

Grace Didn't Die
Galatians 3:7-18
Jesus is Superior to the Law
Josh Sugg Sermon

Intro

Welcome and intro myself.

Reference Easter service, how awesome it was! and how we heard Paul's testimony—the man who wrote this letter.

For those of you who were here for the first time last week, we normally preach straight through books of the Bible. This is called expositional preaching. We took a pause from our regularly scheduled programming for Easter and now we're going to jump back into our series through the book of Galatians, "Grace Didn't Die." This is Apostle Paul's letter to the 1st Century church in Galatia and Paul is hitting the point over and over that the grace of God that saved the Galatians is the same grace that continues in their lives. Grace didn't die, it is alive and well!

2 weeks ago, Austin introduced us to a man named Abraham. We're going to pick up where Austin left off in chapter 3 and we're going to spend significant time talking about Abraham. However, before we do that we've got to go back and look at the incredible story of Abraham. Most of Venture is new to the Bible so we need to understand the context Paul is referencing by talking about Abraham's story of grace.

Not to do that would be like jumping into a TV series multiple seasons down the road. Sure, you might recognize names like Will, Carlton, or Uncle Phil but without going back to the first episode, you won't understand the significance of Will and Uncle Phil's iconic hug at the end of Season 4 Episode 24. Hence, the importance of the best theme song in all of television history:

🎵 Now, this is a story all about how / My life got flipped-turned upside down / And I'd like to take a minute / Just sit right there / I'll tell you how I became the prince of a town called Bel-Air 🎵

Now let's go all the way back to Genesis and see the story of how Abraham became the father of Israel.

The Story of Abraham

- A. Genesis 1 – God creates the world and everything in it.
- Genesis 2 – God gives Adam and Eve the first law. This is the Law of Adam.
- Genesis 3 – Adam and Eve sin and our relationship with God is forever tarnished by the curse of sin because of their Fall.
- Genesis 6 – Because of all of man's wickedness, God decided to flood the earth and He gave Noah instructions to build the Ark.
- Genesis 11 – The Tower of Babel occurs, and God dispersed the people and gave them different languages.
- Genesis 12 – We are introduced to Abraham, but at this time his name was still Abram.

- B. Abram lived in the city of Ur in the region of Mesopotamia. This region was within the Tigris-Euphrates River system in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent. This would be modern day Turkey, Kuwait, Iraq, and Syria. The land is called fertile because it truly was. A stable climate, rich soil, and steady supply of fresh water made it ideal for agriculture to develop, thrive, and provide a sustainable way of life. Ancient cities like Nineveh and Babylon were located in Mesopotamia. This was a great place to live, but God had something better in mind for Abram.
- C. Just like everyone in that region at that time, Abram grew up as a pagan idol worshiper. His father worshipped idols and so did he. At this point, there was nothing particularly special or noble about Abram. He was just like everyone else. Until, in Genesis 12, God spoke to Abram.¹
- D. **Genesis 12:1-3** – “[1] Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. [2] And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. [3] I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”
- E. God called Abram to leave his pagan idolatry. God called him to leave his family. God called him to leave this fertile, promising land. God called him to have faith that where God was leading him was far superior to where he currently was. And Abram listened.
- F. At 75 years old, Abram packed up his stuff and departed from his homeland with his wife, Sarai, and his nephew’s family. However, Abram left with no kids of his own. 75 years old with no kids! Yet God promised to make a great nation out of this barren couple.
- G. Several years later, Abram and Sarai still had no children and this obviously troubled Abram. So, in Genesis 15 God spoke to Abram again and this time He made a covenant with him.
- H. **Genesis 15:1-6** – “[1] After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” [2] But Abram said, “O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” [3] And Abram said, “Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.” [4] And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.” [5] And [God] brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.” [6] And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.”
- I. In Genesis 12, God initiated to Abram and called him out of pagan idolatry to worship the one true God. And here in Genesis 15 God initiated to Abram again and called him out of his barrenness to make a great nation out of him. And God promised this would happen.
- J. But 24 years after God initially called him in Genesis 12, Abram and Sarai still have no kids! I had my first daughter at 24 so if God had fulfilled His promise to give Abram children when He first made the promise, then Abram and Sarai probably would’ve already had grandkids. As much as it might’ve

¹ Joshua 24:2 – “And Joshua said to all the people, “Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, ‘Long ago, your fathers lived beyond the Euphrates, Terah, the father of Abraham and of Nahor; and they served other gods.’”

seemed that God wasn't going to do what He promised, God hadn't gone back on His promise and He spoke to Abram again in Genesis 17.

- K. **Genesis 17:1-8, 15-16** – “[1] When Abram was ninety-nine years old the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, [2] that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.” [3] Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, [4] “Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. [5] No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. [6] I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. [7] And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. [8] And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. “[15] And God said to Abraham, “As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. [16] I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.”
- L. Here we see that God changed their names. He gave them new identities. He gave them new purpose. They were no longer just meant to be Mesopotamian dwellers worshiping whatever “gods” they chose. They were meant to be the father and mother of a multitude of nations. They were meant to have offspring that would change the course of human history.
- M. Just as God promised, Abraham and Sarah had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. Jacob's name was later changed to Israel and this is why they're called the nation of Israel. He had 12 sons who became the 12 tribes of Israel. God promised to make a great nation from Abraham, and despite the rise and fall of many nations over the last several thousand years, the nation of Israel still exists today!
- N. But God's promise didn't just stop there. God covenanted with Abraham to make him a father of a **multitude** of nations. Not just one nation. That's why we can teach our kids the classic “Father Abraham” song.
- O. 🎵 Father Abraham had many sons. Many sons had Father Abraham. I am one of them and so are you. So let's all praise the Lord. 🎵
- P. Now that we better understand the story of Abraham, let's go back to Galatians. Throughout his letter, Paul was confronting a group called the Judaizers. They were a group of Jewish Christians who taught that all Christians must follow the Law of Moses and that Gentile Christians (Christians of non-Jewish heritage) must be circumcised. They taught legalism which says you can be saved from your sin by adhering to the law.
- Q. In Galatians chapter 3, Paul is continuing his argument against the Judaizers' false teaching.

Proposition: Galatians 3:7-18 gives us 3 reasons why Jesus is superior to the law.

The 1st reason why Jesus is superior to the law is that

1) Jesus is the pathway to God's family. (7-9)

Time to take notes

- A. [7] Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. [8] And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
- B. Ancestral pride is deeply ingrained in Jewish culture. This is rooted in God's covenant with Abraham and is perpetuated throughout history. As God confirmed time and time again with the Jewish nation that He was their God and they were His people, this pride only continued to grow.
- C. **Exodus 6:2-8** – God spoke to Moses and said to him, "I am the Lord. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by my name the Lord I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves, and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord.'"
 - D. It is uncommon today to know your family history going back more than a few generations, but there are Jews today who can still trace their lineage back to names in the Old Testament! However, for the early church in Galatia, this familial pride began to lead them astray. They were more concerned with being able to trace their lineage back to Abraham than they were with the God who Abraham believed in.
 - E. Paul challenges this idea by saying that it's only those of faith, not of blood, that are true sons of Abraham.
 - F. **Hendriksen & Kistemaker** – "To be "of faith" means to be characterized or controlled by faith, to have trust in God as one's guiding principle. ... Therefore, even though a man should be a Hebrew of Hebrews, he is not, in the spiritual sense, a son of Abraham unless he be a true believer. Conversely, if he be a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is a son of Abraham, whether he be a Gentile or a Jew by race."²
 - G. This wasn't a new idea that Paul or the New Testament church came up with. This was always the message of the Gospel.

² Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

- H. **Verse 8** – And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”
- I. What Scripture promises God promises, for he is the Speaker.³ God is the author of all Scripture and therefore all the Bible is as sure and true as He is.
- J. Paul asserts that the blessing of Abraham was received by him through faith. It is through the exercise of a similar faith that the Gentiles become his spiritual children. Not through submission to legalism and circumcision.⁴
- K. Abraham was therefore the pattern for all of us to follow. He models how a sinner, Jew or Gentile, must receive salvation. The condition upon which any person was to be justified is faith, and this was announced to Abraham before he was circumcised, which means that circumcision had nothing to do with the acceptance of salvation.⁵
- L. **Verse 9** – So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.
- M. Paul has stated that those who are of faith are the sons of Abraham, and now he emphasizes that those who are of faith are also blessed in the same way Abraham was: with salvation.
- N. There is great assurance here that, “Those that are of faith, they alone but also all of them without exception, are sons of Abraham.”⁶ All of them. Every. Single. One.
1. **Isaiah 56:3a, 6-8** – Let not the foreigner who has joined himself to the Lord say, “The Lord will surely separate me from his people.” ... “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.” The Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, declares, “I will gather yet others to him besides those already gathered.”
 2. **Notes** – Note how this promise runs through both Testaments (Gen. 15:1, 2; 17:7, 8; Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6; Josh. 1:5; 2 Chron. 20:17; Jer. 15:20; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; Ezek. 11:20; Zech. 8:8; 13:9; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3, 7). All are saved by the same faith in the same Savior (Gen. 15:6; Isa. 53; Jer. 23:5, 6; Matt. 1:21; John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 10:43; 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 4:11). The names of all God’s people are written in the same book of life. There are not two of those books: one for the old and one for the new dispensation; there is only one (Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16, 17; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8, 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). All are foreknown, foreordained, called, justified (by faith), and glorified (Rom. 8:29,

³ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

⁵ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

⁶ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

30). Once this is understood the Bible becomes a living book, for we begin to realize that when God says to Abraham, “Fear not ... I am your shield and your exceeding great reward ... your God,” he is speaking also to us. This central promise concerns all believers of both dispensations, for all those that are of faith are Abraham’s children and heirs (Gal. 3:29).⁷

- O. The last time we were in Galatians, Austin gave us a great illustration about trying to fly by putting on a bird suit versus getting in a plane. And told us to take off the bird suit and get in the plane! In my head I visualize this bird suit having “self-righteousness, legalism, by my own strength” roughly stitched into the fabric and feathers for all to see. But that plane had beautifully painted on the side of it, “by grace alone through faith alone airlines.” With that picture in mind, listen to this adapted quote from the great preacher, Charles Spurgeon.
- P. **Spurgeon** – Remember that the safety of the weak and of the strong believer rests upon the same foundation. On board one of the fine [airplanes] that [fly] between England and America there is a strong, hardy, vigorous man. Will he get to America safely? Yes, if the [plane] does. But yonder is a little child that cannot walk and has to be carried in its mother’s arms. Will it reach America safely? Yes, if the [plane] does. Both the robust man and the crying infant, all being well, will reach their journey’s end—if the [plane] does. Their safety lies in the same place. Their condition does not affect their transit. But is there no difference between the child and the man? Assuredly, there is a great deal of difference as to many things, but there is no difference about the fact that their passage across the ocean depends upon the [airplane] rather than upon themselves. The strong man could not walk across the Atlantic any more than the child could. They are alike incompetent for the passage if left alone, and alike capable of it if placed on board the same vessel. So if you meet with a great saint, say to yourself, “My honored brother will get to heaven through Jesus Christ. And I, a poor babe in grace, shall get to heaven in the same way.”⁸
- Q. Our culture loves to tell you how exclusive Christianity is. How it’s like one of us Gaston or Lincoln county people trying to become a member at Augusta National. “You are not welcome here.” But that is not the message of the Bible.
- R. Yes, there are cultural differences between tribes, nations, and languages. Just like there are differences between the child and man aboard the plane. But when it comes to justification and salvation, those differences grant no one preferential treatment before the God of the universe.
- S. Your language? Doesn’t matter. Your race? Doesn’t matter. Your skin color? Doesn’t matter. Your hair color? Doesn’t matter. Your net worth? Doesn’t matter. Your last name? Doesn’t matter. Your zip code? Doesn’t matter. Your marital status? Doesn’t matter. Your felony status? Doesn’t matter. Your citizenship status? Doesn’t matter. Your political party? Doesn’t matter. NONE OF THAT MATTERS!
- T. The only thing that matters is in whom your faith is placed. You will either trust yourself, like the Judaizers did, and you will drown in the Atlantic trying to fly in your bird suit without a plane. You will forever be separated from God and not part of His family.

⁷ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

⁸ Spurgeon, C. (2013). [Galatians](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:7–14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- U. Or you will trust in God and put your faith in Jesus Christ and fly to heaven's gates on the plane of salvation by grace alone through faith alone that He has promised to provide for you. You will be forever united with God as His son or daughter.
- V. Only through Jesus does God gather people to Himself. Jesus is the only pathway to becoming part of God's family.

The 2nd reason why Jesus is superior to the law is that

2) Jesus frees us from the curse of sin. (10-14)

Time to take notes

- A. To understand verses 10-14, you have to know that Paul is going to refer to 2 laws here and he's going to kind of bounce back and forth between the 2 without really much distinction.
 1. The Law of Adam – Given to Adam in Genesis 2. This law promised prosperous life and relationship with God. When this law was broken by Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, all of mankind was placed under the curse of sin. This curse created separation between God and man and death entered the world.
 2. The Law of Moses – Given to Moses throughout the entirety of his leading the people of Israel. This is most notably the 10 Commandments but it also includes the first 5 books of the OT: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. This law promised land and prosperity for the nation of Israel. When this law was broken, those who broke it wouldn't have long life and they wouldn't get to enjoy the Promised Land. Even Moses was a transgressor of the law named after him and he didn't get to enter the Promised Land!
 - a. If you want more explanation of the blessing and the curse of the Law of Moses, check out Deuteronomy 30 sometime this week.
- B. As we listen to Paul talk about these laws, the essential truth is that fallen mankind cannot claim that their moral accomplishment deserves acceptance by God. We call this approach self-righteous legalism. Unfortunately, it is alive and well and thrives among religious people!⁹
- C. The Judaizers were perverting the true purpose of the law. They were relying on works as a means of salvation. On that basis they would fail forever.¹⁰
- D. **[10] For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."**

⁹ Utey, R. J. (1997). [Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians](#) (Vol. Volume 11, pp. 31–36). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

¹⁰ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

- E. The law was never given to be the means of salvation for us. Actually, Paul tells us in Romans 7 that the purpose of the law was basically the complete opposite of that.
1. **Romans 7:7b** – If it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin.
- F. The purpose of the law is to show us how miserably sinful we are.
- G. **Spurgeon** – If there is in any one of us a solitary violation of the command of God, we are cursed by Him. If we have at any time throughout life, in any measure or degree—in deed, word, or thought, by omission or commission—diverged from absolute perfection, we are cursed. Such is the statement of God Himself, by the mouth of His servant Moses, in Deut 27:26. There is no exception; all sins are included in it, and we are all of us included. God will not take part payment. **Holiness is a very different thing from that morality which some men boast of.** If a man does nothing wrong, yet if he fails to do that which is right, he is guilty. Omission is as truly a defect as commission. He misses the mark who shoots beyond it or falls short of it. If you commit a single omission of duty, on the footing of law you are a lost man. If you have omitted, at any time, to love the Lord your God with the whole force and intensity of your nature, if you have omitted in any degree to love your neighbor as yourself, you have committed a breach of the law. Not to obey is to disobey. Who can plead innocence, if this is so?¹¹
1. **Leviticus 11:44a** – For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy.
 2. **James 2:10** – For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.
- H. The curse of failing the law is not merely the wrath of God in the form of the final banishment of the sinner from His presence, with all the sorrow and misery which that includes. It also represents also a present condition of alienation from God caused by a violation of His law.¹²
1. **Deuteronomy 28:66-67** – Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, ‘If only it were evening!’ and at evening you shall say, ‘If only it were morning!’ because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see.
- I. **[11] Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” [12] But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.”**
- J. Paul’s quotation from Habakkuk 2:4 provides evidence that justification by faith was always part of God’s plan of salvation. People were not saved by the law in the OT only to be saved by faith in the NT—salvation has always come by faith.¹³

¹¹ Spurgeon, C. (2013). [Galatians](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:7–14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

¹² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

¹³ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ga 3:7–18). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- K. The statement, “The law is not of faith” means that the two principles of law and of faith as a means of justification are mutually exclusive of one another. They are diametrically opposed to each other.¹⁴
- L. **Utley** – In the matter of right standing (salvation) with God, the choice is faith OR law, not faith AND law. The Judaizers had turned faith in God into rules for God. Even in the OT the individual Israelite was only right by personal faith in YHWH. Never were all Israelites right with God because of their descent from Abraham. “On the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them.’” This quotation comes from Lev. 18:5 (cf. Rom. 10:5), stressing the importance of performing the demands of God. However, the OT is a history of mankind’s inability to perform the OT Law. Therefore, another way of salvation was introduced, which in reality, had always been God’s means of salvation: not human effort, but faith.¹⁵
1. And yet, the Judaizers proudly read the OT and concluded that they could be different, that they could keep the law despite the Jews’ (their own people’s) entire record of history proving otherwise!
- M. I hope you get the sense of how helpless we are when left to our own means of salvation. We are under a curse that we have placed ourselves beneath, but we can never free ourselves from the crushing weight of this curse of sin. Placed under the curse at the Fall of Adam and Eve. Placed under the curse by our own sin.
- N. Enter Jesus Christ! Jesus is the only way we can be freed from the curse of sin.
- O. **[13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—[14] so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.**
- P. **Spurgeon** – Here is substitution. ... He fulfilled the law’s demands by His perfect obedience, and He suffered the law’s utmost penalty by His death upon the cross. Now all those who believe in Him are forever justified because of what He did for them. ... He did not forgive the sin without punishing it, but He exacted the full penalty without the abatement of a solitary jot or tittle. Jesus Christ, our Savior, drank the veritable cup of our redemption to its very dregs. He suffered beneath the crushing wheels of divine vengeance the same pains and sufferings that we ought to have endured. He bore our sins that He might bear them away by the fact of bearing them Himself. This is the central doctrine of the gospel.¹⁶
- Q. Here Paul refers to the substitutionary atonement of Christ. He purchased for us that which we could not purchase for ourselves. The term “redeemed” or “ransomed” means “to buy someone back from slavery” or “capture” (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18–19). This truth is

¹⁴ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

¹⁵ Utley, R. J. (1997). [Paul’s First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians](#) (Vol. Volume 11, pp. 31–36). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

¹⁶ Spurgeon, C. (2013). [Galatians](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:7–14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

overwhelming—He became the curse for us! He fulfilled the law Himself, but died under its curse on our behalf (cf. Isa. 53).¹⁷

- R. Christ earned no curse. He was not forced to be cursed. Instead, He chose to become a curse for us out of sheer love for us.
 - 1. **John 10:17-18** – “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”
- S. Jesus took *for us from* men the mocking, scorning, ridiculing, beating, marring, flogging, whipping, piercing, nailing, and slaughter that we deserve. But beyond that, Jesus took *for us from* God the punishment, separation, abandonment, judgment, forsakenness, affliction, oppression, anguish, shame, guilt, sorrow, grief, and chastisement that we deserve. And we deserve all this because of our inability to be holy because of our sin.
- T. Jesus did what the law never could “so that”:
 - 1. Gentiles might receive the blessing given to Abraham.
 - 2. All who believe might receive the promised Holy Spirit.¹⁸
- U. The very things we pursue for blessing actually end up cursing us. That is, unless we pursue the person of Jesus!

