: The Apostle's Life, Letters, and Thought* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015], 540)

Old Testament were enslaved under the law.<sup>12</sup> The key to Paul's justification argument is the duality between slavery and freedom. Life before Christ embodies slavery.<sup>13</sup> He draws from exodus themes to prove his point.<sup>14</sup> Just as God redeemed Israel from Egypt to be his son; God redeemed the Galatians from their former lives of slavery to be his sons.<sup>15</sup> God established the law over Israel to enslave them until Christ. Though Israel was still God's son, the law did not provide sonship. Old Testament believers were God's children, but they did not inherit Abraham's promises due to their infancy. Further, Israel was also enslaved to Egypt while still being God's son. He argues that true sonship entails the full benefits of inheritance.<sup>16</sup> The law kept Israel from partaking in the blessings of Abraham because the fullness of time had not yet come (4:4). Old Testament believers did not have all the privileges of sonship because God placed them under management until Christ came (4:2).

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 263.

<sup>13</sup> William R. Osborne, *Divine Blessing and the Fullness of Life in the Presence of God*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020), 122-24.

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, *Covenant and God's Purpose for the World*, 98.

<sup>15</sup> A. Andrew Das writes,

More recently, many scholars have note the possibly of exodus and wilderness allusions throughout Galatians and especially in 4:1-11. The evidence is not clear for these allusions as the proponents suggest. Paul neither mentions the narrative explicitly nor cites their distinctive phrasing, the structural similarities between Israel's story and the Galatians' situation may nevertheless suggest an echo at the very general level. In 1:1-4 the Galatians have been rescued from the present evil age but are now, like the rebellious generation of Israel in the wilderness, turning away (1:6-7). In 4:3-7 God redeems and adopts the Galatians even as he made Israel his son, and now the Galatians are turning back again to their former slavery (4:8-9). Christ has freed the Galatians (4:21-5:1a), and so they must not submit again to the yoke of Egypt-like slavery (5:1b). The Galatians story is analogous to the story of Israel upon people's departure from Egypt when they threaten to apostatize and return to slavery (Ex 14:10-12; 16:3; 17:3; Num 11:4-6, 18; 14:2-4; Josh 24:14-20; Neh 9:17). The Israelites threatened to abandon their Lord in order to return to their old rules. The rivals were urging the Galatians to join God's people Israel observance to the law. Paul, may be suggesting that his hearers *already* share Israel's story; the problem is that the Galatians are threatening to share in the worst part of the story. (A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary [St. Louis: Concordia, 2014], 403)

<sup>16</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 134.



## Under Guardians and Managers

Paul's illustration compares the temporary nature of the law to the benefits of sonship found in the new covenant. Paul says that an heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave (4:1). Paul expands on his comment in Galatians 3:24 to teach that though believers in the Old Testament were owners of everything (4:1), God enslaved them until Christ came justify them by faith.<sup>17</sup> He is not saying that Old Testament believers had no assurance of salvation or that God did not justify individuals by faith under the old covenant.<sup>18</sup> Paul aims to show that Israel never experienced the benefits of the promised land under the law.<sup>19</sup> Though Israel took the land, they did not fulfill the Abrahamic covenant there.<sup>20</sup> God justified believers under the old covenant by faith, but they did not receive the promises yet.<sup>21</sup> Thus, Paul is not focused on Israel's lack of justification in the Old Testament but rather on their experience of the privilege of sonship.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden write,

The coming of Christ now signals the end of the law's temporary, imprisoning era. The guardian-like authority of the law is finished now that 'faith' has come, the era in which we are justified by faith (Gal. 3:23-25). The era of the law was like the time an heir is under age and really no different from a slave (4:1-3). But now that era of slavery is finished, for the set time has fully come in which God has sent his Son and his Spirit (4:4-6). Christ's death has not only redeemed us from the curse of the law (3:13) but from the very authority of the law in the old era (4:4-5). "[W]e are no longer under a guardian" (3:25). We are no longer imprisoned by the law. (Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 102)

<sup>18</sup> Sanders, *Paul*, 540.

<sup>19</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 259.

<sup>20</sup> T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 170.

<sup>21</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 75.

<sup>22</sup> Guy Prentiss Water notes, "Now that Christ has come (4:4-5), God's people have fully entered, in Christ, into all that our sonship and inheritance entails." Guy Prentiss Water, "Galatians," in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament: The Gospel Realized*, ed. Guy Prentiss Waters, J. Nicholas Reid, and John R. Muether (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 261.

## Elemental Principles of This World

“Elemental principles of this world” (στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου) appears three times in the New Testament: Galatians 4:3, Colossians 2:8, and Colossians 2:20. The noun version (στοιχεῖα) appears in Galatians 4:9. In Colossians 2:8 and 2:20, elemental spirits of this world refer to teachings out of step with the gospel. Paul writes to the Colossians, warning them not to be taken captive by “philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ” (Col 2:8). In Colossians 2:20, he says, “If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations.” Both verses speak of life before Christ. Paul warns his readers against returning to doctrines that promote a gospel different from Paul’s. Colossians 2:8 and 20 inform Paul’s teaching in Galatians 6:15, where he says the Galatians are a new creation in Christ.<sup>23</sup> Being a new creation describes what it means to live in the age to come (Gal 1:3). In both Colossians and Galatians Paul pleads with his readers not to return to their former lives outside of Christ. By doing this, he can argue that applying the old covenant or prior paganism are equivalent in the new covenant. Since the Galatians are a new creation in Christ, then it seems to be under elementary principles of this world refers to reality outside of Christ.<sup>24</sup> In other words, to be under the elements of the world is to live in the real world without Christ.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 221.

