

## PAUL AND THE FOOLISH GALATIANS: AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF GALATIANS 3:1-14

### The Historical and Cultural Context of the Text

#### *The writer*

"The most uncontroverted matter in the study of Galatians is that the letter was written by Paul, the Christian apostle whose ministry is portrayed in the Acts of the Apostles."<sup>1</sup> The reason is because the writer identifies himself as "Apostle Paul" (1:1). "In fact the original manuscript of the letter was written by Paul himself (6:11), instead of being dictated to a secretary as was Paul's usual practice."<sup>2</sup>

#### *The Recipients*

It is obvious that Apostle Paul directed this epistle to the churches of Galatia (1:2), and he called its recipients Galatians (3:1). However who these people were and where they lived are problems that have proved difficult to pinpoint.

#### **The Northern Galatian Theory**

The traditional opinion held that the recipients lived in the geographical district known as Galatia located in the northern part of the Roman province called Galatia in Asia Minor.<sup>3</sup> This view holds that Paul founded these churches on his second missionary journey after the Spirit forbade him to preach in the province of Asia (Acts 16:6). Paul could have written this epistle then during his third journey either from Ephesus about A.D. 54 or from Corinth about A.D. 57. The main arguments for this "North Galatian theory" are as follows:

- The popular use of the term "Galatians" usually signified people in this area.
- Second, Luke normally referred to geographical districts rather than Roman provinces in Acts.
- Third, there is some similarity between the Galatians as Paul referred to them in this epistle and the Gallic inhabitants of northern Galatia.
- Fourth, Paul traveled through this region during his second journey (Acts 16:6-8).

#### **The Southern Galatian Theory<sup>4</sup>**

The more popular view today maintains that Paul wrote to the churches located in the Roman province of Galatia that he founded on his first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13:38-39, 46, 48; 14:3, 8-10). The arguments for this "South Galatian theory" are as follows:

- Acts 16:6 and 18:23 offer no support to the theory that Paul made a trip to the northern part of provincial Galatia.
- Second, there is no specific information about the northern Galatian churches in Acts.
- Third, the geographic isolation of the North Galatia district makes a visit by Paul improbable. Fourth, Paul usually referred to provincial titles in his writings.
- Fifth, the name "Galatians" was appropriate for the southern area.
- Sixth, the mention of Barnabas in Galatians 2 suggests that the Galatians had met him.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, Word Biblical Commentary series. (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 57.

<sup>2</sup> Lawton Precepts, "Galatians" *Lawton Precepts Digital Library* [www.lawtonprecepts.org](http://www.lawtonprecepts.org). Accessed on 26/04/2008.

<sup>3</sup> Lightfoot, J. B. *The Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians*. Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974)

<sup>4</sup> The promoters of this view are: William M. Ramsay, F. F. Bruce, Merrill C. Tenney, Ronald Y. K. Funk, Donald K. Campbell.

- Seventh, the absence of a North Galatian representative in the collection delegation referred to in 1Corinthians 16:1 implies that it was not an evangelized area.
- Eighth, the influence of the Judaizers was extensive in South Galatia.<sup>5</sup>

Bearing in mind the implications whatsoever, the evangelicals consider the Southern Galatian theory as more plausible because we are convinced of the historical reliability of the book of Acts.

#### *The Opponents*

The identity of the Judaizers is also important. Their method included discrediting Paul. The first two chapters of Galatians especially deal with criticisms leveled against him personally. His critics appear to have been Jews who claimed to be Christians and who wanted Christians to submit to the authority of the Mosaic Law and its institutions. They probably came from Jerusalem and evidently had a wide influence (cf. Acts 15). One man seems to have been their spokesman (3:1; 5:7, 10) though there were several Judaizers in Galatia as the many references to "them" and "they" scattered throughout the epistle suggest.<sup>6</sup> Paul's antagonists in Galatia conceived of themselves as Jewish Christian missionaries, whose goal was to bring the nations into captive obedience to Israel's king, in fulfillment of such OT passages as Ps 2:8 and Gen 49:10.<sup>7</sup> In their view, they were only attempting to promote the promise to Abraham of a multitude of descendants by bringing Gentiles under the dominion of the law, as supported *prima facie* by such prophetic texts as Isa 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-3; Zech 14:16-19.<sup>8</sup> Galatians, therefore, is Paul's response to the efforts of the other missionaries to bring Gentiles who have turned to Christ under the dominion of the law, in order to "complete" their conversion to the God of Israel.

