

GALATIANS

Chapter 3

By Faith, or by Works of the Law?

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. 2 Let me ask you only this: 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 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— 6 just as Abraham “believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? 7 Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify[ϰ**] 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.**

With a dramatic change of tone Paul turns to the Galatian audience for the first time since the beginning of the letter. The direct address in 3:1 suggests crucial information for why Paul is writing. With a rapid-fire barrage of rhetorical questions—characteristic of the ancient diatribe style—the original hearers would recognize 3:1–5 as the beginning of a new section in the discussion. The harsh address may serve to break the evil spell cast by the rivals’ teaching. Surely such frank speech will distinguish this true friend from the flatterers.²⁷ The decisive question is this: how did the Galatians receive the Spirit (3:2)? To review the logic: the message of Christ crucified (3:1) leads Paul to the Galatians’ experience of the Spirit, which is based on faith in Christ crucified rather than on the works of the Law (3:2). Will the Galatians live consistently with the origins of their Christian experience, or will they complete what they began by *departing* from Christ and his Spirit for the realm of the flesh (3:3)? Have they enjoyed such powerful experiences in vain (3:4)? God supplied the Spirit by means of faith and not by means of the Law or its works (3:5). (CC)

The OT prophets had foreseen the outpouring of God’s Spirit in the latter days (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 11:19–20; 36:26–27; cf. *Jub.* 1.23–24). Nevertheless, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel spoke of the coming Spirit in the same breath as Moses’ Law. Both prophets anticipated a renewed and satisfactory obedience of the Torah by God’s people.²⁹ Paul’s Jewish-Christian rivals likely viewed the Spirit and the renewed observance of the Law as two sides of the same coin. Paul, for his part, wishes to dissociate the two. The Spirit came *prior* to the Galatians’ experience of the Law (3:1–5), just as Abraham was justified by faith *prior* to any Law observance (3:6–9), that is, apart from the Law in its as-yet-unwritten state. (CC)

Paul’s train of thought that begins in 3:1 does not conclude until 4:11. Within this larger section, 3:1–14; 3:15–29; and 4:1–11 are distinct subsections—hence the divisions within this commentary. These three subsections could be further divided into 3:1–6; 3:7–14; 3:15–22; 3:23–29; 4:1–7; and 4:8–11. The subsections of the unfolding argument close with key words that introduce what immediately follows. Gal 3:1–6 introduces the concept of “faith,” which dominates the discussion in 3:7–14. In 3:14 Paul introduces the promise of the Spirit, and “promise” figures prominently in 3:15–22; Gal 3:22 refers again to “faith,” a key element in 3:23–29. Finally, 3:29 introduces the notion of an “heir,” a concept that dominates 4:1–7. (CC)

Just as the Spirit is the focal point of 3:1–5 (3:2, 3, 5), the larger section of Paul’s train of thought (3:1–4:11) closes with the Spirit as proof of the Galatians’ status as heirs (4:6–7). Paul associates the Spirit’s reception with both the Abrahamic blessing (3:8, 9, 14) and the Abrahamic promise (3:14, 16, 17, 18, 19,

21, 29). The pivotal role of Abraham in 3:6–9, 14 is subsumed into the motif of the rightful heir in 3:15–29 (3:16, 17, 18, 19, 21, 29). Gal 3:15–29 reaches its climactic point with the unity and oneness of believers in Christ (3:28–29), a oneness that Christ’s Spirit creates. (CC)

Gal 3:1–5, on first glance, does not appear to be primarily about “getting in” (that is, into the people of God) or the beginning of Christian existence, but rather about how one enjoys the Spirit’s power. Paul is emphatic that God supplies the Spirit not by means of or on the basis of the Galatians’ observance of the Law but rather by means of their faith in Christ. The letter to the Galatians is addressing some intensely practical concerns with respect to day-to-day Christian existence. For Paul, ongoing Christian existence must be consistent with its *origins*.³⁴ The origin of faith is justification, as the apostle explained in the preceding section (2:16, 21), and he returns to justification in 3:21, 24. Even if not the central organizing concept in this section of the letter, justification is no mere subsidiary element. The language of justification by faith recurs at several points, in 3:8 (in a dependent clause), in 3:11, and in 3:24. While justification and the reception of the Spirit are conceptually distinct, both occur simultaneously. “Those persons upon whom God bestows the Spirit are justified; the persons whom God reckons righteous have the Spirit poured out upon them.”³⁷ The Christian life does not consist of stages with a Spirit-less “stage 1” and then a “stage 2” with the Spirit. No Christian is without the power of the Spirit of God. (CC)

Two further motifs are crucial to Paul’s argument: faith and Abraham. Paul emphasizes that the benefits of Christ—whether a justified status or the power of the Spirit—are mediated by faith (3:2–5, 6, 11, 12). In this regard, the believer trusts Christ in the same way as Abraham trusted God’s promises. Paul appears to be responding to a concern that someone *else* had raised at Galatia when he turns in 3:7—without any prior explanation or preparation—to the matter of status as sons of Abraham. The apostle is therefore compelled to return to Abraham’s seed in 3:29 and the identity of Abraham’s true heirs (3:29; 4:7). Paul is demonstrating that those who are “one” (3:28) in Christ are Abraham’s true children, quite apart from the Law. After all, Abraham was right with God on the basis of his faith alone without reference to his circumcision or to his obedience to God’s command to slay his son. (CC)

The interpretation of Scripture dominates 3:6–14, and not just the Abrahamic texts. The twin Deuteronomistic motifs of blessing and curse structure the subsection: 3:6–9 as blessing and 3:10–14 as curse. The importance of these motifs is clear from the conditional curse at the beginning of the letter (1:8–9) and the conditional blessing at the end (6:16). “Life and death, blessing and curse” (Deut 30:19) are at stake for the Galatians. Paul quotes from Gen 15:6 in Gal 3:6, from Gen 12:3 in Gal 3:8, from Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10, from Hab 2:4 in Gal 3:11, from Lev 18:5 in Gal 3:12, and from Deut 21:23 in Gal 3:13. The citations in Gal 3:10–13 are related: “cursed” (ἐπικατάρατος) in 3:10 and 3:13, and “will live” (ζήσεται) in 3:11 and 3:12. Also, Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10 and Lev 18:5 in Gal 3:12 are linked by “to do” (ποιέω):

- 3:10 *Cursed* is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law to *do* them.
- 3:11 The righteous one by faith *will live*.
- 3:12 The one who *does* these things *will live* by them.
- 3:13 *Cursed* is everyone who is being hung on a tree.

These Scriptural texts were, arguably, brought to the attention of the Galatians by Paul’s rivals. He could therefore assume the Galatians’ knowledge of these passages even as he reinterprets the texts in a manner radically different from how the Galatians were initially exposed to them. Paul endeavors to prove that Scripture is the best interpreter of Scripture: The curse of the Law is resolved by Christ’s saving death. An individual lives on the basis of faith and not the Law. Human works play no role in God’s salvation. To rely on the Law and its works is to suffer its curse for a failure to do everything it demands. All of these strands in Paul’s logic begin with a jolting call to attention (3:1). (CC)

3:1 ὦ (“O”)—This word, occasionally accented ὦ, could be an exclamation (see BDAG, 2) rather than an interjection, but the emotive ὦ is frequent with vocative nouns and nominative nouns used vocatively (e.g., Mt 15:28; Mk 9:19; Acts 13:10; James 2:20).

τῇ ἀληθείᾳ μὴ πείθεσθαι (“that you should not obey the truth”)—After “bewitched you,” this variant reading (C D² K L P), which could also be rendered as “so as not to be persuaded by the truth,” is an insertion under the influence of Gal 5:7 (contra Textus Receptus and the KJV, which include it).²

οἷς (“before whose”; literally, “before/to whom”; thus οἷς κατ’ ὀφθαλμούς as “before whose eyes”)—This word is emphatically placed at the beginning of its clause. The Galatians have themselves been witnesses.

[ἐν ὑμῖν (“among you”)]—Western and Majority text type witnesses (D F G K L, many minuscules, it^d, s^g syr^h goth *al*) add “among you” with “crucified.” These witnesses probably interpreted the preposition πρό (on the preceding verb προεγράφη) as indicating the time of the Galatian ministry (cf. 4:13), i.e., Paul’s self-portrayal of Christ crucified in their midst. The exclusion of ἐν ὑμῖν is supported by the stronger witness of x A B C P Ψ 33* 81 104 365 1739 1881 and others.

ἔσταυρωμένος (“crucified”)—The perfect tense of the participle conveys a sense of the enduring effects of Christ’s crucifixion. Christ remains the crucified one (Mt 28:5; Mk 16:6; 1 Cor 1:23; 2:2), and his crucifixion is of enduring significance for all who cast their eyes on him. (CC)

Paul’s Amazement at the Galatians’ Desertion of the Gospel (3:1–6)

O foolish Galatians, who bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Paul left the situation with his “brothers (and sisters)” at Galatia behind in 1:9–11 with only a brief nod to his audience in 2:5. Now what a return! Gal 3:1 begins with an “arresting vocative” directly indicting his audience: “*O foolish Galatians.*” The emphatic “O” reinforces the sense of his mood (Rom 2:1, 3; 9:20; 1 Tim 6:20; BDF § 146.2; cf. 2 Cor 6:11; Phil 4:15). Contrary to several translations, Paul does not call the Galatians “ignorant” or “stupid” (NEB, NAB, NJB). Knowledge or intelligence is hardly at issue. Paul uses “foolish” (ἀνόητος) elsewhere only in Rom 1:14 as a synonym for “barbarian” and as the opposite of “wise.” The word may carry a sense of “uncivilized” or “uneducated.” The Hellenized Galatians still had a reputation as barbaric, uncivilized, and cruel people. “Whether the Galatians are civilized is no concern of his.”⁴³ The Galatians are un- (ἀ-) thinking (νοέω) or, better, *foolish*; they lack moral and spiritual discernment (cf. 1 Tim 6:9; Titus 3:3). “[Paul] would not have expected them to be so foolish that they would let themselves be bewitched to turn away from the gospel he had preached.” From the standpoint of first-century Mediterranean culture, a “fool” was one whose behavior shamefully transgressed a social boundary. The boundary transgressed in this instance is none other than the Gospel message of Jesus Christ. This is “tough love.”⁴⁶ What is at stake is apostasy! (CC)

The Evil Eye (3:1)

Paul had just narrated his own experience of the life-changing power of Jesus Christ in 2:20–21. The Galatians too have experienced Christ’s grace, which is why Paul finds their recent behavior so disappointing and incongruous. He asks: “Who *bewitched* [βασκαίνω] you?” The Jewish-Christian rivals were not advocating witchcraft or sorcery (although cf. sorcery in 5:20). When Paul writes of “bewitching”—or better, “casting the evil eye,” a verb used only here in the NT—he is employing the word in the sense of confusing or perverting someone’s thinking.⁵⁰ The metaphorical usage of the word in this context is not to be understood apart from the frequent association of the word with witchcraft. The rival teachers are, *like* sorcerers, manipulating the Galatians with their evil spells. Paul’s “O foolish Galatians” is effectively a call to “snap ... out of it.” “As a good rhetor Paul would know that there was real fear of the evil eye among his Galatian converts from paganism, and one of the best ways he could demonize the agitators would be to suggest that they cast the evil eye on his converts.”⁵² The rival teachers belong to “the present *evil* age” (1:4; see also 2 Cor 11:13–15). (CC)

In the first-century era, people commonly thought that certain persons—or demons or gods or even animals—could cast a spell on someone merely by gazing at them, since the eye, as the window to the heart, could channel inner thoughts, desires, and intentions. A mere look could injure another person or afflict them with disease (Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 681A–D). Invisible, spiritual forces were always at work for the ancients. Many considered the sick or debilitated to be victims of an evil eye. One remedy for the evil eye was to spit, an act which would ward off the threatening disease or magic. Paul reports that the Galatians did not spit at him when they first saw him and received him (4:14; note the references to “eyes” in both 3:1 and 4:15). Ironically, the Galatians now view Paul differently thanks to the influence of an evil eye. Paul is clearly demonizing his rivals’ influence.⁵⁵ The only means to ward off that evil influence is to cast one’s eyes upon Christ crucified! (CC)

The evil eye was regularly associated with envy, jealousy, greed, and stinginess (thus Plutarch, *Quaest. conv.* 681E–683B; cf. envy in Gal 5:21, 26; sorcery in 5:20). The Greek verb Paul employs (βασκαίνω) means “begrudge” in LXX Deut 28:54, 56; Sirach 14:6, 8. The cognate noun βάσκανος is used for a “stingy miser” (LXX Prov 23:6; Sirach 14:3; 18:18; cf. βασκανία as “envy” in 4 Macc 1:26; 2:15). The rival teachers may have begrudged the Galatians’ enjoyment of the Spirit apart from observance of the Law of Moses. Perhaps they begrudged Paul’s success in Galatia. In either case, the rival teachers are, from Paul’s standpoint, threatening to exclude the Galatians if they do not adopt the path of Mosaic Law observance (4:17). (CC)

One specialist has proposed that Paul is alluding in 3:1 to the curses of Deuteronomy 28, especially Deut 28:53–57. During the worst moments in the siege of an Israelite town, even the most compassionate of parents will “cast an evil eye” and refuse to share their food, often the cannibalized flesh of their own children.⁵⁸ The verb the Septuagintal Greek translation employs in Deut 28:56 is the same as in Gal 3:1 (βασκαίνω). The lengthy Deuteronomistic passage (Deut 27:15–28:68; cf. Deut 30:1–20) outlines blessings and curses for the Israelites’ future, depending on their obedience or disobedience. Paul draws on Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10, and 3:6–14 is structured by blessing and curse. If Paul were alluding to Deuteronomy, then, ironically, those who thought they were delivering the Galatians *from* the curse of the Law would actually be delivering the Galatians *to* the curse of the Law, since they are *themselves* cursed. Paul’s rivals are leading the Galatians to “biting and devouring one another” (Gal 5:15), even as accursed parents devour their own children (Deut 28:53–57). This thesis, while intriguing, is vulnerable. The Deuteronomistic echo depends ultimately on a single shared word in the Greek. A single word is not a very compelling verbal connection. The Galatians were new to the Scriptures of Israel. As Paul was moving briskly from location to location in Galatia and founding churches, he would not have had adequate time to instruct the Galatians in the Scriptural heritage of Israel.⁶¹ His rivals appear to be rectifying that problem, but not to the point where the Galatians could be expected to recognize such a faint echo. (CC)

Eyes on Christ Crucified (3:1)

Paul creates a play on the meaning of the word “bewitch” or “cast the evil eye” (βασκαίνω, 3:1) when he continues with “before [whose] eyes” (literally, “according to eyes,” κατ’ ὀφθαλμούς, 3:1). Before the Galatians’ own eyes, Jesus Christ was “publicly portrayed as crucified.” The Galatians’ eyes should have remained fixed on Christ crucified, but instead the Galatians have averted their eyes and have fallen under the influence of false teachers. When Paul writes of Christ’s being “portrayed” (προεγράφη) as crucified, he uses a verb capable of differing translations. The verb could mean “written beforehand” (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.6.12 § 283; 12.2.3 § 30; cf. Rom 15:4; Eph 3:3; Jude 4 [probably]). Paul could be referring to OT prophecies “written beforehand” that are now fulfilled in Christ. Perhaps Paul has in mind lament psalms presaging Christ’s crucifixion (Psalms 18 and 22, or even Isaiah 53). The ensuing verses (e.g., Gal 3:6, 8) refer to Abraham. Paul may see Christ foreseen in the Abrahamic texts. Such an approach to the verb, however, is not likely here. Paul does not bring up Abraham until a few verses later and does not offer

any hint that he has the lament psalms or other OT prophecies in mind. He does not interpret the Abrahamic texts in a messianic fashion, at least in 3:1–14. Paul does not offer any clue or evidence that he is referring to a particular document that he had shared with the Galatians while still with them. Reference to a possible prior Pauline letter is unlikely since 3:1 is in the context of the Galatians' *initial* reception of the Spirit (3:2–3). Perhaps "written beforehand" refers to the prior paragraph at the end of Galatians 2. Ultimately, "written beforehand" does not make sense as a translation when this verb is used with the adverbial modifier "before whose eyes." The ancient Scriptures were hardly written before the Galatians' eyes. (CC)

Some have suggested a *spatial* understanding of the verb: "written before/in front of." Likely Paul did not draw pictures of Christ crucified when he was in Galatia. Another spatial sense of the verb is to "publicly portray" by a posted placard or portrait (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.2.3 § 33). The verb in a spatial sense could also mean to "*proclaim* publicly." Paul most likely intends either "publicly portray" or "proclaim publicly," but in a vivid manner—thus "before whose eyes." The perfect tense of "crucified" (ἔσταυρωμένος) suggests "a past event with continuing importance for the present identity of Jesus Christ and for the salvation he bestows" (cf. 2:19!). (CC)

Paul is not claiming that the Galatians witnessed Jesus' death on the cross. He simply preached the message of Christ crucified so vividly in his words and life that they could envision it. In 2:20–21, the immediately preceding verses, Paul eloquently describes how the crucified Christ now lives *in* Paul. The apostle likely *embodied* the message of the crucified Lord: "The paradox of the Pauline gospel is that the crucified Christ whom Paul proclaimed was also the risen Christ who was living in Paul." God revealed his Son "in" Paul (1:16), and the apostle closes the letter with reference to the marks of Jesus that he bears on his body (6:17; see also the commentary on 4:13). Elsewhere Paul describes the suffering and scars that he endured as a result of his preaching. He writes of carrying in his body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus might be made visible in the bodies of his hearers (2 Cor 4:10–11). The physical scars Paul suffered in his missionary work probably graphically conveyed the sufferings of Christ himself. The scars would have been "a powerful visual aid for his preaching of the cross." Ancient philosophers regularly taught that the style and content of one's presentation should always correspond. Paul in some way embodied Christ to the Galatians, even as he will, by the end of chapter 3, admonish them to see *themselves* as "one in Christ" (3:28)! (CC)

foolish. They were not mentally deficient but simply failed to use their powers of perception (see Lk 24:25; Ro 1:14; 1Ti 6:9; Tit 3:3). (CSB)

That's how we usually translate it. The word there for foolish is the word that Jesus uses of the Emmaus disciples when they didn't read the Old Testament carefully to see that he was the center of the Old Testament. That throughout the Old Testament shot through from beginning to end Christ is the center. Not just discrete passages. Not just a golden thread that kind of weaves it's way through but the entire Old Testament has to do with him. And I think Paul is using this expression in a similar way. (Just – V-23)

Now, I always tell my students here that when I grew up, we were not allowed to say at home. If we were to translate it in the vernacular, we would probably translate it as stupid. Stupid is -- this is kind of what I would like to say invincible stupidity. They should be able to remember the way Paul unfolded for them the Old Testament and it's meaning in terms of the Gospel. And so this is a very, very strong chastisement of them. And then when he says: Who bewitched you? Literally that is who cast a spell on you? Who gave you the evil eye? (Just – V-23)

Matthew 18 and Due Process explanation – convict...

Who ... ? Obviously legalistic Judaizers. (CSB)

Here Paul is excusing the Galatians and shifting the blame to the false apostles. It is as though he were saying: "I see that it was not of your own accord or malice that you fell. But the devil has sent those bewitchers, the false apostles, into your midst, my children; and they so bewitched you with the doctrine of the Law that now you believe otherwise about Christ than you used to, when you heard the Gospel being preached by me. But we are laboring both by exhortation and by writing to break the spell with which the false apostles have bound you, so that those among you who have been taken captive by this bewitchment may be set free by us." (Luther)

has bewitched you – The reason Paul calls the Galatians foolish and bewitched is that he compares them to children, to whom witchcraft does a great deal of harm. It is as though he were saying: "What is happening to you is precisely what happens to children, whom witches, sorceresses, and hags usually charm quickly and easily with their bewitchment, a trick of Satan."

A Greek term used only here in NT. It means to exert an evil influence on someone through the eye, such as casting a spell. (TLSB)

Hebrews 12:1-3, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

portrayed as crucified. See 1Co 1:23; 2:2. The verb means "to publicly portray or placard." Cf. the bronze snake that Moses displayed on a pole (Nu 21:9). (CSB)

Paul preached Christ's death so vividly that his audiences could almost see Jesus die with their own eyes (cf 1 Cor. 2:1-2). (TLSB)

And then Paul tells them why they should be chastised. And I think this is a very poignant moment in the epistle where you can see or get at least a glimpse into Paul's preaching. Because he says to them very clearly: Before your eyes, before your own eyes, Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. Publicly portrayed as crucified. There Paul is talking about his preaching. He's talking about how he laid out for them the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In all it's horror, in all it's scandal, in all it's embarrassment. (Just – V-23)

Now, I don't think that in our culture today we recognize how severely scandalous Jesus' death was. Not only for the Jews. But also for Gentiles. In the ancient world -- and this would have been so true of the people in Galatia -- honor and shame, a person's honor, you know, how they were perceived by others, what the world thought of them, was in a sense the ultimate goal, to have honor. The ultimate shame, of course, is the cross. And in the ancient world, particularly among the Roman culture, the noble person, the noble death, the noble virtues was highly exalted. And here Paul is taking a man, Jesus, who is also he proclaims the Son of God. And showing that he dies the most shameful, the most ignoble death possible. (Just – V-23)

Now, I think we had a little glimpse of how horrible it is a few years back when Mel Gibson had his movie "The Passion of the Christ." And it shocked people. It shocked people because of its violence. And if you remember, part of the critique was people were saying the movie was too violent. But I will say this -- and I think this is what Paul was getting at here -- that movie, the death of Jesus was the most

violent moment in the history of the world. That movie was not violent enough. It didn't show the total horror and scandal and absolute, you know, depravity of the world sins as it killed Jesus. And I think Paul in his own preaching showed how in this scandal, in this shame, in this place where Jesus -- and this is the interesting thing. You know a lot of in the ancient world shame came from being sinned against. And that was a big part of it. For example sexually abused or you are somehow mistreated in a way that wasn't your fault. This is a horrible thing. Here Jesus who is without sin is the most sinned against man in the world. He is the ultimate shame there. And yet in his shame, he brings honor to the world. He brings honor to those who live in shame. (Just – V-23)

3:2 *This only I want to learn from you: by the works of the Law did you receive the Spirit, or by the hearing of faith?* “This only” (τοῦτο μόνον) stands at the beginning of the sentence for emphasis: this one question would decisively resolve the matter were the Galatians to answer honestly. Is their enjoyment of the Spirit by means of, or on the basis of, the Law and its works, or by means of faith? For emphasis in the Greek Paul places “Spirit” before the verb “received.”⁷⁴ The aorist (past) tense of the verb “received/did receive” (ἐλάβετε) likely refers to a particular event. In the prior paragraph Paul contrasts justification by the works of the Law with justification by faith. Here in 3:2 he is again contrasting the works of the Law with faith. Even as justification takes place at the beginning of the Christian life, so also does the reception of the Spirit. The particular event to which Paul is referring is the Galatians’ conversion to faith in Christ. (CC)

Paul begins, as any good teacher would, with the Galatians’ own experience—what they already “know.” God worked powerfully in a life-changing way by their reception in faith of the Gospel message (3:1, 5). “Paul does not seek to convince the Galatians that they really have received the Spirit; the argument works the other way around. He argues from the indisputable empirical fact that they have received the Spirit in order to convince them that no further validating action is required to ensure their status as God’s children.” Apparently, the Galatians’ conversions were accompanied in these early days of Christianity by tremendous power, just as had been the case for so many in the book of Acts.⁷⁷ The initial reception of the Spirit establishes the precedent for their continuing experience of the Spirit (3:5). What began in faith need not be completed by observance of the Law. Indeed, Paul emphatically denies in 3:2 that the “works of the Law” played any role; he expresses that denial first. The Spirit is clear proof that the Galatian gentiles are *already* members of God’s people (Joel 2:28–29 [MT 3:1–2]; cf. 1QS IV.18–21). (CC)

This appeal to the powerful entry of the Spirit at the time of the Galatians’ conversion militates strongly against certain modern views, especially in Pentecostal circles, that believers must experience a *subsequent* empowering of the Spirit. Paul is appealing to the experience of the Spirit as proof that the Galatians are already God’s own. Paul does not believe that the Spirit’s empowerment or gifts come later in the Christian walk! In Christ and his Spirit, every believer is already fully participating in the new age that has dawned with Christ’s saving work (1:4; 6:12–13). The power of the Spirit is a prerequisite for believers to escape bondage to the demonic forces that hold sway over the present evil age (1:4). Paul returns to the Spirit as the beginning point of a wonderful new Christian existence in 3:3. (CC)

Paul betrays how widespread he believes the attraction of the Law is among the Galatians when he addresses his rhetorical question in 3:2 to “you” (plural) and not to “some of you.” The Galatians may find themselves being persuaded of a link between the Spirit and the “works of the Law.” Advocates of the “new perspective on Paul and the Law” (a perspective that is now no longer particularly “new”) have contended that the phrase “works of the Law” always has as its primary concern those aspects of the Law that serve as boundary markers for a people.⁸² “New perspective” interpreters believe that this phrase is shorthand for circumcision, food laws, and the ethnic aspects of the Mosaic Law that distinguish the Jewish people. Paul, for his part, does not at this point mention circumcision, Sabbath observance, food laws, or any of the other aspects of the Law that mark the Jewish people. The focus in Galatians 3 is on

the Law itself as being incapable of salvation. The Law simply came centuries after God’s saving promises to Abraham (3:15–18). God never intended to save by means of the Law (3:21). (CC)

By the Hearing of Faith (3:2, 5)

The Galatians should have realized that the Spirit comes not by the works of the Law but rather “by the hearing of faith,” or perhaps the phrase should be translated as “by the message that evokes faith” (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως). The translation is debated. Even if “the hearing of faith” is ultimately to be favored over “the message that evokes faith” (see below), an emphasis on the power-charged message is nevertheless attractive in this context and not easily dismissed. (CC)

The object of the preposition “by” (ἐκ) in this phrase is, in all likelihood, “hearing/message” (ἀκοῆς) and not “faith” (πίστεως). The NIV and NRSV translations mistakenly take the object of the preposition as “faith/believing” (πίστεως): “by believing what you heard” (3:2; emphasis added). These translations then take the genitive noun ἀκοῆς (“what was heard”) as the object of πίστεως (“believing”). Were that what Paul intended, the word order in the Greek would have been reversed: ἐκ πίστεως ἀκοῆς instead of ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως. Another problem with the NIV/NRSV approach is that the objects of the verb πιστεύω are always in either the dative or the accusative case. One would expect the same of the noun ἀκοῆς, “hearing/what is heard.” Thus ἐξ ἀκοῆς, “by the hearing/message heard,” is the basic prepositional phrase, and “of faith” (πίστεως) modifies “hearing/message” (ἀκοῆς). This prepositional phrase is similar to the phrasing in Rom 3:27, διὰ νόμου πίστεως. No one would contend with respect to Rom 3:27 that boasting is excluded “through believing the Law.” Boasting is excluded through “the Law of faith.” (CC)

The Greek word ἀκοή (“hearing/message”) may refer to (I) the action or sense of hearing (e.g., Mt 13:14; 2 Pet 2:8), or it may refer to (II) the message or report that is heard (e.g., Jn 12:38; Rom 10:16). The Greek πίστις, “faith,” may refer either to (A) the act or state of believing/trusting (the individual believer’s faith, *fides qua creditur*, “the faith by which [the Gospel] is believed,” e.g., Rom 4:5, 9; 1 Thess 1:8) or to (B) the theological message or content that is believed, i.e. the Gospel (*fides quae creditur*, “the faith which is believed” by all Christians in common, e.g., Gal 1:23; 1 Tim 4:1). The various combinations of these meanings lead to four main approaches:

- IA: “by hearing with faith/trust,” i.e., “a faithful hearing” (genitive of quality); “a hearing that comes of faith” (subjective genitive);⁸⁸ “by hearing, that is, by faith” (thus a genitive of apposition or content)
- IB: “by hearing the faith/the Gospel,” i.e., objective genitive
- IIA: “from the proclamation/message that elicits/evokes faith” (genitive of goal or purpose)
- IIB: “from the proclamation/message of the Gospel” (objective genitive or genitive of apposition) (CC)

These four options may be expanded if πίστις is not translated as “believing trust” or “faith,” but instead as “faithfulness.” A popular notion in North American scholarship is that Paul is regularly referring by πίστις to an active “faithfulness,” namely, “the faithfulness of Christ” (πίστις Χριστοῦ). Richard Hays has proposed that Paul is alluding to Christ’s faithfulness in Gal 3:11, and that this understanding of 3:11 is determinative for “faith” (πίστις) in 3:2, 5. Hays has contended that the phrase ἐκ πίστεως (“of faith,” 3:2, 5) represents an allusion to Hab 2:4 and the Messiah’s faithfulness. Such an allusion in 3:2, 5 is improbable. Paul does not quote Hab 2:4 until Gal 3:11, and he does not offer any clue in 3:2, 5, or 6 that faithfulness is in view. Faithfulness was precisely what Paul’s *rivals* were advocating: faithfulness to the Law of Moses! On the contrary, Abraham’s *believing trust* is highlighted in 3:6 and not his faithfulness. When Paul uses the phrase “of faith” (ἐκ πίστεως) in 3:7 as he completes his train of thought, Abraham’s believing trust remains at the forefront. The citation of Hab 2:4, which comes later, in Gal 3:11, should not be retrojected back into 3:6–7. At the same time, if the Greek phrase ἐκ πίστεως does not mean “by

[his] faithfulness” in 3:7, neither must it necessarily mean that elsewhere in Galatians. The “just like” that introduces 3:6 creates a parallel between 3:1–5 and Abraham’s faith (in the promises) which was reckoned to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6, quoted in Gal 3:6). Therefore those who live on the same basis of faith as Abraham (“those of faith,” οἱ ἐκ πίστεως, 3:7, 9) are his “sons” (3:7): “Πίστις [‘faith’] in vv. 2 and 5, πιστεύειν [‘believe’] in v. 6, πίστις [‘faith’] in vv. 7, 8 and 9, and πιστός [‘who had faith’] in v. 9 all refer to the same thing: trusting acceptance of God’s word and obedient compliance with the divine purpose it expresses.” The word “faith” (πίστις) in 3:2 must refer to the same sort of believing faith that Abraham modeled (Gen 15:6, quoted in Gal 3:6). The emphasis on Abraham’s believing trust in Gal 3:6 renders most viable either the first translation, “the hearing of faith” (IA), or the third translation, “the message that evokes faith” (IIA). (CC)

The immediate context offers strong support for translating 3:2’s phrase ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως as “the message that evokes faith” (IIA). In 3:1 Paul refers to the public proclamation of Christ crucified. The Galatians are eyewitnesses to this proclamation (3:1), rendering a reference in 3:2 to “hearing” somewhat jarring. In 3:6 Paul turns to Abraham’s believing trust (the verb πιστεύω). The phrase ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως (“the message that evokes faith”) may be functioning as a transition from the objective message in 3:1 to Abraham’s believing trust in 3:6. Since the genitive noun πίστεως (“of faith”) mostly likely refers to believing trust, the other noun, ἀκοῆς (“hearing; message heard”) would refer to the objective message to which Paul had referred in 3:1. Indeed, Paul employs the noun ἀκοή (“hearing; message heard”) elsewhere for the preached Word of God (Rom 10:16–17, quoting Is 53:1; 1 Thess 2:13). Paul would be claiming that the message of Christ crucified has the power to create the very faith which it demands. Paul could be contrasting human activity (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, “by the works of the Law,” 3:2) with divine initiative (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως, 3:2)—hence the divine “message that evokes faith” rather than the human “hearing of faith.” Elsewhere, Paul makes clear that faith is the miraculous work of God through his Word (Rom 10:14–17; 12:3; Phil 1:29). He does not describe observance of the Law of Moses in terms of divine initiative. (CC)

Despite the strong evidence adduced above, several considerations suggest that the contested phrase (ἐξ ἀκοῆς πίστεως) should be taken as “the hearing of faith” and not “the message that evokes faith.” First, were Paul emphasizing the divine origin of faith, he could have worded the message’s creation of faith more explicitly than with a compressed genitival modifier.¹⁰¹ Second, “the message that evokes faith” requires its own human mediating activity: the *proclamation* of that message! Third, the objective message of Christ crucified in 3:1 is clear whether or not 3:2’s phrase refers back to that message. Fourth, the Greek preposition “by” (ἐκ) in Pauline usage denotes a direct causal relationship (as the source or basis) rather than a remote causal relationship. A message that may or may not be received is not in a directly causal relationship to faith as the Greek preposition would require: thus “the hearing of faith” rather than “the message that evokes (through hearing) faith.” Fifth, in 3:14 Paul returns to “the Spirit,” last mentioned in 3:2–5, and ascribes the receiving of that Spirit to *faith* (“through faith,” διὰ τῆς πίστεως) rather than to the message (that evokes faith). Likewise in 3:22: what was given on the basis of faith in Christ (or the faithfulness of Christ) is given “to those who *believe*” (τοῖς πιστεύουσιν). Believing faith in 3:22 functions as the instrument of reception. Faith represents the sort of hearing that the Scriptures regularly describe as more than a mere registering of sound. To hear is to heed and to respond in obedience. On several occasions Paul employs a cognate word for “obedient hearing” (ὕπακοή; e.g., Rom 1:5; 15:18). Here in Gal 3:2, 5 the apostle is therefore referring to IA, “the hearing *that is* faith” (an appositional genitive) or perhaps a “hearing *with* faith.” Faith is a means of hearing and receiving Christ crucified. Such hearing of the Word is itself “the obedience of faith” (Rom 1:5). To take the Gal 3:2 phrase as “by the hearing of faith” does not detract from the fact that the instrument of faith is itself a divine creation (Rom 10:14–17; 12:3; Phil 1:29). (CC)

3:3 *Are you so foolish—[that] having begun with the Spirit, you are now ending with the flesh?* Paul calls the Galatians “foolish” (ἀνόητοι) again in 3:3 (as in 3:1). He appears confident enough in their

relationship that the provocative wording can serve constructively as a “wake-up” call. He asks in a chiasmic manner (in the Greek word order):

- A Having begun [ἐναρξάμενοι]
- B with the Spirit [πνεύματι],
- C now [νῦν]
- B' with the flesh [σαρκί]
- A' are you ending [ἐπιτελεῖσθε]? (CC)

The Galatians’ flirtation with Moses’ Law threatens a return to the flesh and a loss of the Spirit! “It is ... absurd to regard the gift of the divine Spirit as an imperfect beginning and to expect the climax and perfection from something done to the human ‘flesh.’ ” Paul’s mention of “flesh” in 3:3 alludes to circumcision “in your flesh” (Gen 17:10–13; see also Sirach 44:20). Do the Galatians really think that severing a mere piece of flesh will lead to perfection? (CC)

Jewish authors in Paul’s day at times did indeed view circumcision as the antidote to the evil inclinations of the flesh. Two documents associated with the Dead Sea Scroll community bear witness to the connection. The *Damascus Document* (CD II.14–16) encourages a perfect walk in opposition to the evil inclination: “And now, my sons, listen to me and I shall open your eyes so that you can see and understand the deeds of God, so that you can choose what he is pleased with and repudiate what he hates, so that you can *walk perfectly* on all his paths and not follow after the thoughts of a guilty inclination [יצר] and lascivious eyes” (trans. F. García Martínez; emphasis added). In the *Community Rule* (1QS V.4–5), the author points to circumcision as the solution to the evil inclination: The community member is not to “walk in the stubbornness of his heart in order to go astray following his heart and his eyes and the musings of his inclination [יצר]. Instead he should *circumcise* in the Community *the foreskin of his tendency* [יצר]” (trans. F. García Martínez; emphasis added; cf. James 2:21–23; *m. Ned.* 3.11). The apostle, for his part, engages in a double entendre with the word “flesh” as he contends otherwise. To entertain circumcision in the flesh is, ironically, to surrender *to* the flesh, that is, to an existence under the power of this “present evil age” (1:4). The flesh as a cosmic power endeavors to express itself in the flesh of the individual (cf. 1QS V.4–5). Paul develops the notion of the flesh as a cosmic power later in the letter but hints at that development here as he contrasts the Spirit with the flesh. The Galatians are tragically threatening to abandon the new era that has come in Christ—the “now” (νῦν, 3:3) of the Spirit—to return to the former age (1:4). (CC)

Paul uses the Greek verb ἐπιτελεῖσθε, “you are ending” (3:3), for the *completion* of a process, a process that has a beginning point and an “ending” point (thus 2 Cor 8:6; Phil 1:6). Paul envisions that with the presence of God’s Spirit an eschatological process has begun for the believer that will find its consummation at Christ’s return. To live “in/with the flesh,” then, is to live in an age that stands *apart from* God’s Spirit. Conversely, Paul is not referring by “flesh” to a sinful human nature as such.¹¹⁹ The flesh is primarily a *power*. Those in the flesh live according to the values and desires of this present evil age (1:4). That sort of life has been condemned and vanquished in the cross of Christ. Galatians is intensely focused, then, on the nature of the Christian life! The Galatians are in danger of forfeiting God’s tremendous power for their lives by adopting the weak and beggarly Law of Moses. This is no less a danger for the modern Christian. The quest for spiritual “perfection” can lead an individual astray from the genuine power available to the believer through the steady focus on the crucified Christ and his Spirit. That gaze on Christ’s saving work is always transformative! (CC)

R. C. H. Lenski in his commentary, still popular among conservative Lutherans, has contended that “Spirit” in 3:2 must be the regenerated *human* spirit because of the pairing of “spirit” with “flesh.” He could not fathom how Christians could ever *use* the Spirit in their daily walk (cf. the exhortation in 5:25). Lenski argued that Paul shifted from the Holy Spirit in 3:2 to the human spirit in 3:3 on the basis of the

omission of the Greek article with πνεύματι in 3:3. He supposed Paul's thinking to be that the Holy Spirit animates the human spirit.¹²¹ Unfortunately, Paul offers no contextual clue for a shift in the meaning of the same Greek word (πνεῦμα, "S/spirit") in 3:2 and 3:3. Lenski's rationale for a shift in meaning derives entirely from non-contextual, theological concerns. On the contrary, "Spirit" should be construed with the same sense in both verses. The *beginning point* of the Spirit in 3:3 neatly corresponds to the initial *reception* of the Spirit in 3:2. Paul explodes in exasperation with the Galatians' foolishness (3:3) because of their failure to appreciate how they received the Spirit in the beginning (3:2). Lenski missed the logic that connects 3:2 and 3:3. The believer is never alone but always enjoys the Spirit's enabling power in the walk of faith! (CC)

the Spirit. From this point on in Galatians Paul refers to the Holy Spirit 16 times. (CSB)

The person and work of the Holy Spirit is a theme throughout Gal (mentioned 16 times). God gives His Spirit through the preaching of Christ (Gospel), whom we receive in faith (1Th 2:13)—and not through the works of the Law. *by hearing.* The Spirit works through the Word (see LC II 52). (TLSB)

"If I had nothing else against you," he says, "I would seize upon your own experience." He speaks these words with an indignant mind. It is as though he were saying: "All right. Answer me, your pupil; for you have suddenly become so learned that you are now my masters and teachers. Did you receive the Spirit from the works of the Law or from the preaching of the Gospel?" With this argument he so convicts them that they have nothing they can say against it. For their own obvious and manifest experience was contradicting them and saying that they had received the Spirit, not from the works of the Law but from the preaching of the Gospel. (Luther)

πνεύματι ... σαρκί—These may be instrumental datives ("by the Spirit/the flesh") or datives of manner ("with the Spirit/the flesh"). The question does not impact the meaning of the passage.