<sup>24</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden explain,

The street seems to run both ways in Paul’s argument, because he also describes “our” former enslavement under the law in terms of pagan idolatry. “So also, when we were under age, we were in slavery under the physical elements of the world” (4:3). Paul seems to be referring to the pagan worship of the physical elements such as fire, or the heavenly bodies as gods (cf. Wis. 13:1-2), gods that ruled over the nations (cf. *Jub.* 16:31-32). The law, with its calendar rules aligned as they were with the physical cosmos, in a sense placed Israel in the same position as pagans who worshipped the sun, moon and stars (cf. 4:9-10). This is why Paul asks the Galatians, who have gone from enslavement in pagan worship to knowing the true God, how they can turn back again to that slavery by keeping the law (4:8-11)! Christ has brought the old era of slavery under the law, sin and idolatry to an end. (Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 103)

<sup>25</sup> Matthew S. Harmon writes,

That is why Paul can write that “we” were enslaved to the elementary principles of this world referring to Old Testament Israel and the world.<sup>26</sup> Even though Old Testament Israel had the law, they did not have the inheritance of Abraham.<sup>27</sup> He is not saying the law and paganism were equivalent in the old covenant. He is saying the elementary principles of this world refers to the old era.<sup>28</sup> Israel under the old covenant was enslaved to the law until Christ came (3:23).<sup>29</sup> James Hamilton writes, “Whatever Paul means when he refers to ‘elementary principles,’ from the wider context, it is clear that this time of enslavement is the same in which the Mosaic law was in force.”<sup>30</sup> In summary, Christ delivered all humanity from their former lives to be a new creation to live in the new age—as sons of God.

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God sent his Son to lead both Jews (“born under the law”) and Gentiles (“born of woman”) in a new exodus (note again the redemption language, using the same verb as in Galatians 3:13). By entering into this present evil age controlled by the elements of this world, the Son rescued his people from their slavery and granted them the status of adult sons. Instead of being children under the authority of the elements, believers are now adult sons who have been given the Spirit of God’s Son. As a result, believers are heirs of the promises made to Abraham because they are in Christ, the promised seed of Abraham (3:16). (Matthew S. Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020], 121)

<sup>26</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 103.

<sup>27</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 269.

<sup>28</sup> Neil Martin, “Returning to the Stoichea Tow Kosmou: Enslavement to the Physical Elements in Galatians 4:3 and 9?,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40 no. 4 (2018): 434-52.

<sup>29</sup> Sanders explains,

For our purposes, however, it is sufficient to know in general what Paul meant by *stoicheia*: they are the controlling powers in pagan religion and philosophy. These could have been controlling *thoughts*, but more likely include supernatural beings such as the gods that govern the stars. We do not know what stage the Hellenization of Galatia had reached, but we may assume that the Galatians had been pagans of some sort. Thus, the scriptural law imprisons, paganism enslaves. Functionally, the two are equated. There is only one state of freedom: becoming one person in Christ. In 4:5, Paul mentions bondage to the law again and expresses the state of freedom as “sonship”: he tells the Galatians that God sent Christ to redeem those under the law, “so that we might receive sonship” (4:5). We recall that in 3:26 Paul told the Galatians that, since they are in Christ, they are sons of God. The proof of their status, as it often is, is that God has sent his Spirit into the hearts of believers (4:6). Verse 4:7 repeats their status: “no longer a slave but a son; if a son also an heir through God.” (Sanders, *Paul*, 540)

<sup>30</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 476.

## Summary

Israel is a child of God but did not receive the benefits of their status because God placed them under the law.<sup>31</sup> Though God guaranteed Israel everything, they were no different from a slave because they could not inherit what God promised to them.<sup>32</sup> Paul teaches that God enslaved Israel and the Galatians were enslaved to the elementary principles of this world. These principles refer to life before Christ. The law does not serve the Galatians any more than their former lives of paganism did because they know the one true God and experience firsthand the Abrahamic promises. Thus, in Christ, the Galatians transitioned from slaves to sons of God.

### The Fullness of Time (Gal 4:4-7)

Paul says Christ came in the fullness of time (4:4). Paul proclaims God's purpose in sending Christ was to redeem humanity and adopt them to be his beloved children.<sup>33</sup> To do that, Christ had to come in a certain way. Christ came at the right moment, by the right way, and under the right conditions to redeem those under the law (4:4). Christ established the Galatians' sonship through his life. Once the Galatians receive

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<sup>31</sup> Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness*, 81.

<sup>32</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden note,

To summarize, Paul begins his long argument from Israel's history with the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 15 and 17. He observes that these promises were temporally *prior* to the giving of the law, which means that the law was not added as a means of inheritance, for that would be changing the terms of the covenant. Rather, the law was added to imprison Israel (and the world) under the power of sin. This negative role was a temporary one that the law was meant to play as it prepared the way for the coming of Christ. But now that Christ has come we are no longer under the law but are children and heirs of Abraham and God. (Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 105)

<sup>33</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden write,

The conclusion of Paul's argument from history focuses on the twin themes of family and inheritance, which are so bound up with God's covenant with Abraham: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). He then rephrases this conclusion in the second-person singular, landing on a strikingly personal note to Gentile believers to whom God has given the Spirit of his Son: "So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir" (Gal. 4:7). But although his argument is so rooted in God's covenant with Abraham, it clearly reaches beyond it with its focus on Christ, the descendant of David, and the Spirit, the promise of the new covenant. (Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 104)

sonship from God, Paul says God seals believers by the Spirit in the new covenant as a sign of their status before him (Gal 4:6). The Spirit is the seal that identifies someone as a part of the new covenant. Thus, in Christ, the Galatians are no longer slaves but sons of God, heirs to the promises of Abraham.<sup>34</sup>