#### *The Purpose*

Paul wrote Galatians in response to a heresy brought in after he had taught the Gospel to the Galatians (1:8-9). Paul was also most likely attacked by the "Judaizers" (those seeking to syncretize Judaism with Christianity) to discredit his Gospel message.<sup>7</sup> That is why the first two chapters are devoted to the authority of Paul as an Apostle and his Gospel which he received by revelation from Christ Himself (1:12).

#### *Paul and Judaism*

We must be able to distinguish between these two separable systems of Paul which are: 1. Paul's theological relationship to Judaism 2. Paul's historical relationship to Judaism. Thus, if Paul is perceived to have criticized "Judaism" (e. g. for its belief in justification by works of the law), it is assumed that he cannot have derived his basic ideas from Judaism—and that therefore the historical origin of his theology is to be found not in Judaism at all, but either in the Christ event as a totally new and essentially non-Jewish irruption into the world or in the pagan systems of religion, cult and moral philosophy. Conversely, if Paul is perceived to stand in a positive relation to Judaism at the historical level—that is, if one supposes that Paul's basic thought structure and beliefs remained Jewish after his conversion—it is often assumed that therefore he can have had no real critique of "Judaism."

The fact that Paul criticized some aspects of his native Judaism and that he announced a gospel to the Gentiles does not mean that he broke with Judaism in order to do so. On the

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas L. Constable <http://www.soniclight.com/> Accessed on 29/04/2008.

<sup>6</sup> Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 3 vols. 2nd ed. (London: Tyndale Press, 1966), 2:72-89.

<sup>7</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans & Paternoster: 2002), 25-7.

contrary, by his own account, he claimed to be speaking as a true Jew, criticizing those who embraced other construals of Judaism, on the basis that Israel's God had now acted climatically and decisively in Jesus, the Messiah.<sup>8</sup>

### Syntactical and Exegetical Analysis of Galatians 3:1-14

The first section is principally drawn on the experience of the Galatians, making a clarion call so that they can remember what took place in their lives when they first responded to the gospel and aftermath, before the Judaizers (the circumcision party) came on stage. Paul purposed that this letter would go a long way in making the Galatian Christians to connect his gospel and God's blessings in their lives and thereby the Judaizers would not have means of penetrating and bring them to the bondage of the law and sin.

Galatians 3:1-5 is heavily loaded with rhetorical characteristics "assimilated from the preachers, teachers, and writers of the day."<sup>9</sup> The *interrogatio* method is precipitated with five questions featuring in these five verses. In the same vein, the five rebuking questions mirror a common Greco-Roman diatribe form of argumentation, which Paul is fond of that as well (Rom. 3:1-9, 27-31; 4:1, 9-10; 6:1-3, 15-16; 7:1, 7; 8:31-35). Even the opening rebuke in this chapter: "You foolish Galatians" (v 1; cf. v 3) "reflects common rhetorical practice among the diatribe preachers of Paul's day. Thus in addressing his Gentile converts in Galatia, Paul begins the major argumentative section of his letter by making use of such Greco-Roman rhetorical techniques as he found useful and as his converts would have understood."<sup>10</sup> Lest this is left out, as good as the rhetorical techniques of Paul's day may sound in understanding this letter, one must bear in mind that Paul was writing under the auspices/ guidance of the Holy Spirit using human languages to reveal God's eternal truth.

Next Paul appealed to Scripture to defend salvation by faith alone. To refute the legalists Paul first argued that it is incorrect to say that only through conformity to the Law could people become sons of Abraham (vv. 6-9). Second, he argued that by the logic of the legalists those whose standing the Law determines are under the curse of the Law, not special blessing (vv. 10-14).

Ὁ ἄνοητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν,<sup>11</sup> οἷς κατ' ὀφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη<sup>12</sup> ἑσταυρωμένος;

O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was proclaimed as having been crucified?

<sup>8</sup> N. T. Wright, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology" in *Between Two Horizons: Spanning New Testament Studies and Systematic Theology*, eds. Joel B. Green and Max Turner, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 211-12.

<sup>9</sup> H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* Hermeneia Series. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1961), 128.