ἐπιτελεῖσθε ("you are ending")—Exegetes have perennially debated the difficult question whether this ambiguous form of the verb ἐπιτελέω, "to end" or "to complete," is in the middle or passive voice. The middle voice would bear this sense: "Are you *ending* with the flesh?" (see NAB, NJB, RSV, NRSV). The passive voice would bear this sense: "Are you looking to the flesh to *make you perfect (complete)*?" (see NEB, NASB). Neither approach is without problems. The first verb in the verse (ἐναρξάμενοι, "having begun") is middle, not passive, thereby rendering a passive construction of the second verb less likely. At the same time, the middle voice of ἐπιτελέω is not attested in the LXX or the NT. Context must therefore decide the matter. As the remainder of the letter clarifies, the Galatians are seeking circumcision as a means to perfect their faith, a point the passive voice would convey.⁶ The notion of perfecting is not necessarily excluded by the middle voice, which is attested in non-biblical Greek literature. If one opts for the middle voice, the intransitive middle ("attain perfection" or "bring to an end") would be preferable to the reflexive middle ("perfect yourselves" [through circumcision and the Law]), despite the transitive uses of the verb in 2 Cor 8:6 and Phil 1:6. The initial verb for "beginning" suggests a corresponding second verb for "ending," but to translate the second verb as "ending" or "bringing to an end" should not be taken as excluding the notion of an attempt for perfecting (in the works of the Law). (CC)

are you so foolish – This is the way Paul argues. And I think you have to see this. He is a good rabbi. He'll state something. Then he'll state it again with a tone of interpretation. Now he's going to interpret a little bit of what he said in Verses 1 and 2. He says: Having begun in the Spirit -- the Spirit is repeated -- are you now going to bring this could conclusion in the flesh? Now here you have to have the key where he refers to flesh here, he means circumcision. So if you've received the Gospel and believed in the Gospel by means of the Holy Spirit who proclaimed Christ to you through the preacher, if that is how you received the Spirit, are you now going to bring all of this to conclusion by being circumcised? He's going to get even more graphic in a sense and talk in more kind of even derogative terms of circumcision. But

here he is putting the question plainly. Is it Spirit or is it circumcision? You can't have both. (Just – V-23)

begun by the Spirit. Both salvation and sanctification are the work of the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Now that this argument has been presented, namely, that the Spirit is granted through hearing with faith, not through the works of the Law, Paul begins to exhort the Galatians and to deter them from a twofold danger or loss. He says: “Are you so foolish or senseless that, having begun with the Spirit, you are now being ended with the flesh?” This is the first danger. The second is (v. 4): “Did you experience so many things in vain?” These are rhetorical devices: on the one hand, to deter someone from danger and loss, and, on the other hand, to persuade him on the basis of what is useful, honorable, and easy. Therefore he says: “Having begun with the Spirit.” That is: “Your religion was begun and undertaken in a very beautiful manner.” Or, as he says later (Gal. 5:7): “You were running well.” What is going on? “Now you want to be ended with the flesh, indeed, now you are being ended with the flesh.” (Luther)

perfected by the flesh? Lit. “the flesh,” a reference to human nature in its unregenerate weakness. Trying to achieve righteousness by works, including circumcision, was a part of life in the “flesh.” (CSB)

An allusion to circumcision, which Paul’s opponents were pushing as necessary to make the Gospel “complete” (cf Rm 2:23–29)—reasoning that comes from the fallen human nature, not from God’s Spirit. (TLSB)

3:4 *Did you experience so much in vain—if indeed [it really was] in vain?* The translation of the verb πάσχω, here translated as “experience,” is difficult. This verb is used in the LXX and elsewhere in the NT (forty-one times) to mean “suffer.” Paul refers to the persecution he endured (in 5:11 with διώκω, “persecute”; 6:17) as well as to the rivals’ avoidance of persecution (διώκω, 6:12). Only one passage may refer to the persecution of the Galatians: Paul describes the child born according to the flesh persecuting the child born according to the Spirit (διώκω, 4:29). That reference to persecution is in the context of the rivals’ pressuring the Galatians to change their thinking about the necessity to observe Moses’ Law. Paul employs a different verb in 3:4 (πάσχω, “experience, suffer”) that may or may not be connected to the texts referring to persecution (διώκω, “persecute,” in 4:29; 5:11; 6:12). The Greek word πάσχω, “experience, suffer,” is also used in the Greek literature of Paul’s day for *positive* experiences (see BDAG, 1; Josephus, *Ant.* 3.15.1 § 312). While the preponderance of the word’s usage (and etymology) would favor “suffer,” whenever Paul uses the word in a negative sense that negative sense is always specified by the context (1 Cor 12:26; 2 Cor 1:6; Phil 1:29; 1 Thess 2:14; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 1:12). The immediate context of Gal 3:1–5 decisively favors the positive “experience.” The prior verse (3:3) reminds the Galatians of their beginning in the Spirit, and 3:5 returns to their continued enjoyment of the Spirit along with deeds of power. References to the Spirit in the Galatians’ past (3:3) and present (3:5) sandwich 3:4 and are decisive for its interpretation. What, then, have the Galatians learned from such remarkable experiences? Likewise, the emphatic “so much” (τοσαῦτα), placed at the beginning of the Greek of 3:4, refers back to the experiences of the Spirit in 3:2–3. When Paul refers to the *rivals’* fear of persecution later in the letter (6:12), he offers no clear evidence that the Galatians themselves ever suffered persecution for their faith. (CC)

Significantly, Paul appeals to the Galatians’ experience. Scott McKnight has chided his fellow evangelicals in their emphasis on Scriptural authority for a tendency to avoid reference to personal experience. That same tendency is often evident within Lutheranism. McKnight wrote: “Experience is an integral part of all of our lives. We strip our Christian faith of one of its most important dimensions if we rob it of experience and pretend that Christianity is unemotional, unobservable, and untouchable.... We should not deny this dimension of Christianity.” The error of a Christian faith normed by experience rather than by the Word of God should not lead to the denial of any sort of personal experience (“love,

joy, peace ...,” the fruit of the Spirit, Gal 5:22–23). Too often the reaction to a perceived extreme is to adopt the other extreme. Scripture remains the sole norm, but a balance must be reached that honors the Scripture’s own recognition of God’s good creation of human sensory perception and of valid emotions. (CC)

Paul sincerely hopes that the Galatians have not experienced so much for nothing. The “if” (εἰ) is strengthened by “indeed” (γε). The addition of the Greek καί (included in the English via “indeed”) further distances Paul from the possibility; he refuses to believe it! The apostle holds out hope that his converts did not experience the Spirit “in vain.” Conversely, Paul’s words also function as a *warning* about experiencing the Spirit in vain (cf. Heb 6:4–6: after experiencing the powers of the age to come!). Paul’s worries about having labored in vain are sincere (2:2; 4:11; cf. 1 Cor 15:2; Phil 2:16). The believer must persevere. Believers may indeed fall away from the faith. The rival missionaries are genuinely threatening to render Christ’s death as being for nothing (2:21). Paul’s comment (or question) in 3:4 may be taken as soliciting a denial from the Galatians that their experiences were in vain: “Did you experience so much in vain—if indeed [it really was] in vain?” Paul’s comment could also be taken as a genuine warning of an impending loss. The open-ended conditional form (“if”) means that the Galatians will have to determine for themselves which way to take his comment. (CC)

τοσαῦτα (“so much”)—This may also be translated as “such [remarkable] things.” Since the focus in 3:2 and 3:3 is on the reception of the Spirit, “so much” is preferable as a translation. (CC)

Paul hopes that those who have been misled will return to the true gospel. (CSB)

did you suffer – Did you suffer -- and I think this is an important word -- did you suffer -- meaning did you kind of bear the humility of Christ after receiving the Spirit in vain? I mean was this something that was just you know this preaching of the theology of this cross, this embrace of Jesus and me as he's going to say in Chapter 4 as a sick man, as a man who is broken and Jesus in his cross, did you embrace that in vain, if indeed it is in vain he says? (Just – V-23)

Paul makes no specific mention of the Galatians undergoing suffering. (TLSB)

3:5 *Does, then, the one who grants you the Spirit and works powerful deeds among you [do so] by the works of the Law or by the hearing of faith?* Most commentators have taken the connective “then” (οὖν) as resumptive. In rhetorical questions, however, this connective (οὖν) is normally illative—that is, denoting an inference—and never purely resumptive. “The οὖν [‘then’] in a question always signals a logical connection with what precedes, suggesting that what has gone before in some way evokes the question.” Paul uses the connective in a similar fashion in Rom 4:9a: “Is this blessedness, then [οὖν], pronounced only on the circumcised, or also on the uncircumcised?” By turning to Abraham in Rom 4:9b, Paul signals that the answer to his question in Rom 4:9a is not to be found in David, mentioned in the immediately preceding verses (Rom 4:6–8), but rather in Abraham, mentioned a few verses earlier (Rom 4:1–3). Likewise, Gal 3:5 builds on 3:2: if the Galatians received the Spirit “by the hearing of faith” and not “by the works of the Law,” then they *continue* to experience the Spirit in the same way. (CC)

Some commentators would supply an aorist (past) verb since the main verbs in 3:2–4 are aorist (past): “did you receive?” (ἐλάβετε); “did you experience?” (ἐπάθετε). An understood past tense verb, however, would render 3:5 as roughly the same question as 3:2. Paul has already appealed to their past experiences in 3:4. In 3:5 he moves beyond the past to the present. God’s activity is not limited to the Galatians’ conversions. The elided main verb in 3:5 should therefore be in the same present tense as the participles in 3:5. God continues to be the one who “supplies/grants” (ἐπιχορηγῶν) the Spirit and who “works” (ἐνεργῶν) among his own. The language is that of a free gift quite apart from human worthiness or

initiative. All Christians enjoy God’s bountiful, active, and continuous provision of the Spirit’s power on a daily basis (1 Cor 2:12; 2 Cor 1:21–22; 5:5; Phil 1:19; 1 Thess 4:8; cf. Lk 11:13)! (CC)

From the second-century BC Jewish document *Jubilees* (1.23–24): “And I shall cut off the foreskin of their heart and the foreskin of the heart of their descendants. And I shall create for them a holy spirit, and I shall purify them so that they will not turn away from following me from that day and forever. And their souls will cleave to me and to all my commandments. And they will do my commandments” (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*). The gift of the Holy Spirit in the last days would enable a genuine obedience of the Torah. Undoubtedly, the rivals saw circumcision as the first step to a fuller life of obedience in the power of the Spirit. Paul’s point is that the Galatians have experienced the Spirit’s power since their conversion and irrespective of circumcision or the Law of Moses. Upon reflection, the Galatians’ experience should belie the rivals’ emphasis on the Law. (CC)

What Paul means by “powerful deeds” (δυνάμεις) in 3:5 is not immediately clear. The principal manifestation of the Spirit is the justification of the Galatians “just like” the justification of Abraham (3:6). The same Spirit that works “powerful deeds” in 3:5 also creates inward fruit such as love, joy, and peace in 5:22–23. The fruit of the Spirit’s work cannot be excluded from the mighty deeds of 3:5 since faith, one aspect of that fruit, figures prominently throughout the first half of Galatians 3. The Greek phrase ἐν ὑμῖν rendered as “among you” could be translated as “within you” (cf. Mt 14:2). God works mightily *within* the Galatians. (CC)

On the other hand, the plural form “powerful deeds” elsewhere in the Scripture often refers to miraculous manifestations (e.g., Mt 14:2; Mk 6:2; 1 Cor 12:10, 29; but cf. Col 1:29; 2 Thess 2:9). Miracles would demonstrate the Spirit’s presence in a concrete way. The Galatians may have experienced powerful wonders. The supplying (ἐπιχορηγῶν) of the Spirit is conjoined by the same governing article (ὁ) to the working (ἐνεργῶν) of powerful miracles with God as the understood subject. The powerful miracles were taking place in the community’s *midst* (ἐν ὑμῖν—“among you” and not “in you”; Rom 15:19; 1 Cor 12:10, 28–29). The ongoing nature of these manifestations demonstrates that these mighty deeds are not just those worked by the apostle when he was at Galatia (cf. 2 Cor 12:12). Paul’s appeal to their experience would hardly be apt if he had been referring only to his own working of powerful deeds and not to theirs. (CC)

Modern Western readers must be cautious in appropriating this verse with its description of the powerful manifestations taking place in the Galatians’ midst. First, these manifestations were graciously and freely granted to Christian believers apart from any sort of personal preparation or assistance. There were no “have-not Christians” in the Galatians’ midst. Faith proved sufficient to receive these manifestations. Second, such powerful manifestations may not, at least in the majority of instances, accompany the hearing of faith these days. The Galatians were among the very first Christian believers, and the Spirit may have been granting such powerful manifestations as a means of confirming the Christian movement in its earliest stages (e.g., 1 Cor 2:1–5). Already by the end of the first century AD, these manifestations were becoming dramatically less frequent. One of the attractions of the Montanist movement toward the end of the second century was precisely in its claim of recapturing the miraculous power of the earliest days of Christianity. In third-world countries today, on the other hand, reports of miraculous healings, exorcisms, the recovery of sight by the blind, the restoration of the lame, and other extraordinary manifestations are arguably more frequent. Some Christian groups and denominations in the West also report dramatic miracles. Whether manifested by powerful miracles or not, the Spirit’s presence remains a reality for believers no less today than in those first decades of the Jesus movement. Many believers in Christ overlook that clinging to the cross by faith is itself a powerful miracle wrought by God! (CC)

HIS SPIRIT AND WORK MIRACLES AMONG YOU – This argument, which is based on the experience of the Galatians, so delights the apostle that, after scolding them and deterring them from a double danger, he now repeats the argument; and he does so with an addition: “*He who* supplies, etc.” That is: “Not only have you received the Spirit by hearing with faith, but everything that you have known and done you have by hearing with faith.” It is as though he were saying: “It was not enough that God gave you the Spirit once. But the same God has always abundantly supplied and increased the gifts of the Spirit, so that when you have once received the Spirit, He might always grow and be more efficacious in you.” (Luther)

Manifestations of the Spirit’s power worked through the Gospel proclamation. (TLSB)

3:6 καθώς Ἀβραάμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην (“just like Abraham: he ‘believed God, and so it was reckoned to him as righteousness’ ”)—Paul’s verse agrees with LXX Gen 15:6 except that his introduction has καθώς instead of the first καί and places Ἀβραάμ, “Abraham,” before (rather than after, as also in Rom 4:3) the verb ἐπίστευσεν, “believed,” literally, “just like Abraham: he believed God.” The following καί has a resultative sense (BDF § 442.2): “and so it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” (CC)

just like Abraham: he “believed God, and so it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Several translations (e.g., RSV, NRSV, REB, and NJB) and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA²⁸), a critical edition of the original Greek text, have taken 3:6 as the beginning of a new paragraph as Paul turns from the experience of the Galatians (3:1–5) to the Scriptures and to the example of Abraham. For these translators, καθώς (“just like”) in 3:6 begins a new sentence. Some have even taken 3:6 as the protasis of a new sentence which then closes with 3:7’s apodosis (ἄρα, “then”). Despite the popularity of this translation, it is not the most likely. Whenever the Greek word ἄρα, “then,” introduces the apodosis of a sentence in Galatians (as is supposedly the case in 3:7), the protasis begins with an “if” (εἰ) clause (Gal 2:21; 3:29; 5:11), which is *not* the case in 3:6. Thus, 3:6 and 3:7 are grammatically separate, and if separate, the introductory “just like” (καθώς) in 3:6 refers *backward* to 3:1–5. Furthermore, the Greek word καθώς (“just like”) does not begin a new sentence unless it is followed by the word οὕτως (“so also,” as in, e.g., 2 Cor 1:5). Gal 3:6 should not, then, be construed as a new sentence. To take καθώς as a mere introductory, abbreviated formula (“just as [*it is written*]”) is without parallel elsewhere in Paul (Rom 1:17 and 1 Cor 1:31, e.g., both have the Greek verb γέγραπται, “it is written,” after καθώς). (CC)

A minority of translations (NEB and NAB), along with *The Greek New Testament* (UBS⁴; the other major critical edition of the original Greek text), have therefore rightly taken 3:6 as the continuation and conclusion of 3:1–5 as Paul compares the situation of the Galatians with Abraham’s experience. “Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your observing the law, or by *believing* what you heard, just as ‘Abraham *believed* God, and it was credited to him as righteousness?’” Abraham serves as an example of faith and as a precedent for the Galatians’ experience.¹⁴⁸ Abraham is clear proof that those of like faith enjoy God’s blessings and justification. The clause headed by “just like” (καθώς) modifies “[does God do so] by the hearing of faith?” in 3:5. Paul is not saying that Abraham received the Spirit as did the Galatians—only that the patriarch’s reception of God’s blessings in faith is analogous to the Galatians’ reception of God’s blessings. Abraham benefited from the promises given to him by faith *just as* the Galatians received the promised Spirit by faith. (CC)

Some have questioned the analogy Paul draws between Abraham and the Galatians on the basis of faith/trust. According to this line of reasoning, Paul does not say that Abraham believed “in” God but rather that he trusted God. The verb “believe” (πιστεύω) with the dative object may mean to “believe something to be true” or to “give someone credence about something” but not to “place one’s trust in” (which takes a preposition—πιστεύω plus εἰς and an accusative, as in, e.g., Gal 2:16; πιστεύω plus ἐπί and a dative, as, e.g., in Rom 10:11; or πιστεύω plus ἐπί and an accusative, as in Rom 4:5, 24). Unfortunately,

Paul offers only four instances of the verb “believe” with the dative noun: Rom 4:3, quoting Gen 15:6; Rom 4:17 (note the attraction of the relative in this instance; BDF § 294 [2], [5]); Rom 10:16, quoting Is 53:1; and Gal 3:6. Rom 4:21 supports taking Rom 4:17 as trusting God with respect to his promises. Whether the verb with the dative noun really differs from the verb followed by the prepositional phrases “is an issue waiting for a thoroughly convincing discussion.”¹⁵¹ Nevertheless, Abraham “believed God” in the sense of trusting God’s Word of promise. Such faith in God’s promises was itself called forth by the divine promises (cf. Rom 4:21; Gal 4:28). Paul’s purposes are served by the basic analogy between trust with respect to God’s promises of old and the believer’s trust in Christ. (CC)

Gal 3:6 is, in some ways, a “janus” (two-faced) verse. Not only does the verse connect with 3:1–5, but it also introduces the personage of Abraham. Paul then emphatically claims in 3:7 that those characterized by faith are the true “sons of Abraham.” The apostle does not use this phrase elsewhere in his letters (cf. the two biological sons of Abraham mentioned in 4:22). The phrase “sons of Abraham” appears unprompted and may not be of Pauline origin. Paul draws a conclusion about who the sons of Abraham are from premises that do not mention Abrahamic sonship. Gal 3:6, with its quotation of Gen 15:6, mentions only the patriarch himself. Eventually Paul concludes in Gal 3:29 that those *in Christ* are Abraham’s true “seed,” with 3:7’s unexpected conclusion presaging that later logic. The non sequitur about Abrahamic sonship in 3:7 suggests that the apostle is responding to a question raised by the rivals about the identity of Abraham’s true sons. Abraham was likely exhibit A for Paul’s rivals for two reasons. First, in Jewish tradition Abraham was the model convert from paganism. He left behind the gods of his father’s household for the one true God (Josh 24:2–3; *Jub.* 11.16–17; 12.2–8, 16–24; *Apoc. Ab.* 1–8; 27.7; 31.4–8; Philo, *Virt.* 39 §§ 212–16; Philo, *Spec.* 1.2 § 9; Philo, *Abr.* 13–18 §§ 60–88; Josephus, *Ant.* 1.7.1 §§ 154–57; *L.A.B.* 6.4; 23.5). The Galatian gentiles should therefore take Abraham as their example for conversion. (CC)

Second, and more crucially, in Second Temple Jewish tradition Abraham was faithful in his observance of the commands of God and even of the as-yet-unwritten Law of Moses. He circumcised his household and was faithful (e.g., *T. Levi* 9.1–14; *T. Benj.* 10.4; *2 Bar.* 57.1–3; Philo, *Abr.* 46 §§ 275–76; Justin, *Dial.* 10.3–4 [where Trypho is citing Genesis 17 against Justin]). Some Jewish authors in Paul’s era directly link Abraham’s faith in Gen 15:6 with his obedient near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22 (*Sirach* 44:19–21; *1 Macc* 2:52; *Jub.* 17.15–18; *m. ’Aboth* 5.3; cf. James 2:23). God told Abram in *Jub.* 15.3 to “be pleasing before me and be perfect” (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*). Abraham is then praised in *Jub.* 23.10 as “perfect in all of his actions with the Lord and ... pleasing through righteousness all of the days of his life” (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*). In *Jub.* 24.11: “All of the nations of the earth will bless themselves by your seed because your father [Abraham] obeyed me and observed my restrictions and my commandments and my laws and my ordinances and my covenant” (trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*). *Jubilees* is only one instance of a widespread pattern within Second Temple Judaism of praise for Abraham’s exemplary or perfect obedience. According to *Sirach* 44:20, Abraham “kept the [as-yet-unwritten] law of the Most High,” “and when he was tested he proved faithful” (NRSV). Mattathias in *1 Macc* 2:52 reminds his sons: “Was not Abraham found faithful [εὐρέθη πιστός] when tested [in his willingness to sacrifice Isaac—Genesis 22], and it was reckoned [ἐλογίσθη] to him as righteousness [εἰς δικαιοσύνην]?” (NRSV). *Judith* 8:25–27 recalls how God tested Abraham’s heart. Abraham’s faithfulness and willingness to sacrifice Isaac became a model for the martyrs in *4 Macc* 16:19–20. In *CD III.2–3*: “Abraham ... was counted as a friend for keeping God’s precepts and not following the desire of his spirit” (trans. F. García Martínez). In *Pr. Man.* 8: “You, therefore, O Lord, God of the righteous ones, did not appoint grace for the righteous ones, such as Abraham ... who did not sin against you” (trans. J. H. Charlesworth, *OTP*). In *T. Ab.* 10.13 a voice came down from heaven attesting that up to that point “Abraham has not sinned” (trans. E. P. Sanders, *OTP*).¹⁵⁶ *Mishnah Qiddushin* 4.14 says: “And we find that Abraham our father had performed the whole Law before it was given” (trans. H. Danby). Thus a frequent motif in Jewish treatments of Abraham was his perfect or nearly perfect obedience of God’s will. Abraham was a model not only of conversion but also of faithful behavior. The Dead Sea document

4QMMT 117–18 (4QMMT C 31–32; 4Q398 Frag. 2.II.7–8; 4Q399 Frag. 1.II.4–5) echoes Gen 15:6: “It shall be reckoned to you [plural] as in justice [חֲקֵטָה, literally, ‘righteousness’] when you do what is upright and good before him, for your good and that of Israel” (trans. F. García Martínez). Abraham’s exemplary obedience was stressed *at least as much as* his separation from paganism. In fact, *because of* Abraham’s obedience to God, he had to separate from idolatrous and sinful gentiles. Ethnic separation was *subordinate* to overall obedience of God’s will. (CC)

The Jews celebrated heroes in the OT Scriptural tradition who had piously done God’s will as enshrined in the Law of Moses. For instance, with the same language as Paul’s in Gal 3:6, Phinehas was praised on the basis of his zealous deeds: “It was reckoned to him as righteousness” (ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην, LXX Ps 105:31 [MT/ET Ps 106:31], drawing on Numbers 25). The ultimate example, nonetheless, remained Abraham. Paul’s focus on Abraham’s faith in Gal 3:6 appears deliberately pointed against the way the patriarch was treated in Jewish tradition and by the rivals in Galatia. Descent from Abraham was a matter of pride for the Jews (*Pss. Sol.* 9:9; 3 Macc 6:3). Israel saw itself as Abraham’s “seed” (Ps 105:6 [LXX 104:6]; Is 41:8). Paul’s Jewish-Christian rivals maintained that if gentile Christ-believers were to become Abraham’s children, they would need to follow in the footsteps of Abraham with circumcision and observance of the now-written Mosaic Law. Thus Paul must belabor the subject of the patriarch throughout his letter (3:6–9; 3:14; 3:16–18; 3:29; 4:21–31). The apostle co-opts the rivals’ use of the Abrahamic texts with a rhetorical question highlighting how the patriarch was credited with righteousness on the basis of believing trust in God’s promises. God had offered Abraham what may have seemed like outlandish promises for a person of his age, but the patriarch trusted God. (CC)

The notion that Paul is responding to the use of the Abrahamic texts by his rivals has been called into question by some scholars. Despite the prominence of Abraham in Jewish tradition, these scholars have noted Paul’s failure to mention circumcision in Genesis 17 or the command to circumcise in Lev 12:3. If the apostle were responding to texts used by his opponents, why would he not engage *these* texts? Quite apart from the fact that this is a precarious argument from silence, were Paul to cite such clear Scriptural texts commanding circumcision as an “everlasting covenant,” he would be playing into the hands of his opponents. He would be conceding that the Scriptures—God’s revelation (!)—did indeed advocate circumcision. A better course might be to avoid those passages altogether. (CC)

It would have been difficult to refute the Judaizers on the basis of an exegesis of Gen 17:4–14, for vv 10–14 are particularly plain as to the necessity of being circumcised in order to be accepted by God and remain in covenant relation with him. So Paul focuses on Gen 15:6 in an attempt to highlight the larger and underlying issue, apart from any further regulations or conditions given later. (CC)

Paul does tackle directly some of the rivals’ other Scriptural proof texts (e.g., Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10; Lev 18:5 in Gal 3:12). (CC)

Paul writes that Abraham’s faith was “credited” or “reckoned” (ἐλογίσθη) to him as righteousness. The Greek verb λογίζομαι translates the Hebrew verb חָשַׁב, which means “to account” or “to credit” (in biblical and Second Temple literature, see, e.g., Gen 15:6; Ps 106:31 [LXX 105:31]; 1 Macc 2:52; cf. Rom 4:3, 5, 9, 10, 22; 2 Cor 5:19). The idiom “to reckon to” (Greek λογίζομαι εἰς = Hebrew חָשַׁב לְ) means “to consider something to be true” or “to regard as [having a certain value]” (e.g., Rom 9:8). Paul uses “reckon as righteousness” (the verb λογίζομαι with εἰς δικαιοσύνην) in that sense in Rom 4:3–12. He is *not* commending faith—either in Rom 4:3–12 or in Gal 3:6—as a sort of “faithful” work that might tip the divine scales at the judgment. Faith is simply regarded or accounted “as righteousness.” At the same time, Paul does not envision some sort of legal fiction as if Abraham were not actually righteous. By the end of Galatians 3, Paul clarifies that Baptism and faith are instrumental in uniting the believer to Christ (3:26–29). *In Christ* the believer really *is* righteous. The emphasis in 3:6, however, is on the forensic

dimension of the crediting or counting *apart from* Abraham’s subsequent behavior. Faith is not itself constitutive of righteousness but is *counted as* righteousness. (CC)

Righteousness is, for Paul, closely associated with the Spirit. Just as Abraham received God’s promise with faith which was credited as righteousness (3:6), so also the Galatians received the message of Christ with faith, which has resulted in the reception of the Spirit (3:5). In Paul’s thinking, Abraham’s justification by faith proves that the Galatians must likewise receive the Spirit by faith. Justification and the Spirit’s reception take place simultaneously with faith. Neither is without the other. (CC)

Abraham believed...counted to him as righteousness. Ties the Gn quotation to what has happened to the Galatians when they received the Spirit. Their experience was the same as Abraham’s, whom God declared righteous by faith, as the Scripture clearly proves. “Righteousness is worked in the heart when the Holy Spirit is received through the Word” (AC XVIII 3). (TLSB)

Up to this point Paul has been arguing on the basis of experience. And he vigorously urges this argument that is based on experience. “You have believed,” he says, “and having believed, you have done miracles and have performed many outstanding and powerful deeds. You have also suffered evils. All this is the effect and operation, not of the Law but of the Holy Spirit.” This the Galatians were obliged to admit, for they could not deny the things that were going on before their eyes and were available to their senses. Hence this argument, based on experience or on its effects in the Galatians themselves, is very strong and clear. (Luther)

Now Paul adds the example of Abraham and recites testimonies from Scripture. The first is from Gen. 15:6: “Abraham believed, etc.” He urges this passage strongly here, just as he does especially in Rom. 4:2. “If Abraham was justified by works,” he says, “he has righteousness and something to boast about, but not before God,” only before men; for before God he has sin and wrath. But he was justified before God, not because he worked but because he believed. (Luther)

3:7–5:26 Paul begins a sustained argument from Scripture to disprove two incorrect rabbinic understandings of Abraham’s role: (1) that Abraham was counted righteous because of his faithfulness under testing (which was meritorious); and (2) that Abraham’s faith (Gn 15:6) must be tied together with circumcision (Gn 17:4–14), which is also necessary for a right standing before God. (TLSB)

Abrahamic Blessing (3:7–9)

3:7 οἱ ἐκ πίστεως (“those of faith,” literally, “the [ones] from faith”)—The phrase does not indicate origin (cf. τοῖς ... ἐξ ἐριθείας in Rom 2:8). Paul has in mind an *identity* that is derived from faith (as opposed to works). Nevertheless, people’s actions are not excluded from this identity. Thus some translations have “live by” or “rely on” faith.¹²

υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραάμ (“are the sons of Abraham”)— κ^c A C D G Textus Receptus have υἱοὶ *after* εἰσίν, but υἱοὶ εἰσὶν Ἀβραάμ in \mathfrak{P}^{46} κ^* B is the more difficult reading. The word for “sons,” υἱοὶ, will recur in 4:1–7 as Paul continues an argument that revolves around who are the rightful heirs of Abraham. “Sons” inherited from their fathers, which is likely why Paul chose “sons” (υἱοὶ, masculine) over “children” (τέκνα, neuter). He, in fact, expressly includes the baptized who are “female” (3:28) as “sons” (3:26) and “heirs” (3:29). Paul does not use “sons” because it is appropriate for males who are circumcised; the issue here is not circumcision but rather *descent* or *inheritance*. Paul’s literal term “sons” for those who inherit should therefore be taken to include women. (CC)

You know, then, that those of faith, these are the sons of Abraham. Gal 3:7’s ἄρα functions as an inferential particle: “then.” Paul’s verb γινώσκετε could be either an indicative, “you know,” or an imperative, “consider” or “recognize.” The imperative perhaps may carry more force. The issue is whether Paul is teaching the Galatians something new or reminding them of what they already know. The phrase γινώσκετε ἄρα ὅτι, “(you) know, then that,” regularly served as a disclosure formula in Hellenistic letters “more to remind readers of what is known than to exhort.” The indicative, therefore, is to be preferred as Paul draws a conclusion from 3:6: “you know, then, that ...” (CC)

Mention of Abraham in 3:6 leads to the less-than-obvious conclusion regarding who the true “sons of Abraham” are in 3:7. Paul refers to the category “sons of Abraham” without any sort of preparation or introduction, as if the terminology were already familiar to the Galatians. The rivals had raised the topic, and so Paul apparently did not feel the need to clarify the new phrase in 3:7. He stresses that “those of faith, *these* [οὗτοι]” are the children of Abraham. Paul’s rivals would have argued that one must be circumcised, as was Abraham in Genesis 17, to enjoy the covenant promises as the patriarch’s sons and heirs. God promised that Abraham would be the father of many “nations” (Gen 17:4) and that circumcision would signify an “everlasting covenant” (17:7). Paul is not responding, then, to general synagogue instruction in the Scriptures that the Galatians might have received, but rather to the targeted use of texts to advocate gentile circumcision and Mosaic Law observance. “It is as though Paul is saying, ‘No, it is not the circumcised who are Abraham’s children; rather, those whose identity is derived from faith, *these* are Abraham’s children.’ ” The sons of Abraham are those characterized or *identified* by faith, and specifically that faith in Christ Paul has already spoken of in 2:16: Christ-faith. Paul does not have in mind the faith *of* Christ, since 3:7 is drawing a conclusion from Abraham’s *believing* in 3:6. The Galatians are to *believe* as Abraham believed. (CC)

sons of Abraham. Abraham was the physical and spiritual father of the Jewish race (see Jn 8:31, 33, 39, 53; Ac 7:2; Ro 4:12). Here all believers (Jews and Gentiles) are called his spiritual children (see notes on Ro 4:11–12). They are also referred to as the “seed” or “descendants” of Abraham (v. 16; Heb 2:16). (CSB)

Paul deduced from Gn 15:6 that all men and women who believe are spiritual heirs of Abraham. (TLSB)

3:8 προῖδοῦσα (literally, “foreseeing”)—The aorist adverbial participle is causal: “*Because* the Scripture had foreseen that God would justify the gentiles ... [it] proclaimed the Gospel in advance to Abraham.” God will bless the gentiles by *justifying* them.

ἐκ πίστεως (“by faith”)—The instrumental sense is clearer here (cf. the first textual note on 3:7).

ἔθνη (“gentiles”)—Although “nations” is the intended sense in the MT and LXX, Paul interprets these passages in terms of his gentile audience—thus the translation here as “gentiles,” non-Jews. (CC)

And because the Scripture had foreseen that God would justify the gentiles by faith, [it] proclaimed the Gospel in advance to Abraham that “all the gentiles will be blessed in you.” The postpositive particle δέ, “and,” in 3:8 connects 3:8 to 3:7 as a continuation of Paul’s conclusion with respect to Abraham (in 3:6). Scripture is personified as foreknowing (“the Scripture had foreseen,” προῖδοῦσα ... ἡ γραφή), almost identifying the Scriptures with God himself (cf. Rom 9:17; Gal 3:22; 4:30). Paul clearly has a high view of the Scriptures as God’s own voice. God foresaw the inclusion of the gentiles long before, from the times of Abraham and Moses!¹⁷⁸ What is taking place in the Galatians’ midst is the fulfillment of the ancient promises. Paul is not introducing something novel or outlandish. The Gospel message has always had a universal dimension. God would justify the gentiles on the basis of faith.¹⁸⁰ The rivals had been drawing on the Scriptures in support of their position, and now Paul reclaims the sacred texts for his own case. (CC)

The Scriptures proclaimed to Abraham that “all the gentiles/nations will be blessed in you” (ένευλογηθήσονται έν σοί πάντα τὰ έθνη, Gal 3:8). Although Paul is primarily quoting Gen 12:3, he changes Gen 12:3’s “tribes of the earth” (αί φυλαί τής γής [MT: *בְּכָל־עַמְּוָלָאֵי־הָאָרֶץ*]) to “the nations” (τὰ έθνη) instead. Commentators have disagreed on whether “nations” is from Gen 18:18 or from Gen 22:18. (CC)

Gal 3:8	ένευλογηθήσονται	έν σοί	πάντα τὰ έθνη
	will be blessed	in you	all the nations
Gen 12:3	ένευλογηθήσονται	έν σοί	πᾶσαι αί φυλαί τής γής
	will be blessed	in you	all the tribes of the earth
Gen 18:18	ένευλογηθήσονται	έν αὐτῷ	πάντα τὰ έθνη τής γής
	will be blessed	in him [Abraham]	all the nations of the earth
Gen 22:18	ένευλογηθήσονται	έν τῷ σπέρματί σου	πάντα τὰ έθνη τής γής
	will be blessed	in your seed	all the nations of the earth
Gen 26:4	ένευλογηθήσονται	έν τῷ σπέρματί σου	πάντα τὰ έθνη τής γής
	will be blessed	in your seed	all the nations of the earth
Gen 28:14	ένευλογηθήσονται	έν σοί	πᾶσαι αί φυλαί τής γής
	will be blessed	in you [Jacob]	all the tribes of the earth

καί έν τῷ σπέρματί σου

and in your seed (CC)

One scholar has favored a conflation of Gen 12:3 with Gen 22:18 since Paul may refer to Gen 22:18 in Gal 3:15–17 and since Gen 18:18’s promise was not spoken *to* Abraham (as is the promise in Gal 3:6 and Gen 12:3), but *about* him. On the other hand, Gen 18:18 is a viable candidate as Paul’s source text since it refers back to and is associated with God’s promise to Abraham in Gen 12:3. After the near sacrifice of Abraham’s son, God promised to Abraham the blessing of the nations in connection with Abraham’s “seed” (Gen 22:18). The crucial reference to Abraham’s “seed” is lacking in Gal 3:8, thus diminishing any possibility that Paul is referring to Genesis 22 here. A majority of commentators have therefore concluded that Paul adapts Gen 12:3 with language from Gen 18:18. “It may be significant that Paul cites the first two expressions of the promise [Gen 12:3; 18:18], with the implication that the promise had a universal aspect from the first.” The later instances of the promise in Gen 22:18 and Gen 26:4–5 are associated with Abraham’s faithfulness rather than with his faith in the promises. Paul’s rivals may have given priority to Gen 22:18 and Gen 26:4–5, but the apostle regards Gen 12:3 and Gen 18:18 as foundational. (CC)

Paul typically uses “(the) gentiles” ([τὰ] ἔθνη) in contrast to the Jewish people (e.g., Gal 1:16; 2:2, 8, 9, 12, 14, 15). The Septuagint of Gen 18:18 refers to Abraham’s becoming a great nation even as “all” the nations will be blessed in him. In Genesis, Israel as a “nation” is likely included in the “all nations” blessed in Abraham. As for Paul, the Jews are certainly blessed in Abraham on the same basis of faith as the gentiles, but the larger context of Galatians, especially chapters 1 and 2, favor taking “gentiles” in 3:8 as non-Jews. In 3:14 τὰ ἔθνη again refers to non-Jews. “If Paul had wanted to say ‘all peoples’ he could presumably have quoted Gen 12:3 LXX exactly, leaving in the phrase ‘all the tribes of the earth.’ ” (CC)

In 3:16–18 Paul clarifies that the gentiles are blessed “in” Abraham (3:8) by means of his “Seed,” “who is Christ,” and not just by means of being a people of faith. From Abraham’s loins would come the promised Messiah. Here in 3:6–9, however, the apostle wants to keep the focus on Abraham and his faith—thus “in you [Abraham]” (3:8). As Abraham was reckoned as having “righteousness” (δικαιοσύνη, 3:6) when “he believed” (ἐπίστευσεν, 3:6), in a similar fashion God “justifies” (δικαιοῖ, 3:8) those in Christ on the same basis, “by faith” (ἐκ πίστεως, 3:8). This reckoning is through faith and not through being incorporated *in* Abraham as Gal 3:8’s Scriptural citation might suggest. Since Paul is not referring to Abraham’s *faithfulness*, he very naturally shifts to the language of “*with* Abraham” in 3:9. The gentiles are blessed *with* Abraham by having the same trust as he had. Paul refers to Gen 12:3 (in Gal 3:8) immediately after his reference to Abraham’s believing faith in Gen 15:6 (in Gal 3:6). Gen 15:6 with its reference to Abraham’s trust is therefore foundational for Paul’s understanding. He does not draw any attention to Abraham’s faithful obedience in his going to the land of promise or in his near sacrificing of Isaac. Paul does not draw any attention to Abraham’s obedience with respect to his circumcision. The apostle’s purpose is to draw attention to the *promise* God made to Abraham, a promise in which he simply trusted. (CC)

Scripture foreseeing. A personification of Scripture that calls attention to its divine origin (see 1Ti 5:18). (CSB)

Personification. Paul equates Scripture with God speaking in Gn 12:2–3 (cf Jn 1:1). (TLSB)

This argument is very strong, because it is based on a very definite period of time. The promise of a blessing was given to Abraham four hundred and thirty years before the people of Israel received the Law. For to Abraham it was said: “Because you have believed God and given glory to Him, therefore you will be the father of many nations.” There, by the promise of God, Abraham is established as the father of many nations; and the inheritance of the world is given to him for his sons before there was a Law. “Then why are you bragging, you Galatians, that you obtain the forgiveness of sins, become sons of God, and receive the inheritance through the Law, which followed the promise by a long interval, namely, by four hundred and thirty years?” (Luther)

preached the gospel beforehand. The Scripture (i.e., God speaking) “pre-preached” the good news to Abraham. The basis of salvation was the same in the OT and the NT: the promise of Christ. (TLSB)

ALL NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH HIM – Paul urges this vigorously, as does Scripture itself when it says (Gen. 15:6): “Abraham believed God, etc.” It does not attribute righteousness to Abraham except as a believer. Therefore Scripture speaks about Abraham as he is in the sight of God. In this new argument there is described a new Abraham, separate from the physical bed, marriage, and procreation. He is set forth as he is in the sight of God, that is, believing and justified through faith. To him as a believer Scripture announces: “You will be the father of many nations,” and “In you all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” Paul says: “Scripture anticipates and treads underfoot all the bragging and boasting of the Jews about the Law, because the inheritance of the Gentiles was given to Abraham, not through the Law and circumcision but before it, by faith alone.” (Luther)

Combining words from Gn 12:3 and 18:18, Paul gives scriptural grounds for his central point that the promise to Abraham embraced also the Gentiles, who, like Abraham, are justified by faith. (Note the passive, following the LXX and indicating God’s action.). (TLSB)

3:9 *Consequently, those of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.* In this verse Paul draws an inference (ὥστε, “consequently”) from the preceding verses. A certain rough logic organizes 3:7–9:

3:7 “Those of faith” (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως) are Abraham’s descendants.

