

Exegetical Analysis – Galatians 3:1-29

Ian A. Hicks

1-5 – You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? [2] This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? [3] Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? [4] Did you suffer so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? [5] So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? (1. Ω ἀνόητοι Γαλάται, τίς ὑμᾶς ἐβάσκανεν, οἵς κατ’ ὄφθαλμοὺς Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς προεγράφη ἐσταυρωμένος 2. τοῦτο μόνον θέλω μαθεῖν ἀφ’ ὑμῶν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου τὸ Πνεῦμα ἐλάβετε ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως; 3. οὕτως ἀνόητοί ἔστε; ἐναρξάμενοι Πνεύματι νῦν σαρκὶ ἐπιτελεῖσθε; 4. τοσαῦτα ἐπάθετε εἰκῇ; εἴ γε καὶ εἰκῇ. 5. ὁ οὖν ἐπιχορηγῶν ὑμῖν τὸ Πνεῦμα καὶ ἐνεργῶν δυνάμεις ἐν ὑμῖν, ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἢ ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως)

Paul in chapters 1 & 2 had laid out the gospel of grace for the Galatians which he referred to as his brothers (ἀδελφοί). Notice now the shift in language to “Galatians”. The personal tone of “brotherly” love was replaced by the impersonal tone of a people from Galatia (i.e. a Galatian). This shows us the serious transition of argumentation from what came before, to what is about to come.

“For the first time since 1:11, Paul addresses his readers by name. He refers to them now, not as brethren, but as Galatians, placing them, so to speak, at a formal distance in order to summon them to their responsibility.”¹

There were three clear problems with their code of conduct that Paul is not at all happy about.

The first clear issue here is that their conduct is irrational/foolish (ἀνόητοι). The Galatians were on the verge of accepting such an irrational proposition regarding salvation by works, not by grace. They were falling into the trap of the Judaizers by believing that salvation was on the basis of works, when they had been taught that it was by grace. It was almost as if they were “bewitched” (ἐβάσκανεν) by some magician.

The second issue is that they were clearly taught the true gospel. Paul made this clear in chapter 2 (vs.15-21) regarding the distinction between justification by the law (works) and justification by grace (faith). It is paramount that they understand the relationship of ‘Christ’s crucifixion’

¹ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT), (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI, 1953), 111.

which was portrayed as a public act and the Gospel. It is Christ crucified and his work alone that is necessary here, not works and not the Law, for as Paul will later describe the Law was a tutor to lead to Christ, not the means of salvation for the Galatian.

The third issue that Paul brings to their attention is a deviation or defect from what they had initially experienced. Paul brings to mind (vs.2) their initial experience “did you receive the Spirit by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?” Paul wants to know if they had abandoned such a practical truth as this. Their entrance into the Christian faith, was it by means of their obedience to the Law, or by hearing with faith. Paul’s question is incredibly clear and should have been understood by his audience. The Holy Spirit was not received by works of the Law, but by hearing with faith. This means that it was impossible for them to have been justified by the works of the Law, because they didn’t receive the Spirit by works of the Law, but through hearing and believing (Rom. 10:17).

The answer is proposed by Paul in Galatians 3:3. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh? Ah, is it not the Spirit who began (ἐναρξάμενοι) to work in you, and by the work of the Spirit are you now not being perfected (ἐπιτελεῖσθε)? Having begun by faith, they must continue in faith.

“Paul emphasizes this conflict by three sets of comparisons: (1) works versus hearing, (2) law versus faith, and (3) spirit versus flesh.”²

Suffer (ἐπάθετε) in (vs.4) likely means “experience” as this makes more sense than attributing their actions at this point to some sort of persecution. The Galatians had experienced several things, but were those things experienced in vain (εἰκῇ)? Paul asks such a startling question because it appears that all they experienced meant very little to them because this little spell they were under has apparently influenced them so much, such that they are deviating from the truth that they had received.

In (vs.5) we have a repeat of what was just stated in (vs.2). “So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?”. Is it God who performs his “works” among you, and if so, does he do it by works of the Law? This anticipates an end of the argument from experience that Paul is presenting. His question propels one to the logical conclusion that their experience of being a Christian was not contingent upon works of the Law, for it had nothing to do with the Law, it had to do with God monergistically engaging in actions apart from the Law.

**6-9 – Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. [7]
Therefore, recognize that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. [8] The
Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel**

² James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians*, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 10, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), 454.

beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” [9] So then, those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. (6. καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ Θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην. 7. Γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, οὗτοι νιοί εἰσιν Ἀβραάμ. 8. προϊδοῦσα δὲ ἡ γραφὴ ὅτι ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοῖ τὰ ἔθνη ὁ Θεὸς, προευηγγελίσατο τῷ Ἀβραὰμ ὅτι Ἐνευλογηθήσονται ἐν σοὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη 9. ὅστε οἱ ἐκ πίστεως εὐλογοῦνται σὺν τῷ πιστῷ Ἀβραάμ.)