<sup>10</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 41 (Dallas, Texas: Word Books, 1990), 99.

<sup>11</sup> The Textus Receptus, following C D K L P Ψ most minuscules vg<sup>mss</sup> syr<sup>h</sup> goth eth al, adds τῆ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι 5:7. Adapted from Bruce M. Metzger ed. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York, London: United Bible Societies, 1975), 593.

<sup>12</sup> The Textus Receptus, following D E F G K L many minuscules it<sup>d, g</sup> syr<sup>h</sup> goth al, adds ἐν ὑμῖν, which the AV takes with the following ἑσταυρωμένος ("crucified among you"). The text is decisively supported by □□Ψ 33\* 104 234 424 c 912 1739 it<sup>r</sup> vg syr<sup>p</sup> cop<sup>sa, bo</sup> arm eth al.. *ibid.*, 594.

ὦ it is O! as used in English which is an interjection (exclamation) that introduces amazement, surprise, shock and so on—used both in address and emotion. In this context, it is the emotion aspect that will best fit in. Apostle Paul is expressing his emotion of shock as a result of the spiritual misbehaviour of his audience.

ἀνόητοι

This word is repeated in verse 3 which signals to us the sharpness of Paul's address. The tone seems coarse and aggressive in nature but sort of a sincere emotional outburst. The word means 'unintelligent, foolish, opposite of σοφός ...of the intellectual and spiritual condition of men before becoming Christians (Tit 3:3)'.<sup>13</sup> In other words, 'not understanding, foolish: unreasonable.'<sup>14</sup> To make this word more contemporary, it is the expression of the illogicality or without the power to reason like beasts (Psalm 48:13). This may sound too harsh even violating Jesus' proscription in Matthew 5:22. Paul's act here does not contradict Jesus' teaching. This is a rebuke of a loving spiritual daddy to his children. The difference lies in the fact that Paul did not call them "fools" (noun=personality) rather "foolish" (adjective=momentary character disposition).

ἐβάσκανεν

βασκαίνω bewitch, placed under a spell. Primarily, the verb means *to bewitch* as in Deut 28:56; Gal 3:1 Bauer comments that one can ward off βασκαίνω by spitting three times.<sup>15</sup> And secondarily it means to envy. The verb only appears here in the entire New Testament, it was usually used in the Greek world in figurative sense to mean 'to fascinate, by casting an evil eye' or 'bewitch.'<sup>16</sup> It is possible to have been using such acts for commercial purposes (cf. Acts 20). The Galatian Christians were acting as if someone has bewitched them as they were misbehaving like the case of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 4:28-37. However, witches have no power in Christ.

προεγράφη

A compound word meaning, "Write in former times (pf. pass. be written about or marked out Jd 4); write above or already; put on public display, placard (Gal 3.1)."<sup>17</sup> "The attentive contemplation of which picture ought to have been a preventive against that bewitchment."<sup>18</sup> Paul is understood to be reminding the readers of the vividness of his verbal (not visual) presentation of the crucifixion of the Christ.

2 τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ' ὑμῶν· ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;

I desire to learn only this from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing of faith?

<sup>13</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, a translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 70.

<sup>14</sup> *A Lexicon Abridged from Lidell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford; The Clarendon Press, 1974), 64.

<sup>15</sup> BAGD, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 136.

<sup>16</sup> H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, 131.

<sup>17</sup> United Bible Society in Galatians 3:1 *Bible Works* 5.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph Henry Thayer, ed., trans., and enlarged, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book company, 1889), 538.

The clause τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ' ὑμῶν· (“I desire to learn only this from you”) seems to be an hyperbolic expression. Paul uses this to draw the attention of his readers to a very crucial issue. The Galatians were taken back to the very beginning, when they first received the Spirit by the believing the message of the cross of Christ (v 2). “The evidence of the Spirit’s entrance into their lives in that conversion experience must have been undeniably clear for Paul to use it as reference point in his argument”<sup>19</sup> (cf. 3:27; 4:6). The readers are reminded of the foundation of their spiritual experience that it surfaced as a result of the Spirit of God which was graciously given. The remembrance and renewal of this truth assaults the assumption that God’s blessing is contingent on coming on board of the Judaizing party.

3. τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ' ὑμῶν· ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;

Are you so foolish, having begun by the Spirit are you now being perfected by flesh?