3:8 God promised Abraham that all the gentiles would be *blessed* in him (Gen 12:3).

3:9 Therefore, “those of faith” (οἱ ἐκ πίστεως), i.e., including gentiles, are *blessed* with Abraham.

In this logic, Paul connects the blessing of Gen 12:3; 18:18 with the faith of Abraham (Gen 15:6). Although the word “faith” (πίστις in 3:7, 8, 9) can also mean “faithful,” Abraham was “faithful” precisely in his believing trust! Likewise, the gentile Galatians are enjoying the blessing of God promised to Abraham (note the present tense of εὐλογοῦνται, “are blessed,” 3:9) by faith, quite apart from the Law of Moses and its works. Both 3:7 and 3:9 emphasize “faith” as the basis for sharing in Abrahamic blessings and descent. (CC)

Abraham, the man of faith. Paul develops this theme at length in Ro 4; see also Heb 11:8–19. (CSB)

Gk *ek pisteos*, appears nine times in Gal (based on Hab 2:4; cf Gal 3:11; Rm 1:17; Heb 10:38). It carries the sense of “the faith people” (those who believe), as distinguished from “the circumcision party” (2:12; lit, “those of the circumcision”). Abraham belonged among the people of faith. (TLSB)

Here the emphasis and whole force is on the words “with Abraham who had faith.” The world is promised to Abraham, but to the one who has faith. Therefore all the world is to be blessed, that is, is to receive the imputation of righteousness, if it believes as Abraham did.” (Luther)

3:1–9 The Galatians’ experience (vv 1–5) and Scripture’s witness concerning Abraham (vv 6–9) teach that all believers are heirs of Abraham, to whom faith “was counted . . . as righteousness” (v 6). Paul warns against being mesmerized by the foolish notion that salvation is completed by works of the Law. Those who see the crucified Christ in faith, however, see their sins completely forgiven. • How blessed we are, Lord, to be the heirs of Your promises! Thank You for granting me faith through Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

The Righteous Shall Live by Faith

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.” **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.” **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[e] through faith.

The Curse of the Law (3:10–14) (CC)

3:10 ἐμμένει (“does abide by”)— κ^c A C D Textus Receptus strengthen the prepositional prefix (ἐν) of the verb by adding an ἐν afterward: thus ἐμμένει ἐν, “does abide by” or “does continue in.” The change conforms with LXX Deut 27:26. (In Gal 3:12, note the similar change in the Textus Receptus: the addition of ἀνθρώπος brings Gal 3:12 into conformity with Lev 18:5.) (CC)

For all who are of the works of the Law are under a curse, since it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law to do them.” Paul turns from the brighter motifs of Abraham, faith, and blessing (3:6–9) to the Law and its curse (3:10–14). Gal 3:10 explains *why* a right standing and relationship with God must be based on faith: “For” (γάρ) the Law in actuality only brings about a curse. Paul cites the book of Deuteronomy, a narrative dominated by the promise of blessing or curse depending on whether the people were obedient or disobedient (Deuteronomy 27–30). Paul’s emphasis from Deuteronomy remains limited to the curse. Deuteronomy opens with Israel’s failure to believe God’s promise of land upon the return of the spies from Canaan (Deut 1:19–46). The central legal code (Deut 11:31–26:15) anticipates further serious failures on the part of the people, such as idolatry (chapter 13), murder (chapter 19), and sexual sin (chapter 22). Just prior to the legal code, Deuteronomy narrates the people’s idolatry with the golden calf (Deut 9:1–10:11, esp. Deut 9:4–9, recalling Exodus 32). Immediately after the legal section, Moses commands the building of a stone altar on Mount Ebal, the mountain of curse (Deut 27:1–8)—not a hopeful omen for the people (cf. Deut 11:29; 27:13). (CC)

Paul’s quote in Gal 3:10 comes primarily from Deut 27:26 at the conclusion of the Shechemite Decalogue, the twelve curses pronounced by the Levites on Mount Ebal. Deut 27:26 pronounces a curse upon those who disobey the Law. Such a passage would be precisely the sort of text to which Paul’s rivals would point in encouraging observance of Moses’ Law. In Paul’s day curse tablets also filled the landscape of Anatolia. The rivals need only have pointed to the danger of the curse for disobedience of the Law from Deut 27:26 to spur the Galatians to action. “This would have been a brilliant contextualization on the part of the Jewish-Christian missionaries, given that a fear of being cursed was an integral part of the Anatolian culture.” Paul does not employ Deut 27:26 anywhere else in his letters. With the exception of 3:13 in the immediate context, he does not draw on the nouns or adjectives of the “curse” word group elsewhere (κατάρα; ἐπικατάρατος). The Deuteronomic categories of blessing and curse do not reflect the apostle’s own concerns. In fact, his conclusion—that those who *adopt* the Law are under its curse—runs against the literal meaning of the passage. Paul is trying to show why the rivals’ proof text really supports his own non-Law-observant approach to the gentiles.

The apostle reasons:

Premise: “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law to do them.”

Conclusion: “All who are of the works of the Law are under a curse.” (CC)

Omitted premises are a regular feature of Paul’s writing. The implied premise, if reconstructed as closely as possible from the stated premise and the conclusion, would read:

All who are of the works of the Law do not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law to do them. (CC)

As a matter of style, ancient rhetoricians commended the omission of premises in enthymemes that would have been clear or obvious. Paul is assuming that Law observers simply do not do all that is written in the Law.²⁰⁴ The adherents of Moses’ Law have not attained, at least from Paul’s experience, the comprehensive, perfect obedience that it demands. Shockingly, the apostle concludes that those who *do* the Law find themselves under its curse! (CC)

The wording of Paul’s citation, especially the phrase “the words of this law” (Deut 27:26), reflects the broader context of Deuteronomy 27–30:

LXX Deut 27:26	τοῖς λόγοις	τοῦ νόμου	τούτου
	the words	of the Law	this

Gal 3:10	τοῖς γεγραμμένοις	ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ	τοῦ νόμου	
	written	in the book	of the Law	
LXX Deut 28:58	τὰ γεγραμμένα	ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ		τούτῳ
	written	in the book		this
LXX Deut 28:61	τὴν γεγραμμένην	μὴ ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ	τοῦ νόμου	τούτου
	not written	in the book	of the Law	this
LXX Deut 29:19	αἱ γεγραμμέναι	ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ	τοῦ νόμου	τούτου
(ET 29:20)	written	in the book	of the Law	this
LXX Deut 29:20	τὰς γεγραμμένας	ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ	τοῦ νόμου	τούτου
(ET 29:21)	written	in the book	of the Law	this

The phrase in LXX Deut 29:20 (ET 29:21) occurs also in LXX Deut 29:26 (ET 29:27) and LXX Deut 30:10. (CC)

The Gal 3:10 citation does not exactly match the extant Masoretic or Septuagintal versions. The citation is closest to Deut 27:26 in LXX^A with three exceptions: (1) the omission of ἄνθρωπος, “man,” after πᾶς, “all”; (2) the dropping of ἐν, “in,” before πᾶσιν, “all the things”; and (3) the change of τοῖς λόγοις τοῦ νόμου τούτου, “the words of this Law,” to τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου, “written in the book of the Law.” Paul may be citing the text from memory or drawing on a version of the text no longer extant. He may also be deliberately modifying the original text. As for the ending of the citation, note Paul’s use of ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ, “in the book,” and his alteration of λόγοις, “words,” to γεγραμμένοις, “written.” The apostle’s citation of Deut 27:26 must be considered within the larger context of Deuteronomy 27–30. Paul was not the first to treat Deuteronomy 27 within its broader context. Several Second Temple texts borrowed Deuteronomy 27–32’s fourfold pattern of sin, punishment, repentance (turning point), and salvation (*Jub.* 23; *T. Mos.*).²⁰⁹ The Second Temple Jewish interpretation of Deuteronomy 27–32 as a unit lends plausibility to Paul’s treatment of Deuteronomy 27 within the broader context of Deuteronomy 27–30. (CC)

Paul modifies Deut 27:26 with language from LXX Deut 29:19–20 (ET 29:20–21): “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by *all the things written in the book of the Law* to do them” (Gal 3:10). Both Deut 27:26 and LXX Deut 29:19–20 (ET 29:20–21) emphasize “all.” The word “all” is therefore not incidental to Paul’s citation but reflects an emphasis in Deuteronomy itself (e.g., Deut 27:3, 8; 28:1, 15, 58; 31:12). Gal 3:10 says nothing about the ethnic aspects of the Law that the “new perspective” interpreters in modern Pauline scholarship like to emphasize. With the inclusion of the word “all,” Paul is referring to more than just the boundary-marking features of the Law of Moses. He is referring to the *entirety* of the Law. The fact that Paul’s claim is far more comprehensive is reflected in his modification and broadening of the Deut 27:26 citation to include language from elsewhere in Deuteronomy 27–32. LXX Deut 29:19–20 (ET 29:20–21) refers to the *written* legal code! The Galatians must do either the *whole* Law or none of

it. A piecemeal approach will not do! They must “abide” by the Law as a comprehensive way of life without failure. (CC)

In Galatians the Greek preposition ὑπό with the accusative case (ὑπὸ κατάραν, “under a curse”) expresses being “under” the authority or power of someone or something. The rivals may have expressed sentiments similar to Josephus’ (*Ag. Ap.* 2.28 § 210): “To all who desire to come and live *under the same laws with us* [ὑπὸ τοὺς αὐτοὺς ἡμῶν νόμους], he [Moses] gives a gracious welcome, holding that it is not family ties alone which constitute relationship, but agreement in the principles of conduct” (Thackeray, *LCL*). For Paul, on the other hand, to be under the Law means to be under its *curse*. He has already pronounced a curse on his rivals in 1:8–9. Should the Galatians adopt the path of Moses’ Law, far from being a source of blessing, the Law will pronounce its curse upon them. He does not envision any other outcome with respect to Law observance. At the same time, Paul does not want to imply that the Jews are automatically punished merely by being associated with the Law. The issue is their disobedience of the Law and not their mere association with it. Paul therefore alters the language of *being* “cursed” (ἐπικατάρατος) in the Deuteronomy citation to being “*under a curse*” (ὑπὸ κατάραν). Some interpreters missed the point when they understood the language of being “under” the curse as a mere threat, an understanding which the dark history of human disobedience clearly belies. Were the curse of 3:10a a mere threat, Paul’s reasoning would hardly serve as a deterrent to Law observance. The rivals would simply encourage the Galatians to devote themselves more fully to the Law in order to enjoy its blessings. No, the curse stands over *any* (ὅσοι, “as many as, all”) who take on observance of the Law because of their inevitable failure to obey God’s Law. The requisite perfect obedience of the Law is simply impossible. (CC)

Advocates of the “new perspective on Paul” have regularly denied the impossibility of doing the Law as a problem either for Paul or for the Jews of his day. They have overlooked the extent to which perfect obedience figured in Second Temple Jewish texts. The Dead Sea Scroll authors admonished the members of their community to walk in a perfect manner (CD II.15–16; cf. 1QS I.8; III.9; IX.18–19). They lamented that human beings inevitably walk in both wisdom *and* folly, at least until the eschaton, when they would be “cleansed” of the tendency toward sin (1QS III.21–23; IV.18–22; XI.14–15; 1QH VII [= XV].15–17; XIV [= VI].8–10). Only a small handful of exceptional individuals were believed to have escaped the dark taint of sin. “Abraham was perfect in all of his actions with the Lord and was pleasing through righteousness all of the days of his life” (*Jub.* 23.10; cf. *Jub.* 15.3). Jacob, Leah, and Joseph were “perfect” (*Jub.* 27.17; 36.23; 40.8). Noah “was righteous in all of his ways just as it was commanded concerning him. And he did not transgress anything which was ordained for him” (*Jub.* 5.19; trans. O. S. Wintermute, *OTP*). Philo qualifies that Noah attained a perfection relative to his generation: he was “not good absolutely” (οὐ καθάπαξ; *Abr.* 7 §§ 36–39; Colson, *LCL*; cf. Philo, *Deus* 25 § 117; 26 § 122; 30 § 140; Philo, *Abr.* 6 § 34; 9 § 47). Philo emphasizes instead the sinlessness of Moses (*Mos.* 1.28 § 162; 2.1 § 1; 2.2 §§ 8–11; Philo, *Leg.* 3.46 § 134; 3.47 § 140; Philo, *Ebr.* 23 § 94; Philo, *Sacr.* 3 § 8). The concessions in such texts that only very rare, exceptional individuals perfectly obeyed God’s Law explains how a Jew of this period, such as the apostle Paul, could assume that his coreligionists simply do not obey God’s Law without sin. (CC)

When “new perspective” scholars deny that perfect obedience plays a role in the interpretation of Gal 3:10, they primarily appeal to the availability of a system of atonement and sacrifice, including the Day of Atonement, for failures of Law observance. These interpreters have judged the supposed problem of perfect obedience “a ridiculous caricature of Judaism.”²¹⁷ No Jews would have experienced any problem or angst over perfect obedience since they could simply take advantage of the sacrificial system that was readily available. “New perspective” interpreters have failed to recognize that neither Paul’s rivals nor he ever claimed that the sacrificial system sufficed for forgiveness or righteousness (Gal 2:16)! That is the role of Christ (3:13). Paul reserves the status of God’s elect for those who recognize his “rule” that in Christ neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matters (6:15–16). He denigrates dependence on the

Mosaic covenant (3:15–17; 4:21–31). Paul interprets the gracious elements of Second Temple Judaism strictly in terms of Christ. The rivals, on the other hand, were emphasizing the Law as a means of furthering the Galatians’ reception of the Spirit (3:3). Even as the rivals viewed Christ and the Law as compatible, they viewed the Law and the Spirit as equally complementary. Paul responds that the Spirit comes *exclusively* through Christ, not through the Mosaic Law nor in any combination with the Mosaic Law (see, e.g., 4:4–6). (CC)

Some “new perspective” interpreters have gone a step further and claimed that the Deuteronomy verse was directed primarily toward Israel as a corporate people suffering under the curse of the exile. Associated with this perspective is the assumption that Second Temple Judaism widely viewed itself as still under the curse of the exile. The pre-Christian Paul, on the other hand, attests a very different perspective: he affirms his blameless righteousness with respect to the Law (Gal 1:13–14; Phil 3:3–9; cf. Rom 2:17–20; 10:2–3). Paul therefore targets his criticism in Gal 3:10 against those *relying* on the Law! The *Damascus Document* (CD I.5–8) assumes an *end* to the exile. 4QMMT in the Dead Sea Scrolls promises righteousness and blessing to the obedient. Many Second Temple documents and authors adopt an optimistic approach to the Law. Paul, on the other hand, appears to be affirming a sort of spiritual exile in the covenantal curses for those who disobey the Law in spite of their optimism. (CC)

“To do them” (τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά) is emphatically placed at the end of the sentence. The Greek article τοῦ with the infinitive, in the classical period, frequently expressed purpose or result (“to do them”). The Hebrew use of the infinitive, on the other hand, parallels the Latin modal ablative. Perhaps, then, the infinitive may be rendered as “by doing them.” It is unclear if the infinitival clause (τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά) should be taken either as expegetical, further explaining what preceded (“by doing them”), or as expressing a result (“to do them”). In either case, the final infinitival clause keeps the focus on *doing* what is written in the book of the Law and on the curse that falls upon those who do not *do* what the Law requires. (CC)

rely on works of the law. The reference is to legalists—those who refuse God’s offer of grace and insist on pursuing righteousness through works. (CSB)

Not restricted merely to Jews or Jewish Christians, the Law applies to all humanity. (TLSB)

under a curse. Because no one under the law ever perfectly kept the law. God’s blessing has never been earned, but has always been freely given. (CSB)

All who rely on the works of the Law (“under the Law,” v 23; 4:4, 5, 21) to become righteous before God are under divine condemnation. Luther: “In ‘keeping’ the Law he [the doer of the Law] does not keep it” (AE 26:268; see FC SD VI 4). (TLSB)

Therefore the curse is a kind of flood that swallows up whatever is outside Abraham, that is, outside faith and the promise of the blessing of Abraham. Now if the Law itself, given through Moses by a divine command, subjects those who are under it to a curse, much more will those laws and traditions do so which have been invented by human reason. If anyone, therefore, wants to escape the curse, let him take hold of the promise of the blessing, or the faith of Abraham; otherwise he will remain under the curse. From this passage, “shall be blessed in you,” it follows that all nations before, during, and after Abraham are under a curse and are to be under a curse forever, unless they are blessed in the faith of Abraham, to whom the promise of the blessing was given, to be broadcast to his descendants. (Luther)

abide by all things. Paul, an authoritative interpreter of the OT, intensifies Dt 27:26 by loosely quoting Dt 28:58 and emphasizing “all things” written in the whole Law (Dt 30:10; cf 28:1, 15). (TLSB)

James 2:10, “For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it.”

3:11–12 Shows that faith and Law are mutually exclusive principles. (TLSB)

3:11 *Because no one is justified before God by the Law, it is clear that “the righteous one by faith will live.”* Many believe that Paul’s *real* argument against the Law is in 3:11–12: The Law, based on works, simply has nothing to do with faith. The contrast in 3:11–12 between the Law’s works and faith parallels a similar contrast in 2:16. These verses beg the question as to why there should be such a contrast at all since the rivals viewed the Law and faith as complementary. Gal 3:10 therefore serves as crucial support for 3:11–12’s contrast and prevents these verses from deteriorating into a bare assertion. Shared wording in Paul’s citations further strengthens the connection between 3:11–12 and 3:10 and substantiates that 3:10 is pivotal for the interpretation of the ensuing verses:

- Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10: “Accursed is everyone who does not remain *in* [the prefixed ἐν in ἐμμένει] all the things written *in* [ἐν] the book of the Law so as *to do them* [ποιῆσαι αὐτά].”
- Hab 2:4 in Gal 3:11: “*The* [ὁ] just one from faith *shall live* [ζήσεται].”
- Lev 18:5 in Gal 3:12: “*The* [ὁ] *one having done them* [ποιήσας αὐτά] *shall live* [ζήσεται] *in* [ἐν] *them* [αὐτοῖς].”

A tight logic binds together 3:10–12. (CC)

Normally, interpreters have connected “it is evident/clear” (δῆλον) with the preceding ὅτι (“that”): “Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law; for [or ‘because’] ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith’ ” (NRSV). In this translation the Hab 2:4 citation in Gal 3:11b offers the basis for the conclusion stated in 3:11a. Most commentators have not considered that “it is clear” (δῆλον) may be connected instead with the *following* “that” (ὅτι): “*Because* no one is justified before God by the Law, *it is clear that* ‘the righteous one by faith will live.’ ” This second option is more likely. Throughout Greek literature “it is clear” (δῆλον) goes with a following “that” (ὅτι) far more frequently than with a preceding “that.” In almost every instance in Greek literature, when “it is clear” is both preceded and followed by “that” (ὅτι), as in 3:11, “it is clear” (δῆλον) goes with the *following* “that.” The initial “that” (ὅτι) in 3:11—or better “because”—serves to refer backward to 3:10. Gal 3:10 forms the basis for the conclusion Paul draws in 3:11:

Since no one is justified before God by the Law (3:11a) (because those “of the works of the Law” [ἐξ ἔργων νόμου] are under its curse [3:10]), “it is clear that ‘the righteous one by faith will live’ ” (3:11b). (CC)

The problem with *doing* the Law in 3:12 is that people *do not do* the Law as is required (3:10). The particle that introduces 3:11 (δέ, left untranslated) serves as a connective to 3:10 and is not adversative. In this approach to 3:10–12, the curse of the Law in 3:10 is not far from view in 3:11–12. With 3:13 Paul relieves the problem of the Law’s curse. (CC)

When Paul asserts that “no one is justified before God,” the passive “is justified” (δικαιοῦται), as with other passive constructions in the letter, refers to God’s activity. Justification is not the activity of human beings. “Before God” (παρὰ τῷ θεῷ) refers to God’s judgment or estimation (e.g., Rom 2:13; 1 Cor 3:19; 2 Thess 1:6). “By/in the Law” (ἐν νόμῳ) in Gal 3:11 recalls persevering “in” the Law (the ἐν prefix in ἐμμένει) in 3:10. The sense may be locative: an *identity* “in” the Law. An instrumental sense, however, seems more natural at this point: one is not justified *by means of* the Law. (CC)

The apostle contends, drawing on the language of Hab 2:4, that the righteous live by faith—although he does not mark the words as a citation. According to Habakkuk, the wicked Chaldeans had invaded the

holy land as punishment against God’s people for their sins. The righteous individual would survive these dark events and “live” by means of his or her “faith(fulness).” The righteous one would be vindicated or justified. This section of Habakkuk encourages perseverance in the face of suffering. God added that the Chaldeans would suffer their judgment in due time; God will deliver his people. (CC)

One school of interpretation has understood Paul’s Habakkuk text to refer to the Messiah Jesus, but the apostle does not render such a reference explicit (cf. Rom 1:17). The Hebrew text of Hab 2:4 may be translated as “the just shall live by his faith(fulness).” The referent of “his” is unclear: the pronoun could refer to *God’s* faithfulness, to the righteous individual’s *own* faith(fulness), or to the Messiah’s faithfulness. One Greek Septuagintal text (LXX^A) is ambiguous, “my just/righteous one shall live on the basis of faith(fulness),” while another text (LXX^B) translates the verse as referring to *God’s* faithfulness. The Dead Sea Scroll community interpreted the verse as applying to faith in or loyalty to the community’s teacher (1QpHab VII.14–VIII.3; note: not the Teacher’s own faithfulness). The Dead Sea passage also mentions “toil,” perhaps in obedience to the Law. The later rabbis understood Hab 2:4 to promise a reward for the faithful (e.g., *b. Mak.* 24a). The notion of faithful Law observance that is present in most of these texts is completely absent in Paul. He does not follow either the Masoretic or the Septuagintal text since he deletes the pronoun (MT: “his”) that modifies “faith(fulness).” Had God’s faithfulness or Christ’s faithfulness been in view, the deletion of the pronoun would be inexplicable. Paul remains riveted on the blessings associated with faith apart from the deeds prescribed by the Law. Christ is not the subject until 3:13, where Paul explicitly mentions him. Prior to 3:13 the apostle refers to “those of (believing) faith” (3:7, 9), “the gentiles” (3:8), “all who are of the works of the Law” (3:10a), “everyone who” (singular, πᾶς ὄς, 3:10b), and “no one” (3:11a). Christ and his own faithfulness is simply not in view in 3:11. Had Christ been “the righteous” one of 3:11 and had this verse been referring to his faithfulness to the Law, then he would have been the exception disproving the very rule Paul just cited: “no one is justified before God by the Law” (3:11). Another clue that Paul is interpreting Hab 2:4 in terms of believers in general, and not Christ, is the parallelism of Hab 2:4 with Lev 18:5:

Hab 2:4	ὁ δὲ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ...	ζήσεται
	but he who is righteous by faith	shall live
Lev 18:5	ἃ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος	ζήσεται
	which [things] having done,	a shall live
	person	

These two passages, when juxtaposed, offer differing answers not to the question “*how* will one live?” but rather to the question “*who* shall live?” The reader must wait until 3:13 for Christ to enter the picture. (CC)

Paul’s omission of “his” from the original Hebrew text may well be his own adaptation of the Habakkuk text in the face of his rivals’ use of the same text. They would have cited Hab 2:4 as evidence of the need for the righteous to remain faithful (to the Law of Moses)—thus “his” [the Law observant’s] faithfulness. Paul no longer considers faith to be faithfulness to the Law as he had earlier in his life. Now he interprets the passage strictly in terms of believing faith. In the context of Paul’s argument in Galatians as a whole, the apostle sees faith as believing trust with Christ’s eschatological, saving work as that faith’s object. In other words, whereas the rivals *combined* faith with the Law of Moses, Paul redefines faith exclusively in terms of Christ. Christ’s death is sufficient to save, a point which becomes clearer in 3:13. (CC)

The Jews of Paul’s day may actually have been misinterpreting Habakkuk as a reference to *faithfulness* rather than to believing trust. In Hab 1:4–11 God would judge Judah (by means of Babylon) for failing to

keep the Torah. That punishment would be a test of faith for the remnant since God also promised the eventual judgment of Babylon (Habakkuk 2) and a new deliverance and exodus (Habakkuk 3). The remnant would have to trust God's promises even if the fig tree did not blossom and even if the vines lacked fruit. God would deliver his people (Hab 3:17–18). Paul's reinterpretation of Habakkuk in terms of believing trust may well represent a return to the original context of Habakkuk in contrast to the use of the prophet by his rivals in Galatia. Like Abraham in Gal 3:6, the righteous one trusts God's saving promises. (CC)

Paul supports the claim that no one is justified (the verb δικαιούται, literally, "righteous-ed") before God by the Law with a passage that refers to "the righteous one" (δικαίος), the cognate noun. The verb and the noun should be interpreted similarly because of the logical linkage of their respective clauses. Since the point of 3:11a is that no one has a right *status* before God on the basis of the Law, then the sense of "righteous" in Paul's use of Hab 2:4 must be forensic/declaratory rather than ethical. In addition, English translations do not always convey the play on words in 3:11: "No one is justified [δικ- word group] before God by the Law" even as "the righteous one [δικ- word group] by faith will live." One lives as a Christian the same way as one becomes a Christian—by faith! One does not complete this walk by the Law (3:3). (CC)

A longstanding debate has questioned whether the words "by faith" modify "the righteous one" or "will live" (Gal 3:11). In the Greek (and Hebrew) the prepositional phrase "by faith" is positioned between those phrases, and could modify either: "*the one who is righteous* by faith" or "*shall live* by faith." Modern translations tend to take "by faith" adverbially, modifying "will live": "the righteous shall live by faith" (ESV; similar are KJV, NASB, NRSV). The adverbial understanding matches the Masoretic Text as well as the Septuagint. "Will live by faith" would parallel 3:12's "will live by/in them [the Law's commands]." On the other hand, 3:11 employs the expression "justified by/in the Law" (ἐν νόμῳ ... δικαιούται), which links the verb "justified" with the Law as the *means* of justification. So the disputed noun, "the just(ified)/righteous one" (ὁ δίκαιος), should probably be modified in parallel fashion with the phrase "by faith" (ἐκ πίστεως) as the *means* of being justified. Paul frequently places his modifying prepositional phrases *after* the nouns they modify (e.g., τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα, "Israel according to the flesh," 1 Cor 10:18) as an equivalent to a position between the article and the noun (ὁ ἐκ πίστεως δίκαιος, literally, "the by-faith righteous one"). Paul reduces faithfulness to its ultimate core: believing trust. Nevertheless, he would surely agree with both the adjectival *and* the adverbial readings of "by faith." "Paul's point is precisely that the identity of 'the righteous person' *per se* derives from and is determined by faith. And that includes his 'living' as 'one who is righteous'; 'from faith' characterizes and constitutes his relationship with God from beginning to end." (CC)

Although "will live" (ζήσεται) is in the future tense, the verb may be understood in the sense of eschatological life after the final judgment "before God" or in the sense of life in the present. If one interprets "is justified" (δικαιούται) in terms of a right status before God on the Last Day, then eschatological life may be in view here. "Will live" parallels "is justified." At the same time, Paul begins the chapter in 3:3 by emphasizing that what began in the Spirit must remain consistent with that beginning, i.e., the Christian life (see also 2:14, 20). Either present life or eschatological life can be contextually justified, and neither is easily excluded. With 3:12 Paul turns to living "in/by" the Law, and the frequent denial of an eschatological sense of "will live" (ζήσεται) in 3:11–12 becomes even less plausible. (CC)

live by faith. Means here (and in v. 12) almost the same thing as "will be justified." (CSB)

3:12 αὐτὰ ... αὐτοῖς ("these things ... by them")—While the pronominal referents are technically ambiguous in Paul, the sense is clear: the commands of the Torah. The referents of these pronouns are προστάγματα ("ordinances") and κρίματα ("judgments") in the original context of LXX Lev 18:5 (in κ

and A: καὶ φυλάξεσθε πάντα τὰ προστάγματά μου καὶ πάντα τὰ κρίματά μου καὶ ποιήσετε αὐτά, ἃ ποιήσας ἄνθρωπος ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς (“and you shall keep all my ordinances and all my judgments, and you shall do them, which [things] having done, a man/person shall live in/by them”). Paul changes Lev 18:5’s “which [things] having done” (ἃ ποιήσας) to “the one who does these things” (ὁ ποιήσας αὐτά), which is closer to his wording of Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10, “to do them” (τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά). Paul’s omission of ἄνθρωπος (“man, person”) in LXX Lev 18:5 is understandable in view of the usage of οὐδεὶς, “no one,” in 3:11. The shared verb ζήσεται, “will live,” links Gal 3:12’s quote of LXX Lev 18:5 with the LXX Hab 2:4 quote in Gal 3:11. (CC)

But the Law is not of faith; rather, “the one who does these things will live by them.” With the adversative δέ (“but”), Paul cites Lev 18:5 to the effect that the Law is not based on faith (3:11) but rather on *doing*, an endeavor that is doomed to fail, as he has already explained in 3:10. Paul shifts prepositions: whereas one lives, literally, “from” (ἐκ) faith (3:11), one lives, literally, “in” (ἐν) the commands of the Law (3:12). To live “in” the commands of the Law may have the locative sense of “in the sphere of the Law” rather than agency (“by means of”). Certainly the Jewish people lived or walked “in” the sphere of the Law as God’s people. Nevertheless, means is the more likely understanding of Lev 18:5 (בְּאֵלֵיהֶם, “by them”). “Life” is regularly the *goal* of Law-observant activity in the Pentateuch. The individual does the Law so that he or she may live (e.g., Deut 4:1; 8:1; Ezek 20:11, 13 [drawing on Lev 18:5]). (CC)

As was the case with Deut 27:26 in Gal 3:10 and arguably also with Hab 2:4 in Gal 3:11, Paul’s rivals appear to have introduced Lev 18:5 to the Galatians as a proof text for their position. The later rabbis seized on the word “man” (אָדָם; ἄνθρωπος) in all the Hebrew and Septuagintal texts of Lev 18:5—a word that Paul conspicuously omits. The rabbis concluded that any “man,” even a gentile, could be righteous if he or she observed the Law (*b. Sanh.* 59a; *b. B. Qam.* 38a). In *m. ’Aboth* 6.7: “Great is Torah for it gives life, unto those that practise it, in this world, and in the world to come” (Soncino ed.). Lev 18:5’s presumed teaching that *any* man may enjoy eternal life by obedience to the Law, i.e., including the gentiles, would have been prime fodder for the rivals’ teaching at Galatia. (CC)

In Jewish literature “will live” may refer both to life in the present age and to life in the world to come (e.g., *m. ’Aboth* 6.7). Unfortunately, many commentators have wrongly excluded any reference to life in the world to come. The gift of life enjoyed in the present cannot be sharply distinguished from its eschatological continuation. Longstanding Jewish tradition certainly took Lev 18:5 to refer to life in the present within God’s elect people Israel (Baruch 4:1; 1QS IV.6–8; *Let. Aris.* 127; Philo, *Congr.* 16 §§ 86–87). Second Temple literature, however, frequently extended the blessings and curses of the Law to the life beyond. The nations would be punished and Israel vindicated in the coming age, perhaps after death and/or after final judgment. 1QS IV.6–8 in the Dead Sea Scrolls refers to “everlasting blessing and eternal joy in life without end” as an extension of the “long life” and “fruitfulness” enjoyed in the present for the righteous (cf. Dan 12:2; Wis Sol 2:23 [and passim]; 2 Macc 7:9; 4 Macc 15:3; 17:12). A multitude of plagues in the present as well as “eternal damnation,” “permanent error and shame,” would afflict the unrighteous (1QS IV.12–14; trans. F. García Martínez). The *Damascus Document* (CD) III.14–16 draws on Lev 18:5 (via Ezek 20:11, 13) in relation to what “man must do in order to live by them,” which is then followed in CD III.17 by “whoever spurns them shall not live” (trans. F. García Martínez). In other words, those who followed the right path would enjoy life and those who did not would not live. The contrast of “live” and “not live” suggests that eternity is in view (cf. CD III.20). The Second Temple document *Pss. Sol.* 14:1–10 contrasts the “destruction” of the “sinner” with the “inheritance” of the “devout,” who “shall live” “forever,” while *Pss. Sol.* 14:3 draws on Lev 18:5: “will live by it forever” (ζήσονται ἐν αὐτῷ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα). The qualification “forever” (εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα) tacked onto Lev 18:5, the word “in paradise” (παράδεισος), and the mention of the trees of life would have been unnecessary if the author had not wanted to stress eschatological life. “Indeed, such an eschatological slant on the life of Lev 18:5 would have played readily into Paul’s hands, as he transposes the life of the Torah into eternal life in Christ.” Eternal life is a present reality for those in Christ (a gnomic future of “live”). “Justification is an

end-time gift that has invaded the present era.”²⁶⁰ Jesus’ resurrection inaugurates a new age. Paul therefore contrasts two approaches to life in 3:11 and 3:12, the Law and faith. (CC)

The notion that faith and Law observance are antithetical would have been a radical concept for the Jews of Paul’s time. Doing the Law in the traditional Jewish sense meant living within the framework of God’s election of the people Israel. Certainly the laws of Leviticus set the people apart from the surrounding nations as God’s own and provided the sacrificial system for their failures. Nevertheless, God’s people were to *do* the Law (e.g., Lev 18:5). Paul’s unique, stark antithesis between doing and believing is only possible because he has sundered the deeds prescribed by the Law from God’s gracious activity. It is Paul’s own reconceptualization of God’s gracious activity understood strictly in terms of Christ that leads to the antithesis between faith and works.²⁶² The apostle does not view the historic election of the people Israel as efficacious apart from Christ (3:28). He does not view deliverance from the present evil age as possible apart from Christ (1:4). Paul therefore interprets the saving actions of God in the Pentateuch in view of what God has done in Christ (e.g., Deut 30:12–14, quoted in Rom 10:6–8; 1 Cor 5:7). The Mosaic Law had *always* pointed forward to God’s grace in Christ (Gal 3:15–18). To take on the deeds prescribed by the Law is to engage in vain works—mere, empty *doing*. With Paul’s new understanding in light of Jesus’ death and resurrection, how much more does he rise up in protest against any thought that the gentile Galatians would need to add Torah keeping to their trust in Christ! (CC)

Paul’s pessimism about receiving life through the Law in Lev 18:5 is not without biblical precedent. Ezek 20:11, 13, 21 and Neh 9:29 appear to have drawn on Lev 18:5 in condemning Israel’s failure. Israel brought upon itself the covenant curses. Whereas the Galatian rivals represented an optimistic approach to Lev 18:5, Paul represents a darker strain of interpretation: Israel has found itself in spiritual exile. People simply do not do what the Law requires, and the promised life of the Law proves illusory. Paul turns to Christ in Gal 3:13 as the only solution to spiritual exile. (CC)

law is not of faith – Paul is arguing on the basis of a very clear testimony of the prophet that there is simply no one who attains to justification and life in the sight of God except the believer, who attains to righteousness and life on the basis of faith, without the Law or love. The reason: The Law does not rest on faith, that is, the Law is not faith or anything about faith; it does not believe. Nor are the works of the Law faith. Therefore faith is something different from the Law, just as the promise is something different from the Law. But the promise is not grasped by doing; it is grasped only by believing. (Luther)

will live by them – I understand this part of the statement as irony, although it can be expounded in a moral sense, namely, that those who keep the Law morally, that is, without faith, shall live by it; that is, they will not be punished but will have physical rewards from it. But I take this passage as a general statement, like that saying of Christ (Luke 10:28): “Do this, and you will live,” so that it is a kind of irony or ridicule. “Yes, just go ahead and do it!” Paul wants to show here what the righteousness of the Law and of the Gospel is, exactly and accurately. The righteousness of the Law is to keep the Law, according to the statement: “He who does them, etc.” The righteousness of faith is to believe, according to the statement, “The righteous shall live by faith.” (Luther)

3:13 γενόμενος ... κατάρα (“becoming a curse”)—The participle is either modal or causal: “*by becoming a curse*” Christ exhausted the curse and robbed it of its power. “Become a curse” is a more vivid way of saying “become accursed.” Some have contended that the action of the participle (Christ’s becoming accursed) *precedes* the main verb ἐξηγόρασεν (“Christ *redeemed* us”). Aorist participles, however, do not necessarily indicate action prior to the main verb. Aorist participles that *follow* the main verb, as in this instance, tend to express coincidental action. Christ’s act of redemption is in all likelihood *concurrent* with his “becoming a curse.”

ὅτι γέγραπται (“since it is written”)—The ὅτι is likely causal as the Scriptural citation provides the basis for Christ’s redeeming work.

ἐπικατάρατος (“cursed”)—For Deut 21:23 the Septuagint (LXX^{A, F}) has a perfect passive participle, either κεκατηραμένος or κεκαταραμένος (“having been cursed”). Paul’s change to the verbal adjective ἐπικατάρατος (“cursed”) probably represents an assimilation to ἐπικατάρατος in LXX Deut 27:26, quoted in Gal 3:10. Christ is the solution to the curse of the Law.

ὁ κρεμιάμενος (“who is being hung”)—The participle need not be translated as semantically passive. BDAG (κρεμάννυμι, 2) also allows for a deponent, intransitive translation, “who hangs on a tree.” Paul, of course, is interpreting the Deuteronomy text in terms of a killing by crucifixion rather than the hanging of a corpse.

ἐπὶ ξύλου (“upon a tree”)—These words are in LXX Deut 21:23 and conclude Gal 3:13, but do not correspond to any words in the MT (e.g., the MT lacks a phrase such as גַּב־לֵבַי). The possibility cannot be ruled out that Paul’s inclusion of ἐπὶ ξύλου draws on an unknown Hebrew textual tradition. 11QT LXIV.6–13 (also 4QpNah I.7–8) refers to crucifixion as an execution on a tree. Nevertheless, the addition of “upon a tree” (ἐπὶ ξύλου) after “is being hung” (κρεμιάμενος) agrees with the Septuagint over any other extant text, including the MT. The simplest explanation is that Paul is drawing on the Septuagint. (CC)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law by becoming a curse on our behalf, since it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is being hung on a tree.” “Christ” (Χριστός) is placed at the beginning of the Greek sentence for emphasis, and the lack of a connecting particle at the beginning of 3:13 lends rhetorical force to the change of subject. Christ has decisively “redeemed us from the curse of the Law.” The aorist (past) tense of “redeemed” (ἐξηγόρασεν) assures the Galatians that this saving work is complete. Normally, “redeem” (ἐξαγοράζω) signifies payment for manumission of a slave (e.g., Diodorus Siculus 15.7.1; 36.2.2). Sometimes the verb refers only to a purchase. Redemption suits the larger context of Galatians in which slavery and freedom remain central categories (e.g., 4:5; 5:1). Christ’s redemption delivers the individual “from the present evil age” (1:4) and—in the immediate context—from the curse pronounced by the Law (3:10; also 3:23). (CC)

The Crucified as Cursed?

