

## **The Apocalypse of Faith: An Exegetical Study of Galatians 3:19-29**

Galatians 3:19-29 brings much of Paul's theology and, more pointedly, his polemic in Galatians into sharp focus. Words rich with biblical imagery dot the landscape of the text. While the internal relationships of the words in the text in Galatians 3 are vitally important to understanding Paul's message, we cannot disassociate these words from their metasyntax and metalexigraphical context. That is, there are key words in this text which tell a story, emphasizing particular points of God's activity in saving his people. Sometimes the tendency in dealing with these Pauline passages of Scripture is to demand scientifically precise meanings of words. The word must fall into definition number one, two or three in Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich. But to reverse a colloquial phrase, in Paul, many times, a word paints a thousand pictures. Words like "law," "sin," "seed," "promise," "justification," "life," "sons" and "heirs" are but a few examples of words that are bursting at the seams with redemptive substance. Each word tells the story from a particular angle while fitting together with the other aspects of the story told by the other words. These words are not abstractions in Paul only connected to the "Idea." Rather they are actors in the divine drama.

"Faith," in this particular text, is another one of those expressions which cannot be hemmed into one small wineskin. Faith, whether the noun (πίστις) or the verb (πιστεύω), is used in no less than three different ways in this passage. Paul speaks about (the much controverted) πᾶσις Ἰησοῦ, all those who *believe*, and Faith as the new age in which God has brought to fruition that which he promised to Abraham. This last sense is the sharp edge of Paul's argument against the Galatians' errant belief and behavior. The Galatians desired to stay in Act 3, as it were, when the drama had moved on to Act 4. Or worse yet, it would be like trying to cross back through the Red Sea to Egypt once you had been safely delivered to the other side. Unthinkable! It is in this sense that Paul is pitting the Law against Faith. These were two stages in the unfolding plan of God's redemption. You either live in one or the other but not in both at the same time and in the same relationship.

This basic approach to Galatians is accepted by some and vehemently rejected by others. Even the "some" who accept the fact that Paul is laying out for us redemptive-history rather than a treatise that primarily focuses on individual salvation<sup>1</sup> don't always follow through consistently with this hermeneutic. It is my contention that Galatians as a whole and 3:19-29 in particular are understood best when approaching them in apocalyptic/eschatological/redemptive-historical terms. Of course, the one sure test of exegetical correctness is whether all of the passage makes sense within its own context as well as in the flow of the entire epistle. Having struggled through Galatians in years past in the pastoral ministry, I have been forced to look at the text again. While teaching through Galatians several years ago using the template of what has come to be called "the traditional approach,"<sup>2</sup> I was constantly frustrated with bits of the text that would not fit within the hermeneutical box that I had prepared for them. I suppose it would have been easy

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<sup>1</sup>This is not to say that individual salvation is not dealt with by Paul in Galatians. It most certainly is. But it is dealt with *not* by focusing on it as primary. The primary aspect of salvation is that which God has accomplished in Christ in the history of redemption. Individuals become a part of that larger story.

<sup>2</sup> The "traditional approach" I am understanding as the basic approach Luther took toward Galatians. That is, the law is essentially a *principle* of works by which one seeks to merit his justification but finds only condemnation. Faith is essentially a *principle* of grace by which the righteousness of Christ (i.e., justification) is applied to us. While I have no problem with the theological content of what Luther said at this point (e.g., no one can merit righteousness before God), I am convinced that this was not Paul's primary emphasis in this epistle.

to consider some of these texts digressions. But that simply did not make sense. Paul is moving rapid fire through this letter in a tight series of arguments concerning the gospel. Every word in Galatians is purposeful and aimed at the *milieu* of the church. Some of the pieces of the text that did not fit were Paul's own conclusions that he was drawing from his extensive arguments. Following my hermeneutic I would come to different conclusions. For instance, my hermeneutic did not draw from Paul's argumentation the problems that Paul addresses in his two rhetorical questions in 3:19 and 3:21. Why would Paul address these particular questions at this time? My approach to the text also caused problems where Paul expressed no problem at all. Case-in-point: when Paul speaks about baptism in 3:27, I had to explain why Paul was not exchanging one external, works-righteousness rite with another external works-righteousness rite.<sup>3</sup> But, as will be seen, what Paul says here needs no rhetorical defense. It makes perfect sense within *his* context. Granted, finding that context through mirror reading is a difficult task. But it is a task to which any diligent and faithful exegete must give himself until the inspired text is coherent in our understanding. The problem of coherency in Scripture does not lie in the text itself but in us and our approaches. So then, it is not the text that must be conformed to our approach, but our approach must be conformed to the inspired text. My ambitious aim in this essay is to examine Galatians 3:19-29 using what I understand as Paul's redemptive-historical hermeneutical lenses, given to us at the entrance-door of the epistle, to comprehend what Paul is saying about the apocalypse of faith. More specifically, Paul is telling us that Abraham's "faith" has been realized in Christ (i.e., the Messiah along with his family), who has ushered in the new aeon. This, as we will see, has implications for how the people of God in this new aeon are to relate to one another.

### ***Where Are We?: Contextual Matters***

#### ***The Galatian Problem***

No one passage can be set off in isolation from the rest of the epistle if the meaning of the passage is to be rightly determined. There are a number of concerns which are involved in determining the proper setting of the passage. The first is the historical setting. One problem that exegetes have in approaching the Pauline epistles in particular is the reconstruction of the historical context. Some say this is, at best, a course fraught with uncertainties and, therefore, it is impossible to be sure about much of anything. Nevertheless, the reconstruction of the historical context is something that must be done unless the exegete is ready to become an eisogete. It is impossible to reconstruct everything that was going on in Galatia at this time. But the historical situation can be reconstructed to the point that we can make good sense of what Paul is saying.<sup>4</sup>

Dealing with all of these historical contextual matters concerning Galatians is beyond the scope of this essay and must be left to lengthier discussions in New Testament Introductions<sup>5</sup> and the commentaries.<sup>6</sup> But there are some matters of historical context that are generally accepted by commentators that provide the essential reconstruction that we need for our passage. These are elements of the situation that can rather easily be derived from the text of Galatians

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<sup>3</sup> There will be more on this *ad loc.*, but a number of commentators find this tension in their approach to this passage. Cf. e.g., Bruce, NIGTC, 185-6; Dunn, Galatians, 203f.; George, Galatians, 277; Witherington, Grace In Galatia, 277.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion about the task of reconstruction of the historical context, see Silva, Interpreting, 103ff.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. e.g., Carson, Moo and Morris, Introduction, 289-303.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bibliography.

itself. Our primary historical concern is that of the Judaizers<sup>7</sup>. Exactly who these agitators<sup>8</sup> were, we do not know. They could very well be associated with the men “sent from James” whom Paul opposed in Antioch.<sup>9</sup> But, then again, these men might have received the correction that Paul gave Peter, and this whole dispute might have been settled at the Jerusalem Council.<sup>10</sup> What we do know is that they came to Galatia after Paul’s establishing of the church and were seeking to have the Galatian Christians submit to circumcision.<sup>11</sup> This debate about circumcision is inexorably bound to Paul’s discussion of “the works of the law.”<sup>12</sup> Whatever Paul means by one of these is interrelated and interprets the other to some degree or another. And all of this relates to Paul’s anathematizing these Judaizers as proclaimers of another gospel.<sup>13</sup>

The basic shell of the problem in Galatia is here generally reconstructed. The content of the other gospel and, consequently how Paul deals with these teachings, becomes the issue that divides exegetes at various points. Is the content of this “other gospel” a merit-based salvation of which circumcision and works of the law are vital parts? Or is Paul focusing upon something else? The implications of this question are far-reaching for an understanding of Galatians. If in Galatians Paul is understanding the equation, “circumcision = merit salvation,” then “works of the law = merit salvation.” If this is indeed the case, then Paul’s use of νόμος must have both an historical referent in the Torah as well as a “meta-referent” to the law as a principle of merit-based salvation. Abraham and Israel then become more-or-less historical examples concerning how God saves people instead of actors in the story of how God has saved his people in Christ. This fundamental hermeneutic, I propose, will not make good sense of the text. While it does contain some valid applications of the text, those applications cannot become the primary meaning of the text.

### ***Putting on the Hermeneutical Glasses***

The primary reason for my assertion that this is a flawed hermeneutical principle for Galatians does not lie outside of the text but within it. The text of Galatians does not only give us the historical and theological context in which we are to read this epistle, but it also gives us the hermeneutical key which unlocks the door to Galatians. This key is found in Paul’s own introduction to Galatians: “Paul, an apostle--not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ... Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father....”

As many commentators accurately note, Paul comes out firing. He is obviously concerned that his apostolic authority has been questioned among the Galatians. So he establishes that authority once again with them from the beginning. This questioning of his authority or even his validity as an apostle must have something to do with Paul’s ministry to the uncircumcision. Paul is, no doubt, the apostle to the Gentiles.<sup>14</sup> Later in the epistle he makes it

<sup>7</sup> This, of course, is an appellation given to this particular group by exegetes as part of the historical reconstruction of the context based upon the actions of the group as related to us by Paul in Galatians.

<sup>8</sup> Gal 1:7.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Gal 2:12.

<sup>10</sup> This issue would involve the dating of Galatians. For the various opinions see Carson, Moo, and Morris, Introduction, 293-4 and the commentaries.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. e.g., Gal 2:3; 5:2-6; 6:12-13

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g., Gal 2:16; 3:2, 5; 6:13.

<sup>13</sup> Gal 1:8-9.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Rom 11:13.

plain that the apostles in Jerusalem validated his ministry to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles.<sup>15</sup> It is quite possible that because Paul is not requiring circumcision that these Judaizers would question his authority as an apostle. Consequently, Paul must re-establish his authority so that he is not found to have run in vain.<sup>16</sup>

What might seem to be just a general Christian affirmation concerning the resurrection of Jesus in 1:1 becomes vital in interpreting Galatians when coupled with what Paul says about Jesus' death and the reason for it 1:4. Paul is not here using Christian niceties to get them out of the way in order that he might get to the theological meat of the matter. Paul is setting the context for us. The historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah is the crux of Paul's argument. Something happened in this unrepeatable event that changed everything. And what the death and resurrection of Jesus changed does not comport with the "gospel" that the Judaizers are proclaiming.

Paul's words about being delivered from this "present evil age" may seem innocuous enough to some of his readers, but they will have a bit of a sting with them when Paul makes all the connections concerning with this present evil age and the Law. Many commentators have no problem understanding that Paul is referring to a common Jewish apocalyptic schema that divides history into two ages: this present age and the age to come.<sup>17</sup> What Paul is saying here is that in the death and resurrection of Jesus, the age to come prophesied by the prophets has arrived. God's people have been delivered from the previous age and now live in "the age to come." This age to come is nothing less than the new creation promised by Isaiah and the other prophets. And for Paul, in "the new creation" neither circumcision nor uncircumcision is anything.<sup>18</sup>

In order for this transition to take place, the problem of sin must be dealt with decisively. The present age is, after all, "evil." The evil of which Paul speaks is that which is associated with "the god of this age," Satan himself.<sup>19</sup> It is to this angelic creature that Adam relinquished authority in the Garden through his sin. Because of sin man was exiled from the Garden and looked for the age to come when the enemy would be defeated, an entrance would be made back into the Garden (more specifically to the Tree of Life) and man would be exalted to rule the earth as God originally intended. The death of Jesus has accomplished the deliverance necessary for this to happen because he has given himself up for our sins. As Paul will develop in the body of this epistle and develops extensively elsewhere, Jesus can do this because he is Israel's Messiah, the promised seed of Abraham. Through death Jesus was "freed" from sin<sup>20</sup> and thus frees all those who are "in" him because we are crucified with him.<sup>21</sup> But if we participate in his death, we will also participate in his resurrection, which inaugurates the new creation, the age to come. Jesus' death and resurrection and our participation in them, therefore, are pivotal for understanding how those in Christ are to relate to the present evil age. This is the dilemma that Paul is facing. The Galatians do not understand the story of redemption and where they are in it.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Gal 2:1-10.

<sup>16</sup> Gal 2:2.

<sup>17</sup> See e.g., Bruce, 75-7; George, 87-8, Martyn, 97ff., Dunn, 36; Longnecker, 8-9.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Gal 6:15.

<sup>19</sup> 2 Cor 4:4. There are some possible connections between Paul's use of the articular *πονηρός* and Jesus' use of the same in what is commonly designated "The Lord's Prayer." There it is emphasized by many that the adjective takes the substantive quality and becomes a designation for Satan, the evil one. To be delivered from this present evil age is to be delivered from the one who is himself evil, the god of this age.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Rom 6:7. Paul's use of *δικαίω* here is interesting. I will deal more with this concept and its relationship to life when I examine Gal 3:21.

<sup>21</sup> Gal 2:20.

As Ben Witherington aptly comments, “He [Paul] believes, and wishes his audience to be aware what time it is.”<sup>22</sup> Once they learn what time it is, the questions of circumcision and works of the law will be put in their proper place.

What Jesus did in giving himself up on the cross for our sins was not a plan schemed up in his own mind. Instead it was “according to the will of God and our Father.” This little phrase denotes not only the sovereign intention of the Father in the death of Jesus, but it also implies Jesus’ faithful obedience to the will of the Father. Jesus became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.<sup>23</sup> Both God’s will and the faithfulness of Jesus are major threads that run throughout this epistle and are important to our particular text.