ἔργων νόμου (works of the law)—a genitive of description connoting the works that are under the governance of the law—is “Paul’s code for those requirements of the law in particular which brought to the sharpest focus of Israel’s claim to be distinctive from others as God’s covenant people.”<sup>20</sup> The question demands a serious answer: How did you receive the Holy Spirit? The answer to this one question should settle the whole debate (cf. v. 5). It was obviously not by keeping the Law but by hearing and believing the gospel, the message of Christ crucified (cf. Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 12:13). “. . . those who stressed the law put no emphasis on the Holy Spirit. But from the day of Pentecost on, the Christians emphasized the importance of the Holy Spirit for Christian living.”<sup>21</sup> Justification (2:16) and the Holy Spirit become the believer’s possession not by the works of the Law but by faith through one act of believing. How are we thus justified? By the hearing of faith (cf. 2:21; 3:1).

4 τσαῦτα ἐπάθετε εἰκῆ; εἴ γε καὶ εἰκῆ.

Have you experienced so many things in vain? if indeed also in vain

ἐπάθετε from the word πάσχω surprisingly, this is the only text that πάσχω is used to describe a positive experience or blessing.<sup>22</sup> “Used of good, meaning to experience, to have happen to oneself, to receive (Gal. 3:5).”<sup>23</sup> Here is another question drawn from their experiences. Paul softens the blow by adding, “If indeed it was in vain,” leaving open the possibility and hope that it was not. In other words, ‘I hope what I have heard about you is not

<sup>19</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The IVP New Testament Commentary series Galatians* (Downers grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 79.

<sup>20</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians: Black’s New Testament Commentary* (London: Black; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 172.

<sup>21</sup> Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul’s Charter of Christian Freedom* (Downers Grove, Illinois.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 95.

<sup>22</sup> Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 634.

<sup>23</sup> Spiros Zodhiates, ed. *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 1127.

true or that you have come back to your senses.’ The apostle uses the same approach several other times in the letter, hitting hard at an error or failure and then softening his tone (see, e.g., 4:9-14, 20; 5:2-10).<sup>24</sup> εἴ by form it is first class condition but by function it is second class condition.

5 ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως;

Therefore the one who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, is it by works of the law or by hearing of faith?

This is the last question of this section (3:1-5) which is an extensive summary of 3:1. The reason for the present participle of ἐπιχορηγῶν (“supplies”) is to describe the continuous manifestations of God’s grace via the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church. So how do we seek justification/ pursue perfection? God does not cease in supplying His Spirit (cf. Phil. 1:6).

6 Καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην.

Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.

καθὼς a conjunction from κατά (down) and ὡς (as); (1) a comparative often with οὕτω(ς) (so, in this way) following according as, just as (LU 11.30).

Why making reference to Abraham?

- a. at the very beginning of Israel’s history it is clearly evident that God had chosen this one nation in order that in and through its great “seed” it might not only receive a blessing but also become a blessing to *the world*;
- b. that equally from the very beginning the divinely appointed means of receiving this blessing, so as to be able to impart it to nations, was *faith*, not works. (italics original)<sup>25</sup>

To press this further, it might be the fact that the opponents or the Judaizers so to speak, were using Abraham as their pace setter or religious figure in order to argue their case, thus perpetually boasting about their descent from Abraham. Their error was in the perception that their natural/biological tie to Abraham would guarantee their favourable standing before God (Gal 2:3; 5:2, 3; 6:12, 15; cf. Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33, 39, 40, 53), “and as if the *righteousness* which Jehovah had ‘reckoned’ to Abraham (Gen. 15:6) had been a *debt* which God owed him for his *work* (cf. Rom. 4:4).”<sup>26</sup> In response to their argument, Paul uses that same premise which is their common ground to demonstrate how it opposes their teachings, because the emphasis of the text is on faith and not on works. “...this faith, says Paul, in complete harmony with Gal 3:1-5, was not a matter of merit on Abraham’s part, but was by God graciously ‘reckoned’ or ‘imputed’ to for righteousness.”<sup>27</sup> So if the opponents think that their clamoring on the necessity of circumcision in order to enhance salvation by appealing on the life of Abraham (Gen. 17:23-27), it is indeed a lost battle because Abraham’s circumcision was preceded by justification many years (Gen 15:6; 16:16; 17:24). Due to Abraham’s justification he became the “daddy” of all who would share in his faith both the circumcized and the uncircumcized alike.