Paul, will now move from what was an argument from experience, to an argument from the Old Testament scriptures, specifically the experience/case with Abraham. Just like the case with the monergistic working of God and the Gospel of his sovereign grace, even so (Καθὼς) in the case of Abraham Paul will make the same conclusion as is seen in the above text.

One needs only to pause for a moment to consider what is being proposed here by Paul. James Montgomery Boice has a helpful chart that I will share here that will show the contrast being made between the true gospel, and the gospel that the legalizers were presenting.

*Image 1*³

The Test Question:		
Believing what was heard	or	“observing the law”?
The true gospel		The legalizers’ “gospel”
3:6-9 Faith (“Abraham”)		3:10-14 Law (the “curse”)
3:15-18 Faith (“covenant”)		3:19-22 Law (“transgressions”)
3:23-29 Faith (“heirs”)		4:1-7 Law (“bondage”)

The discussion surrounding faith gives Paul reason to appeal to the justification by faith alone that Abraham had in the Old Testament. Abraham is a prime example because he “believed” (ἐπίστευσεν) entrusting himself to God, and it was “that faith” that was reckoned to him as righteousness (ἐλογίσθη δικαιοσύνην).

In (vs.7) Paul makes a startling statement, to those who had forgotten the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Gen. 12:3). Paul wants the reader to know or be sure (γινώσκετε) that

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 10, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), 455.

it is those who share the same faith as Abraham that are truly his sons. Paul will restate this fact in (vs.29) to conclude this chapter. The point raised by Paul is extremely important. It was not his “physical” offspring that were his sons, but his “spiritual” offspring that were his. Why? Because it was by faith that one is rightly related to God, not by works of the Law.

However, at this point one might be confused. Is Paul saying that Jews and Gentiles who make up the Church (justified by faith alone and not by works of the Law) are Abraham’s offspring? What happens to the physical Jews who were also promised to be as vast as the stars in Gen. 15:5? It is important to note at this juncture that the Covenantalist approach to this passage is extremely flawed. There is no indication *at all* that “Gentile” believers become “spiritual Jews”, or that the church becomes some sort of “new/spiritual Israel”. There is also no indication that the promises made to Abraham have been nullified.

“Thus, if Gentile believers become the children of Abraham by faith, does that not make them “spiritual Jews?” Not at all. Even in the physical realm not all the children of Abraham are Jews. Arabs are as much the descendants of Abraham as Jews, but in no way can they be classified as Jews. What is true of the physical is also true of the spiritual realm’ being children of Abraham by faith is not enough to make one a Jew. What then is the meaning of this passage? To begin with, it should be noted that the context is concerned with the question of whether salvation is by works or by grace through faith. The Hebrew concept of “children” or “sons” often has the meaning of “followers.” The point is that Abraham was declared righteous on the basis of faith and not on that of works. The true followers of Abraham, who practiced faith rather than works to attain salvation. The Gentile Galatians were never said to become Jews, but rather children of Abraham. Being a child of Abraham alone is not enough to make one as Jew.”⁴

As Fruchtenbaum rightly pointed out, there is no indication that Gentile believers here become spiritual Jews. They become children of Abraham, by means of faith, rightly related to Christ.

“The fact that the true seed of Abraham includes both Jews and Gentiles does not rule out a continuing distinction for Israel in the New Testament. Nor should the calling of the Gentiles as the seed of Abraham be construed as the formation of a “new spiritual Israel” that supersedes the Old Testament nation of Israel. If Abraham were merely the father of Israel, we would have to conclude that the Gentiles who are now a part of his seed are therefore part of Israel. But according to the New Testament Abraham is more than that; he is portrayed as the father of both the people of Israel and of the Gentiles. On the grounds that Abraham was a believer before he was circumcised—that is, before he was recognized as a Hebrew—the apostle Paul declared him to be “the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised...and...also the father of the uncircumcised” (Ro 4:9-12; cf. v. 16). Further evidence of this truth is found in the fact that the New Testament teaching of the inclusion of the Gentiles in the seed of Abraham is never related to the fulfillment of the promise of a “great nation” (Ge 12:2). Rather, it is always tied to the promise of universal blessing to all nations (Gal 3:7-9). This the promises concerning the

⁴ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, (Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX, Revised Edition: 2018), 669.

physical seed constituting the nation of Israel remain alongside this universal promise even as they did in the original statement in the Old Testament.”⁵

In (vs.8) the point is further nailed home. The Old Testament scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles (by means of faith), and the message proclaimed beforehand to Abraham was the blessing made to him that all nations will be blessed “through” him.