### **God Sent His Son**

Christ's arrival marks the center of all history. To communicate the sonship the Galatians have with God, Paul says that God sent his Son to the world. Vital to Paul's soteriology is his Christology.<sup>35</sup> Jesus's identification as God's Son matters.<sup>36</sup> Throughout his letter, Paul has taught his readers that it is by the Son's revelation of himself that he is an apostle (Gal 1:16). It is through the Son he lives by faith (Gal 2:20). Here, it is God's Son who enters into reality as the awaited offspring of Adam to redeem the people of the world and allow them to be sons of Abraham by faith. The Galatians only become sons of God through the Son of God. Paul speaks the same message in Romans 8:3-4 when he says, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." Both texts refer to God sending his Son and the purpose it accomplishes.<sup>37</sup> Romans conveys in more detail what Christ's

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<sup>34</sup> Frank Thielman, *The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 92.

<sup>35</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *In the Fullness of Time: An Introduction to the Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022), 237.

<sup>36</sup> Richard B. Gaffin, *By Faith, Not by Sight: Paul and the Order of Salvation*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 49.

<sup>37</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 265.

humanity does. Christ's arrival from a woman means he perfectly identifies with humanity. Specifically, he is in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom 8:3b).<sup>38</sup>

### **The Galatians' Adoption**

The Galatians only become sons of God through the Son of God and their sonship comes by the means of adoption. Paul is the only New Testament author to use adoption to describe salvation (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5). He uses the term adoption to communicate the past, present, and future realities his readers experience through Christ.

**Adoption as a past reality.** Paul writes in Ephesians 1:5 that God predestined his people for adoption before the foundations of the world. This teaches that adoption is not a response to humanity's alienation from God but has always been a part of God's redemptive plan for humanity. Because adoption is not a response to sin, the Galatians' possession of the Abrahamic blessings have always been designed to be by faith, which God preached beforehand to Abraham (Gal 3:7-9).

**Adoption as a present reality.** Though the Galatians were predestined in the past, they experience the spiritual blessings of adoption in the present. Romans 8:15 says, "For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" Romans 8:15 and Galatians 4:5 address similar themes. Both passages declare that Christians in Christ are no longer slaves to anything within the old age.<sup>39</sup> Both passages pronounce Christians as becoming co-heirs of God with Christ. Both passages explain that Christians in Christ are new spiritual creations. Thus, the Galatians presently enjoy an adopted status as God's children through faith (Gal 4:3, 7; Rom 8:15; 17). The Galatians should renounce the

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 172.

<sup>39</sup> Harmon, *Galatians*, 227.

Judaizers false gospel because everything they offer the Galatians currently have as adopted children of God.

**Adoption as a future reality.** Lastly, Paul says that adoption has future implications for believers. Romans 8:23b says, “But we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.” Unlike the previous passages that address God’s eternal plan for salvation and the spiritual effects believers experience in their lives currently, Romans 8:23 says adoption is also in the future; specifically, believers experience adoption fully when they are transferred into the likeness of Christ through the redemption of their bodies. In other words, adoption is complete for believers when their outer selves match their inner selves. Thus, there will be no sign of the old age because death and sin will be no more.

### **The Galatians Are Sons of God**

Paul says that God sending Christ made the Galatians sons of God. Paul continues to say that, because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, “Abba! Father!” (4:6). The proof that the Galatians are God’s sons is the Holy Spirit within them.<sup>40</sup> Paul changes from “we” to “you” in 4:6 to affirm the Galatians new status as accepted sons of God. Craig Keener notes, “Paul shifts from ‘we’ to ‘you’ in 4:6 not to imply that what he says is untrue of Jewish believers (cf. 4:5), but rather to reinforce for his mostly gentile audience that they too are directly included as the children of whom he is speaking (4:5) and thus heirs (4:7), as he affirmed in 3:29.”<sup>41</sup> The Judaizers claim that circumcision were needed for the Galatians to have sonship. Paul says the Spirit signifies their sonship.

Paul explains that because the Galatians are God’s children, God sent his Spirit to dwell within them. Some scholars argue that Paul teaches two different chronologies

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<sup>40</sup> Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 477.

<sup>41</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 345.

regarding how the Spirit comes to dwell within someone. Paul says in Romans 8:14-17, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom 8:14-15). Scholars suggest Paul says in Galatians 4 that believers first become sons, then they receive the Spirit, whereas in Romans 8:14-15, believers receive the Spirit to make them sons.<sup>42</sup> I believe it is a mistake to separate the two. The main point of Galatians 4:6 is not to focus on a chronological reception of the Spirit but on the fact that the Galatians have the Spirit in the first place.<sup>43</sup> Paul’s reasoning boils down to focusing on the new covenant the Galatians have with Christ,<sup>44</sup> remembering the gospel they accepted in the beginning. Through Christ the Galatians have the Spirit which makes them sons, heirs according to the promise (4:7).

## Summary

To convince the Galatians they possessed the Abrahamic inheritance, Paul focused on Christ and his inception into the world. God sent Jesus to be born from a woman and under the law so that the Galatians might receive adoption.<sup>45</sup> Jesus being born from a woman means he fully identifies with humanity. Jesus being born under the law means he fulfilled the required conditions of God’s moral standard. Through Jesus coming in the fullness of time, the Galatians partake in the new creation.<sup>46</sup> The Galatians possess

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<sup>42</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 272.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Longenecker writes, “For Paul, it seems, sonship and receiving the Spirit are so intimately related that one can speak of them in either order (cf. the almost free intertwining of categories in Rom 8:1-2 and 9:-11), with only the circumstances of a particular audience, the issue being confronted, or the discussion that precedes determining the order to be used at any given time or place.” Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 173.