### *The Flow of the Epistle*<sup>24</sup>

Having laid the foundation for understanding their plight, Paul turns to deal with the situation at hand in Galatia. The Galatian problem is serious. They are defecting from the one who has called them in the grace of Christ in order to follow after a different gospel, which, as Paul makes clear, is no gospel at all.<sup>25</sup> These agitators are turning the gospel of Christ into its complete opposite.<sup>26</sup> This language of reversal fits in well with what Paul is saying about the progress of redemptive-history having founds its τέλος in Christ. Paul’s opponents in Galatia were not announcing a variation on the theme of the gospel. This was an all together different gospel. The harshest condemnation is reserved for those who proclaim this gospel. They are ἀνῶθεμα. Paul even goes so far as to include himself in this condemnation if he participates in the announcement of this different gospel. But of course his persecution by the circumcision for Christ’s sake proves that he is not.<sup>27</sup> When Paul refers to angels from heaven in 1:8, this does not seem to be hyperbolic emotionalism. Rather, this has a direct connection to what will be said in 3:19 concerning angels being intermediaries through whom the Law was ordained.<sup>28</sup> The truth or falsity of the message that is proclaimed by heavenly angels or earthly angels (i.e., “messengers”) is now to be measured by what God has done in Christ. He is the hermeneutic.

Paul was obviously accused of many things; things to which we are not privy. One thing seems sure from 1:10: someone was accusing Paul of being a people-pleaser with the message he was preaching. But Paul turns the tables. By the end of the epistle Paul says essentially that this circumcision group is the group wanting to avoid persecution (i.e., by the Jews). Paul bears in his body the marks of Jesus.<sup>29</sup> Being a faithful servant of Christ—the One who has brought in this new age to which the Law could only look—has cost him much pain. The only marks the

<sup>22</sup> Witherington, 275.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Phil 2:8.

<sup>24</sup> I will of necessity be brief about the flow of Paul’s thought up to the point of the focal text. To provide a defense of all of the following assertions would take an entire commentary. My aim here is to show the flow of Paul’s argument so that the focal passage can be understood within that context.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Martyn’s discussion concerning μεταίθημι, 108.

<sup>26</sup> Cp. Acts 2:20 and the use of μεταστρέφω there. Also cf. Martyn, 112-3.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Gal 5:11

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Martyn, 113; Witherington, 83. Even though I think both of these men need nuancing at this point, I think they are on the right track in making the connection between the Law of Moses and the angels. Kept within the redemptive-historical framework, the law can be both holy, righteous and good but also “another gospel” when its proper place is not recognized.

<sup>29</sup> Gal 6:17.

Judaizers possess are the marks of the unfulfilled promises of God: circumcision. And because of this they are not being persecuted.<sup>30</sup>

In 1:11-24 Paul launches into a defense of the gospel he preaches, which is inextricably bound up with his authority as an apostle. The gospel he preaches was not something that was handed down to Paul through tradition<sup>31</sup> or taught to him by man. Paul's gospel came δι' ἀποκαλύψεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ ("the apocalypse of Jesus Christ"). Paul uses this apocalyptic language again in 1:16. The language here is right in line with the way Paul expects his readers to interpret the book: eschatologically. The modern exegete knowing what happens in Acts 9 might have the tendency to confine this apocalypse of Jesus in Paul to a personal experience of conversion. While it cannot be denied that Paul had a personal experience with the risen Christ, Paul's language is pointing us to something bigger than himself. Paul has been swept up in *the* revelation of Jesus Christ. Moisés Silva concludes:

The clearest evidence [i.e., of the revelation in Paul as eschatological] is the clause in 3:23, τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι ("the faith that was to be revealed")... [T]his verse is part of a passage that carries explicitly eschatological overtones, and it would make little sense to understand the revelation mentioned there as *conceptually distinct* from what Paul describes in 1:12 and 16. Indeed, given the strategic significance of 1:11-12, there is good reason to believe that in this formulation of his thesis Paul is anticipating the redemptive-historical point developed in 3:19-29.<sup>32</sup>

Before Paul realized that the story had taken a dramatic turn in Christ, he lived in the previous chapter. No one was more zealous than Paul for the traditions that were handed down to him by the fathers. Paul's association with the Gentiles—indeed, his being the apostle to the Gentiles—is a dramatic turn of events. Before this time Paul could have never been accused of colluding with the Hellenizers of his day who sought to do things such as reverse their circumcision. What would make this avid persecutor of aberrant sects who sought to include Gentiles as full members of the people of God begin to preach the faith he once sought to destroy? The only answer is that he realized that this is the time in which God was fulfilling his promises. What Paul saw on the road to Damascus was not only about his personal experience (even though Paul himself must certainly bow his knee to Jesus as Lord). Paul's experience informed him that God had fulfilled his promises in the man Jesus whom he raised from the dead. Therefore, this was the time for the Gentiles to come in to the family, just as the prophets foretold. Proclaiming the good news to the Gentiles was the purpose of the revelation of Jesus Christ in Paul.<sup>33</sup> Times had changed. In these last days Paul must respond to the word of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

A time came when Paul's gospel was put to the test, as it were, before the apostles in Jerusalem. This would be the time Paul would learn whether or not he had run in vain. The pillars of the church were there. Paul, Barnabas, and Titus, who was a Greek, were there also. Even though some pseudo-brethren came in to spy out the liberty that they had in Christ Jesus,<sup>34</sup> Peter, James and John confirmed the gospel that Paul preached. This confirmation took two forms. First, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. Second, Peter, James and John extended

<sup>30</sup> Gal 6:12.

<sup>31</sup> Gal 1:12, παραλαμβάνω, cp. e.g., 1 Cor 15:1.

<sup>32</sup> Silva, 173, emphasis original.

<sup>33</sup> Note the ἵνα clause in 1:16.

<sup>34</sup> This issue of bondage v. liberty will be visited again in 3:19-29.

to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, acknowledging that they were co-laborers in the same gospel ministry. They understood that Paul's mission was to the uncircumcised while Peter's allotment was to the circumcised. In Jerusalem circumcision was not an issue.

Unlike the Jerusalem situation, in Antioch circumcision became a tremendous issue. Antioch of Syria was the "hub" of the Gentile mission at this time. Peter went up to visit and was eating with the Gentiles. But when certain men from James came up to Antioch, he withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentiles. Even Barnabas, Paul's cohort, was caught up in this hypocrisy. If this situation is read from the standpoint of the merit-based justification hermeneutic, it simply does not make good sense. What Paul is dealing with in this section concerns issues of separation that are dictated by the Old Covenant Law, the Torah. The Law creates two distinct people groups: Jews and Gentiles. To be a part of the priestly nation is to be a Jew and to remain separate from the Gentiles. Distinctions between the two groups must be held firmly. But Peter, having realized what has happened in Christ—the dividing wall being broken down—is enjoying table fellowship with the Gentiles. Peter learned this lesson on a roof top in Joppa.<sup>35</sup> Now he is reverting back to the old distinctions. It is for this reason that Paul says that Peter, Barnabas, and all the rest who joined in with them were "not in step with the truth of the gospel." Paul's use of the word ἀλήθεια should not be understood in the Platonic sense of "truth." Paul is not dealing with an abstract concept but rather the faithfulness of God revealed in Christ.<sup>36</sup> The circumcision party was not walking in accord with the good news that had been revealed in Christ. They, like the Galatians, were slipping back into the previous age, the age of unfulfilled promises. This is nothing less than a denial of the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Going backwards in redemptive-history is proclaiming that the people of God still wait for God to fulfill his promises. Peter has affirmed that he believes that God has fulfilled his promises as evidenced in part by his eating with the Gentiles. But now he is forcing Gentiles to live like Jews when he himself has lived like a Gentile. This is great hypocrisy and not in step with the truth of the gospel.

At this point in the discourse (i.e., 2:15-21) it is difficult to decide whether or not Paul is continuing his rebuke of Peter or providing more of a commentary on why his rebuke was valid.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the case, this section in Galatians is pivotal. Any exegete's fundamental hermeneutic will be tried by fire in these few verses. Again, it is difficult to maintain the traditional merit hermeneutic when plowing through this passage. How one understands the phrases ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ("out of the works of the Law") and ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ ("out of the faith of Christ") and the word/concept of "justification," ultimately determines how the entire passage is understood. Left in the context I believe that the Jew v. Gentile, clean v. unclean, Law-of-Moses people v. people-who-do-not-possess-the-law-by-nature<sup>38</sup> is the best way to understand what Paul means when he is talking about "works of the law." I also believe (for reasons that I will explain later) that ἐκ πίστεως Χριστοῦ is best understood as "on the basis of the faithfulness of Christ." Paul is contrasting foundations for justification: the Law of Moses v. what God has done in Christ. The *instrument* for the appropriation of our justification (i.e., our

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Acts 10.

<sup>36</sup> Paul is using this word as John uses it in John 1:17, "For the law was given through Moses; grace and *truth* came through Jesus Christ." "Truth" here does not stand in contrast to the law of Moses in such a way as to make the Law a "lie." The Law of Moses was not God's final revelation and thus the fulfillment of his promises. God's covenant faithfulness is seen fully and finally in Jesus the Messiah. Cf. C. van der Waal, The Covenantal Gospel (Neerlandia, Alberta: Inheritance Publications, 1990), 70-71.

<sup>37</sup> For comments on this see Bruce, 136.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Rom 2:14.

existential experience of faith), while necessary in the larger discussion, is not Paul's emphasis *in this phrase*. The work of Christ in his death and resurrection as the ground of justification *is* the emphasis. This righteousness, this vindication, this life<sup>39</sup> is grounded in the work of Christ. The Law of Moses could not bring God's promises to fulfillment and was never intended to do so. There is no possibility of "two tracks" to justification. The law brought death, which was ultimately realized in Jesus himself taking the curse of the Law on the cross.<sup>40</sup> Only on the other side of this death can the life that God promised to the world through his Spirit be realized. But if this righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ has died in vain. That is, if the Law was God's final word, the fullness of his promise, then the death of Christ is of no use at all.

The immediate context for 3:19-29 begins in earnest in 3:1. Paul appeals to the Galatians on the basis of their experience. As we see from the book of Acts, when the gospel penetrated new territories, there were dramatic experiences of the work of the Spirit. Paul could possibly be referring to an Acts-type experience of the Galatians. These visible manifestations of the Spirit's activity were so obvious that they became one of the convincing pieces of evidence at the so-called Jerusalem Council. Peter says there, "And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith."<sup>41</sup> No doubt he at the least had the experience at Cornelius's house in mind here. Whether this happened in Galatia or not, something happened with which Paul and the Galatians were familiar. It is to this experience that Paul turns and asks: "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"

The meaning of this last phrase (ἀκοῆς πίστεως) has been discussed much.<sup>42</sup> Paul's use of this phrase finds its referent in Isaiah 53:1, which leads me to conclude that Paul is referring to the message of the faith; i.e., the gospel. This gospel message, though, is the one that demands a response from those who hear the message. To discuss this phrase at length is beyond the scope of this essay. But it should be noted that to say that ἀκοῆς πίστεως refers to the message of the gospel does not mean that the response of personal faith is nowhere in view. Paul goes on to speak about Abraham and his response of faith to God's promise. And it is *God's promise* that must be kept in its proper place in this passage.<sup>43</sup> The promise of God—or the word of God—is the foundation upon which all genuine experiences of faith are built. Because of this, to drive a hard wedge between the message and the response is unwarranted. At this point I agree with Hays in his assessment:

Perhaps the truth of the matter is that Paul's compressed language will not answer all the questions that we would like to put to it and that he did not intend a clear distinction: ἀκοῆ πίστεως means simply "the faith-message," and the attempt to distinguish between "the message that evokes faith" and "the message of 'the faith'" is our problem rather than Paul's.<sup>44</sup>

The obvious answer to Paul's question posed to the Galatians is that they received the Spirit through the message of faith, not the works of the law. Abraham then comes into the

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Rom 5:18; 3:21; see discussion below.

<sup>40</sup> Gal 3:10-14.

<sup>41</sup> Acts 15:8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. e.g., Hays, *The Faith*, 124-132; Bruce, 148-9; Longnecker, 102-3; Martyn, 286-9.

<sup>43</sup> In fact, in George, 271, his quasi-chiasm encompassing 3:6—4:31 has the subject of "Promise" parallel. The promise of God (esp. as it has been fulfilled in Christ) is central to Paul's thought here.

<sup>44</sup> Hays, 131.



picture here much like he does in Romans 4. The question is, Who are the true children of Abraham? But why is this question important? Because Abraham is the promise-bearer. This promise-bearing election goes all the way back to the promise of the seed of the woman in Genesis 3:15. The opening chapters of Genesis are careful to link genealogically the promise bearing line from Adam to Seth, from Seth to Shem and from Shem to Abraham. To his seed is promised the dominion of the world. That which was lost in Adam would be restored and brought to consummation through Abraham's seed. The Jews as physical descendants of Abraham believed themselves to be the exclusive heirs to the promise given to Abraham. But Paul wants the Galatians (as well as the Jews) to read that promise again. The promise of God that will be fulfilled through Abraham's seed is life for all nations, which includes the Gentiles.

The promise of God remains prominent within the passage even though Abraham's faith is also emphasized. Paul is accentuating more *what* Abraham believes than the fact *that* Abraham believes. To put it another way, the object of Abraham's faith is more in view than his personal experience of faith. This is borne out by the fact that Paul goes on in the context to compare and contrast promise and law in their historical settings, not faith versus unbelief as it is realized in individuals. Again, this does not put the reader in an either-or dilemma (i.e., *either* the text is speaking about the promise *or* it is speaking about Abraham's faith). God's covenant word, his word of promise, always calls for a particular response of faith from each and every person to whom it is proclaimed. Abraham heard that word and believed it.

The promise proclaimed to Abraham that he believed was the good news that through him all the nations would be blessed. This blessing of which God speaks is nothing less than life for the world. Early on in Genesis blessing is closely joined with life. God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.<sup>45</sup> God does the same with other creatures as well.<sup>46</sup> The world that had died in Adam would be "blessed" in Abraham. Those who believe the promise given to Abraham now revealed in Christ Jesus participate in that blessing, that life, that justification<sup>47</sup> promised to Abraham. Keeping this within its redemptive-historical context, this life only comes with the revelation of the Messiah, God's final word. Up to that time there can only be a forward-looking hope for the fulfillment of God's promises.