<sup>24</sup> John MacArthur, *The John MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), 68.

<sup>25</sup> William Hendrickson, *New Testament commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books House, 1968), 119.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*, 19-20.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.*

“According to Jewish interpretation at the time of Paul, Abraham’s faith was a meritorious work: Abraham ‘put his faith in God,’ and therefore God counted that act of faith for what it was, as righteousness.”<sup>28</sup> Paul’s employment of quotation from Gen. 15: 6 in confirmation of the implied answer to the question in vv 2, 5 (by “hearing of faith” and not by “works of the law) stands against such presupposition. The reason is not farfetched in that Paul does not “take the ‘counting’ as an accounting of Abraham’s merit, or even in the sense that Abraham’s faith was regarded or estimated by God as if it were righteousness.”<sup>29</sup>

Many explanations have been offered for the role of Abraham in the argument Paul mounts in Galatians 3. But all of them hitherto have missed the centrality of ethnicity and collective memory in understanding what Paul says and how he says it. Abraham was central to the ethnic identity of the Judeans of his time, as Paul was only too aware. He knew that in Galatia his opponents were using this glorious figure from the collective memory and mnemonic tradition of Israel in their attempt to persuade Paul's non-Judean converts to become Judeans through circumcision. To counter this threat he had to detach Abraham from Israel and its collective memory and attach it to the Christ-movement and its collective memory. Central to his argument is the claim that Christ is the seed referred to in the scriptural promises made "to Abraham and his seed" and that Christ-followers receive these promises because through baptism they are all one in Christ Jesus. In addition, Paul reinterprets these promises to connect them with the dramatic gifts of the Holy Spirit that were characteristic of his congregations. Paul's entire argument represents a daring essay in the contestation and re-application of the collective memory of Abraham, away from the ethnic group where it arose to his socio-religious Christ-movement groups in Galatia.<sup>30</sup>

As a matter of fact, the life of Abraham stands as the timeless specimen/sample of the manner by which every man shall be justified. Abraham’s faith in God generated obedience. If Abraham had not believed in God he would not have been able to obey. In fact, his belief in God is more glaring than his obedience. In summary, if there is no belief in God there cannot be obedience to God.

ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ

What is the object of Abraham’s belief? It is obvious from the text that it was God’s promise—an heir from his loins.

ἐλογίσθη

λογίζομαι meaning to “count, reckon, calculate, take into account; credit, place to one's account; consider, think, suppose; evaluate, look upon as, class; maintain, claim; think on, reflect upon.”<sup>31</sup> It comes as no surprise that a mainstay of his argument is his appeal to Abraham, the redoubtable father of the Jewish people, who was reckoned righteous “from the hearing of faith,” not “from works of the law.” In both Galatians and Romans (chapter 4 using

<sup>28</sup> H. W. Heildland, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. IV. A trans. By G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1976), 290.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1953), 135.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Philip F. Esler "[Paul's contestation of Israel's memory of Abraham in Galatians 3](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LAL/is_1_36/ai_n16359501)". Biblical Theology Bulletin. Spring 2006. FindArticles.com. 25 Apr. 2008. [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m0LAL/is\\_1\\_36/ai\\_n16359501](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0LAL/is_1_36/ai_n16359501)

<sup>31</sup> United Bible Societies Galatians 3:6 in *Bible Works* 5 2001.

Psalm 32 as illustration), it is the story of Abraham that reveals so much of Paul's intentions and the inner workings of his thought.

7. γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι υἱοὶ εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ.

Consequently, you know that those who are by faith are the sons of Abraham.

The presence of ἄρα is an introduction of an inference to be drawn from the previous discussion. γινώσκετε verb indicative present active 2nd person plural OR verb imperative present active 2nd person plural (so RSV and NAB). This paper subscribes to the indicative alternative. "In this verse [v. 7] Paul extended his argument from Abraham to his posterity and raised for the first time the question that would dominate the remainder of Gal 3 and 4: Who are the true children of Abraham? This train of thought will find a conclusion in the allegory of the two mothers, Sarah and Hagar, and their two sons, Isaac and Ishmael (4:21-31)."<sup>32</sup> Sonship to the patriarch depends on this "genealogy" of faith which goes back to Abraham"; the determinative factor is no longer physical but spiritual descent.<sup>33</sup>

8. προϊδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφή ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοὶ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ θεός, προευηγγελίσσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.