To conclude the section (vs.9) Paul restates that it is those who are of faith (not of works) that are blessed (εὐλογοῦνται) alongside of Abraham.

10-14 – For all who are of works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law, to do them.” [11] Now, that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “the righteous one will live by faith.” [12] However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, “The person who performs them will live by them.” [13] Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— [14] in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. (10. Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν, ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν, γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά 11. ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ Θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι Ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται· 12. ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ Ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς. 13. Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα, ὅτι γέγραπται Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὁ κρεμάμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου 14. ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ γένηται ἐν Ἰησοῦ Χριστῷ, ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ Πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως)

The contrast will be apparent as we move into the next section. Paul switches gears from the *blessing* of those who have faith to the *curse* of those who are abiding and attempting to uphold the Law.

“Faith brings blessing, but the Law produces a curse because of the requirement that one must *continue* to meet its demands faithfully.”⁶

Paul reminds his audience that the curse (κατάραν) of the Law is upon all those who “do not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law”. What a weight, what a burden, to uphold the entire Law on our own everyday. What is this curse?

“This is the penalty God pronounces on the transgressor of His law. The curse is death. “The

⁵ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1993), 50.

⁶ Everett F. Harrison, *Galatians in The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, (Moody Monthly, The Iversen Associates, New York, 1971), 705.

soul that sinneth it shall die.”⁷

In (vs.11) Paul lays out the hard truth that justification *is not* by works of the Law, for on our own we are not able to be justified by our works nor are we able to uphold the Law completely as Christ did. This impossibility is what Paul is pointing us towards. The alternative, which is the only means of salvation for us as humans is justification by faith, not by works (δίκαιος ζήσεται πίστεως). The only means of true justification in God’s eyes is faith.

Habakkuk 2:4

“Behold, as for the proud one, His soul is not right within him; But the righteous will live by his faith.

“Under law, one must *do* before he can *live* (Lev. 18:5). Under the Gospel one gets life from God through faith, then begins to do the will of God in the energy of that faith.”⁸

In (vs.12) the Law is said not to be of faith? How can this be? The Law was of *doing* not of *believing*. It was this very point that would shatter the Judaizers arguments. The Law imposed an impossible task upon its readers, one that could not be fulfilled without one who was perfect.

This leads us to (vs.13) where Paul tells us that Christ *redeemed* us from the curse of the Law (Χριστὸς ἐξηγόρασεν κατάρας νόμου). It was Christ who was able to uphold the Law perfectly never failing in one regard. It was Christ who “became” a “curse” for us. This perfect Christ took the place of a lawbreaker (all of us) and endured exactly the same penalty as any other who would come under the curse of the Law. The one who would hang on a tree (Deut. 21:23) was cursed, and it was Jesus who became that curse for us, such that we were free from the curse of the Law. What a marvelous truth! The result in (vs.14) is that “in” Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles, as was promised in Gen. 12:3. Again, by faith, we have received that which was promised, not by works of the Law.

15-18 – Brothers and sisters, I speak in terms of human relations: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. [16] Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as one would in referring to many, but rather as in referring to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. [17] What I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise. [18] For if the inheritance is based on law, it is no longer based on a promise; but God has granted it to Abraham by means of a promise. (15. Αδελφοί, κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω. ὅμως ἄνθρωπον κεκυρωμένην διαθήκην οὐδεὶς ἀθετεῖ ἢ ἐπιδιατάσσεται. 16. τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ. οὐ λέγει Καὶ τοῖς σπέρμασιν, ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν, ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐφ’

⁷ Charles B. Williams, *Galatians: A Commentary on the Pauline Epistles*, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1953), 67.

⁸ Everett F. Harrison, *Galatians in The New Testament and Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, (Moody Monthly, The Iversen Associates, New York, 1971), 705.

ένός Καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὃς ἔστιν Χριστός. 17. τοῦτο δὲ λέγω· διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην ὑπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ ὁ μετὰ τετρακόσια καὶ τριάκοντα ἔτη γεγονὼς νόμος οὐκ ἀκυροῖ, εἰς τὸ καταργῆσαι τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν. 18. εἰ γὰρ ἐκ νόμου ἡ κληρονομία, οὐκέτι ἐξ ἐπαγγελίας· τῷ δὲ Ἀβραὰμ δι’ ἐπαγγελίας κεχάρισται ὁ Θεός.)

Interestingly, Paul reverts back to his previous tone here referring to the Galatians as “Brethren” (Ἄδελφοί). It is like he is trying to get them to rationalize with him at this point as his brother. Now that he has clarified this emphatic truth re: *Justification by Faith Alone*, he can proceed to explain a further truth in terms of human relation. The expression “in terms of human relations” should be understood as an apology.