But what if some insist that God's final word is found in the Law? They are under the curse of the Law. This is what Paul says in 3:10-14. The quotations from Scripture in this passage are not arbitrary, nor are they wrenched out of their context to prove a general principle about what happens when people rely on their own efforts to merit favor with God. The Law's purpose, as will be explained, was never to bring the life promised to Abraham. The Law's intention was to bring the death that would lead to life on the other side. Israel as God's priestly nation had the responsibility of being the sin-bearing nation. Christ, Israel's royal priest, was then the representative not only for Israel but for the whole world. The Law brought the problem of sin to a particular place to be dealt with: Israel. Israel's representative, embodying Israel in himself, took upon himself the curse that the Law promised would belong to Israel. The death needed to satisfy the wrath of God and free the world from the bondage of sin, was accomplished in the death of Christ Jesus. Because of this death, life, the blessing of Abraham, could come to the nations through Christ's resurrection.<sup>48</sup> But if people insist on living under Law, refusing to

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<sup>45</sup> Gen 1:28.

<sup>46</sup> Gen 1:21-22.

<sup>47</sup> 3:21

<sup>48</sup> I have dealt briefly here with a tightly packed passage that deserves much more treatment. For an excellent discussion on this passage see Wright, Covenant, 137-156.

acknowledge that God has “moved on,” they continue to live under the curse that the Law promises.

Further credence is given to this approach to 3:10-14 when Paul’s follow-up example is given in 3:15-18.<sup>49</sup> Paul follows the historical working out of God’s promise to Abraham and shows that the Law was not God’s final intention. Some might make the mistake of driving a wedge between the Law and the promise here seeing them as antithetical to one another. Those who read Galatians as a treatise against legalism proper tend to see this passage as one of the linchpins for their hermeneutic. The Law does not annul the promise. The promise does not come by law but by promise. This argument is advanced by George when he writes: “For Paul it was crucial that this original ‘covenant of promise’ be distinguished from the law of Moses. The law demands, ‘Do this!’ The promise grants, ‘Accept this!’ Here in v. 18 Paul drew the two into sharpest antithesis: If law ... not promise; if works ... not grace.”<sup>50</sup> But is Paul pitting the Law against the promise in this fashion? Further reading would say that this is a misreading of Paul at this point. Paul asks the question he knows will arise in v. 21: “Therefore is the Law against the promise?” Well, in the works versus grace scenario we would expect to hear, “By all means YES!” But that is not what Paul says. He says just the opposite in the strongest negation that he uses: *μὴ γένοιτο*. So Paul is either theologically schizophrenic, or we are not understanding Paul if we are reading him through those particular lenses. I believe the latter.

Understood in the terms explained in 3:10-14, this passage makes perfect sense and is not in conflict with Paul’s conclusion about the friendship between the Law of Moses and the promise given to Abraham. The promise that preceded the Law by 430 years states God’s ultimate intention: one seed. Though it is common to reduce this seed down to a single individual, namely Jesus the Messiah, Paul seems to be speaking about the one family that will be the Christ family. At this point N. T. Wright gives great clarity to this passage:

If, as would accord with good exegetical practice, we approach the difficult passage about the ‘seed’ in 3.16 in the light of the quite clear reference in 3.29, where (as in 3.15-18) it is found within a discussion of the Abrahamic ‘inheritance’, we might suggest that the singularity of the ‘seed’ in v. 16 is not the singularity of an individual person contrasted with the plurality of many human beings, but the singularity of one *family* contrasted with the plurality of families which would result if the Torah were to be regarded the way Paul’s opponents apparently regard it.<sup>51</sup>

If understanding “Christ” this way seems a bit strange, one need only refer to the OT to understand that the Hebrew equivalent, *בְּרִישִׁתָּא*, is not only used of a singular person, but also the people of God as a whole.<sup>52</sup> The author of Hebrews uses *Χριστός* in this way when referring to

<sup>49</sup> I realize that there is no “formal” connective here such as *καὶ*, *δέ*, *οὖν*, etc. But it is clear that Paul is explaining by example the things he has just said.

<sup>50</sup> George, 249-50. In both cases there is a “doing” involved. Some action still needs to be taken. A person must *believe*. Even though it will be argued (rightly in my estimation) that faith is a gift from God, it is still the person who must believe. God does not “do” the believing for him. The categories again make things more difficult than they should be. The difference between the OC and the NC is not “doing” v. “not doing,” works v. faith, or merit v. grace. There are many examples of faith in the period of the Law (cf. Heb 11). These hermeneutical categories steer the reader the wrong way.

<sup>51</sup> Wright, 163.

<sup>52</sup> Psalm 28:8, “The LORD is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed [*בְּרִישִׁתָּא*].” Cf. also Psa 89:51.

Moses faithfulness in suffering with the people of God rather than enjoying the comforts of Egypt.<sup>53</sup> The people of God are God's "Christ people."<sup>54</sup>

The Law does not unite the nations but divides them. This is evident in the Law itself. Israel is to remain a distinct nation from all the nations of the earth. So how does this comport with the promise of God given to Abraham? For one thing, as long as the Law is in place, the promise is not fulfilled. The presence of the Law in the history of the world means that there is still another chapter in God's saga of redemption. The Law is anticipatory, provisional and, thus, incomplete. Since the Law divides the nations, the inheritance promised to Abraham can in no wise come by the Law. From this vantage point it is easy to understand the questions that Paul's hypothetical interlocutor now raises.

### ***What Happened To The World?: Law and Faith***

The breaking down of the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles was cataclysmic. The world had been shaped in this particular fashion for approximately 1500 years. This was not some Enlightenment category of "religion" that was at stake here. This is how the entire world was defined according to the Law given by God. Now Paul is saying that things have radically changed. There are no more divisions. This was God's intention all along when he gave his promise to Abraham. The natural questions that arise from this are what we would find any God-fearing Jew asking Paul in light of what he has said: "If this was God's intention all along, then why the Law?" And, "If the Law creates two peoples but God's intention was one united people, then is the Law against the promise of God?"

These questions (expanded for clarification) are the obvious structural markers for this passage. But the structure goes beyond the asking of questions by a supposed interlocutor. Both answers, while differing in length, follow the same fundamental outline. After each question is posed in its respective place, Paul answers the question by stating (1) the purpose of the Law (in regard to the particular question), (2) the terminus of the Law in Christ and (3) the conclusion. The answers have their various nuances in regards to the specific questions, but the conclusions are one: there is one seed.<sup>55</sup> Again, the reader is driven to keep all of Paul's argumentation within this context. We will only understand Paul here if we read him through the lenses of his eschatology: Christ has come and re-arranged—or better, re-created—the world.

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<sup>53</sup> Heb 11:24-26.

<sup>54</sup> This does not mean that the "Christ family" can be understood apart from the individual who is the anointed one. This is Christ head and body.

<sup>55</sup> The answer to the second question (vv 21-29) is involved and draws some penultimate conclusions concerning the function of the Law. But these conclusions are, in fact, penultimate. They serve the ultimate conclusion: there is one people of God. One of the various problems that I have found with the merit-based justification hermeneutic at this point is that it puts Paul's focus in precisely the wrong place textually, and, indeed, theologically in this particular passage. Much attention, for instance, is given to the law as *παιδαγωγός*, but commentators fizzle out when Paul draws *his* conclusions at the end of the section. The oneness of God's people as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise becomes subservient to the function of the Law as leading us (usually individually) to Christ. The justification of individuals is not out of the purview of Paul's thoughts. But to put it as Paul's main emphasis makes little or no sense of his conclusions, falling short of dealing with the text the way Paul wrote it.

### ***Why the Law?: 3:19-20***

Paul's answer the first question in a condensed and even terse manner. The structure of the answer is clearly discernable from what is being said, and it parallels the structure of the answer to the second question.

1. The Purpose of the Law: It is added because of transgressions (19b)
2. The Terminus of the Law: Until the seed to whom it was promised should come (19c)  
[The Character of the Law: Temporary by nature (19d)]
3. Conclusion: The oneness of God's people (20)

### ***The Purpose of the Law: "It was added because of transgressions"***

Paul's question naturally arises from what he has been arguing.<sup>56</sup> Some would mistake Paul's argumentation as him speaking against the Law. He was, in fact, accused at times of speaking against the Law.<sup>57</sup> He knew of the objections that would arise from what he proclaimed. So, he poses the questions in order to answer the objections: "Why then the Law?" The first order of business that needs to be handled in this text is what Paul means by νόμος. This may seem strange because no commentator that I have read argues against this as referring to the Law of Moses. The complete context points to the fact that this is the Law of Moses. This was the Law that was added four hundred thirty years after the promise was given.<sup>58</sup> The promise refers to the promise given to Abraham. The Law given four hundred thirty years later refers to the Law given at Sinai. What could be clearer. The reason I belabor the obvious is that while it is recognized that Paul is speaking of the Law of Moses at this point, throughout the rest of the passage (and, indeed, throughout the rest of the epistle) it is common to take the Law to which Paul is referring as a principle of law. That is, the law is a commandment that condemns a person of personal guilt making him aware of his need for grace. Some of that thinking becomes enmeshed in this passage and distorts Paul's original intention. The exegete's law-as-principle view bleeds through as individual, personal justification becomes the issue of the text. The Law of Moses becomes almost an example of the law-principle rather than a historical step in the progress of redemption's story. But the law-as-principle approach is at best an application. The application must remain subordinate. As we take Paul's meaning in this redemptive-historical fashion we come through with a rich biblical theology and a myriad of applications.

In order to answer the question, Paul gives the purpose of the law. This purpose is tersely stated, "it was added because of transgressions." Views about the meaning of this phrase are almost as numerous as the commentaries on the passage itself. Two of the major views that are nuanced by different commentators understand this phrase as either (1) the purpose of the Law was to make existing sin transgression, or (2) the Law was to be the cause of more transgression.<sup>59</sup> The first purpose states the revelatory nature of the Law. In the second the Law has a causal function for producing sin. For the latter the appeal is made to Romans 5:20 which

<sup>56</sup> The inferential οὐν makes the connection clear.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., Acts 21:28.

<sup>58</sup> Gal 3:17.

<sup>59</sup> Dunn has a unique view on this phrase. He sees it in a positive light. He understands that God provides for sacrifice in the Law until the coming of the Seed. Cf. 189-90.

says, “But the Law came in by a side road in order that the trespass might abound. But where the sin abounded, grace did much more abound.” Acknowledging the fact that the Law does reveal transgressions, Bruce goes on to strongly argue that “*χάρις* expresses purpose, not antecedent cause. The law was brought into the situation as an additional factor, in order to produce transgressions.... That the promulgation of specific enactments creates a corresponding category of specific violations, with opportunity (and perhaps temptation) to commit these violations, is a fact of human experience. But Paul’s statement goes beyond this: the *purpose* of the law was to increase the sum-total of transgressions.”<sup>60</sup> This view creates a theological problem for some and forces them to handle προσετέθη (“it was added”) in a manner which “protects” God from being the cause of sin. Martyn is a prime example of this. He takes the passive as referring to the angels being the ones who added the law while the promise was given directly by God.<sup>61</sup> While this may be appealing, many times throughout the Scriptures the Law is referred to as “the Law of God.”<sup>62</sup> This is most certainly a divine passive.<sup>63</sup> God is the One who adds the Law.

Against this view of the Law being a cause for increased transgressions stands Fung<sup>64</sup> and Witherington. Witherington states, “Was the purpose of the Law to make sin known or to increase or multiply sin?” He asserts that “what Paul means is that the Law turns sin, which certainly already existed before and apart from the Law, into transgression. That is, the Law makes quite clear that every sin is a sin against God.”<sup>65</sup> At this point I tend to agree with Longnecker who says, “It may be, in fact, that Paul had no intention of being as precise as commentators would like to make him.”<sup>66</sup> But I must gently disagree with Longnecker who makes these the only two alternatives.

This phrase cannot be examined under a microscope as if it stands alone and has meaning apart from what precedes and follows. The Law “was added because of transgressions *until the seed to whom it was promised should come.*” The common views about the purpose of the law either “making sin known” or “increasing sin” are both acceptable. And they are better understood when we keep Paul’s larger picture in mind. Paul is leading us through an historical flow that must take into account the place of Israel in the unfolding of redemptive history. It was to Israel that the Law was given to separate them from all the nations of the earth.<sup>67</sup> But why did God separate Israel from all the nations? Was God quarantining a people for their own sake or for some other purpose? Underlying the phrase “because of transgressions” is the purpose of Israel.

Sin comes to a sharp focus in Israel. Here sin becomes transgression because the Law defines the lines that make sin a transgression. Israel’s position before God and for the world was to recognize this sin as transgression and deal with it accordingly. This is what a priest does. At the giving of the Law this is the purpose for which God set Israel aside, constituting her as a nation. Exodus 19:6 makes this clear: “‘And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These *are* the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.” Israel’s vocation was to bring sin (which became transgression, an intensified form of sin) to the place of judgment, put it to death, receive life from God, and take that life to the world, making it fruitful

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<sup>60</sup> Bruce, 175; emphasis original.

<sup>61</sup> Martyn, 354.

<sup>62</sup> Josh 24:26; Neh 8:8, 18; 10:28; Rom 7:22, 25; 1 Cor 9:21.

<sup>63</sup> Witherington, 255.

<sup>64</sup> Fung, 159.

<sup>65</sup> Witherington, 255-6.