<sup>44</sup> Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles*, 120.

<sup>45</sup> Crowe, *The Path of Faith*, 133.

<sup>46</sup> Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 77.



the Spirit as a seal of their new identity in the new covenant. Through Christ, the Galatians transitioned from slaves to sons of God.

### **Known by God (Gal 4:8-11)**

Paul concludes his teaching about the Galatians' possession of the Spirit and their adoption by outlining the consequences if they choose to trust the law. Despite having begun by the Spirit, the Galatians would again be in slavery because slavery to the law would be a result of falling away from the gospel (3:2). If the Galatians embrace the law after their conversion, then Paul says his ministry to them was in vain (4:11).<sup>47</sup> To trust in the law would be equivalent to returning to their former lives of paganism. Paul mentions this to explain how their former lives of worshipping gods did not benefit them, just as returning to the law in light of Christ will not benefit them either (4:9). Paul tells the Galatians that in Christ, God knows them. The Galatians do not need to observe laws to have a relationship with God but have faith in his Son.

### **The Galatians Have Come to Know God**

Paul claims that if the Galatians return to the law, then they will act as if they were in their pre-conversion slavery.<sup>48</sup> The Galatians' slavery is focused on "those that by nature are not gods" (4:8).<sup>49</sup> Applying what he had just told them in 4:1-7, Paul recalls their past to note they should know better than to adopt teaching contrary to what

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<sup>47</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 275.

<sup>48</sup> Harmon states,

Paul reminds the Galatians that before they believed the gospel and came to know God, they "were enslaved to things that by nature are not gods" (*ἐδουλεύσατε τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς*). Picking up language from 4:3, Paul returns to the Galatians' pre-conversion slavery. Whereas in 4:3 the enslaving power was the "elemental forces of the world" (HCSB), here it is "things that by nature are not gods" (*τοῖς φύσει μὴ οὖσιν θεοῖς*). This would seem to be a reference to the pagan deities that the Galatians worshiped before their conversion. These pagan deities are a subcategory of the "elements of the world" (4:3), part of the old creation, this present evil age (1:4), along with the Mosaic law. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 233-34)

<sup>49</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 277.

he told them prior (1:1-10). In light of Christ, subjection to the Torah is no different than following false gods.<sup>50</sup> Paul says in 4:9, “But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God” (v. 9a). Paul expounds on the importance of knowing God and being known by God in their current state. The Galatians do not just know God, but God knows them. God knowing his people means he chooses his people.<sup>51</sup> The Galatians come to know God because God first knew them and redeemed them through his Son.<sup>52</sup> If the Galatians chose the law, then they chose slavery over freedom. If they chose the law, they deny Christ, renounce their faith, and return to their former lives of bondage.<sup>53</sup>

### **Paul Fears He Labored in Vain**

Paul fears his work in the Galatians’ lives has been in vain by them turning to the Mosaic law (4:11). In addition to, in light of Christ, turning to the law is no different than the Galatians turning to their former lives of paganism (4:9).<sup>54</sup> The Galatians’ observance to days, months, seasons, and years implies that they have adopted more than circumcision into their lives but the other aspects of the Old Testament law (Gal 4:10). Paul elsewhere addresses the issue of observing certain days as more important than

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<sup>50</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 278.

<sup>51</sup> Schreiner notes,

Even though it is true that believers have come to know God, there is a deeper reality that explains why they know God’s saving love, namely, God’s knowledge of them. God’s knowledge of his people hearkens back to the Hebrew verb “know” where God’s knowledge refers to his choosing of someone—the setting of his affection upon someone. Hence, he “knew” Abraham by choosing him to be the father of the Jewish people (Gen 18:19). He “knew” Israel and chose them out of all the people groups on earth (Amos 3:2). He “knew” Jeremiah before he was born and hence appointed him to be a prophet (Jer 1:5). So too, the Galatians have come to know God because God knew them first, because he loved them and graciously chose them to be his own. (Schreiner, *Galatians*, 278)

<sup>52</sup> Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory*, 263.

<sup>53</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 278.

<sup>54</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 279.

others in Romans 14:5 and Colossians 2:16.<sup>55</sup> In both texts, the issue is leading new Gentile believers to obey the law more than the new covenant. Paul is not opposed to practicing traditions of the Old Testament in the new covenant. Paul is against observing old covenant traditions as a necessity for the Christian life. The Galatians' flirtation with Mosaic law is why Paul mourns that he labored in vain. To exchange the gospel of Jesus Christ for the Mosaic law is to trade freedom for slavery. Paul stresses that the Galatians have transitioned from slaves to sons in Christ. They do not need to observe the law because Christ has set them free.

### **Conclusion**

Paul explains that Israel and the Galatians were positioned the same before Christ. God enslaved both groups to elementary principles of the world, which is a reality outside the new covenant. God promised Israel in the Old Testament the blessings of Abraham, but they did not receive the blessings until Christ came. Paul connects the Galatians' history with Israel to show life in the new covenant is better than any other practice. In the new covenant, the mosaic law has lost its place as the distinguishing marker of what identifies someone within the community of God. When Christ came in the fullness of time, he redefined membership in the community of God. The Galatians and all believers transition from slaves to sons of God through Christ's work on the cross and his resurrection. Through Christ, the Galatians are no longer slaves, but heirs of the promises of God won through Christ.