“The immutability of God’s arrangements should be beyond debate but Paul finds it necessary to discuss the matter to make it fully clear to his readers.”⁹

Paul, in continuing his explanation mentions “a man’s covenant” which should be properly understood as a covenant (διαθήκην) not a “testament, or will”.¹⁰

This covenantal oath once it is sworn cannot be altered by anyone including God himself. Both parties are bound to the covenant and bound to its requirements. It is impossible to add or remove stipulations to the covenantal agreement. This shows the unilateral and unconditional nature of the covenantal program laid out in God’s promise plan through Abraham.

In (vs.16) Paul says that the promises were spoken of to Abraham to his seed. Yet, the promises were spoken to his *seed* in the singular. The *seed* in the singular is different from the *seeds* (which is used in the singular as a collective noun referring to all of a person’s descendants). Here, Paul wants to focus on the singular *seed* (Jesus the Messiah), not the corporate physical offspring which is Israel. Jesus is the climax of all promises made to Abraham. It is in Christ that all these promises reach their culmination and fulfillment. This *seed* is the promised one.

As we move into (vs.17) there is an important point made by Paul. What Paul is focused on is not so much the unique seed at this point but the contrast made with the Law and Promise (Faith). The Law (the legal part of the Torah) came into being during the time of Moses. This Law, coming 430 years after the formation of the Abrahamic covenant did not in anyway shape or form invalidate a covenant that was previously established by God, such that the promises pertained in it would be nullified (καταργῆσαι) or made inoperative. These promises could not nullify an oath sworn.

In (vs.18) Paul draws a contrary point to what was just stated in (vs.15-17). *If* the inheritance of these promises was based on Law (the legal part of the Torah) then the promise would be

⁹ Ibid., 707.

¹⁰ Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, (Intervarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 2007, 195-196.

conditional not unconditional. The Abrahamic covenant was not a conditional promise, it was an unconditional promise seen through God's monergistic work passing between the two pieces while Abraham was sleeping (Gen. 15:17-18).

"A close examination of the context reveals no covenant stipulations which could be viewed as pure legislative or ethical codes. What the context does reveal is that God has praised His servant Abraham because he has been faithful to do whatever the Lord instructed him to do. He did it not out of compulsion to legislation, but in a faith response to the instruction of God."¹¹

"As most scholars now recognize, the covenant and its circumstances were in the form of a royal (land) grant, a legal arrangement well attested in the ancient Near East. . . . the Abrahamic Covenant, . . . must be viewed as an unconditional grant made by Yahweh to His servant Abram, a grant that was to serve a specific and irrevocable function."¹²

"But, whatever the precise symbolism, the important point to note is that God alone (represented by the theophanic imagery of fire and smoke) passed between the dissected animals, indicating the unilateral nature of this particular covenant. Indeed, the fact that there is no 'sign' associated with this particular covenant is probably explained by the complete absence of human obligations. Thus, the covenant established in Genesis 15 is unilateral, more akin to a Royal Grant) than 'suzerain-vassal treaty', with obligations being undertaken by God alone."¹³

"The Abrahamic covenant contributes to the eschatology of Israel by detailing the broad program of God as it affects Abraham's seed. . . . It is not too much to say that the exegesis of the Abrahamic covenant and its resulting interpretation is the foundation for the study of prophecy as a whole, not only as relating to Israel, but also for the Gentiles and the church. It is here that the true basis for premillennial interpretation of the Scriptures are found."¹⁴

"this covenant is depicted simply as a binding promise—or, better, a promissory oath—on the part of God. No particular conditions are attached to it. True, it is assumed that Abraham would continue to trust God and walk before him in righteousness and obedience, and the point is now and then made that Abraham did so (e.g., 22:16, 16:50). But the giving of the promise itself is not made subject to conditions. There is no list of commandments that Abraham must obey, or obligations that he must fulfill, if it is to be made good... The patriarchal covenant thus rests in God's unconditional promises for the future, and it asks of the recipient only that he trusts."¹⁵

"Clearly, the pledge to Abraham was a unilateral, unconditional covenant and not a bilateral,

¹¹ Robert L. Dean, Jr., *Theonomy, the Mosaic Law, and the Nations*, (unpublished paper), 13.

¹² Eugene H. Merrill, *A Theology of the Pentateuch*, in Roy B. Zuck, editor, *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1991), 26.

¹³ Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: A Biblical Theology of Covenant* (Downers Grove, IL, Intervarsity Press, 2007), 86.

¹⁴ John F. Walvoord, *Israel in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962), 44-45.