<sup>66</sup> Longnecker, 139.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Exod 19:1ff.

in every sense of the word. As the world's priest, Israel would draw upon herself the sins of the world and, in turn bring life to the world as a light to the nations. Offering gifts and sacrifices on the behalf of others is at least one of the various duties of a priest.<sup>68</sup>

Israel's priestly duty concerning the nations is most pointedly demonstrated in the Feast of Tabernacles or Booths. While the Feast commemorates the wandering of the children of Israel in the wilderness, it looks to the ingathering of the nations into the people of God. In other words it looks toward the time when the world will be made alive. But in order for this to happen, sin must first be punished. During the week of worship, Israel was to offer up a total of seventy bulls. With the emphasis on the ingathering of the nations, it is difficult to miss the significance of the number seventy and its reference back to Genesis 10 and the Table of Nations. Israel was sacrificing for the nations. Israel did not exist for herself. She existed for the life of the world.<sup>69</sup>

***The Terminus of the Law: "until the seed to whom it was promised should come"***

The Law, therefore, provided a place for sin to be dealt with. Inasmuch as the Law creates Israel at Sinai, the Law created a *place* or a *people* which would be the location that God would bring the death that sin deserved. The Law would function in this capacity according to Paul until (ἄχρις) the seed to whom it was promised should come. The Law would bring death. Only *after* the Law's epoch would life come to the world as promised to Abraham. This does not mean that Israel under-Law is of no use. On the contrary, without Israel the promise of life could not be realized. That is life for the nations could only come through death under the Law. So the law is added (i.e., to the promise) "because of transgressions until the seed to whom it was promised should come." Once this seed comes and goes through the death prescribed because of transgressions, life will flow out to the world.

This line of thinking should not have been foreign to Israel. From the beginning the promised seed was prophesied to suffer and through that suffering to conquer the seed of the serpent. Seed language does not begin with God's promise to Abraham, but God's promise to Abraham picks up on the original seed language in Genesis 3:15. And with that continuity it should have been recognized that the seed must suffer in order for God's purposes for the world to be realized.

The promise spoken to the serpent in Genesis 3:15 as well as the subsequent expulsion from the Garden, all speak to the absolute necessity of death to remedy the problem of sin in the world. The reason that God expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden is revealed to us specifically in Genesis 3:22, "Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever--." Man was driven from the Garden so that he would not eat of the tree of life and live forever.<sup>70</sup> Living forever in the present condition would mean that there would be

<sup>68</sup>Cf. Heb 5.1

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Num 29:12ff. Quite an interesting theological point is made at the end of this Feast which correlates with Paul's main emphasis in this passage. On the eighth day one bull was sacrificed. This surely points to the future of the world: all nations will become one new nation.

<sup>70</sup>Much speculation is engaged in when speaking about the tree of life and this statement spoken by God. I do not believe that the tree of life contained some kind of magical fruit which God could not control. But we must account for the fact that this is God saying that they would live forever, not the serpent, and not man himself. Taking a sacramental view of the tree is helpful. God's word (which is pervasive throughout the opening chapters of Genesis) is "attached" to this tree. What God says will happen. God named this tree "the tree of life" because that would be its function; i.e., the means through which God would communicate His life to man. God is not unfaithful to His word. It is because of this that man must be barred from the tree.

no hope of ever being freed or justified from sin. Only through death can a person be freed from sin.<sup>71</sup> God in His mercy bars man from the tree of life so that man will be able to die, being released from the power of sin. As God's promises move toward their fulfillment in the world through the seed, the Law (and thus Israel) becomes the place where this death will occur. Therefore, the Law plays an indispensable role in the fulfillment of the promise. But that role is only temporary. The structures that the Law sets up to divide the world are only for a designated time.<sup>72</sup> When the seed comes—the one Christ family—the Law's function in this capacity is complete.

***[The Character of the Law: “ordained through angels”]***

The terminus of the Law with the coming new epoch is also concerned with its character. The last phrase in 3.19 may, at first, seem like a throw away line in Paul's discussion concerning the place of the Law. Why does Paul “throw in” this mention of the angels? In many treatments of this phrase by commentators, the focus on the angels is more on some type of ontological inferiority which then makes the Law less than the promise. That is, the angels are obviously not equal in substance with God. The angels delivered the Law. The promise came by the God-man. Therefore the promise is greater than the Law. While all of these premises as well as the conclusion are true, I do not believe this is Paul's line of reasoning. Paul is not gratuitously adding something about “essence.” Nor is he saying that because the Law was mediated *per se* that it is inferior. It is still the Law of God.<sup>73</sup> The flow of thought follows the flow of history once again.

First, it is well recognized that Paul is referring to something that was common knowledge at his time. Angels were the messengers who delivered the Law to Moses. The LXX's reference in Deuteronomy 33:2 interprets שָׁרָפִים as ἄγγελοι. This seems to be the predominant view of the Jews, at least in the NT. Stephen refers to the receiving of the Law that was delivered by angels.<sup>74</sup> The author of Hebrews also makes reference to the Law being delivered by angels.<sup>75</sup> The presence of angels at the giving of the Law is undisputed. But what does their presence have to do with the inferiority of the Law to the promise revealed in Christ? The presence of angels from the time of the Garden of Eden has been conspicuous up to this point. When the first man and woman were driven from the Garden, cherubim were placed at the entrance to guard the way to the Tree of Life. Man, from that time forward (at least), was under the guardianship of the angels. They were both those who protected man from judgment, but they also prosecuted judgment when the Law was violated. While angels played particular roles in the life of Abraham as well as others, what concerns us here is the place of angels with reference to the Law. They are the deliverers and guardians of the Law. Israel (especially the priests) was reminded of this as the veil that separated the Holy place from the Holy of Holies had two cherubim embroidered on it. They are as they were at Sinai: surrounding the throne of God on God's holy mountain, guarding the way to the Garden. It can be said then that the entire OC system was overseen by angels. So, when it is said that Christ came “under the Law” later

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Rom 6.7

<sup>72</sup> Note again, “*until* the seed to whom it was promised should come.” That time indicator is vitally important in the flow of Paul's argument.

<sup>73</sup> Cf. e.g., Josh 24:26

<sup>74</sup> Acts 7.53

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Heb 2:2. He, like Paul, builds his case for the superiority of God's final word in Jesus the Messiah over all other preceding words; including, but not limited to, the Law.

on,<sup>76</sup> this is functionally equivalent to him being made “a little lower than the angels.”<sup>77</sup> The angels are the guardians of God’s people until the seed to whom belonged the promise would come and enter through the veil into the Garden of God. Therefore, when the veil of the Temple was torn in two at the crucifixion of Jesus, not only was this a sign that access had been made to the throne of God, but that the OC angelic administration as guardians over God’s people came to an end.

The key to understanding the purpose of Paul’s statement concerning the angels has to do with their continuing relationship with the Law. They are administrators of the Law until the seed, the Son, should come. The “age of angels” in this sense is now over. We are full-grown sons who no longer need these παιδαγωγῶν.<sup>78</sup>

***Conclusion: “... in the hand of a mediator. He is not a mediator of one, but God is one.”***

The angels ordained the Law in the hand of a mediator. The mediator then becomes the focus of Paul’s short conclusion in 3:20. The mediator to whom Paul is referring is Moses. This “in the hand” language in reference to the Law is used of Moses and his relationship to the Law throughout the OT, especially in the LXX.<sup>79</sup> Paul introduces the language to draw his first conclusion concerning the place of the Law in God’s unfolding plan of redemption: there is one family.

Paul’s conclusion in 3:20 is not at all as clear as we might like it to be. In fact, it is quite a difficult piece to understand if for nothing else its terseness. This brevity has led to the majority of interpretations following this basic understanding: “Now a mediator is not the mediator of one party only [but two]; but God is one.” This basic line of thought seems to be that the presence of a mediator implies that the Law is one step further away from God. Couple this with the common interpretation of ontological inferiority or the inferiority of mediation by angels, and people are continually being removed from God by the Law. The sticking point in Paul’s argument then has to do with the fact that the Law was not directly communicated from God but through deputies. As George notes, “The promise to Abraham came directly from God, not through angels, nor by means of a merely human mediator such as Moses.”<sup>80</sup> Others concur with this general way of thinking. No doubt there is valid biblical teaching concerning the distance of OC versus nearness of the NC.<sup>81</sup> But again, Paul is taking a different trek. The point is not the *presence* of a mediator *per se* but what the mediator mediates and to and for whom he mediates.

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<sup>76</sup> Gal 4:4

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Heb 2:5-9; Ps 8:5. I take it that the inspired author of Hebrews interpreted אֱלֹהִים correctly.

<sup>78</sup> Again, I see the tightness of Paul’s argument here with the parallels between the function of the angels and the function of the Law which the angels delivered. Paul’s description of the Law as παιδαγωγός in 3:24, 25 may also be attributed to the function of the angels.

Also, the whole movement of this passage which proceeds through to at least 4:7 has this immaturity-to-maturity theme. The people of God were children under the παιδαγωγός until they became full-grown sons who were able to receive the inheritance. The place of the angels in this whole process fits best, in my opinion, as the guardians (for lack of a better English translation) of the children until they are full grown. When they are full-grown they will no longer need the function of the angels in this capacity.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Lev 26:46; Num 4:37, 41, 45, 49; 9:23; 10:13; 15:23; 16:40; 33:1; 36:13; Josh 21:2; 22:9; Jdg 3:4; 1 Kgs 8:56; 1 Chr 16:40; 2 Chr 33:8; Neh 9:14; 10:29; Ps 77:20.

<sup>80</sup> George, 258; Cf. also Bruce, 179.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. e.g., Heb 7:18-19; 10:1-22



This brings us to the question of translation itself. A more wooden translation of the genitive ἐνὸς would serve us well here: “But the mediator of one he is not; but God is one.” The mediator of whom Paul is speaking is Moses. Moses is not the mediator of one. The question is, “One what?” Paul’s emphasis up to this point has been the contrast between how the Law divides the world into two basic groups: Jews and Gentiles. But the promise (which the Law serves and does not annul) is that all the nations of the earth will be blessed. Abraham will have a seed, not seeds.<sup>82</sup> When Moses mediates the Law, he does so for Israel, creating Israel as a single family over against all the other families of the earth.

One strong proof for understanding the passage this way is Paul’s use of the “God is one” formula in 3:20b. The parallel between Paul’s use of the phrase here and his use of the phrase in Romans 3:29-30 bolsters up the fact that Paul’s concern is for the oneness of God’s people as Jews and Gentiles as opposed to the Jews and Gentiles remaining separate. Though how the rest of the passage correlates with these statements seems to elude commentators, it is widely recognized that these statements of “God is one” deals with the reconciliation of the Jews and Gentiles. Bruce summarizes this interpretation in one succinct statement, “The one God is God of Jews and Gentiles alike (cf. Rom 3:29f.). The law divided them; the gospel brings them together.”<sup>83</sup> The Romans passage is clear concerning this issue: since God is one there must be one people of God. The Law does not facilitate this but, in fact, creates a divided humanity. By its very nature, in relationship to the unity of God, therefore, the Law cannot be God’s final word. It was given as a temporary measure until the time when humanity—Jew and Gentile—could be made one new man.<sup>84</sup>

### *A Summary Statement*

Paul’s argument up to 3:18 has led him irresistibly to ask the question he knows will arise: “Why then the Law?” That is, if the Law does not deliver the inheritance promised to Abraham, what is its purpose? With the above exegesis and because of the terseness of the answer, let me summarize and amplify what I believe Paul’s answer is in 3:19b-20.

The Law was added (i.e., to the promise) because transgression needed to be clear, multiplied, intensified. Transgression needed a place in which it would be properly handled. God created the nation of Israel for this purpose. They were to be that priestly nation upon whom the sin of the world would devolve and be destroyed. But this arrangement had a termination point. That point would be when the seed to whom the inheritance of Abraham was promised should come. But before that seed came, the Law itself revealed its inferiority to the age of promise because of its mediation through angels. Angels as guardians of the OC world clearly represent the fact to us that the promised age has not been ushered in. Man is not mature enough to receive his inheritance. He is still a child. When man is exalted over the angels, then the world will be united and the age of angels will be over. When these angels delivered the Law they

<sup>82</sup> That is, one family not two or more. See discussion of this on p. 10 above concerning Gal 3.16.

<sup>83</sup> Bruce, 179. Calvin also recognizes this as a Jew-Gentile issue but takes the identification of the mediator to be Christ (103). Longnecker (142-3) continues to hold that the issue is direct involvement v. angelic (or some type of) mediation. He does cite Isa 63:9 (LXX) for defense along with wider Jewish traditions. But his view on mediation would again fall short in the overall flow of the passage.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Eph 2:14-15. Paul’s use of σὰρξ in conjunction with νόμος in the context of creating one new man out of the two moves in the same direction as the present passage. The Son takes on the flesh of Israel under Law and through His death renders the Law ineffective. Through this he creates (a word filled with redemptive-historical overtones) one new man.

did so through the hand of a mediator, Moses, who delivered the Law to Israel as Israel. This set Israel apart from the nations. But that could not be God's final word because God is not the God of one particular family (i.e., like some tribal deity). The God of Israel is the God of the whole world. God is one and therefore must have one people. So then, the Law anticipated fulfillment, a time when it would no longer serve its redemptive-historical purpose. God would unite Jews and Gentiles in his promised seed.

### ***Is The Law Contrary To The Promise?: Galatians 3:21-29***

As Paul moves to the next question, he essentially takes the same approach to the answer. This approach itself is revealing about Paul's way of thinking. A penultimate conclusion is reached in 3:25, but it serves the greater conclusion to come in 3:26-29. Like 3:19b this penultimate conclusion describes the nature or character of the Law. It is this character that necessitates its termination. That is, the Law by its very nature has a termination point. The way it was given and its designed function anticipate an end. The skeletal structure of the text flows like this:

Question: Is the Law contrary to the promise?

1. The Purpose of the Law: To shut up all under sin so that the promise might come (21-22)
  - A. The purpose is *not* life/righteousness (21b)
  - B. The purpose is to shut up all under sin (22a)
  - C. All are under sin in order that the promise out of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe (22b)
  
2. The Terminus of the Law: The coming of faith (23-25)
  - A. The Law terminates at the revelation of the coming faith (23)
  - B. The Law terminates because of its character/nature (24)
  - C. The apocalypse of faith releases the Law (25)
  
3. Conclusion: The oneness of God's people (26-29)
  - A. *For* you are all sons of God (26)
  - B. *For* as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (27)
  - C. *For* you are all one in Christ Jesus (28-29)

If the Law forms two families/peoples over against the promise, which indicates that there will be one family, then is the Law against the promise? Is the Law then antithetical to the nature of the promise? Up to this point, this is exactly what it appears Paul has said (i.e., there are two distinct purposes for the Law and the promise). But as Paul will explain, the Law serves the promise. It is not antithetical but a necessary and temporary friend. Nevertheless, when it has served its purpose to bring about the promise, it steps off the stage in the divine drama.