The 3rd reason why Jesus is superior to the law is that

3) **Jesus came first. (15-18)**

Time to take notes

- A. This will be a shorter point because we naturally understand when the first or the original thing is the best. Take, for example, some movies and their sequels.
 - 1. Independence Day > Independence Day: Resurgence
 - 2. Jaws > Jaws 2
 - 3. Zoolander > Zoolander 2
 - 4. Speed > Speed 2
 - 5. Caddyshack > Caddyshack 2
 - 6. Grease > Grease 2
 - 7. Space Jam > Space Jam: A New Legacy
 - 8. Taken > Taken 2, Taken 3, any Liam Neeson movie since

¹⁷ Utley, R. J. (1997). [Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians](#) (Vol. Volume 11, pp. 31–36). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

¹⁸ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 597–599). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

- B.** *But Josh, you said in Genesis 2 that God gave Adam and Eve the first law. And then God gave Moses the law in the first 5 books of the Bible. I don't see anything about Jesus until the NT, until the book of Matthew.*
- C.** **Colossians 1:15-20** – [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
- D.** **Genesis 3:14-15** – The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; **he** shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise **his** heel.”
- 1.** You might be thinking, “*What does this have to do with Jesus coming first?*” Well, did you catch the “he” at the end of verse 15? That “he” certainly wasn’t Adam. Adam didn’t bruise the head of Satan. That “he” is Jesus! Before Moses, before Abraham, before any other man ever existed, before Adam, Jesus Christ was the plan by which all men would be saved. He was always the plan. He was Plan A.
- E.** Paul is now going to address the Galatians as brothers. In the preceding section he was addressing the Judaizers. But now he is directly addressing the Galatians. He is speaking with a loving urgency, yet with a peaceful, comforting tone.¹⁹
- F.** **[15] To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified. [16] Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ. [17] This is what I mean: the law, which came 430 years afterward, does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to make the promise void.**
- G.** It is a matter of common knowledge that among men a last will or testament, once legally ratified, cannot be nullified or amplified. Then wouldn’t this be true, and all the more, with respect to the covenant which the God made to Abraham and his seed? Surely, when God’s will or testament has been decreed and ratified it cannot be set aside or changed.²⁰
- 1.** This is because God is immutable. God never changes. There is no need to improve. No need to tweak anything. Listen to “Immutable” by Shai Linne for more.²¹

¹⁹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

²⁰ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

²¹ <https://open.spotify.com/track/1BlwCbn1iZyXv5XfTIEeNB?si=8f2c06d454ef4873>

- H.** The fact that the promises were made to Abraham and to all believers all down the ages who follow Abraham in his act of faith, indicates that the faith way of salvation existed before the law was given, continued through the time the law was in force, and is still in effect after the abolition of the law at the Cross. Thus, the entrance of the law did not affect the covenant at all.²²
- I.** Now if you enjoy reading the OT like me, you might be wondering about these 430 years. When did it start? Is this an exact number? Did Paul round or exaggerate? Do these years align with the OT timeline and the years mentioned there? Those critical of the Bible who would like to discredit its legitimacy and inherency will give you several reasons why Paul's 430 years is wrong. However, there is one clear explanation that aligns with the whole of Scripture.
- 1.** The period began with the final confirmation of the covenant to Jacob (given in Gen. 46:1–4). Accordingly, the 430 years went from the end of one era (the Age of Promise) to the beginning of another (the Age of Law). This seems to fit best with Exodus 12:40.²³
 - 2.** The covenant which God made with Abraham was repeated and confirmed in identical language in the promise addressed to Isaac and to Jacob. ... The reasonable character of this explanation is evident from the fact that Scripture itself definitely points in this direction, for again and again it mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in one breath.²⁴
- 3.** Finally, Paul applied the principle of the permanence of faith by affirming that a covenant made so long before could not possibly be altered by a later giving of the Law. The Law was given 430 years after the promise. When did that lengthy period of time begin?
- a.** Some have suggested it began with Abraham, in which case the 430 years included the Israelites' time of about 200 years in Canaan and about 200 years in Egypt. The Septuagint supports this view, but this conflicts with the clear statement in Exodus 12:40 that the Egyptian sojourn was 430 years.
 - b.** Another suggestion is that the period began with the confirming of the Abrahamic Covenant with Jacob (Gen. 35:9–12).
 - c.** A third and perhaps best view is that the period began with the final confirmation of the covenant to Jacob (given in Gen. 46:1–4). Accordingly, the 430 years went from the end of one era (the Age of Promise) to the beginning of another (the Age of Law). This seems to fit best with Exodus 12:40. (Gen. 15:13 and Acts 7:6, in referring to the sojourn in Egypt as 400 years, may be using rounded figures.) During that long interval God blessed the patriarchs on the basis of faith alone, and the coming of the Law could not change this in any way.
- Additionally, the Law could not alter God's dealing with Abraham on the basis of a promise because the two are fundamentally different in nature. They do not co-mingle; they cannot be combined. Instead, the inheritance (i.e., justification by faith) was given by God as an unconditional gift to those who believe. Contrary to the claim of the Judaizers, obedience

²² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

²³ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 597–599). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

²⁴ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

to the Law was not necessary to gain the inheritance. God's way of salvation has always been by grace through faith.²⁵

4. With reference to these "four hundred thirty years" there is much difference of opinion. The question has been asked: Was there not all interval of two hundred fifteen years between Abraham's call and Jacob's "descent" into Egypt (Gen. 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9)? These two hundred fifteen years plus the four hundred thirty years in Egypt (Exod. 12:40) add up to six hundred forty-five years from Abraham's call to the exodus, and the same number of years (plus a few months, Exod. 19:1) to the giving of the law (Exod. 20). If the repetition of the promise of Gen. 12:1–3 in Abraham's later years, with specific mention of the seed (Gen. 13:15; 15:5, 18; 21:12; 22:15 ff.; 24:7), be taken as the beginning of the interval between the promise and the law, some years could be subtracted from the two hundred fifteen and from the total of six hundred forty-five, but even then the question would remain: How can Paul say that the law came into existence four hundred thirty years after the covenant-promise? Was not the intervening period considerably longer? Among the answers that have been suggested are the following:
 - a. Paul errs, having been misled by the Greek Bible (LXX) which in Exod. 12:40 gives a total of four hundred thirty (or, according to another text, 435) years as the duration of the sojourn of the Israelites in Canaan and in Egypt (literally, "in Egypt-land and in Canaan-land").
 - b. The period from the giving of the promise to Abraham, as recorded in Gen. 12, to the giving of the law at Sinai, actually covered only four hundred thirty years, as is clear from such passages as Gen. 15:16; Exod. 6:15–19 [Hebrew text: verses 16–20]; and Num. 26:57–59. Of this entire period two hundred fifteen years belong to the stay in Canaan, two hundred fifteen to the sojourn in Egypt. I cannot accept either of these theories. The round figure "four hundred years," and the more exact figure "four hundred thirty years," for the sojourn in Egypt are too definitely established in Scripture as an indication of the time that the Israelites spent there to be so easily dismissed (Gen. 15:13; Acts 7:6; and Exod. 12:40 Hebrew text). Paul, thoroughly at home in the Old Testament, knew this. Besides, would not two hundred fifteen years have been too short a period for "three score and ten" people at the outset (Gen. 46:27) to grow into a nation so great that at the time of the exodus it had produced "about six hundred thousand men on foot (Exod. 12:37) besides the women and children?"
 - c. We have here a case of "intentional understatement" made by Paul so that the Galatians may say: "Paul is certainly not exaggerating, for when the law finally came into existence the covenant had been in force much longer than four hundred thirty years, hence could certainly not be annulled."
 - d. As I see it, the best answer is the following: The covenant which God made with Abraham was repeated and confirmed in identical language in the promise addressed to Isaac and to Jacob. Compare, for example, Gen. 22:18 (to Abraham), 26:4 (to Isaac), and 28:14 (to Jacob), in each of which are found the words: "And in your seed shall all the nations (in 28:14: "families") of the earth be blessed." "It may not be unreasonable to suppose that it was from such a time, at which the promise was confirmed (to Jacob) that Paul is measuring the interval which extends to the giving of the law at Sinai" (C. R. Erdman, op.

²⁵ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 597–599). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

cit., p. 69). This, as I see it, best accounts for the figure “four hundred thirty years afterward.”

The reasonable character of this explanation is evident from the fact that Scripture itself definitely points in this direction, for again and again it mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in one breath. Not only this, but in nearly every case when this occurs it is in connection with the divine promise that the three patriarchs are grouped together as if they were one (Gen. 28:13; 32:9; 48:16; 50:24; Exod. 3:16; 6:3; 32:13; Deut. 1:8; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 1 Chron. 29:18; Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26; Acts 3:13; 7:32).²⁶

- J. We already established that it's either faith OR law, not faith AND law. Paul reinforces this concept again.
- K. His point is clear: it is not conceivable that the later covenant could undo the earlier one. But that is in fact what the law would do if it could offer the inheritance on a basis other than that of a gracious promise. The teaching of the Judaizers in effect creates an unbearable conflict between the two covenants. The inheritance comes either by grace or by the works of the law; and since it comes by the former, it cannot come by the latter (cf. Rom. 4:5).²⁷
- L. **[18] For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise.**
- M. All through the book of Genesis, it is promise, promise, promise.
1. Abraham was given salvation and became a father by promise.
 2. Isaac was born according to promise and he was an heir of the promise.
 3. Jacob was an heir of the promise.
 4. The whole covenant is according to free grace and divine promise.
 5. Those who believe in Christ are heirs according to the same promise.
 6. Promise takes us out of the region of law.²⁸
- N. **K.S. Wuest**—The word gave is ... a specialized word. It denotes not merely a gift, but a gift which is given out of the spontaneous generosity of the giver's heart, with no strings tied to it. The Greek word grace ... has the same root and the same meaning. Thus the word refers, not to an undertaking based upon terms of mutual agreement, but upon the free act of one who gives something, expecting no pay for it. This at once shows the difference between law and grace. If salvation were by obedience to the law, that would mean that it would be based upon a mutual agreement between God and the sinner whereby God would obligate Himself to give salvation to any sinner who would earn it by obedience to the law.²⁹

²⁶ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). [Exposition of Galatians](#) (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.

²⁷ Silva, M. (1994). [Galatians](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 1214–1215). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

²⁸ Spurgeon, C. (2013). [Galatians](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:15-18). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

²⁹ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

- O. **K.S. Wuest** – The doctrine of the Judaizers at first glance appeared only to add some harmless new conditions to the covenant of grace. But the character of these new conditions virtually annulled it. Works added to faith would annul the entire covenant since any dependence upon works means that it is necessary to abandon faith. That means that any sinner who claims to be saved on the basis of works plus faith is still a lost sinner. ... Here is the terrible tragedy of those systems which teach that works are needed for salvation in addition to faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. They are sending millions to the Lake of Fire by their heretical teaching.³⁰

Challenge:

As a father, one of the more frightening things that can happen in the middle of the night is for you to wake up to your children screaming, “Daddy!” While this can be annoying when one of my kids just needs to be put back under the covers or, like last night, her pillow fell off the bed, if we take a moment to reflect on what’s happening, there is beauty in that blood-curdling scream.

In that dark moment of the night, my children haven’t woken up afraid and their first instinct is “Daddy!” They’re convinced that Daddy will keep his promises to keep them safe, to comfort them, to calm them, to be with them. To be their shelter in the storm.

So it is with God, and abundantly more so! In darkest night, in the worst times, in God there is security, safety, and assurance! Paul has told us that everything Abraham had was given to him by a promise from God. But this promise wasn’t just for Abraham and his family.

Romans 4:20-25 – No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

As we heard last week, Paul endured hard labor, imprisonments, countless beatings by lashes and rods, often near death, stonings, shipwrecks, constant journeys, danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from his own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold and exposure, anxiety for all the churches. Yet, this same man proclaimed this amazing truth:

Romans 8:38-39 – For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

That’s deep assurance. That’s deep faith. That’s what it looks like to be fully convinced that God will keep His promises.

So, here’s the challenge:

³⁰ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [Wuest’s word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Do you trust the promises of God? Are you fully convinced that God will do all that He said He will? It is natural to trust yourself, but that is far inferior to trusting in Jesus. Trusting in Jesus is the only way to have assurance of your soul.

Immediately after the Fall of Adam, God made a promise to him. That promise was fulfilled in the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus. And every one of God's promises ever since has been fulfilled in the birth, death, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Will you trust His promises? No matter where you find yourself today, will you trust His promises?

He will never leave you. He will never forsake you. Do not be frightened. Do not be dismayed. The Lord is with you wherever you are.³¹

God is worthy of your trust. God is worthy of your faith. No matter what's going on in your life, put your faith in Jesus today.

Additional Commentary

Spurgeon's Application

Examine Yourself to See Whether You Are of the Works of the Law

I pray that everyone may examine himself to see whether he is of the works of the law. Are we legal in our feelings? Are we relying upon the self and its doings? Does anyone among us feel that there is not a more deserving person than himself? Because he is a good churchgoer, does he think himself accepted by the Lord? Because of confirmation or baptism or attendance at the sacrament, does he hope to be saved? Because of his decent and respectable life, does he reckon himself just? If such is your hope, you are "of the works of the law," and it is not my word, but the word of the Lord, that you are under the curse. Think of this, you who are so very good, so free from fault! There is nothing else for you but the curse. You are not the same as those men who are mentioned in the Scriptures as justified. They lived by faith, and you hope to live by works. As you are not the same, you will not come to the same end. It is a thought that vexes you, and possibly even makes you angry, that you should be under the curse—but it will be well for you to know the truth, however black it looks. Nothing remains but a fearful looking forward to judgment. For where there is even now a curse, what else can there be but fiery indignation at the last?

Unfortunately, I cannot bring this most searching truth home to the conscience. It requires a miracle of grace to get this truth into the heart of man and to make him feel the full terror of it. It is so repugnant to our proud human nature that we incline to any error that will obscure it. Come, Holy Spirit, with your divine light, and flash this truth upon the sinner's eyes in such a way that he must see it!

Condemned by the Law, Acquitted by Grace

Let me put two questions to you. First: Have you ever been condemned by the law in your own conscience? "No," you say. "I do not know what you mean." Of course you do not, and you have therefore no true hope that you are saved. But I will ask you again: Have you ever been condemned by the law in your conscience? Did you ever stand before God's bar, like a poor condemned criminal before his judge, ready for execution?

³¹ Joshua 1:5, 9

Have you ever felt yourself to be a worthless, ruined, sin-condemned, law-condemned, conscience-condemned sinner? Have you ever fallen down before God and said, “Lord, you are just. Though you slay me, I will say that you are just, for I am sinful and deserve your wrath”? As the Lord lives, if you have never felt and spoken like that, you are still a stranger to His grace. The man who acquits himself, God condemns; and if the law condemns you, God will acquit you. As long as you have felt yourself condemned, you may know that Christ died for condemned ones and shed His blood for sinners. But if you say, “I am good, I am righteous, I am honorable,” then be warned of this: your armor is the weaving of a spider, and it shall be broken in pieces. The garments of your righteousness are light as gossamer and shall be blown away by the breath of the Eternal in that day when He shall unspin all that nature has ever woven. Take heed of this: If you have never been condemned by the law, you have never been acquitted by grace.

Now I will ask you another question: Have you ever felt yourself to be acquitted by grace? If you have never felt your chains fall off you, then your chains are still on you—for when God breaks our chains off us, we know ourselves to be free. If a man had been a galley slave, chained to an oar for many a year, and if he were set free, do you think that he would not know whether he were free or not? Do you think that a slave, who had been toiling in bondage for years, when once he trod the land of freedom would not know it? Or if a man, who has been dead in his grave, were to be awakened to life, do you think he would not know it? He will know himself to be alive as the emancipated slave will know that he is a free man. Most of us, when God set us free from our prison, leaped for joy. We remember that the mountains and the hills broke forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field clapped their hands. I ask you again: Did you ever feel yourself to be forgiven? If you say, “No,” then you have no reason to think that you are forgiven. If the Lord has never whispered in your ear, “I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions” (Isa 43:25), you have no right to think yourself pardoned. Examine yourself, and know whether you have been condemned by the law and whether you have been acquitted by grace!

Live by Faith, Not by Rules or Experience

I fear that some of my brothers and sisters try to grow in spiritual life by adopting methods that are not of faith. Some think that they will set themselves rules of self-denial or extra devotion—these plans are lawful, but they are not in themselves effective. Vows may be observed mechanically, and rules obeyed formally, and yet the heart may be drifting away yet further from the Lord. Indeed, these vows and rules may be a means of deluding us into the vain belief that all is well, whereas we are nearing to spiritual shipwreck. I have found in my own spiritual life that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular morning and evening prayer is one that is indispensable to a believer’s life, but the prescribing of the length of prayer, and the constrained remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may lead to bondage and strangle prayer rather than assist it. To say I will humble myself at such a time, and rejoice at another season, is nearly as much an affectation as when the preacher writes in the margin of his sermon, “Cry here,” “Smile here.” If the man preached his sermon rightly, he would be sure to cry in the right place and to smile at a suitable moment. When the spiritual life is sound, it produces prayer at the right time, and humiliation of soul and sacred joy spring forth spontaneously apart from rules and vows. The kind of religion that makes itself to order by the almanac and turns out its emotions like bricks from a machine—weeping on Good Friday and rejoicing two days afterwards, measuring its motions by the moon—is too artificial to be worthy of your imitation. The liberty of the spiritual life is a grand thing. And where that liberty is maintained constantly and the energy is kept up, you will need much faith, for the fading of faith will be the withering of devotion. Faith enriches the soil of the heart. Faith fills our treasuries with the choicest gold and loads our tables with the daintiest food for our souls. Faith in Jesus, the Savior, faith in the heavenly Father, faith in the Holy Spirit—this we must have, or we perish like foam upon the waters.

As the other side of all this, some Christians appear to try to live by experience. If they feel happy today, they say they are saved; but if they feel unhappy tomorrow, they conclude that they are lost. If they feel at one

moment a deep and profound calm spreading over their spirits, then they are greatly elevated. But if the winds blow and the waves beat high, then they suppose that they are not the Lord's people. Ah, miserable state of suspense! To live by feeling is a dying life. You do not know where you are or what you are if your feelings are to be the barometer of your spiritual condition. A simple faith in Christ will enable you to remain calm even when your feelings are the reverse of happy, to remain confident when your emotions are far from ecstatic. If, indeed, we are saved by Jesus Christ, then the foundation of our salvation does not lie within us, but in that crucified Man who now reigns in glory. When He changes, then what changes must happen to us! But since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, why do we need to be so soon removed from our steadfastness? Believe in Jesus when you cannot find a spark of grace within yourself. Cast yourself as a sinner into the Savior's arms when you cannot think a good thought or uplift a good desire. Have confident faith in Jesus at all times, for if you believe in Him you are saved and cannot be condemned. However good or bad your state, this shall not affect the question. You believe; therefore, you will be saved.

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3:7–8. Striking a tremendous blow at the Judaizers, Paul linked the past with the present and declared that just as **Abraham** was saved **by faith** so were those who now claimed to be his **children** (*huioi*; lit., “sons”). Abraham and his spiritual descendants, both Jews and Gentiles, have all been declared righteous by faith. Moreover, this conclusion is in harmony with **the Scripture** which states that **all nations will be blessed through Abraham** (cf. Gen. 12:3). Thus the justification of uncircumcised Gentiles was anticipated in the universal aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant when God **announced the gospel** (lit., “the good news”) **... to Abraham**. It should not be overlooked that Paul referred to Scripture speaking as though God were speaking, so it can rightly be affirmed that what the Bible says, God says. This and similar verses (e.g., John 10:35b; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20–21) provide important support for believing in the absolute and total inspiration and authority of Scripture.

3:9. The apostle concluded this phase of his argument by stating that though provision was made for “all nations” (v. 8), only **those who have faith** receive the blessing of justification. Thus Paul drew a distinction between God's provision and human appropriation.

3. by the effect of the law (3:10–12). Having established the fact that justification is by faith from the experiences of the Galatians and of Abraham, Paul then showed the illogic of reliance on the Law.

3:10–11. Contrary to what the Judaizers taught, the Law could not justify; it could only condemn. Paul quoted Deuteronomy 27:26 to show that **the Law** demanded perfection and that **a curse** was attached to failure to keep any part of it. The breaking of only one command even once brings a person under the curse; and since everybody fails at some point, all are under the curse. The proposition that a person can gain divine acceptance by human effort is therefore totally destroyed. Quoting the Old Testament again, Paul showed that even during the dispensation of **Law** legal obedience was not the basis for a **justified standing before God ... because**, as the Prophet Habakkuk wrote, **The righteous will live by faith** (Hab. 2:4).

3:12. But perhaps **faith** and **the Law** could be combined; perhaps both are needed. Quoting again from the Old Testament Paul proved this to be scripturally impossible. Law and faith are mutually exclusive. The basic principle of the Law is found in Leviticus 18:5: **The man who does these things will live by them**. Only perfect performance could win divine approval under the Law, but since that was not achievable the Law could only condemn a person (cf. James 2:10) and cause him to cast himself on God in faith.

³² Spurgeon, C. (2013). [Galatians](#). (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:7–14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

4. by the work of Christ (3:13–14).

3:13. The positive side of Paul's argument emphasized that there is hope for all who have broken the Law and are therefore under its curse. That hope is not in man but in **Christ** who **redeemed us from the curse of the Law**. But how did Christ redeem (*exēgorasen*, lit., "buy out of slavery"; cf. 4:5; see chart "New Testament Words for Redemption" at Mark 10:45) man? The answer is **by becoming a curse for us**. This is a strong declaration of substitutionary redemption whereby Christ took the penalty of all guilty lawbreakers on Himself. Thus the "curse of the Law" was transferred from sinners to Christ, the sinless One (cf. 1 Peter 3:18), and He delivered people from it. The confirming quotation from Deuteronomy 21:23 refers to the fact that in Old Testament times criminals were executed (normally by stoning) and then displayed on a stake or post to show God's divine rejection. When Christ was crucified, it was evidence He had come under the curse of God. The manner of His death was a great obstacle to faith for Jews until they realized the curse He bore was for them (cf. Isa. 53).