Paul cites Deut 21:23, which in its original context referred to an individual who was stoned to death and then hanged from a tree or wooden post for public display. The corpse could not remain on the tree overnight after the execution. The apostle stands in a line of Jewish tradition that applied this verse to crucifixion. This tradition raises questions: Would Paul contend on the basis of Deut 21:23 that a crucified person automatically bore God’s curse? Did the pre-Christian Paul object to Jesus as the Messiah precisely because he was crucified? Deut 21:23 is in the context of capital punishment of a rebellious son as an egregious Law violator, a “glutton and a drunkard” (Deut 21:20), i.e., an *apostate*. The pre-Christian Paul may well have hurled Deut 21:23 against the Christians as proof of their error—although the possibility remains incapable of proof. A crucified Messiah was certainly a scandal to the Jews (1 Cor 1:23). Paul is not the only NT author who felt compelled to draw attention to Deut 21:23 (see Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29; 1 Pet 2:24). The late, fourth-century, Jewish *Syriac Didascalia* wields Deut 21:23 as an argument against the Christians. A crucified individual could not, then, be the Messiah. Paul’s fundamental opposition to the early Christian movement would melt away in the face of the risen, vindicated Crucified One. Perhaps already from the Damascus road Paul began to see the curse of Jesus Christ as *necessary* in God’s plan to take away the Law’s curse of humanity. (CC)

Such a scenario for Paul’s conversion, unfortunately, must remain exceedingly tentative and may not actually be the case. The best evidence for the scandalous nature of the crucifixion is a fourth-century document from well after the time of Paul. In contrast, Philo and Josephus were near contemporaries of the apostle. Of the five references to crucifixion in Philo and the fifteen to seventeen in Josephus, not a one labels the crucified as accursed. Many Jews considered those crucified by Antiochus the “worthiest”

and “of noble soul” and the eight hundred Pharisees crucified by Alexander Janneus to be righteous martyrs (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.5.4 §§ 255–56 [Marcus, LCL]; 13.14.2 §§ 380–81; cf. 2 Sam 21:12). Crucifixion did not entail the stigma of God’s curse. Josephus describes Haman’s death in the book of Esther as a crucifixion and never hints that his death was a curse (*Ant.* 11.6.11 §§ 261, 266). Josephus even refers to Jesus’ crucifixion with no hint that he suffered God’s curse (*Ant.* 18.3.3 § 64). Faithful Jews suffered crucifixion in *T. Mos.* 6.9 and 8.1. The Dead Sea text 11QT^a LXIV.11–12 is the only Jewish text connecting crucifixion with God’s curse. “There is little reason to conclude that Deut. 21:22–23 was the definitive word for interpreting crucifixion and that Jews would generally have seen Jesus to be cursed because he was crucified.” For Jews, the issue with Jesus would simply have been the shameful crucifixion itself. This was an *unexpected* end for a Messiah figure. (CC)

Christ redeemed “us”—“after he had become a curse for us” or “because he had become a curse for us” or “by means of having become a curse for us” (3:13). The participle γενόμενος, “becoming,” can be taken in differing ways but makes best sense expressing the *means* by which Christ redeemed us. Paul signals his quotation of Deut 21:23 with “it is written.” The Septuagint has “cursed *by God*” (LXX: κεκατηραμένος ὑπὸ θεοῦ) to render the ambiguous “curse of God” in the Hebrew text (כִּלְיָתָא נִלְיָתָא). Paul does not use the Septuagint’s perfect passive participle κεκατηραμένος for “cursed” but chooses rather the same adjective, ἐπικατάρατος, that he employs in 3:10. “Cursed” (ἐπικατάρατος) in 3:13 therefore links directly with “cursed” (ἐπικατάρατος) in the citation of Deut 27:26 in 3:10. Both 3:10 and 3:13 also stress “everyone” (πᾶς in both verses). Jesus became as one who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law. “Christ became a curse for us to set us free from the curse of the Law” (Luther, AE 26:278). Jesus’ death absorbs and exhausts the Law’s curse for “us.” “Jesus’ death on a cross ... transforms everything, ending the old world under the Law and opening up a new world of grace, freedom, and blessing. That is why Paul regards a return to life under the Law as an absurd denial of God’s grace.”²⁷⁷ The redemption in Christ is complete and requires no supplementation. (CC)

Paul’s alteration of the Septuagint’s perfect passive participle κεκατηραμένος, “(having been) cursed,” to the adjective ἐπικατάρατος, “cursed,” renders the Septuagint’s prepositional phrase “by God” (ὑπὸ θεοῦ) grammatically awkward. An adjective with the prepositional phrase (“by God”) is, grammatically, without parallel in the LXX and the NT. The grammatical point does not rule out the possibility that more is at stake in Paul’s omission of “by God.” Some have speculated that perhaps the apostle did not view Christ’s death as an instance of being cursed by God since the Savior’s death was, for Paul, an act of *obedience* to God (cf. Rom 5:19; 2 Cor 5:19). Paul may be distancing the dark, cursing voice of the Law from God’s saving actions emphasized throughout the Galatians letter. God acts to save apart from the Law (3:8, 11). (CC)

The Mechanism of Christ’s Redemption

Paul does not explain the exact mechanism of Christ’s saving work (“Christ redeemed us,” 3:13). The interpretive suggestions vary wildly. One scholar has noted the Greek word “sent forth” (ἐξαποστέλλω) in 4:4 and theorized that Paul must have had in mind the scapegoat in the Day of Atonement ritual (Leviticus 16), which carried the people’s sins away into the wilderness. The only connection to the Day of Atonement ritual, however, would be a single word (“sent,” 4:4) that is not a technical term for the ritual. Paul uses the same verb in 4:6 for God’s “sending” of the *Spirit*. Anglican bishop and scholar N. T. Wright theorized that God piled up the sins of the world on Israel, and then loaded those sins on Israel’s representative, the Christ.²⁸² Unfortunately, Paul does not render explicit an Israel-reduced-to-one logic, and he certainly does not spell out Israel’s representative role on behalf of all humanity. These verses (3:10–13) speak instead of the Law’s curse against *any* who fail to do what it requires—whether Jew or gentile—and of Christ’s bearing the Law’s curse. Another biblical scholar interpreted 3:13 in light of the (much) later *Palestinian Targums’* association of Deut 21:23 with Israel’s apostasy at Baal-peor in Num 25:1–9. The offenders in that incident were to be hung “upon the wood/tree.”²⁸⁴ The Baal-peor incident

supposedly precipitated the Deuteronomy covenant, which was delivered by Moses to Israel on that very spot. Unfortunately, Paul does not verbally allude to Num 25:1–9, and the Second Temple literature of Paul’s day does not provide any precedent for the later Targumic tradition. A Baal-peor connection remains “too speculative.” Still another scholar cited *Gen. Rab.* 56.4 and (Ps.-)Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 10.6, written several centuries after Paul, as evidence of an interpretive tradition connecting Deut 21:23’s “upon the wood/tree” (עַל־הָעֵץ) with Abraham’s near sacrifice of Isaac in Gen 22:6–9, since Isaac was laid “above the wood” (Gen 22:9: מֵעַל לְעֵץ; LXX: ἐπάνω τῶν ξύλων). A connection based on the mere word “wood” in such late literature is, again, of dubious value for the interpretation of Paul. Regardless of the exact mechanism in view, Paul’s gentile audience would have understood the basic point that Jesus’ death redeems the believer from the Law’s curse. As an ethnic group, the Galatians numbered among the Celts, who sacrificed criminals to their gods by crucifying them (Diodorus Siculus 5.32.6). (CC)

Whether Paul’s thinking here is substitutionary is unclear. Did Christ become accursed *in our stead*? As one recent commentator put it: “The substitutionary meaning (‘in our place’ or ‘in our stead’) would imply that Christ took upon himself a penalty that ought to be imposed on human beings. For Paul, however, human beings apart from Christ are already under a curse (v. 10a); the issue is redemption from this already-existing situation.” In other words, the human predicament is even direr than the substitutionary sense suggests. Christ entered into and identified with the situation of those under the Law (4:4) “having become a curse for us” (3:13): “The idea is not that Christ became the curse from which ‘we’ are then granted an exemption, but that Christ shared ‘our’ predicament in order to liberate ‘us’ from that predicament, along with himself (cf. Rom 6:9; 1 Cor 15:21).” (CC)

Many interpreters have thought that Gal 3:13 reflects an early Jewish-Christian creed about the vicarious benefits of Jesus’ death as he took the Law’s curse upon himself. Paul uses similar language, for instance, in 2 Cor 5:21: “The one who knew no sin [Christ] he [God] made sin on our behalf/in our place/for us [ὕπερ ἡμῶν].” Many commentators have viewed 2 Cor 5:21 as a text reflecting the OT “sin offering” by which sin was transferred away from the individual. The problem with this reasoning is that “sin” (ἁμαρτία) must bear two very different meanings within 2 Cor 5:21 with no contextual cue to distinguish them. The sacrificial language that accompanies “sin” (ἁμαρτία) when it is being used for the sin offering is absent in 2 Cor 5:21 and should not be assumed. Paul does not employ the (arguably) technical term for the OT sin offering (περὶ ἁμαρτίας). Advocates of pre-Pauline tradition have recognized the tremendous variation in how Paul words his prepositional phrases with ὑπέρ “on behalf of; for the benefit of; in place of.” The variation from passage to passage suggests that the language here in Gal 3:13 (ὕπερ ἡμῶν κατάρα, “a curse on our behalf”) may be entirely his own. Paul does not employ the preposition (ὕπερ) here in a strictly substitutionary sense (as he does in, e.g., Philemon 13). Christ certainly endured the curse in our stead, but the preposition does not lose the sense of “on our behalf” or “for our benefit.” More to the point, Christ endured the curse in order to free humanity from the *enslaving power* of the Law’s curse. Paul modifies the benefits of Christ’s saving death in 1:4 to signal his apocalyptic interests. As J. Louis Martyn explained about 3:13:

There are not three actors—the guilty human being, Christ as the substitutionary sacrifice for that person’s guilt, and God, who, accepting that sacrifice, forgives the guilty human being. There are four actors: the powerful, enslaving curse of the Law, human beings enslaved under the power of that curse, Christ, who comes to embody the enslaving curse, and God, who in this Christ powerfully defeats the Law’s curse, thus liberating human beings from their state of enslavement. (CC)

Ironically, the Law’s horrific cursing of Christ released blessing for all humanity. A victorious new age has dawned in Christ’s liberating work (cf. 1:4; 6:14–15). (CC)

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. See 4:5; Ro 8:3. (CSB)

We are liberated from the Law’s deadly slavery and curse by the payment of a price (cf Rev. 5:9). (TLSB)

tree. Used in classical Greek of stocks and poles on which bodies were impaled, here of the cross (see Ac 5:30; 10:39; 1Pe 2:24). (CSB)

Applied to the crucified Christ (cf Ac 10:39; 13:29; 1Pt 2:24). In its original context, it referred to the hanging of a criminal’s corpse on a tree or pole after execution. (TLSB)

3:14 ἵνα (“so that”)—Under the influence of the Septuagint, the difference between ἵνα clauses for purpose and result was frequently blurred.

ἐπαγγελίαν (“promise”)—The presence of εὐλογία (“blessing”) in the prior clause led some scribes to replace ἐπαγγελίαν with εὐλογίαν (ℱ⁴⁶ D* F G). In favor of ἐπαγγελίαν are ℱ⁹⁹ κ A B C D² Ψ and ℳ. (CC)

blessing of Abraham. See v. 8; Ro 4:1–5. (CSB)

What is promised here could not happen in any other way than that Jesus Christ should become a curse, join Himself to the accursed nations, remove the curse from them, and bless them with His blessing. (Luther)

promise of the Spirit. See Eze 36:26; 37:14; 39:29; Jn 14:16; cf. Eph 1:13. (CSB)

By faith in Jesus Christ, whose atoning work delivered us from the curse of the Law, all believers (Jew and Gentile) receive the gift of the Spirit. (TLSB)

“The promise of the Spirit” is a Hebraism; it means “the promised Spirit.” Now the Spirit is freedom from the Law, from sin, death, the curse, hell, and the wrath and judgment of God. Here our merit of congruity or condignity is nothing; but only the free promise and gift disclosed to Abraham that we might be free from all evil and receive everything good is important. We do not receive this freedom and gift of the Spirit by any other merits than by faith; it alone takes hold of the promise, as Paul says clearly here: “That we might receive the promise of the Spirit, not through works but through faith.” (Luther)

3:10–14 Christ redeems us from the Law’s curse by becoming a curse for us. One sin, no matter how trivial it may seem to us, makes us a transgressor of the whole Law and accountable to God (Jas 2:10). But Christ’s death on the cross releases us from the guilt of every transgression. • O Holy Spirit, continue to strengthen us in the new life of faith begun in our Baptism. Amen. (TLSB)

The Law and the Promise

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. 18 For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. 19 Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made, and it was put in place through angels by an intermediary. 20 Now an intermediary implies more than one, but God is one.

21 Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. **22** But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.

23 Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. **24** So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. **25** But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, **26** for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. **27** For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. **28** There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave[g] nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. **29** And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

After mention of “the promise of the Spirit” in 3:14, Paul begins the new paragraph in 3:15, 18 by exploring the promise’s relation to the Law of Moses. How exactly is the promise mediated to Abraham’s descendants? Paul is clear that the Law does not in any way mediate Abraham’s inheritance. Christ, Abraham’s Seed, is the sole legitimate heir of the promises (3:15–18). Those incorporated by baptismal faith “in Christ” (3:28) are the only ones able to enjoy promise(s) intended for the one “Seed.” (CC)

In the prior paragraph (3:10–14), Paul severs God’s blessings from the Law given at Mount Sinai and associates those blessings solely with what was promised to Abraham (3:6–9). The Mosaic Law mediates only God’s curse (3:10–13). Gal 3:15–18 begins a new section by rendering explicit the separation of Abrahamic promise and Sinaitic Law that is implicit in 3:6–13. Many Jews in Paul’s day connected the Mosaic Law with Abraham’s covenant, as if they were two sides of the same coin. Some Second Temple Jewish authors would place the word “covenant” (διαθήκη) parallel to the commands given at Mount Sinai or to the Law of Moses or to the Books of Moses. For instance, “all this is the book of the covenant of the Most High God, the law that Moses commanded us” (Sirach 24:23 NRSV). A little earlier in the apocryphal book, in Sirach 17:12–13, God “established with them an eternal covenant” in the glory the Israelites saw and heard at Mount Sinai. In Sirach 28:7: “Remember the commandments, ... remember the covenant of the Most High” (NRSV). The Law and the covenant are virtually equated in the phrase “the law of the covenant of the Lord” (Sirach 39:8). A similar equation is in *4 Ezra*, a Jewish apocalyptic text from the end of the first century AD. Unlike ben Sira’s preference for the singular “covenant,” the author of *4 Ezra* prefers the plural “covenants” while chastising Israel’s disobedience of God’s commandments (*4 Ezra* 3:32–33). The author juxtaposes “the law of our ancestors and the written covenants” (*4 Ezra* 4:23; cf. *4 Ezra* 8:27: “those who have kept your covenants”). In *4 Ezra* 7:24: “They scorned his Law, and denied his covenants; they have been unfaithful to his statutes” (trans. B. M. Metzger, *OTP*). *4 Ezra* 7:46, on the other hand, departs from the pattern in employing the singular noun when the author inquires who among mortals “has not transgressed your covenant.” (CC)

Some Second Temple authors, such as the writer of *Jubilees*, would distinguish individual biblical covenants while at the same time collapsing them together into a single metaphor for God’s relationship with Israel. Moses is said to have renewed the feast of Shebuot at Mount Sinai on the fifteenth day of the third month, which happened to be the same day of the year that God established the feast with Noah (*Jub.* 6.1–21), instituted a covenant with Abraham (*Jub.* 14.1–20), and changed Abram and Sarai’s names (*Jub.* 15.1–16). On that day was also the institution of circumcision (*Jub.* 15.1–34), Isaac’s birth and weaning (*Jub.* 16.13; 17.1), Jacob’s covenant with Laban (*Jub.* 29.7–8), and Jacob’s celebration at the Well of Oaths (*Jub.* 44.1, 4). The shared date signals continuity between the covenant relationship with the patriarchs and the Sinaitic legislation. The various individual covenants express, effectively, a single overarching covenant between God and the people. Likewise the Wisdom of Solomon seems to blur the distinction between the Sinaitic covenant and the covenants “given to the fathers” (Wis Sol 12:21; 18:22). (CC)

Second Temple authors maintain that Abraham observed the Law of Moses before it had been delivered to the people in written form. According to Sirach 44:19–20: “Abraham was the great father of a multitude of nations, and no one has been found like him in glory. He kept the law of the Most High” (NRSV). 2 Bar. 57.2 claims that Abraham followed the “unwritten law” and that the “works of the commandments were accomplished at that time” (trans. A. F. J. Klijn, *OTP*; so also Philo, *Abr.* 46 §§ 275–76; *Jubilees* 11–23; *m. Qidd.* 4.14; *b. Yoma* 28b). Such statements further meld the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants. The virtual equation of the patriarchal covenant(s) and Moses’ Law is understandable. The promise and covenants to Abraham are central to the narrative of the Torah. The contrasting impulses in Second Temple authors—to identify and to distinguish the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants—render the debate at Galatia comprehensible. Paul’s Galatian rivals viewed observance of the Torah as a means to mediate Abraham’s covenantal blessings. Paul responds that the Sinaitic Law “adds” nothing to what God already established with Abraham. He explodes the connection between Abrahamic covenant and Sinaitic Law. (CC)

Paul, for his part, stresses the temporary span of the Law. Temporal terms dominate this section: “until” (ἄχρις, 3:19); “before” (πρό, 3:23); “until this coming faith” (εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν, 3:23); “until Christ” (εἰς Χριστόν, 3:24); “since faith has come” (ἐλθούσης ... τῆς πίστεως, 3:25); “no longer” (οὐκέτι, 3:25); “as long as” (ἐφ’ ὅσον χρόνον, 4:1); “until” (ἄχρι, 4:2); “when” (ὅτε, 4:4); “no longer” (οὐκέτι, 4:7). Paul continues to speak in apocalyptic terms of the passing of an age to make way for a new age in Christ (cf. 1:4; 6:14–15). The apostle’s apocalyptic emphases differ from Luther’s anthropological framework of thought when he wrote of the Law: “Therefore the Christian is divided this way into two times. To the extent that he is flesh, he is under the Law; to the extent that he is spirit, he is under the Gospel” (AE 26:342). The “end” “set for the Law” (AE 26:342) is therefore, for Luther, an existential moment when the individual believer turns away from sin and the flesh to Christ, a moment that may recur in the ongoing Christian struggles of this life (AE 26:317–18). Luther envisioned “flesh” in terms of human ontology, that is, the human constitution, whereas Paul is concerned with “flesh” as a powerful, almost demonic force that gives birth to its own children (4:29) and that wages a fierce campaign against the Spirit (5:17). Those who are characterized by the works of the flesh will by no means inherit the kingdom of God (5:19–21). Christ’s followers decisively crucified the flesh with its passions and desires (5:24) and must now live consistently with that crucifixion (5:25–6:10). The temporal limitation of the Law’s cursing voice prepares for Paul’s application later in the letter. (CC)

The Divorce of the Abrahamic Inheritance from the Mosaic Law (3:15–18) (CC)

3:15 ὁμως ([“even though” or “likewise”]). (CC)

Brothers (and sisters), I am speaking from a human standpoint: no one annuls or adds a codicil to a validated will even of a human being. Paul frequently uses familial addresses to signal the beginning or ending of a discrete unit of the letter (at the beginning of sections: 1:11; here; 4:12; 5:13; 6:1; at the end: 4:31; 5:11). After the harsh address of 3:1, the apostle switches gears to a more coaxing tone. The Galatians may be confused and misled in their thinking, but Paul reminds them—for the first time since 1:11—that he is trying to persuade them from the point of view of their relationship together in the family of God. They remain “brothers (and sisters)” (ἀδελφοί). Indeed, he will begin to use familial language more frequently as the letter progresses from this point (4:12, 28, 31; 5:11, 13; 6:1, 18). The rebuke of 3:1 has served its purpose. Alienation will hopefully give way to reconciliation. (CC)

Paul immediately qualifies what he plans to say with the words “I am speaking as a man [κατὰ ἄνθρωπον],” or more precisely, “I am speaking from a human standpoint.” The Gospel, on the other hand, is *not* a human matter (οὐκ ἔστιν κατὰ ἄνθρωπον, “is not a human affair,” 1:11). Paul may even be signaling in 3:15 a *merely* human standpoint. The qualifying phrasing prepares the Galatians for the illicit notion that a will or covenant could be altered after its ratification (3:17). Paul may also be signaling that

he is using the Greek word διαθήκη for “a last will and testament,” that is, in a different sense than the rival teachers; for them, the word refers to a “covenant.” (CC)

Outside of Jewish circles, the word διαθήκη, *diathēkē*, always refers to a “last will and testament.” Even the Jewish historian Josephus uses the term in this way throughout his writings. (e.g., *J.W.* 1.23.2 § 451; 1.29.2 § 573; 1.30.3 § 588; 1.30.7 § 600; *Ant.* 13.13.1 § 349; 17.3.2 § 53; 17.4.2 § 78; 17.6.1 § 146). In 3:15–18 Paul employs legal terminology that would have been familiar in the Greco-Roman world for last wills and testaments: “ratify/validate a will” (κυρόω διαθήκη), “annul (a will)” (ἀθετέω), “add a codicil” (ἐπιδιατάσσομαι). On the other hand, in two hundred seventy out of two hundred eighty-six instances, the Jewish translation of the Scriptures into Greek, the Septuagint, uses this word (διαθήκη) to translate the Hebrew word for “covenant” (ברית). Whether Paul is referring to a “covenant” or to a “last will and testament,” the point remains essentially the same. A *diathēkē* cannot be subsequently altered. Indeed, the participial form for “ratified/validated” (κεκυρωμένην) is in the perfect tense, which suggests irrevocability. Not only is the legal instrument to which Paul refers irrevocable, any attempt to alter it would in effect nullify God’s gracious dealings. In 3:15 Paul uses the same verb for “nullify” (ἀθετέω) as in 2:21 in the context of nullifying God’s grace. Paul is verbally connecting 2:21 and 3:15: God’s grace is at stake. (CC)

The Jewish rivals at Galatia associated the Sinaitic Law with God’s covenant with Abraham. Paul, in response, divorces the Abrahamic covenant from the promises at Mount Sinai. In the ensuing verses the apostle clarifies that the Law was a late-comer onto the scene long after the Abrahamic promises had been ratified. In anticipation of 3:16–18, Paul may already be trying in 3:15 to unravel the way the Galatians were being taught to think about “covenant.” Although as non-Jews the Galatians had used the Greek word διαθήκη exclusively for a “last will and testament,” the rivals were teaching them about a Jewish “covenant” inclusive of Mount Sinai. Paul’s “I am speaking from a human standpoint” (3:15) could be a signal that he is shifting the meaning of *diathēkē* back to the secular sense of the term that was more familiar to the gentile Galatians. The apostle seeks to redefine the term in a way that *excludes* Mount Sinai. (CC)

Paul’s adversative particle (ὅμως, “even of a human being”) can be understood in two different ways. It may signal an antithesis between “I am speaking in a merely human fashion” (κατὰ ἄνθρωπον λέγω) and what follows, in which case Paul would be saying: “Though I am speaking as a man [or from a human point of view], nevertheless what follows is true: No one annuls or adds to a human covenant once it has been established.” On the other hand, Gal 3:15 seems to be making a comparison, as is the case in Paul’s other use of this word (ὅμως) in 1 Cor 14:7. In both instances, Paul shifts the Greek particle (ὅμως) to the beginning of the sentence from its more natural position prior to the second member of the comparison. The particle therefore appears to be influenced by the word “equally, likewise” that is spelled with the same letters even if accented differently (ὁμῶς). The comparison in Gal 3:15 would center on the word “human” (ἄνθρωπον): as with a human covenant or testament, “so it is in the case” of God’s covenant with Abraham. (CC)

The longstanding problem with translating διαθήκη as a “last will and testament” has been caused by a lack of clarity as to the precise legal tradition to which Paul is referring, whether Roman, Greek, or Jewish. People in Paul’s era would have been familiar with irrevocable distributions of property in both Jewish and Greco-Roman circles. These irrevocable instruments were labeled “after death” (μετὰ τὴν τελευτήν) and never as a “last will and testament” (διαθήκη). A will, by contrast, was always revocable.⁵² Roman law allowed a later will to set aside an earlier one. “It is now well established that both Greek and Roman wills were revocable by the maker.”⁵⁴ Inheritance laws typically allowed for amendments. Paul does qualify his argument as a merely human approach. He may be speaking hypothetically. More likely, he simply intends to convey that the testament is irrevocable by “no one” *else* but the testator himself. (CC)

On the other hand, good reasons suggest that Paul may mean by the use of διαθήκη a “covenant” and not a “last will and testament.” Jewish covenants included blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience of the covenant stipulations. The language of blessing and curse in 3:6–14 primes the Galatian hearer to think in terms of a covenant in 3:15. In each of Paul’s other uses of the term (διαθήκη) he is referring to a covenant instrument (Rom 9:4; 11:27; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6, 14; Gal 4:24; cf. Eph 2:12). Paul clearly uses διαθήκη in Gal 3:17 for the Abrahamic covenant. Galatians 3 remains absorbed with matters Jewish. Paul’s purpose is simply to distinguish the Abrahamic covenant (see 3:6) from the Sinaitic Law, which came four hundred thirty years later. The Abrahamic covenant cannot be altered by the later revelation. (CC)

The ancients would seal a covenant agreement with a ratifying oath. God makes a covenant with Abraham in Gen 15:17–21 and 17:1–27. A ratifying oath takes place after the binding of Isaac in Gen 22:15–18. This oath is significant in many ways for the interpretation of Gal 3:15: (1) God ratifies by oath the Abrahamic covenant; (2) Abraham and the Seed are the specified beneficiaries of the agreement; (3) the gentiles will benefit from and be blessed by this “covenant” agreement. No one can modify or annul a covenant once it has been ratified by the covenant oath. In Gen 15:9–21 God takes upon himself the threat of the covenant curses if he does not fulfill the promises to Abraham. The events with Israel at Mount Sinai cannot annul God’s promises to Abraham, promises which included the gentiles!⁶¹ Scott Hahn, who has vigorously advocated for an allusion in Gal 3:15 to Genesis 22, concluded with respect to the claim by Paul’s rivals at Galatia that it is necessary to observe Moses’ Law: “Since, at the Aqedah, God put himself under a unilaterally binding oath to fulfill his covenant with Abraham, this [claim] would be nonsense.” One cannot legally alter a covenant confirmed by oath. (CC)

On the other hand, the weakness of interpreting *diathēkē* in 3:15 as “covenant” is that Jewish covenantal texts do not appear to use the specific legal terminology that Paul employs in Gal 3:15–17. In these verses Paul employs potentially familiar legal terminology associated with a “last will and testament”: “ratify/validate a will” (κυρόω διαθήκην), “annul (a will)” (ἀθετέω), “add a codicil” (ἐπιδιατάσσομαι). The testament or will is indeed irrevocable and inalterable by anyone other than the testator. In view of the use of the word *diathēkē* as a “last will and testament” in the setting and culture of the Galatians themselves, Paul appears to be using the word in its secular sense at this point. He will return to a “covenant” in 3:17 with some very polemical comments. (CC)

Brothers. Paul calls them brethren. Remember, that’s an endearing term. Part of the family of God. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. God is our Father. Jesus is our brother. And together in the church we are brothers and sisters in Christ. (Just – V-27)

to give a human example – And he says: I am speaking according to man literally but he says what I’m going to do is I’m going to give you a human example here that everybody can understand. And it’s a very simple one. (Just – V-27)

This human example from legal practice teaches that no one can alter a legally ratified covenant or last will and testament. It is irrevocable. (TLSB)

man-made covenant. The Greek word normally indicates a last will or testament, which is probably the legal instrument Paul is referring to here. But in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the OT) it had been widely used of God’s covenant with his people (see also Mt 26:28; Lk 1:72; Ac 3:25; 7:8; 2Co 3:14; Heb 8:9), so Paul’s choice of analogy was apt for his purpose. (CSB)

On the basis of this custom of human wills, then, Paul argues as follows: “How does it happen that men are obeyed, but God is disobeyed? Political and civic ordinances are observed religiously; here nothing is

altered, nothing added, nothing taken away. Only our theology, to which all the creatures nevertheless bear witness—only it suffers alteration and addition.” It is very persuasive when Paul argues this way from the examples and laws of men. That is why he says: “To give a human example.” It is as though he were saying: “In wills and in other human business there is a performance, and what the law commands is observed. Why does not the same thing happen even more in the testament of God, which God Himself promised to Abraham and to his offspring?” Therefore this is a sufficiently strong argument, based as it is on a divine ordinance.

3:16 τῷ δὲ Ἀβραάμ ἐρρέθησαν αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ—“The promises” (αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι) “were spoken” (ἐρρέθησαν) not only “to Abraham” (τῷ ... Ἀβραάμ) but also “to his Seed” (τῷ σπέρματι αὐτοῦ), Christ. One exegete presumed that Christ was not present with Abraham and therefore could not have received the promises at that point (see, however, the commentary on 4:4). He proposed that the datives “to” Abraham and “to” his Seed be understood as datives of reference. The phrase would then be translated something like “with reference to Abraham and his Seed.” A dative of reference is not the most likely approach to the syntax. Paul, as others in his day, regularly uses λέγω with a dative noun for “speak to someone.” The promises could have been relayed to the Seed from Abraham’s time. (CC)

“Seed” (σπέρμα) is semantically ambiguous in that it may refer to a collective entity or to a single person. The Septuagintal translator of Genesis employs the word collectively (e.g., Gen 13:16; 15:5; 16:10; 22:17; thus also *b. Pesah.* 119b; *b. Ned.* 31a) as well as for an individual (e.g., Gen 4:25; 21:13). Paul seizes on the ambiguity from a rhetorical standpoint for his own purposes. (CC)

ὡς ἐπὶ πολλῶν ἀλλ’ ὡς ἐφ’ ἑνός (“as to many, but as to one”)—This includes an understood λέγων, “speaking,” since the implied subject is presumably “God” (ὁ θεός) and not “the Scripture” (ἡ γραφή with an understood λέγουσα); BDF § 425 (4). God ratifies the covenant (3:17). Also, ἐπὶ here is virtually equivalent to περί and means “with respect to.” (CC)

καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου, ὃς ἐστὶν Χριστός (“and to your Seed, who is Christ”)—The antecedent of the masculine relative pronoun ὃς (“who”) is σπέρματι, the neuter noun σπέρμα (“seed”). Ordinarily one would expect the relative pronoun to be neuter too, ὃ. “Attraction of the relative into the gender of the complement is usual when the relative clause gives the proper name of something or someone that was mentioned in the main clause in general terms.” In this case the proper name is Χριστός (“Christ”). (CC)

Now to Abraham the promises were spoken and to his Seed. It does not say “and to the seeds,” as to many, but as to one: “and to your Seed,” who is Christ. When Paul raises the topic of the sons of Abraham in 3:7, he appears to be responding to a topic initially brought up by the rival teachers. In explaining the significance of Abraham for the Galatians, the rivals would have corrected and/or supplemented Paul’s preaching by stressing Abraham’s circumcision in Genesis 17 (see Gal 5:1–12; 6:11–18). Had the rivals’ correction been aggressive, they might have charged Paul with altering the Abrahamic “covenant” (διαθήκη) by failing to require the Galatians’ circumcision. Moses’ Law had codified Abrahamic circumcision for subsequent generations (Lev 12:3). In a less heated moment at a later time, in Romans 4 Paul concedes Abraham’s circumcision but clarifies that circumcision was a sign of Abraham’s *faith* by which he was reckoned righteous (Romans 4). The patriarch’s justifying trust (Gen 15:6) came well before the institution of circumcision (Gen 17:10–12). In the heated situation at Galatia where salvation itself is at stake (Gal 1:6–9), Paul’s point is best served by ignoring any nuanced connection between Abraham and circumcision and by stressing the patriarch’s association with the promises. The coordinating δέ (“now”) signals a shift in subject from the “covenant/last will and testament” (3:15) to the “promises” (3:16). Instead of “covenant,” Paul develops the notion of “promise(s)” in the remainder of the chapter (plural: 3:16, 21; singular: 3:14, 17, 18, 22, 29; 4:23, 28). (CC)

Although Genesis does not employ the language of “promises” as such, God made three promises to Abraham in Gen 17:1–9: Abraham (and his seed) would be fruitful (17:2, 4, 5, 6); the land would be in his eternal possession (17:8); and God would be his God (17:7). Although Paul ignores Genesis 17’s requirement of circumcision, he does allude to several of the Abrahamic promises. Abraham responded in faith to God’s promise of descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens (Gen 15:5–6; Gal 3:6). Paul draws attention to God’s promise that all the gentiles would be blessed in Abraham (Gen 12:3; 18:18; Gal 3:8). God also promised Abraham that he would give “to you and to your Seed” (σοι καὶ τῷ σπέρματι σου, LXX Gen 13:15; 17:8; cf. σπέρμα, “seed,” three times [!] in Gen 17:7–8) “the earth” (τὴν γῆν, Gen 13:15; 17:8)—the “land” of Canaan. Abraham reviewed God’s promises to him and to his seed concerning the land in the Septuagintal version of Gen 24:7 (σοι δώσω τὴν γῆν ταύτην καὶ τῷ σπέρματι σου, “to you I will give this land and to your seed”). The multiple promises and references to the land may explain Paul’s alternation between the plural (αἱ ἐπαγγελίαι) and the singular (ἡ ἐπαγγελία) of the word “promise” in 3:16–18, 21–22, 29. When Paul defines the “promise” in terms of the Spirit (3:14), the point is not that God promised to Abraham the Spirit but rather that by virtue of the Spirit the Abrahamic promises, especially the land, are being realized. The Spirit is a crucial aspect of the fulfillment of the promises. The Spirit is creating far more descendants for Abraham than he could ever have imagined!⁷³ In effect, Paul is reconceptualizing the promise(s) of the land of Israel (LXX Gen 13:15; 15:18; 17:8; 24:7) by expanding the horizon to include—by the Spirit-created (gentile) descendants of Abraham—the *entire world* (cf. Rom 4:13)! (CC)

Another possible interpretation of the plural “promises” in 3:16 is that Paul is referring not to a single promise made multiple times but rather to *multiple* promises. God promised to Abraham land (Gen 17:8; also Gen 12:7; 13:14–17; 15:7, 18–21; 24:7), a son/heir (Gen 17:15–22; also Gen 15:2–4; 18:9–15), and numerous descendants (Gen 17:1–7; also Gen 12:2; 15:5; 18:18; 22:17)—although only the land was specifically promised to Abraham’s seed (e.g., Gen 12:7; 15:18; 17:8). The Spirit appears to replace the land in Paul’s thinking. The Spirit is also instrumental in bringing about the many descendants of Abraham in Christ (Gal 3:29; 4:29). “Paul thus speaks of ‘promises’ because the promise of the Spirit encompasses the other two [the promise of a son and heir and the promise of many descendants], which are also interpreted christologically.” (CC)

A much tighter sequence of thought based on διαθήκη, *diathēkē*, “covenant/testament” could be created by skipping from Gal 3:15 to 3:17. In 3:16—the apparent interruption—Paul is adamant that the “Seed” is one and only one. The apostle is not the first to interpret the promised seed of Abraham as a single individual. Jewish interpretation in Paul’s day occasionally took the “seed” of 2 Sam 7:12 (LXX 2 Kgdms 7:12) as a reference to a messiah figure. Nevertheless, a theological argument based on the detail that the “seed” promised to Abraham is grammatically singular would have surprised Paul’s contemporaries.⁷⁸ Genesis 17 employs the word “seed” for Abraham’s collective descendants. Even the apostle himself refers to Abraham’s plural “sons” (υἱοί) in Gal 3:7. In Gal 3:16 Paul denies the collective sense of the “seed” that the rivals would have assumed on the basis of Genesis 17. As justification for his interpretation, Paul could have pointed to Isaac as Abraham’s single son of promise (Gen 22:2, 12, 16–17; 24:7). Genesis 22 stresses in three separate instances that Isaac was Abraham’s one and only son (Gen 22:2, 12, 16). Yet the apostle completely ignores Isaac in favor of a direct connection between Abraham and Christ as the Seed. Paul conspicuously exchanges Christ for the role that Isaac played as the single seed. The words “and to your seed” are *missing* in Gen 22:17–18 as Paul draws his phrasing instead from Gen 13:15 and 17:8. For instance, the “and” (καὶ) in the phrase “and to your Seed” is unnecessary for his argument and serves as evidence that Paul is *citing* Gen 13:15 and 17:8 at this point and not merely alluding to them. (CC)

Paul deliberately limits the promises to Abraham and his single “Seed” at this point because he intends by the end of the chapter to speak of a new (and the only) collective entity: those “in Christ” (Gal 3:28). Paul

is redefining God's people not in terms of ethnic Israel of old but rather in terms of a common Baptism and faith in Christ, the Seed proper. That logic finally becomes clear in 3:29. The emphatically singular Seed in 3:16 is a rhetorical move that denies the collective interpretation at this stage of the developing argument. Here Paul must deny a collective entity, Israel, in favor of the single Seed, Christ, so that through the single Seed, Christ, he may speak later of a *new* collective entity, those incorporated by Baptism into Christ (3:27–29). Each stage of this rhetorical move is critical. After limiting the beneficiaries of the Abrahamic promises to Christ alone, Paul is ready for a new collective people, a people whose ethnic membership extends well *beyond* ethnic Israel! At issue is the question of who Abraham's descendants really are. Paul envisions even gentiles numbering among those children—but that is to anticipate what comes later in the chapter (3:26–29). In fact, Paul anticipates the end of the chapter already in 3:6–9 when he writes that those “of faith” are “the sons of Abraham.” Gal 3:15–29 therefore represents yet another line of reasoning leading to a similar conclusion about Abraham's descendants. (CC)

promises. Here Paul uses a new term and calls the promises of God a testament. A testament is nothing else than a promise, except that it has not yet been revealed but is still only signified. Now a testament is not a law; it is a gift. For heirs do not look for laws or for enforcement; they look for an inheritance from a testament. Therefore Paul first explains the terms, and then he applies the analogy and stresses the term “offspring.” “To Abraham,” he says, “the promises were made; that is, the testament was drawn or ordained for him.” Therefore something was promised and granted to him. It was not laws that were handed down to him, but a testament about a spiritual blessing. If, therefore, we observe human testaments or promises, why do we not observe divine ones as well, which are the testament of God, of which a human testament is only an allegory or mask? Again, if we observe the signs, why do we not rather observe the things that are signified? For the testament spoken to Abraham was not human—although it would not be violated even if it were—but divine. (Luther)

your offspring, who is Christ. After God revealed His Son to Paul at conversion (Ac 9:1–16), Paul understood the “promise” in a totally new way. Cf v 19. Christ is the ultimate heir of the inheritance promised to Abraham. (TLSB)