It must be noted at this point that the question Paul's imaginary interlocutor raises is also the question evoked by those who take a basic Law-Gospel hermeneutic. Taking that approach at this point would force us into the opposite answer that Paul gives. In answer to the question, "Is the Law against the promise?" the answer must be "Yes, as much as works righteousness is against salvation by grace alone through faith alone." But Paul surprises the Law-Gospel

dichotomist at this point and says, “May it never be!” The Law is not contrary to the promise. The redemptive-historical approach make better sense of Paul’s words at this point.

Paul’s resounding *μὴ γένοιτο* may surprise those who accuse Paul of speaking against the Law of Moses.<sup>85</sup> But Paul staunchly defends his position against those who refuse to hear all that he was saying.<sup>86</sup> Paul in no way believes the Law to be evil. Quite the opposite is the case. The Law is holy and the commandment is holy, just, and good.<sup>87</sup> Paul is not dealing with a good versus evil question. He is dealing with an old age versus new age question. The Law is in the old age, but that does not mean it fights against the promise. On the contrary, “the law is certainly harmonious with God’s saving purposes, that is, with the Abrahamic promise.”<sup>88</sup> From Paul’s strong negation on, the explanation is given of the proper relationship of Law and promise. In his explanation, Paul maintains the absolute necessity and goodness of the Law while demonstrating that its time has passed.

***The Purpose of the Law: To shut up all under sin in order that the promise might be given***

***No life/righteousness ἐκ νόμου (21b)***

Paul begins his answer to the question by stating what the purpose of the Law was not ... nor was ever intended (by God) to be. “For if the Law was given [by God] which had the ability to make alive/to give life, then righteousness would have been based on the Law.” Much in this statement demands attention if Paul is to be understood properly at this point. A couple words carry tremendous baggage into this text.

First, what does Paul mean by a Law which had the ability “to give life (*ζωοποιῆσαι*)?” Fung understands Paul to be speaking of life in the “soteriological sense.”<sup>89</sup> By this I take him to mean life as it is “distributed” to each individual. Life is conceived in an almost narrow ontological sense. It is that awakening or resurrection which is dogmatically referred to as regeneration. This is a sort of spiritual life-force that awakens us and keeps us breathing in a spiritual sense. But Fung himself sees the problem with this in the overall context when he says, “Since in the context Paul is more concerned with the objective facts of salvation history than with the subjective development of faith in the individual (see on vv. 22ff. below) ... [the law’s purpose being ‘to awaken a conviction of sin and guilt’ and thus the need of a Savior] appears less appropriate.”<sup>90</sup> Witherington also assumes that this is how “life” should be understood at this point. “The point is that the Law wasn’t meant to give what the promises promised, it wasn’t meant to ‘make alive’ or give a person a right relationship with God.”<sup>91</sup> The dilemma which is

<sup>85</sup>This seems to have been a common objection to the preaching of early Christians. Paul is accused of preaching against the Law in Acts 21:28. Stephen is also accused of this in Acts 6:11. Paul’s line of questioning here, therefore, is not totally hypothetical. He has experienced these objections.

<sup>86</sup>Cf. Acts 25:8. Of course there were things in Paul’s polemic against the Law that could be distorted if ripped out of context. This is why Paul is explaining his position more fully in this passage. This happens at other places in Paul’s epistles as well in dealing with various subjects. Cf. e.g., Rom 3:1ff.; 6:1; 9:14, 19.

<sup>87</sup>Rom 7:12.

<sup>88</sup>Silva, 187-8.

<sup>89</sup>Fung, 162.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 164. The reconciliation of the two is lacking.

<sup>91</sup>Witherington, 259.

caused by such exegesis is resolved when one takes the eschatological approach that Paul introduces in 1:4.<sup>92</sup> This “life” of which Paul speaks is “the life of the age to come.”

Second, Paul introduces δικαιοσύνη to his argument, tying it closely with life. Again, many times this word is narrowly defined in an individualistic soteriological sense of a person’s positive standing in God’s tribunal. While the world certainly includes this, it is not exclusive of this. In fact, this position of right standing with God must assume the broader meaning of the term. On a number of occasions in the OT, righteousness is linked to God’s actions in delivering or saving his people. YHWH proclaims through the prophet Isaiah, “My *righteousness* is near, My *salvation* has gone forth, And My arms will judge the peoples; The coastlands will wait upon Me, And on My arm they will trust. Lift up your eyes to the heavens, And look on the earth beneath. For the heavens will vanish away like smoke, The earth will grow old like a garment, And those who dwell in it will die in like manner; But *My salvation* will be forever, And *My righteousness* will not be abolished.”<sup>93</sup> YHWH is praised by his people in Psalm 98, “The LORD has made known *His salvation*; *His righteousness* He has revealed in the sight of the nations.”<sup>94</sup> In these instances God’s righteousness is his acting in accord with his covenant promises to deliver his people. As Leon Morris says in his commentary on Romans, “The thought in such passages is that God will not abandon his people. Since he is righteous, he will certainly deliver them.”<sup>95</sup> It is on this basis—i.e., God’s covenant faithfulness—that God’s people can plead for his righteousness to be revealed.<sup>96</sup> This is the way, I believe, that Paul is using δικαιοσύνη here. “Righteousness” is the fulfillment of God’s promise for the salvation of his people.<sup>97</sup> This concept of righteousness fits well into Paul’s context of the revelation of faith.

A close connection is made between righteousness (δικαιοσύνη) and life (ζωοποιῆσαι). Paul says, “If the Law was given which was able to give life, then righteousness would have indeed been ἐκ νόμου.” Why does Paul not say, “If the Law was given which was able to give life, then *life* would indeed have been ἐκ νόμου.” A virtual equation of life and righteousness is being made. This equation may cause no small debate when working with common dogmatic categories. Old debates about whether or not righteousness is infused or imputed will arise. With the equation between the two and the dogmatic baggage brought to the text, consistent Protestants are brought to a conundrum. Righteousness is a legal standing with God. It is solely a declaration that changes our status before God. This must never be mixed with regeneration lest we come out on the wrong side of the Tridentine formulations. I suggest that this debate is framed the wrong way if one were dealing with these words in this context (as well as in other contexts in Paul). δικαιοσύνη here as being infused *or* imputed is a fundamental category mistake.

So then, what is this life and how is it related to righteousness? If the larger context of Paul’s discussion is what I have proposed—i.e., the two ages—then the connection is quite clear. Through the fall of Adam, death was brought into the world.<sup>98</sup> This death was not limited to human creation, but also affected non-human creation. Non-human creation was subjected to

<sup>92</sup>See discussion on 1:4 above on pp. 3-5.

<sup>93</sup>Isa 51:5-6, emphasis mine.

<sup>94</sup>Psa 98.2, emphasis mine. Here the parallel is realized in chiasmic structure. Cf. also Ps 71:15; Isa 45:8; 46:13; 56:1.

<sup>95</sup>Morris, 102.

<sup>96</sup>E.g., Pss 31:1; 35:24; 71:2; Dan 9:16.

<sup>97</sup>I am aware that this is not the only context in which the δικ- word group is used. But the fact that this is a legitimate understanding of the word is beyond question. Cf. Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Doctrine of Justification*, 2d ed., esp. pp. 1-16.

<sup>98</sup>Rom 5:12.

futility.<sup>99</sup> Now it waits for the revelation of the sons of God. What the whole creation needs is a transformative, life-giving new creation. This new creation, this new life, was inaugurated at the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This new creation was the promise of God from the time of the fall and the protoevangelion. God's covenant with creation anticipated the renewal/transformation/new life. In order for this new life to come, God must be faithful to his covenant and raise up a new Adam to be the head of this creation. This God did in the Person and work of Jesus the Messiah, the true son of God. In Jesus we see the righteousness of God—the saving covenant faithfulness—revealed. And through him, as he embodies the old creation in himself,<sup>100</sup> takes it to the grave, and rises again in a transformed, new creation body. Righteousness and life can be thus identified with one another.

There is no need to create a false dilemma between God's righteousness in fulfilling his covenant and our righteousness. Part and parcel to God's acting in righteousness is the declaration and deliverance of his true sons. As Paul makes clear in Romans 8, there is no freedom for creation from moribundity brought on by sin except through the revelation of the sons of God.<sup>101</sup> God's true Son/sons must be vindicated/justified before the fullness of his own righteousness can be revealed. This vindication happened initially in the resurrection of Christ whom God declared to be his Son with power by the resurrection of the dead.<sup>102</sup> It is in union with the resurrected Jesus that believers are vindicated/justified.<sup>103</sup> This vindication/justification is life.<sup>104</sup> Now, in union with the resurrected Messiah we ourselves are vindicated and participate in the life of the age to come.

One more conceptual tool needs to be unpacked in this sentence before a conclusion can be drawn as to the meaning of the text. The prepositional phrase ἐκ νόμου is vital in understanding, not only what Paul is saying here, but the contrasting phrase ἐκ πίστεως. Both are used with similar syntactical overtones. No doubt there are instances in which ἐκ may be used to indicate agency or means. But even in those instances the primary connotation of source is not far away. In Paul's context, I believe this connotation of source is primary. I agree with Longnecker, "The phrase ἐκ νόμου indicates source (cf. 2:16; 3:2, 5), and so 'on the basis of law.'"<sup>105</sup> The NASB reflects this understanding as well: "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? May it never be! For if a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law." If Paul wanted to emphasize agency or means—which he does later in the context—the preposition διὰ would have been much more suited to his purpose. Because he does use διὰ in 3:26 to indicate agency clearly, we must

<sup>99</sup>Rom 8:19-22.

<sup>100</sup>Paul speaks about this in part in ch. 4 when he speaks about Christ's being born "under the Law."

<sup>101</sup>Rom 8:19-22.

<sup>102</sup>Rom 1:4.

<sup>103</sup>Rom 4:25.

<sup>104</sup>Paul makes this connection clear in Rom 5:18 where he draws the parallel between the two Adam's. Adam's one act of disobedience brought condemnation (which is death). But the one act of obedience results in δικαίωσιν ζωῆς; i.e., the justification which is life. Though meaning of the phrase is debated, I agree with Richard Gaffin that great weight must be given to the statement that led into this discussion, namely what Paul said in 4:25. "The structure of the justifying act, then, will have to be understood in the light of 4:25 and the broader context of Paul's teaching, that is, in terms of resurrection (cf. v. 10). Accordingly, there is good reason for taking the genitive in the expression 'justification of life' (v. 18) as appositional...." (Gaffin, Jr., Richard B., Resurrection and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Soteriology, Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1978, 131, fn 157.) Cf. also Rom 6:7.

<sup>105</sup>Longnecker, 144.

assume that he is careful about his choice of preposition here.<sup>106</sup> Righteousness and life do not come on the basis of the Law. The Law was never intended to be God's final word. Therefore, it is not in the Law or on the basis of the Law-defined world that the fullness of the righteousness of God is seen. Consistent with what Paul has been saying, the purpose of the Law, stated negatively, is *not* to be the fullness of God's promise of life for the world. For if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died in vain. There would be no need for the death and consequent resurrection of Christ if the Law was the end (τέλος) of God's plan.

***The purpose is to shut up all under sin (22a)***

The Law does have a redemptive-historical purpose. God's Law is not superfluous to redemption but absolutely necessary. Though it does not serve the telic purpose that many of the Jews desired, it does aid the promise. The promise is served by the Law, "the Scripture," shutting up all under sin. Because it is Scripture and thus "God-breathed,"<sup>107</sup> the Law cannot be purposeless. Indeed in a somewhat parallel passage, Paul attributes the shutting up or imprisoning to God himself, making Scripture here a metonymy for God.<sup>108</sup>

In Paul's mind the purpose of the Law is clear: to imprison all under sin. The most popular thought concerning this passage is that the Law shows up the sinfulness of man for what it is, renders him helpless before God, therefore he must be saved through faith and not works. Bruce and Fung once again are illustrations of this. "It cannot of itself impart life, but (ἀλλά) by showing the bankruptcy of human effort it shuts men and women up to the grace of God as their only hope."<sup>109</sup> Fung takes a more creative approach as he understands individual salvation to be a perspective of salvation history. "The entire passage is, in fact, an elaboration of the antithesis between law and promise already introduced in vv. 13f. As in that earlier passage (cf. especially vv. 13f. and v. 22), the doctrine of justification by faith is explained historically, that is, from the perspective of salvation history."<sup>110</sup> A couple of fatal flaws render this exegesis improbable. First, the text is primarily dealing with redemptive history, the contrast between two epochs of history, not an individualistic approach to soteriology in the narrow sense. To make the passage refer primarily to the individual is to turn the text upside down. There are multitudes of implications and applications to individuals (and Paul includes them), but they will not be properly understood if Paul's meaning is not first comprehended.

Second, the Law portrayed as leaving man in a helpless position with no way to have a proper relationship with God—no sins forgiven, no possibility of right standing with God—simply does not fit the evidence of Scripture. God's grace is exhibited in the Law itself from the beginning by providing sacrifices for the atonement of sin. Certainly these were mere shadows of the fullness to come in Christ,<sup>111</sup> but to say there was no hope of forgiveness "under the Law" is erroneous. How can Luke say about Zecharias and Elizabeth that they were righteous, walking in all the commandments of the Law if there were no possibility of personal righteousness

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<sup>106</sup>Those who would want to understand ἐκ here and in the contrasting phrase ἐκ πίστεως as indicating some type of agency instead of source, seem to have a theological axe to grind. As in the NASB, the prepositions take on two different connotations whereas Paul is using the same prepositions to contrast two different sources of life. Because of this, we cannot have one phrase translated so that it indicates instrumentality while the other indicates source.