3:14. Two purposes for Christ's redemptive work are given, each introduced by the Greek conjunction *hina*, "in order that" (cf. 4:5): (1) **Gentiles** might receive **the blessing given to Abraham**; as already stated (3:8) this is a reference not to personal or national blessings but to the promised blessing of justification apart from works of the Law, available to all who believe; (2) all who thus believe **might receive the promise of the Spirit**, that is, the Holy Spirit, who was promised (cf. v. 2). Again the apostle emphasized that salvation and sanctification come **by faith**, not by works.

5. by the permanence of faith (3:15–18).

3:15–16. Even if Paul's opponents admitted that Abraham was justified by faith, those Judaizers might have argued that the Law, coming at a later time, entirely changed the basis for achieving salvation. To refute this, Paul declared that just as a properly executed Roman **covenant** (or will) cannot arbitrarily be **set aside** or changed (probably reference to ancient Gr. law), so the promises of God are immutable. Further, **the promises ... spoken to Abraham and to his seed** were not fulfilled before the giving of the Law. Rather, they found fulfillment in Christ and are in effect forever. The blessing of justification by faith is therefore permanent and could not be changed by the Law. The stress on **seed** (cf. Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 24:7), not **seeds**, was made simply to remind the readers that the faithful in Israel had always recognized that blessing would ultimately come through a single individual, the Messiah (cf. Gal. 3:19). And Matthew declared Christ to be *the* Son of Abraham and the true Heir to the First Covenant's promises (Matt. 1:1). 3:17–18. Finally, Paul applied the principle of the permanence of faith by affirming that a covenant made so long before could not possibly be altered by a later giving of the Law. **The Law** was given **430 years** after the promise. When did that lengthy period of time begin? Some have suggested it began with Abraham, in which case the 430 years included the Israelites' time of about 200 years in Canaan and about 200 years in Egypt. The Septuagint supports this view, but this conflicts with the clear statement in Exodus 12:40 that the Egyptian sojourn was 430 years. Another suggestion is that the period began with the confirming of the Abrahamic Covenant with Jacob (Gen. 35:9–12).

A third and perhaps best view is that the period began with the final confirmation of the covenant to Jacob (given in Gen. 46:1–4). Accordingly the 430 years went from the end of one era (the Age of Promise) to the beginning of another (the Age of Law). This seems to fit best with Exodus 12:40. (Gen. 15:13 and Acts 7:6, in referring to the sojourn in Egypt as 400 years, may be using rounded figures.) During that long interval God blessed the patriarchs on the basis of faith alone, and the coming of the Law could not change this in any way. Additionally **the Law** could not alter God's dealing with **Abraham** on the basis of **a promise** because the two are fundamentally different in nature. They do not co-mingle; they cannot be combined. Instead, **the inheritance** (i.e., justification by faith) was given by **God** as an unconditional gift to those who believe. Contrary to the claim of the Judaizers, obedience to the Law was not necessary to gain the inheritance. God's way of salvation has always been by grace through faith.

3:7 sons of Abraham Refers to those who express faith like Abraham—not Abraham’s biological sons. Abraham represents the model of faith for all believers, both Jews and non-Jewish people (Gentiles).

3:8 scripture In this context, this refers to what is now called the ot.

God would justify the Gentiles by faith Paul argues here that his gospel message—the justification of Gentiles through faith apart from the law—was always part of God’s plan. Elsewhere, Paul refers to this as a mystery (Rom 16:25; Eph 1:9; 3:9). Inclusion in the people of God would occur by faith in Christ, the promised seed of Abraham (Gal 3:7–8).

Faith

In you all the nations will be blessed This quotation comes from Gen 12:3. In the context of Galatians, this blessing is the Spirit and the gift of justification by faith.

3:9 who have faith are blessed together with Abraham Paul emphasizes that faith, not ethnicity, is the determining factor—which means that Gentile believers like the Galatians can share in Abraham’s blessing.

3:10 law are under a curse Paul draws on Deut 27:26 and 28:58 to show that every person—whether Jew or Gentile—who relies on works of the law is under the curse of the law. That curse stands in direct contrast to the blessing of Abraham that comes to those who trust God—including Gentiles (Gal 3:6–9).

for it is written A standard formula used to introduce a quotation from Scripture.

abide by all the things that are written Paul quotes Deut 27:26 to inform the Galatians that they must obey the entire law, not just portions of it. Failure to do so results in curse, not blessing.

3:11 by the law See Gal 2:16 and note.

who is righteous will live by faith Paul’s quotation from Hab 2:4 provides evidence that justification by faith was always part of God’s plan of salvation. People were not saved by the law in the ot only to be saved by faith in the nt—salvation has always come by faith. Also important to Paul’s argument is that Hab 2:4 does not distinguish between Gentiles and Jews in reference to righteousness. Faith is what matters to God—not a person’s ethnicity.

3:12 the law is not from faith This phrase means that the law is based on doing, not trusting. Paul’s point here is not that the law fails to justify those who do its works, but that God did not intend for the law to make people righteous. Paul cites Lev 18:5 in this verse to show that Scripture itself teaches that the law’s function is to provide a way to live obediently under God’s rule (see Rom 10:5; compare Luke 10:27–28).

3:13 Christ redeemed us from the curse God’s provision through Christ’s death on the cross enables believers to no longer live under the threat of condemnation.

Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree This quotation is from Deut 21:23. When Christ became a curse for us through His loving sacrifice on the cross, He accomplished redemption and atonement for those who believe.

Jesus’ Fulfillment of Old Testament Prophecy Table

3:14 blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles It has always been God’s plan to provide righteousness based on faith, as modeled by Abraham.

receive the promise of the Spirit through faith Paul began this section with rhetorical questions implying that the Galatians had received the Spirit through faith (Gal 3:2–5). Given this, the Galatians had already experienced the fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham.

3:15 according to a human perspective Paul uses a common situation to help the Galatians understand the argument of vv. 1–14.

³³ Campbell, D. K. (1985). [Galatians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 597–599). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

covenant of a man has been ratified In Paul's example, the covenant refers to the promise that God made to Abraham (before God instructed Abraham to be circumcised; Gen 17). This covenant was ratified not by circumcision, but by God Himself (Gen 15:9–21).

3:16 and to your descendant The promise of blessing and the Spirit is given to Christ through Abraham. This narrow application of the promise then expands to all who believe, leading to one people of faith descended from Abraham (including Jews and Gentiles).

3:17 four hundred and thirty years Refers to the Israelites' period of slavery in Egypt. After the exodus (Exod 12:40–41), Yahweh gave the law to the Israelites in the wilderness (Exod 20–24).

in order to nullify the promise Paul's point is that the law does not alter anything about God's earlier covenant with Abraham (Gen 15:12–21).

3:18 it is no longer from the promise The law is not, and never was intended to be, the means by which believers experience their inheritance as God's children.

34

3:7 “be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham” This statement is the major thrust of this contextual unit. This declaration would have appalled the false teachers (cf. 3:14, 29; Rom. 2:28–29; 14:16–17). This same truth is alluded to in the message of John the Baptist (cf. Luke 3:8) and specifically in the words of Jesus in John 8:37–59. One can tell Abraham's sons by how they live, not by who their parents are!

3:8 “The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith” This Hebraic idiom affirms the full inspiration of the OT. In this verse the Scripture is personified twice.

The salvation of all humans has always been God's plan (cf. Gen. 3:15). There is only one God and all humans are made in His image (Gen. 1:26; 5:1; 9:6); therefore, He loves everyone (cf. Ezek. 18:32; John 3:16; 1 Tim. 2:4; 2 Pet. 3:9). The universal love of God which includes the Gentiles is clearly seen in Isaiah (cf. 2:2–4; 45:21–25; 56:1–8; 60:1–3), Jonah, John 3:16, and Eph. 2:11–3:13.

© **“All the nations will be blessed in you”** Here Paul quotes God's promise to Abraham, recorded in Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4. The Hebrew verb form may be (1) a PASSIVE form, “will be blessed” (cf. Gen. 18:18; 28:14) or (2) a MIDDLE REFLEXIVE form, “will bless themselves” (cf. Gen. 22:16–18; 26:4). However, in the Septuagint and in Paul's quote, it is PASSIVE, not MIDDLE. In this text Paul combined Gen. 12:3 with 18:18 from the Septuagint.

3:9

The preposition “*syn*,” meaning “joint participation with,” shows the close identification between Abraham and all those who have faith in God. The description of Abraham as “faithful” or “believing” emphasizes that Abraham believed God by trusting in His promise. NT faith also means trusting in the trustworthiness of God and His promises. However, remember that Abraham did not have perfect faith, he too, tried to help God fulfill His promise by having a natural child with Hagar. It is not mankind's perfect faith, but the object of their faith.

3:10

In the next step in the argument, Paul moved from Abraham to the strict legal requirements of the Mosaic Law. The argument challenges the bad theology of the Judaizers. Trusting in adherence to the Law characterized the Pharisees of Jesus' day (cf. Rom. 10:2–5). Paul asserted that self-effort to obtain right standing is only a road to damnation (cf. 2:16). Paul knew this road well! Although Paul was primarily referring to the Mosaic Law, the referent is “law” in general or human effort by means of some external moral standard. Which standard is not important—the essential truth is that fallen mankind cannot claim

³⁴ Barry, J. D., Mangum, D., Brown, D. R., Heiser, M. S., Custis, M., Ritzema, E., ... Bomar, D. (2012, 2016). [Faithlife Study Bible](#) (Ga 3:7–18). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

that their moral accomplishment deserves acceptance by God. We call this approach self-righteous legalism. It is alive and well and thrives among religious people!

© **“for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to perform them’ ”** This alludes to Deut. 27:26 and 28:58ff. Although the word “all” does not appear in Deut. 27:26, but it does appear in 28:58. The curse of the Law is alluded to in John 7:49. If one breaks the law in one way, even just once, he falls under the condemnation of the Law, (cf. James 2:10; Gal. 5:3). The OT Law became a death sentence for all humans (Col. 2:14). God said “the soul that sins, it will surely die.” All of the children of Adam have sinned! The Law, as a means of right standing with God, is only applicable to the one who never commits sin. The problem with this is that all have sinned and have come short of the glory of God (cf. Rom. 3:9–18, 22, 23; 11:32).

3:11

Here Paul quoted Hab. 2:4 (cf. Rom. 1:17 and Heb. 10:38). Rather an ambiguous verse, Hab. 2:4 has been understood in several different ways: (1) the Masoretic Text has “the righteous shall live by his faith/faithfulness;” (2) the Septuagint has “the righteous shall live on the basis of my (God’s) faithfulness;” and (3) Paul’s use favors faith-based righteousness through Christ versus works-based righteousness through the Mosaic Law. There may be a veiled allusion to Gen. 15:6 because both Hab. 2:4 and Gen. 15:6 have the same two key terms: faith and righteousness.

3:12

Here is the basic assumption! In the matter of right standing (salvation) with God, the choice is faith *or* law, not faith *and* law. The Judaizers had turned faith in God into rules for God. Even in the OT the individual Israelite was only right by personal faith in YHWH. Never were all Israelites right with God because of their descent from Abraham.

© **“on the contrary, ‘He who practices them shall live by them’ ”** This quotation comes from Lev. 18:5 (cf. Rom. 10:5), stressing the importance of performing the demands of God. However, the OT is a history of mankind’s inability to perform the OT Law. Therefore, another way of salvation was introduced, which in reality, had always been God’s means of salvation: not human effort, but faith. Salvation by grace through faith is the essence of the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:22–36; Eph. 2:8–9).

3:13 “Christ redeemed us” Here Paul refers to the substitutionary atonement of Christ. He purchased for us that which we could not purchase for ourselves. The term “redeemed” or “ransomed” means “to buy someone back from slavery” or “capture” (cf. Acts 20:28; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 1 Pet. 1:18–19).

SPECIAL TOPIC: RANSOM/REDEEM

I. OLD TESTAMENT

A. There are primarily two Hebrew legal terms which convey this concept.

1. *Gaal*, which basically means “to free” by means of a price paid. A form of the term *go’el* adds to the concept of a personal intermediary, usually a family member (i.e. kinsman redeemer). This cultural aspect of the right to buy back objects, animals, land (cf. Lev. 25, 27), or relatives (cf. Ruth 4:15; Isa. 29:22) is transferred theologically to YHWH’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt (cf. Exod. 6:6; 15:13; Ps. 74:2; 77:15; Jer. 31:11). He becomes “the redeemer” (cf. Job 19:25; Ps. 19:14; 78:35; Prov. 23:1; Isa. 41:14; 43:14; 44:6, 24; 47:4; 48:17; 49:7, 26; 54:5, 8; 59:20; 60:16; 63:16; Jer. 50:34).

2. *Padah*, which basically means “to deliver” or “to rescue”

a. the redemption of the first born (Exod. 13:13, 14 and Num. 18:15–17)

b. Physical redemption is contrasted with spiritual redemption (Ps. 49:7, 8, 15)

c. YHWH will redeem Israel from their sin and rebellion (Ps. 130:7–8)

B. The theological concept involves three related items

1. There is a need, a bondage, a forfeiting, an imprisonment.

- a. physical
- b. social
- c. spiritual (cf. Ps. 130:8)
- 2. A price must be paid for freedom, release, and restoration.
 - a. of the nation, Israel (cf. Deut. 7:8)
 - b. of the individual (cf. Job 19:25–27; 33:28)
- 3. Someone must act as intermediary and benefactor. In *gaal* this one is usually a family member or near kin (i.e. *go'el*).
- 4. YHWH often describes Himself in familial terms.
 - a. Father
 - b. Husband
 - c. Near Kin

Redemption was secured through YHWH's personal agency; a price was paid, and redemption was achieved!

II. NEW TESTAMENT

A. There are several terms used to convey the theological concept of redemption.

1. *Agorazō* (cf. 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Pet. 2:1; Rev. 5:9; 14:3). This is a commercial term which reflects a price paid for something. We are blood-bought people who do not control our own lives. We belong to Christ.

2. *Exagorazō* (cf. Gal. 3:13; 4:5; Eph. 5:16; Col. 4:5). This is also a commercial term. It reflects Jesus' substitutionary death on our behalf. Jesus bore the "curse" of a performance-based law (i.e. Mosaic Law), which sinful humans could not accomplish. He bore the curse (cf. Deut. 21:23) for us all! In Jesus, God's justice and love merge into full forgiveness, acceptance, and access!

3. *Luō*, "to set free"

a. *Lutron*, "a price paid" (cf. Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). These are powerful words from Jesus' own mouth concerning the purpose of His coming, to be the Savior of the world by paying a sin-debt He did not owe (cf. John 1:29).

b. *Lutroō*, "to release"

(1) to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21)

(2) to give Himself to redeem and purify a people (Titus 2:14)

(3) to be a sinless substitute (1 Pet. 1:18–19)

c. *Lutrōsis*, "redemption, deliverance, or liberation"

(1) Zacharias' prophecy about Jesus (Luke 1:68)

(2) Anna's praise to God for Jesus (Luke 2:38)

(3) Jesus' better, once offered sacrifice (Heb. 9:12)

4. *Apolytrōsis* (cf. Luke 21:28; Rom. 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 1:7, 14; 4:30; Col. 1:14; Heb. 9:15)

5. *Antilytron* (cf. 1 Tim. 2:6). This is a crucial text (as is Titus 2:14), which links release to Jesus' substitutionary death on the cross. He is the one and only acceptable sacrifice; the one who dies for "all" (cf. John 1:29; 3:16–17; 4:42; 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:10; Titus 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 2:2; 4:14).

B. The theological concept in the NT implies

1. Mankind is enslaved to sin (cf. John 8:34; Rom. 3:10–18; 6:23).

2. Mankind's bondage to sin has been revealed by the OT Mosaic Law (cf. Gal. 3) and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount (cf. Matt. 5–7). Human performance has become a death sentence (cf. Col. 2:14).

3. Jesus, the sinless lamb of God, has come and died in our place (cf. John 1:29; 2 Cor. 5:21). We have been purchased from sin so that we might serve God (cf. Rom. 6).
4. By implication both YHWH and Jesus are “near kin” who act on our behalf. This continues the familial metaphors (i.e. father, husband, son, brother, near kin).
5. Redemption was not a price paid to Satan (Medieval theology), but the reconciliation of God’s word and God’s justice with God’s love and full provision in Christ. At the cross peace was restored, human rebellion was forgiven, the image of God in mankind is now fully functional again in intimate fellowship!
6. There is still a future aspect of redemption (cf. Rom. 8:23; Eph. 1:14; 4:30), which involves our resurrection bodies and physical intimacy with the Triune God.

© **“from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us”** This verse quotes Deut. 21:23 which was used to describe someone who had already been killed and was then publicly hanged or impaled as an act of public humiliation. This inappropriate burial was interpreted as a curse by God (cf. Isa. 53:4, 10). Jesus’ crucifixion as a sinless substitute meant that He took the curse of the Law on Himself for us (cf. 2 Cor. 5:21). This truth is overwhelming—He became the curse for us! He fulfilled the law Himself, but died under its curse on our behalf (cf. Isa. 53).

3:14 The two PURPOSE CLAUSES in verse 14 serve to describe the purpose of God in calling Abraham: (1) to bring the heathen into the blessings enjoyed by Israel through the promise to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:3; Gal. 3:8–9); and (2) that by faith all might receive the Spirit which was the promised sign of the New Age. The experience of Pentecost was a sign to the Apostles that the New Age had dawned. Receiving the Spirit is a metaphor for salvation (cf. 3:1; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; Rom. 8:9).

3:15–17

Paul proceeds with his argument by means of a common human illustration. He uses a term in Koine Greek which may be translated as either “will” or “testament,” in connection with one’s inheritance. In Classical Greek it is translated “covenant.” In the Septuagint this term is always used of a covenant between God and man. Due to this ambiguity, Paul used this legal metaphor as an example for God’s covenanting or contracting with Abraham and his descendants. This contract cannot be changed! The same type of argumentation using the concept of a last will and testament is found in Heb. 9:15–20.

SPECIAL TOPIC: COVENANT

The OT term *berith*, covenant, is not easy to define. There is no matching VERB in Hebrew. All attempts to derive an etymological definition have proved unconvincing. However, the obvious centrality of the concept has forced scholars to examine the word usage to attempt to determine its functional meaning.

Covenant is the means by which the one true God deals with His human creation. The concept of covenant, treaty, or agreement is crucial in understanding the biblical revelation. The tension between God’s sovereignty and human free-will are clearly balanced in the concept of covenant (i.e. conditional covenants). Some covenants are based exclusively on God’s character and actions (i.e. unconditional covenants).

1. creation itself (cf. Gen. 1–2)
2. the call of Abraham (cf. Gen. 12)
3. the covenant with Abraham (cf. Gen. 15)
4. the preservation of and promise to Noah (cf. Gen. 6–9)

However, the very nature of covenant demands a response (i.e. conditional covenants)

1. Adam must obey God and not eat of the tree in the midst of Eden
2. Abraham must leave his family, follow God, and believe in future descendants by faith
3. Noah must build a huge boat far from water and gather the animals
4. Moses brought the Israelites out of Egypt and received specific guidelines for religious and social life with promises of blessings and cursings (cf. Deut. 27–28)

This same tension involving God’s relationship to humanity (i.e. conditional covenants) is addressed in the “new covenant.” The tension can be clearly seen in comparing Ezek. 18:13 with Ezek. 36:26–27. Is the covenant based on God’s gracious actions (i.e. Ezek. 36) or mandated human response (i.e. Ezek. 18)? This is the burning issue of the Old Covenant and the New. The goals of both are the same: (1) the restoration of fellowship lost in Gen. 3 and (2) the establishment of a righteous people who reflect God’s character.

The new covenant of Jer. 31:31–34 solves the tension by removing *human performance* as the means of attaining acceptance. God’s law becomes an internal desire instead of an external performance. The goal of a godly, righteous people remains the same, but the methodology changes. Fallen mankind (cf. Gen. 3) proved inadequate to be God’s reflected image. The problem was not the covenant, but human sinfulness and weakness (cf. Rom. 7; Gal. 3).