Now the promises were spoken to him, not for all the Jews or for many offspring but for one Offspring, which is Christ. The Jews do not accept this interpretation of Paul's; they imagine that there is a shift of number here and say that a singular is being used for a plural. But we remain with the spirit of the apostle, who does not stress the term “offspring” without purpose; he explains in a truly apostolic way that this Offspring is Christ. Even if the Jews deny this, we have the sufficient and powerful arguments that Paul cited earlier; these they cannot deny, and these arguments support the present one as well. So far the analogy or allegorical picture of the divine ordinance, that is, of a human testament. Now he expounds and applies it. (Luther)

He says: When there is a covenant, a man-made covenant -- we're talking now just about a simple covenant or testament, you know, or if you want to call it will or testament. And I think will or testament is a better translation here. A man-made will, no one can annul it, no one can add a codicil to it. (Just – V-27)

Now, that's not only true for the time of Paul and the time of Abraham, that's true today. You know, just the other day my Father and I went down to the lawyer to talk about his will. He's moved to Indiana. There are some different things going on here. So he wants to revise his will. I cannot add to that will. I cannot annul it. Only my Father can. No one can do that. That, humanly speaking, is a given. We all can understand that. And Paul wants to say then that that's the same thing if you translate it over into the covenants that God makes with us. (Just – V-27)

Now, remember what a covenant is. A covenant is where God -- I mean -- let's back up and say what is a covenant between human beings? A covenant is where we make an agreement. And usually they would call about it as cutting a covenant. And they would take the animal. And they would cut it in two. And there would be a space between them. And if you and I were to make a covenant with one another, you know, an agreement of some sort, then we would both walk between the animal. And by doing that, we would say to one another that if any one of us broke that covenant, we could render the other like this animal. We could cut them in two. Which is kind of an interesting thought, isn't it? When God makes a covenant, though, he's the only one that goes through the animal. And if you remember in Genesis the covenant with Abraham with the smoking pot, which was the presence of God. And Abraham didn't go through there because it's a unilateral covenant. (Just – V-27)

Now, Paul is building on that concept, this unilateral covenant, when he's talking about the covenant made with Abraham. And look at Verse 16. And here you have to notice that the promises is in the plural. Like I said, there were three promises. Verse 16 says the promises that were made, that were added to Abraham and to his seed -- now, that's singular. The promises is plural. Three promises, Cana, circumcision, all nations blessed in Abraham. And to his seed. Singular. It does not say and to seeds, Paul says as to many. But as to one and to your seed, who is Christ.(Just – V-27)

Whoa. Now that's an amazing interpretation. Nobody else I think up until this point had ever made an interpretation of that text like had this one. And what he is doing here, Paul is, is showing the kind of interpretation of Scripture that he and Jesus are doing now after the incarnation of Jesus. And that is a radical Christological namely interpreting the Scriptures in terms of Jesus. (Just – V-27)

Now, I think the Jews may have seen this as a reference to the Messiah. But they saw these promises being fulfilled through the generations, through the loins of the people in Israel who contain the seed of the Messiah. I don't think they saw that there was a direct link between the promise given to Abraham and Christ that kind of jumped over all of Old Testament history and found it's place then in Christ. Now, that's what Paul is saying. Paul is saying that the promises are given directly to Christ. And if you think about those three promises, they all come to fulfillment in Christ. Jesus coming to the Promised Land is himself now the Promised Land. He's heaven it self. He is where we now have our being. Jesus in his circumcision brings an end to circumcision. Jesus sheds his blood on his eighth day and for all intents and purposes, all of humanity is circumcised as him. And that's the end of it. And Jesus dies not just for the Jews but he dies for all of the people of God. And that promise, that the seed of Abraham, who is Christ, now brings salvation to all people is the promise that matters. And that is exactly, exactly what Paul wants to say here. That it's not to the many seeds, but it's just to the one seed. But it's all about going from Abraham to Christ. Now, if you do that, if you go from Genesis to the New Testament, what you skip over is the law. And that shows you that the intent of the promise of Abraham was to find it's end in Christ. Not in the law given to Moses. That is the point of his argument. (Just – V-27)

3:17 ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ (“by God”)—Several manuscripts add εἰς Χριστόν (“in Christ”) after θεοῦ (D G Textus Receptus and most minuscules). In this reading, the Abrahamic covenant was ultimately between God and the seed of Abraham. The variant may be theologically motivated since, in relating Christ to the Abrahamic covenant, it “indicates the pre-existence of Christ and shows him as acting in history prior to the incarnation.”⁸ The variant also reflects the role of Christ in 3:16, 24. θεοῦ alone is well supported in ℣⁴⁶ × A B C, among others. (CC)

My point is this: the Law, which came four hundred thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously validated by God so as to nullify the promise. The words, literally, “but I say” (τοῦτο δὲ λέγω) and the “previously ratified/validated covenant” (διαθήκην προκεκυρωμένην) signal a return to the topic of 3:15 after the brief but important parenthesis in 3:16. The word “but” (δέ) with a verb of saying, “I say” (λέγω) in 3:17, introduces a conclusion to the line of thought that began with the initial “I say/am

speaking” (λέγω) in 3:15: thus “my point is this.” The sentence would read rather literally: “The covenant [*diathēkē*/διαθήκη] previously ratified by God, the after-430-years-enacted law does not ‘de-ratify’ (= annul).” With 3:17 the *diathēkē* is clearly the Abrahamic “covenant,” a covenant Paul associates with the promises and not with circumcision. This covenant, Paul emphasizes, was ratified *beforehand* (προκυρώ), roughly four hundred thirty years prior to the Sinai Law. (CC)

Gen 15:13 specifies four hundred years as the time of Israel’s slavery in Egypt. Ex 12:40 has four hundred thirty years. The rabbis estimated that four hundred thirty years separated Abraham’s promises from the conclusion of Israel’s slavery in Egypt (Ex 12:40: Egypt *and* Canaan), whereas four hundred years refers only to the time in Egypt. Josephus takes a similar approach with four hundred years for the time in Egypt (*Ant.* 2.9.1 § 204; *J.W.* 5.9.4 § 382) and four hundred thirty years from Abraham’s entry into Canaan until the exodus from Egypt (*Ant.* 2.15.2 § 318). “It seems, therefore, that this was the traditional way in Paul’s day of treating the discrepancy between Gen 15:13 and Ex 12:40 and of understanding the respective time spans.” Paul would simply be relaying a common understanding in his day.⁹³ The four-hundred-thirty-year period may be a conservative understatement of the time between Abraham and Sinai. Paul’s rivals may have recognized that the gap was actually much longer. Over a hundred years probably separated the Abrahamic promises from Israel’s entry into Egypt. The separation of time between Abraham and the Law would be even greater and Paul’s point that much stronger. (CC)

Whereas God was the one who established and ratified the Abrahamic “covenant” (3:17), Paul avoids directly ascribing the Law to God. The apostle does not deny God’s relationship with the Law but limits himself to saying that the Law “came (into being)” or somehow “happened” (γεγονώς, from γίνομαι). The apostle also emphasizes the subsequent character of the “after-four-hundred-thirty-years Law.” The later Law does not nullify the earlier promise to Abraham. As Luther noted:

God acted properly in giving the promise such a long time before the Law, lest it be said that righteousness is given through the Law, not through the promise. Moreover, it was intentional that He preceded the Law with promises; for if He had wanted us to be justified by the Law, He would have given it four hundred and thirty years before the promise or certainly with the promise. (AE 26:300). (CC)

Many Second Temple Jews viewed the Law as *eternal* (e.g., *Wis Sol* 18:4; *4 Ezra* 9:37; *1 En.* 99.2; *Jub.* 3.31; 6.17 [“heavenly tablets”]; *Baruch* 4:1; *2 Bar.* 77.15; *Philo, Mos.* 2.3 § 14). Abraham was thought to have observed the Torah in its as-yet-unwritten form. Paul shatters that point of view by distinguishing the Abrahamic covenant from the later Mosaic dispensation. One obvious objection to Paul’s line of reasoning, of course, is the inclusion of the requirement of circumcision with the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:9–14). The rivals associated Abraham with the Law and circumcision. Whereas Paul may agree in associating circumcision with the later Law of Moses (Lev 12:3), the apostle views the mandate of circumcision as *subsequent* to justifying faith (Rom 4:10–12), since Gen 17:1–14 took place after Gen 15:1–6. Paul is opposing the Jewish tradition of his day that frequently connected Abraham with Mount Sinai. Paul’s divorce between Abraham and Mount Sinai may have taken the rival teachers by surprise. (CC)

430 years. See Ex 12:40–41. The period in Egypt is designated in round numbers as “400 years” in Ge 15:13; Ac 7:6. (CSB)

Gn 15:13 gives a round number of 400 years for Israel’s slavery in Egypt. (TLSB)

does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God – The promise is not invalidated, either in wording or in its character. (TLSB)

Here the Jews could object: “God was not content with giving the promises to Abraham, but four hundred and thirty years afterward He also promulgated the Law. Having spread abroad His promises, as that which could not justify, God added something better, namely, the Law, so that upon its arrival as a more worthy successor not idle men but the doers of the Law would be justified through it. Therefore the Law that followed the promise abrogated it.” The Jews have many evasions of this sort. But Paul refutes this objection clearly and forcefully, saying: “The Law could not abrogate the promises. On the contrary, in fact, the testament that was made and promised to Abraham—‘In your Offspring, etc.’—is the testament of God, ratified before the circumcision of the entire Jewish nation. For the promises that Scripture contained were the letters; to them seals were added later on, namely, circumcision and other ceremonial laws. Therefore the Law that came four hundred and thirty years after the promise did not abolish it; nor would it have taken anything away from the promise if it had come sooner. But now that the Law was given so many centuries after the promise, it does not make it invalid.” (Luther)

But let us permit these two to confront each other; and let us see which is more powerful, that is, whether the promise abolishes the Law or the Law abolishes the promise. If the Law abolishes the promise, then it follows that by our works we make God a liar and make His promise invalid. For if the Law justifies, it liberates from sin and death, and, consequently, so do our works and human powers that keep the Law; then the promise made to Abraham becomes invalid and altogether useless. Then it follows that God is a liar and a babbler. For if one who promises does not want to perform what he has promised but wants to make it invalid, what does this mean but that he is a liar and a babbler? But it is impossible for the Law to make God a liar and for our works to render the promise invalid. Therefore it must be valid and firm—since God does not promise without purpose—even if we were able to observe and fulfill the Law. And even if we were to concede that all men are as holy as the angels are—which is impossible—and that they do not need the promise at all, even then it must be asserted that the promise is altogether sure and firm; for otherwise God would be found to be a deceiver or a liar who either would promise to no purpose or would not be willing to perform what He has promised. Therefore just as the promise is before the Law, so it is above the Law. (Luther)

God acted properly in giving the promise such a long time before the Law, lest it be said that righteousness is given through the Law, not through the promise. Moreover, it was intentional that He preceded the Law with the promises; for if He had wanted us to be justified by the Law, He would have given it four hundred and thirty years before the promise or certainly with the promise. But now He is completely silent about the Law at first; He establishes it finally after four hundred and thirty years. Meanwhile, for that entire time, He speaks about His promises. Therefore the blessing and the gift of righteousness came before the Law, through the promise. And therefore the promise is superior to the Law. Thus the Law does not abrogate the promise. But faith in the promise, by which believers were saved even before Christ was revealed, and which is now being preached through the Gospel to all the nations of the universe, destroys the Law, so that it can no longer increase sin or terrify sinners or reduce to despair those who take hold of the promise by faith. (Luther)

The law which came -- and this is interesting -- 430 years afterward does not annul a covenant previously ratified by God. So as to make the promise null and void. Now, this is where he tells you how he sees the law. The law is a parentheses. The law comes 430 years after the promise given to Abraham. And it is not something that like a will and testament of a human being, when it comes, annuls or adds to the promise. It is simply a parentheses. And he is in Verse 19 going to explain to us what it is, that the law is all about. But here he puts it in its historical context. And it's important to recognize that the law does not annul the promise, the covenant, given to Abraham that came 430 years earlier. (Just – V-27)

3:18 *For if the inheritance is based on the Law, it is no longer based on a promise, but to Abraham God has graciously given [it] through a promise.* In his explanation in 3:18 (“for,” γάρ), Paul seizes on the key word “promise” (ἐπαγγελία) in 3:17. He introduces “the inheritance” (ἡ κληρονομία), a concept also

present in the Abrahamic narratives (see the cognate verb in LXX Gen 15:3–4, 7–8; 21:10; 22:17; 28:4). Abraham’s inheritance figures prominently in the ensuing discussion (Gal 3:29; 4:1, 7, 30; 5:21). As with the Abrahamic covenant, Paul denies any association between the Abrahamic inheritance and the Mosaic Law. The conditional sentence supposes what is not the case in reality: “If the inheritance [comes] from the Law, then it does not come from the promise.” The conditional sentence might also be translated this way: “For if the inheritance is based on the Law, then it is no longer based on the promise.” The meaning is not significantly impacted. (CC)

“No longer” (οὐκέτι) could be temporal but is more likely logical: if the inheritance were based on observance of the Law, then it would no longer be based on the promise “graciously given” (κεχάρισται, literally, “graced”) to Abraham. “God” is placed at the end of the Greek verse for emphasis: “God has graciously given.” That which is “graced” is a strictly undeserved, sheer gift (cf. 1:6, 15; 2:21). If the inheritance is by the Law, then it is not by a gracious promise, and if it is by a gracious promise, then it is not by the Law. The perfect tense of the verb “graced” or “graciously given” (κεχάρισται) may signify the ongoing nature, effect, or benefits for the recipients. Another possible explanation for the perfect tense is that “has graciously given” (κεχάρισται) is the equivalent of “it has been written that he gave” (γέγραπται ὅτι ἐχαρίσατο; BDF § 342 [5]): “God has [in Genesis] made a free gift to Abraham by way of unconditional promise.” (CC)

The Greek article with “inheritance” (ἡ κληρονομία in 3:18) identifies a particular inheritance, namely, the one associated with the “promise” and “covenant” in the prior verse (Gal 3:17; cf. Gen 13:15; 15:7; 17:8; cf. also Rom 4:13–14). The “inheritance” in Gal 3:18 therefore serves as a synonym for God’s gracious promise. Paul may be referring to Christ’s Spirit: the inheritance (of the Spirit) was graciously given through a promise (of the Spirit; 3:14). The Spirit functions in the stead of the land as the Abrahamic “inheritance” (see the commentary on 3:16). “The inheritance” may also include reference to Abraham’s Seed (Gen 15:2–4; 21:10–12; Gal 4:30). Jewish literature extended the promise of the land to the entire world (Sirach 44:21; *Jub.* 22.14; 32.19; 2 *Bar.* 14.13; 51.3; 1 *En.* 5.7; cf. Pss 22:27–28 [MT 22:28–29]; 47:7–9 [MT 47:8–10]; 72:8–11; Zeph 3:9–10; Mt 5:5). Paul agrees that Abraham is the heir of the entire world (Rom 4:13). Others have connected Paul’s term “inheritance” in Gal 3:18 with justification since the language of grace (κεχάρισται, “has graciously given”) parallels the gracious character of justification in 2:21 (χάρις, “grace”; δωρεάν, “in vain”). “Inheritance” in Jewish thought could refer to eternal life or an eschatological reality (*Pss. Sol.* 14:5, 9–10 [spiritualized as eternal life?]; 15:10–11; 17:23; 1 *En.* 40.9 [eternal life]; *Sib. Or. Frag.* 3.47; cf. Mt 19:29; 25:34; Mk 10:17; Lk 18:18; Acts 20:32; Heb 1:14; 1 Pet 1:4; 3:9; Rev 21:7). One “inherits” God’s kingdom (the verb κληρονομέω in Gal 5:21; also 1 Cor 6:9–10; 15:50; and “inheritance” in Eph 5:5). “Inheritance” is therefore capable of a number of interpretations. (CC)

Sadly, the rivals thought that Abraham’s inheritance comes through observance of the Law. They confused God’s gracious gift with what is earned or deserved, at least in part, through obedience. Philo, Paul’s near contemporary, writes on Gen 17:2: “Now covenants [διαθήκαι] are drawn up for the benefit of those who are worthy of the gift, and thus a covenant is a symbol of the grace which God has set between Himself Who proffers it and man who receives” (*Mut.* 6 § 52; Colson, LCL). Even the very language of “promise” in Jewish literature was associated with the Mosaic Law (2 Macc 2:17–18—“God ... has saved all his people, and has returned the inheritance to all, ... as he promised through the law” [NRSV]; *Pss. Sol.* 12:6; *Sib. Or.* 3.768–69; 2 *Bar.* 14.12–13; 57.2). Paul’s comments are therefore understandably pointed in Gal 3:18. He insists that the promise and inheritance are matters of God’s grace quite apart from Moses’ Law. Luther commented:

Natural reason, no matter how blind it is, is still forced to admit that it is one thing to promise and another thing to demand, one thing to grant and another to accept. If a horse could speak, it would be forced to say that it is one thing when a stableboy offers it oats to eat and another thing when

the stableboy mounts it and rides it. Therefore the promise and the Law are as far apart from each other as heaven and earth. (AE 26:303) (CC)

So if the promise (of the Spirit; 3:14) provides all that the Galatians need, what was the point of the Law? (CC)

inheritance. Luther: “The forgiveness of sins, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life, which means that we are the sons and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17)” (AE 26:304). (TL SB)

no longer comes by promise – So also in Rom. 4:14: “If it is the adherents of the Law who are to be the heirs, faith is null, and the promise is void.” Nor can it come out any other way; for the distinction is altogether clear, that the Law is not the promise. Natural reason, no matter how blind it is, is still forced to admit that it is one thing to promise and another thing to demand, one thing to grant and another to accept. If a horse could speak, it would be forced to say that it is one thing when a stable boy offers it oats to eat and another thing when the stable boy mounts it and rides it. Therefore the promise and the Law are as far apart from each other as heaven and earth. For the Law demands: “Do this!” The promise grants: “Accept this!” (Luther)

Therefore Paul concludes as follows: The blessing is given on the basis of the promise; therefore it is not given on the basis of the Law. For the promise says: “In your Offspring they will be blessed.” Therefore he who has the Law does not have enough, for he does not yet have the blessing and so remains under the curse. Hence the Law cannot justify, because the blessing has not been added to it. In addition, if the inheritance were by the Law, God would be found to be a liar, and the promise would become void. Likewise, if the Law could obtain the blessing, why would God promise it, saying, “In your Offspring, etc.”? Why would He not rather say: “Do this, and you will receive the blessing!” or “By keeping the Law you can merit eternal life”? This is an argument from contraries: The inheritance is given on the basis of the promise; therefore it is not on the basis of the Law. (Luther)

God gave it to Abraham by a promise – This is undeniable, that before there was a Law, God by a promise granted Abraham the blessing or inheritance, that is, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life, which means that we are the sons and heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17). For Genesis clearly says (22:18): “In your Offspring shall all the nations be blessed.” There the blessing is granted without regard for the Law or works. For before Moses was born or anyone had thought about the Law, God had already taken the initiative and granted the inheritance. “Then why do you boast that you attain righteousness through the Law, when righteousness, life, and salvation were given to Abraham your father without the Law and before the Law, in fact, before there was anyone who could have kept the Law?” Anyone who is not moved by all this is blind and stubborn. I have already set forth the argument about the promise carefully and at length, and so now I am only touching on it in passing. (Luther)

And here in Verse 18, you can see that he uses now for the first time the language of inheritance. For if the inheritance of Abraham -- and these are the progeny of Abraham. And these are both uncircumcised Gentiles and Jews. In other words, that which creates -- or let's put it this way: The church creating spirit of Christ, that's the inheritance. That if this inheritance comes by the law, then it is no longer by the promise. But God has gifted it to Abraham by means of the promise. Now, here you've got to see that the law is not opposed to the promise in a sense that's what Paul's opponents are doing. They are setting the law and the promise against one another. (Just – V-27)

And Paul is saying very clearly: Hey, listen. The law is great. I'm not against the law. But don't try to make the law the promise or the promise the law. They are two different things. They came at two different times. They are historically conditioned. And the law does not in any way nullify the promise.

Now, the law is not opposed to the promise. And I think it's important to say this. And the reason why the law is not opposed to the promise is because the law is not able to give life. It does not compete with the promise in giving life. He's going to say that. That's important. Secondly, it has a different function from the law. It's to shut up everything under sin's power. This is the argument that he's going to make in the next section. So that's what the law does. You know, the law actually points you to the promise. And then third, and this is related, the law closes every door of access to God except Christ's faith and our faith in Christ. So the law is not opposed to the promise. It just does different things. And as he says: If the inheritance -- in other words, that which creates the church, that which creates children of Abraham and makes them part of his inheritance. If that's not by the promise, then it's not the inheritance. Because God gave this promise to Abraham. Not by means of the law. But by means of grace. And that's why he uses the word gifted. He granted it. He gifted it to them. (Just – V-27)

This is a space in which God is making right what has gone wrong. That is what the promise is about. The law does not make right what has gone wrong. It can't. He's already talked about that. And he's building on that now in terms of his interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant. And so at this point what we see is that Christ is the true heir of the promise of Abraham. And if one is united with Christ in his life, then we receive the same inheritance that was promised to Abraham and is now fulfilled in Christ. (Just – V-27)

Why Then the Law? (3:19–25) (CC)

3:19 τί οὖν ὁ νόμος (“why then the Law?”)—See BDF § 480 (5) on the ellipsis of the verb. In place of the simple reading ὁ νόμος (“the Law”), “the Law of deeds” (ὁ νόμος τῶν πράξεων, \mathfrak{P}^{46} G I^{lat} Ambst) is a secondary expansion identifying the nature of the Law further.

προσετέθη, ἄχρις (“it was added ... until”)—The element of disparagement implicit in the verb “added” probably led to a change to the verb ἐτέθη, “was placed, set up, established,” in D G Irenaeus and Ambrosiaster. The manuscripts supporting the alternative are later, as is the case for the replacement of παραβάσεων, “transgressions,” with, e.g., πράξεων, “deeds”—excluding, of course, the AD 200 manuscript \mathfrak{P}^{46} . “The lack of a verb in P⁴⁶ and the verb of the Western uncials, ‘was established,’ makes interpretation of the law as an insignificant, parenthetical afterthought less likely, if not impossible. Deletion of the verb ‘was added’ also makes this passage more in harmony with 3:15 that states ‘no one annuls even a man’s will, or *adds* to it.’ ” The replacement of “transgressions” with “deeds” in \mathfrak{P}^{46} may mean that the Law checks and restrains *evil* deeds or that the Law encourages *good* deeds. The variant therefore removes any hint of disparagement of the Law. In fact, however, Paul’s argument in 3:19 is based on the qualification that the Law came *after* the promise he cites in 3:15–18.

διαταγείς δι’ ἀγγέλων (“it was arranged through angels”)—The participle is likely of attendant circumstance, “*and* it [the Law] was arranged through angels.” (CC)

ἐν χειρὶ μεσίτου (“by the hand of a mediator”)—“By the hand of” is a Hebraism for “by means of” (Lev 26:46; cf. Acts 11:30). Christ cannot be the “mediator,” as Jerome thought (*Comm. Gal.* 2.3.19–20 [PL 26:366A–367B (441–42); Fathers of the Church 121:147–49]), since he is already identified in the verse as “the Seed” (τὸ σπέρμα, 3:19). The phrase “by the hand of Moses” (ἐν χειρὶ Μωϋσῆ) is common in the Septuagint and would have been easily understood. Second Temple literature refers to Moses as the mediator of the Law (e.g., Philo, *Mos.* 2.31 § 166; *T. Mos.* 1.14; cf. Heb 8:5–6). (CC)

Why then the Law? It was added for the sake of transgressions, until the Seed for whom it had been promised should come, and it was arranged through angels by the hand of a mediator. “Then” (οὖν) indicates that the question is prompted by what precedes. The interrogative (τί) could be pronominal —“*what* then is the Law?”—but Paul does not normally omit the copula, or verb of being, when he is asking “*who/what* is?” (thus 1 Cor 3:5; cf. Rom 3:1). After Paul’s claim that the promise, the Spirit, and

the inheritance are all on the basis of faith (Gal 3:18), the Galatians might wonder why there ever was the Law of Moses. The interrogative is therefore adverbial: “Why then the Law?” (as in, e.g., Rom 3:7; 14:10; 1 Cor 4:7; 10:30; 15:29c; 15:30; Gal 5:11; Col 2:20). Paul is not concerned with what the Law is, but rather with its purpose. (CC)

“It Was Added” (CC)

Paul explains that the Law was “added for the sake of transgressions” and was in effect “until the Seed ... should come.” That Moses’ Law was “added” implies that it was not part of God’s original plan.¹⁰⁸ The Law of Moses was a parenthesis in time. Similarly, Paul explains that his own zeal for the Law had been a parenthesis in his life before he returned to his original divine calling (1:13–16). The temporary nature of the Law’s oppressive role is central to 3:19–25. Paul employs temporal expressions for the Law *five times*, in 3:19; 3:23a; 3:23c; 3:24; and 3:25. Even in 4:1–2, guardians and trustees are only for a time. The temporary reign of the Law is at odds with Jewish affirmations of the Law’s eternal purpose and significance (e.g., Wis Sol 18:4; 1 En. 99.2; Jub. 3.31; Josephus, *Ag. Ap.* 2.38 § 277). (CC)

When Paul says that the Law “was added,” he employs a passive verb and does not directly claim that “God added the Law.” In 3:18, by way of contrast, Paul clearly emphasizes God’s giving Abraham the inheritance. Paul never affirms in Galatians, as he does in Romans, that the Law is “holy and just and good” (Rom 7:12; cf. Rom 7:14, 22). Some scholars have concluded that Paul is denying the divine origin of the Law. To the contrary, he openly affirms the Law as God’s in Romans (Rom 7:22, 25; 8:7), albeit in a less contentious situation. To return to Gal 3:19, Paul explains that Moses’ Law was ordained “through angels.” The angels’ role does not detract from the ultimately divine origin of the Law. Angels are instrumental in the giving of the Law, but they are not its originators. Paul would have used a different preposition (ὕπό, “by,” and not διά, “through”) had the “angels” been the authors of the Law. He is not suggesting in any way that the angelic mediation of the Law is somehow demonic or without divine authorization.¹¹⁴ Paul is quite clear elsewhere when he has demons in mind (1 Cor 10:20–21). God is clearly the active agent behind the gracious “promise” to Abraham in 3:18, and so God should be understood behind 3:19’s passive verb “it had been promised.” That clause, “for whom it had been promised” (ὃ ἐπήγγελται, 3:19), is parallel to another, “and it was arranged through angels” (διαταγείς δι’ ἀγγέλων, 3:19). Both of these clauses are subordinate to the main verb “it was added.” Just as God is the active agent behind the promising, God would be the understood subject who ordains the Law. Furthermore, such passive constructions in the letter to the Galatians typically have God as the subject. (CC)

The point is that Paul’s interests would not be served in the Galatian conflict situation by proclaiming openly that “God added the Law.” Such an admission would surely have furthered the rivals’ Law-observant case: If “God gave the Law,” then presumably it continues to represent his will! If the Law of Moses is God’s will, then the Galatians should observe that Law. Paul leaves the role of God implied and diminished in passive constructions: thus the Law was διαταγείς, “ordained,” “arranged,” or “instituted.” The verb Paul chooses (διαταγείς) is related to the verb “adds a codicil” (ἐπιδιατάσσεται) in 3:15. By his choice of wording, Paul echoes what he just made clear in 3:15–18, namely, that the Law of Moses would be an illicit addition to God’s gracious dealing with Abraham. (CC)

“For the Sake of Transgressions” (CC)

Paul explains that the addition of the Law was “because of” or “for the sake of transgressions” (τῶν παραβάσεων χάριν). The preposition (χάριν) may indicate cause or goal. The prepositional phrase may be translated and understood in at least seven different ways with very different, positive or negative implications. (The fourth and seventh options are the most viable.) (CC)

1. The Law was added “because of” transgressions—a causal approach to the preposition (e.g., Lk 7:47; 1 Jn 3:12). Some have interpreted the Law in Gal 3:23–25 as a disciplinarian. Paul may be saying that the Law functions to *restrain* transgressions. Unfortunately, the apostle does not actually describe the Law as a teacher or disciplinarian in 3:23–25 but rather as an agent of imprisonment. If the Law could successfully restrain sin, then Paul would be conceding the rivals’ case in promoting circumcision and the Law as the answer to sin—as if cutting off a mere piece of flesh would resolve the problem of the Flesh! This approach should be rejected.

2. Perhaps a causal approach could be understood as suggesting that the Law *resolves* or *deals with* transgressions through its sacrificial system. This approach should be rejected as well since Paul never grants any atoning value to the Mosaic sacrificial system in his letters. He reserves saving value for Christ’s work alone. If the sacrificial system had been effective prior to and without Christ, then Christ’s death would have been unnecessary (2:21; 3:21). Abraham was saved on the same basis of faith as those in Christ (3:6)!

3. Perhaps the Law was added “because of the transgressions [*of Israel*].” Paul could be alluding to the golden calf incident in Exodus 32 and the very beginning of the Law’s reign over Israel (thus Gal 3:17). In other words, the Law was intended to assist the Israelites as they served as the “depositories” of “the revelation of mercy through the Messiah.” Paul does not develop such notions in this context. He seems to avoid any role for Israel as the promises avail only to Abraham and to the single Seed, Jesus Christ (3:16–18). This approach should be rejected.

4. Another clue to resolving the enigmatic “because of/for the sake of transgressions” is the link between 3:19’s temporal limitation (“*until* the Seed ... should come”) and 3:23’s “*before* the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the Law, imprisoned *until* this coming faith should be revealed.” The logic of 3:23 seems to follow directly from 3:19. So the Law was *hemming people in* and *in that sense* has ceased. Perhaps the Law was not imprisoning as much as it was *restraining* a certain people (Israel), that is, in the sense of keeping them separate and distinct from the rest of the world. The Law of Moses *no longer divides Jew from gentile* with the coming of the Messiah. This approach to Paul’s reasoning would presage his climactic declaration in 3:28 and is a viable interpretive option.

5. The Law was added “*for the sake of* transgressions”; the preposition expresses goal or purpose. Perhaps Paul is saying that the Law somehow produces or provokes transgression. Perhaps the Law promotes *additional* transgressions that make the awful plight of sin even more obvious. Rom 5:20 might say “the Law slipped in order to increase transgression.” The Law creates a situation in which the only escape is “in Christ.” Humanity would clearly need a Savior (Rom 3:20; 4:15). On the other hand, it is not clear why the Law of Moses would produce transgression until Christ came and then no longer do so. Surely any who would adopt the path of the Law would find sin replicating itself through the Law (Rom 7:7–25). Furthermore, Paul’s prepositional phrase (with χάριν, “because of” or “for the sake of”) more likely expresses a *constructive* purpose for the Law. He needs to explain why the Law was added if it has nothing to do with the Abrahamic inheritance or promises (3:18). Finally, the notion that the Law increases transgression is supposedly more clearly expressed in Rom 5:20; nevertheless, to understand Rom 5:20 as “(the Law) increased transgression” is less likely than “transgression increased.” “Increase” (πλεονάζω) is usually an *intransitive* verb and is clearly intransitive in Rom 5:20b, “where sin increased.” The notion that the Law was added in order to *increase* transgression is a strange notion. Did God command in the Law “thou shalt not kill” in order to *increase* murder? The fifth option is unlikely.

6. The Law was added “*for the sake of* transgressions” in the sense of *identifying* transgressions. Perhaps the Law (as Scripture) enclosed all people “under sin” in Gal 3:22 by identifying sin. In other words, the Law renders sin into clear, obvious transgression.¹³⁴ Rom 4:15: “For the Law brings wrath. But where there is no Law, neither is there transgression [παράβασις].” However, Paul says that the Law was added “until” the Seed, Christ, came (Gal 3:19). Paul is surely not saying that the Law identified transgression as such until Christ came and now no longer does so.

7. The notion of goal or purpose may convey that the Law “converts” sin into transgressions. Paul says in Rom 4:15 that transgression (παράβασις) does not exist where there is no Law (see also Rom

5:13; 7:7–8, 13). The Law causes sin to be reckoned as something more, as transgression of God’s revealed will. However, Adam’s sin in the garden was a “transgression” (παράβασις) long before Mount Sinai (Rom 5:14; cf. 1 Tim 2:14). His violation of the command God gave him in the garden (not to eat the fruit) is analogous to violation of the commands of Moses’ Law (cf. Rom 7:7–12). In Romans Paul offers clearer statements on the nature and meaning of “transgression,” and perhaps those statements may illumine Gal 3:19. Paul does not spell out the logic of Rom 4:15 and Rom 5:20 in Galatians. Caution should be exercised before reading Romans *into* Galatians. This seventh option, nevertheless, is viable. As sin is rendered into transgression, the dire situation of humanity becomes clearer. Although the Law is “until” Christ (Gal 3:19), one should not conclude that after Christ’s historic work the Law would cease to function in rendering sin into transgression. Only for those who have been redeemed and delivered from the present evil age (1:4) and who are “in Christ” (1:22; 3:26; 5:6) and the “new creation” (6:15) does that converting function of the Law come to an end. The Law exposes and worsens the crisis of sin until the Seed arrives and ushers in a new era (cf. 3:10: the curse of disobedience). This seventh option, like the fourth, therefore fits Paul’s line of reasoning. The ensuing verses may offer further clues as to which option is to be preferred. (CC)

“Until the Seed for Whom It Had Been Promised Should Come”

The termination point of the Mosaic Law is the coming of the Seed (οὗ ἔλθῃ τὸ σπέρμα) “to whom” or “for whom it had been promised” (ὃ ἐπήγγελται). The perfect tense of “it had been promised” refers to a past action with present results. The Law’s era is over. Such a concept would have been difficult for many Jews to accept. Nevertheless, the crucial turning of the ages took place with the coming of Christ, the Seed. Christ’s coming represents the invasion of this world by future realities as the “new creation” (1:3; 6:15) irrupts into the present. Paul employs temporal expressions to contrast the “former” era of the Law with the “now” in Christ. (CC)

“It Was Arranged through Angels by the Hand of a Mediator”

Throughout Jewish literature, angels were instrumental in the giving of the Law (LXX Deut 33:2: “The Lord from Sinai comes ... with myriads ... at his right, angels [ἄγγελοι]”; Ps 68:17 [MT 68:18; LXX 67:18]; Acts 7:38, 53; Heb 2:2; *Jub.* 1.27–2.1 (angel of the presence); 50.6, 13; Philo, *Somn.* 1.22 §§ 140–44; Josephus, *Ant.* 15.5.3 § 136: “we have learned the noblest of our doctrines and the holiest of our laws from the messengers [angels] sent by God” (Marcus, LCL); *L.A.E.* preface (archangel Michael). The rivals may even have cited the angels’ involvement as proof of their high estimation of the Law.¹⁴³ Paul does not indicate that he is departing from the usual, positive estimation of the angels’ involvement. He does not demonize the angels. Likewise, Moses’ involvement as the “mediator” should not necessarily be construed negatively. The Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Jewish literature regularly refer to Moses’ mediation of the Law.¹⁴⁵ “By the hand of a mediator” alludes to the oft-used phrase for the giving of the Law “by the hand of Moses” (בְּיַד־מֹשֶׁה, e.g., Lev 26:46; Num 15:23; 36:13; Philo, *Somn.* 1.22 § 143; cf. *T. Mos.* 1.14; LXX Ex 34:29: ἐπὶ τῶν χειρῶν Μωϋσῆ). (CC)

why then the law – When we teach that a man is justified without the Law and works, this question necessarily follows: “If the Law does not justify, why, then, was it given?” Again: “Why does God prod and burden us with the Law if it does not give life? Why is it necessary for us to be strained and vexed so hard by it if these others, who have worked only one hour, are made equal to us, who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat (Matt. 20:12)?” For as soon as the grace proclaimed by the Gospel comes, this great murmuring arises, without which the Gospel cannot be proclaimed. The Jews had the opinion that if they observed the Law, they would be justified. Therefore when they heard the Gospel teach that Christ came into the world to save not the righteous but sinners, and that these latter will go into the kingdom of God before them, they became extremely indignant. They complained that for

so many centuries they had borne the yoke of the Law with great trouble and labor and had been miserably vexed and oppressed by the tyranny of the Law without any results, in fact, at the greatest inconvenience to themselves; on the other hand, the idolatrous Gentiles had obtained grace without any labor or trouble. (Luther)

Therefore this is a difficult question. Reason is brought short by it and cannot answer it but is offended by it in the highest degree. Because reason does not know anything except the Law, it necessarily deals with this and supposes that righteousness is attained through it. Accordingly, when it hears this statement of Paul's, novel and unheard-of in the world, that the Law was given on account of transgressions, it judges as follows: "Paul is abolishing the Law, for he is saying that we are not justified through it. Yes, he is a blasphemer against the God who gave the Law; for he says that it was given on account of transgressions. So let us live as the Gentiles do, who do not have the Law! Let us sin and abide in sin, so that grace may abound. 'Let us do evil that good may come' (Rom. 3:8)." This is what happened to the apostle Paul. (Luther)

was added. From the time of Abraham, the promise covenanted to him (Ge 12:2–3, 7; 15:18–20; 17:4–8) had stood at the center of God's relationship with his people. After the exodus the law contained in the Sinaitic covenant (Ex 19–24) became an additional element in that relationship—what Jeremiah by implication called the "old covenant" when he brought God's promise of a "new covenant" (Jer 31:31–34). (CSB)

Opposite the Promise/Gospel, the Law discloses sin for what it really is, a violation of God's revealed will. (TLSB)

These are distinct matters; therefore their use is distinct also. Hence the uses of these things must not be confused. "A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman's garment" (Deut. 22:5). Let the uses of the things remain distinct; otherwise sheer confusion results. The male was not created for spinning; the woman was not created for warfare. Let the proper station and task be attributed to each person: let the preacher and bishop teach; let the prince, etc., rule; let the people obey the magistrate. In this way let every creature serve in its own order and place. Let the sun shine by day, and the moon and stars by night. Let the sea produce fish, the earth produce plants, and the forests produce animals and wood. (Luther)

In the same way let not the Law usurp for itself an alien function and use, that of justification; but let it leave this solely to grace, to the promise, and to faith. Let the monks fast, pray, and dress differently from the rest of the Christian people. Let them do this, that is, and even more to tame the flesh and put it to death. But let them not attribute to these disciplines the function of justifying in the sight of God, for this is an alien function that does not belong to them. What, then, is the function of the Law? Transgression. Really a lovely function! "The Law," he says, "was added because of transgressions"; that is, the Law was added beyond and after the promises until the offspring would come. Thus in Rom. 5:20: "The Law came in," that is, after the promises of grace and until Christ, who would fulfill the promises. (Luther)

Here one must know that there is a double use of the Law. One is the civic use. God has ordained civic laws, indeed all laws, to restrain transgressions. Therefore every law was given to hinder sins. Does this mean that when the Law restrains sins, it justifies? Not at all. When I refrain from killing or from committing adultery or from stealing, or when I abstain from other sins, I do not do this voluntarily or from the love of virtue but because I am afraid of the sword and of the executioner. This prevents me, as the ropes or the chains prevent a lion or a bear from ravaging something that comes along. Therefore restraint from sins is not righteousness but rather an indication of unrighteousness. Therefore just as a rope holds a furious and untamed beast and keeps it from attacking whatever it meets, so the Law constrains an insane and furious man lest he commit further sins. This restraint makes it abundantly clear

that those who have need of it—as does everyone who is outside Christ—are not righteous but unrighteous and insane, whom it is necessary to tame with the rope and with prison to keep them from sinning. Therefore the Law does not justify. (Luther)