<sup>107</sup>2 Tim 3:16

<sup>108</sup>George, 261.

<sup>109</sup>Bruce, 180.

<sup>110</sup>Fung, 166.

<sup>111</sup>Heb 10:1-4

“under Law?”<sup>112</sup> How could David dare cry out to God, “Vindicate me, O YHWH, according to my righteousness and my integrity that is in me?”<sup>113</sup> Scripture simply does not validate this way of thinking.

This, of course, does not mean that sin is not a problem or that we are not helpless apart from the salvific grace of God. Sin is a problem and we are helpless. But Paul approaches this from another angle. Once again Paul is emphasizing the priestly purpose of Israel, and thus the Law, in the purpose of God. As explained earlier, the Law brings sin into the place where it can be dealt with. The Law provides the place for sin and its eventual solution. Creating a priestly nation, the Law provides a new Adam, a new representative, for the whole creation.<sup>114</sup> So, the Law functions to imprison all under sin.

***The purpose is so that the promise might come ἐκ πίστεως Jesus Christ (22b)***

The validity of the above interpretation is strengthened by the cogency of the purpose clause found in 3:22b. All things are imprisoned under sin so that the promise might come in Jesus Christ. As all sin is drawn into one place, Jesus, who is born under Law, takes upon himself the sin of the world, thus dealing once-and-for-all-time with this problem in the cosmos. Because of his work, the promise—which is the promise of the Spirit who brings life to the world<sup>115</sup>—has come to realization. Those that believe are the inheritors of that promise.

The promise can be enjoyed by those who believe because of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. This little phrase—ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ—has been and continues to be the subject of no small debate.<sup>116</sup> In contrast with the earlier ἐκ νόμου, the promise is realized ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, on the basis of the faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ. Switching to agency does not work in the juxtaposition in which Paul places these. Nor does agency account for the redundancy that would be caused by τοῖς πιστεύουσιν if ἐκ πίστεως refers to “by faith;” i.e., of the individual. Clearly the idea here is that of source.<sup>117</sup> This understanding of “the faith of Christ” emphasizes the fact that the means of our justification is only in Christ and *his* relationship with God. He is the only Mediator. His faith(fulness) is the ground of our justification. He represents us to the Father. “... πιστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ as the source or ground *out of* which the promise is given to those who believe. Clearly, the concept πίστις/πιστεύειν is used in this verse with a double directionality; it characterizes both the recipients (οἱ πιστεύοντες) and the source from which the promise is given (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) ... Gal 3:22b, then, may be interpreted to mean that the promise (= the Spirit; cf. 3:14) is given (by God) to believers as a result of Jesus Christ’s faithfulness.”<sup>118</sup> Martyn also notes, “All other doors being closed, God acted via ‘Christ’s faith,’ an expression by which Paul refers to Christ’s trustful obedience to God in the giving up of his own life for us.... Paul says exactly the same

<sup>112</sup>Luke 1:6.

<sup>113</sup>Ps 7:8; cf. also 18:20; 26:1; 35:24.

<sup>114</sup>Note Paul’s phrase τὰ πάντα. As Witherington explains, “τὰ πάντα means literally ‘all things’ and while the focus may be particularly on humans the parallel usage in Col. 1.20 and Ephes. 1.10 suggests a broader nuance including ‘things in heaven’ as well as ‘things on earth’.” (260)

<sup>115</sup>Gal 3:8, 14.

<sup>116</sup>For a full treatment of this, see Hays, esp. 141-162. For the contrary position see Murray, *Romans*, vol. 1, appendix B, 363ff.

<sup>117</sup>Silva’s wrestling with this phrase is also helpful. “The translation of ἐκ in this passage, as elsewhere, raises some problems. My rendering ‘comes from’ focuses on the concept of source, but that does not exclude other nuances, such as an instrumental meaning or the rendering ‘is based on/depends on.’” (189, n. 4)

<sup>118</sup>Hayes, 148, 153.

thing when, in Rom 5:19, he names the act by which Adamic Sin [*sic*] has been vanquished: Christ's obedience."<sup>119</sup> Jesus Christ faithfully obeyed the Father, even to the point of death. It is on the basis of his faithfulness that we enjoy the promise of the Spirit.<sup>120</sup>

The personal appropriation of the work of Christ comes in precisely at this juncture. Paul says that the Law shut up all things under sin so that the promise which comes because of or out of the faithfulness of Jesus Christ might be given *to all who believe*. The fact that Paul has been taking a redemptive-historical approach and not an individualistic approach is made clear here. The promise has objectively, historically come in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. But that objective, historical work must be entered into by faith. That is, each person must make the story of Christ his own. To inherit the promise that is in Christ, a person must be in Christ, clinging to him in faith.

### ***The Terminus of the Law: The Coming of the Faith (23-25)***

The evidence that Paul is speaking in redemptive-historical/eschatological categories is compounded in these verses. Much temporal language is used. "Before" the faith came. "Until the coming faith was revealed." We were under the παιδαγωγός "until" Christ. Some take these words to be referring to the experience of each individual who comes to faith in Christ. As I have mentioned earlier, this is problematic in context. Paul has taken an historical sequence of Abraham to Moses to the present, indicating that he is speaking about epochs. Another problem is understanding individual, existential faith since Christ came and what was true of God's people in the OC period. In the text the contrast is clear: the age of faith comes in with the coming of Christ. If this is taken in individualistic terms, that would necessitate the interpretation that people in the OC did not exercise faith. Though this would be vehemently denied by those advocating this hermeneutical approach (I am sure), to try to make the contrast otherwise would be artificial and contrived. The stark contrast is clear. The only way to handle this and maintain that people in the OC exercised faith (which they clearly did) is to understand this as a contrast of the ages: Law and Faith. Silva summarizes vv. 23-25 and this contrast this way, "The apostle is in fact telling us that the age of faith began after the period of law had come to an end."<sup>121</sup>

### ***The Law terminates at the revelation of the coming faith (23)***

<sup>119</sup>Martyn, 361.

<sup>120</sup> For those who may not be comfortable with the fact that πίστις may have several different nuances, the words of J. B. Lightfoot are helpful. Lightfoot makes note that the words denoting 'faith' in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and English "hover between two meanings; trustfulness, the frame of mind which relies on another; and trustworthiness, the frame of mind which can be relied upon." He goes on to say, "Owing to these combined causes, the two senses [i.e., the active and passive meanings πίστις] will at times be so blended together that they can only be separated by some arbitrary distinction. When the members of the Christian brotherhood, for instance, are called 'the faithful,' οἱ πιστοί, what is meant by this? Does it imply their constancy, their trustworthiness, or their faith, their belief? In all such cases it is better to accept the latitude, and even the vagueness, of a word or phrase, than to attempt a rigid definition, which after all can be only artificial. And indeed the loss in grammatical precision is often more than compensated by the gain in theological depth. In the case of 'the faithful' for instance, does not the one quality of heart carry the other with it, so that they who are trustful are trusty also; they who have faith in God are steadfast [*sic*] and immovable in the path of duty?" ... On the other hand, as 'faith,' 'belief,' it assumes in the teaching of our Lord, enforced and explained by St. Paul, the foremost place in the phraseology of Christian doctrine. From this latter sense are derived all those shades of meaning by which it passes from the abstract to the concrete; from faith, the subjective state, to the faith, the object of faith, the Gospel, and sometimes, it would appear, the embodiment of faith, the Church (see Gal. i.23, iii.22-26, vi.10)." (154, 155, 157)

<sup>121</sup>Silva, 179



Paul's temporal sense is clear here with his use of the word "before." But what is this "faith" to which he is referring? What is its antecedent in this context? I suppose one might take "those who believe" as somewhat of a reference point and speak about a person's trek to faith in Christ. But that does not seem to be Paul's referent. Paul is referring to the faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ mentioned earlier. The faith revealed is incarnate faith. This faith is also one with the faith of Abraham spoken of earlier in chapter 3. Abraham's faith is not one-dimensional (i.e., Abraham's personal experience of faith). Abraham's faith is also the promise to which Abraham looked. It is the word of God, the promise to Abraham, the gospel, which is now all embodied in Christ. Abraham's faith has come. And that faith is Christ.

Between the time the promise is given to Abraham and Abraham's faith is realized in Christ Jesus, the Law came into being.<sup>122</sup> Therefore, in this age of Law "we," Paul says, "were guarded under Law, shut up until the coming faith was revealed." Paul's use of the first person plural could be referring to the Jews in particular. Paul did not shy away from identifying himself with the Jews as distinguished from the Gentiles in 2:15-21. This would certainly fit here in that the Jews were specifically under Torah. But in another sense, because Gentiles have now been grafted into the people of God, the story of the people of God from the beginning is now their story. Therefore, Paul can tell it as including the Gentiles now since they are *now* a part of the people of God. The people of God were under Law.

The condition of being "under Law" is one of being "guarded" or "shut up." Understanding being "guarded" or "shut up under Law" as referring solely to the Law's condemnation of sin is not totally in keeping with the flow of Paul's thought here. No doubt aspects of condemnation are there and quite relevant.<sup>123</sup> But another image arises that is not as pejorative. That is the image of childhood as opposed to maturity. This will be played out more in the context in the next couple of verses and especially in the beginning of chapter 4. That discussion needs to inform us as to what it means to be "shut up" and "guarded" by the Law. If this section corresponds to what Paul alludes to concerning the character of the Law in v. 19, then this makes great sense of both passages. The Law, which was within the angelic administration, keeps God's immature children under close watch; teaching, training, correcting, and punishing. As children, the people of God were, in a sense, quarantined from the world; separated from the world by the Law. This is, of course, a position of both privilege and responsibility. Therefore, the image can be both positive and negative.

Being under the guardianship of the Law/angels was the state of God's people until the coming faith was revealed. The revealing of faith was the apocalyptic event which brought and end to the epoch of Law. Martyn observes,

Paul's use of the passive verb 'was revealed' shows his intention to speak here of God's eschatological act, and thus his concern to refer to the faith that is God's deed in Christ (so also 'the faith' in vv 25 and 26). From 2:16, 3:22-25, and 4:4-6, we see that Paul is referring interchangeably to the coming of Christ, to the coming of Christ's Spirit, and to the coming both of Christ's faith and of the faith kindled by Christ's faith. It is that multifaceted advent that has brought to a close the parenthetical era of the Law, thus radically changing the world in which human beings live.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>122</sup>Cf. Gal 3:10-18.

<sup>123</sup>Cf. Gal 3:10-14.

<sup>124</sup>Martyn, 362. I am not comfortable with understanding the era of Law as "parenthetic." This connotes that the whole sens of salvation-history might be understood just as well without it. I do not believe that when Paul says "the Law was added," he was speaking about the Law as a mere parenthesis. The Law, as Paul demonstrates, is

The faith of Abraham (i.e., the object of his faith, the promise of God) revealed in the faithfulness of Jesus the Messiah brought to a conclusion the Law's chapter in God's story of redemption.

### *The Law terminates because of its character/nature (24)*

The inferential ὥστε used at the beginning of v. 24 further indicates that guarding and shutting up under the Law is associated with the pedagogical function of the Law. The conclusion is drawn from what is said in v. 23 that the Law is *our* παιδαγωγός. In the Greek and Roman world the παιδαγωγός was customarily a slave in the household who had charge over the children from around age six to late adolescence.<sup>125</sup> He was responsible for the supervision and protection of those under his care. Though some were harsh disciplinarians, “there is certainly nothing derogatory in the term pedagogue.”<sup>126</sup> Paul strategically and carefully chooses his word because he is drawing a big picture with numerous connotations. The Law does supervise, protect, and chastise. But the bigger picture is that it has a temporary status. It only serves in its function while the subjects are children. Once adulthood or maturity is reached, the job is finished and the παιδαγωγός is released from that particular duty.

The nature of the Law as παιδαγωγός, therefore, means it has a terminus. Reading many translations, an English reader would not be able to obtain this meaning. The ASV, AV, NASB, NIV, and NKJB, for example, translate this verse similarly as the παιδαγωγός “leading us to Christ.”<sup>127</sup> This translation presupposes a particular interpretation that has the flavor of the “three uses of the Law.”<sup>128</sup> The ESV and NRSV both translate this correctly as the Law being our παιδαγωγός “until Christ.”<sup>129</sup> The advent of Christ is the terminus of the Law.<sup>130</sup>

The Law as παιδαγωγός has a purpose.<sup>131</sup> That purpose is that out of the faith(fulness) we might be justified/vindicated. The people of God are preserved, protected, corrected, etc. so that we might be vindicated out of the faithfulness of Christ. The meaning of this harks back to the earlier discussion about the function of the Law in marking out the people of God as a priestly—and, thus, sin-bearing—people. The Law keeps the people of God partitioned off from the rest of the world so that this vicarious, sin-bearing responsibility can be fulfilled. Through death and resurrection, Jesus the Messiah, the sons of God will be vindicated and come into their inheritance.<sup>132</sup> The Law has protected, trained, and provided the context for this to happen. “‘Christ’ represents the freedom of mature age, for which the constraints of childhood are a preparation.”<sup>133</sup>

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absolutely necessary to God's entire plan. Only after its function is completed can it be jettisoned as defining the people of God.

<sup>125</sup>See, e.g., George's discussion 265f.

<sup>126</sup>TDNT 5:620.

<sup>127</sup>Note: the NIV does have an alternative marginal reading.

<sup>128</sup>Contra George's discussion *ad loc.* Again, this does not mean that the three uses of the Law as traditionally formulated are not valid. It is to say that Paul is not discussing those uses here.

<sup>129</sup>The εἰς should be taken temporally. Cf. Bruce, 183; Martyn, 363.