The same tension between OT unconditional and conditional covenants remains in the NT. Salvation is absolutely free in the finished work of Jesus Christ, but it requires repentance and faith (both initially and continually). It is both a legal pronouncement and a call to Christlikeness, an indicative statement of acceptance and an imperative to holiness! Believers are not saved *by* their performance, but *unto* obedience (cf. Eph. 2:8–10). Godly living becomes *the evidence* of salvation, *not the means of* salvation. This tension is clearly seen in Hebrews.

3:15

Paul responds to the Judaizers’ claim that the Mosaic Law superseded the Abrahamic promise. The promise to Abraham in Gen. 15 was ratified by both God’s promise and a sacrifice in which Abraham had no covenant responsibilities, only faith (cf. Gen. 15:12–21).

3:16 “the promises” “Promises” is PLURAL because of the number of times God repeats His promise to Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:1–3; 13:14–18; 15:1–5, 12–18; 17:1–14; 22:9–19).

© **“his seed”** The use of “seed” is a word play on a common idiom for descendant. Although SINGULAR in form, it can be singular or plural in meaning. In this case, Paul used it as a reference to Jesus, not Isaac—thus, God’s promise was not linked to the Mosaic Covenant. “Seed” could be understood in the corporate sense of God’s children by faith, like Abraham.

3:17 “the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later” Paul gives another reason for the superiority of the Abrahamic promise, it preceded the Mosaic Law. There has been much discussion about the number four hundred and thirty years, which appears inaccurate when compared with the reference of Exod. 12:40 to the Egyptian captivity’s duration as 430 years. Some scholars use the Septuagint translation and the Samaritan Pentateuch of Exod. 12:40 which adds “and in the land of Canaan.” Genesis 15:13 and Acts 7:6 record that Israel was in captivity in Egypt for 400 years. Others assert, however, that the promise was not to Abraham alone, but was repeated to all of the Patriarchs, and simply refers to the time from the last repeated promise to the patriarchs to the time of Moses’

receiving the Law. In context, Paul's explanation concerns not the duration of time, but the long interval between the promise to Abraham and the Law to Moses.

© **“as to nullify the promise”** This word is translated many different ways, but its main meaning is to make something useless, null and void, inoperative, powerless, but necessarily non-existent, destroyed, or annihilated.

This word (*katargeō*) is translated so many different ways but its main meaning is to make something useless, null and void, inoperative, powerless but not necessarily non-existent or destroyed.

SPECIAL TOPIC: KATARGEŌ

This (*katargeō*) was one of Paul's favorite words. He used it at least twenty-five times but it has a very wide semantic range.

- A. It's basic etymological root is from *argos* which meant
 - 1. inactive
 - 2. idle
 - 3. unused
 - 4. useless
 - 5. inoperative
- B. The compound with *kata* was used to express
 - 1. inactivity
 - 2. uselessness
 - 3. that which was cancelled
 - 4. that which was done away with
 - 5. that which was completely inoperative
- C. It is used once in Luke to describe a fruitless, therefore useless, tree (cf. Luke 13:7).
 - D. Paul uses it in a figurative sense in two primary ways:
 - 1. God making inoperative things hostile to mankind
 - a. mankind's sin nature—Rom. 6:6
 - b. the Mosaic law in relation to God's promise of “the seed”—Rom. 4:14; Gal. 3:17; 5:4, 11; Eph. 2:15
 - c. spiritual forces—1 Cor. 15:24
 - d. the “man of lawlessness”—2 Thess. 2:8
 - e. physical death—1 Cor. 15:26; 2 Tim. 1:16 (Heb. 2:14)
 - 2. God replacing the old (covenant, age) for the new
 - a. 1. things related to the Mosaic Law—Rom. 3:3, 31; 4:14; 2 Cor. 3:7, 11, 13, 14
 - b. analogy of marriage used of Law—Rom. 7:2, 6
 - c. the things of this age—1 Cor. 13:8, 10, 11
 - d. this body—1 Cor. 6:11
 - e. leaders of this age—1 Cor. 1:28; 2:6

This word is translated many different ways, but its main meaning is to make something useless, null and void, inoperative, powerless, but necessarily non-existent, destroyed, or annihilated.

3:18

This PERFECT MIDDLE VERB emphasizes what God Himself has done in the past with results that abide into the present. The basic root of “granted” is “gift” or “grace.” It emphasizes the free nature of God's acts, solely on the grounds of His character through the work of the Messiah.

7 the ones who have faith Those who are justified by faith in Jesus, those whose faith is counted for righteousness, they are the children of believing Abraham—not those who are under the law of Moses, not those who trust in works and boasters in circumcision. These, even among the Jews, are but His children by the power of nature, to whom no more belongs than to Ishmael. Abraham was the father of the faithful, or believing. In his grandest aspect he is not the sire of a rebellious nation, but of the believing seed. Abraham is the father of the believers, and believers are all the children of Abraham.

Both Strong and Weak Are Saved by Faith

Preaching Themes: Faith, Salvation

Remember that the safety of the weak and of the strong believer rests upon the same foundation. On board one of the fine steamboats that flit between England and America there is a strong, hardy, vigorous man. Will he get to America safely? Yes, if the ship does. But yonder is a little child that cannot walk and has to be carried in its mother's arms. Will it reach America safely? Yes, if the ship does. Both the robust man and the crying infant, all being well, will reach their journey's end—if the ship does. Their safety lies in the same place. Their condition does not affect their transit. But is there no difference between the child and the man? Assuredly, there is a great deal of difference as to many things, but there is no difference about the fact that their passage across the ocean depends upon the steamboat rather than upon themselves. The strong man could not walk across the Atlantic any more than the child could. They are alike incompetent for the passage if left alone, and alike capable of it if placed on board the same vessel.

So if you meet with a great saint, say to yourself, "My honored brother will get to heaven through Jesus Christ. And I, a poor babe in grace, shall get to heaven in the same way."

sons of Abraham Race has nothing to do with this matter; an end has been put to all that. God is not the God of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles. Here is a new race whose distinction is not that they were born of blood, or of the will of the flesh, or of the will of man, but by the will of God. This is the token by which they are known: They believe God, and it is accounted to them for righteousness—even as it was accounted to Abraham.

8 the good news That is the gospel. We are blessed by it because we believe in Christ, and so become the children of believing Abraham.

to Abraham The apostle tells us that the gospel was preached to Abraham. The true gospel is no new thing; it is as old as the hills. It was heard in Eden before man was driven from the garden, and it has since been repeated in sundry ways and in diverse places, even to this day. Oh, that its very antiquity would lead men to venerate it, and then to listen to its voice! It is "gospel," or good news—the best of news for fallen men. Oh, that they would receive it with gladness!

in you That is, "In you, because you are the father of believers. You are a sort of head and prototype of men who believe in me. So, 'In you all the nations will be blessed.' And in your seed, too, as you will be the father of the Christ, all nations will be blessed."

³⁵ Utey, R. J. (1997). *Paul's First Letters: Galatians and I & II Thessalonians* (Vol. Volume 11, pp. 31–36). Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International.

blessed Just as Abraham was blessed, so are the nations to be blessed, that is, by faith. By faith, they become his spiritual seed; by faith, they enter into his covenant; by faith, they receive the blessings of grace.

9 blessed together with Abraham Just as the believing Abraham was accounted righteous, so believing men, who are the spiritual seed of Abraham, are also accounted righteous.

10 are under a curse All that the law can do for sinners is judge them, condemn them, and curse them. All the people in the world who think themselves good, all the mere moralists, all those who, however amiable they may be, however excellent and religious they may be, are trusting to be saved by good works, are all under the curse, as surely as the drunkard, or the liar, or the swearer is under the curse.

Breaking the Law Is Like Cutting a Wire

Preaching Themes: Good Works, Law

You may have kept the law in many points, but if you have broken it in one, you are under its curse. If you want to send a message by the telegraphic wire, it may be perfectly sound for one hundred miles, but if it is only broken in one inch—not only that, but if it is simply cut across—you cannot send the message by it.

Cursed is everyone That is all that Moses can say to you, and all that the Old Testament can reveal to you. Apart from faith in Christ, all its rites and ceremonies, all its laws and precepts, if you are resting in them, can only land you under the curse, because you cannot continue in all things that are written in the book of the law to do them. You have not so continued thus far, you will not so continue, and nothing but an absolutely perfect obedience to the law could save a man by the way of works. As that obedience is not possible, we come under the curse if we come under the law. Do not look to Moses to bring you into Canaan; that can only be done by “Joshua,” Jesus.

abide by all the things The law roars like a lion upon us in this sentence. If there is in any one of us a solitary violation of the command of God, we are cursed by Him. If we have at any time throughout life, in any measure or degree—in deed, word, or thought, by omission or commission—diverged from absolute perfection, we are cursed. Such is the statement of God Himself, by the mouth of His servant Moses, in Deut 27:26. There is no exception; all sins are included in it, and we are all of us included. God will not take part payment. Holiness is a very different thing from that morality which some men boast of.

Breaking the Law After 20 Years Is Still Breaking the Law

Preaching Themes: Good Works, Law

If we had accomplished obedience for twenty years, yet still, if in the next year we broke the law, we would come under its curse. A thief is not excused because he was honest beforehand, nor a murderer because previously he had not shed blood. A Methuselah would be under the law in his nine hundredth year. The curse still might fall on him, even though up till then he had stood firm.

to do them If a man does nothing wrong, yet if he fails to do that which is right, he is guilty. Omission is as truly a defect as commission. He misses the mark who shoots beyond it or falls short of it. If you commit a single omission of duty, on the footing of law you are a lost man. If you have omitted, at any time, to love the Lord your God with the whole force and intensity of your nature, if you have omitted in any degree to love your neighbor as yourself, you have committed a breach of the law. Not to obey is to disobey. Who can plead innocence, if this is so?

11 will live by faith The apostle quotes from the Old Testament, from Hab 2:4, and thus confirms one inspired statement by another. Even the just are not justified by their own righteousness, but live by faith. It follows then most conclusively that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God. If the best of men find no justification coming to them through their personal virtues, but stand accepted only by faith, how much more such imperfect beings, such frequent sinners as ourselves?

Holiness, Like Blossoms, Does Not Cause Life

Preaching Themes: Faith, Holiness

Holiness is not the cause of spiritual life and safety; faith is the wellspring of all. In the spring you see the hawthorn covered with a delicious luxuriance of snow-white flowers, loading the air with fragrance, but no one among the admiring gazers supposes that those sweet blossoms caused the hawthorn to live. After a while you notice the horse chestnut adorned with its enchanting pyramids of flowers, but none among you foolishly supposes that the horse chestnut was sustained and created by its bloom. You rightly conceive these forms of beauty to be the products of life and not the cause of it. You have here, in nature's emblems, the true doctrine of the inner life. Holiness is the flower of the new nature, but the fair graces of holiness do not save, or give spiritual life, or maintain it.

The most enterprising merchant holds his personal property not on account of his character or deservings, but because of his civil rights as a citizen. A man may cultivate his land up to the highest point of production, but his right to his land does not depend upon the mode of cultivation, but upon his title deeds. So the Christian man should aim after the highest degree of spiritual cultivation and of heavenly perfection. And yet his salvation, as to its justness and security, does not depend on his attainments, but rests upon his faith in a crucified Redeemer. Faith is the fruitful root, the inward channel of sap, the great life-grace in every branch of the vine.

12 law is not from faith The very spirit of law is the spirit of works. And as life only comes by faith, it cannot come by the works of the law, for they are not of faith. The law says nothing about faith; it speaks only about doing: "You must carry out my regulations, and you must observe my statutes by following them; I am Yahweh your God. And you shall observe my statutes and my regulations by which the person doing them shall live; I am Yahweh" (Lev 18:4-5). The law demands doing; the gospel enjoins believing. The believing man comes in as an heir of the blessing, but the man who trusts to his own doing is an heir of the curse. We cannot be saved partly by faith and partly by works. The roads are distinct. We must keep the whole law if we would be saved by it. Our only hope is in the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ received by faith.

will live by them So that the justified man is not justified by the law, but by faith. He stands before God not in what he does, not even in what the Spirit enables him to do. His own prayers and tears and communings with Christ, his own labors, his earnest and indefatigable attempts to extend the kingdom of Christ—all tell for nothing in the matter of his justification. He hangs them all upon the cross of Christ and relies only upon the cross, looking in no manner whatever to anything that comes of himself.

13 Christ redeemed us The atonement is a ransom—that is to say, a price paid. In the present case, the original word is more than usually expressive; it is a payment for, a price instead of. Jesus in His sufferings performed what may be forcibly and fitly described as the payment of a ransom, the giving to justice a *quid pro quo* for what was due on our behalf for our sins. Christ in His person suffered what we ought to have suffered in our persons.

curse of the law In all the pages of revelation you will find no blessings that the law ever gave to one who had offended it. There were blessings for those who kept it completely—though none ever did—but no blessing is ever written for one offender. Blessings we find in the gospel; curses we find in the law.

becoming a curse Christ was no curse in Himself. In His person He was spotlessly innocent, and nothing of sin could belong personally to Him. In Him was no sin. "God made him to be sin for us," the apostle adds elsewhere, "who knew no sin" (2 Cor 5:21). There must never be supposed to be any degree of blameworthiness or censure in the person or character of Christ as He stands as an individual. He is in that respect without spot or wrinkle, or any such thing—the immaculate Lamb of God's Passover. Nor

was Christ made a curse of necessity. His own intrinsic holiness kept Him from sin, and that same holiness kept Him from the curse. He was made sin for us not on His own account, not with any view to Himself, but wholly because He loved us and chose to put Himself in the place we ought to have occupied. **for us** Here is substitution. What else can the words mean? Christ hung on a tree for us, bearing our curse, in our room and place and stead. We were all under the curse of the law, but Christ voluntarily took our place and was made a curse for us, so that the blessing might be ours. He fulfilled the law's demands by His perfect obedience, and He suffered the law's utmost penalty by His death upon the cross. Now all those who believe in Him are forever justified because of what He did for them.

We have heard some preach a gospel something after this order: that, though God is angry with sinners, yet, out of His great mercy, for the sake of something that Christ has done, He does not punish them, but remits the penalty. This is not God's gospel, for it is neither just to God nor safe for man. We believe that God never remitted the penalty. He did not forgive the sin without punishing it, but He exacted the full penalty without the abatement of a solitary jot or tittle. Jesus Christ, our Savior, drank the veritable cup of our redemption to its very dregs. He suffered beneath the crushing wheels of divine vengeance the same pains and sufferings that we ought to have endured. He bore our sins that He might bear them away by the fact of bearing them Himself. This is the central doctrine of the gospel.

14 blessing of Abraham Christ was made a curse for us that the blessing might come upon us. He took our curse that we might take the blessing from His own dear hands and might possess it evermore.

promise of the Spirit Wherever the Spirit of God dwells, the covenant is fulfilled. You have in the Spirit the foretaste of the promised rest; you have the initial stages of the promised perfection; you have the dawn of the promised glory. The Spirit is the earnest of the inheritance till the redemption of the purchased possession, to the praise of His glory.

through faith Dear friends, are you living by faith upon the Son of God? Are you trusting in God? Are you believing His promises? Some think that this is a very little thing, but God does not think so. Faith is a better index of character than anything else. The man who trusts his God and believes His promises is honoring God far more than is the man who supposes that by any of his own doings he can merit divine approval and favor.

Transferring Our Bad Debt to Jesus

Preaching Themes: Faith

I never had a better idea of believing in Jesus than I once had from a poor countryman. Speaking about faith, he said, "The old enemy has been troubling me very much lately, but I told him that he must not say anything to me about my sins. He must go to my Master, for I had transferred the whole concern to Him, bad debts and all." That is believing in Jesus. Believing is giving up all we have to Christ and taking all that Christ has to ourselves.

Application

Examine Yourself to See Whether You Are of the Works of the Law

I pray that everyone may examine himself to see whether he is of the works of the law. Are we legal in our feelings? Are we relying upon the self and its doings? Does anyone among us feel that there is not a more deserving person than himself? Because he is a good churchgoer, does he think himself accepted by the Lord? Because of confirmation or baptism or attendance at the sacrament, does he hope to be saved? Because of his decent and respectable life, does he reckon himself just? If such is your hope, you are "of the works of the law," and it is not my word, but the word of the Lord, that you are under the curse. Think of this, you who are so very good, so free from fault! There is nothing else for you but the curse. You are not the same as those men who are mentioned in the Scriptures as justified. They lived by faith, and you hope to live by works. As you are not the same, you will not come to the same end. It is a thought that vexes you, and possibly even makes you angry, that you should be under the curse—but it will be well for

you to know the truth, however black it looks. Nothing remains but a fearful looking forward to judgment. For where there is even now a curse, what else can there be but fiery indignation at the last?

Unfortunately, I cannot bring this most searching truth home to the conscience. It requires a miracle of grace to get this truth into the heart of man and to make him feel the full terror of it. It is so repugnant to our proud human nature that we incline to any error that will obscure it. Come, Holy Spirit, with your divine light, and flash this truth upon the sinner's eyes in such a way that he must see it!

Condemned by the Law, Acquitted by Grace

Let me put two questions to you. First: *Have you ever been condemned by the law in your own conscience?* "No," you say. "I do not know what you mean." Of course you do not, and you have therefore no true hope that you are saved. But I will ask you again: Have you ever been condemned by the law in your conscience? Did you ever stand before God's bar, like a poor condemned criminal before his judge, ready for execution? Have you ever felt yourself to be a worthless, ruined, sin-condemned, law-condemned, conscience-condemned sinner? Have you ever fallen down before God and said, "Lord, you are just. Though you slay me, I will say that you are just, for I am sinful and deserve your wrath"? As the Lord lives, if you have never felt and spoken like that, you are still a stranger to His grace. The man who acquits himself, God condemns; and if the law condemns you, God will acquit you. As long as you have felt yourself condemned, you may know that Christ died for condemned ones and shed His blood for sinners. But if you say, "I am good, I am righteous, I am honorable," then be warned of this: your armor is the weaving of a spider, and it shall be broken in pieces. The garments of your righteousness are light as gossamer and shall be blown away by the breath of the Eternal in that day when He shall unspin all that nature has ever woven. Take heed of this: If you have never been condemned by the law, you have never been acquitted by grace.

Now I will ask you another question: *Have you ever felt yourself to be acquitted by grace?* If you have never felt your chains fall off you, then your chains are still on you—for when God breaks our chains off us, we know ourselves to be free. If a man had been a galley slave, chained to an oar for many a year, and if he were set free, do you think that he would not know whether he were free or not? Do you think that a slave, who had been toiling in bondage for years, when once he trod the land of freedom would not know it? Or if a man, who has been dead in his grave, were to be awakened to life, do you think he would not know it? He will know himself to be alive as the emancipated slave will know that he is a free man. Most of us, when God set us free from our prison, leaped for joy. We remember that the mountains and the hills broke forth before us into singing, and all the trees of the field clapped their hands. I ask you again: Did you ever feel yourself to be forgiven? If you say, "No," then you have no reason to think that you are forgiven. If the Lord has never whispered in your ear, "I, even I, am He that blots out your transgressions" (Isa 43:25), you have no right to think yourself pardoned. Examine yourself, and know whether you have been condemned by the law and whether you have been acquitted by grace!

Live by Faith, Not by Rules or Experience

I fear that some of my brothers and sisters try to grow in spiritual life by adopting methods that are not of faith. Some think that they will set themselves rules of self-denial or extra devotion—these plans are lawful, but they are not in themselves effective. Vows may be observed mechanically, and rules obeyed formally, and yet the heart may be drifting away yet further from the Lord. Indeed, these vows and rules may be a means of deluding us into the vain belief that all is well, whereas we are nearing to spiritual shipwreck. I have found in my own spiritual life that the more rules I lay down for myself, the more sins I commit. The habit of regular morning and evening prayer is one that is indispensable to a believer's life, but the prescribing of the length of prayer, and the constrained remembrance of so many persons and subjects, may lead to bondage and strangle prayer rather than assist it. To say I will humble myself at such a time, and rejoice at another season, is nearly as much an affectation as when the preacher writes in the margin of his sermon, "Cry here," "Smile here." If the man preached his sermon rightly, he would be sure to cry in the right place and to smile at a suitable moment. When the spiritual life is sound, it

produces prayer at the right time, and humiliation of soul and sacred joy spring forth spontaneously apart from rules and vows. The kind of religion that makes itself to order by the almanac and turns out its emotions like bricks from a machine—weeping on Good Friday and rejoicing two days afterwards, measuring its motions by the moon—is too artificial to be worthy of your imitation. The liberty of the spiritual life is a grand thing. And where that liberty is maintained constantly and the energy is kept up, you will need much faith, for the fading of faith will be the withering of devotion. Faith enriches the soil of the heart. Faith fills our treasuries with the choicest gold and loads our tables with the daintiest food for our souls. Faith in Jesus, the Savior, faith in the heavenly Father, faith in the Holy Spirit—this we must have, or we perish like foam upon the waters.