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<sup>55</sup> Harmon explains,

For the gentile Galatian believers to scrupulously observe these special days, festivals, etc. as a part of pursuing justification was not a step forward in their spiritual life, but a return to slavery to the elementals. Paul was not opposed to Jewish believers observing the Sabbath or celebrating the various festivals (Rom 14:5-9). He himself seems to have celebrated Pentecost (Acts 21:17-26), even going so far as to participate in ritual purification and pay the vows of other Jewish believers (21:26). But what Paul could not tolerate was any effort to make these observances a necessary part of the Christian life, or especially any effort to impose them upon gentile Christians. (Harmon, *Galatians*, 238-39)

## CHAPTER 8

### A TALE OF TWO WOMEN (GAL 4:21-5:1)

Paul spends most of Galatians conveying that the law brings enslavement. Relying on the law means not only operating under the old age (1:4) but denying God's covenantal promises fulfilled in Christ (2:15-16). Paul argues that there has always been one gospel, first promised to Abraham but culminated in Christ as the true offspring of Abraham.

Paul reminds the Galatians through the Mosaic law and the prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery. He does this by first challenging the way the Judaizers approach salvation. Paul appeals to the new covenant in Christ to show that it does not offer justification but instead enslaves everyone. He has done so before, but now takes a new approach. Paul does not appeal to texts regarding the law; instead, he appeals to Abraham and his two sons. To convey the enslaving nature of the law and its inability to offer salvation, he compares Abraham's two sons and shows how Abraham conceived both—one by the flesh and the other by the power of God.<sup>1</sup> Abraham's two sons serve as a paradigm to show how individuals inherit God's promises. Paul conveys that those who trust in the flesh to inherit the promises remain in slavery but those who trust in God are free (4:23).<sup>2</sup> He connects the Galatians' experience with God to show that they came to know God through God's will.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jarvis J. Williams, *Galatians*, New Covenant Commentary (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020), 143.

<sup>2</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden write, Paul builds upon this distinction between Ishmael and Isaac an allegorical interpretation of the story that elucidates the enslaving nature of the law covenant and the freedom of the new covenant (Gal. 4:24a). Most scholars observe that Paul's allegory is 'tempered' by typology. Ishmael and Isaac are OT

Paul says that the two births may be interpreted allegorically (*ἀλληγορέω*) and represent two covenants (4:24). He presents the Abrahamic covenant as the means of salvation to convey the error of trusting in the Mosaic covenant as opposed to God's power.<sup>4</sup> If the Galatians rely on obedience to the law for justification, then they identify with Ishmael, the lineage outside of God's plan for salvation (Gen 21). In other words, the Galatians would trust in the wrong covenant for salvation.<sup>5</sup>

Paul equates Hagar's slavery with the Mosaic law.<sup>6</sup> Relying on works of the law to justify places someone outside God's plan and does not produce freedom but slavery.<sup>7</sup> Paul declares the Galatians' freedom in Christ and their status as children of the promise by drawing from Isaiah 54. He does this to show that humanity in Christ, regardless of ethnic

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figures who correspond to and foreshadow what God is now doing in Christ and the church. And yet Paul's reading of the story goes beyond typology, inasmuch as Hagar and Sarah are identified as the law covenant that bears children into slavery and the new covenant that bears children into freedom. (Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin M. McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 52 [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020], 106-7).

<sup>4</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 107.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary Series: New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 293.

<sup>6</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden explain,

Paul explicitly identifies Hagar with the law covenant given to Israel at Sinai: "One covenant is from Mount Sinai and bears children who are to be slaves: this is Hagar" (Gal. 4:24). Since he has already argued that God gave the law to imprison people in sin, his identification between the slave woman and the law covenant is not surprising. He solidifies this identity further in the next verse by observing that both are associated with the geographical location of Arabia: "[T]he Hagar-Sinai mountain is in Arabia" (Gal. 4:25a; our tr.). And yet the mountain also corresponds geographically "to the present city of Jerusalem, because she is in slavery with her children" (Gal. 4:25b). In context, the slavery of Jerusalem and her children must refer to those who were currently labouring under the authority of the law. (Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 107)

<sup>7</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden note, "Ishmael's mother is the law covenant and corresponds to the present city of Jerusalem in that she is enslaved to the law and bears children who join her in that slavery." Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 107.

background, can rejoice because though they were without a husband (God), now they have a relationship with God through his power.<sup>8</sup>

Paul concludes his argument by highlighting how Hagar's offspring did not inherit the promised land. Sarah commanded Abraham to cast Hagar and Ishmael out because Ishmael is not a coheir with Isaac (Gen 21:10-13). He assures the Galatians that they are children of the promise because they came to know Christ through God's power, just as Sarah conceived Isaac through God's power. Paul details God's working with humanity to teach that circumcision never justified a person—that comes only through faith in Jesus Christ. The Galatians are free in Christ through faith, so Paul encourages them to stand firm. To rely on the law would return them to slavery and align them with the slave woman who did not inherit the Abrahamic promises.

### **Abraham Had Two Sons (4:21-23)**

To advance his theological defense of justification, Paul turns to Abraham's offspring and how he had two sons to show how the law cannot justify a person (4:21). Paul appealed to Abraham before to address the relationship between faith and justification. Now, Paul appeals to Abraham in a unique way. He claims that Abraham's offspring resemble the relationship between freedom found in Christ and enslavement to the law (4:22). For Paul, for the Galatians to understand the law, they need to understand the genesis of Abraham's sons (4:23).

### **Do You Not Listen to the Law?**

Paul meets the Galatians' desire to practice circumcision by questioning their understanding of the law (Gal 4:21). He argues that if they knew what the law taught, they would realize they were mistaken regarding the purpose of the law completely (4:21). It is important to note his words to the Galatians and their desire to be "under the law"

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 45 (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2018), 203.