<sup>130</sup>Paul parallels the apocalypse of faith and the coming of Christ. When faith appears, the Law's function is over. When Christ appears, the Law's function is over. This, once again, strengthens the Christological function of πίστις in v. 23. Christ is the faith that appears. That is, he is not merely the object of faith but the substance of it as well.

<sup>131</sup>ὅτι

<sup>132</sup>Cf. Rom 4:25.

<sup>133</sup>Lightfoot, 149.

### ***The apocalypse of faith releases the Law (25)***

Verse 25 draws a penultimate conclusion about the Law; the conclusion to which I have already alluded. When the faith comes (i.e., Christ), we are no longer under the παιδαγωγός. We have come into maturity. We are children ready now to inherit and take responsibility of the Father's household. The Son is now what the first son, Adam, was intended to be: the lord of the world. Because this is now the condition, because the Son and all those in him have been vindicated (i.e., declared to be God's true Son(s) and thus rightful heir of all),<sup>134</sup> the Law has run its course. Therefore, we are no longer under the παιδαγωγός. This has more to do in Paul's thinking with how Jew and Gentile relate as the people of God than it does with how individuals feel about their sin. That is, in this context, the Law's purpose being finished is more sociological (and, thus, ecclesiological) than it is psychological.

### ***Conclusion: The Faith Revealed Means The Law's Purpose Is Finished And The People Of God Are One (3:26-29)***

The conclusion of this section is built around three γάρ's by which Paul is digging down to the theological rock bottom reasons for his conclusions. While giving the reasons for his conclusions concerning the Law, he is also giving further conclusions. That is, "You are all one in Christ Jesus, therefore the Law's function has ceased in redemptive history." And, "The Law's function has ceased with the revelation of the faithfulness of Christ Jesus, therefore you are all one in him." There is a wonderful double *entendre* in this section. Each conclusion presupposes the other. Dunn notes, "The 'For' indicates that the following assertion is as much the basis of the argument just completed (iii.23-5) as its conclusion."<sup>135</sup> I suppose that it could be argued that this is simply circular reasoning. Even if it is, for Paul, the circle begins and ends with Christ.

### ***For you are all sons of God in Christ (26)***

The reason that the Law's pedagogical function has ended is asserted in v. 26: "For you are all sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus." There is obviously no question in the mind of Paul or his readers that Christ has indeed come or been revealed. The question is, "What does the revelation of Christ mean for the people of God?" Paul has established the meaning of the coming of Christ earlier in this discussion in which Christ is understood to be the seed of Abraham, the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. Christ is the revelation of Abraham's faith. Jesus is the true seed and, thus, the true son of God. Now, those in union with him are consequently "sons of God."

This title, "son(s) of God," was special to Israel for a number of reasons. Witherington notes, "The designation 'sons of God' was seen in Jewish circles as something that should be predicated exclusively of Israel. Israel was, and the nations were not, God's 'sons'."<sup>136</sup> The children of Israel were the son, the firstborn, that God delivered from Egyptian bondage.<sup>137</sup> This status was more than an endearing, familial privilege (although it was that). The son of God was the ruler of the world. This is true from creation forward. Adam is created as the son of God<sup>138</sup> to

<sup>134</sup>Cf. e.g., Daniel 7.

<sup>135</sup>Dunn, 201.

<sup>136</sup>Witherington, 269-70.

<sup>137</sup>Cf. Ex 4:22-23; Deut 14.1-2; Hos 11.1

<sup>138</sup>Lk 3:38.

have dominion over the entire earth, and especially the beasts. Adam was the image of God in a particular way that gave him the right and responsibility to rule the earth. Adam sinned by handing over the rule of the world to a beast. From that time forward, God's plan was to raise up a new son who would take dominion over the world and rule the wild beasts of the earth. Noah becomes a particular expression of this as well as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And when God speaks of Israel as being "his son, his firstborn," they are understood to be the heirs of the world. As Israel evolves into a kingdom, the son of God title takes more focus as the son of David is declared to be God's son.<sup>139</sup> He is the one who will rule. And all Israel will join in that rule with him.

As mentioned above, Paul presents Christ as that true seed of Abraham, the true son of God. Now all those joined to him are heirs of the promise and will rule the world.<sup>140</sup> Sons of God, therefore, are now defined by whether or not they are united to the Son, the seed of Abraham, the Son of David.

Emphasis is laid on this union as Paul describes how we are sons of God: through the faith in Christ Jesus. Paul's phrase could be understood in a couple of ways. First, Paul could be speaking about the personal exercise of faith in which a person gives himself wholly to Christ. In this case the "in Christ Jesus" is taken as being the object of faith. This is, more than likely, included in what Paul is saying, but it does not seem to be exclusively Paul's point.

Another way of understanding this is that Paul is using πίστεως here to refer to Jesus' faithfulness and, thus, the fulfillment of God's promise. In this case the phrase would read something like this, "through the faithfulness which is found in union with Christ." Lightfoot rightly recognizes Paul's union-with-Christ language here, but does not account for a more expanded understanding of πίστεως when he writes, "The context shows that these words must be separated from διὰ τῆς πίστεως. They are thrown to the end of the sentence so as to form in a manner a distinct proposition, on which the Apostle enlarges in the following verses: 'You are sons by your union with, your existence in Christ Jesus.'"<sup>141</sup> I go further than Lightfoot here and understand διὰ τῆς πίστεως as having reference to the "in Christ" language. This is the faith that has been revealed in Christ. Now all of those who participate in the new age ushered in by Christ's faithfulness, being united with him, are the sons of God.

### ***For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (27)***

The second level of explanation and conclusion is introduced with the γὰρ of 3:27. All are sons of God through the faith in Christ Jesus *precisely because* as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Union with Christ is what makes the Galatians sons of God, heirs of the promise.

Introducing baptism into the discussion at this point has caused many commentators no small consternation. Lengthy discussion concerning either why this is not water baptism or why Paul is not exchanging one external rite for another dominates the commentary on this passage. Unfortunately, that with which the student ends is not a better understanding of what Paul *is* saying but all that he is *not* saying. Bruce frames the question that plagues the minds of many skittish Protestants. "The question arises here: if Paul makes baptism the gateway to 'being-in-

<sup>139</sup>2 Sam 7:14.

<sup>140</sup>Ephesians 1:20-22; 2:6.

<sup>141</sup>Lightfoot, 149.

Christ’, is he not attaching soteriological efficacy to a rite which in itself is as external or ‘material’ as circumcision?”<sup>142</sup> In response to a formulation by E. P. Sanders, Bruce responds,

... [B]ut Paul, who had learned so clearly the religious inadequacy of the old circumcision, was not the man to ascribe *ex opere operato* efficacy to another external rite. If he were asked where and when he received justification by faith, he would have pointed to the Damascus road at the moment when the Lord appeared to him; his baptism, which took place some days later, could have been no more than a seal of what had happened there and then.” [Then uses Acts 9.17 as proof that baptism followed his filling with the Spirit.] “If it is remembered that repentance and faith, with baptism in water and reception of the Spirit, followed by first communion, constituted one complex experience of Christian initiation, then what is true of the experience as a whole can in practice be predicated of any element in it. The creative agency, however, is the Spirit. Baptism in water *per se* is no guarantee of salvation (cf. 1 Cor. 10:1-12) as the indwelling presence of the Spirit is....”<sup>143</sup>

Dunn, who is not wary of different perspectives, also sees this passage as a problem if taken to refer to water baptism. He believes that Paul must be referring to a “dry” Spirit baptism. Baptism here is metaphorical.<sup>144</sup> George explains the dilemma more fully from the circumcision-equals-works-righteousness-versus-pure-grace perspective.

However important these ideas became for later sacramental theology, though, they were far removed from Paul’s concern with baptism in Galatians. The whole burden of the letter has been to say that salvation is received through faith in Christ alone apart from the works of the law including specifically the requirement of circumcision. After all that Paul had said against the Judaizers and their interposition of circumcision as a prerequisite for right standing with God, did he here set forth his own rite of initiation into God’s favor? Was he saying to the Galatians: ‘My opponents were wrong in trying to circumcise you. What you really need is to be baptized! The requirement of baptism has replaced that of circumcision. If you want to be right with God, you must trust in Jesus Christ and be baptized with water?’ ... Yet this is precisely what Paul did not say to the Galatians. To believe in Jesus Christ and water, Jesus Christ and bread and wine, Jesus Christ and church membership, Jesus Christ and anything else is to profane the grace of God and render useless the death of Christ (2:21).<sup>145</sup>

Even Witherington is carried away down this path of interpretation. “The real question to be raised about vs. 27, however, is whether Paul is actually talking about what happens through or in the rite of baptism or whether Paul is using baptismal language to refer to what happens in conversion, a spiritual even of which baptism is only the appropriate symbol.” And further, “Conversion and initiation are not identical in Paul’s view, the former is something that happens to a person by grace through faith, the latter depicts and provides a means of formally recognizing the transformation before the congregation. In other words the former spiritually

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<sup>142</sup>Bruce, 185.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., 185-6.

<sup>144</sup>Dunn, 203f.

<sup>145</sup>George, 277.

integrates a person into the body of Christ, the latter socially does so, reinforcing the convert's experience of conversion."<sup>146</sup>

Wading through all these dilemmas can be a bit disconcerting. I suggest that we disentangle ourselves from their supposed dilemmas by asking the questions, "Did Paul see baptism in this discussion as a quandary that needed to be explained? If he did, why did he not take the time to deal with it in a section in which he is raising objections to his teaching? And, if this does not present a problem for Paul, how is he understanding baptism so that it does not present a problem in his larger soteriological schema?"

Galatians 3:27 is one of those points in Galatians which is a test case for the exegete's hermeneutic. If the student approaches this passage with the equation of external rites equals works righteousness, then the common dilemma referred to many times above will continue to be a red herring in the path. Paul's words at this point do not need to be contorted. If our approach does not make Paul read smoothly here, then our approach to Paul needs to be changed. He is obviously thinking different than the modern Protestant commentator.

First, the fact that this does not refer to water baptism but to a "dry" or internal baptism needs to be recognized as untenable in the entire context. Paul's context of dealing with the oneness of the people in the Church and their eating at one table rules out this invisible baptism or "baptism as a metaphor" interpretation. If this baptism is a completely invisible work—i.e., if it is confined to the hearts of individuals—how would anyone ever know with whom we are to eat? No man knows what occurs in the hearts of other individuals. As a rule, we must judge others on quite objective grounds—baptism, continuation with the Church in faithfulness, moral uprightness, etc. Purporting that Paul is speaking of an invisible baptism here causes more problems than it solves, especially in light of the pastoral exhortations to come in this letter.

The argument might continue to be advanced that if this is referring to water baptism, then does this not put us in an *ex opere operato* position in which the baptizand, united to Christ, is then guaranteed an inheritance by virtue of baptism? Would this not destroy salvation by faith? I believe the question is framed the wrong way. This question still deals with "What time is it and, consequently, who is the seed of Abraham?" But the first half of the question has great bearing on this. People seem to want to dig into what goes on "inside" the person at this point. They want to deal with the "psychology of conversion" and its relationship to baptism or some type of ontological change in the person himself (for lack of a better term) than his "social identity" or his identity within a particular world/age. This latter, I believe, is what Paul is dealing with so that baptism does not pose a dilemma concerning salvation. What Paul is saying here has more to do with the nature of the church than it does with the psychology or ontology of the individual. To "put on Christ" is to become a part of his body, the church. And the church is this Israel of God to which Paul refers later. Baptism is the crossing of the sea that brings people into this new world society: the eschatological people of God. Those baptized people are required to exercise faith. They are not to be like those who were baptized into Moses and ate and drank spiritual food and drink but then rebelled against God.<sup>147</sup> Just as Israel that wandered through the wilderness and heard the gospel to which they were to respond in faith, so NC members are to respond in faith to God's gospel now proclaimed in Christ Jesus.<sup>148</sup> If the NC people of God do not, they will be counted worthy of greater punishment than those who died

<sup>146</sup>Witherington, 276, 277. I say "even Witherington" because I believe he has the hermeneutical framework to be able to deal adequately with this passage.

<sup>147</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 10:1ff.

<sup>148</sup>Cf. Heb 4.1f.

under the Law.<sup>149</sup> Baptism understood as the entrance into the church, the body of Christ, the eschatological people of God, therefore, avoids any problems of works righteousness by external rites or mere externalism. More than this, this view adequately explains, within the context, what baptism *is* instead of making a list of denials. If this view is taken, it can be easily understood why Paul sees no dilemma concerning baptism. In fact, it supports what he has been saying throughout the entire letter. There is one church, one people of God, consisting of Jews and Gentiles.<sup>150</sup> All of those who have been baptized into Christ, therefore, are to be treated as the people of God.

### ***For you are all one in Christ Jesus (28-29)***

With the last γὰρ Paul is reaching the climax of this smaller section. Although γὰρ does not appear until the latter half of v. 28, the link with v. 28a and the previous sentence should be apparent. The Law has finished its role in the life of the people of God *because* you are all sons of God through the faith of Christ Jesus. You are all sons of God through the faith of Christ Jesus *because* as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. Union with Christ in baptism is what makes us sons, and because of this you are all one in Christ Jesus and the old age distinctions do not determine standing among the people of God.

Paul prefaces the main point of his explanation/conclusion by introducing three sets of opposites who have different relationships penultimately with circumcision and ultimately with the promise. These antithetical pairs are explained in a number of ways. It could be that Paul is merely dealing with divisions that exist in the world at present with little reference to the OT. Understanding this to be the sole context is problematic in my estimation. The OT defines the world and proper relationships. It has also been suggested that Paul is following the morning prayers of the Jews who made this three-fold distinction.<sup>151</sup> Martyn suggests that 3:28 is an adaptation of an ancient baptismal formula.<sup>152</sup> Some or all of these points may have some relevance to Paul's statement. But in keeping with his line of thought, the Law creates divisions. It is impossible under Law, under the old aeon, to realize fully the unity that God intends for all the nations. This is exemplified in the distinctions created and sustained in the old age.