As the other side of all this, some Christians appear to try to live by experience. If they feel happy today, they say they are saved; but if they feel unhappy tomorrow, they conclude that they are lost. If they feel at one moment a deep and profound calm spreading over their spirits, then they are greatly elevated. But if the winds blow and the waves beat high, then they suppose that they are not the Lord's people. Ah, miserable state of suspense! To live by feeling is a dying life. You do not know where you are or what you are if your feelings are to be the barometer of your spiritual condition. A simple faith in Christ will enable you to remain calm even when your feelings are the reverse of happy, to remain confident when your emotions are far from ecstatic. If, indeed, we are saved by Jesus Christ, then the foundation of our salvation does not lie within us, but in that crucified Man who now reigns in glory. When He changes, then what changes must happen to us! But since He is the same yesterday, today, and forever, why do we need to be so soon removed from our steadfastness? Believe in Jesus when you cannot find a spark of grace within yourself. Cast yourself as a sinner into the Savior's arms when you cannot think a good thought or uplift a good desire. Have confident faith in Jesus at all times, for if you believe in Him you are saved and cannot be condemned. However good or bad your state, this shall not affect the question. You believe; therefore, you will be saved.³⁶

Exposition

15 covenant A covenant is a covenant. Whatever happens, it cannot be altered. It stands, though it was only made by men.

no one declares it invalid If a covenant is legally drawn up, signed, and sealed, and witnessed, then there it stands. No honorable man would think of drawing back from it. An appeal can be made to it in any court of law where it may be produced.

16 does not say Quoting from the Old Testament, we may believe in the absolute plenary inspiration of that sacred book, because the apostle founds an argument upon the singular of a noun having been used rather than the plural. Notice how important a single letter of the Scriptures may be. A vital doctrine may depend upon the use of a singular or plural noun. Therefore, let us jealously guard the smallest jot or tittle of the inspired word of God.

and to your descendant This is sound reasoning. God made a covenant with Abraham and said that in him and in his seed all nations should be blessed. All believers are in Christ, who is here called Abraham's seed, and therefore they must be blessed. Whatever the law may say or may not say, it was not given until 430 years after the covenant was made with Abraham and therefore cannot affect it in any way.

³⁶ Spurgeon, C. (2013). *Galatians*. (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:7–14). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

17 does not revoke That is clear enough. The covenant made with Abraham and his seed cannot be affected by anything that was said or done on Sinai. Whatever the covenant of works may be or say or do, it comes in more than four centuries after this glorious covenant of grace had been signed and sealed and ratified. Therefore, it cannot be affected; it must stand fast forever.

covenant previously ratified Is that not a splendid argument? The covenant was made with Abraham that God would bless him and his seed. Well, 430 years after, the law was given on Sinai, but that could not affect a covenant made 430 years before. The argument goes to prove that the covenant of grace is not affected by any law of rites and ceremonies—no, not even by the moral law itself. The covenant made with Abraham and his seed must stand. The seed signifies those who believe; therefore, the covenant stands fast with Abraham and all other believers.

18 from the promise All through the book of Genesis, it is promise, promise, promise. Isaac was an heir of the promise, and Jacob was an heir of the promise. In fact, Isaac was born by promise and Ishmael, the elder brother, did not inherit the blessing because he was born after the flesh. Those who believe in Christ are heirs according to the promise. Now a promise takes us out of the region of law.

God graciously gave it God gave it to Abraham by promise. It was a free gift; He did not bestow it upon the condition of merit on Abraham's part. Isaac was born not according to the power of the flesh, but according to promise, and the whole covenant is according to free grace and divine promise.

through the promise So then we know it is by promise, and God must keep His promise, and we must believe it. It must be true. And if we do believe it, we shall prove it to be true, and it will be fulfilled in every jot and tittle to every believing soul.

37

12

Clearing the Way for God's Blessing

GALATIANS 3:10–14

MY FATHER-IN-LAW spent his life operating on hearts. He was a thoracic surgeon in Indianapolis for thirty years. He retired several years ago. But before he hung up his stethoscope and put away his scalpel, I figured I should go in and watch him operate.

So I did, and I learned a valuable lesson from doing so. Watching my father-in-law perform open heart surgery, it was crystal-clear to me that you may have a strong heart, but if you have a blocked artery, you're as good as dead. One blocked artery can so hinder the flow of blood to the heart, and thus to the rest of the body, that it can be, and often is, fatal. Which is where heart surgeons come in: they deal with the blockage that hinders the life-giving flow of blood so a person can go on living.

In a way that is what God did by sending his Son, Jesus Christ, into the world. The mission of the Son into our sin-torn world was a massive operation, vastly more so than even open heart surgery. But if God's life-giving blessing was going to flow into the lives of people, it was necessary.

³⁷ Spurgeon, C. (2013). *Galatians*. (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 3:15–18). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Just as surely as the heart pumps blood, so too it's God's desire to pump blessing into the world. But something has gotten in the way of God's blessing—human sin and, in response to human sin, God's curse.

This first happened when Adam and Eve sinned. As a result God cursed the creation. But it happened again with God's own redeemed people, the people of Israel, who were to be the agents of God's reversal of the curse for the whole world. Yet they too sinned and as a result came under God's curse; only this time it was *the curse of the Law*.

This is, in a nutshell, what Paul says in this passage: *The Law's curse blocks God's blessing*. But Christ's death has removed the Law's curse, so that now in Christ Jesus God's blessing can once again freely flow to the world.

God has cleared the way for his blessing to flow to the nations, to people of every language and tribe and nationality and race, even to you and me. Through the cross of Christ he cleared the way. He sent his Son, our Savior, into the world. Jesus Christ thus came as an obedient Son to make his blessings flow "far as the curse is found," as the Christmas carol puts it.

The Law's Curse Blocks God's Blessing (3:10–12)

In the immediately preceding passage (3:6–9) we see that Abraham's blessing goes to those who live their lives by faith along with Abraham, the man of faith. From the beginning God always intended to extend Abraham's blessing to the nations. Genesis 12:3, which Paul quotes in 3:8, says this very thing: "In you shall all the nations be blessed."

But, of course, the Biblical story doesn't simply go from Abraham in Genesis 12 to the Great Commission and the nations in Matthew 28. It's not as if God leap-frogs over the top of the Jewish people, the nation of Israel. There are many, many chapters in between. and those chapters tell the story of the people of Israel, Abraham's physical offspring. This is the story of the Old Testament. And it's a rich and colorful one.

But from a human perspective it's also sad. It's a story of grace and redemption, yes; but it's also a story of rebellion and sin, eventually leading to Israel herself receiving the curse of the Law for failing to keep the Law. This is Paul's point in 3:10: "For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, 'Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them' " (cf. Deuteronomy 27:26).

Paul, then, goes on to reinforce this point in the next two verses, with two more pithy statements and two more Old Testament citations (3:11, 12). If the Law's not the path to blessing, and if it's not the route to justification, then what is? We experience God's blessing and find justification before him only by living a life of faith: "Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law" (3:11a). In fact, this is what the prophet Habakkuk himself learned many hundreds of years before Christ: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4).

Lest there be any misunderstanding, Paul drives home this point with a second pithy statement and another quote from the Old Testament. Why can't God's blessing be found in the Law? Because, as Paul says, "The law is not of faith, rather 'The one who does them shall live by them' " (3:12). In order for the Law to bless, the Law must be kept. But this is where Israel fell short. She did not keep the Law. If she would have, as Leviticus 18:5 says, then, to be sure, she would have found life through the Law. But she didn't; so she received the curse of the Law and thus *death* through the Law. And this eventuated in her being exiled out of the land of promise and scattered among the nations.

The main point of these three verses, then, is simply this: Israel is under the curse of the Law; and so too are all who depend on the works of the Law. Yet this is not only a statement of historical fact; it's also a warning to anyone who, like the Galatians, thinks that the Law itself is the pathway to blessing or the way to life.

What we learn from the whole Old Testament, as well as from this passage, is that God has posted a gigantic "Dead End" sign over the path of the Law. The Law *cannot* give life (3:21). Apart from the grace of God, the Law of God will only stir up the sin within you, ultimately choking you to death.

What folly, then, to try to sail the ship of morality all the way to Heaven. It's been tried many times, but it simply won't work. Listen to how Charles Spurgeon grapples with the dead end of the Law as the pathway to God's blessing:

The law seemed also to blight all my hopes with its stern sentence, 'Cursed is everyone that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.' Only too well did I know that I had not continued in all those things, so I saw myself accursed, turn which way I might. If I had not committed one sin, that made no difference if I had committed another; I was under the curse. What if I had never blasphemed God with my tongue? Yet, if I had coveted, I had broken the law. He who breaks a chain might say, 'I did not break that link, and the other link.' No, but if you break one link, you have broken the chain. Ah, me, how I seemed shut up then! I had offended against the justice of God; I was impure and polluted, and I used to say, 'If God does not send me to hell, He ought to do it.' I sat in judgment upon myself, and pronounced the sentence that I felt would be just... So the law worried and troubled me at all points; it shut me up as in an iron cage, and every way of escape was effectually blocked up.

Perhaps some to whom we minister are still locked up in that iron cage. They've tried every way of escape but found them all to be blocked. They've tried moral reform, allegiance to the right Christian causes, even church membership. Yet they've never truly come to Christ by faith in brokenness and repentance, in need of grace and mercy. And so they're still shut up in an iron cage, still trying to convince themselves that the one who keeps the Law's demands shall live by them.

Christ's Death Redeems from the Law's Curse (3:13)

Shut up in an iron cage with no way of escape—that's a fit description of the life of everyone apart from the grace of God. It is a good description of Israel of old. The whole nation was shut up in an iron cage with no way of escape. In fact, the Old Testament ends with the entire nation scattered among the nations of the world. And the only thing they can do is wait for God to show up and do something about their desperate situation. Thus they sing (in the words of the later hymn), "O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel, that mourns in lonely exile here, until the Son of God appear."

And after many hundreds of years Immanuel did indeed come. "When the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, that he might redeem those who were under the law" (4:4, 5). Or as Paul triumphantly declares in this passage, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (3:13).

I love the strength of this verse. Notice it does not say Christ *tried* to redeem us from the curse of the Law; nor does it say Christ *made it possible* for us to be redeemed from the curse of the Law. His statement is much heartier and full blooded. Paul was convinced that Christ accomplished something *definitive* on the cross. His death was *entirely effective*; he accomplished precisely what he wanted to accomplish: he redeemed his people from the curse of the Law.

But how did Christ redeem us from the curse of the Law? He did it in a way that was, in the words of one of the twentieth century's most famous theologians, "almost unbearably severe." He accomplished redemption by doing the unthinkable: "by becoming a curse for us" (3:13). Now for a pious Jew like Paul this would have been a horrific thought, blasphemous even. Jesus had been nailed to a tree that we now call the cross. And the Law clearly states, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree" (3:13b; cf. Deuteronomy 21:23).

He who knew no sin became sin, "so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21). What a remarkable twist to the story! It's like a heart surgeon who realizes the only way his patient will survive is with a heart transplant; so the surgeon voluntarily gives his own heart, his very own life, to save his dying patient.

This is what our Lord did at Calvary. Let us, then, in the words of the hymn "I Stand Amazed,"

... stand amazed in the presence

Of Jesus the Nazarene.

And wonder how he could love me,

A sinner, condemned, unclean.

He took my sins and my sorrows,

He made them His very own;

He bore the burden to Calvary,

And suffered and died alone.

O how marvelous! O how wonderful!

And my song shall ever be:

O how marvelous! O how wonderful!

Is my Savior's love for me!

When life is difficult and we begin to feel like we're under God's curse, we can run to the cross of Christ and find that the curse has indeed been lifted from us.

In Christ Jesus God's Blessing Now Flows (3:14)

Because of the cross of Christ, the curse of the Law has been lifted. That which blocked the flow of God's blessing has now been removed. God's blessing can flow to the nation of Israel and even to all the nations of the earth. This is the upshot of what Paul wants to say in this passage: in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham now flows not only to Israel but to the Gentiles of the nations (3:14).

When people from among the nations of the earth turn from sin and trust in Christ, they receive forgiveness and reconciliation and thus stand in the channel of God's promised blessing. This is the great impulse behind the outreach and mission of the church: to extend God's blessing to the nations.

But also, Paul says, Christ's death opens the pathway for God's blessing to flow to the nation of Israel. The promised Spirit now flows to the remnant of Israel. They experience renewal through the Spirit as they

embrace their own Messiah by faith. Christ's absorbing the curse of the Law allows God to pour out his promised Holy Spirit upon his people through faith (3:14b).

This is what Israel's prophets had envisioned would one day take place. God would restore the nation of Israel by removing her sin and sending his Spirit. And this pouring out of God's Spirit upon the people of Israel happened on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2). Speaking to the crowd of Jews in Jerusalem at that time, the Apostle Peter tells them:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. (Acts 2:32, 33)

But the renewal of Israel is not yet complete. It's only partial. Indeed, a day is coming when all Israel shall be saved; right now this is not the case. Two thousand years ago Paul recognized that "a partial hardening has come upon Israel" (Romans 11:25). And it remains to this very day. But as Paul goes on to say, one day this hardening will be removed, and then "all Israel will be saved" (Romans 11:26a). "The Deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob"; 'and this will be my covenant with them when I take away their sins' " (Romans 11:26b, 27; Isaiah 59:20, 21).

Yet when Israel is at last fully renewed, this will mean, as Paul says, even greater blessing for the nations! Israel's partial renewal has already meant great things for the nations. But what, then, will Israel's complete renewal mean for the nations of the earth? It will mean a massive enfolding of people from every tongue and tribe and language and people (cf. Romans 11:11-16).

Conclusion: Clearing the Channel of Our Lives

The coming of Christ Jesus into the world, dying in our place upon the cross, taking upon himself the dreaded curse of the Law, has enabled God's blessing to flow freely. God has cleared the way for his blessing. And he's done so because of Christ and only in Christ—in Christ *alone*. So we must exhort those who have not already done so to flee to Christ and hide themselves in him as their only hope!

What must happen for us to be effective channels of God's blessing to flow into the lives of others? We need the mind of Christ our Savior, our minds conformed to his, our hearts saturated with his Word, his peace ruling our lives in everything, his love filling us as the waters cover the sea. His humility must be ours, so that we exalt him and gladly abase ourselves; his strength and courage must be ours as we run the race set before us, looking onward and upward, only to Jesus; and his beauty must rest upon us as we seek the lost to win, so that forgetting the channel, they may only see him.

13

Why Then the Law?

GALATIANS 3:15-22

WHEN I VISIT PEOPLE'S HOMES, I always enjoy seeing what's on their refrigerator: family photos, school calendars, grocery lists, the latest art project, a wedding invitation, magnets, bumper stickers, baby announcements, a reminder about a doctor's appointment—just about anything and everything!

My wife and I have one or two pictures on ours. But in the center, prominently displayed so they can't be missed, are our three Wilson family rules. These are three simple, commonsense rules we consistently encourage our children to follow.

#1: No talking back.

#2: No interrupting.

#3: Obey the first time.

But do you know what we've found with our kids? Posting rules on the refrigerator doesn't create the desirable behavior in their lives! This doesn't mean posting our rules is pointless. They reveal what's important to us as parents, set clear expectations for our kids, provide them with boundaries for appropriate behavior, and communicate how we want them to interact with us and each other. But at the end of the day we realize that these rules don't create the obedience they command.

Rules are like that. They guide behavior but don't create it. Every parent knows this. But so, too, does every police officer. In the United States today seven million people are in jail or prison or on parole or probation; yet as a society we've never had more laws on the books. Obviously, laws don't create compliance.

Sadly, this is true even of God's Law. On Mount Sinai Moses receives God's Law. It calls for righteousness. But it cannot create righteousness. This is the basic weakness of the Law: it cannot create within us the desire to do the very thing it demands of us. It can guide right desire, but it cannot give right desire. Or as Paul puts it in this passage, the Law cannot give *life*.

The Law's inability to give life is the thrust of what Paul says about the Law in Galatians. The Law cannot do the most important thing: *make us alive!* Only the Father, who gave life to his Son by raising him from the dead, can give us life through the presence of his Holy Spirit, the kind of life we need to live the new life God desires for us.

We live in a world of laws and rules and ordinances and policies. Everywhere we look, we find someone laying down the law for us. Indeed, each one of us is, at any given moment, under many more laws than the ancient Israelite ever was. And yet, like the Israelites, we're prone to think we can find life from the law, whether God's Law or man's. As fallen creatures, this is one of our fundamental mistakes: looking to rules to find life.

If you're wondering whether that's true, consider children. How easily they fixate on rules, as though the rules were the source of life. But perhaps our kids develop this mind-set by watching their parents. Don't we as parents easily assume and thus act as though rules are the means of giving life? If we will take an honest look at our own hearts, we'll see how quickly we go to the rules or the expectations or the law and there try to derive some power for living. Indeed, this may be most tempting for Christians themselves, for those who take God's Law and thus human laws quite seriously.

Law and Promise (3:15–18)

For those of us addicted to seeking life in the Law, this passage provides sweet medicine. But first let's remind ourselves of where we've been and what we've seen. Long ago God promised to bless the world through Abraham (3:6–9). Yet the Law that God gave to Abraham's offspring blocked the flow of this blessing (3:10–14). Thus what God promised to Abraham has not, and indeed cannot, come through the Law. It is just the opposite in fact. Israel is under the Law's curse rather than enjoying God's blessing.

Here in 3:15–18, then, Paul no doubt feels compelled to deal with how God's Law relates to God's promise. More specifically, how does the Law that God gave Moses on Mount Sinai relate to the promise that God made to Abraham when he said, "In you shall all the nations be blessed" (3:8)?

If we simply follow the story line of Scripture, we'd have every reason to think that the Law God gave to Moses *directs the flow* of God's promise to the nations. First came the promise to Abraham; then, 430 years later, came the Law to Moses. Presumably then that which came later (i.e., the Law) would direct the flow of that which came first (i.e., the blessing).

In this scenario the Law is like a funnel into which God pours his promised blessing. This is how first-century Jews, like those stirring up trouble in Galatia, would have viewed things. It's also how some twenty-first-century Jews view things. If you want the blessing promised to Abraham, you must go to the Law to get it. To be blessed with Abraham, you need to become a child of Abraham, one of his offspring to whom the promise was given. And this means you must become Jewish, embracing the Law with its works and way of life.

If you spend any time on the Internet, you come across pop-up advertisements, boxes that show up on your screen in bright, flashing colors and offer you something fantastic, like a new iPad or an all-expenses-paid trip to Maui. And, amazingly, all you need to do, they tell you, is click on the button at the bottom of the screen.

If you've ever been suckered into one of these too-good-to-be-true offers, you're now wise as to how they work. While they wow you with a great promise, you soon realize it's not nearly that simple. You realize you only receive the promised gift once you've done something far more involved and a lot more complicated!

Paul, however, says that God's promise and Law don't relate to each other in that way. The Law doesn't modify or complicate the promise or the original terms of the covenant that God made with Abraham. As Paul says, "To give a human example, brothers: even with a man-made covenant, no one annuls it or adds to it once it has been ratified" (3:15).

More importantly, Paul clarifies the identity of the recipient of God's promise to Abraham. Ultimately, he says, the recipient isn't Israel, nor is it even the Church. According to this passage, the true recipient of God's promise to Abraham is God's single seed, Christ. "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, 'And to offsprings,' referring to many, but referring to one, 'And to your offspring,' who is Christ" (3:16).

Here, then, is the key point about God's promises: *Christ Jesus is the one true beneficiary of all of God's promises*. God has given everything to Christ. Every blessing God wants to give to the world, and to you and me, has already been given to Jesus. Thus every blessing we seek, every good thing in the world, is to be found in Christ. "For all the promises of God find their Yes in him" (2 Corinthians 1:20).

We share in these promises, therefore, by coming to Christ and being found in him. "In you shall all the nations be blessed," God said to Abraham. But how do we get into Abraham? Not by getting into Israel through the Law, but by coming to Christ by faith. As Paul will say a little later on, "In Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ... And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (3:26, 27, 29).

Christ is at the center of all that God is doing in the world. Indeed, Christ is the center of all that God wants to do *for* the world—and for you and me. So don't make the mistake the Galatians were making. Don't look anywhere for God's blessing other than to Christ. It can only be found in him.