The other use of the Law is the theological or spiritual one, which serves to increase transgressions. This is the primary purpose of the Law of Moses, that through it sin might grow and be multiplied, especially in the conscience. Paul discusses this magnificently in Rom. 7. Therefore the true function and the chief and proper use of the Law is to reveal to man his sin, blindness, misery, wickedness, ignorance, hate and contempt of God, death, hell, judgment, and the well-deserved wrath of God. Yet this use of the Law is completely unknown to the hypocrites, the sophists in the universities, and to all men who go along in the presumption of the righteousness of the Law or of their own righteousness. To curb and crush this monster and raging beast, that is, the presumption of religion, God is obliged, on Mt. Sinai, to give a new Law with such pomp and with such an awesome spectacle that the entire people is crushed with fear. For since the reason becomes haughty with this human presumption of righteousness and imagines that on account of this it is pleasing to God, therefore God has to send some Hercules, namely, the Law, to attack, subdue, and destroy this monster with full force. Therefore the Law is intent only on this beast, not on any other. (Luther)

That is, so that transgressions might be increased, recognized, and made more visible. And in fact this is what happens. For when through the Law a man's sin, death, the wrath and judgment of God, and hell are revealed to him, it is impossible for him not to become impatient, murmur, and hate God and His will. He cannot endure the judgment of God and his own death and damnation, and yet he cannot flee. Then he inevitably falls into hate and blasphemy against God. When there was no trouble, he was a big saint; he worshiped and praised God, genuflected, and gave thanks, as that Pharisee did in Luke (18:11). But now that sin and death have been revealed, he would want God not to exist. In this way the Law produces extreme hate toward God. This means that through the Law sin is not only disclosed and recognized, but that through this disclosure sin is increased, inflated, inflamed, and magnified. This is what Paul is saying in Rom. 7:13: "It was sin, working death in me through what is good, in order that sin might be shown to be sin, and through the commandment might become sinful beyond measure." There he discusses this effect of the Law at some length. (Luther)

And that's what he asks in Verse 19. Why then the law? And here you have perhaps one of the most, oh, convoluted interpretations of Paul that you will see. And it's all based on one simple little word. And what Paul is doing here is telling us about the genesis of the law. Why the law comes. And he says very simply: It was added -- and here is how you translate this: It was added either on account of transgressions or in order to revoke transgressions or whatever. Let me just look at the ESV here. It says: It was added because of transgressions. A very simple translation. Now, that word is a very difficult word. And I want to suggest to you that there are four ways of understanding Verse 19 here and this particular statement. And I want to tell you what the various interpretations have been. And then I want to highlight the one that I think it is. (Just – V-29)

First of all, this has been translated that the law was added in order to produce or provoke transgressions. In other words, the transgressions were there. But the law actually produced them by showing people their sin. Now, to a certain extent we can go with that. But I think that's probably not the best way to understand it. A second way of understanding it is this: That the law was added to identify humanity's sinfulness as conscious transgression. Now, those of us that learned the three uses of law, we would say that this is where the law is a mirror. That when the law comes, we recognize our transgressions. It doesn't produce them. But it shows us our sin. And I think that's very, very true. Also, I think the law could be said was added to restrain transgressions. To pose a restraint to human sin. Again, that's one of the three uses of law. The first use as a curb to keep people from sinning. So here is the law. And whoa. You look at the law and say: If that's what the law means, then I'm not going to do that so I'm not going

to continue to sin. It's going to provide a restraint for me from sinning. The fourth interpretation is to provide a remedy for transgressions. Now, this is very wrong. This is the opponents' understanding of the law. That yeah, the promise was there. The promise was great. But it was not enough. So God had to produce the law as a remedy for transgressions. And now the law was going to be a means of salvation. (Just – V-29)

Now, there you can see that what Paul's opponents are doing with promise and law is exactly the same thing that they are doing now with the Gospel and the law. Promise and Gospel is the same. And the law is something that's added later on, 430 years later, to restrain people, to show them their sins. And the fifth one, let me give you that one now. Because of the transgressions of Israel, the golden calf. That's the historical context. That's why it was given. It wasn't given to provoke transgressions. To kind of produce them. And it wasn't given as a remedy as transgressions. It was given as we would say in its first and second uses to provide for us a restraint of sin and to show us our sin. That's why the law was added. And it was added until a certain point. Look at Verse 19 again. Until which time the seed came to whom it was promised. So there Paul is going back and say: Yeah, the law was a parentheses: Until the Christ came. And he tells us how the law was delivered. (Just – V-29)

Now, if you might remember in the first chapter: Even an angel from heaven should preach to you a Gospel contrary to which you received, let him be accursed. Well, here's that reference to angel. And as I said, this is not found in Exodus. It's not found in the Old Testament. This is an intertestamental tradition. But it's one that everybody accepted. And that is that it was put into place, that is the law, the law was established, so to speak, instituted by angels in the hand of a mediator. And that's Moses. So it's the angels who delivered the law to Moses. And instituted it. Now, that shows you. And Paul makes reference to this. And this is why for law -- for Paul the law is good. The law comes from God. It comes from angels. And it's given to Moses, the mediator. But what the teachers are saying, the opponents of Paul are saying is that because it was delivered by angels to Moses, now we as messengers of God, as angels, we are now showing that that same law given to Moses is being given to you, Galatians, as a means of salvation. (Just – V-29)

the promise. (CSB)

In a spiritual sense: The Law must not rule in the conscience any longer than the predetermined time of that Blessed Offspring. Therefore when the Law has disclosed my iniquities to me, has terrified me, and has revealed to me the wrath and judgment of God, so that I begin to blanch and to despair, then the Law has reached the prescribed manner, time, and purpose when it must stop exercising its tyranny, because then it has discharged its function by adequately disclosing the wrath of God and creating terror. Here one must say: "Stop, Law! You have caused enough terror and sorrow. Thou dost overwhelm me with all Thy waves; Thy dread assaults destroy me (Ps. 88:7, 16). O Lord, do not rebuke Thy servant in Thy anger, nor chasten me in Thy wrath (Ps. 6:l)." When these terrors and complaints come, it is the time and the hour of the Blessed Offspring. Then let the Law withdraw; for it was indeed added for the sake of disclosing and increasing transgressions, but only until the point when the Offspring would come. Once He is present, let the Law stop disclosing transgressions and terrifying. Let it surrender its realm to another, that is, to the Blessed Offspring, Christ; He has gracious lips, with which He does not accuse and terrify but speaks better things than the Law, namely, grace, peace, forgiveness of sins, and victory over sin and death. (Luther)

through angels. See Dt 33:2; Ac 7:38, 53; Heb 2:2. (CSB)

Though unidentified, the intermediary (Gk *mesites*), according to most commentators, is probably Moses, who was assisted by angels (cf Dt 33:2; Ps 68:17). God spoke directly to Abraham, but He administered the Law through intermediaries—evidence that the Law is inferior to the Promise/Gospel. (TLSB)

This is a slight digression, which Paul does not complete but only touches in passing. Then he goes on. Soon he returns to the topic he had introduced, namely (3:21): “Is the Law, then, against the promises of God?” Now this was the occasion for his digression: There occurred to him a difference between the Law and the Gospel, namely, that the Law which was added to the promises differs from the Gospel not only as to time but also as to author or efficient cause. “For the Law was given through angels (Heb. 2:2); but the Gospel through the Lord Himself.” Therefore the message of the Gospel excels the Law, because the Law is the voice of servants, but the Gospel is the voice of the Lord. To reduce the importance of the Law, therefore, and to amplify that of the Gospel, he says that the Law was the doctrine for an extremely short time (since it lasted only until the fulfillment of the promise, that is, until the Blessed Offspring that fulfilled the promise); but the Gospel was forever. Therefore the Law is much inferior to the Gospel, because it was ordained through servants, through the angels, while the Gospel was ordained through the Lord Himself. Thus Heb. 1:2 says: “In these last days God has spoken to us by a Son [who is that Blessed Offspring], whom He appointed the Heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.” But the Lord speaks much differently from the servants. (Luther)

In addition, the message of the Law was not only delivered through servants, the angels, but through another servant, who was inferior to the angels, that is, through a man; as he says here, “through the hand of an intermediary,” that is, of Moses. Now Christ is not a servant; He is the Lord Himself. He is not the Mediator between God and man according to the Law, as Moses was; but He is the Mediator of a better covenant. As I have said, Paul only touches on this in passing and does not explain it. The Law was delivered through the angels as servants, because on Mt. Sinai Moses and the people heard the speaking God, that is, angels speaking in the person of God. Hence Stephen says in Acts 7:53: “You received the Law as delivered by angels,” that is, through angels who delivered it and handed it down, “and you did not keep it.” The text of Ex. 3:2 clearly states that an angel appeared to Moses in a flame of fire and spoke with him from the midst of the bush. The Latin text is corrupt here; for it does not have the word “angel,” but “Lord.” Through an ignorance of the Hebrew language this passage provoked a debate over whether the Lord Himself or an angel spoke to Moses. (Luther)

Therefore there are two mediators here; one is Moses, and the other is Christ. And here Paul touches on the history in Exodus about the giving of the Law; it says that Moses led the people out of their tents to the meeting with God and gathered them at the base of Mt. Sinai. Here there was a sad and horrible sight: the whole mountain was on fire. When the people saw this, they began to tremble; for they believed that in this violent storm they would soon perish. Because they could not endure the Law as it was being pronounced from Mt. Sinai in all its terror—for the terrifying sound of the Law would have killed the people—they said to Moses (Ex. 20:19): “You step close and hear what the Lord is saying, and then you speak to us.” And he says: “I have been the trustee and mediator between God and you.” From this it is abundantly clear that Moses was appointed as the mediator between the people and the speaking of the Law. (Luther)

3:20 ἐνὸς οὐκ ἔστιν (“is not of one”)—A negated verb attracts the negative to itself, hence the position of οὐκ immediately before ἔστιν (BDF § 433 [1]). The statement is elliptical: “Now the mediator is not ‘of one’ [person or party?], but God is one.” (CC)

Now the mediator is not of one, but God is one. Since the Law is at issue (3:19), the mediator of 3:20 most likely remains Moses and the article (“the”) is anaphoric. Interpreters have long recognized the emphasis on oneness in this verse and the surrounding context.¹⁴⁸ Paul writes of the one Seed (3:15–19). In 3:20 he emphasizes the one God even as believers are one in Christ (3:28). The oneness of God is the content of the *Shema* (Deut 6:4), the central tenet of the Jewish faith. The Law, on the other hand, fosters multiplicity by dividing humanity into Jew and non-Jew, the very divisions dissolved by oneness in Christ (Gal 3:28). When Paul writes that the mediator is not “of one, but God is one,” the apostle specifies God

as “one.” The phrase “of one” in the first half of the verse probably does not refer to God. If God were also the referent of the “of one,” then different wording would have better conveyed that God is the referent. (CC)

Since “of one” in the first half of 3:20 does not likely refer to God, some interpreters have identified the first “one” (ἐνός) in 3:20 with the “one” Seed in 3:16, namely, Christ. The mediator Moses does not mediate the one, Christ. However, “of one” (ἐνός) in 3:20 does not have an article with it, “of *the* one,” in reference to the “one” previously mentioned in 3:16. Other interpreters have therefore questioned whether Paul is referring back to the “one” Seed of 3:16. Taking the word “mediator” (μεσίτης) as a predicate nominative, rather than as the subject of the sentence (as “mediator” is usually understood), and taking ὁ δέ, meaning “and/n^{ow} he,” as the full subject of the verb “is” (ἔστιν), would resolve the difficulty: “Now he [Moses, the ‘mediator’ of 3:19] is not mediator of [the] one.” In this particular grammatical construction, the first “one” in 3:20 (“of one”) would not have a Greek article (“the” is supplied in English) and could be referring to the “one” Seed of 3:16. (CC)

If Paul is referring by “of one” (ἐνός) to the Seed of 3:16, at least two interpretive options have been espoused. In the first, the apostle could be saying that the Law was ordained through angels by the hand of a mediator, Moses, but the mediator is not “of” or belonging to the Seed, Christ. Paul may be saying that Moses and his people were not among those “in Christ.” Moses was the founder of a *different* people. Nevertheless, since God is one, God must be God both of those “in” Moses and those “in Christ.” This approach is not likely because Paul does not identify Moses as the founder of a people. He is a *mediator*. The real founder or forefather of Moses’ people is Abraham. Rather than dissociating Abraham from those of Christ, Paul views Abraham’s believing (Gen 15:6, quoted in Gal 3:6) as a precursor of Christian faith. The Law may have been an interruption in God’s saving dealings (Gal 3:15–19), but the apostle does not suggest the harsh logic that Moses was not “in Christ.” This first approach may be modified into a more viable form: perhaps Paul, in saying that Moses was not the mediator of the one Seed, is making the point that Moses did not mediate *Abraham’s* Seed and therefore the Abrahamic promises. The Abrahamic promise was to the one Seed, Christ. Moses mediated the Law rather than the promises. Even in this modification of the first approach, it is not clear why Paul would add that “God is one” in 3:20b. (CC)

N. T. Wright has proposed a novel, second approach in which “of one” (ἐνός) in 3:20 refers to the “one” Seed of 3:16. He also offered a solution to how the monotheistic affirmation in the second half of 3:20 may function in Paul’s logic. He translated 3:20 as “a mediator is not ‘of one [*family*],’ but God is One.” In other words, the Law mediated by Moses was intended for and limited to Israel, only a *portion* of humanity, and not the whole “one family” of all humanity. Wright read Gal 3:20 as parallel to Rom 3:29–31, where the one God is the God of both Jew and gentile. Monotheism would only be consistent, for Paul, with a single united human family. Moses did not mediate that one, united human family since his Law divided humanity by setting the Jews apart (e.g., Num 23:9). Whereas the rival teachers at Galatia would have claimed from the *Shema*¹ that the nations must abandon their idols to worship in a Law-observant manner the God of Israel (see, e.g., *Let. Aris.* 139–42), Paul would see Christ as the *real* means of bringing people together under the one God. Several problems beset Wright’s creative proposal. First, Rom 3:29–31 is far clearer than Gal 3:20 in problematizing the division of the one family of humanity into Jew and gentile. Such a division (outside of Christ) is clearer in Gal 3:28 than in 3:20. Second, Paul is stressing that the Seed is one in a *singular* sense rather than in the collective sense of Israel. The rivals, for their part, had been stressing participation with the Jewish people in the Abrahamic “seed.” After Paul’s firm stress on the singular Seed in 3:16, a collective plural would be unexpected in 3:20. In fact, it is the restriction of the Seed to one individual, Christ, that prepares for the introduction of a new collective people “in Christ” in 3:28–29. Wright is reading 3:20 in view of the later 3:28–29 rather than seeing 3:20’s stress on oneness as *preparation* for 3:28–29. Wright has to *reverse* the logic of the text. Paul would not have omitted “family,” “people,” or “nation” had he intended “of one *people*.” He would

have made that sort of logic more explicit had that been his intention. Wright's logic is therefore "rather tortuous." The Seed is the single person, Jesus Christ, and not a collective entity. The Seed is certainly not the collective people of Israel as would be the rivals' perspective. (CC)

Some have contended that Paul is envisioning in 3:20 a plurality of individuals involved, that is, a mediation of two groups. In other words, the mediator would be going between the angels on the one hand and the Israelites on the other. This possibility should be dismissed. Paul does not identify the angels as the originators of the Law. The Law came *through* angels (3:19). Moses acted at Mount Sinai on behalf of God (Exodus 32–34), a fact which Paul does not deny (cf. the glory on Moses' face in 2 Corinthians 3). (CC)

Moses' legitimate role as the Law's mediator must be considered in connection with the Second Temple Jewish perspective that mediation itself is an inferior arrangement. In *QG* 1.55 Philo points out that God did not use an intermediary (μεσίτη) to encourage giving others a share of incorruptibility. The Jews prioritized God's direct dealings over mediation. In Is 63:9 God acted directly to save apart from an ambassador, messenger, or intermediary. The Dead Sea community anticipated a day when a "mediator" would no longer be necessary (1QH XIV [= VI].13–14). Josephus (*Ant.* 3.5.4 § 89) notes how God initiated the Law by speaking directly apart from a feeble, human tongue (Moses'). The people, awed by the sound of God's voice, begged Moses to act as a mediator (Ex 20:19; Deut 5:22–27; 18:16). The golden calf incident caused the Israelites to lose the right to hear God for themselves. Moses' mediation between God and the people became necessary because of the people's sin. In commenting on Ex 20:19, Philo writes (*Her.* 5 § 19; cf. *Post.* 43 § 143; *Somn.* 1.22 § 143): "Now wise men take God for their guide and teacher, but the less perfect take the wise man; and therefore the Children of Israel say [to Moses] 'Talk thou to us, and let not God talk to us lest we die' (Ex. 20:19)" (Colson, LCL). Heb 12:18–19 reflects this tradition: "For you have not come to what can be touched and a burning fire and darkness and gloom and a windstorm and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made those listening to them ask that not another word be spoken to them." Similarly, Paul contrasts the ministry of Moses with its veil and the ministry of Christ with unveiled faces (2 Cor 3:12–18). Philo calls Moses the "mediator and reconciler" (*Mos.* 2.31 § 166 [Colson, LCL]). Paul has Moses in mind in Gal 3:19–20 precisely in his mediatorial role. (CC)

Paul may view mediation *itself* as entailing a plurality of parties, whereas God is one who acts unilaterally. A mediated transaction would be inferior to God's direct dealings. Such mediation does not reflect negatively on the Law but rather is a commentary on the Israelites' frailty and sin. The plurality entailed in mediation is at odds with the nature of the one God.¹⁷⁰ Gal 3:20b may be alluding to the *Shema*^c of Deut 6:4. "Shema" (the imperative שׁמַע) means "hear" or "listen": "Hear, O Israel: ... the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). The Israelites no longer heard the one God themselves. The one God dealt directly with Abraham but indirectly with the Israelites through Moses. Immediacy and intimacy appear to be at the forefront of Paul's thinking.¹⁷² Perhaps one might speak of "the 'immediatorship' of Christ." In Christ, the one God is acting directly for his people. (CC)

The Mosaic covenant was a formal arrangement of mutual commitments between God and Israel, with Moses as the mediator. But since the promise God covenanted with Abraham involved commitment only from God's side (and God is one; see note on Dt 6:4), no mediator was involved. (CSB)

The doctrine that God is one (Dt 6:4; 1Co 8:6)—and therefore needed no angelic mediator to convey the Promise/Gospel—reaffirms the superiority of the Promise/Gospel over the Law as well as the unity of the Father and the Son, who served as mediator. (TLSB)

Now, this is very important to make this distinction. And Paul then goes to Verse 20 here to try to help them to see that this is a difference of understanding of the law. This is one of the hardest verses to

interpret in Galatians. In fact, one commentator said that there are 100 different interpretations for Verse 20. I don't think it's that hard. But he says: The mediator is not one. Okay. The mediator is not one. Namely, Moses is not one. He is a mediator. But God is one. (Just – V-29)

And I think what he's saying here, Paul is, is that when you have a mediator like Moses, and angels who are also in a sense serving as mediators, that this is not expressing the oneness of God. That this is something that God must do on account of transgressions. Because the golden calf and the children of Israel needed a restraint to sin and something to show them their sin. God is one. His promise is one. And when he speaks directly to Abraham about the promise, he doesn't use angels. He doesn't use a mediator. He doesn't have somebody else. He goes directly to Abraham. And that's because Abraham and his seed, Christ, is one. And I think you can see here that the promise is singular. The laws are many. (Just – V-29)

Paul is beginning now to compare the two intermediaries; and he is speaking generally, since the term “intermediary” is a general one. “An intermediary implies more than one.” Thus there is no intermediary between God and God; but this term necessarily includes two, one of whom needs intercession and the other not. Therefore an intermediary implies not one but two, and two who disagree with each other. According to this general definition, Moses is an intermediary, because he mediates between the Law and the people, who cannot endure the theological use of the Law. Therefore a new face has to be put on the Law, and its voice has to be changed; that is, the theological message of the Law, or the living Law in experience, has to put on a mask and become tolerable and audible through the human voice of Moses. (Luther)

Now when the Law has been masked this way, it no longer speaks in its majesty but through the mouth of Moses. Nor does it carry out its function this way any longer; that is, it does not pound terror into consciences. And so men simply do not understand it now but are made smug, sleepy, and presumptuous hypocrites through it. And yet one or the other has to happen: Either the Law must be separated from its proper use by a veil; but then, as I have said, it creates hypocrites; or it must appear in its proper use without the veil, and then it kills, because the human heart cannot endure the Law in its true use without the veil. If you look at the purpose of the Law without a veil, therefore, you must either take hold of the Blessed Offspring—that is, you must look beyond the purpose of the Law at Christ, who is the fulfillment of the Law and who says: “The Law has frightened you enough. Take heart, My son; your sins are forgiven” (Matt. 9:2)—or you must have Moses with his veil as your intermediary. (Luther)

This is why Paul says as a general principle: “An intermediary implies more than one.” It was impossible for Moses to be the intermediary only of God, because God does not need an intermediary. Nor is he the intermediary only of the people. But between God and the people, who are not in harmony with God, he acts as the mediator. For it is the function of an intermediary to reconcile the offended party with the offending party. Nevertheless, as I have said, Moses is the sort of intermediary who merely changes the sound of the Law and makes it tolerable to hear, not one who provides the strength to keep the Law. In other words, he is an intermediary of the veil, and therefore he does not grant the power of the Law except in the veil. Therefore it is necessary for his disciples to remain hypocrites. (Luther)

But what do you suppose would have happened if the Law had been given without Moses, either before or after Moses, and there had been no intermediary, but the people had been unable either to flee or to have an intermediary? Either the people would have been crushed with extreme terror and would have expired immediately; or, if they were to be saved, another intermediary would have had to come to intercede between the Law and the people in such a way that the Law would have remained unimpaired in its force, but the people would have come into harmony with the Law. Moses comes into the breach and becomes the intermediary; he makes the mask and puts on the veil, but he cannot remove the terror of the conscience before the Law. Therefore when Moses and his veil have been put away and a man in the hour

of death or in a struggle of conscience feels the wrath and judgment of God over the sin that the Law discloses and increases, then, if he is not to despair, there must come another Mediator who will say: “You shall survive, sinner; that is, you will not die, even though the Law and its wrath remain.” (Luther)

That Mediator is Jesus Christ. He does not change the sound of the Law, as Moses did; nor does He cover it with a veil or lead me away from a view of the Law. But He sets Himself against the wrath of the Law and abolishes it; in His own body and by Himself He satisfies the Law. Afterwards He says to me through the Gospel: “Of course, the Law is horrible and wrathful. Do not be afraid, however, or run away; but stand fast. I take your place and make satisfaction to the Law for you.” He is a far different Mediator from Moses, who intercedes between a wrathful God and the sinner. Here the intercession of Moses is of no use, for now he has disappeared and has discharged his function with his veil. Here there is a confrontation between a desperate sinner or a dying man and an offended and wrathful God. Therefore another Mediator than Moses must come to make satisfaction to the Law, take away its wrath, and reconcile me, a damned sinner who has been sentenced to eternal death, to the wrathful God. (Luther)

3:21 τοῦ θεοῦ—“Of God” is omitted in \mathfrak{P}^{46} and B (and it^d Ambrosiaster Marius Victorinus). Was “of God” original and then accidentally omitted in transmission? Or was it subsequently added, perhaps under the influence of Rom 4:20 or 2 Cor 1:20? “Of God” is included in κ A C D Textus Receptus. The external witnesses for inclusion are slightly stronger.

εἰ γὰρ ἐδόθη νόμος ὁ δυνάμενος ζωοποιῆσαι, ὄντως ἐκ νόμου ἂν ἦν ἡ δικαιοσύνη—In this context, the conditional sentence with indicative verbs (ἐδόθη ... ἦν) expresses unreality: “For if the Law had been given that is able to make alive, righteousness would indeed have been on the basis of the Law.” “We may find a condition of past unreality in the apodosis as well as in the protasis. For ἦν with ἂν may be either present or past unreality, the imperfect of ‘to be’ doing duty for the aorist of this verb (R. 1015). Only the context decides. Here past unreality is more in place than present: ‘would have been’ and not ‘would be.’ ” “Unreal” periods such as this one are relatively scarce in Paul (BDF § 360). The apostle more typically expresses unreal conditions *without* the unreal form with ἂν.

In place of ἐκ νόμου (“on the basis of the Law”), \mathfrak{P}^{46} has the variant ἐν νόμῳ (“in/by the Law”), an understandable change since 3:11 has ἐν νόμῳ (as does 5:4, whereas 3:18 has ἐκ νόμου). The external evidence for the variant is weak. (CC)

Is the Law, then, against the promises of God? By no means! For if the Law had been given that is able to make alive, righteousness would indeed have been on the basis of the Law. The expected answer to Paul’s question would surely be “yes”! Gal 3:15–18 is clear that any addition to the Abrahamic promises—even the Law of Moses—would be an illegal codicil. Paul’s answer, surprisingly, is “by no means!” The apostle employs this expression three times in Galatians (2:17; 3:21; 6:14) and nine times in Romans (e.g., Rom 3:31; 6:1–2) in response to charges, whether actual or rhetorical. The Law and the promises are not, in fact, opposed to each other. Gal 3:21 is offering an important clarification (γάρ, “for”) lest the hearer draw the wrong conclusion. (CC)

Paul explains his surprising response with a conditional sentence. The condition poses whether a Law had been given which could make alive. The Israelites heartily affirmed the life-giving power of the Law (e.g., Lev 18:5; Deut 6:24; 30:15–20; 32:47; Ps 119:93; Prov 3:1–2; 6:23), as did their successors: Sirach 17:11 (“the Law of life”); 45:5; Baruch 3:9; 4:1; m. *’Aboth* 2.7–8: “The more study of the Law the more life.... If [a man] has gained for himself the words of the Law he has gained for himself life in the world to come” (trans. H. Danby); *4 Ezra* 7:17, 21; 14:30; *Pss. Sol.* 14:2. Paul thinks otherwise and interprets the OT support differently. Although “had been given” (Gal 3:21) is yet another instance of the divine passive construction that Paul employs throughout the letter, the apostle maintains his pattern from 3:19 in refusing to be forthright that God gave the Law. He rhetorically distances the Law from its divine origin. The promises, on the other hand, are a different matter. They are “of God” (3:21). (CC)

Paul takes as a given that righteousness does not come from the Law. In 2:16 Paul interprets a shared Jewish-Christian affirmation which says that the works of the Law do not justify. Paul's rivals, on the other hand, assumed that with faith in Christ the Law *could* justify. Here in 3:21 Paul is no longer contending that righteousness does not come by means of the Law (see 2:21 for that contention). Paul's point here is that since the Law does not justify, it is equally incapable of bringing life. In this particular instance, the unreal conditional form expresses genuine unreality. Making alive is God's work (2 Ki 5:7; Neh 9:6; Jos. Asen. 8.3; 12.1; 20.7; Let. Aris. 16; Jn 5:21; Rom 4:17; the Spirit: Jn 6:63; Rom 8:11; 2 Cor 3:6; 1 Pet 3:18). In 2 Cor 3:6 Paul writes that the letter (the Law) kills but the Spirit gives life. By "life" Paul frequently refers to *spiritual* life (Rom 8:11; 1 Cor 15:22, 36, 45; 2 Cor 3:6). He uses "making alive" (ζωοποιέω) for the resurrection in 1 Cor 15:22, 45 (ζάω, "live," is used similarly in LXX Ezek 37:1-14). In Gal 3:21 Paul is distancing the Law from God's saving, life-giving activity. (CC)

The reason the law is not opposed to the promise is that, although in itself it cannot save, it serves to reveal sin, which alienates God from man, and to show the need for the salvation that the promise offers. (CSB)

Paul emphatically rejected the false conclusion (cf Rm 3:21) that Law and Promise stand in opposition to each other, as if they are rival systems of salvation. The Law has no such function. (TLSB)

Now, that's an important point when he goes on in Verse 21. When he says: Therefore, the law is not according -- no. He says it in a question: Therefore is the law according to the promises of God? Let it not be so. See, the law and the promises do not belong together. They are different things. And he says: Why? Now, this is what I was saying earlier. This is why the law is not opposed to the promise because they are doing different things. If a law was given that was able to give life -- now I think that is a synonym for justification. Making right what has gone wrong. If there was a law that could give life -- that is make right what has gone wrong -- therefore, out of the law righteousness would be. Righteousness would be out of the law. (Just – V-29)

But it's not. It's not. Because making right what has gone wrong, I think that's why you can make those as synonyms because they are in the same sentence. The mosaic law never was God's intention, God's gift, if you want to use it that way, God's grace for making right what has gone wrong. That is not what it's about. The law as we're going to see was an imprisoning jailer. It was something that kind of kept people from sinning and going away from the covenant. A way of keeping them kind of on the track. Here is kind of third use of the law in a way. But it was never the means by which God intended to save people. (Just – V-29)

is the law...contrary to the promises – Earlier Paul said that the Law does not justify. Then let us abolish it! No; for it, too, has its usefulness. What is that? It brings men to a recognition of themselves; it discloses and increases sin. Here immediately another question arises: If the Law merely makes men worse by disclosing their sin to them, it conflicts with the promises of God; for God seems merely to be irritated and offended by the Law, so that He neither observes nor keeps His promises. "We Jews thought the opposite, namely, that through the Law we are kept and held in that outward discipline, so that God may be moved by this to speed the disclosure of the promise, and so that by this discipline we might merit the promise." Paul replies: "No. Quite the contrary, in fact. If you pay attention to the Law, the promise is held back even more." For human reason offends the God who promises when it refuses to listen to His good and holy Law but says: "Let not God speak to us" (Ex. 20:19). Should God keep His promises for those who not only do not accept His Law and discipline but hate it bitterly and run away from it? Here, as I have said, the question immediately arises: Then the Law seems to stand in the way of the promises of God? Paul only touches on this question in passing and goes on; still he does reply to it and says: (Luther)

certainly not – Why? – First, because God is not moved to make His promises by our worthiness, merits, or good works; but He promises purely on the basis of His inexhaustible and eternal goodness and mercy. He does not say to Abraham: “Because you have observed the Law, therefore all nations shall be blessed in you.” But to one who was uncircumcised, who did not have the Law, and who was still an idolater, as is written in Joshua 24:2, He says: “Go from your country: I will be your Protector” (Gen. 12:1–3); and again: “In your Offspring, etc.” (Gen. 22:18). These are completely absolute promises that God promises to Abraham freely, without any condition or any consideration of works or merits, whether preceding or subsequent. (Luther)

This is chiefly an argument against the Jews, who suppose that the divine promises are being hindered by their sins. God does not delay His promises, Paul says, on account of our sins; nor does He hasten them on account of our righteousness and our merits. He does not consider either one. Therefore even if we were made worse through the Law and hated God more, God would still not be moved by this to defer the promise; for it does not depend on our worthiness and righteousness but on His goodness and mercy. Therefore it is a pure fiction when the Jews say: “The Messiah has not come, because our sins are delaying His coming.” As though God would become unjust on account of our sins or a liar on account of our lies! He Himself always remains righteous and truthful, whether we sin or do not sin. Therefore His truth is the only reason for His observing and fulfilling the promise. (Luther)

Secondly, although the Law discloses and increases sin, it is still not against the promises of God but is, in fact, for them. For in its true and proper work and purpose it humbles a man and prepares him—if he uses the Law correctly—to yearn and seek for grace. For only when a man’s sin is disclosed and increased through the Law does he begin to see the wickedness of the human heart and its hostility toward the Law and toward God, the Author of the Law. Then he seriously feels that he not only does not love but hates and blasphemes God, the supremely good, with His most holy Law. Now he is forced to confess that there is nothing good in him at all. When he has been crushed and humbled this way, he acknowledges that he is truly miserable and damned. Therefore when the Law forces a man to acknowledge his evil this way and to confess his sin sincerely, it has performed its function; its time has come to an end, and the time of grace has come, when the Blessed Offspring is to arrive, who will raise up and comfort the man who has been frightened and wounded by the Law. (Luther)

For this reason, therefore, the Law is not against the promises of God: first, because the promise does not depend on the Law but on the truth of God; secondly, because in its highest and greatest use the Law humbles and by humbling makes men groan, sigh, and seek the hand of the Mediator. It makes His grace and mercy very sweet—as Ps. 109:21 says, “Thy mercy is sweet”—and His gift precious beyond the telling. Thus it makes us ready for Christ. He who has never tasted the bitter will not remember the sweet; hunger is the best cook. As the dry earth thirsts for rain, so the Law makes the troubled heart thirst for Christ. To such hearts Christ tastes sweetest; to them He is joy, comfort, and life. Only then are Christ and His work understood correctly. (Luther)

Therefore the best use of the Law is to be able to employ it to the point that it produces humility and a thirst for Christ. He Himself requires thirsting souls and attracts them in a most charming manner to Himself when He says (Matt. 11:28): “Come to Me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” Therefore He gladly soaks and irrigates this dry ground. He does not pour out His waters on ground that is fertile or fat or free of thirst. His blessings are inestimable. Therefore He grants them only to the needy; He preaches good news to the poor (Luke 4:18) and gives water to the thirsty. “If anyone thirst,” He says in John 7:37, “let him come to Me.” “He heals the brokenhearted” (Ps. 147:3). That is, He comforts and saves those who have been vexed and troubled by the Law. Accordingly, the Law is not against the promises of God. (Luther)

righteousness would indeed be by the law – After these refutations and arguments, therefore, Paul teaches, at some length and with considerable beauty, that if you consider the true and best use of the Law, it is nothing but some sort of discipline toward righteousness. It humbles men and makes them ready for the righteousness of Christ, if it performs its proper function, that is, if it makes them guilty, terrifies them, makes them conscious of sin, wrath, death, and hell. When this has happened, the presumption of their own righteousness and holiness disappears, and Christ, with His blessings, begins to become sweet. Therefore the Law is not against the promises of God; it is for them. Although it does not fulfill the promise and does not grant righteousness, still, in its use and function, it humbles us and thus makes us ready for the grace and blessing of Christ. (Luther)

3:22 ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (“on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ”)—Scholars are uncertain whether the prepositional phrase is adjectival, modifying “the promise” (ἡ ἐπαγγελία), or adverbial modifying δοθῆναι (“might be given”). The translation here takes the phrase as adverbial, but the evidence does not allow certainty. A decision does not impact the perennial “faith in/of Christ” debate. (CC)

On the contrary, the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin in order that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. The emphatic “but” or “on the contrary” (ἀλλά) introduces the real situation after the denial of the (unreal) circumstances imagined in 3:21: the Law could not make alive. Rather, the Scripture imprisoned or locked up (συγκλείω) all humanity under the curse of sin. What does Paul mean by “the Scripture” (ἡ γραφή)? He does not use the word “Law” (νόμος). Perhaps he means Scripture in general (γραφή in, e.g., *Let. Aris.* 155; *Philo, Mos.* 2.17 § 84). Elsewhere when Paul refers to Scripture in general, he employs the plural form of the noun, “the Scriptures” (αἱ γραφαί, Rom 1:2; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor 15:3, 4). Since Gal 3:22 offers a counterpoint (ἀλλά) to 3:21, just as the subject of 3:21 is “the Law,” so also 3:22’s must be “the Scripture.” “The Scripture” appears to be synonymous with the Mosaic Law in the preceding verse. Paul does not appeal to “Scripture” elsewhere in his writings without identifying a particular verse (Rom 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Gal 3:8; 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18). The definite article with the word “Scripture” could indicate that he does indeed have a particular text in mind, perhaps the cursing voice of the Law in Deut 27:26, which he cites in Gal 3:10. Gal 3:10 is pivotal to the apostle’s logic in Gal 3:10–14. “Under sin” (ὑπὸ ἁμαρτίαν, 3:22) would effectively refer to being “under a curse” (ὑπὸ κατάραν, 3:10). On the other hand, the next few sentences refer to the Law in general, a fact which leads some commentators to conclude that the reference to “Scripture” must be generalizing here as well. Whether Paul is thinking of a particular verse or the Mosaic Law or Scripture in general, he clearly views “the Scripture” as a quasi-personified, imprisoning power. “Scripture” in this instance may well be a way of referring to *God* (cf. Rom 11:32: *God’s* imprisoning activity!). “The new preachers in Galatia ... attach great weight to the Scripture; it provides *them* with *the* authority for their gospel of circumcision. It is surely their trump card. Paul now, as in 3:8, solemnly summons ‘the Scripture’ as a witness for his own theology, against the new preachers and their optimistic view of the law.” (CC)

The restrictive function which the Scripture plays in 3:22 cannot be limited to the Law’s confinement and demarcation of Israel from the other nations. In Second Temple thought the Torah was often viewed as a protective fence around the people of Israel. The people were to avoid unclean foods, pagan practices, and idolatry. The Law served as a boundary marker that distinguished Israel from the larger pagan world. Paul is not describing the beneficent role of the Law to isolate Israel from the sinful nations; rather, he is describing the Law as a prison with no escape. The Law leaves people *under the very power of sin!* Paul regularly uses “under” (ὑπό) for slavery to a ruling cosmic power, whether the curse (3:10), the Law (3:23; 4:4, 5, 21; 5:18), the pedagogue (3:24–25), guardians and overseers (4:2), or the elements of the cosmos (4:3). From Paul’s apocalyptic standpoint, sin is a power that stands over the entire cosmos. (CC)

The “all things/everything” (τὰ πάντα; neuter) locked up “under sin” could instead be translated as “all *people*.” Although Paul uses the masculine plural (πάντας) for “all people” in Rom 3:9 and Rom 11:32,

his choice of the neuter pronoun in Gal 3:22 may be deliberate. The neuter gender of the nominative would emphasize the general quality (of all humanity) rather than individuals (BDF § 138 [1]). On the other hand, with Luther: “When someone says ‘all things,’ he does not except anything” (AE 26:333). Perhaps even the Law is included in “all things.” The Law cannot bring forth life because *even the Law* remains captive to the power of sin (cf. Rom 7:7–12; 8:20). The Law’s imprisonment would prevent anyone from enjoying the privileges God promised for the children of Abraham (see Gal 4:1–7). (CC)

The imprisoning voice of Scripture should not be severed or dissociated from God. The personified, living voice of Scripture is a proxy for God’s own will and voice. Even as God/the LORD himself came to Abraham and made promises in the Genesis narrative (e.g., Gen 12:1; 18:17–19), in Gal 3:8 the “Scripture” announced the promise to Abraham. The promise given freely in 3:22b corresponds to the promise of Scripture in 3:6–9. With its other voice, Scripture also curses and imprisons (3:10, 13). The imprisoning voice of Scripture in 3:22a corresponds to the cursing voice of the Law in 3:10–13. Even as the Scripture imprisons all things under sin in 3:22, in Rom 11:32 *God* locks up all in disobedience in order to have mercy on all. Paul views the speech of the Scriptures as bearing the life-transforming power of God! (CC)

Scripture imprisoned all things under sin for a *purpose* (ἵνα, “in order that”), for an intended result. The only solution to this hemmed-in, restrained condition is the freely granted faith in/of Jesus Christ. God did not “give” a life-proffering Law in 3:21, but in 3:22 the “promise” is “given” to those who believe. This promise is given to believers on the basis of or by means of “faith in/of Jesus Christ,” to reprise the phrasing of 2:16–17. Paul articulates more fully Christ’s saving work in 3:26–4:7, but in the more immediate context of 3:23 he unpacks the Scripture’s imprisoning as the work of the Law. He then describes that imprisoning in 3:23–25 as analogous to the work of a pedagogue, a slave who watched over and restrained a child. The Law imprisons and allows no escape. (CC)