And because the scripture saw before hand that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, it promised Abraham that all nations will be blessed through you.

Verse 8 presents us with the personification of Scripture. Here Paul sees the Scripture as a written transcript of the living divine Word that comes directly from the mind and mouth of God, and so can be personified. It is always in the plan of God to justify the Gentile nations ἐκ πίστεως ("by faith")—by means of faith.

προευηγγελίσσατο τῷ Ἀβραάμ ὅτι ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη ("it promised Abraham that all nations will be blessed through you"). Of this speech, S. K. Williams has suggested persuasively that to say that the nations are blessed in Abraham is to say that they are blessed as he was, namely to be reckoned righteous, and thereby not required to render themselves righteous by observing the Law.<sup>34</sup>

9. ὥστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ.

so that those who have faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

"Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing?" (3:2, 5). Paul answers this question first with the example of Abraham in 3:6-9: "Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). This example of Abraham, the patriarch of God's people, clearly demonstrates what the principle is whereby human beings can establish a proper relationship to God and become his people. It is faith. Hence "it is those of faith who are "members of God's people, namely "the children of Abraham (v 7). This is tantamount to

<sup>32</sup> George, Timothy. *Galatians*. New American Commentary series. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 223.

<sup>33</sup> G. Schrenk, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. V. A trans. By G. W. Bromiley, 1005.

<sup>34</sup> Williams, "Justification of the Spirit in Galatians," 97; cited by Ben Witherington, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998 ), 228.

the fact that even if Gentiles have faith can be of course “justified” that is, properly relate to God as His people. This is confirmed by Gen. 12:3, which declares God’s will to make Abraham the source of blessing for all nations (v 8). The conclusion of all this lesson from the example of Abraham is that “those of faith (ἐκ πίστεως) are blessed with Abraham who had faith” (v 9).<sup>35</sup>

3:10 Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν· γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά.

For as many are by works of law are under a curse; for it has been written that everyone who does not abide in all the things written in the book of the law so as to do these things is cursed.

Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν (“For as many are by works of law”) the same is used in vv 2, 5, with the addition of the word Ὅσοι (“all”), which makes more encompassing than the Judaizers alone (Jew and Gentile alike inclusive). Although Paul weaves a new line of argument, he makes this connect up with preceding argument, as is obvious from the initial γὰρ (“for”)—conjunction. ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν (“under a curse”) the idea is of severing from God and by nature an antithesis of blessing.

γέγραπται... ποιῆσαι αὐτά. (“Cursed be...and do them”) this quotation of Scripture is from Deut 27:26, where it closes the list of curse pronounced at Mount Ebal. When Paul uses the formula γεγραμμένοις (“it has been written”) he is doing so in more than a merely formal way. Rather it is an assertion and pronouncement of the authority of Scripture. To claim that Scripture itself demonstrates the judgment due to all who do not abide by everything in the law would obviously be effective argument in refuting those who were appealing to Scripture in support of a continued legal approach to righteousness. But by clamoring on the requirement of any part of the law (e.g. circumcision) “the Judaizers were incurring a curse if they failed in any other part of it. The fact was that law as a means of salvation could bring only curse and was therefore ineffective.”<sup>36</sup>

N. T. Wright shows a run of Paul’s argument in 3:10

On the assumption (I) that

- a) Israel as a whole is under the curse if it fails to keep Torah;
- b) Israel as a whole failed to keep Torah;
- c) Therefore Israel is under a curse

Paul is arguing that (II) that

- a) All who embrace Torah are thereby embracing Israel’s internal way of life;
- b) Israel as a nation has suffered historically, the curse that the Torah held out for them if they did not keep it;
- c) Therefore all who embrace Torah now are under this curse.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 128.

<sup>36</sup> Donald Guthrie, *The New Century Bible Commentary: Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publ. Co., London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Publ. Ltd., 1973), 97.

<sup>37</sup> Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology*, (London, New York: T&T Clark Ltd, 1991), 137-56.

11. ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται·

that no one is justified by law before God is clear, because the righteous will live by faith.