³⁸ Wilson, T. (2013). [*Galatians: Gospel-Rooted Living*](#). (R. K. Hughes, Ed.) (pp. 107–118). Wheaton, IL: Crossway.

3:6–14 The Abrahamic promise. The quotation from Gn. 15:6 becomes a key factor for Paul, and he will use that text again in Rom. 4 where he expands on the significance of Abraham. The point is simple: if God credited Abraham with righteousness because he believed, then surely the true children of Abraham are those who believe as he did (*cf.* Rom. 4:11–12). In addition, Paul quotes another statement from Genesis that focuses on the significance of Abraham's life for the Gentiles: *All nations will be blessed through you* (Gn. 18:18; 22:18; *cf.* Gn. 12:3; 26:4; 28:14). It is as though Paul's gospel of freedom was already being preached long before the coming of Christ.

Having identified the character of God's relationship to Abraham (6–9), the apostle moves on to develop a negative proposition in vs. 10–14: righteousness must come through faith rather than law because the law cannot justify. The central argument is in vs 11–12, and it is supported by a double quotation, one from Habakkuk and the other from Leviticus. The reference to Hab. 2:4 is usually rendered (with the niv) *the righteous will live by faith*. (Paul's Greek, but not the corresponding OT Hebrew text, can also be translated 'the righteous-by-faith will live'.) This passage is fundamental to Paul's teaching. Indeed, that quotation serves as the very theme out of which the letter to the Romans is developed (Rom. 1:16–17). Because the Hebrew text is most naturally translated 'the righteous will live by his *faithfulness*', some have argued that Paul is misusing the OT, which appears to be urging obedience to God's law. However, Hab. 2:4 is itself a very clear allusion to Gn. 15:6 (both passages use the key Hebrew roots for righteousness and faith/faithfulness). The prophet may have had in view the whole of Abraham's 'faithful' life, including the patriarch's willingness to offer Isaac, but surely that life must be seen as an outworking of the initial act of faith. Though in ch. 3 Paul does not develop the ethical implications of faith, it is clear from 5:13–6:10 (and from Rom. 6–8) that he regarded an obedient life (faithfulness) as inseparable from the faith that justifies. The apostle is not using Hab. 2:4 for purposes that contradict the original. One could even argue that his theology of faith and righteousness grew out of Habakkuk's dependence on the Abrahamic pattern.

Also problematic is the way that Paul seems to set Hab. 2:4 in opposition to Lv. 18:5, 'The man who does these things will live by them', with the inference that 'the law is not based on faith' (lit. 'the law is not from faith'). Without question, the apostle recognizes a basic contrast between the Mosaic administration and the ministry of the gospel (*cf.* 2 Cor. 3:6–18). But does that mean that he views the law in itself as opposing the principle of faith? Certainly not, as the very context of ch. 3, particularly v 21, makes clear. The focus of this whole passage is the role of the law to obtain the Abrahamic inheritance, righteousness and life (see especially v 18). The law would indeed contradict the principle of faith if the purpose of the law were to justify. In other words, it was the Judaizers themselves (very possibly appealing to Lv. 18:5 for their position) who brought law and promise into opposition by telling the Gentiles that in order to receive the Abrahamic promise they must submit to the legal observances.

In any case, Paul uses the contrast between these two texts (Hab. 2:4 and Lv. 18:5) as proof that the law cannot provide righteousness. The argument is further refined, however, by two other quotations, one in v 10, the other one in v 13. The first one comes from Dt. 27:26, which places a curse on everyone who does not fully perform the works of the law (in other words, the law curses rather than justifies). The second one comes from Dt. 21:23, which Paul takes as an anticipation of the curse-bearing work of Christ. We need not despair about the law's inability to justify and its power to curse. Christ, by his death, delivered (*redeemed*) us from that curse and thus brought to fruition the Abrahamic promise through the Spirit (14).

3:15–25 The place of the law. Having expressed himself rather negatively about the law, Paul may have sensed the need to expand on how that law fits into God's purposes. Just what is the relationship between it and the promise to Abraham? His answer focuses on the fact that the law is both *later* than the giving of the promise (15–18) and *earlier* than the fulfilment of the promise (19–25).

First, then, the apostle points out that the law covenant was given by God more than four centuries after the Abrahamic covenant had been established. (The word translated *covenant* usually means ‘will’ or ‘testament’, but was used by the LXX to render the standard Hebrew term for ‘covenant’. Whether Paul intended a double meaning is difficult to tell.) His point is clear: it is not conceivable that the later covenant could undo the earlier one. But that is in fact what the law would do if it could offer the inheritance on a basis other than that of a gracious promise. The teaching of the Judaizers in effect creates an unbearable conflict between the two covenants (17). The inheritance comes either by grace or by the works of the law; and since it comes by the former, it cannot come by the latter (18; cf. Rom. 4:5). In the course of the argument, Paul reminds the Galatians of something that they (and probably even the Judaizers) accepted, namely, that the promise to Abraham’s seed finds its fulfilment in Christ (16). This point will become important in the argument that follows.

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Verse seven. The words “know ye,” are not imperative but indicative. “Ye perceive,” is the sense. This verse contains a deduction from the previous verse. The word *therefore* from *ara* (ἀρα), is inferential. The argument is, “Since faith was the way Abraham was justified, it follows that those who exercise like faith, are his true followers.” The word *faith* is here general in its application, indicating the determinative factor in life, as against works as a means of appropriating salvation. The expression “they which are of faith,” refers to those who have exercised faith for salvation, and whose standing and character are consequently determined by that faith. The phrase “sons of Abraham,” is not to be understood in a genealogical sense but rather in the ethical sense of the term. Abraham was accepted by God on the basis of faith, and God deals with all men on the same moral basis. God is no respecter of persons. Thus the faith exercised by Abraham is declared to be the fundamental condition of acceptance with God. *Children* is from *huioi* (υἱοί), properly *sons*.

Translation. Ye perceive, therefore, that those who are of faith these are sons of Abraham.

Verse eight. This verse contains Paul’s answer to the false assumption of the Judaizers that inasmuch as it is in Abraham that all nations were to be blessed, they would have to be incorporated in his descendants by the rite of circumcision.

By the use of the word *and*, from *de* (δε), Paul asserts that the blessing of Abraham, namely, the one he received from God, justification, was received by him through faith, and that it is through the exercise of a like faith that the Gentiles become his spiritual children, and not through submission to circumcision. The expression *the scripture*, usually denotes a particular passage of scripture (see Luke 4:21; II Tim. 3:16). The passage referred to here is Genesis 12:3. Paul attributes foresight to scripture. This is a figure of speech expressing the thought that God’s divine foresight is expressed in the scriptures. The Jews had the formula, “What did the scripture foresee?”

Thus God, foreseeing that He would justify the Gentiles by faith announced the gospel to Abraham, which message was to be received by faith. The good news announced to Abraham was that some day the Saviour would arise out of his nation Israel, and that the Gentiles would be saved through Him as Abraham was saved. Thus, Abraham rejoiced to see the coming of that day (John 8:56). Abraham was therefore to become the pattern to all who would follow, of how a sinner, Jew or Gentile, must appropriate salvation. The words *would justify*, are from a present tense verb in Greek, the thought being that Paul is here dealing with a general principle, God’s rule of action on the basis of which He operates for all time. Thus, the condition upon which any person was to be justified is faith, and this was

³⁹ Silva, M. (1994). [Galatians](#). In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., pp. 1214–1215). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

announced to Abraham before he was circumcised, which means that circumcision had nothing to do with the acceptance of salvation.

Translation. And the scripture foreseeing that on a basis of faith God justifies the Gentiles, announced the gospel beforehand to Abraham, namely, All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.

Verse nine. This is a definite statement of the proposition which Paul wishes to prove. The emphasis is upon the fact that the believing ones are blessed with salvation, rather than those who depend upon good works as the Judaizers did. The word *faithful* is added as a descriptive word in order to impress upon the reader that the important thing about Abraham was the fact that he chose the faith way of salvation rather than depend upon personal merit and good works. The word here does not speak of faithfulness of life in the sense of fidelity, but of the fact that Abraham believed God. And well might Abraham have depended upon good works, from a purely human standpoint. Excavations in the city of Ur where Abraham lived, reveal the fact that Abraham was not a wild desert sheik, but an educated, wealthy, sophisticated citizen of the world, a man living in and ostensibly partaking of a state of culture and opulence little dreamed of by the person who is unfamiliar with the ancient civilizations of the past.

Abraham was no ignoramus with a gullible faith. With all his cultural background, and in spite of it, he saw that much of that with which we have to do, is taken upon faith, including the way of salvation. Those who exercise a like faith to Abraham, share with him in the same salvation which he received from God.

Translation. So that those who are believing ones are being blessed in company with believing Abraham.

III. *The Judaizers taught that the law was a means of justification. But Paul shows that the law is a means of condemnation, and that it is the Lord Jesus who rescues us from its condemnation through the blood of His Cross (3:10–14).*

Verse ten. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 27:26. Instead of being blessed by their act of putting themselves under the law, men put themselves under a curse. The Judaizers maintained that their knowledge of the law entitled them to the blessings which were attached to the sons of Abraham. Our Lord said to representatives of this same system: “Ye are constantly searching the scriptures; and in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. And ye will not come to Me that ye might have life” (John 5:39, 40). This was the sin of Israel, ignoring the righteousness of God, Christ, and going about to establish its own righteousness (Rom. 10:1–4). Paul argues that on the contrary, Israel has by its attempt to be justified by the law, entailed the curse of the broken law, for no man could keep the law. This curse is not merely the wrath of God in the form of the final banishment of the sinner from His presence, with all the sorrow and misery which that includes, but represent also a present condition of alienation from God caused by a violation of His law. The word *continueth* is a figurative expression. It speaks of the law as a prescribed district or domain in which one remains or out of which one goes.

Translation. For as many as are of the works of the law, are under curse. For it stands written, Cursed is every one who is not remaining constantly in all things which stand written in the book of the law in order to do them.

Verse eleven. The words “by the law” are in the Greek *en nomoi* (ἐν νομοῖς), literally “in law,” corresponding to “in the book of the law” of verse 10. We have here the locative of sphere. The man who does not continue in the sphere of the law is under the curse. And the man who attempts to remain in the sphere of the law by obeying it, is not justified in the sight of God, and for the reason that justification is by faith. The reason why obedience to the law cannot justify a sinner is that his obedience cannot pay for his sin. Only blood can pay for sin, for blood means outpoured death, and death is the wages of sin. God declares a believing sinner righteous on the basis of the fact that Christ has met the requirements of the law which we broke and Himself becomes our righteousness.

The word *just* as describing *man* is used as a legal rather than an ethical term. It refers to the man approved by God and accepted on the basis of faith, not to the man’s character as exhibited by what he does. The words *shall live* refer as the context indicates, not to the impartation of a new and divine life

which produces a new experience, but to the act of God in justifying him. He lives in a new relationship to God, that of being accepted in the Beloved.

Translation. But that in a sphere of law no one is being justified in the sight of God is clear, because, The righteous man shall live by means of faith.

Verse twelve. The statement, "The law is not of faith" means that the two principles of law and of faith as a means of justification are mutually exclusive of one another. They are diametrically opposed to each other. Then Paul quotes Leviticus 18:5, "The man that doeth them shall live in them." Light is thrown upon this statement by the apostle in Romans 10:5 where he quotes this same passage from Leviticus, when he says, "Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law." That means that there is a righteousness that a human being could accrue to himself by a perfect obedience to the law, a thing which a fallen sinful human being cannot do, but which a perfect sinless being could do. But that righteousness would be different from the righteousness which God imputes to the believing sinner. The former would be obtained by works, and would be a human righteousness. The latter is obtained by faith and is a divine righteousness. Under the legal enactments of the Mosaic law, this could be the futile attempt of a sinner to work out under law a righteousness which God could approve. Under grace, it is the act of a believing sinner accepting as a gift, a righteousness which God has approved, even the Lord Jesus Himself.

Translation. And the law is not of faith; but the one who has done them, shall live in them.

Verse thirteen. The word *redeemed* is from *exagorazo* (ἐξαγοράζω), the general significance of which is "to redeem from slavery." It means "to buy up." It is used frequently in the LXX, with the idea that such deliverance involves cost of some kind, effort suffering, or loss to the one who effects the deliverance. It conveys the figure of a ransom. Men needed a ransom, for the law had left them prisoners under sentence of death.

There are three Greek words translated by the words *bought* or *redeemed*. These three tell the story of redemption. The first is *agorazo* (ἀγοράζω) (I Cor. 6:20), which means *to buy in the slave market*. We are slaves of sin. Our ransom price was paid by the Lord Jesus, His precious blood. Peter in his first epistle (1:18) says that we were not redeemed with little silver and gold coins used to buy a slave out of slavery, but with precious blood, highly honored, as of a lamb without spot or blemish, the blood of Christ. Thus, believers become bondslaves of the Lord Jesus by right of purchase. The word *doulos* (δουλος), *bondslave*, translated *servants* in Romans 6:18, refers to one born in slavery.

The second word is the one Paul uses in the verse we are studying, *exagorazo* (ἐξαγοράζω), *to buy a slave out of the market-place*. The bondslave of the Lord Jesus is bought not only to be His bondslave, but he is bought out of the slave market, never to be put up for sale in any slave market. He becomes the bondslave of the Lord Jesus for time and for eternity.

The third word is *lutroo* (λυτροο) (I Peter 1:18; Titus 2:14). The noun having the same root means "ransom money used to liberate a slave." The verb means "to set free by the payment of a ransom." The bondslave of the Lord Jesus is set free from his former slavery to sin, to realize in his life that for which God created him, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

The curse here is that which the legalistic passages of the Mosaic law pronounced upon those who did not perfectly obey its demands. The law pronounced a blessing and a curse. But the blessing proved barren, for the law made no allowance for human sin and frailty. The curse, which involved the wrath of a righteous God, brought condemnation upon the offender. From this hopeless state of condemnation in which the sinner was not only helpless to redeem himself, but helpless to satisfy the just demands of the law and thus find acceptance with God, Christ redeemed us by satisfying the just demands of the law which we broke, paying the penalty in our stead, leaving a holy God free to bestow mercy on the basis of justice satisfied.

A vivid picture of it all is given us in the three expressions, *under the curse* (3:10), *made a curse for (above) us* (3:13), and *redeemed us out from under the curse* (3:13). Sinners were under the curse. Christ came above us, thus between us and the curse. He took the blow of the Damascus blade that hung over us,

and took us out from under the curse, having become a curse about us. The word *above* is the root meaning of *huper* (ὑπερ), the preposition of substitution, used already in this epistle by Paul to speak of the substitutionary character of our Lord's death.

The word *us* refers to the Jewish nation. The Mosaic law was given to the Jew only. That is not to say however that the Gentile is not held responsible by God under the all-inclusive principles of right conduct that inhere in God's character and in His dealings with the human race. Thus the Jew was under the curse, and being redeemed by Christ from the curse, the blessing of Abraham, justification by faith, which in the plan of God was to flow through Israel to the Gentiles, was at liberty to flow out to the latter.

The words *being made* are from *genomenos* (γενομενος) which means "to become." It is a participle of means, expressing the method by which Christ redeemed us from the curse. In the words "Cursed is everyone that hangeth on a tree," Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy 21:23. They are introduced by Paul to support his statement to the effect that Christ became a curse. The Deuteronomy passage has reference to the dead body of a criminal who had been put to death by stoning, and which was hung upon a tree. There is no reference here to Roman crucifixion, which was unknown at the time of Moses. Paul quotes from the LXX and omits the words *of God* after *cursed*, since our Lord was in no sense accursed by God in His crucifixion. It was the curse of the Mosaic law that descended on Christ, subjecting Him to the death of a malefactor. The law satisfied its demands upon the Lord Jesus, and thus thrust Him out of the pale of its legal jurisdiction. Believers, being identified with Him in His death in which He paid our penalty, are likewise cast out with Him, and are therefore no longer under curse.

Translation. Christ delivered us by the payment of ransom from the curse of the law by becoming a curse in behalf of us, because it stands written, Accursed is every one who is suspended upon a tree.

Verse fourteen. There are two purpose clauses in this verse, each introduced by the word *that* (*hina* (ἵνα)). These are coordinate, depending upon the statement in verse 13 to the effect that Christ became a curse for us in order that the blessing of Abraham, justification by faith, and also the Holy Spirit, might be given to both Jew and Gentile (Joel 2:28). The law which was the barrier that separated Jew and Gentile, is done away in Christ. By its removal, the Gentiles are put on a common level with the Jew, and thus united, both Jew and Gentile are recipients of the Holy Spirit through faith.

Translation. In order that to the Gentiles the blessing of Abraham might come in Jesus Christ; in order that the promise of the Spirit we (Jew and Gentile) might receive through faith.

IV. *God made provision for justification to be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, and also the gift of the Spirit to both Jew and Gentile, doing this before the Mosaic law was given. The law therefore cannot make void that which was done by God prior to the giving of the law (3:15-18).*

Verse fifteen. Paul now presents an argument to show that the covenant God made with Abraham was still in force, basing it upon the priority of the covenant and its irrevocable character. He asserts that it is common knowledge that when men make a contract, and that contract is once agreed upon, it cannot be modified or changed except by the mutual consent of both parties to the contract. Paul applies this to God's covenant with Abraham, contending that the law cannot modify it since it was given centuries later. Paul addresses them as brethren here. In the preceding section he was not so much addressing the Galatians as he was speaking of the Judaizers. Here he is directly addressing the former. It was an expression of loving urgency, and conciliatory in tone. How different is this from the apostle's abrupt "Paul... to the churches of Galatia" (1:1, 2).

The words, "I speak after the manner of men" have in them the idea of, "I speak from a human point of view," or, "I speak as men do concerning their affairs." Paul is not apologizing for the illustration he is using, but is desirous of accommodating himself to the ordinary way in which the average man thinks, so as to be perfectly intelligible to his readers.

The word translated *covenant*, deserves careful treatment. It is the word *diatheke* (διαθεκε) which in its verb form means "to place between two." It refers to the act of one of two individuals placing between them something to which he obligates himself. It is an engagement on the part of one in the sense that he

enters into an agreement with another to do thus and so. The word here must not be understood as meaning a *testament*, namely, the testamentary disposition of goods. It is used only once in the New Testament in that way (Heb. 9:15–17). It refers to an agreement in which God enters into covenant relations with Abraham, and in which He promises to justify him on the basis of his faith in the atonement which He Himself would some day offer. That covenant or agreement was made by God. God also gave the law centuries later, and the God who made a covenant with Abraham would not invalidate that covenant by adding another specification to it, namely, obedience to law coupled with faith as the two prerequisites to salvation.

The word *confirmed* is from *kuroo* (κυροο) which means “to confirm solemnly or publicly, to ratify.” It is in the perfect tense, which indicates that the ratification is a past matter, and that at present the matter is closed and established. Therefore, just as in human relations, an agreement solemnly ratified cannot be changed unless by mutual consent of the parties involved, so in this divine relationship. “No man disannuleth or addeth thereto.” *Disannuleth* is from *atheteo* (ἀθετεο) which means “to render without place or standing, to abrogate, to annul.” *Addeth thereto* is from *diatasso* (διατασσο), which means, “to make additional prescriptions.” Two distinct methods of invalidating a contract are, *first*, to annul it directly, and *second*, to impose new conditions which are diametrically opposed to its spirit or purpose. The doctrine of the Judaizers at first glance appeared only to add some harmless new conditions to the covenant of grace. *But the character of these new conditions virtually annulled it. Works added to faith would annul the entire covenant since any dependence upon works means that it is necessary to abandon faith. That means that any sinner who claims to be saved on the basis of works plus faith is still a lost sinner.* One cannot carry water on two shoulders. Neither can one depend upon self effort to save one, and at the same time put faith in the Lord Jesus for salvation. Here is the terrible tragedy of those systems which teach that works are needed for salvation in addition to faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus. They are sending millions to the Lake of Fire by their heretical teaching.

Translation. Brethren, what I have to say is in accordance with common human practice. Even though it be a man’s covenant, when it has finally been ratified, no man annuls it nor adds stipulations to it. *Verse sixteen.* The promises were made to Abraham and to his seed, Christ. But when Christ is seen as seed of Abraham here, all those saved by Him are included. The word *seed* when used in the singular number in the Old Testament means *progeny*. Thus to Abraham personally and to all those who by faith in Christ are brought into salvation, were the promises made. *The fact that the promises were made to Abraham and to all believers all down the ages who follow Abraham in his act of faith, indicates that the faith way of salvation existed before the law was given, continued through the time the law was in force, and still is in effect after the abrogation of the law at the Cross. Thus the entrance of the law did not affect the covenant at all.*

Translation. Now to Abraham were made the promises, and to his seed. He does not say, And to the seeds, as in respect to many (seeds), but in respect to one (seed), and to your seed who is Christ.