(4:21). To be under the law, as previously mentioned, means living under the power of sin and in the old age before Christ (2:16; 2:21; 3:1-5; 3:10-14; 3:18; 3:19; 3:21; 3:24-4:7; 4:8-11). Paul reminds them in 4:21 that with the law comes slavery for all under its jurisdiction.<sup>9</sup> The Galatians would not only have to follow circumcision but keep the law in its entirety to achieve justification.<sup>10</sup> Paul responds to the Galatians' desire to keep the law to earn or maintain justification with God's covenant promise to Abraham that he will have a son born from his power, not man's. Thus, Paul reminds them through the Mosaic law and the prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery.<sup>11</sup>

### **The Path of Two Sons**

Paul begins his argument by drawing from the Old Testament and the genesis of Abraham's two sons (Gen 16-21).<sup>12</sup> Notably, he does not begin by naming the women but by characterizing them (Gal 4:22).<sup>13</sup> The slave woman is Hagar, and the free woman is Sarah. One son (Ishmael) was born from slavery, the other (Isaac) from freedom. To further his teaching on the laws of enslavement, Paul connects the Galatians' current situation with Hagar's relationship with Abraham and the means through which Ishmael was born.<sup>14</sup> Douglas Moo writes, "Paul's concern is with maternity, and the argument proceeds by oppositions: believers are the children of the free woman and not the children of the slave

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<sup>9</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 142.

<sup>10</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 298.

<sup>11</sup> James M. Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 477.

<sup>12</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 41 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 207.

<sup>13</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 298.

<sup>14</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 299.

woman.”<sup>15</sup> He believes the Galatians are children of the free woman because he reads all of Scripture with Christ as the center of salvation history.<sup>16</sup> The issue with the Judiazers’ interpretation of the law is that the law does not guarantee the Abrahamic inheritance, but faith in God’s promises does. He appeals to the path of two sons because one leads to slavery and the other leads to freedom.<sup>17</sup>

Paul transitions in Galatians 4:23 to defend why believers are children of the free woman, not the slave woman. Hagar birthed Ishmael according to the flesh (Gal 4:23a), whereas Sarah birthed Isaac according to the promise (Gal 4:23b). The flesh describes human agency. Abraham and Sarah doubted God’s promise of an offspring and tried to achieve an offspring through their power and control (Gen 16; 17:18).<sup>18</sup> Isaac, on the other hand, was born according to the promise. God promised Sarah, a barren elderly woman, that she would conceive and give birth to a son (Gen 17:15-18, 18:10-15; 21:1). Isaac’s birth happened because of God’s power alone. Thus, Isaac was born as a result of God’s promise to Abraham and Sarah.<sup>19</sup>

Paul’s comparison between Ishmael and Isaac’s birth sets the paradigm regarding how God brings someone into a relationship with himself—through faith. He

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<sup>15</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 298

<sup>16</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 76.

<sup>17</sup> Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters*, 79.

<sup>18</sup> Matthew S. Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 261.

<sup>19</sup> Jason C. Meyer and E. Ray Clendenen write,

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 and E. Ray Clendenen, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology* [Nashville: B & H, 2009], 131)



can say that the Galatians' current ambitions to follow the law as a means of justification is the same as Ishmael's birth because both attempts to bring about the fulfillment of God's promises through works rather than faith result in slavery rather than freedom.<sup>20</sup>

### **Two Covenants (Gal 4:24-28)**

Paul's argument could transition from 4:21-23 to 4:28-31 and seem reasonable. Still, the apostle argues that the two women may be interpreted allegorically to show that the law cannot justify someone or bring freedom (4:24a). His objective is not only to point out the status of the two women within the Abrahamic covenant but to theologically show the resemblance they share with the Abrahamic covenant and Mosaic covenant. It appears he does this to expose his opponents' flawed interpretation of justification.<sup>21</sup> The two women represent the two covenants, Paul's logic in identifying Isaiah 54:1 with the two covenants, and lastly, how believers can know they are like Isaac the child of promise.

### **A Covenant of Freedom and a Covenant of Slavery**

It is difficult to see how Hagar historically anticipates the Sinai covenant regarding God's interaction with people. Still, it appears that Paul is not so much concerned with historical facts but with theological implications.<sup>22</sup> He is responding to the Judaizers and their flawed Mosaic law interpretation—his concern is how God's promises come to fulfillment.<sup>23</sup> The Judaizers advocated for justification through observance of the law. Paul

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<sup>20</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 299.

<sup>21</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 413.

<sup>22</sup> A. Andrew Das, *Galatians*, Concordia Commentary (St. Louis: Concordia, 2014), 495.

<sup>23</sup> David Arthur DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2018), 396.

links the Mosaic law's enslavement with Hagar because neither offer justification because God's promises come by faith.<sup>24</sup>

Paul continues by identifying Hagar and the Mosaic law with present Jerusalem (4:25). He desires to draw out the Judaizers' poor interpretation of salvation history. Paul's argument here draws two lines across history.<sup>25</sup> One line is drawn by faith and God's power; the other is drawn by works through human effort.<sup>26</sup> One line embodies freedom and promise; the other embodies slavery and old age.<sup>27</sup> Paul is not saying Hagar "is" Mount Sinai in a literal sense but rather in theological trajectory. In other words, ending in slavery and not promise fulfillment.<sup>28</sup> Present Jerusalem symbolizes the old age.<sup>29</sup> Hagar's child, salvation through the Mosaic covenant, existing in present Jerusalem, never offered justification.<sup>30</sup> To rely on such things leads to slavery rather than freedom.<sup>31</sup> Paul is

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<sup>24</sup> G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *The Story Retold: A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 264.

<sup>25</sup> DeSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 396.

<sup>26</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung and Philip S. Henman, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 207.