¹⁵ John Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 25-26.

conditional one!”¹⁶

“Evidence that the covenant is unconditional. The Scriptures afford a most complete line of evidence in support of the unconditional character of the covenant. (1) All Israel’s covenants are unconditional except the Mosaic. The Abrahamic Covenant is expressly declared to be eternal and therefore unconditional in numerous passages (Gen 17:7, 13, 19; 1 Chron 16:17; Ps 105:10). The Palestinian Covenant is likewise declared to be everlasting (Ezek 16:60). The Davidic Covenant is described in the same terms (2 Sam 7:13, 16, 19; 1 Chron 17:12; 22:10 ; Isa 55:3; Ezek 37:25). The new covenant with Israel is also eternal (Isa 61:8; Jer 32:40; 50:5 ; Heb 13:20). (2) Except for the original condition of leaving his homeland and going to the promised land, the covenant is made with no conditions whatever. It is rather a prophetic declaration of God of what will certainly come to pass, and is no more conditional than any other announced plan of God which depends upon God’s sovereignty for its fulfillment. (3) The Abrahamic Covenant is confirmed repeatedly by reiteration and enlargement. In none of these instances are any of the added promises conditioned upon the faithfulness of Abraham’s seed or of Abraham himself. While God promises in some instances the larger aspects of the covenants in recognition of Abraham’s faithfulness, nothing is said about it being conditioned upon the future faithfulness of either Abraham or his seed. (4) The Abrahamic Covenant was solemnized by a divinely ordered ritual symbolizing the shedding of blood and passing between the parts of the sacrifice (Gen 15:7-21; Jer 34:18). This ceremony was given to Abraham as an assurance that his seed would inherit the land in the exact boundaries given to him in Genesis 15:18-21. No conditions whatever are attached to this promise in this context. (5) To distinguish those who would inherit the promises as individuals from those who were only physical seed of Abraham, the visible sign of circumcision was given (Gen 17:9-14). One not circumcised was considered outside the promised blessing. The ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant and possession of the land by the seed is not hinged, however, upon faithfulness in the matter of circumcision. In fact, the promises of the land were given before the rite was introduced. (6) The Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed by the birth of Isaac and Jacob to both of whom the promises are repeated in their original form (Gen 17:19; 28:12-13). To them again no conditions were delineated for the fulfillment of the covenant. The added revelation is that the promised seed would be channeled through them. (7) Notable is the fact that the reiterations of the covenant and the partial early fulfillments of the covenant are in spite of acts of disobedience. It is clear that on several instances Abraham strayed from the will of God, as for instance in his departure out of the land and sojourn in Egypt. Jacob has the promise given him in spite of his disobedience, deceit, and unbelief. In the very act off fleeing the land the promises are repeated to him. (8) The later confirmations of the covenant are given in the midst of apostasy. Important is the promise given through Jeremiah that Israel as a nation will continue forever (Jer 31:36). The place of the new covenant given through Jeremiah in its relation to the Abrahamic Covenant and the extensive and numerous predictions in the Minor Prophets concerning Israel’s regathering and restoration to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant will be considered in later discussion. The very existence of this large body of Scripture is an important link in the proof of the unconditional

¹⁶ Walter Kaiser, *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, 152.

character of the Abrahamic Covenant. (9) The New Testament declares the Abrahamic Covenant immutable (Heb 6:13-18; cf. Gen 15:8-21). It was not only promised but solemnly confirmed by the oath of God. (10) The entire Scriptural revelation concerning Israel and its future as contained in both the Old and New Testament, if interpreted literally, confirms and sustains the unconditional character of the promises given to Abraham.”¹⁷

19-22 – Why the Law then? It was added on account of the violations, having been ordered through angels at the hand of a mediator, until the Seed would come to whom the promise had been made. [20] Now a mediator is not for one party only; but God is only one. [21] Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God? Far from it! For if a law had been given that was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law. [22] But the Scripture has confined everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. (19. Τί οὖν ὁ νόμος; τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν προσετέθη, ἄχρις ἂν ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα ὃ ἐπήγγελται, διαταγεὶς δι’ ἀγγέλων ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου. 20. ὁ δὲ μεσίτης ἐνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν, ὁ δὲ Θεὸς εἰς ἔστιν. 21. ὁ οὖν νόμος κατὰ τῶν ἐπαγγελιῶν τοῦ Θεοῦ; μὴ γένοιτο. εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ἐκ νόμου ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη. 22. ἀλλὰ συνέκλεισεν ἡ γραφὴ τὰ πάντα ὑπὸ ἀμαρτίαν ἵνα ἡ ἐπαγγελία ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ δοθῇ τοῖς πιστεύοντιν)

After demonstrating the importance of the inheritance received by God’s monergistic work, one would immediately ask, “why the Law then?” Why have the legal part of the Torah if the Law couldn’t possibly save mankind? Seems sort of odd to have the Law and also have the Promise made 430 years before. One conditional (Mosaic), one unconditional (Abraham). If the Law was independent of the promise in (vs.18) then what was the point?