Verse seventeen. The words “And this I say,” take up for the purpose of further argument or explanation a thought which has already been expressed. In verse 16, Paul has by inference hinted at what he states plainly in this verse. The figure of 430 years, Paul probably took from Exodus 12:40. The statement of the length of time that elapsed between the giving of the covenant to Abraham and the giving of the law to Moses, implies that the law was something new and different which could not therefore be an element forming part of the promise. The longer the covenant was in force as the alone method upon which God operated in the saving of sinners, the more impressive is Paul’s statement. God was saving men on the basis of faith without works since the time of Adam, or 2,500 years before the law was given. The law was in force from Moses to Christ, or for a period of 1500 years. At the Cross it was abrogated. The Judaizers not only attempted to retain the Mosaic institutions for the Jews, but tried to impose them upon the Gentiles, *to whom that law was never given.* This was what Paul was fighting.

Paul's argument therefore is as follows. If a covenant once in force cannot be changed or rendered void by any subsequent action, God's covenant with Abraham cannot be changed or rendered void by the subsequent law. If this principle holds good in a human covenant, much more is it true when God makes the covenant, since God is more certainly true to His promise than man.

Translation. This now is what I mean. A covenant previously established by God,¹⁸ the law, which came after four hundred and thirty years, does not render void, with the result that the promise becomes inoperative.

Verse eighteen. Paul's argument in this verse is, that if the law affects the promise at all, it renders it null and void. It cannot be added to it without destroying it. Salvation must rest either upon the promise *or* upon the law. The Judaizers claimed that it rested upon the promise *and* the law. But Paul has shown that the law did not abrogate the promise, and thus it had no effect upon it. Thus, if as the Judaizers say, the inheritance is on the basis of law obedience, then it is not on the basis of promise. But, Paul adds, God gave it to Abraham on the basis of promise. That settled the matter. The words, *law* and *promise* are without the definite article, indicating that Paul is speaking of them here in their character of two opposing principles.

The word *gave* is from *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι). This is a specialized word. It denotes not merely a gift, but a gift which is given out of the spontaneous generosity of the giver's heart, with no strings tied to it. The Greek word *grace* (*charis* (χαρις)) has the same root and the same meaning. Thus the word refers, not to an undertaking based upon terms of mutual agreement, but upon the free act of one who gives something, expecting no pay for it. This at once shows the difference between law and grace. If salvation were by obedience to the law, that would mean that it would be based upon a mutual agreement between God and the sinner whereby God would obligate Himself to give salvation to any sinner who would earn it by obedience to the law. But the very genius of the word *charizomai* (χαρίζομαι) militates against the teaching of the Judaizers, namely, that salvation is by works. There is a Greek word *huposchesis* (ὑποσχέσις) which is used of an offer based upon the terms of a mutual agreement. But it is not used here.

Furthermore, the verb *gave* is in the perfect tense here, which tense speaks of a past completed act having present results. The past act of God giving the inheritance on the basis of a promise, has present results, present to the writer. God gave the inheritance to Abraham by promise 2000 b.c. The results of this act were still in existence in the century when Paul wrote. The law was given 1500 b.c., and the promise still held good after the law came and had been set aside.

Translation. For if the inheritance is from law (as a method of divine dealing), no longer is it from promise (as a method of divine dealing). But to Abraham through the intermediate instrumentality of promise God has in grace freely bestowed it.

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7. Paul continues: Know then that those that are of faith, it is they who are sons of Abraham. To be "of faith" means to be characterized or controlled by faith, to have *trust in God* as one's guiding principle. When this can be truly affirmed of persons, then they are sons of Abraham; and if sons then also heirs, true partakers of the spiritual promise that was made to Abraham. Note the emphasis on the fact that they, *they alone* but also *all of them*, are the true sons of Abraham.

What Paul is writing was nothing new. Christ in his teaching had emphasized the same truth, namely, that not physical descent but spiritual likeness makes a person a true son of Abraham. Those are sons of Abraham who do the works of Abraham (Luke 19:9; John 8:39, 40; cf. Matt. 8:11, 12). And John the

⁴⁰ Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 92–103). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

Baptist had taught similarly (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8). Just as it is true that to be a child of God one must be like God (Eph. 5:1; 1 John 2:29: 3:1, 8, 9), so also it cannot be denied that to be a son of Abraham one must be like Abraham, imitate his conduct, and thus become a partaker of his blessedness. Therefore, even though a man should be a Hebrew of Hebrews, he is not, in the spiritual sense, a son of Abraham unless he be a true believer. Conversely, if he be a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, he is a son of Abraham, whether he be a Gentile or a Jew by race.

8. Continued: Now Scripture, foreseeing that it was by faith that God would justify the Gentiles, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, (saying): “In you all the nations shall be blessed.” In the words “Scripture foreseeing ... preached the gospel beforehand” we have a very emphatic identification of God and his Word: what Scripture promises God promises, for he is the Speaker. Since the Holy Spirit is Scripture’s Primary Author the conclusion is inevitable that God and his Word are most closely connected. The thing *foreseen*, because it had been thus ordained before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4, 11), was that it was “by faith” and not “by works” that God would justify the Gentiles. If the Galatians would only understand this, they would not allow themselves to be misled by the Judaizers. “By faith” means “by trustfully receiving” God’s gift out of his hand. It is thus, thus *only*, that the nations of the world were to receive pardon, right standing in the sight of God and his holy law, and adoption as sons; in a word: justification. This precious doctrine had been previously “gospelled” to Abraham. It had been proclaimed to him as good tidings of great joy for the entire world. This promise, though always valid, was to be realized *on an international scale* with the coming of Christ and of the dispensation which that coming would usher in. The content of the promise proclaimed to Abraham, recorded in words varying slightly but always essentially the same, was this: “In you all the nations shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; 22:18). The blessing of which Paul is thinking is that of “justification by faith,” as the context indicates; and this, in turn, was basic to all the blessings of salvation full and free. But inasmuch as the fulfilment of this promise, on a world-wide scale, was a matter of the future, it is readily understood that the phrase “in you” must be understood as Abraham himself also certainly understood it, namely, “in the Messiah,” “the seed of the woman” (Gen. 3:15), Abraham’s seed (see on verse 16).

9. A significant and logical conclusion is drawn. The assurances were: *a.* Those that are *of faith, they alone* but also *all of them* without exception, are sons of Abraham (verse 7); and *b.* “in Abraham,” that is, “in his seed,” shall *all the nations* be blessed, for it was foretold that it would be *by faith* that God would justify *the Gentiles* (verse 8). Conclusion: **Therefore, those that are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the man of faith.** This conclusion is warranted, for those who are “of faith” are the ones who exercise faith. As such they are the sons of Abraham; hence, they are blessed with him, the man of faith, who “in hope believed against hope, in order that he might become a father of many nations” (Rom. 4:18). The passage (Gal. 3:6–9; cf. verses 14, 26–29) clearly teaches the important truth—by many so deplorably rejected—that the church of both dispensations, the old and the new, is *one*. All believers dwell in the same tent (Isa. 54:1–3). When the old dispensation ended it was not necessary to pitch a new tent; the old one was simply enlarged. All of God’s children are represented by the same olive tree. The old tree did not have to be uprooted; new branches were grafted in among the old (Rom. 11:17). To each of the saints the same promise is given: “I will be your God.” Note how this promise runs through both Testaments (Gen. 15:1, 2; 17:7, 8; Exod. 20:2; Deut. 5:6; Josh. 1:5; 2 Chron. 20:17; Jer. 15:20; 24:7; 30:22; 31:33; Ezek. 11:20; Zech. 8:8; 13:9; 2 Cor 6:16; Heb. 8:10; Rev. 21:3, 7). All are saved by the same faith in the same Savior (Gen. 15:6; Isa. 53; Jer. 23:5, 6; Matt. 1:21; John 3:16; Acts 4:12; 10:43; 15:11; Rom. 3:24; 4:11). Apart from us those of the old dispensation do not reach perfection (Heb. 11:40). The names of all God’s people are written in the same book of life. There are not two of those books: one for the old and one for the new dispensation; there is only one (Exod. 32:32, 33; Ps. 69:28; Dan. 12:1; Mal. 3:16, 17; Luke 10:20; Phil. 4:3; Rev. 3:5; 13:8; 17:8, 20:12, 15; 21:27; 22:19). All are foreknown, foreordained, called, justified (by faith), and glorified (Rom. 8:29, 30). All partake and will partake of the glories of Jerusalem the Golden, the city on whose gates are written the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel,

and on whose foundation stones are engraved the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev. 12:12, 14). Cf. John 10:16; 17:11.

Once this is understood the Bible becomes a living book, for we begin to realize that when God says to Abraham, "Fear not ... I am your shield and your exceeding great reward ... your God," he is speaking also to us. This *central* promise concerns all believers of both dispensations, for all those that are of faith are Abraham's children and heirs (Gal. 3:29). No clearer language could have been used than that which is found in Rom. 4:22–24. There Paul, having again made mention of the fact that Abraham's faith "was reckoned to him for righteousness," adds, "But not for his sake alone was it written that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also."

10. Having shown that righteousness comes by way of faith, Paul now expresses this same truth negatively. What he states in verse 10 ff. may therefore be considered a corollary of the thought expressed in verses 6–9. Moreover, his attack against the false doctrine of the Judaizers, by which the Galatians were being influenced, thus increases in intensity and directness. It develops into a head-on collision: **For as many as rely on law-works are under a curse; for it is written: "Cursed (is) everyone who does not continue in all the things that are written in the book of the law, to do them."** This is a modified quotation from Deut. 27:26, which, according to the Hebrew reads: "Cursed (is) he who does not confirm the words of this law, to do them." In the Old Testament these words form the conclusion of the chapter that contains the curses that were to be pronounced from Mt. Ebal after the children of Israel would have passed over the Jordan. Now the curse which the law here pronounces is very real. Unless this be granted Gal. 3:13 will be meaningless. Nevertheless, it is a fact, often ignored, that in Deuteronomy not only the blessing which was to be shouted from Mt. Gerizim but also the curse occurs in a setting of love, the idea being that by means of proclamation of this blessing and curse Israel, tenderly addressed as "the people of Jehovah thy God," shall live a consecrated life to the glory of their merciful Deliverer. Paul's intentional departure from the Hebrew text when he writes, "the book of the law" may have been occasioned by his desire to emphasize the thought that the entire law, with all its precepts, considered as a unity, is meant. His reference to "everyone" and to "all the things" reminds one of the LXX rendering: "Cursed (is) every man who does not continue in all the words of this law, to do them." But these changes are not of an essential nature.

Now what was really the purpose of God's law? God gave his law in order that man, by nature a child of wrath, and thus lying under the curse (Gal. 3:13), as definitely declared in Deut. 27:26; John 3:36; Eph. 3:2, might be reminded not only of his unchanged obligation to live in perfect harmony with this law (Lev. 19:2) but also of his total inability to fulfil this obligation (Rom. 7:24). Thus this law would serve as a custodian to conduct the sinner to Christ (Gal. 3:24; cf. Rom. 7:25), in order that, having been saved by grace, he might, in principle, live the life of gratitude. That life is one of freedom in harmony with God's law (Gal. 5:13, 14). However, the Judaizers were perverting this true purpose of the law. They were relying on law-works *as a means of salvation*. On that basis they would fail forever, and Deut. 27:26, when interpreted in that framework, pronounced God's heavy and unmitigated curse upon them; yes, *curse*, not blessing. The law condemns, works wrath (Rom. 4:15; 5:16, 18).

11. The fact that the opponents were diverting the law from its true purpose and that this attempt was bound to result in tragic failure is brought out clearly, as Paul continues: **Now it is evident that by law no one is justified before God, for "The righteous shall live by faith."** The law has no power to subdue man's sinful tendencies. It cannot destroy the power of sin within man (Rom. 8:3). How then can a sinner ever attain to the ultimate blessing of being righteous in the sight of God? How can that true, rich, full life in which man is at peace with his Maker, and abides in sweet communion with him, ever be reached? The answer, which holds for both dispensations, the old and the new, and for people of every race or nationality, whether Gentile or Jew, is this: "The righteous shall live by faith." It is the man who has placed his entire confidence in God, trusting him implicitly, and accepting with gladness of heart the gracious provision which that merciful Father has made for his salvation, it is he, he alone, who shall live. This

living consists in such things as: *a.* enjoying the peace of God which passes all understanding (Phil. 4:7), in the knowledge that in the sight of God's holy majesty the believer is *righteous* (Rom. 5:1; 8:15); *b.* having fellowship with God "in Christ" (John 17:3); *c.* "rejoicing greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory" (1 Peter 1:8); *d.* "being transformed into the image of the Lord from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18); and *e.*, last but not least, striving to be a spiritual blessing to others to the glory of God (1 Thess. 3:8).

Now if the Judaizers had only paid more attention to the Word of God and had accepted it, they would have known that not by trusting in his own reasoning or in his own accomplishments but "by faith" the righteous man attains to this bliss of "living." This had been clearly stated by Habakkuk the prophet (Hab. 2:4). That man of God appeared upon the scene of history during the reign of wicked Jehoiakim (608–597 b.c.). The words "The righteous shall live by his faith" may even be considered the theme of Habakkuk's prophecy. The divisions then would be: I. *Faith tested*: the prophet's questions and Jehovah's answers (chapters 1 and 2), and II. *Faith strengthened* by a vision shown in answer to the prophet's prayer. What bothered Habakkuk was that it seemed as if wicked men were getting away with their wickedness.

Jehovah apparently tolerated such evils as the exploitation of the needy, strife, contention, violence, etc. So the prophet begins to ask questions. He addresses these questions to Jehovah. He complains, objects, and waits for an answer. Habakkuk's first question amounted to this, "Why does Jehovah allow the wicked in Judah to oppress the righteous?" Jehovah answers, "Evil-doers will be punished. The Chaldeans (Babylonians) are coming." But this answer does not quite satisfy the prophet. So he asks another one, which was tantamount to this: "Why does Jehovah allow the Chaldeans to punish the Jews, who, at least are more righteous than these foreigners?" The prophet stations himself upon his watch-tower and awaits an answer. The answer arrives: "The Chaldeans, too, will be punished. In fact *all sinners* will be punished ... but the righteous shall live by his *faith*." It is his duty and privilege to trust, and to do this even then when he is not able to "figure out" the justice of Jehovah's doings. In this humble trust and quiet confidence he shall truly *live*.

But Jehovah does more than merely tell the prophet that he must exercise faith. He also strengthens that faith by means of a marvelous, progressive vision. Habakkuk sees the symbol of Jehovah's presence, descending from Mt. Paran. Having descended he stands firm and shakes the earth. The tent-hangings of Cushan and Midian are trembling and are being torn to shreds. One question worries the prophet: "Upon whom is Jehovah's wrath going to fall? Merely upon the realm of nature? Upon Judah perhaps?" Finally, the answer arrives: Jehovah destroys the Chaldeans and delivers his people.

So fearful and terrifying had been the appearance of Jehovah, so alarming the sound of the tempest, of crumbling mountains, etc., that the prophet is trembling in every part of his body. Nevertheless, having witnessed that Jehovah had descended for the defense of his own people, Habakkuk no longer questions the ways of God's providence. From now on he "waits quietly." He expresses his feelings in a beautiful Psalm of Trust: "For though the fig-tree shall not flourish.... Yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation."

In this case, too, as with the quotation from the story of Abraham (Gen. 15:6; cf. Gal. 3:6), I beg to differ from those who think that Paul's appeal to an Old Testament passage in his battle with the Judaizers is far-fetched. These interpreters seem to see little if any connection between "the faith versus law-works controversy" of Paul's day and the "faith versus Chaldean self-confidence contrast" described in Habakkuk's prophecy. It is an error, however, to restrict the latter contrast so narrowly. A rapid review of the contents of the Old Testament book has certainly shown that the quiet confidence which Jehovah so patiently teaches his servant is contrasted also—perhaps *especially*—with the prophet's own tendency to question the ways of God's providence. Fact is that the sinner is beset with enemies: the accusing voice of conscience, the doubting mind, etc. He must have peace. How will he obtain it? The Judaizers answer: "by trusting in his own works (circumcision, etc.)." Habakkuk, before he had fully learned the lesson which God was teaching him, gives evidence of answering: "by trusting in his own reason." That is why it was so difficult for him to harmonize the events that were happening in Judah with the existence of a holy God.

That is why he had asked so many questions. But Habakkuk learned his lesson. When he sat down to write his prophecy he had learned it thoroughly, and gave an account of the experience through which he had passed. But whether a person trusts in his own *works* or in his own *reason*, in either case is he not trusting in “flesh”? As I see it, therefore, to clinch his argument Paul could not have chosen a better prophecy from which to quote than that of Habakkuk. The passage fits the situation exactly! In every age it remains true that “The righteous shall live by faith.” “In quietness and confidence shall be your strength” (Isa. 30:15).

12. Continued: **But the law does not belong to faith; on the contrary, “He who does them shall live by them.”** In its own setting the included quotation from the book of Leviticus (18:5) is beautiful and comforting. It is introduced as follows: “Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, I am Jehovah your God” (verse 2). This encouraging assurance is repeated in verse 4, and is followed by “You must therefore keep my statutes and my ordinances; which, if a man do, he shall live by them: I am Jehovah” (verse 5). In summary this means: “As your *sovereign* God I have a right to order you to keep my statutes, and as your *faithful and loving God* I will help and strengthen you to observe these statutes out of gratitude.” So interpreted, observing God’s law is the believer’s joy. Did not the Psalmist exclaim: “O how I love thy law! It is my meditation all the day”?

However, when one begins to “*rely on law-works*” (Gal. 3:10), as if such obedience to law amounts to a ticket of admission into the kingdom of heaven—and *that*, after all, is the context here in Galatians—he should bear in mind that, *so conceived*, law is the very opposite of *faith*. The two cannot be combined. Leaning on law means leaning on self. Exercising faith means leaning on Christ. As avenues by which men attempt to obtain salvation the two simply do not mix. They are thoroughly antagonistic. Paul himself supplies the best commentary: “But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love toward man appeared, he saved us, not by virtue of works which we ourselves had performed in a (state of) righteousness, but according to his mercy through the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit” (Titus 3:4, 5). Cf. John 1:17. Those who expect to be justified by observing all the statutes and ordinances of the law should remember that “He who does them shall live by them.” They are even more foolish than those who imagine that they can quench their thirst by drinking salt water. Lev. 18:5 now becomes their accuser, but that is *their* fault!

13. The penitent sinner does not need to despair, however. To be sure, he is by nature under the curse of the law, as has been indicated. From this pitiable situation he is unable to deliver himself. But God has provided the remedy: **Christ redeemed us**—Gentiles as well as Jews (see verse 14)—**from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.** Christ purchased us free from the curse of the law. He bought us back from the sentence of condemnation which the law pronounced on us and from the punishment of eternal death which it exacted (Gen. 2:17; Deut. 30:15, 19; John 3:36; Rom. 5:12; 8:1; Eph. 2:3). He rescued us by the payment of a ransom (Exod. 21:30), the ransom price being his own precious blood (1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; Rev. 5:9; cf. 1 Peter 1:18, 19). He became a curse—that is, “an accursed one”—for us. It is, indeed, difficult to conceive of the majestic Christ as being *accursed*. What! Jesus anathema? In the face of 1 Cor. 12:3 how would one dare to say that? This becomes all the more a problem when we consider that we generally—and rightly—associate the curse with *sin*, and Christ had no sin (Isa. 53:9; John 8:46; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 Peter 2:22). The only solution is the one supplied by the beautiful words of Isa. 53:6: “Jehovah laid on him the iniquity of us all”; cf. also verses 10–12. Christ’s curse-bearing, then, was vicarious: “Him who knew no sin he made to be sin for our sake, in order that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor. 5:21). This eminently scriptural truth of Christ’s substitutionary atonement is being denied by ever so many people. It has been called “butchershop theology.” Nevertheless, not only is it taught here in Gal. 3:13 in unmistakable language but it is the doctrine of Scripture throughout (Exod. 12:13; Lev. 1:4; 16:20–22; 17:11; Ps. 40:6, 7; 49:7, 8; Isa. 53; Zech. 13:1; Matt. 20:28; 26:27, 28; Mark 10:45; Luke 22:14–23; John 1:29; 10:11, 14; Acts 20:28; Rom. 3:24, 25; 8:3,

4; 1 Cor. 6:20; 7:23; 2 Cor. 5:18–21; Gal. 1:4; 2:20; Eph. 1:7; 2:16; Col. 1:19–23; Heb. 9:22, 28; 1 Peter 1:18, 19; 2:24; 3:18; 1 John 1:7; 2:2; 4:10; Rev. 5:9; 7:14).