<sup>27</sup> Harmon writes,

The "Jerusalem above" is Paul's way of referring to the eschatological state that results from God fulfilling his promises to redeem his people from their sin, bring them out of their exile, and transform creation itself. Paul's point, then, is that through Jesus Christ's death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, he has brought into existence the eschatological people of God and inaugurated the promised new creation. (Matthew S. Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020], 121)

<sup>28</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 302.

<sup>29</sup> Schreiner explains, "Paul continues to emphasize the theme of slavery. The present Jerusalem, along with her children, is enslaved. The standard Jewish view was that the law is the pathway to liberation and freedom, but Paul argues that it ends up enslaving and captivating people, for the law demands obedience and does not grant any power to keep its precepts. It slays but does not give life." Schreiner, *Galatians*, 302.

<sup>30</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 144.

<sup>31</sup> Bruno, Compton, and McFadden, *Biblical Theology*, 109.

reminding the Galatians through the Mosaic law and prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery.

### **Jerusalem from Above Is Free**

Paul appeals to Isaiah 54:1 to convey that what Isaiah prophesied regarding the barren woman rejoicing has come to fulfillment in the Galatians lives through Christ. Isaiah 54:1 promises that Israel's seed would inherit the nations through God as their redeemer. Isaiah describes this by saying God will establish the heavenly Jerusalem on earth.<sup>32</sup> By quoting Isaiah 54:1 in relation to justification in the Abrahamic covenant, Paul claims that the new covenant is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. Jews and Gentiles exist together under the banner of Christ as the blessings of the age to come invade the present evil age.<sup>33</sup> This is important because Paul opposes the Judaizers' view that the Galatians still live in the old age where the law is still in effect (4:3-5).<sup>34</sup> Paul proclaims that the Galatians are children of promise, like Isaac, because their justification came through faith not works of the law.<sup>35</sup> The Gentiles do not have to practice circumcision for acceptance before God, but instead they must have faith in God's promises.<sup>36</sup> Thus, Paul reminds the Galatians through the Mosaic law and the prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery.

### **For Freedom Christ Has Set Us Free (Gal 4:29-5:1)**

Paul concludes his argument in Galatians 4:28 and continues to 4:29-5:1 to show that just as Isaac's birth came by faith, so too did the Galatians' new birth (4:31).

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<sup>32</sup> Moo, *Galatians*, 305.

<sup>33</sup> Longenecker, *Galatians*, 214.

<sup>34</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 303.

<sup>35</sup> Benjamin L. Gladd, *From Adam and Israel to the Church: A Biblical Theology of the People of God*, Essential Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2019), 140.

<sup>36</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 302.

His main argument here is that anything accomplished outside of God's plan and power will not be blessed or experience freedom.<sup>37</sup> He encourages the Galatians through the Scriptures that if they understand what it says (4:21), they will not only reject the idea of justification through the law but also remove the Judaizers from their midst.

### **The Birth Plan Matters**

Paul reveals to the Galatians through Scripture that just as Ishmael persecuted Isaac, the Judaizers persecute them (4:29).<sup>38</sup> His aligns the Judaizers with Ishmael because they deny the work of the Spirit as the sole means of justification.<sup>39</sup> To show that, he describes how Ishmael was born opposed to Isaac. He describes the births as "according to the flesh" and "according to the Spirit." Having Ishmael according to the flesh means Abraham attempted to bring God's promises through his effort. According to the Spirit, on the other hand, conveys that God gave Isaac to Abraham to fulfill his promise. The relationship between flesh and Spirit is important because Paul already questioned the Galatians regarding how they received the Spirit (3:2).<sup>40</sup> Thus, Paul continually shows that anything done through the flesh cannot bring freedom, but only slavery.

### **The Promise Seed Persecuted**

To show that anything done through the flesh brings slavery, Paul appeals to Genesis 21:8-10. The narrative shows Ishmael (the son born according to the flesh) laughing at Isaac (the son born according to the Spirit) (Gen 21:8-9). The text does not say why Ishmael laughed, only Sarah's reaction to his laughing. Sarah tells Abraham, "Cast out this slave woman with her son, for the son of this slave woman shall not be heir

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<sup>37</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 306.

<sup>38</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 305

<sup>39</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 148.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 262.

with my son Isaac” (Gen 21:10). Sarah’s reaction to Ishmael’s laughing conveys that he did not view Isaac as the heir of promise. Ishmael did not share in the covenantal hope promised by God through Isaac. Consequently, Ishmael gets cast out from the covenant community along with his mother, Hagar. Ishmael’s consequence resembles slavery because he did not experience the blessings of the Abrahamic promise.

Paul cites Genesis 21:10 to align the Judaizers’ message with Ishmael’s laughing. Just as Ishmael laughed at God’s promised heir, the Judaizers deny faith as the only means of salvation for the Galatians. Just as the slave woman and her offspring were cast out, the Judaizers and their false gospel should be cast out. Paul encourages the Galatians by reminding them that they are children of the free woman because of Christ.<sup>41</sup> To be a child of the slave woman is to attempt to earn justification by their means. This logic is covenantal madness for Paul because redemptive history has proven time and time again that proper relationship with God comes through God’s power by God’s promises.<sup>42</sup> Again, Paul reminds the Galatians through the Mosaic law and prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery.

### **Stand Firm**

Paul roots his call to the Galatians to stand firm in God’s covenantal promises.<sup>43</sup> Drawing from everything he has said until this point, he proclaims that freedom is found in nothing else but Christ. Galatians 5:1 summarizes all of the letter in terms of the

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<sup>41</sup> Das, *Galatians*, 511.

<sup>42</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, *Covenant and God’s Purpose for the World*, Short Studies in Biblical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 108.