The question of whether Paul uses ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ to refer to “faith *in* Jesus Christ” or the “faith(fulness) *of* Jesus Christ” has proved perennially difficult to answer. Scholarship has remained stubbornly divided on the question. Adherents of the “faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ” translation claim strong support in this verse. If Paul means by the disputed phrase “faith *in* Jesus Christ,” then the verse would be rather redundant (as is clear in the NIV translation): “so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.” A reference to the “faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ” would neatly remove the redundancy: “so that what was promised might be given through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ to those who believe.” Furthermore, how was the promise God made in Genesis “through faith *in* Jesus Christ”? Rather, in this view, God’s ancient promise is fulfilled in Jesus’ own faithful obedience to God to the point of death on the cross. Jesus’ faithful death benefits believers and fulfills the ancient promises. (CC)

The following verses offer further support for the “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” translation. In 3:23 “faith” is “revealed.” Paul uses the verb “reveal” (ἀποκαλύπτω) only once in relation to a human attribute (1 Cor 3:13). Elsewhere, he uses “reveal” for God’s righteousness (Rom 1:17), God’s wrath (Rom 1:18), God’s glory (Rom 8:18), God’s wisdom (1 Cor 2:10), God’s revelation (1 Cor 14:30), God’s goal (Phil 3:15), and the Son of God (Gal 1:16). “Not only does πίστις [‘faith(fulness)’] ‘come’ (3:23, 25), but it is ‘apocalyptically revealed’ (ἀποκαλυφθῆναι, 3:23b). The choice of verbs in verses [3:]23–25 (esp. ἀποκαλύπτω) makes it difficult to understand πίστις as the religious disposition, the decision, or response of an individual believer.” Faith as individual trust could hardly have been described as “coming” when Abraham possessed believing trust long before Christ (Gal 3:6). The reference to “the faith” which “has come” in 3:25 would therefore refer metonymically not to the individual’s own belief, but rather to Christ, the faithful and obedient one. The “Seed,” Christ, must “come” (3:19) even as “faith”—*Christ* the faithful one—comes in 3:23. “We are no longer under a custodian” (3:25), ‘under the law’ (3:23), which was ‘our custodian until [eis] Christ’ (3:24), meaning ‘until [eis] Faith should be revealed’ (3:23).” “To

be justified on the basis of faith” (3:24) would mean “to be justified on the basis of Christ’s faith(fulness)” (cf. 2:16). (CC)

Despite this evidence, the case for the subjective genitive “faith(fulness) of Jesus Christ” is not as decisive as its proponents have claimed. Those who translate the phrase with an objective genitive —“faith *in* Jesus Christ”—have interpreted the perceived redundancy (“basis of faith ... those who believe”) as a matter of emphasis. In countering the rivals’ emphasis on the works of the Law, Paul wants to highlight the importance of faith for conveying the saving benefits of Christ’s work in fulfillment of God’s promises. Although Abraham placed his trust in the saving promises long before the Seed came, faith’s object is fully revealed only with Christ’s climactic advent (cf. 3:6–9, 15–18). In that sense, “faith has come” (3:25) with Jesus Christ. (CC)

Scripture imprisoned – In other words, whatever is outside Christ and the promise—with no exceptions, whether it be the Ceremonial Law or the Moral Law or the Decalog, whether it be divine or human—is consigned to sin. When someone says “all things,” he does not except anything. Therefore we conclude with Paul that apart from faith in Christ, all the statesmanship and laws of the Gentiles, no matter how good and necessary, and all forms of worship and religion are subject to sin, death, and eternal damnation unless, as follows next, there is added the promise on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus. A great deal has been said about this earlier. (Luther)

Scripture, which contains God’s Law, incarcerated the whole world with no hope for release. Sin’s dreadful power subjugated all of human existence. The Law does have a purpose in God’s plan, to show the need for deliverance. (TLSB)

And so in Verse 22 he says: But the Scriptures -- and this is an important statement. But the Scripture I should say it singular. But the Scripture in prison shut up everything, all things, all things, under the power of not law but sin. Now that’s a little change here. And notice the power of. Sin is a cosmic power, too. Just like the law is. Now, why did the Scriptures shut up all things under the power of sin? And this is interesting. In order that the promise would be given by the faith of Jesus Christ to those who were believing. (Just – V-29)

What the law does is it shows us our sin. And when -- and here I think the Scripture is in a sense simply a synonym for the law. The Scripture, which contains the law, shows us our sin and shuts us up in a jail. So that through the law, we see our sin and in seeing our sin, we see that we are incapable of making ourselves right with God. And that is done so that we can see that it’s all about -- look at the language here -- in order that the promise would be given first by Christ’s faithfulness. And here he says Christ Jesus’ faithfulness unto death. Even death on a cross. To those who believe in Christ’s death. Now, there are the two alternatives. Law is sin. And here he says it’s shut up, imprisoned. Or Christ’s faith and our faith in Christ. Which is the way of salvation? (Just – V-29)

promised by faith...those who believe – Earlier Paul said that Scripture has consigned all things to sin. Is this to be forever? No, but only until what was promised has been given. Now the promise is the very inheritance or blessing promised to Abraham, that is, deliverance from the Law, sin, death, and the devil; and the gift of grace, righteousness, salvation, and eternal life. That promise, he says, is not obtained by any merit, Law, or work; but it is given. To whom? To believers. Believers in whom? In Jesus Christ, the Blessed Offspring who redeems believers from sin in order that they may receive the blessing. These words are not obscure; they are very clear. Nevertheless, it takes effort to observe them diligently and to weigh their force and seriousness correctly. For if all things have been consigned to sin, it follows that all the Gentiles are accursed and lack the glory of God, that they are subject to the wrath of God and to the dominion of Satan, and that no one can be delivered from all these by anything except by

faith in Christ Jesus. Therefore Paul battles mightily in these words against the fanatical opinions of the sophists and of all self-righteous people about the righteousness of the Law and of works, “that what was promised to faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.” (Luther)

3:23 *Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the Law, imprisoned until this coming faith should be revealed.* In 1 Cor 9:20 Paul contrasts people who are “under the Law” (ὕπὸ νόμον) with those in 1 Cor 9:21 who are “without the Law” (ἄνομος). Although Paul considers the gentiles a Law to themselves in Rom 2:12–16, he nevertheless contrasts those who have the Law (ἐν νόμῳ, Rom 2:12) with those who do not (τὰ μὴ νόμον ἔχοντα, Rom 2:14). If Paul uses the phrase “under the Law” (ὕπὸ νόμον, Gal 3:23) for specifically Jewish existence (as in 1 Cor 9:20), then Gal 3:23 would be describing *Jews* imprisoned and guarded under the Law. For some interpreters, then, the Jews’ release from the disciplinarian brings about a result that “you ... *all*” (Gal 3:26, 28) now enjoy. In short, gentile participation in Abraham’s heritage (3:29) would be dependent upon the priority of the Jews in God’s saving plan. This approach, however, is not the only viable reading of these verses. (CC)

Paul clearly conveys in 3:22 a *universal* situation: “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin.” Again, the “everything,” literally, “all things” (τὰ πάντα; neuter) locked up “under sin” could be translated as “all *people*” but may possibly even include Moses’ Law. The connections between 3:23 and the prior verse suggest that the universal dimension of 3:22 *continues* in 3:23. First, Paul repeats the verb “imprison” or “hem in” (συγκλείω) from 3:22 as a passive participle in 3:23. Second, the apostle has more to say about “faith,” featured prominently at both the beginning and the end of 3:23. The doubled emphasis in 3:23 on faith encloses or bookends the doubled emphasis on the Law’s imprisonment. (CC)

Despite these connections with 3:22, those who advocate the Jews’ priority in God’s salvation have maintained that 3:23 represents a *shift* in focus from the entire world under sin (3:22) to the specific plight of “we” Jews “under the Law.” Paul would shift yet again from “we” Jews in 3:23–25 to “you” gentiles in 3:26 in order to emphasize that all people, whether Jews or gentiles, may be incorporated into Christ. Nevertheless, a universalizing emphasis on all people may also be clear in 3:23 with the phrase “under the Law.” (CC)

A few interpreters have understood “under the Law” in 3:23 as shorthand for the fuller phrase “under the curse of the Law,” a concept that Paul introduces in 3:10. Paul uses “under the Law” in 1 Cor 9:20–21, however, with no connotation of a curse but as a way of distinguishing Jews from gentiles who are *not* under the Law. Since gentiles are not *ordinarily* “under the Law,” the phrase is not likely, *of itself*, shorthand for the fuller phrase “under the curse of the Law.” Nevertheless, in 3:23–25 Paul describes existence “under the Law” as oppressive, a description that is explicable in view of Paul’s negative comments about the Law earlier in 3:10. (CC)

To recap the logic of 3:10: the rival teachers drew upon Deuteronomy to explain to the Galatians that the Law curses everyone who does not obey all that it commands. That would include the Galatian Christians too, even though they are gentiles. In other words, for the logic to work, *even as gentiles* they are subject to the Law’s curse for disobedience. In order to avoid the awful curse, the Galatians should adopt the path of Law observance to complement their faith in the promised Messiah. Not surprisingly, then, Paul describes the Galatians in 4:21 as *desiring* to be “under the Law.” Paul reasons in 3:10, instead, that to *adopt* the path of Law observance is to fall under its curse for disobedience. As those desirous to obey the Mosaic Law, such reasoning would be rhetorically potent. The apostle can then recall that potent reasoning in 3:23 with the oppressive phrase “under the Law.” (CC)

In other words, the unfolding logic *within the letter itself* should be the primary clue to 3:23–25. The apostle is likely assuming his earlier reasoning in 3:10–13. The rival teachers have placed the Galatians in a position where two paths stand before them. The path of the Law is oppressive and entails a curse from

which there is no other escape. The saving work of Christ is the only path that brings blessing. If Paul is reasoning along these lines, then 3:23, while certainly applicable to Jews “under the Law,” *should not be limited* to the Jewish people. Likewise, a restriction of the first person plural verb in 3:25 to the Jews is unlikely: “Since faith has come, *we are* no longer under a custodian.” The Galatian gentiles were seeking to return to a situation under a custodian. Paul turns to the *real* means of salvation in 3:26–29. Such an interpretation of 3:23–25 has the advantage of consistency with the universal plight of Jews and gentiles in 3:13–14 and 4:3–7 and avoids the problems associated with a Jewish priority model. (CC)

Paul is gradually focusing more emphatically on the Galatians themselves as he shifts from third person description in 3:22 to the first person in 3:23–25 to the second person in 3:26–29. The “for” (γάρ) at the beginning of 3:26 *builds* on the logic of the prior verse. “We” are freed by faith from an existence under a custodian (3:25), “for” (explanatory) through faith “you” are *all* sons of God. The explanation of 3:26 is more naturally related to 3:25 if the referents of “we” and “you” remain the same. *Even the gentiles* are enjoying a release from the plight “under the Law” (3:23). (CC)

The verb φρουρέω means to “protect” or, alternately, to “guard (from escaping)” or “hold in custody” (Phil 4:7; 1 Pet 1:5). The agent at work behind the passive verb “we were held in custody” (ἐφρουρούμεθα) probably remains “the Scripture” from 3:22. The verb may bear either the negative sense of a soldier or jailer preventing an escape or the positive sense of a parent protecting a child. In either case, the sense of restriction is unavoidable. Perhaps Paul is using the associated participle “imprisoned” (συγκλειόμενοι), with the sense that the Law separates Israel from the outside, gentile world. “Imprison” (συγκλείω), however, usually refers negatively to being enclosed, besieged, or shut up under the *enemy’s* hand (LXX Jer 21:4; Ps 77:62 [MT/ET 78:62]; 1 Macc 4:31; 5:5; 15:25). The notion of being “under” an enemy’s hand points away from the Law’s boundary-maintaining function in favor of the Law as an oppressive, cosmic power. Paul speaks similarly of the Law in Rom 6:15; 7:1–6. To be shut up “under the Law” (Gal 3:23) is also to be “under sin” (3:22) because the Law offers no help against sin (note the parallel expressions). Sin foils the “best attempts to find liberation from the curse of the law by means of the law.” (CC)

The confinement of the Law is limited to the time before “this faith” (3:23) came. Paul refers to the “coming” of “the/this faith” twice in this verse (πρὸ τοῦ δὲ ἔλθειν τὴν πίστιν; εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν) and again in 3:25. The definite article (“the/this”) appears to be anaphoric and refers to the previous use of the term “faith” in the disputed phrase “faith in/of Christ” in 3:22 (BDF § 252). “Faith” in 3:23 refers to Jesus Christ, whether as the object of believing trust or as the subject of faithfulness. Paul speaks of *Christ’s* being revealed in 1:16 and 3:19. Paul therefore modulates in 3:24 to “until *Christ*” (εἰς Χριστόν). Faith, Jesus Christ, has come. Christ loved and gave himself for humanity (2:20). Even as a reference to believing trust, “faith” must still be conceived in terms of its necessary, eschatological object: “Christ-Faith.” The coming of Christ is the fulfillment of faith’s longstanding expectations and at the same time provides more specific content with respect to that faith. The Law no longer functions as a restrictive guardian figure now that Christ has come. Salvation in 3:23–25 is not expressed as the forgiveness of sins but rather as liberation from powerful enslaving forces! (CC)

the coming faith. In Christ (v. 22). (CSB)

Paul continues to declare the usefulness and necessity of the Law. Earlier (v. 19) he said that it was added on account of transgressions. This does not mean that it was the chief purpose of God in giving the Law only to cause death and damnation; as he says also in Rom. 7:13: “Did that which is good bring death to me? By no means!” For the Law is a Word that shows life and drives us toward it. Therefore it was not given only for the sake of death. But this is its chief use and end: to reveal death, in order that the nature and enormity of sin might thus become apparent. It does not reveal death in a way that takes delight in it

or that seeks to do nothing but kill us. No, it reveals death in order that men may be terrified and humbled and thus fear God. The text of Ex. 20:20 itself shows this clearly: “Do not fear,” it says, “for God has come to prove you, and that the fear of Him may be before your eyes, that you may not sin.” Therefore the function of the Law is only to kill, yet in such a way that God may be able to make alive. Thus the Law was not given merely for the sake of death; but because man is proud and supposes that he is wise, righteous, and holy, therefore it is necessary that he be humbled by the Law, in order that this beast, the presumption of righteousness, may be killed, since man cannot live unless it is killed. (Luther)

Although the Law kills, therefore, God still uses this effect of the Law, this death, for a good use, namely, for life. When God saw that the most widespread pestilence in the whole world, that is, hypocrisy and confidence in one’s own saintliness, could not be restrained and crushed in any other way, He decided to kill it by means of the Law. This was not to be permanent; but it had as its purpose that when this pestilence was killed, man would be raised up again and would hear this voice beyond the Law: “Do not fear. I did not give the Law and kill you through it with the intent that you should remain in death, but that you should fear Me and live.” A presumption of good works and of righteousness leaves no room for the fear of God. But where there is no fear of God, there cannot be a thirst for grace and life. Therefore God must have a mighty hammer to crush the rocks, and a fire burning in the midst of heaven to overthrow the mountains, that is, to crush that stubborn and perverse beast, presumption. When a man has been brought to nothing by this pounding, despairs of his own powers, righteousness, and works, and trembles before God, he will, in his terror, begin to thirst for mercy and the forgiveness of sins. (Luther)

Now, listen to the language here. Listen to how he's now talking about the era of the law, which is the Old Testament. Even though he doesn't use that language here. But he's going to contrast it to the era of *faith*. He says: *Now, before faith came -- before the era of faith, Christ's faith and our faith in Christ -- we were imprisoned. You know, we were held captive under the power of the law. That's the life Paul lived as a Pharisee before the cross. That's his nomistic life in which he lived according to the mosaic Sinaitic covenant. That's what happened before Christ came. And he says very clearly: Imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. Now, look at that. Imprisoned until the faith that was about to come would be Apocalyptically revealed. Now there faith is invasively revealed. Just like Christ is invasively revealed in the incarnation. (Just – V-29)*

Here it's faith. And I think that the language here of faith is simply a metaphor for Jesus. When faith comes, that means Jesus comes. When he comes, everything changes. The whole cosmos changes. The way in which we look at reality changes. And of course that finds its culmination in the cross as Paul has already said. Where Christ is cursed because he is under the power of the law there. And the law kills him. (Just – V-29)

under the law imprisoned. To be a prisoner of sin (v. 22) and a prisoner of law amounts to much the same, because law reveals and stimulates sin (see 4:3; Ro 7:8; Col 2:20). (CSB)

The Law and the Promise can represent two different eras in salvation history. However, God has always worked with people in these two ways. (TLSB)

This means that before the time of the Gospel and of grace came, it was the function of the Law to keep us confined under it as though we were in prison. (Luther)

This is a beautiful and most appropriate analogy, which shows what the Law accomplishes and how upright it causes men to be. Therefore it must be carefully weighed. No thief or murderer or criminal who has been captured loves his fetters or the foul prison in which he is held bound. In fact, if he could, he would destroy his prison and his iron shackles and reduce them to ashes. In prison he does indeed refrain from doing evil, not out of good will or out of a love for righteousness but because the prison prevents

him. Now that he is locked up, he does not despise and hate his sin and crime—in fact, he heartily laments that he is not free and is unable to commit further crimes—but he hates his prison; and if he could get out, he would return to his former life of crime. Such is the power of the Law and such is righteousness on the basis of the Law that it forces us to be outwardly good so long as it threatens transgressors with penalties and punishment. Then we comply with the Law out of fear of punishment, but we do so unwillingly and with great indignation. What kind of righteousness is that, if you refrain from evil because you are compelled by the threat of punishment? In actual fact, therefore, this righteousness of works is nothing but to love sin, to hate righteousness, to despise God and His Law, and to adore the worst sort of wickedness. As vigorously as a thief loves prison and hates his crime, so readily do we obey the Law, do what it commands, and refrain from what it forbids. (Luther)

until the coming faith would be revealed – Paul is referring to the time of fulfillment, when Christ came. But you should apply it not only to the time but also to feelings; for what happened historically and temporally when Christ came—namely, that He abrogated the Law and brought liberty and eternal life to light—this happens personally and spiritually every day in any Christian, in whom there are found the time of Law and the time of grace in constant alternation. The Christian has a body, in whose members, as Paul says (Rom. 7:23), the Law and sin are at war. By sin I understand not only lust but all of sin, as Paul usually speaks about sin, saying that it not only still clings to a flesh that is Christian and baptized, but that it battles against it and captures it, producing at least a powerful urge, if not actual assent or action. Even though a Christian does not fall into coarse sins like murder, adultery, or theft, he still is not free of impatience, grumbling, hatred, and blasphemy against God—sins that are completely unknown to the human reason. They force him against his will to despise the Law; they force him to flee from the countenance of God; they force him to hate and blaspheme God. For just as sexual desire is powerful in the body of the young man, and just as the ambition to gain glory and possessions is powerful in the mature man, and just as greed is powerful in the old man, so in the saintly man impatience, grumbling, hate, and blasphemy against God are powerful. There are examples of this throughout the Psalms, Job, Jeremiah, and all Scripture. Therefore when Paul describes this spiritual struggle, he uses very emphatic and meaningful terms like “being at war,” “fighting back,” and “making captive.” (Luther)

3:24 ὥστε (“so then”)—This signals result or consequence. (CC)

γέγονεν (“became”)—The use of the perfect (γέγονεν) for the aorist is well supported in the manuscript tradition, but P^{46} and B have the second aorist ἐγένετο, “(it) was.” There is no distinction in meaning (BDF § 343). The perfect in this case does not have a sense of continuing action. The Law does not continue to act as a custodian for believers. (CC)

So then, the Law became our custodian until Christ, so that we might be justified on the basis of faith. Paul draws an inference from the preceding verses: “so then.” The temporal expressions in 3:23–24 inform Paul’s conclusion in 3:25 and help clarify how he views the Law as a custodian or “pedagogue.” In the Greco-Roman world, from the age of six to sixteen a boy would be cared for by a pedagogue (Plutarch, *Mor.* 4A–B; 439F; Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.22.26; 3.19.5–6; Xenophon, *Lac.* 3.1; Philo, *Sacr.* 4 § 15). Pedagogues were slaves who disciplined and protected a child on his way to and from school. They kept watch over the boy and supervised the boy’s daily activities (e.g., Josephus, *Ant.* 1.2.1 § 56). They would rebuke or discipline the child for wrong or immoral behavior (Philo, *Mut.* 39 § 217; Plato, *Leg.* 7.808D–809B). While the formative role of the pedagogue was admired as the ideal during the early Roman Empire, the actual practice was far less than ideal. The least desirable slaves typically served as pedagogues (Plutarch, *Mor.* 4A–B). Many pedagogues had reputations for being overly harsh in their discipline. At no point did the child enjoy freedom from the rule of the pedagogue. Only upon reaching the age of maturity would he be free to live by “his own laws” (αὐτονόμος, Xenophon, *Lac.* 3.1). (CC)

Pedagogues were viewed both positively and negatively in antiquity. Modern interpretations of Gal 3:24 vary depending on how the scholar understands the ancient pedagogue. The best guide to Paul's view of the "pedagogue" is expressed in the immediate context of the verse. The NRSV translates the Greek word for "pedagogue" as "disciplinarian." The KJV translates it as a "schoolmaster" who is "to bring us unto Christ" (NASB: "to lead us to Christ"). In the English language a "pedagogue" is a teacher or tutor. Certainly Paul's rivals in Galatia would have welcomed the notion of the Law as a moral educator which leads people to Christ. For them, the Law and Christ would be perfectly compatible.²¹⁷ If the pedagogue were fulfilling a positive educational function in leading people to Christ, it would be unclear why Paul would consider pedagogy to have ended with Christ's coming. While the pedagogue provided basic moral discipline and escorted the child to and from the school, he himself was not an educator.²¹⁹ The ancients never confused the "pedagogue" with a *didaskalos* or teacher (Plato, *Lysis* 208C; Plato, *Leg.* 7.808D–E). For that matter, the Law does not "lead" people "to Christ" (a telic sense of εἰς Χριστόν). Those who rely on the Law find themselves "under" (ὑπό) a pedagogue (3:25) in the same manner as being "under sin" (3:22) or "under the Law" (3:23). Paul is stressing the *confining* or *oppressive* function of the Law (3:22–23). The translators of the KJV ("bring us unto Christ") and NASB ("lead us to Christ") overlooked the temporal expressions that dominate this paragraph: "until the Seed" (3:19), "before the coming of this faith" (3:23), "until this coming faith" (3:23), "since faith has come" (3:25). Even as the Law imprisoned "until" the "coming" of "faith" (εἰς τὴν μέλλουσαν πίστιν, 3:23), the prepositional phrase in 3:24 is likewise temporal: εἰς Χριστόν, "up to Christ" or "until (the coming of) Christ." Existence "under" the Law is like being "under sin" (3:22; see also Rom 3:9) or under the curse of the Law (Gal 3:10) or "under the elements" (4:3). The Law is an oppressive custodian but only for a temporary period. The Law's oppressive, imprisoning role has come to an end in Christ. One age is giving way to another. "We" are no longer "under" a pedagogue (3:25). (CC)

The Law functions as a custodian "so that" "we might be justified" on the basis of faith. The restrictive "pedagogue" guarantees no other way out apart from a genuine liberation from captivity. Lenski found "startling" the phrase "we might be justified on the basis of faith" (ἐκ πίστεως δικαιοθῶμεν) since Paul seems to make faith the source or basis of God's justifying activity (as is the case also in Gal 3:12 and Rom 1:17; 4:16). Lenski labored with the Lutheran fathers to interpret the phrase as "in view of *the saving merits of Christ* perseveringly apprehended by faith." Lenski would likely have found the modern translation of "faith" as Christ's own "faithfulness" theologically attractive. Irrespective of the faith in/of debate, if the Law were able to function positively in leading people to life, then justification would have been by means of the Law (3:21). However, gentile and Jew enjoy God's justification in the same way, by faith! (CC)

no longer under a guardian. The expression translates the Greek (from which "pedagogue" is derived). It refers to the personal slave-attendant who accompanied a freeborn boy wherever he went and exercised a certain amount of discipline over him. His function was more like that of a baby-sitter than a teacher (see 1Co 4:15, "guardians"). (CSB)

Greek paidagogos, "boy," "child leader." Greco-Roman households often secured slave who duty was to supervise and guard (though not to teach) children from about ages 6-16. Guardians had to walk children to and from school. Their temporary role served as the point of comparison. The Apology of the Augsburg Confession says, "God wants wild sinners to be restrained by civil discipline. To maintain discipline, He has given laws, letters, doctrine, rulers and penalties." (TLSB)

When Paul says that "the Law was our custodian until Christ came," he once more joins Law and Gospel together in feeling, even though in themselves they are as far apart as possible. This analogy of the custodian is truly outstanding; therefore it must be considered carefully. Although a schoolmaster is very useful and really necessary for the education and training of boys, show me one boy or pupil who loves

his schoolmaster! For example, did the Jews love Moses warmly and willingly do what he commanded? Their love and obedience toward Moses was such, as the history shows, that at times they would have been willing to stone him. Therefore it is impossible for a pupil to love his schoolmaster. For how could he love the one by whom he is being detained in prison, that is, by whom he is being forbidden to do what he would like to do? If he commits something that is against his schoolmaster's orders, he is denounced and scolded by him; what is more, he is forced to embrace and kiss his whip. How wonderful the pupil's righteousness is, that he obeys a threatening and harsh schoolmaster and even kisses his whip! Does he do this willingly and joyfully? When the schoolmaster is absent, he will break the whip or throw it into the fire. And if he had authority over the schoolmaster, he would not let himself be beaten by the schoolmaster's whips but would order that the schoolmaster be whipped. Nevertheless, a schoolmaster is extremely necessary for a boy, to instruct and chastise him; for otherwise, without this instruction, good training, and discipline, the boy would come to ruin. (Luther)

Therefore the schoolmaster gives the boy the impression of being his taskmaster and executioner and of holding him captive in prison. To what end and for how long? So that this severe, hateful authority of the schoolmaster and the slavery of the boy will last forever? No, but for a predetermined time, so that this obedience, prison, and discipline may work for the boy's good and so that in due time he may become the heir and the king. For it is not the father's intention that the son be subject to the schoolmaster forever and be whipped by him, but that through the instruction and discipline of the schoolmaster the son may be made fit for accession to his inheritance. (Luther)

Christ came – Thus Paul says that the Law is nothing but a custodian. But he adds “until Christ came.” Thus he said above (v. 19): “The Law was added because of transgression, till the Offspring should come”; and (v. 22) “Scripture consigned all things to sin, that what was promised, etc.”; and (v. 23) “we were confined under the Law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed.” Therefore the Law is not simply a custodian; it is a custodian “until Christ came.” For what kind of custodian would it be who would merely annoy and whip a boy and would teach him nothing? That is the kind of teacher the previous century had, when the schools were a veritable prison and hell, and the teachers were tyrants and executioners. The boys continually suffered floggings; they studied with great effort and untiring diligence; but very few of them ever accomplished anything. The Law is not such a teacher. It not only frightens and annoys, as an unskilled and stupid teacher only whips his pupils and does not teach them anything. But with its whippings it drives us to Christ, just as a good teacher whips, trains, and disciplines his pupils in reading and writing with the purpose of bringing them to a knowledge of the liberal arts and of other good things, so that eventually they may do with pleasure what initially, when they were forced to it by their teacher, they did involuntarily. (Luther)

By means of this fine illustration, therefore, Paul shows the true use of the Law: that it does not justify hypocrites, because they remain outside Christ in their presumptuousness and smugness; on the other hand, if those who have been frightened use the Law as Paul teaches, it does not leave them in death and damnation but drives them to Christ. Those who continue in these terrors and in their faintheartedness and do not take hold of Christ by faith despair utterly. With this allegory of the custodian, therefore, Paul clearly portrays the true use of the Law. For just as the custodian scolds, drives, and troubles his pupils, not with the intention that this custody should last forever, but that it should come to an end when the pupils have been properly educated and trained and that they should then eagerly and freely enjoy their liberty and their inheritance without the constraint of their custodian, so those who are frightened and crushed by the Law should know that these terrors and blows will not be permanent, but that by them they are being prepared for the coming of Christ and the freedom of the Spirit. (Luther)

justified by faith – Paul is speaking about those who are to be justified, not about those who have been justified. Therefore when you want to discuss the Law, you must accept the subject matter of the Law, namely, the sinner and wicked person. The Law does not justify him; but it places his sin before his

eyes, crushes him, leads him to a knowledge of himself, and shows him hell and the wrath and judgment of God. This is the proper function of the Law. Then there follows the application of this function: the sinner should know that the Law does not disclose sins and humble him to make him despair, but that the Law was instituted by God so that by its accusation and crushing it might drive him to Christ, the Savior and Comforter. When this happens, he is no longer under a custodian. But those who already have faith are not under the Law but are free of it, as Paul shows at once in the words that follow. The Law disciplines only the wicked, who have not yet been justified. This use is extremely necessary; for since the whole world is in the power of sin (1 John 5:19), there is need for this ministry of the Law to reveal sin; for without it no one could come to righteousness, as we have said at great length earlier. But what does the Law do in those who have been justified through Christ? Paul replies in these words, which are a sort of appendix: (Luther)

Now, look at Verse 24. You have first the result clause and then a purpose clause. So Verse 23: Before faith came we were enslaved, held captive under the power of the law. Imprisoned until the faith that was about to be revealed, Apocalyptically revealed came. So that, with the result that, the law has become our imprisoning jailer. And here it's until Christ came. Now, that's the point of the law. And the pedagogus, the pedagogue, pedagogy, the word for education, that's the word that's being used here. And interestingly in the ancient world, a pedagogue, you know, you say I'm a Father and I have sons and I gave them over to a pedagogue, he's basically like a jailer so them. They are considered slaves. Paul is going to say that later on. You know, they are not a son. They are a slave. Until it comes time for the inheritance. And that's what a pedagogue does. He kind of -- he makes their life almost as if they are in jail. And that's what the law did. It put us in jail until Christ came. It was an imprisoning jailer. So that, in order that, we might be declared righteous by faith. Christ's faith and our faith? Christ. Because that's the era of faith. (Just – V-29)

So there you can see the law is not a friend. The law is a power that enslaves us, puts us in jail. And we're freed when Christ, the one who is the faithful one and who we now believe in declares us righteous, justifies us if you want to make that statement or declares what was wrong now right. (Just – V-29)

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3:25 *Since faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian.* Paul does not write “but with the coming of the Christ we are no longer under the Law.” In contrast to “the pedagogue,” Paul continues to emphasize “the faith.” The article with “faith” is anaphoric referring back to the coming of faith in 3:23. The coming Faith may refer to the faithfulness of Jesus Christ or to believing faith conceived in terms of its necessary object, “Christ-faith.” Confident assertions of the one option over the other overextend the available evidence. Commentators have often overlooked that Paul conceives of “the Faith” as an alternative religious system to that of the Mosaic Law. Whether Paul has Jews primarily or exclusively in mind with the first person “we”—a possibility that is rather questionable—or all humanity, either interpretive option is inclusive of the Jewish people. Paul is pointing out that even those who claim the authority of James and the other Jewish-Christian leaders in Jerusalem (cf. 2:11–13) are no longer under the Law. The Galatians are seeking to return to a “B.C. lifestyle in an A. D. period.”(CC)

no longer under a guardian – That is, we are free from the Law, our prison and our custodian; for after faith has been revealed, it no longer terrifies and troubles us. Paul is speaking here about the faith promulgated through Christ at a specific time. For having assumed human nature, Christ came once for all at one time, abrogated the Law with all its effects, and by His death delivered the entire human race from sin and eternal death. Therefore if you consider Christ and what He has accomplished, there is no

Law anymore. Coming at a predetermined time, He truly abolished the entire Law. But now that the Law has been abolished, we are no longer held in custody under its tyranny; but we live securely and happily with Christ, who now reigns sweetly in us by His Spirit. But where the Lord is, there is freedom (2 Cor. 3:17). If we could perfectly take hold of Christ, who has abrogated the Law and reconciled us sinners to the Father by His death, then that custodian would have no jurisdiction whatever over us. But the law in our members is at war with the law of our mind (Rom. 7:23), and it interferes so that we cannot take hold of Christ perfectly. Therefore the defect is not in Christ; it is in us, because we have not yet shed the flesh, to which sin clings as long as we live. So far as we are concerned, then, we are partly free of the Law and partly under the Law. With Paul we serve the Law of God with our mind, but with our flesh we serve the law of sin (Rom. 7:25). (Luther)

From this it follows that according to our conscience we are completely free of the Law. Therefore this custodian must not rule in our conscience, that is, must not menace it with his terrors, threats, and captivity. No matter how he tries this, the conscience remains unmoved; for it has in view Christ the crucified, who abolished all the claims of the Law upon the conscience, "having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands" (Col. 2:14). Therefore the conscience must be as unaware, in fact, as dead toward the Law as a virgin is toward a man, and vice versa. This does not come by works or by any righteousness of the Law; it comes by faith, which takes hold of Christ. According to our feelings, however, sin still clings to the flesh and continually accuses and troubles the conscience. So long as the flesh remains, there remains the Law, the custodian who continually terrifies and distresses the conscience with his demonstrations of sin and his threats of death. But it is always encouraged by the daily coming of Christ. Just as He once came into the world at a specific time to redeem us from the harsh dominion of our custodian, so He comes to us spiritually every day, causing us to grow in faith and in our knowledge of Him. Thus the conscience takes hold of Christ more perfectly day by day; and day by day the law of flesh and sin, the fear of death, and whatever other evils the Law brings with it are diminishing. For as long as we live in a flesh that is not free of sin, so long the Law keeps coming back and performing its function, more in one person and less in another, not to harm but to save. This discipline of the Law is the daily mortification of the flesh, the reason, and our powers, and the renewal of our mind (2 Cor. 4:16) (Luther).

Thus we have received the first fruits of the Spirit (Rom. 8:23), and the leaven hidden in the lump; the whole lump has not yet been leavened, but it is beginning to be leavened. If I look at the leaven, I see nothing but the leaven; but if I look at the mass of the lump, there is not merely the leaven anymore. Thus if I look at Christ, I am completely holy and pure, and I know nothing at all about the Law; for Christ is my leaven. But if I look at my flesh, I feel greed, sexual desire, anger, pride, the terror of death, sadness, fear, hate, grumbling, and impatience against God. To the extent that these are present, Christ is absent; or if He is present, He is present weakly. Here there is still need for a custodian to discipline and torment the flesh, that powerful jackass, so that by this discipline sins may be diminished and the way prepared for Christ. For just as Christ came once physically, according to time, abrogating the entire Law, abolishing sin, and destroying death and hell, so He comes to us spiritually without interruption and continually smothers and kills these things in us. (Luther)

And then Verse 25, this is a conclusion. But again, it uses that same kind of sense of the coming of faith. But now that faith has come. I think that's the way. Yeah. But now that faith has come, we are no long under the power of -- and look at that hupah, same word, under the power of the enslaving jailer, the imprisoning jailer. That is the law. Because now we're in the era of faith, that is now that the Gospel has come because Christ has come, that which we believe, now that that has come, we are in a position now to see that the law is not enslaving us because we have been freed in Christ. (Just – V-29)

Now, I think you can see that this is a very complicated argument. And yet at the same time it's very, very simple. Is it Christ? Or is it the law? Is salvation through Christ alone? Or is salvation through

Christ and works of the law? If works of the law imprison us, then why? Why would we want to be back in prison? (Just – V-29)

Now, this is going to be a key point to Paul's argument in the future. He is saying to the Galatians: Before you came to faith, when you were unbelievers, you were imprisoned under the power of sin. Why would you want to replace the enslavement of sin with another enslavement? To be enslaved under the law? That's the way it was for me before Christ came, before I was converted to Christ at Damascus. Why would you go back to that? I preach to you the freedom of the Gospel says Paul to the Galatians. I have set you free in Christ. Christ has freed you by his becoming a curse on behalf of you. So why would you want to go back to your former lifestyle? Why would you like to become what is the equivalent of a pagan? It's a different jail. But it's still a jail. (Just – V-29)

Now, this is going to be the powerful argument that's going to be building from this point on. And I think you can see that Paul makes it very clear that with the coming of faith, with the coming of Christ, this now era of faith, we're now no longer living under the power of the law. And really we're no longer living under the power of sin. Because through Christ who took our sin upon himself and was killed by the law, cursed by the law on the cross, we now live as members of Christ in the era of faith. (Just – V-29)

The Law played an interim role for Israelites from Moses to Christ, but when faith (i.e., Christ) came, this arrangement ceased. (TLSB)

3:25–26 By adoption, the justified believer is a full adult and heir in God's family, with all the attendant rights and privileges (4:1–7; Ro 8:14–17). (CSB)

3:26 All One in Christ Jesus by Baptism (3:26–29)

πάντες γὰρ υἱοὶ θεοῦ ἐστε (“you are all sons of God”)—The subject, πάντες, “all,” is placed in an emphatic position at the beginning of the sentence. The placement of the predicate, υἱοὶ θεοῦ, “sons of God,” prior to the copula, ἐστε, “you are,” is likewise a signal of emphasis. (CC)

διὰ τῆς πίστεως (“through faith”)—This reading is well supported but without the article in \mathfrak{B}^{46} P Clement Cyprian. (CC)

ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“in Christ Jesus”)—The deletion of ἐν (“in”) before “Christ Jesus” in \mathfrak{B}^{46} and the tenth-century 1739 (also 1881) is an assimilation to 2:16 (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ) and to 3:22 (ἐκ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), where no preposition intervenes between “faith” and “Jesus Christ.” The \mathfrak{B}^{46} reading is also less awkward, less unusual, and thus most likely secondary. (CC)

For through faith, you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus. After downgrading the status and role of the Mosaic Law as an agent of imprisonment and condemnation in the preceding verses, in 3:26–29 Paul turns to the positive side of the benefits “in Christ”—thus the “for” (γάρ) that relates 3:26–29 to 3:19–25 as the converse. Faith and Baptism incorporate an individual and a community “into” Christ, through whom all people may enjoy Abrahamic sonship and status as God's own children. Arguably, 3:26–29 represents the pivotal, climactic center of the letter. (CC)

In 3:26, “you are *all* sons of God *in Christ Jesus*.” At the end of 3:28, Paul concludes that “you are *all one in Christ Jesus*.” He is emphasizing a status “in Christ Jesus” that “all” baptized believers enjoy. Paul uses the phrase “in Christ” with at least three senses. First, he uses “in Christ” to refer to Christian

believers. In 1:22 Paul mentions “the assemblies of Judea in Christ.” “In Christ” functions synonymously in that verse for those whose faith is in Christ (so also in Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1; 2 Thess 1:1). Second, the prepositional phrase may bear an instrumental sense: “by/through Christ Jesus.” In Gal 5:10 Paul is persuaded “in the Lord,” presumably, *by* the Lord. In 1 Cor 1:2 those sanctified “in Christ Jesus” are surely sanctified *by* Christ Jesus (see also Gal 2:17; 3:14; so also Rom 14:14; 2 Cor 3:14; Phil 4:13). Third, “in Christ Jesus” may have a locative sense (e.g., Gal 2:4; 3:26, 28; 5:6; see also Rom 8:1; 2 Cor 5:17, 19; Eph 1:20; Phil 3:9). This usage is analogous to the Johannine pattern: even as Jesus declares he is “in” the Father without compromising the integrity of his personal identity (Jn 10:38; 14:10, 11, 20; 17:21), Paul speaks similarly of the believer as “in” Christ. The believer does not lose his or her individuality or identity by being absorbed into Christ. Nevertheless, the believer shares in the person of Christ in an intimate relationship. (CC)