Paul tells us that the Law was *added* (προσετέθη) because of transgressions (χάριν παραβάσεων). These transgressions are the sins of the Jewish people (specifically).

“As Sha’ul explains in Romans 7, that a key purpose of the commandments was to make Jewish people ever aware of their sin – not that the Jews were more sinful than the Gentiles, but that, like Gentiles, Jews too “fall short of earning God’s praise” (Ro. 3:23).”¹⁸

The Law was ordered, or arranged thoroughly (διαταγεὶς) by the angels (ἄγγελων). Paul means by this that the Torah was handed down to Moses on Mount Sinai by means of the angels (Acts 7:53) through a mediator (Moses). The Law was meant for Israel until the unique *seed* Jesus had come through whom the promise was ultimately fulfilled. What this means is that the Law is not meant for the church and is not a governing factor for them. The Law of Christ, the Law of the *seed* and his commands are the only thing that we should be following, not the

¹⁷ John F. Walvoord, *The Abrahamic Covenant and Premillennialism*, (Continued from the October-December Number, 1951). Millennial Series. Brown-Driver-Briggs' Definition 1) long duration, antiquity, futurity, for ever, ever, everlasting, evermore, perpetual, old, ancient, world 1a) ancient time, long time (of past) 1b) (of future) 1b1) for ever, always 1b2) continuous existence, perpetual 1b3) everlasting, indefinite or unending future, eternity.

¹⁸ David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville, MD), 550.

stipulations laid out in the Torah.

It is said in (vs.20) that there are hundreds of different interpretations of this verse. I don't believe that the scriptures are quite this complicated. There appears to be one suitable interpretation re: what Paul means here. Ridderbos summarizes it nicely:

"Wherever a mediator is involved, two parties are involved: a mediator does not represent one party... The intention then is to put the emphasis on the one-sided character of the promise. The law came through mediatorial channels. Two parties were involved in it. To achieve its purpose, the law is dependent upon human appropriation and agreement. God is the author of the law, but man is the subject of its fulfillment. Hence, in the execution and maintenance of the law, all sorts of intervening persons are required. In the giving of the promise, however, no mediator intervened. God was at work alone: for He is not only the author of the promise; He fulfills it also."¹⁹

I believe that Ridderbos has encapsulated the general gist of the argument that Paul is setting forward. A mediator is required when the law is brought forward, when there is no mediator there is no interference and the promise can be executed by the one who authored the promise. This might be in fact why the covenant was unconditional, such that Abraham didn't become some sort of mediator.

Another question that would arise at this point is: "Is the Law then contrary to the promises of God?" the answer is "May it never be!". Why would the Law be contrary to the promises that God laid out when he was the lawgiver and the one that invoked the covenant with Abraham? If "a" law had been given (not *the* law that was given) which was able to impart life to those that adhered to it, then of course righteousness and obedience to the law would have been based solely on the law. However, in (vs.22) Paul tells us that the "Scripture" has shut up everyone under sin. It makes most sense to understand that the law closes up all access to life.

"By the way of the law, therefore, the impotence of man to achieve his salvation has become manifest."²⁰

The purpose as made evident by Paul is that the promise (ἐπαγγελία) by faith (πίστεως) would be granted to all those who believe in Jesus Christ. The source is not the law, the source is the promise which found its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Jesus gives what the law couldn't and that is life.

23-29 – But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the Law, being confined for the faith that was destined to be revealed. [24] Therefore the Law has become our guardian to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. [25] But now that faith has come,

¹⁹ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (NICNT), (WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. Grand Rapids, MI, 1953), 140.

²⁰ Ibid., 142.

we are no longer under a guardian. [26] For you are all sons and daughters of God through faith in Christ Jesus. [27] For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. [28] There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. [29] And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (23. Πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἐλθεῖν τὴν πίστιν ὑπὸ νόμου ἐφρουρούμεθα συνκλειόμενοι εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν ἀποκαλυφθῆναι. 24. ὥστε ὁ νόμος παιδαγωγὸς ἡμῶν γέγονεν εἰς Χριστόν, ἵνα ἐκ πίστεως δικαιωθῶμεν. 25. ἐλθούσης δὲ τῆς πίστεως οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγὸν ἐσμεν. 26. Πάντες γὰρ νιοὶ Θεοῦ ἔστε διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 27. ὅσοι γὰρ εἰς Χριστὸν ἐβαπτίσθητε, Χριστὸν ἐνεδύσασθε. 28. οὐκ ἔνι Ιουδαῖος οὐδὲ Ἑλλην, οὐκ ἔνι δοῦλος οὐδὲ ἐλεύθερος, οὐκ ἔνι ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ· πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἰς ἔστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ. 29. εἰ δὲ ὑμεῖς Χριστοῦ, ἄρα τοῦ Ἀβραὰμ σπέρμα ἔστε, κατ' ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι.)