Why is no one justified ἐν νόμῳ? “Paul rejects the Law not because of an empirical observation that no one can do what it requires but because its claim to give life, explicitly articulated in Lev. 18:5 ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς [Gal 3:12], is incompatible with the gospel story, which says that Christ had to die in order to give life to us (3:13-14; cf. 2:21).”<sup>38</sup> Paul turns to the other side of the coin, to a prophetic passage calling to mind Yahweh’s vindication of his faithful people, who are “blessed” rather than “cursed.” Hab 2:4 is introduced as providing the reason why it is δῆλον (clear) that “in the law no one is justified before God.” “In the law” is the functional equivalent of “those who are of works of the law” in the previous verse. Accordingly, for Paul it is evident that those who remain “in the law,” the Judaizers and those like them, cannot be “justified before God,” simply because, in the words of Hab 2:4, “the righteous shall live by faith,” the implication being that these people do not belong to the company of the righteous who will live by virtue of their faith (fulness).

3:12 ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς.

Law is not by faith but by the one who does these things will live by them

ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, “but the law is not by faith.” The postpositive δὲ Here particularly in association with ἀλλ’ that follows, is adversative (“but”), “just as it is in v 11—thereby setting v 12 in sharp contrast to v 11, just as v 11 is in sharp contrast to v 10 (contra Betz, *Galatians*, 147; Howard, *Paul: Crisis in Galatia*, 63-64). So vv 10 and 12 are lined up on the one side, that of law and curse, with v 11 on the other, that of faith and righteousness.”<sup>39</sup> Responding to the idea that perhaps both Law and faith are necessary for justification Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5. This verse shows that they are mutually exclusive. They are two entirely different approaches to God.

3:13 Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα, ὅτι γέγραπται· ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὁ κρεμάμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου,

Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it has been written, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,

ἐξηγόρασεν

This term refers in the New Testament to Christ’s redemptive work, the stress now being to purchase to freedom from the law (Gal. 4:1ff). God pays the price himself in Christ, meeting the law’s claim and thus giving true freedom through justification by faith (Galatians 3:24-25). Why is redemption needed? “Redemption is needed because the law is God’s holy ordinance and eternally valid. ...while Christ undoubtedly obeys and serves God, God himself

<sup>38</sup> Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3: 1-4:11* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 179.

<sup>39</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, *Word Biblical Commentary* Vol. 41, 119.

acts in him on our behalf and toward us. Hence redemption is not to be severed from the “we” who by it are put back in fellowship with God by faith.”<sup>40</sup>

The aorist tense of ἐξηγόρασεν (“redeemed”) “signals the historical event of Christ’s death on the cross,”<sup>41</sup> which is then further referred to as his γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα (“becoming curse for us”). The explicit phrase ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου (“from the curse of the law”)—denoting the power from which Jesus has emancipated us thus God’s wrath—occurs only here in Paul, though the concept appears earlier in v 10 where Deut 27:26 pronounces a curse on everyone who accepts the obligations of the law but “does not continue in all the things written in the book of the law to do them.” Not only did Jesus do the will of God from the heart “(thus embodying the new covenant) but on behalf of others he endured the curse pronounced by the law on law breakers (by accepting the form of death which, according to the law, incurred the divine curse) and thus redeemed from the curse those who were under law, so that they might through faith receive the promised Spirit and adoption as sons in the family of God (3: 10-14; 4:4-6).”<sup>42</sup>

14 ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν<sup>43</sup> τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.

but in order that Abraham’s blessing might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus in order that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The presence of ἵνα is an indication of the two purpose clauses in the sentence. “This verse describes the purpose for which Christ redeemed his people from the curse of the law.”<sup>44</sup> This gift of the Spirit (who is the substance of the promise),<sup>45</sup> is to be received through faith—the faith in vv 7, 9, 11. In the original promise to Abraham there was no mention of the Spirit but only the blessing of justification by faith, and yet here Paul conceives of the fulfillment of that promise as constituted above all in the bestowal of the Spirit upon those who have faith.<sup>46</sup> By appealing to the example of Abraham in Romans 4 and Galatians 3, Paul argues that the true sons of Abraham are those who are justified by faith as the patriarch was. This seems to have been a common style of argument for the apostle as he discusses faith in Christ as a fulfillment of the Old Testament expectation. In other words Paul defends his message as being more in harmony with Old Testament theology than that of his opponents.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> F. Büchsel, “exagorázō” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 19.