In support of the idea that Christ became a curse for us Paul appeals to Deut. 21:23: **for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanging on a tree.”** In its Old Testament context, however, that passage does not refer to death by crucifixion, which was not known among the Israelites as a mode of capital punishment. It refers, instead, to the custom according to which after a wrong-doer had been executed, his dead body was nailed to a post or tree. But if, in the sight of God, the hanging of a *dead* body was a curse, how much more would not the slow, painful, and shameful death by crucifixion of a *living* person be a curse, especially when that dying one was experiencing anguish beyond the power of description! See Matt. 27:46.

14. The curse having thus been borne and lifted off our shoulders, the blessing can now flow forth: **in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Jesus Christ, in order that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.** The two purpose clauses are co-ordinate. They cover the same ground, the second explaining the first. Among all the priceless gems sparkling in the crown of Abraham’s blessing (the blessing he received) this surely was one of the most precious, namely, that through him—more precisely through his seed, the Messiah—a countless multitude of people was to be blessed. Through Christ and his Spirit (literally “the Spirit of promise,” but this means “the promised Spirit,” cf. Acts 1:4, 5; Eph. 1:13) the river of grace (cf. Ezek. 47:3–5; Ps. 46:4; Rev. 22:1, 2), full, flowing, freshening, fructifying, and free, would continue on and on, blessing first the Jews but subsequently men of every race, Gentiles as well as Jews. And to receive this blessing, namely, the realization of the promise, “I will be your God,” all that is necessary is *faith*, confidence in Christ Crucified, for it is at Calvary that the fires of God’s wrath have spent all their fury, and believers of every tribe and tongue and people and nation are therefore perfectly safe!

Chapter 3

Verses 15–29

Theme: *The Gospel of Justification by Faith apart from Law-works Defended against Its Detractors*
 II. *Its Vindication: both Scripture—i.e., the Old Testament—and life (experience, past history) bear testimony to its truth*

C. This promise or covenant is superior to the law, for the latter reached us through mediation, the former came directly from God, and is still in force. The law, which came later, far from annulling the promise, serves it, by revealing our sinfulness and leading us to Christ. All who belong to Christ are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise.

3:15–29

C. The superiority of the promise over the law

15 Brothers, I speak from a human standpoint: even a human testament, once ratified, no one sets aside or amplifies. 16 Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He does not say, “And to the seeds,” as (referring) to many, but as (referring) to one, “And to your seed,” which is Christ. 17 Now this is what I mean: a covenant that has been ratified by God, the law, which came into existence four hundred thirty years afterward, does not annul so as to make the promise ineffective. 18 For if the inheritance (is) due to law, it (is) no longer due to promise; but to Abraham it was through a promise that God graciously granted it.

19 Why then the law? By reason of the transgressions it was added, until the seed should come to whom the promise had been made, having been ordained through angels by the agency of an intermediary. 20 Now the intermediary does not represent (just) one party, but God is one.

21 (Is) the law then contrary to the promises of God? By no means. For if a law had been given that was able to impart life, then indeed righteousness would have come by law. 22 But Scripture has locked up the whole world under (the power of) sin, in order that as a result of faith in Jesus Christ the promise might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before this faith came, we were kept in custody under law, being locked up with a view to the faith that was to be revealed. 24 So the law became our custodian (to conduct us) to Christ, that by faith we might be justified. 25 But now that this faith has come we are no longer under a custodian.

26 For you are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus. 27 For as many of you as were baptized into (union with) Christ have put on Christ. 28 There can be neither Jew nor Greek; there can be neither slave nor freeman; there can be no male and female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. 29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise.

The promise is superior to the law because it was *earlier*. Moreover, being in the nature of a testament, already ratified and in force, this promise or covenant could not be set aside by the law which came so much later (verses 15–18). Besides, the promise came to Abraham *directly*; the law was given to Israel *indirectly*, by mediation (verses 19, 20). For both of these reasons the promise is superior to the law. The Galatians should remember this and repent of their error of listening to the Judaizers who exalt the law above the promise.

15. Paul writes: Brothers, I speak from a human standpoint. He is taking his illustration from human life so that the Galatians may understand all the better that those to whom they have been lending a listening ear are false guides. Jesus also often made use of earthly stories (parables) to illustrate heavenly realities. Note that Paul calls the Galatians "brothers." This shows that when he exclaimed "O foolish Galatians" he was scolding them as a father or mother rebukes an erring son who is the object of tender love (cf. 4:19, 20). Continued: **even a human testament, once ratified, no one sets aside or amplifies.** It is a matter of common knowledge that among men a last will or testament, legally ratified, cannot be nullified. Nor can it be amplified: not a single codicil can be added to it. Then would not this be true all the more with respect to the covenant-promise which the immutable Jehovah made to Abraham and his seed? Was not this covenant in the nature of a testament? Was it not re-affirmed to Isaac, Jacob, etc.? Did it not begin to go into effect immediately, namely, when "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness"? Surely, when God's will or testament has been thus decreed and ratified it cannot be set aside or changed. This logical deduction, already implied here in verse 15, is going to be clearly expressed in verse 17. However, the inviolability and immutability of God's promise will become all the more evident when it is understood first of all that, in the final analysis, it is a promise that concerns not physical Israel but Christ together with those who are "in him," for all the promises of God find their Yes in him (2 Cor. 1:20; cf. Eph. 1:3). If this be understood it will be seen that the words which now follow are not really a parenthesis but part of the argument:

16. Now to Abraham were the promises spoken, and to his seed. He does not say, "And to the seeds," as (referring) to many, but as (referring) to one, "And to your seed," which is Christ. Is this argument a bit of rabbinical casuistry, ingenious perhaps but unconvincing? Does not Paul know that even in Hebrew the word *seed* is a collective noun, so that no plural is needed to indicate more than one? See Gen. 15:5; 16:10; 22:17; 46:6; 2 Kings 11:1; 2 Chron. 20:7; Mal. 2:15; etc. And as to the Greek word for *seed*, namely, *sperma*, does the apostle not realize that this word also is a collective noun (Matt. 22:24; Rom. 4:18; Acts 7:6; 2 Cor. 11:22), so that *spermata* (seeds) would have been unnecessary in any case? Shall we say then that in arguing against rabbinical adversaries Paul was using rabbinical methods that belonged to the exegesis of that happily bygone day and age? How can Paul say that the singular *seed* indicates one person, namely, Christ, when in Gal. 3:29 he himself uses that very word *in the singular* as a collective noun which refers to all believers? Besides, did he not realize that the seed promised to Abraham would be "as the stars in multitude" (Gen. 15:5; 22:17)?

As I see it, the answer is as follows:

(1) It is not true that the Hebrew word for *seed* always refers to more than one person. In Gen. 4:25 it refers to Seth, to him *alone*; in 21:13 to Ishmael; in 1 Sam. 1:11 to Samuel; in 2 Sam. 7:12 to Solomon as a type of Christ; so also in 1 Chron. 17:11. And obviously—see the context in each case—the Greek

equivalent *sperma* has a singular reference not only here in Gal. 3:16 but also in 3:19; Acts 3:25; Rom. 9:7, 8; and Heb. 11:18.

(2) It should be readily admitted that Paul knew that both the Hebrew and the Greek word for *seed* (singular) often refer to more than one person. He knew that Abraham's seed would be as the stars in multitude. However, in keeping with the point which he is driving home, namely, that God promised salvation not to Abraham's physical descendants but to true believers, to them *all* (whether Jew or Gentile) and to them *alone*, he is saying that this great blessing is concentrated in *one* person, namely, Christ. It is in him, in him *alone*, that all these multitudes of believing Jews and Gentiles are blessed. It is in this sense that *seed* is singular, definitely not plural. It is true that the physical descendants of Abraham inherited the physical land of Canaan, according to God's promise (Gen. 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7), but even Abraham already knew that there was more to this promise than appeared on the surface. The promised country on earth was the type of "the better country," the heavenly, reserved for believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, for them *all* and for them *alone*, as is beautifully stated in Heb. 11:8–16. Now the one and only heir of that "country" is Christ, for he is the Son by nature. It is by his grace that believers, as children by adoption, are joint-heirs with him (Rom. 8:17). And as for the basic promise, expressed from the beginning in spiritual terms, the promise according to which God assures Abraham that he will be his God and that in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed (17:7; 22:18), is it not very obvious that this promise also, in its fulfilment, was centered exclusively in *one* person, namely, Christ? The many are blessed in the One!

(3) In promising these rich spiritual blessings God had from the very beginning turned Abraham's attention away from the plural to the singular, from *seeds* to *seed*: "As for Ishmael, I have heard you ... but I will establish my covenant with Isaac.... In Isaac shall your seed be called" (Gen. 17:20, 21; 21:12; cf. Rom. 9:7). Similarly, at a later time God made it very clear to Isaac and Rebekah that not in the line of Esau but in that of Jacob the promise would be continued (Gen. 25:23; cf. 27:27–29). Accordingly, Paul's distinction here in Gal. 3:16 between *seeds* and *seed* is based on the words which God himself addressed to the patriarchs.

(4) It appears to be clearly implied in such passages as John 8:56; Heb. 11:13, 17–19 that Abraham understood that Isaac would not himself be the Hope of mankind. He knew that Isaac's birth would pave the way for the coming of the real Messiah, the genuine *seed*, the *One* through whom God would bless all the nations. He was aware of the fact that the promised blessings would be concentrated in this one great person. At the time of Christ's birth even the highest court in Israel, the Sanhedrin, interpreted the prophecy of Micah 5:2 *personally*, that is, as referring to the birth of one definite person, Christ (Matt. 2:4–6). Is not the personal interpretation of Isa. 53—"Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.... He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities," etc.—better by far than the exclusively *nationalistic*? Were not Isaiah and Micah contemporaries? And can we not go back beyond these two prophets, and their Messianic utterances, to 2 Sam. 7:12, 13? Does a reference to Solomon *exhaust* the meaning of the words, "I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever"? Does not also that promise refer to one exalted person, one greater by far than Solomon? Does not the same thing apply to Gen. 49:10? And does not this series of promises, everyone of which refers ultimately to one definite person, a person who had not yet arrived but was eagerly awaited, finally point back to Gen. 3:15, which concerns *the seed of the woman*, the very culmination of God's promise not only to Adam but also to Abraham?

The words which, according to Gen. 3:15, God addressed to the serpent—that is, to Satan—were as follows: "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Is it not probable that Abraham knew this prophecy? It refers to the woman's *seed*, and here, too, the primary reference would appear to be to *one* person, though a further collective reference is not thereby ruled out. Dr. G. Ch. Aalders makes the following comment (my translation from the Dutch): "There is more here than merely this, that man will

gain the victory over the serpent.... In that serpent a definite personality is being addressed.... And if the enemy whose discomfiture is here announced must be a definite personality, then would it even be possible that the One who conquers him could be other than also a definite personality? Even the contrast *head* and *heel* suggests that the struggle will finally be fought between two contestants. Also the Hebrew demonstrative pronoun [*that one* or *he*] strongly suggests that the conqueror is to be regarded as one person." Having pointed out that this protevangelium does not exclude the reference to a collective interpretation of the concepts "your seed" and "her seed," Aalders continues: "But in the end the figure of the Mediator stands in the foreground, and this so much so that in the words in which the final struggle is described there is definite mention of only one person, who is indicated by this seed of the woman. The real struggle is won by no one else than by our Lord Jesus Christ" (*Korte Verklaring, Genesis, Vol. I, pp. 136-138*).

As mentioned earlier, Abraham probably knew this prophecy. But more important is the fact that the Holy Spirit, who inspired Galatians as well as Genesis, knew what content he was pouring into Gen. 3:15; 13:15; 17:7, 8; 22:18; 24:7, as well as into Gal. 3:16. And is it not significant that in the echo of Gen. 3:15 which we have in Rev. 12:1-6 the struggle is again *primarily* between the two personal antagonists: Christ and Satan? To be sure, from this struggle "the woman" is not excluded (verses 6, 13) yet the central figure, the One who really conquers, is *Christ*.

Accordingly, Paul's intention in writing, "He does not say, 'And to the seeds,' as (referring) to many, but as (referring) to one, 'And to your seed,' which is Christ," is to show *a.* that God's promise to Abraham, in its richest, spiritual meaning, was to be fulfilled in connection with one—and not more than one—definite person, Christ, the true seed; *b.* that all those—and only those—who are "in him" are saved; *c.* that had the case been otherwise, that is, had the promised blessings been dispersed indiscriminately among an indefinite aggregate of individuals, such plurality would have been definitely indicated; and *d.* that being thus concentrated unchangeably in the one seed, Christ, nothing, not even the law, is able to nullify this promise, a truth to which the apostle gives further expression by continuing:

17. Now this is what I mean: a covenant that has been ratified by God, the law, which came into existence four hundred thirty years afterward, does not annul so as to make the promise ineffective. "Even a human testament, once ratified, no one sets aside or amplifies" (verse 15); hence, this holds all the more with respect to a *testament* or *covenant* (same word in the original) ordained and ratified by God. Between the giving of the promise and the promulgation of the law at Sinai there had been an interval of "four hundred thirty" (Exod. 12:40) or, in round figures, "four hundred" years (Gen. 15:13; Acts 7:6). Surely a covenant that had been in effect for so long a time, that partook of the nature of a testament, and had been established by the unchangeable Jehovah, whose word never fails, could not be annulled by the law!

With reference to these "four hundred thirty years" there is much difference of opinion. The question has been asked: Was there not all interval of two hundred fifteen years between Abraham's call and Jacob's "descent" into Egypt (Gen. 12:4; 21:5; 25:26; 47:9)? These two hundred fifteen years plus the four hundred thirty years in Egypt (Exod. 12:40) add up to six hundred forty-five years from Abraham's call to the exodus, and the same number of years (plus a few months, Exod. 19:1) to the giving of the law (Exod. 20). If the *repetition* of the promise of Gen. 12:1-3 in Abraham's later years, with specific mention of *the seed* (Gen. 13:15; 15:5, 18; 21:12; 22:15 ff.; 24:7), be taken as the beginning of the interval between the promise and the law, some years could be subtracted from the two hundred fifteen and from the total of six hundred forty-five, but even then the question would remain: How can Paul say that the law came into existence four hundred thirty years after the covenant-promise? Was not the intervening period considerably longer? Among the answers that have been suggested are the following:

(1) Paul errs, having been misled by the Greek Bible (LXX) which in Exod. 12:40 gives a total of four hundred thirty (or, according to another text, 435) years as the duration of the sojourn of the Israelites in Canaan *and* in Egypt (literally, "in Egypt-land and in Canaan-land").

(2) The period from the giving of the promise to Abraham, as recorded in Gen. 12, to the giving of the law at Sinai, actually covered only four hundred thirty years, as is clear from such passages as Gen. 15:16; Exod. 6:15–19 [Hebrew text: verses 16–20]; and Num. 26:57–59. Of this entire period two hundred fifteen years belong to the stay in Canaan, two hundred fifteen to the sojourn in Egypt.

I cannot accept either of these theories. The round figure “four hundred years,” and the more exact figure “four hundred thirty years,” for the sojourn *in Egypt* are too definitely established in Scripture as an indication of the time that the Israelites spent there to be so easily dismissed (Gen. 15:13; Acts 7:6; and Exod. 12:40 Hebrew text). Paul, thoroughly at home in the Old Testament, knew this. Besides, would not two hundred fifteen years have been too short a period for “three score and ten” people at the outset (Gen. 46:27) to grow into a nation so great that at the time of the exodus it had produced “about six hundred thousand men on foot (Exod. 12:37) besides the women and children?”

(3) We have here a case of “intentional understatement” made by Paul so that the Galatians may say: “Paul is certainly not exaggerating, for when the law finally came into existence the covenant had been in force much longer than four hundred thirty years, hence could certainly not be annulled.”

As I see it, the best answer is the following:

(4) The covenant which God made with Abraham was repeated and confirmed in identical language in the promise addressed to Isaac and to Jacob. Compare, for example, Gen. 22:18 (to Abraham), 26:4 (to Isaac), and 28:14 (to Jacob), in each of which are found the words: “And in your seed shall all the nations (in 28:14: “families”) of the earth be blessed.” “It may not be unreasonable to suppose that it was from such a time, at which the promise was confirmed (to Jacob) that Paul is measuring the interval which extends to the giving of the law at Sinai” (C. R. Erdman, *op. cit.*, p. 69). This, as I see it, best accounts for the figure “four hundred thirty years afterward.”

The reasonable character of this explanation is evident from the fact that Scripture itself definitely points in this direction, for again and again it mentions Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in one breath. Not only this, but in nearly every case when this occurs *it is in connection with the divine promise that the three patriarchs are grouped together as if they were one* (Gen. 28:13; 32:9; 48:16; 50:24; Exod. 3:16; 6:3; 32:13; Deut. 1:8; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20; 1 Chron. 29:18; Matt. 22:32; Mark 12:26; Acts 3:13; 7:32).

18. It has been established, therefore, that justification, hence salvation in all its fulness, the entire “inheritance,” is the result of God’s promise, a covenant-promise that could not have been abrogated by Sinai’s law, which did not enter into the picture until much later. Salvation, then, is not the result of law or law-observance. Neither is it possible to combine the two, as if *law* and *promise*, merit and grace, were twin sources of eternal bliss for God’s children. Says Paul: **For if the inheritance (is) due to law, it (is) no longer due to promise; but to Abraham it was through a promise that God graciously granted it.** The Galatians will have to make up their minds once for all. They will have to choose between God’s way and man’s way of being saved. They must fully return to the position of faith in God and in his promise. In this connection there are especially four words that deserve emphasis, all of them underscoring the same idea, namely, that salvation is God’s gift, not man’s achievement:

(1) It is the result of God’s *covenant*, and, as shown earlier, this covenant is of the nature of a *testament*, a sovereign *grant* (verses 15, 17). It is not a *contract* or *compact* reached after lengthy bargaining, bickering, and wrangling. It was God who established this covenant. It was he who stipulated the manner in which it would attain its purpose for man, namely, through faith. It is even God who grants this faith. He grants what he demands (Eph. 2:8).

(2) The main feature of this covenant is therefore God’s *promise*, his solemn *assurance*: “I am (will be) your God,” “In your seed I will bless you,” “I will give you the land” (ultimately “the better land, Canaan above,” as has been indicated).

(3) God’s covenant with Abraham was therefore a “covenant of *grace*.” “To Abraham it was through a promise that God *graciously* granted it.” Human merit has nothing to do with it. In fact, God’s gift would be deprived of its gracious character if it were afterward made to depend on strict compliance with law.

(4) The promised salvation is an *inheritance*. Paul says, “If *the inheritance* (is) due to law, it (is) no longer due to promise.” An inheritance is freely bestowed. It is a gift; hence, is not bought with money, nor earned by the sweat of human toil, nor won by conquest. Moreover, it is duly acquired (by right rooted in grace), and inalienable (cf. 1 Kings 21:3). As an inheritance it is future glory of which, however, the first instalment has even now become our possession (Eph. 1:13, 14).

Now it is certainly true that in the historical realization of the divine arrangement for man’s salvation action proceeds from two parties: God and man. *God* makes the promise and points out the way in which it is to be fulfilled, namely, through faith (Gen. 15:1, 4, 5; 17:7; etc.). *Abraham* believes (Gen. 15:6; 17:1b, 9; etc.). God does not believe for him. When the Philippian jailer asked Paul and Silas, “Men, what must I do to be saved?” Paul did not answer, “Nothing at all, just wait until it pleases God to come and save you.” What he did say was this, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household” (Acts 16:30, 31). Nevertheless, this two-sidedness is completely subsidiary to the one-sided character of the covenant, as has already been indicated. If strict compliance with the demands of the law could have saved anyone, Paul certainly would have entered heaven by that gateway (Phil. 3:1–6). But the Lord had revealed to him the utter impossibility of success in this direction. No wandering sheep ever returns to the fold unless the Master finds him and brings him home.

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⁴¹ Hendriksen, W., & Kistemaker, S. J. (1953–2001). *Exposition of Galatians* (Vol. 8, pp. 123–140). Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.