Paul having concluded his contrast between *law* and *promise* now moves into the discussion as it pertains to *bondage* and *freedom*. In (vs.23) Paul says that before faith came (before the object of faith was revealed) the Jews were kept in custody (imprisoned) by the law.

“That, after all, is why sin is so terrible and fatal for man: it gets its power from the law (1 Cor. 15:56, Rom. 7:13, and 4:15) … The character of this is bondage, as will appear from what follows later, is both juridical and ethical. For, on the one hand, the law brought wrath and curse by reason of transgression (*cf.* verse 13); on the other hand, the law, by reason of its impotence, its inability to “make alive” was also the means of making man conscious of his ethnical inadequacy.”²¹

Those who were confined to the law were forced towards the faith. Jews are the focus here, however this doesn't exclude Gentiles from also being kept in custody under the law. At the coming of Christ, that which was hidden was then revealed.

In (vs.24) Paul tells us that the Law (*νόμος*) has come into being to be our “guardian” or “tutor” (*παιδαγωγὸς*) to lead us to Christ. The law acting as a “boy leader” or “schoolmaster” served as a harsh disciplinarian for the Jewish people. The reason this happened was because the Judaizers had perverted the law. So, for them, rather than understanding the reason the law came into being (to point to Christ), it had become a means of discipline if laws were not upheld. The Jewish people needed to turn from their legalism to be justified by faith.

In (vs.25) Paul tells us that now (δὲ) that faith has come, the Jewish people and the Gentiles are no longer under a tutor (οὐκέτι ὑπὸ παιδαγωγὸν). Paul said the same thing in Romans 10:

Romans 10:4 NASB
For Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

²¹ Ibid., 144.

This doesn't mean that the law is gone, or that there is no need for the law. We as Christians (Jews and Gentiles) are not governed by the Old Covenant Law, we are governed by the Law of Christ.

1 Corinthians 9:21 NASB

to those who are without the Law, I became as one without the Law, though not being without the law of God but under the law of Christ, so that I might gain those who are without the Law

Galatians 6:2 NASB

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

In (vs.26) Paul tells us that the true sons and daughters of God are those that are found in Christ Jesus.

“If Jews and Gentiles exercise this trusting faithfulness, which belongs to both of us by virtue of our union with the Messiah... then both Jews and Gentiles are... children of God, adopted as God’s sons (4:5) on the ground of our union with the Messiah Yeshua, who himself is already God’s Son.”²²

Paul in (vs.27) speaks of our “baptism” (ἐβαπτίσθητε) or full immersion into Christ. Note this was not meant to be an argument for physical (water) baptism, but a spiritual baptism completed by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit brings us into union with Christ and with his Body, the Church.

In (vs.28) Paul declares that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ.” This terminology has been twisted by two extremes: Egalitarians who claim that equality in Christ means there are no distinct roles for men and women, and Covenant Theologians who deny that there is a distinction between Jews and Gentiles at an ethical level. Paul is absolutely not saying that there is no longer any distinctions between “race, gender, or ethnicity”.

“Obviously there are still physical, psychological and social distinctions between male and female and slave and freeman (even today there remain in the world tens of millions of slaves), even though in union with the Messiah Yeshua they are all one, so far as their acceptability before God is concerned. The same is true of Jews and Gentiles: the distinction remains; the verse does not obliterate it. The bible recognizes such differences between various groups ... Similarly there remain differences between Jews and Gentiles, differences in cultural background and religious heritage, differences in what God has promised them as a people... It is not that there is to be one race or one nationality, but one Messianic Community”²³

“If Paul himself is taken as a model one must say that the differences between the categories

²² David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, (Messianic Jewish Publishers, Clarksville, MD), 553.

²³ Ibid., 554-555.

remain. He continues to reflect a Jewish self-consciousness (cf. Gal. 2:15; II Cor. 11:22; Phil. 3:5; Rom. 11:14), to treat Jews and Gentiles as ethnic units (cf. Rom. 9-11), to address slaves, slaveowners, men and women as distinct groups... Being in Christ does not do away with Jew or Greek, male or female, even slave or free, but it makes these differences before God irrelevant.”²⁴

“Since all believers became one with each other, human distinctions lose their significance. None is spiritually superior over another, that is, a believing Jew is not more privileged before God than a believing gentile... a believing slave does not rank higher than a believing free person; a believing man is not superior to a believing woman.”²⁵

“Paul is saying that no longer can any of these social distinctions be used to establish the *identity of Christians*. There are Jewish Christians and Christian slaves. There are Christian men and Christian women. But there are now merely descriptive terms, none of which is relevant when we ask the central question, “What is a Christians?” Paul asserts now that the one thing which sums up the identity of *all* Christians is the relationship each enjoys with God the Father.”²⁶