<sup>41</sup> David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, Gen. eds. *Word Biblical Commentary* vol 41, 121.

<sup>42</sup> F. F. Bruce, *Pal: Apostle of The Free Spirit* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1977), 199.

<sup>43</sup> Influenced by the occurrence of εὐλογία in the preceding clause, several witnesses, chiefly Western in character ... replace ἐπαγγελίαν with εὐλογίαν. Metzger *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*.

<sup>44</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 151.

<sup>45</sup> NEB

<sup>46</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 152.

<sup>47</sup> Robert A. Payne, “The “Seed,” the Spirit and the Blessing of Abraham” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 606 (April 1995): 212.

### Analysis

In this pericope Galatians 3:1-14 we can figure out the following:

- The five/six rhetorical questions convey the shock of Apostle Paul to the disposition of his audience
  - The Galatian Christians were acting foolishly
  - They were acting as if they have been bewitched by someone
  - They were acting as if the message of the crucified Christ has escaped their memory
  - They were struggling as if something could be added to the completed redemptive work of Christ
  - They were acting as if their reception of the Holy Spirit is contingent on their observance of the law
- The redemptive history of Abraham will go along in answering the above questions
  - Abraham's response of faith yielded God's unconditional justification
  - Those who share in Abraham's faith also share in his blessing
  - God's foreknowledge of extending his promises to all the nations was in operation even before Abraham's call
  - The crux of Abraham's call was blessing participation and not circumcision
  - The law pronounced judgment all those who did not observe the whole of it
- Conclusively, there is need for the testimony of the Old Testament to demonstrate the relationship between faith and obedience.
  - There was no way out of the bondage of law in as much as one's life is governed by it
  - So, justification is based on faith and not obedience to the law
  - It is syncretistic to combine both human deeds with the divine grace
  - Christ's redemptive work on the cross demonstrates God's act of substitutionary atonement for those who respond in faith
  - Christ's redemption includes both the Jews and the Gentiles sharing Abraham's blessing
  - The bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon the church as God promised is the output of Christ's redemption

### Theological Analysis

- Why do sinners need God's justification?
  - There is nothing human being can offer to God than to trust Him
  - Faith in God is our response to God's salvation offer
  - The Holy Spirit is God's provision to make us obedient to Him in love
- δικαίωσις entails justification and imputation of God's righteousness
  - ὄν suggests an on-going divine activity
  - Abraham experienced imputation of righteousness based on his response of faith
  - Impartation of righteousness is both a gift and fruit of the Holy Spirit

### Contextualization/ Conclusion

- We should neither seek to "conform all people to one kind of experience, nor should we demand that every person have some kind of powerful experience as evidence for conversion."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Scot McKnight, *The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 145.

- We should earnestly trust God for the fruit of the Spirit rather than the gift of the Spirit which is temporary (e.g. speaking in tongues which is common to the Pentecostal movement)
- The pang of witchcraft accusation is a pressing issue in the church today particularly in the northern Nigeria. We must know that witches have no power in Christ, although they may exercise their power outside Christ but not in Christ.
- Our natural parental relationship (Abraham) does not guarantee eternal blessing but faith does.
- Physical circumcision does not determine our relationship with God but spiritual does count because that is the new covenant.
- The cross is God in His love sending Jesus to take our curse, to rescue us from the sinful 'world', to bring us into 'new creation', to us into the family of God as children of God having the Spirit of God.<sup>49</sup>
- "[T]he idea of the hanged Christ has the potential to be a cause of offense to Babukusu people. The cross could have been considered a source of cursing. Instead the logic of sacrifice has allowed the cross to be for the Babukusu a sign of life and blessing."<sup>50</sup>
- Our struggle to obey the law will lead us to nowhere but faith in Christ will produce obedience.
- It is faith that determines our position before God (justification). So what God wants from us is faith.
- God is in charge of determining our justification and not our works.

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<sup>49</sup> David Wenham, *Paul and Jesus: The True Story* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 52.

<sup>50</sup> Eliud Wabukala and Grant LeMarquand "Cursed be Everyone who Hangs on a Tree: Pastoral Implications of Deuteronomy 21:22-23 and Galatians 3:13 in an African Context" in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, trajectories and Trends* eds. Gerald O. West and Musa W. Dube (Bosten, Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, Inc., 2001), 358.

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