“In Christ Jesus” in 3:26 is in the immediate context of a *second* prepositional phrase: “through faith.” The two prepositional phrases, “through faith” and “in Christ Jesus,” may be construed in differing ways grammatically. First, the two prepositional phrases may be taken *together* (e.g., NASB: “through faith in Christ Jesus”; KJV is similar), or, second, as *separate* modifications of “you are all sons of God—*through faith*, [and] *in Christ Jesus*” (see, e.g., RSV, NRSV, NEB). Supporting the first approach, in an early textual tradition (B⁴⁶) a scribe understood the prepositional phrases together as referring to “faith in Christ Jesus”—evidence that the scribe interpreted the now disputed “faith in/of Christ” phrases the same way (“in”). To render “faith in Christ Jesus” as the meaning of the two prepositional phrases more clearly, the scribe removed the definite article (τῆς) before “faith” (πίστεως) and the preposition “in” (ἐν), thus changing διὰ τῆς πίστεως ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ to διὰ πίστεως Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ. The second approach, in which “through faith” and “in Christ Jesus” are unassociated modifications, strikes many as awkward. To ameliorate that awkwardness, many translations distance the two prepositional phrases from each other: “through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.” In a similar construction in Rom 3:25, “through faith” modifies separately from the prepositional phrase “in his blood.” The construction “faith *in* the Lord/Christ Jesus” (πίστις ἐν τῷ κυρίῳ/Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ) is limited to the disputed Pauline letters (Eph 1:15; Col 1:4), and even these two instances may indicate the sphere of faith rather than the object of faith. Paul does not generally use the preposition “in” (ἐν) to refer to putting one’s trust “in” someone or something. Paul expresses faith *in* Christ with the *verb* “believe” (πιστεύω) in 2:16 (note the preposition εἰς, not ἐν). One puts one’s faith “into” Christ. Most decisively, 3:28 maintains the emphasis on being “in Christ Jesus.” The second approach, then, is preferable; the two prepositional phrases are separate modifications. “In Christ Jesus” is adverbially modifying the main verb, “you (all) are” (ἐστε): “Through faith, you are all ... in Christ Jesus.” (CC)

That “all” the believers in Galatia are God’s sons (and daughters) is a “startling pronouncement” despite Paul’s emphasis on “all the nations” and “all under sin” in 3:8, 22 (cf. 3:28; 6:10). First, the Jews considered *Israel* to be God’s children (Ex 4:22–23; Deut 14:1–2; Is 43:6; Jer 31:9; Hos 1:10 [MT 2:1]; 11:1; *Jub.* 1.24–25; Sirach 36:17; 3 Macc 6:28; 4 *Ezra* 6:55–59; cf. *Pss. Sol.* 17:26–27), or at least the righteous within Israel as God’s children (Wis Sol 2:13–18; 5:5; Sirach 4:10; 51:10; 2 Macc 7:34; *Pss. Sol.* 13:8). Paul’s rivals would have agreed with Israel’s being God’s children as they sought to include the Galatian gentiles among the Messiah’s own people. Second, Paul is clear throughout his letters that Jesus is *the* Son of God (seventeen instances; e.g., Gal 1:15–16; 2:20). From the very first verses of Galatians in which Paul narrates the Father’s raising Jesus from the dead, God’s Son is Jesus Christ. Paul is explaining in 3:26–29 how believers come to *share* in the rights of the Son. Surprisingly, the apostle emphasizes that “all,” whether Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, enjoy in Christ the rights of sons, whether as sons of Abraham (3:7) or as sons of God. (CC)

Paul shifts from “we” in 3:25 to “you” in 3:26 as a way of emphasizing his point that the gentile Galatians are included in the benefits in Christ: thus “you ... all” are “in Christ.” Paul repeats the point in 3:28. Jewish ethnic identity is no longer a stumbling block for enjoying God’s blessings. Although for the sake

of clarity the words “through faith” may be placed at the beginning of 3:26 in an English translation, Paul places the word “all” at the beginning of the sentence in the original Greek. The rivals had been preaching to the Galatian Christians the necessity of joining the people of Israel. Again, Paul wants to be very clear that they are “all” already included! (CC)

sons of God through faith – As a very good teacher of faith, Paul always has these words on his lips: through faith, in faith, on the basis of faith in Christ Jesus, etc. He does not say: “You are sons of God because you are circumcised, listen to the Law, and keep its works,” as the Jews imagined and as the false apostles taught; but “through faith in Christ Jesus.” Therefore the Law does not create sons of God; much less do human traditions. The Law cannot beget men into a new nature or a new birth; it brings to view the old birth, by which we were born into the kingdom of the devil. Thus it prepares us for the new birth, which takes place through faith in Christ Jesus, not through the Law, as Paul dearly testifies: “You are all sons of God through faith.” It is as though he were saying: “Even though you have been troubled, humbled, and killed by the Law, the Law has not made you righteous. It has not made you sons of God, but faith has. Which faith? Faith in Christ. Therefore faith in Christ, not the Law, creates sons of God.” The same thing is written in John 1:12: “To all who believed, He gave power to become children of God.” (Luther)

All believers in Christ, including Gentiles, without distinction, bear this honorific title once reserved for Israel (Ex 4:22–23; Dt 14:1; Is 43:6; Hos 1:10). (TLSB)

3:27 *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ put on Christ.* “Through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus” (3:26), “*for* [γάρ] as many ... as were baptized into Christ put on Christ.” Gal 3:27 supports 3:26. The close connection between 3:26 and 3:27 reflects how inseparably Paul views faith and Baptism. In the book of Acts the apostles required new converts to be baptized (e.g., Acts 2:38; 10:47–48), and new believers sought Baptism themselves (e.g., Acts 8:36). The NT treats faith and Baptism as intimately related. Baptism is a one-time event by which believers decisively “put on” Christ (note the aorist tense of ἐνεδύσασθε). (CC)

At least one interpreter has doubted whether Paul is referring to water Baptism in 3:27. She connected Gal 3:27 with 1 Cor 12:13 as references to “Spirit baptism.” A reference to “Spirit baptism,” however, is far-fetched in 1 Cor 12:13 since Paul is revisiting his discussion of Baptism in 1 Cor 1:13–16 and is clarifying that water Baptism, far from being a source of division, is actually the means by which the Spirit unites believers into a single body (cf. 1 Cor 1:11–12). “Baptism” in the Greek language almost always referred to the application of a liquid. The rare instances which depart from this pattern include clear contextual indications that the “Baptism” should be taken in an unusual, metaphorical sense. Non-sacramental commentators have typically asserted that Baptism is merely metaphorical for conversion.²⁴⁴ Paul’s own language, however, is much stronger than that. Those who have been baptized have put on Christ, and that putting on of Christ in Baptism is the basis (γάρ) for how believers become sons of God in Christ Jesus (3:26). Paul’s assertions should be taken as they stand. (CC)

Many interpreters have concluded that Paul is drawing on a baptismal tradition or creed from the earliest Christian assemblies. In that case, the strong affirmation of Baptism and its benefits would predate Paul’s ministry. Gal 3:27–28; 1 Cor 12:13; and Col 2:11–12; 3:10–11 bear at least six distinctive features of a possible baptismal tradition/creed:

1. All three passages treat Baptism. (CC)
2. Each passage offers a series of contrasting pairs that are abolished through Baptism. Only the first pair in Gal 3:28, “neither Jew nor Greek,” is directly relevant to the Galatian situation. The second pair,

“neither slave nor free,” refers to a social reality and classification, whereas elsewhere in the letter slavery functions in a metaphorical sense for existence under the forces of the old age. Similarly, the “male and female” pair seems irrelevant for the rest of Galatians. The second and third pairs of opposites thus seem ill-fitted to their context and could be vestiges of a baptismal tradition. Even the pairing of “Jew” and “Greek,” which is indeed central to the letter, differs from Paul’s preference for the word “gentile” (Gal 2:11–15; 3:8, 14). (CC)

3. In each passage the opposing pairs are overcome by unity in Christ, whether within the corporate body (1 Cor 12:13), within one corporate person (Gal 3:28), or within Christ himself (Col 3:11). (CC)

4. Gal 3:29 follows 3:26 very naturally in terms of grammar and logic. After identifying the Galatians as “sons of God in Christ Jesus” in 3:26, 3:29 very naturally concludes that those “of Christ” are “Abraham’s seed” and “heirs according to the promise.” A fairly coherent train of thought would result from the omission of the intervening material (3:27–28). The intervening material may therefore be a citation of pre-Pauline tradition. (CC)

5. Even as 3:26 concludes with “in Christ Jesus,” so also does 3:28 (without διὰ τῆς πίστεως, “through faith”). The repetition of the phrase may signal a return from the cited material (3:27–28) to Paul’s own line of thought (3:29, as in 3:26). (CC)

6. Paul shifts from first person plural pronouns and verbs (“we,” “our”) in 3:23–25 to second person plural pronouns and verbs (“you,” Greek plurals) in 3:26–29. (CC)

Unfortunately, the claim that Paul is drawing on traditional credal language is ultimately unverifiable. Gal 3:26–28 bears a Pauline stamp. For instance, “baptized into Christ” is Paul’s own phrasing (cf. Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 10:1–2). Other NT writers prefer to write of being “baptized into *the name of*” (Mt 28:19; Acts 2:38; 8:16; 19:5). Gal 3:27 serves as support (note its initial “for,” γάρ) for 3:26, especially with 3:26’s reference to faith, a motif that is central in the preceding verses, 3:22–25. The emphasis in the Galatian context on faith in Christ is lacking in 1 Cor 12:13 and Col 3:10–11. Paul also stresses in Gal 3:26 that “through faith” the Galatians “are all ... in Christ Jesus.” Baptism brings about a corporate unity. The inclusion of the gentiles in God’s saving plan as well as the unity of a new humanity is a major emphasis of Paul’s letter. Thus an old reality of Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female have passed away in favor of a “new creation” in which there is “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision” (6:14–15). The new corporate community replaces the old, divided realities. Gal 3:27–29 is laying the foundation for Paul’s turn to the relationships between believers in the community in Galatians 5 and 6. Whether or not Paul is drawing on traditional material, his own stamp on these verses is clear. (CC)

Paul never uses “baptize” (βαπτίζω) with the Greek preposition “in” (ἐν). One is baptized “into” (εἰς) Christ (3:27; also Rom 6:3; 1 Cor 1:13 [“into the name of”], 15; 10:2 [“into Moses”]; 12:13 [“into one body”]). The Greek preposition often translated as “into” (εἰς) could have a static sense in the ancient Greek papyri. If Paul is using εἰς in that sense, Rom 6:3 may be referring to being baptized “in” Christ rather than “into” (εἰς) Christ, even as one is baptized “in” (εἰς) the triune name in Mt 28:19. Nevertheless, Baptism incorporates a person *into* the sphere of Christ and his power. An individual “is baptized” into Christ. “To be baptized” is likely another instance of the now-familiar divine passive construction that Paul is using throughout the letter. In view of 3:1–5, 14; 4:1–7, God’s own Spirit is likely the active agent in the birthing of God’s children through Baptism (cf. 4:29). (CC)

Paul’s clothing language stresses the believer’s new identity in Christ. Some would take the metaphor further to suggest that Baptism must be administered by a full immersion. To be clothed in Christ or to put on Christ is an image unrelated to the application of a liquid and offers little or no evidence with regard to whether Baptism is to be administered by an immersion or not. The Greek verb for “baptize”

(βαπτίζω) refers to the mere application of a liquid and not necessarily to an immersion. The word can be used for soldiers carrying their weapons overhead in water who are “baptized” only up to their waists. “To put on” or “to clothe oneself with” is a figure of speech that derives from the Hebrew Bible and means “to be characterized by the named quality or attribute.”²⁵² God clothes himself with the attributes of righteousness, majesty, power, and praise (Pss 93:1 [LXX 92:1]; 104:1–2 [LXX 103:1–2]; Is 51:9; 59:17; Wis Sol 5:18). The psalmist prays that Israel’s priests would be clothed with righteousness (Ps 132:9 [LXX 131:9]; see also 2 Chr 6:41), and God responds by clothing them with salvation (Ps 132:16 [LXX 131:16]). Isaiah calls on Zion to clothe herself with the attributes of strength and glory (LXX Is 52:1). God clothes humans with strength in Sirach 17:3 in order that they might have dominion over the beasts and the birds (Sirach 17:4). Those clothed in strength, dignity, wisdom, or righteousness are recognized by those attributes (Job 29:14; Prov 31:25–26; Sirach 6:31). Those clothed in shame suffer dishonor and disgrace (Job 8:22; Pss 35:26 [LXX 34:26]; 109:29 [LXX 108:29]; 132:18 [LXX 131:18]; 1 Macc 1:28). Since so much of the ancient body was covered by clothing, clothes served as a person’s identity markers. They announced a person’s country of origin, social class, and occupation. To put on Christ is therefore to be *identified* with Christ! Paul often uses a clothing metaphor as he stresses a new identity in Christ along with the attendant behavioral traits (Rom 13:12–14; 2 Cor 5:2–3; 1 Thess 5:8; Eph 6:11–17; Col 3:10, 12; cf. Zech 3:3–5). That emphasis on a new identity is the strongest in Gal 3:27 when the believer puts on Christ. Whereas Paul’s rivals were encouraging a stripping off of sinful flesh in circumcision, Paul counters with putting on Christ. No longer do people see Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female, to anticipate 3:28. In the believer, people see *Christ!* “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (2:20). (CC)

baptized into Christ. See Ro 6:3–11; 1Co 12:13. (CSB)

Through Baptism, God incorporates believers into union with Christ (cf Mt 28:19). Thus His righteousness becomes theirs. Luth: “Christ Himself is our garment ... the garment of our righteousness and salvation” (AE 26:353; see LC IV 83–84). (TLSB)

Putting on Christ is understood in two ways: according to the Law and according to the Gospel. According to the Law (Rom. 13:14), “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ; that is: Imitate the example and the virtues of Christ. Do and suffer what He did and suffered.” So also 1Peter 2:21: “Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, that we should follow in His steps.” In Christ we see the height of patience, gentleness, and love, and an admirable moderation in all things. We ought to put on this adornment of Christ, that is, imitate these virtues of His. In this sense we can imitate other saints as well. (Luther)

But to put on Christ according to the Gospel is a matter, not of imitation but of a new birth and a new creation, namely, that I put on Christ Himself, that is, His innocence, righteousness, wisdom, power, salvation, life, and Spirit. We were dressed in the leather garment of Adam, which is a deadly garment and the clothing of sin. That is, we were all subjected and sold into the slavery of sin; horrible blindness, ignorance, and a contempt and hatred of God are present in us. Besides, we are filled with evil lust, uncleanness, and greed. By propagation from Adam we have acquired this garment, that is, this corrupt and sinful nature, which Paul calls “the old man.” He must be put off with all his activities, so that from sons of Adam we may be changed into sons of God (Eph. 4:22 and Col. 3:9). This does not happen by a change of clothing or by any laws or works; it happens by the rebirth and renewal that takes place in Baptism, as Paul says: “As many of you as were baptized have put on Christ.” Titus 3:5: “He saved us, in virtue of His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration.” For in those who have been baptized a new light and flame arise; new and devout emotions come into being, such as fear and trust in God and hope; and a new will emerges. This is what it means to put on Christ properly, truly, and according to the Gospel. (Luther)

In Baptism, then, it is not the garment of the righteousness of the Law or of our own works that is given; but Christ becomes our garment. But He is not the Law, not a lawgiver, not a work; He is the divine and inestimable gift that the Father has given to us to be our Justifier, Lifegiver, and Redeemer. To put on Christ according to the Gospel, therefore, is to put on, not the Law or works but an inestimable gift, namely, the forgiveness of sins, righteousness, peace, comfort, joy in the Holy Spirit, salvation, life, and Christ Himself. (Luther)

One of the reasons that we think that Paul is exegeting that is interpreting a baptismal formula here because in the early Christian churches whether you realized this or not most baptisms if possible were done by immersion. And they were done in the nude. So when you came up out of the font, you were immediately -- you had a white robe put on you after you were anointed with oil. And that robe was a symbol of your righteousness in Christ. And that's essentially what that means, to be clothed in Christ is simply to say that one is now a Christ in the world. That one now represents Christ not in kind of a detached way. But because Christ is in us and we are in him. And that that union with Christ means that when people see us, what they see is Christ. That's what baptism means for Paul. Now, remember, this is one of his very earliest, if not his earliest statement on baptism. And it is profound in every way. (Just – V-39)

3:28 οὐκ ἔνι (literally, “there is not”)—The ἔνι may be taken in two different ways. This word could be a strengthened form of ἐν with an understood verb of being, ἐστί, along with an understood ὑμῖν, “among you.” Thus οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν ὑμῖν, “there is not among you.” More likely, ἔνι is a shortened form of ἔνεστιν, which may mean “it is possible,” e.g., 4 Macc 4:22. ἔνεστιν or its shortened form ἔνι may also have the sense “there is,” e.g., 1 Cor 6:5; Col 3:11; James 1:17; Sirach 37:2. The negation here is emphatic. The context of this verse favors “there is not” rather than “there cannot be.” Paul is writing of a new *reality* and not a mere possibility. Furthermore, when ἔνεστιν means “it is possible,” an infinitive is normally present, which is not the case in 3:28. (CC)

πάντες γὰρ ὑμεῖς εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ (“for you are all one in Christ Jesus”)—In place of the four words εἷς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ, B^{46} and A only have two words, ἐστε Χριστοῦ, resulting in the statement, “for you are all *of* [i.e. belong to] Christ.” The “of Christ” would match the phrasing in 3:29 (Χριστοῦ). K^* has three words, ἐστε ἐν Χριστοῦ, resulting in “for you are all *in* Christ.” Both variants omit εἷς, “one,” to avoid the potential misunderstanding that the distinctions of Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female cease to exist entirely. The ancient scribes responsible for the variants took 3:28 as describing who is “in” or “of” Christ. Some manuscripts have the neuter ἓν (“one”) instead of the masculine εἷς (“one”), perhaps under the influence of 1 Cor 12:12. (CC)

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Paul heralds the benefits of Baptism in 3:28 with a proclamation of the unity of humanity in Christ. No longer is there Jew or Greek, slave or free, male and female. The Greco-Roman world was intensely hierarchical. The ancients celebrated and coveted the honor associated with superior status, even though that status was set, in large measure, from birth. Diogenes Laertius in antiquity attributed to the philosophers Socrates and Thales this thanksgiving: “There were three blessings for which he was grateful to Fortune: ‘first, that I was born a human being and not one of the brutes; next, that I was born a man and not a woman; thirdly, a Greek and not a barbarian’ ” (*Vit. Phil.* [Thales] 1.33; Hicks, LCL). Plutarch attributes to Plato similar language.²⁵⁶ Even the Jews celebrated status in a threefold classification of their own. According to the fifth-century AD Babylonian Talmud, Rabbi Judah said: “[A Jewish man] must recite three blessings every day: ‘Praised are you, O Lord, who has not made me a gentile,’ ‘Praised are you, O Lord, who did not make me a boor,’ and ‘Praised are you, O Lord, who did not make me a woman’ ” (*b. Menah.* 43b, citing *t. Ber.* 6.18a; trans. J. Neusner). In the Jewish

morning prayer: “Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who hast not made me a heathen. Blessed art thou . . . , who hast not made me a bondman [slave]. Blessed art thou . . . , who hast not made me a woman.” (CC)

The free Jewish male found justification for these distinctions in the Law of Moses. The Law distinguished the male, who could observe God’s commandments fully throughout the entirety of a month, from the woman, who could not (Lev 15:19). The Jewish historian Josephus was blunter: “The woman, says the Law, is in all things inferior to the man” (*Ag. Ap.* 2.24 § 201; Thackeray, LCL). Likewise the slave or uncircumcised gentile was limited in ability to observe the Law.²⁵⁸ The distinctions of Jew and Greek, slave and free, and male and female were the product of the covenant of circumcision in Gen 17:9–14. Circumcision reinforced the boundary between Jew and Greek, the distinction between men and women, and the freedom to observe the Law fully. Paul announces that the era of such divisions is over! No longer do these distinctions hinder an individual from being a full member of God’s people. The privileges “in Christ” are not hierarchically ranked. No Christian believer is second class.²⁶¹ “Baptism into Christ provides for a unity that cannot be realized in a circumcised community.” (CC)

The final clause of 3:28 explains *in what respect* the relationships of Jew/Greek, slave/free, and male/female are abolished: “*for* [γάρ] you are all one [person] in Christ.” Paul employs the masculine form of “one” (εἷς) rather than the neuter (ἓν). Baptized believers are incorporated into a oneness with the person of Christ himself. In Christ is a new humanity, a new creation (6:15; see also Rom 5:12–21; 1 Corinthians 15). Paul finally resolves the central problem of Galatians 3. He finally explains how believers enjoy the benefits of Abrahamic sonship. The beneficiary of the Abrahamic promises is Christ alone (Gal 3:15–17). The baptized are “one” in and with Christ and thereby enjoy the promises and status of God’s children (3:28). (CC)

Many interpreters have read 3:28 as if Paul had written “you are all *equal* in Christ.” Many have considered 3:28 a “Magna Carta” for a new humanity in which the differences between men and women, slave and free, and Jew and Greek are abolished. Paul the apocalyptic thinker envisions a new age in Christ and his Spirit which invades and abolishes the distinctions of “the present evil age” (1:4). Nevertheless, that change of the eras is not yet fully realized. An “already-not yet” tension characterizes Paul’s thought. Where exactly is the emphasis to be placed? On the “already” side of the equation or on the “not yet”? In 3:28 the apostle is stressing the state of affairs that exists *now* in Christ. Thus the verse closes “you *are* all one in Christ”—present tense. Baptized believers are *already* enjoying these benefits. (CC)

Paul offers clues within the letter and elsewhere in his writings for the potential social implications of the pairings in 3:28. With respect to the Jew-Greek distinction, Paul does not envision Jews abandoning their ancestral rites. Paul did not cease being a Jew (Gal 2:15; Phil 3:3–8). When Paul asks in Rom 3:1 whether there is any remaining advantage in being a Jew, he responds in Rom 3:2 that there are indeed advantages. He develops his logic in greater detail in Romans 9–11. In Paul’s metaphor in Romans 11 gentiles, as outsiders, are grafted onto the olive tree that represents Israel’s unique heritage. Likewise in Galatians, Paul refers to the gentile believers as members of the Jerusalem above (4:21–31). The difference between Jew and gentile is not erased. Gentiles join God’s people as gentiles (see, e.g., 2:3, 11–14), and yet they must be incorporated into the heritage and blessings of Abraham. (CC)

Neither does Paul abolish the distinction between slave and master. Although the presence of faith has radically modified the relationship between Onesimus and Philemon, Paul does not demand that Philemon release Onesimus. Slaves, if not offered their freedom, should stay where they are (1 Cor 7:17). At the same time, Paul is clear that the relationship between master and slave has been radically transformed by the presence of Christ. The master and the slave who are both Christian are dear siblings within the family of God. In Gal 4:1–7 Paul draws on the concepts of slavery and freedom in order to

identify whether a person is enjoying the benefits of Christ and his Spirit, or whether he or she still remains under the oppressive powers of the Law, sin, and this evil age. Paul urges the Galatians to use their freedom “through love” to become enslaved to each other (5:13). (CC)

Paul breaks the pattern for the third pair: “There is neither Jew *nor* Greek, there is neither slave *nor* free, there is no male *and* female.” “Male and female” (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ) is not the normal way of identifying men and women. These words seem to focus on gender distinction. Some have argued that Paul envisions an abolition of such distinctions entirely. Surely the biological difference between men and women is not thereby abolished. The Greek Septuagint of Genesis offers a helpful clue: God made humanity “male *and* female” (ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ) in Gen 1:27, before the fall into sin. An allusion to the Genesis creation account here is rendered more likely by Paul’s later mention of the dawning “new creation” in 6:14–15. In Mk 10:6–8 (|| Mt 19:4–5; cf. Mk 12:25) Jesus interprets Genesis’ “male and female” (Gen 1:27; see also Gen 2:24) in terms of marriage. In Mt 22:30 Jesus explains that after the resurrection the relationships between men and women will not be the same. Although for Paul marriage is clearly optional in 1 Corinthians 7, marriage remains a godly state. Paul does not envision an abandonment of male and female roles, as if believers would no longer be husbands and wives. The remainder of the Pauline corpus does not bear out an abolition of the created differences between men and women. (CC)

One recent interpreter, Brigitte Kahl, has contended that Paul in his letter to the Galatians is undermining any hierarchy of gender. Paul draws on the language of the male body, such as “foreskin” (ἀκροβυστία, 2:7; 5:6; 6:15) and “seed” (σπέρμα, 3:16, 19, 29), and then declares that there is “no male and female” (3:28). He describes himself as a mother giving birth (4:19). Kahl’s observations, however, do not prove that Paul is particularly concerned with the respective roles of men and women. Most of the apostle’s emphases highlight circumcision and the Jew/gentile divide, the central issues in the letter. The image of Paul as a mother giving birth paves the way for the discussion of Sarah and Hagar in the following paragraph, in which Paul makes no particular point about gender roles. Instead he contrasts two Jerusalems, one under the Law and in servitude and the other free (Gal 4:21–31). (CC)

Other interpreters have taken the opposite extreme and have limited the application of Paul’s words “male and female” to justification or salvation in Christ. They have denied any social implications in 3:28 at all. However, Paul posits a *new* pair of opposites in 5:6 that reminds the reader of 3:28: “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision.” The apostle envisions powerful social implications for those “in Christ” (3:28). That pair of opposites is done away with in favor of “faith expressing itself through love” (5:6). In other words, the divisions of 3:28 and 5:6 are resolved through faith’s loving expression. In 6:15 the apostle returns to “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision” as replaced by the “new creation.” Sandwiched between these two instances of the circumcision/uncircumcision pairing (5:6; 6:15) is a middle section, 5:13–6:10, in which Paul develops more fully the social implications of the “new creation.” In that section Paul envisions people filled by God’s Spirit who express the Spirit’s fruit of Christ-like behavior in love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, and more. Paul is not envisioning a revolution of society from without. He imagines something far more powerful. He is envisioning a transformation of fallen people from within, and that transformation leads *any* given societal relationship into a new Christ-like direction. The master-slave relationship may not be abolished, but the way the master and the slave relate to each other will be transformed by the presence of Christ and the Spirit’s fruit in action. Likewise, the roles of men and women may not be abolished, but the relationship of husband and wife will be characterized by the presence of Christ and the Spirit’s selfless fruit in action. Such Christ-like behavior is far more revolutionary than this present age can even imagine. (CC)

For Paul, male and female are one person in Jesus Christ. They do not lose their individual identities but share in the identity and personhood of Christ. As individuals, the believer bears Christ to the world. This is also a *corporate* identity. Paul does not countenance isolated individualism. *All* believers, regardless of ethnicity, gender, or social class, are one person in Jesus Christ.²⁸⁰ “You are all” (3:28) stands in contrast

to the distinctions in the first part of the verse. Believers all share in a new identity as they *together* bear Christ to the world. Paul will continue this train of thought in Galatians 5 and 6, where he returns to the pairs of opposites that are done away with in Christ. Abolishing the old division of circumcision and uncircumcision is the new reality in Christ and his Spirit. Christians are simply a different sort of people. (CC)

Unity in Christ transcends ethnic, social and sexual distinctions (see Ro 10:12; 1Co 12:13; Eph 2:15–16). (CSB)

Ethnic, social, and sexual identities do not determine one’s standing before God. All who are baptized into Christ are one in His Body, even while distinctions present in creation remain. (TLSB)

Here many other titles could be added of offices that have been divinely ordained, For example: “There is neither magistrate nor subject, neither professor nor listener, neither teacher nor pupil, neither lady nor servant.” For in Christ Jesus all social stations, even those that were divinely ordained, are nothing. Male, female, slave, free, Jew, Gentile, king, subject—these are, of course, good creatures of God. But in Christ, that is, in the matter of salvation, they amount to nothing, for all their wisdom, righteousness, devotion, and authority. (Luther)

With the words “there is neither Jew,” then, Paul vigorously abolishes the Law. For here, where a new man comes into existence in Baptism and where Christ is put on, there is neither Jew nor Greek. Now he is not speaking of the Jew in a metaphysical sense, according to his essence; but by “Jew” he means someone who is a disciple of Moses, who is subject to the laws, who has circumcision, and who observes the form of worship commanded in the Law. Where Christ is put on, he says, there is no Jew any longer, no circumcision, no temple worship, no laws that the Jews keep. For Christ has abolished throughout the world whatever laws there are in Moses. Therefore the conscience that believes in Christ should be so sure that the Law with its terrors and threats has been abrogated that it simply does not know whether Moses or the Law or the Jew ever existed, for Christ and Moses are utterly incompatible. Moses comes with the Law and various works and forms of worship; but Christ, granting grace and righteousness, comes absolutely without the Law or any demands of works. John 1:17: “The Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” (Luther)

With the next words, “nor Greek,” Paul also rejects and condemns the wisdom and righteousness of the Gentiles. Among the Gentiles there were many great and outstanding men, such as Xenophon, Themistocles, Marcus Fabius, Atilius Regulus, Cicero, Pomponius Atticus, and many others. Endowed as they were with excellent, in fact, heroic virtues, they administered their commonwealths very well and accomplished many brilliant things for the welfare of the commonwealth. And yet, with all their wisdom, power, honorable deeds, outstanding virtues, laws, righteousness, worship, and religion—for we must not imagine that the Gentiles were simply despisers of honesty and religion, but all the nations scattered all over the world had their own laws, worship, and religion, without which the human race cannot be governed—with all these adornments, I say, they amounted to nothing in the sight of God. Therefore whatever belongs to domestic, political, and divine justice, such as the justice of the Law, with the highest obedience, performance of the Law, and sanctity—none of this amounts to anything in the sight of God. Then what does? The garment of Christ, which we put on in Baptism. (Luther)

Thus no matter how diligently a slave performs his duty, obeys his master, and serves faithfully; or if a free man directs and governs either the commonwealth or his private affairs in a praiseworthy way; or whatever a male does as a male, getting married, administering his household well, obeying the magistrate, maintaining honest and decent relations with others; or if a lady lives chastely, obeys her husband, takes good care of the house, and teaches her children well—these truly magnificent and outstanding gifts and works do not avail anything toward righteousness in the sight of God. In other

words, whatever laws, ceremonies, forms of worship, righteousness, and works there are in the whole world, even those of the Jews, who were the first to have a kingdom and a priesthood that was divinely instituted and ordained, together with its laws, devotion, and forms of worship—nevertheless none of these can take away sins or deliver from death or save. (Luther)

“Therefore, O Galatians, your false apostles are seducing you when they teach that the Law is necessary for salvation. In this way they are snatching you from the great glory of your new birth and sonship and are calling you back to your old birth and to the miserable slavery of the Law. From sons of God who are free they are making you slaves of the Law, so long as they seek to distinguish among persons on the basis of the Law.” There is, of course, a distinction among persons in the Law and in the sight of the world; and there must be one there, but not in the sight of God, where all men are equal. “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). In the presence of God, therefore, let Jews and Gentiles and all the world keep silence (Hab. 2:20). Of course, God has various ordinances, laws, styles of life, and forms of worship in the world; but these do not achieve anything to merit grace or attain eternal life. As many as are justified, therefore, are justified, not on account of their observance of human or divine Law but on account of Christ, who has abrogated all laws everywhere. The Gospel sets Him forth to us as the only One who placated the wrath of God by His own blood, as the Savior; without faith in Him, the Jews will not be saved through the Law. (Luther)

all one in Christ Jesus – These are magnificent and very glorious words. In the world and according to the flesh there is a very great difference and inequality among persons, and this must be observed very carefully. For if a woman wanted to be a man, if a son wanted to be a father, if a pupil wanted to be a teacher, if a servant wanted to be a master, if a subject wanted to be a magistrate—there would be a disturbance and confusion of all social stations and of everything. In Christ, on the other hand, where there is no Law, there is no distinction among persons at all. There is neither Jew nor Greek, but all are one; for there is one body, one Spirit, one hope of the calling of all, one and the same Gospel, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, one Christ, the Lord of all (Eph. 4:4–6). The same Christ whom Peter, Paul, and all the saints have, we have too—you and I and all believers; and all baptized infants have the same one also. Here the conscience knows nothing about the Law but looks only at Christ. This is why Paul always makes it a practice to add the words “in Christ Jesus”; if Christ is lost sight of, everything is over. (Luther)

This is beautifully shown by the story of the bronze serpent, which is a figure of Christ (John 3:14). The Jews, who were being bitten by the fiery serpents, were commanded by Moses to do nothing but look at that bronze serpent with a fixed gaze. Those who did so were healed merely by their fixed gaze at the serpent. But the others, who did not listen to Moses, looked at their wounds rather than at the serpent and died. Thus if I am to gain comfort in a struggle of conscience or in the agony of death, I must take hold of nothing except Christ alone by faith, and I must say: “I believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who suffered, was crucified, and died for me. In His wounds and death I see my sin; and in His resurrection I see victory over sin, death, and the devil, and my righteousness and life. I neither hear nor see anything but Him.” This is the true faith of Christ and in Christ, through which we become members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones (Eph. 5:30). Therefore in Him we live and move and have our being (Acts 17:28). Hence the speculation of the sectarians is vain when they imagine that Christ is present in us “spiritually,” that is, speculatively, but is present really in heaven. Christ and faith must be completely joined. We must simply take our place in heaven; and Christ must be, live, and work in us. But He lives and works in us, not speculatively but really, with presence and with power. (Luther)

3:29 Bligh pointed out that there appears to be an ellipse after ἐστέ in place of the fuller ἄρα κατ’ ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι, “then/consequently heirs according to the promise.” He added: “Since parataxis is used, κατ’ ἐπαγγελίαν κληρονόμοι [‘heirs according to the promise’] is probably regarded as

explanatory of σπέρμα [‘seed’], and τοῦ Ἀβραάμ [‘of Abraham’] goes with both nouns [‘seed’ and ‘heirs’]: ‘then you are Abraham’s “seed,” his heirs according to the promise.’ ” (CC)

And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to the promise. Paul brings together key strands from the chapter. Although the phrase “sons of Abraham” would match Paul’s reasoning in 3:7 and in 4:1–7, in 3:29 the apostle returns instead to the “seed of Abraham” (τοῦ Ἀβραάμ σπέρμα). In 3:16 Paul introduces “seed” language only surprisingly to deny corporate Israel as Abraham’s seed in favor of the single person of Jesus Christ. The polemical edge about Paul’s denial in 3:16 suggests that the rivals probably introduced the phrase “seed of Abraham” to the Galatians. Similarly, in 3:7 Paul answers a question he had not himself asked regarding the identity of the real sons of Abraham. That verse too seems to be a response to someone else’s point. The rivals would have been pointing to the OT Septuagint, in which “seed of Abraham” functions as a synonym for the people of Israel (2 Chr 20:7; Ps 104:6 [MT/ET 105:6]; Is 41:8; cf. Rom 11:1; 2 Cor 11:22). The rivals were encouraging the Galatians to accept circumcision and thereby become members of “Abraham’s seed” and children. (CC)

Paul affirms that the promises were to Abraham and to his single offspring, Christ (Gal 3:15–18). Baptized believers are “one (person)” “in” Christ (3:28). Paul therefore declares that those who are “of Christ” are the corporate seed of Abraham and the heirs of the promises (3:29). To be in Christ, Abraham’s sole Seed and heir (3:16), is to enjoy all the privileges of Abrahamic descent. Thus even gentiles can enjoy those privileges through Baptism and faith. Paul emphasizes the Galatians’ inclusion with the emphatic second person pronoun (ὕμεῖς): “If *you* are Christ’s.” The conditional sentence calls on the Galatians to recognize for themselves the reality of the protasis (εἰ, “if ...”). God entered into a special relationship with his people Israel. In Ex 19:5: “You shall be for me a treasured possession out of all the peoples” (cf. Deut 29:12–13 [MT 29:11–12]). In Deut 27:9: “This very day you have become the people of the LORD your God.” The prophet Jeremiah looked forward to a new covenant: “At that time, says the LORD, I will be the God of all the families of Israel, and they will be my people” (Jer 31:1). Jewish literature regularly extols the special relationship between God and Israel (e.g., 1 En. 1.8; 1Q22 II.1: “On this day [you are going to become the peo]ple of God, your God” [trans. F. García Martínez]; 1QM XIII.9: “You, [have crea]ted [us] for you, eternal people” [trans. F. García Martínez]; 1Q34bis 3.II.5: “You have chosen a people in the period of your favour” [trans. F. García Martínez]; 1QS IV.19–23; *Jub.* 1.22–25). The apostle is clear that that special relationship is only enjoyed by those “of Christ” (Gal 3:29)! (CC)

Not surprisingly, key terms from throughout the chapter recur at this climactic moment, including “Abraham” (see 3:6–9) and the Abrahamic “promise” (see 3:8). The emphatic “according to the promise” entails an implicit contrast with the Law of Moses, another key aspect of the chapter. Paul introduces the “inheritance” and Jesus Christ as the one and only heir of Abraham in 3:15, 17, and 18 and returns to the theme with “heirs” here. The heir of Abraham is the “Seed,” Jesus Christ (3:16), and thus in 3:29 those “of Christ” are the “seed of Abraham” and “heirs” “according to the promise.” The “then” (ἄρα) in the middle of the verse is a conclusion not only to the conditional sentence of 3:29 but also to the chapter as a whole. The Law is unable to mediate the blessings of the Abrahamic inheritance, which are available only in Christ. There is no middle ground between Paul and his rivals. The Galatians “in Christ Jesus” (3:28) are the true descendants of Abraham. As co-heirs and sons with Christ, they enjoy the promise. Paul is clear in 3:14 that the Abrahamic promise entails the powerful Spirit. God has sent his Spirit into their hearts (4:6). The Galatians are not just the descendants of Abraham. They are the children *of God* (3:26)! (CC)

Christians are Abraham’s true, spiritual descendants. (CSB)

The argument in vv 15–29 comes full circle. Gentiles believing in Christ, who is Abraham’s Seed (“Offspring” in the singular; see note, v 16), become Abraham’s seed (“offspring” in the collective plural) and thus heirs of the promise given to him. (TLSB)

In a short statement Paul here transfers all the glory of Lebanon to the desert; that is, he makes all the Gentiles the offspring of Abraham and transfers to the Gentiles the fatherhood and the blessing promised to Abraham. Scripture had predicted long before that this would happen when it said (Gen. 22:18): “In your Offspring shall all the nations be blessed.” Because we Gentiles believe and because by faith we receive the blessing of the Offspring of Abraham, therefore Scripture calls us sons of Abraham and hence heirs. And so we are all one in Christ, who is the Offspring of Abraham. Hence the promise, “In your Offspring, etc.,” applies also to us Gentiles; and the Christ who is promised here is ours also. Of course, the promise was given only to the Jews, not to the Gentiles, as Ps. 147:19–20 states: “He declares His word to Jacob. He has not dealt thus with any other nation.” Nevertheless, what was promised comes to us through faith, by which alone the promise of God is received. Although it was not promised to us, it was promised about us; for we were named in the promise, “In your Offspring, etc.” The promise shows clearly that Abraham was to be the father not only of the Jewish nation but of many nations, the heir not of one kingdom but of the entire world (Rom. 4:13). Thus the glory of the whole kingdom of Christ has been transferred to us. Therefore all laws are completely abrogated in the heart and conscience of the Christian, even though they still remain outwardly in the flesh. About this I have spoken at great length earlier. (Luther)

3:15–29 Through Christ, God fulfills the promise He gave to Abraham. All united to Christ by Baptism become heirs of the promise and therefore are righteous before God. The Law, as between Moses and Christ, still serves the good purpose of revealing sin and our need for a Savior. However, Christ does what the Law cannot do. He gives forgiveness and life. • Lord, help us to see that in our congregation all are to be welcomed, whatever their background or place in life. Help us also to reach out to all with the message of Jesus’ love. Amen. (TLSB)