The first distinction is without qualm. The world is divided along the line of Jew and Greek (i.e., non-Jew). While there were God-fearers, no uncircumcised Gentile could be a part of the priestly nation. The advent of Christ breaks down this wall of partition because he fulfills the function of Israel in redemptive-history. Now the promise to Abraham is realized in Christ: all the nations of the earth are blessed.

The second distinction is a little more difficult. Paul could be speaking about a "generic" sociological order quite familiar in the Roman Empire. I believe Paul is dealing with a situation created by circumcision or distinctions that exist even among the circumcised. Troy Martin

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<sup>149</sup>Cf. Heb 10.28ff.

<sup>150</sup>All of this is not to say that baptism cannot be twisted by individuals to be some type of scheme for works righteousness or presumption. But these are distortions of God's intended purpose. Those who are baptized are brought into this new, eschatological people of God. And that status brings with it the responsibility to live by faith, a life which Paul will describe as the epistle progresses.

<sup>151</sup>Cf. e.g., Bruce, "By similarly excluding the religious distinction between slaves and the freeborn, and between male and female, Paul makes a threefold affirmation which corresponds to a number of Jewish formulas in which the threefold distinction is maintained, as in the morning prayer in which the male Jew thanks God that he was not made a Gentile, a slave or a woman." (187)

<sup>152</sup>Martyn, 378ff.

offers an explanation of this distinction based upon the prescriptions for circumcision as originally instituted in Genesis 17.

This covenant also distinguishes between slave and free. Slaves in a Jewish household must be circumcised even if they are not born into the household but bought from foreigners. The covenant recognizes no exceptions but stipulates, “Both he [the slave] that is born in your house and he that is both with you money shall be circumcised.” The free person, however, who dwells in a Jewish sojourner or resident alien (גֵּר). Jewish legal text frequently refer to such uncircumcised persons in the community (Lev 16:29; 17:10; 19:10; 24:16; Deut 14:21; 24:14). The day laborer may work in the household business alongside the slaves but is not required to be circumcised unless he desires to participate in the Passover meal (Exod 12:24, 48; Num 9:14). Hence, the covenant of circumcision distinguishes between slave and free and provides a basis for the antithetical pair slave/free in Gal 3:28b.<sup>153</sup>

The strength of this position is that it keeps all the circumcised in proper distinctions over against all of the uncircumcised in the passage. Jew → slave → male are all circumcised. Gentile → free → woman are all uncircumcised.<sup>154</sup>

Another way of looking at this is from the perspective of distinctions within the house. While a slave who was a member of Israel had to be circumcised, he did not enjoy the same status as the heir, the child of promise. Eliezar in relationship with Isaac is prime example. Before Isaac is born, Eliezar is a slave in the household of Abraham and Abraham’s heir.<sup>155</sup> Eliezar is like an adopted son because he was born in Abraham’s house. No doubt Eliezar was circumcised when the time came to institute the rite. But Eliezar never enjoyed the status of the heir once Isaac was born. Though they were members of the same household and both were circumcised, only the seed, the child of promise, would inherit the promise. Now that the seed has come and fulfilled the mission, all those joined to him have equal standing in the house.<sup>156</sup> Even within the circumcision there are distinctions that are made.

The last set of opposites take an interesting turn in structure. Paul moves from the phrase structure οὐκ ... οὐδέ for Jew/Gentile and slave/free to a οὐκ ... καὶ structure for male/female. Again the inadequacy of the old age system as a whole is revealed. In the beginning God created Adam as male and female. Paul’s phrase here is exactly the same as the LXX’s translation of Genesis 1:27. But the Law never allowed the inheritance to be fully realized as male and female. While there were glimmers of it throughout the old age, circumcised males were the recipients of the promise. But now, just as it is with the slaves of the house, so it is now with females: they are co-equal heirs of God’s promise because they are in Christ.

The negative reason that these distinctions no longer exist is because the Law has finished its appointed role and, in this sense, has been set aside. The positive reason these distinctions no longer exist concerns the fact that they are all in Christ. They are one family. As

<sup>153</sup>Martin, 117-18.

<sup>154</sup>Also, if this line is taken, it might play right into what Paul will say about the Jerusalem below being in bondage. They are holding on to circumcision and, thus, the old world distinctions, and because this they remain slaves, or in bondage, even until the present. Cf. Gal 4:25.

<sup>155</sup>Cf. Gen 15:2.

<sup>156</sup>The strength of this perspective is that it coincides well with what Paul says in v. 29. All in Christ are Abraham’s seed and heirs according to the promise.



stated above, they are this one family because they are united to this seed (singular) who is the heir of the promise.

Paul's statement leads him to his final conclusion which is alluded to throughout this passage and is now stated in a succinct, summary fashion in v. 29: "and if you [are] of Christ, you are consequently Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise." The connection is obvious at this point. But to reiterate, Christ is the promised seed of Abraham, his true son and heir. To be united to Christ is to be in this Christ family, which is the family of Abraham. So, this seed—Christ, head and body—is the one family to whom the promise is made and who inherits the world.

### ***Pastoral Applications***

The fact that we no longer have these occasional problems with which Paul dealt in Galatia may tend to lead some to wonder about the relevance of Paul's words ... that is if this line of interpretation is correct. But drawing out applications from this text for present situations is, I believe, enhanced by this interpretation not crippled. If specific historical contexts ruled out relevant applications for the present, then most of the Bible would not be applicable. But we know from Scripture itself that specific historical situations were recorded for our examples. Paul makes this clear, for instance, in 1 Cor 10. Therefore, understanding the specific Galatian context as being one primarily concerned with a transitional age from the age of Law to the new age, does not mean that applications cannot be made.

#### ***(1) God's word demands a response of faith.***

The "Faith" that is revealed in Christ Jesus demands that people who hear this word respond in trusting obedience to that word. Only as people look to Christ in faith can they inherit the promises given to Abraham and realized in Christ. As Paul says in 3:22, the promise is given "to those who believe." All of the nuances of the word "faith" in this passage do not rule out this personal obligation to respond to the gospel appropriately. Indeed, it is precisely because "the Faith" is revealed that people must respond with the obedience of faith to that revelation. The story of God is not one concerning which we can stand as a detached observer, simply learning all of the facts about the progress of history, watching it go by as we would a cinematic production. The revelation of God in Christ demands that we become a part of that story, that we make it our own. And the way that is described by Paul in this passage is that we believe; i.e., that we commit ourselves to living out this story.

Pastors, therefore, are not called merely to recount facts and lecture to God's people. Rather we are to set before them life and death, blessing and curse. We are to prompt, prod, and seek to persuade men to repent and believe. We are to warn them that if they do not believe, they will not inherit God's promises. We are to comfort those who do believe and encourage them to persevere in that faith.

#### ***(2) All of those in Christ Jesus are one family.***

Many Christian churches affirm this truth when we confess that we believe in "one holy catholic and apostolic church." Some have qualified this to the point that no one really knows who is a part of this church, but all those who *really* are members of this church are in a "mystical union." Instead of the doctrine of the oneness or unity of the family being an impetus

to unity of the members of the body of Christ, the teaching of the mystical union has turned on its head the expression of unity to which Paul exhorts the Galatians later in the epistle. We can, for instance, bite and devour one another, and even consume one another, because we are not certain that this person is *really* mystically joined with us in Christ. The biblical teaching concerning our union with one another in Christ has been turned by some into a hermeneutic of suspicion concerning the status of other church members. We wonder, “Is this person really a member of the body of Christ, or is he an imposter? God will work it out in the end. I need not concern myself with that. In the meantime I will treat him with suspicion. We may be a part of the same family, but I won’t treat him as such.”

What if there were a family in which the husband and wife were separated, living in opposite ends of the country. The children were rebellious and did not speak to one another or their mother or father. Whenever they did communicate, they were always suspicious of one another’s motives and they could not speak except to argue. Would any pastor come along and say, “Well, at least they are a family. They are mystically united in covenant with one another. All of this other wrangling does not matter. They are bound by covenant.” Would any pastor worth his salt speak like this? Then why do we speak like this about the family of God? Why is that we can have unhealthy, suspicious, and argumentative relationships with others in the family and justify it by saying, “We are mystically unified”? The fact is, because the family is in covenant they are obligated to live like a family; a family that reflects the self-giving love of the Triune God.

What I am *not* calling for here is an uncritical, blind ecumenism that has no standards except that I must be tolerant of everything. There are certainly boundaries around the table fellowship of the family. A person cannot deny Christ and still be considered a person who should come to the family’s table. A person cannot live in impenitence and not be censured by the church. Paul makes this quite clear in 1 Cor 5 as well as other places. The family has its boundaries, and those boundaries must be guarded with diligence.

Sometimes the boundaries are too loose to be sure. But many times they are drawn too tightly as well. We would all agree that people who deny Christ should not come to the table with the rest of the family. But what does it look like to deny Christ? “Well,” some might say, “it is to say that Christ is not the only way of salvation,” or “It is to deny either that Christ is human or he is divine.” Certainly these all qualify as “denying Christ.” But what about denying that those who are members of Christ are genuinely members of Christ? This, indeed, is the issue over which Paul confronts Peter at Antioch. Though it may be purported that what Peter is really doing is denying an abstract doctrine of justification by faith alone, this is not Paul’s context. In fact, Paul affirms that Peter would believe this ... in theory.<sup>157</sup> But Peter is not walking in the truth of the gospel because he refuses to eat with the Gentiles who are in Christ. Peter is saying that the end of the story is the Law which keeps people divided at the table and, therefore, Christ died in vain. Peter is denying Christ because he is refusing to acknowledge people who are in Christ.

It is quite an easy thing to say that we love God whom we have not seen. But any denial to acknowledge, love, and fellowship with our brothers whom we can see *is* a denial of the Christ to whom they belong. When we refuse to eat at the same Table of the Lord with those who baptize with a different mode, we are, in effect, saying that they do not belong to the Lord. When we refuse to eat at the same Table of the Lord with those whom we think to be a little quirky in their doctrines but can still legitimately be called “Christian,” then we have denied the

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<sup>157</sup>Cf. 2:15ff.

Christ to whom they belong. When we divide churches over issues such as eschatological doctrines, how can we justify that before God? When we divide churches over the fact that some believe certain words can be used in various ways—e.g., words like faith, justification, sanctification, glorification—or that some have varying, but orthodox, views of the sacraments, how do we justify not eating with one another at the same Table? Or maybe someone says that Galatians does not primarily concern Paul’s polemic against works righteousness. Is that person to be anathematized? In all of our struggle for some type of Platonic “truth,” we seem to have forgotten that truth about the unity of the body of Christ. Have we forgotten that one of the sins for which a person may be cut off from the Table is that of impenitent contention? Contentious people in the church, though, normally justify themselves as being champions of “the truth.” Many times they are simply denying Christ for whom they say they are fighting.

***(3) The church has visible, tangible means by which our responsibilities to one another are defined.***

With all the discussion about unity above, the question must be asked, “How do I know with whom I am to act like a family? How do I know with whom to eat?” Paul answers that question in this passage: “as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” As mentioned in the exegesis of the text, there are some who relegate this baptism to an invisible baptism; i.e., an internal change of heart. Not only do I believe this is bad exegesis, but it is also an easy out for dealing with other members of the church. Here we run into the problem again of being able to pick and choose with whom we will be unified. If I don’t believe that this person is *really* baptized, then I need not strive for unity with him or her. I become the ultimate judge of whether a person is in the family or out of the family. This is quite the convenient situation for a contentious person. He can always justify his actions of excluding other by saying, “They are not really in the family.”

Paul does not view the situation from the same perspective. All of those who have been brought into the church through baptism are (objectively) members of the family and are to be treated as such. But the reader need not get the wrong idea here. To be treated like a family member means that a person should always be called by the church to live by faith. And if he refuse to repent of sin when confronted, *then* he is to be excluded from the family because he is not acting like the family ought to act. This is not *carte blanche* acceptance with no responsibility. Family members are to be encouraged, cared for, warned of impending danger, and nourished. Each family member then has the responsibility to act like a member of the family ought to act.

***(4) Always be careful to represent your opponent correctly in a disagreement.***

Sometimes it simply comes with the territory of communication, but it is always disturbing to be misrepresented by others. In this passage and elsewhere Paul is answering objections he, no doubt, had heard about his views of the Law. Paul spent time answering those objections. The people to whom he wrote had either intentionally twisted what he was saying, innocently misunderstood, or believed gossip about what Paul believed. Now, if people innocently misunderstand what another believes, this is easily corrected. But the other two are insidious and are like cancers that grow rapidly in the body of Christ.

Paul was accused of teaching contrary to the Law of Moses when he was not. Paul was accused of believing that the Law was evil when he said just the opposite. Sometimes a person

might begin to believe that others were not listening and simply believed about Paul what they wanted to believe because it was good for their own agenda. This is not so far removed from how some people act in the church today. We caricature others' beliefs in order to exalt ourselves, making ourselves look like the champions of orthodoxy, guardians of the truth, and smarter than everyone else. But in order to do this we must first demonize our opponent. So what if we know he does not really believe in salvation by works and denies it vehemently, we conclude from the sound bites we have heard or the snippets from articles we have read or from someone we trust telling us that he does. In this we create straw men, just like Paul's opponents did with him. Straw men are easily consumed and the guy with the flame-thrower looks powerful. But to act like this is to misrepresent another person. It is to lie about him. And that is not a characteristic that is to adorn the elect of God. A family member who engages in this type of activity needs to be called on the carpet because God's family is not supposed to act like this.

### *Conclusion*

Living with divisions that are created outside of God's revelation in Christ is anti-gospel and therefore anathema. If anyone preaches any other gospel than the one that unites Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female in the inheritance of the saints, then that person has denied Christ. Indeed, if God's righteousness—i.e., his faithfulness to his covenant promises—is realized in any other way than through Christ's life, death, and resurrection, then Christ has died in vain. May God grant his grace to his people to live what it means to be the new humanity living in the new world created by the apocalypse of faith.