<sup>43</sup> Keener explains,

The command *stand firm* is appropriate for a people delivered from slavery; Moses exhorted the Israelites, just delivered by God from slavery in Egypt, to “stand firm” because God would protect them from their pursuers (Exod. 14:13), who wanted to reenslave them (14:5). God delivered his people from slavery in Egypt, breaking their yoke so they could stand upright (Lev 26:13). Paul warned the Galatians not to be subjected *again* to slavery not because they had observed the law itself before, but rather because they were returning to elementary matters appropriate at most (in the case of the law) for an earlier stage of salvation history (Gal 4:3, 8-10). (Keener, *Galatians*, 440-41)

implications of the gospel for the Galatians. Christ freed the Galatians from the curse of the Mosaic law (3:13).<sup>44</sup> They are free to have a relationship with God by faith through the death of Jesus Christ.<sup>45</sup> Because Christ has set the Galatians and all Christians free, Paul yearns for them not to submit to the Judaizers' teaching because it would lead them back to Sinai, back to slavery, and back to histories longing for Christ.<sup>46</sup> To submit to the yoke of slavery is to un-adopt oneself from God's family and seek familial ties with Ishmael.<sup>47</sup> Paul effectively says that everything the Judaizers-offer is theirs already.<sup>48</sup> The law enslaves all under its domain. In contrast, Christ liberates Galatians to a hope of righteousness (5:9).<sup>49</sup> Paul reminds the Galatians through the Mosaic law and prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery.

### **Conclusion**

To submit to the yoke of slavery would mean forfeiting their freedom, metaphorically going back in time, and living under the law.<sup>50</sup> To demonstrate that, Paul allegorically walked through Scripture to show that slavery connects to human effort and the old age. To trust in the law for justification is to identify with Ishmael. For Ishmael was not the offspring of faith rather Abraham's attempt to bring about God's promises by works. For Paul, the Galatians are children of the free woman because they came to know God through faith, not works of the law. To trust in God's promises by faith is to identify

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<sup>44</sup> Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 243.

<sup>45</sup> McKnight, *Galatians*, 244.

<sup>46</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 149.

<sup>47</sup> Schreiner, *Galatians*, 307.

<sup>48</sup> Keener, *Galatians*, 440.

<sup>49</sup> Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*, 478.

<sup>50</sup> Williams, *Galatians*, 149.

with Isaac because God promised to give Isaac to Abraham by his power alone. The Galatians are called to rejoice because they have been brought into God's family through the blood of Jesus. Because the Galatians know who they are in Christ, they can resist the Judaizers' false gospel, because they are heirs of the Abrahamic promises and recipients of the Holy Spirit. Paul reminds the Galatians through the Mosaic law and the prophets that justification through Christ leads to freedom, whereas relying on the law leads to slavery.

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## ABSTRACT

### NO OTHER GOSPEL: DISTINGUISHING FAITH AND WORKS IN PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS FOR THE STUDENT MINISTRY OF BETHEL CHURCH

Foster James Toft, DMin  
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2023  
Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Brian J. Vickers

This work walks through Paul's proclamation of the finished work of Jesus as Paul teaches that there is no other gospel. In other words, salvation has always been by grace through faith across all redemptive history. Chapter 2 argues that very reality. By looking at Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden and God's covenant with Abraham, salvation is seen as an act of faith in response to God's grace. Abraham believed in God, which he counted as righteousness (Gen 15:6).

Chapter 3 begins an exposition of Galatians, showing how Paul argues my exact point. Paul begins and ends his letter with similar themes: the false teachers lead the Galatians to work for themselves and traditions rather than Jesus Christ. Paul curses anyone, including himself, if they add to the message of the gospel that was initially given. There has always been one gospel, and no one is above it.

Chapter 4 shows that justification by faith alone encourages ethnic unity within the new covenant inaugurated by Christ. For societies and different cultures to come together, there must be a center from which all persons can agree upon. That center is Christ and the faith people have in him that unites all people together.

Chapter 5 continues the theme of faith being the unifier of all people. Not only is faith in Christ the source by which all people are united, but all people, regardless of their background, receive the blessings given to Abraham, regardless of the familial ties.

In Christ, people become a new creation. Once someone is in Christ, they inherit the same promises by grace through faith, like everyone else from everywhere else.

Chapter 6 shows that even though the Abrahamic inheritance comes only by faith, and faith is the source by which people become children of God, the law still has a purpose within redemptive history and is good. It is good because it fits within the Abrahamic covenant. The Abrahamic covenant is superior to the mosaic covenant in its historical setting and theological outlook.

Chapter 7 shows that when people trust Christ as savior and place their faith in him, they transition from slaves to sons of God. This is significant because people's position before God changes. Slaves do not receive blessings or inheritance. The rightful heir to the father's possessions belongs to his son. Because all those who place their faith in Jesus become sons of God, their title changes, and they identify as God's child—the rightful heir to the Abrahamic promises.

Chapter 8 concludes the project by examining Paul's theological reasoning behind his letter. By looking at Ishmael and Isaac's births, Paul defends that there has always been one way to be free. If the Galatians (and Christians today) trust in any source for freedom outside of faith in Jesus Christ, they will be slaves. All other forms of teaching and outlooks on life lead to slavery. Only faith in God's promises will lead to genuine freedom.



VITA

Foster James Toft

EDUCATION

BA, Purdue University, 2016

MDiv, Faith Bible Seminary, 2019

MINISTERIAL EMPLOYMENT

Pastoral Intern, Faith Church, Lafayette Indiana, 2016-2019

Pastor of Student Ministries, Bethel Church, Crown Point, Indiana, 2019-