“Clearly, it does not mean that differences of nationality, status, and sex cease to exist. A Jew remains a Jew; a Gentile, a Gentile. One does not lose his identity by becoming a Christian. Paul simply means that having become one with God as his sons, Christians now belong to each other in such a way that distinctions that formerly divided them lose significance.”²⁷

“...all are equally welcome to come to Christ. Not all are simply equivalent, however. If Jews, Greeks, slaves, free, male and female no longer existed, Paul could not make such comments as “to the Jew first” (Rm 2:9-10), “slaves obey your masters” (Eph 6:5), and “wives, submit to your own husbands” (Eph 5:22). Likewise, if in church ministry there is no difference in role between men and women, Paul could not say that elders are men (1Tm 3:1-2) and that women are excluded from teaching leadership (1Tm 2:12).”²⁸

An important conclusion that must be made is that our unity does not exclude diversity. Our unity incorporates diversity such that we see a beautiful picture of what God intended, not that we are somehow spiritually superior because we are a male or a freeman or a Jew.

In (vs.29) Paul makes a wonderful statement. He says, “And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.” What a beautiful statement. Our belonging to Christ makes us Abraham’s descendants. What does this mean? Paul further alluded to this in

²⁴ Charles B. Cousar, *Galatians: Interpretation Commentary*, (John Knox Press, Louisville, 1982), 85-86.

²⁵ Donald K. Campbell, *Galatians: The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament, (Victor Books, 1983 copyright, 1988 8th printing), 600.

²⁶ Lawrence O. Richards, *Galatians: The Victor Bible Background Commentary, New Testament*, (Victor Books, 1994), 452-453.

²⁷ James Montgomery Boice, *Galatians, The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, Volume 10, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), 468.

²⁸ Gerald Peterman, *Galatians: The Moody Bible Commentary*, (Moody Publishers, Chicago, 2014), 1836.

his letter to the Church in Ephesus. He states that Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel.

Ephesians 3:6 NASB

to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,

This means that Gentiles have become partakers of the commonwealth of Israel united with Jews in the promises that were made to Abraham.

Ephesians 2:12-13 NASB

remember that you were at that time separate from Christ, excluded from the people of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of the promise, having no hope and without God in the world. [13] But now in Christ Jesus you who previously were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

These blessings are the “spiritual” not the “physical” blessings that were made to Abraham. In Christ, we are Abraham’s spiritual offspring, his spiritual seed partaking in the spiritual blessings found in Christ.

Ephesians 1:3 NASB

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ

Notice that Paul is not saying that the church is now the “new Israel” or “spiritual Israel” – as if somehow negating physical Israel (kinsmen according to the flesh) – but is rather confirming Gentile inclusion into the spiritual promises made to Abraham, by faith, found ultimately in Christ. Gentiles are partakers of the promises, they have been grafted into the Olive Tree, partaking of the rich-root. They are not replacing physical Israel, because God still has a plan for ethnic Israel those that were cut-off from the Olive Tree (Rom. 11:25-26). This promise doesn’t negate the promises that are applicatory to the physical offspring.

“The fact that the true seed of Abraham includes both Jews and Gentiles does not rule out a continuing distinction for Israel in the New Testament. Nor should the calling of the Gentiles as the seed of Abraham be construed as the formation of a “new spiritual Israel”.”²⁹

“Since Gentiles become part of the seed of Abraham, does this not in some way make them spiritual Jews? Again the answer is negative; there are members of the physical seed of Abraham who are not Jews. The same is true in the spiritual realm. The meaning of this verse can best be understood if compared with Ephesians 2:11-13 and 3:6... These Ephesians passages clarify what is meant by the Galatians statement of becoming heirs to the promise. It does not mean that

²⁹ Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational and Non-Dispensational Theology*, 55.

gentiles believers become Jews in a mystical way, but rather that they become partakers in the spiritual blessings of the Jewish covenants and receive this privilege by faith. This act does not make them spiritual Jews but spiritual Gentiles. Even by being partakers, they do not share in all the facets of the covenants, but only in the spiritual blessings contained in them. Things such as inheritance of the land and circumcision, among others, are not appropriated by believing Gentiles. These elements are exclusively for the Jew... The question is: is the spiritual seed of Abraham ever called *Israel*? The answer is: No!”³⁰

Paul’s conclusion here in this chapter is that the law could not possibly save, but the promise made to Abraham by faith is what unites us as a diverse group (Jew, Gentile, slave, free, man, woman) in Christ. The law could never save, for no one, but the *seed* could save us. What a glorious reminder of *justification by faith alone in Christ alone*!

³⁰ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, (Ariel Ministries, San Antonio, TX, Revised Edition: 2018), 669-670.